

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a white butterfly. The hand is positioned in the center-right of the frame, with the butterfly resting on the palm. The butterfly's wings are spread, showing delicate patterns. The background is dark and textured, possibly a wooden surface or a wall. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the hand and the butterfly against the dark background.

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**edited by Amanda Hash
and Mary Stone Dockery**

Stone Highway Review is a new journal of poetry and prose, dedicated to publishing women and other underrepresented voices. **Stone Highway Review** wants to publish the beautiful, the exciting, the new.

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super collider

John Andrews

They stole the idea from us, baby.
I told you no one was watching
us in the hot tub as we threw our bodies
into one another creating sparks
and the next day scientists broke
ground on the Large Hadron Collider in France
as the water spiraled in a vortex forcing
everything to touch everything
scientific law said shouldn't, we tried
to look like we never once touched
under electron microscopic lenses
magnets pushed opposite each other
amongst the steam speeding up particles
in a circular time frame unmeasurable
slamming atoms into one another in just the right way
they ripped each other apart.

The Time Following Rilo

Matt Bender

I wake up Sunday, staring like a dog staring; a bone in its mouth.

Now it rains.

It was everything as you imagine it being beforehand, the patio with the paint flaking off in tiny spirals, a wooden cornice and a root knobbed walkway, nature as perfect as your own back yard. Inside there is plush carpet, deep blue and the kind you could grab handfuls of while getting screwed from behind. I found a new boy named Ben, a name I had never loved before. We made pasta and all the other useless things that lovers make, drinking bottle after bottle of red wine without labels. The sex was so hard it bruised your ankles. It was spring, of course, and needed to be this way.

Fresh bread, we baked, and all the sugar-coated drugs that made our lives slug by as if they were syrup themselves. Heroin, candy, cigarettes. We even cooked up some of the wallets we stole, just softened them up over medium heat and ate them with everything inside.

I open my eyes and its all still there, him and her behind me whispering.

A pair of wings to keep me warm.

With a slow groan I open up, letting the sweet flower in my belly roll out, out of my mouth and down my chin where it becomes a dark spot on the carpet I will contemplate the next day while vacuuming.

FROM Shoal
Rosebud Ben-Oni

Once you played a blind widow
on one leg in St. Luke's
surgical theater. Gangrene capped
your toes dropping off in green

Legos lying in ruins, your wrecking-ball brother
abandons you at 2 am deserted streets, sparrows sing

just beneath your sleep, the wind
howling down Dyckman,

snaking through a passing
procession where you face the Virgin Guadalupe
on a poster, a voodoo doll, an urn of clay
covered in sweaty garland and grease.
Goat blood foams in the Hudson.

Fast-talk flying off the sidewalk, you'd hopscotch
barefoot outside Grant's tomb.
The Virgin staring, the Ché staring,
Buicks with megaphones, they knew, the red-faced

coachman too, you cried when he struck his horse, absurd plume
drooping, carriages looping like cattle-cars over you,

herald stuck on a lopsided stool
stranded along Riverside in plastic sandals.

Less than a pedestrian who fears
red lights and bike messengers

speeding across Columbus Avenue, always frostbitten and antique,
where scaffolds lash out over rosewood shops and still startle you.



Outside St. John the Unfinished, you scorn the sensible:
a miracle materialized on heartwood.

Paint peeling a child's face
restored from polio, from his mother's rosary

hangs a broken neck— a saint's
last performance, her primitive
mouth howling over a casket,
a compost bin.

You hear the stain-glass burst open,
its translucent doves impaled on a forklift.

Mistaking their aim, prongs have pierced
through and discovered you in a confessional.

About That Night

Ariana Den Bleyker

"We have all been in rooms we cannot die in."

James Dickey

Of all the men in the room, he spoke most
of survival--the Darwin kind. It's true,
he'd somehow bedazzled himself into my world.

Friend of a friend. Though he would do, if
he weren't so, so human, if I weren't so bent
on perfection. Yeah, I was warned...
survival always begins with thoughts of the bedroom.

&

In this room is the tattooed body of desire,
the safety of its skin its danger;
it's where thirst-like we carry on with lipstick
on the glass as we change evolution forever;

where we have learned to submit
to the next generation in the most significant ways,
the empty sound of each moan a tribute
to science, unconscious but jarring.

&

Years later when we sit face to face,
crowding each other with nothing
but small talk gliding across that same room,

which one of us will choke down the discomfort
rewinding the very thing burning between us?

The Girl in the Box

Sivan Butler-Rotholz

The ringleader taught me
that if you bend enough you break.
That you are never adequate
wrenched over a trapeze,
grasping with one sorrowed knee.
That the more you contort
the harsher the critic
until you learn you'll never please
with
or without
a net.

An acrobat is just a man,
a girl in a box only half herself,
and rings, like hoops, can be aflame as well.

These scars are from swallowing knives.

Sunburn

Sivan Butler-Rotholz

I must find some distraction from the sandy nature of your hair.
In this view outside my window–
Russian Hill above red eucalyptus–
I am naked between floor and ceiling.

The morning settles over San Francisco in waves
The colors shifting by hour
Currently in brightest blue–your eyes, our eyes, always hid from
each other at morning.

How much I enjoyed your youth until it smothered us
like beauty.

The hard wood floor beneath my feet reminds me of the
difference between Wendy and
Peter Pan

I did fly for a moment; such a lovely shade of honey.

Serotonin

Valentina Cano

I imagine a day
without this pulling of skin,
the taffy-like expansion in the sun,
the morph into bitter porcelain.
Drying from the inside, out.

I picture myself
rising without having to sweep
my cells together.
Smiling without cracks sprinkling to life.

I long for a day
when utensils will not sing to me
with their silver charms,
humming of moonlight and
ice against a glass.

That day,
that morning of hushed relief,
I hope it's closer,
ticking nearer to me.

In Idolness

Emily Capettini

I leave my window open at night. It is cold; there is snow on the ground and ice in the corners of the old windowpanes, but it's only a crack. A crack in the regulations of things, and I am unable to slide through. It is a gap wide enough for her to slip inside, for she is brave and therefore can go where I cannot. The covers are pulled up to my nose. When I put my mouth above the covers and inhale, the wind whirls to greet me, a chilly gust down my throat, spearmint.

It is silent, like only winter can be, disturbed by the scrape-clunk from the snow shovel on the back sidewalk in the early mornings and the shrieking rumble of a snow plow at night. One passes now, the egg-yolk yellow light tumbling across my wall, highlighting the poster-sized reproduction of Klimt's *The Kiss* I've always been self-conscious about. The wind exhales through the window, and the light near my bed turns off, extinguished. My room becomes the color of a crisp sky.

The window shudders and gasps open, and she is back, shutting the window silently behind here.

“Still awake, then?”

I was waiting for you, goes unsaid and frosts my lips. Instead, I say, in an attempt at confidence, “It's barely past eleven.”

“Rebel,” she teases, grinning and kicking off her boots. She tosses aside her sweater, wriggles out of her pants. She leaves them on the floor and puts her hands on her hips, standing in just her camisole and the thermal leggings she wears

under her jeans. The bag in her hand *clinks*, clandestine Morse code. She crosses to where I'm sitting up in bed, wrapped in my quilt. She produces a slender bottle, dark purple and corked. A little western flower, now purple with love's wound.

She drinks first, then passes it to me.

"What is it?"

"Drink," she says.

I sip. It is heavy and sweet like a plum, warm at the base of my throat. When my lips part from the bottle's, hers follow. She kisses me with the same ease as she sneaks out into the cold winter evening, her teeth hooking against my lip. The silk of her camisole is cool against my fingers, and her breath gusts against my mouth, spearmint.

The drink vanishes, between us. She drinks more than I do, love-in-idleness, and I take only a few gulps before I allow her to drink the rest. The integrity of memory wavers uncertainly between us.

She will not be here when I wake up; she is not idle in daylight.

I leave the window open at night.

Night Noir

Susana H. Case

We lie in bed angry and silent—
the hammering outside
a type of bleeding.
Too much exhaustion to look.

Urban brick cliff apartments,
depositories for delusion
and dinner deliveries—
only God makes better pizza
—and a frieze of maids
with swollen ankles.
They're from far away
places with beaches and sun.

Nights like this, children
gather to smoke
rough-rolled joints by the river
a raucous antidote to futures
dissolved
to flat screens and cubicles

and the hoarse moan for more
of anything
rivals the hammering
as our lips kiss—
zest into stickiness and sad

nostalgia, sweet-tasting
poison, anti-freeze abandoned
in the shaded furrows
of the gutter. Our lips
their imprecise account
of love, this prison
of waning moon and cervix.

Zigzag Outlines

Ha Kiet Chau

Sobbing in front of the Buddha altar.

Bowed head shaking.

Fifth child, a self-proclaimed adolescent sin,

Slams the door on her strict family.

Father bolts the locks on her Americanized culture.

The Marilyn's, the Jimmy Deans, the Sid Viciouses.

Kneel before the Buddha statue, beg a million mercies.

A rebelliousness perishes her black gothic clothes.

Satan's hands wipe her dark pout, seizing her red wits,

Howling a zany shriek like a zebra attacked,

Against the protesting whines of the helicopter engine.

Father's black thunder fumes.

Summoning strict storms.

Mother cracks her red lightning whip.

Twelve tick-tocks on the cuckoo clock strike past curfew.

Chinese myth roars in full force,

Electrocuting a disobeying Cinderella, her yellow dyed hair,

Smoky black as God's rage, in a fierce sky awaiting punishment.

Juvenile delinquent, step down harder on the pedal,

Claw a way out of this rolling thunderous maze,

Like a Chinese Natalie Wood,

Stuck among the seventeen sticky cobweb clouds.

Wave a flag stained with stars.

Is it the China or the American flag?

Fly her Chinese American roots down a dead end cliff.
Flap her bold, blue, slick wings.
Camouflage her sapphire arms against the turquoise clouds.
Kick her parent's scolds away, near a tiny glimmer of rainbow.
Blink back tears as father's fist plunk-plunk against her head.
Stupid girl, wake up, why are you wasting your life away?

Her independence, her womanhood,
Stomping with elephant's legs, echoing,
Cracking her liberal earth.
Crash Amelia Earhart's freedom,
Flop like a fiddly heart down under,
As a yielding engine whimpers.
Testing its final limits. Fuel groaning for oil.
Clouds flinging her face down on her bed.
Sobbing.
Zigzag rumblings outline her two halves.
Her Chinese and American self.
No way home.

Sunny
Tony Colella

Around you I remember a winter so cold
it cracked the air with errant ice.

I curled in the four-square pane of sun
coming through my window, and thought
of margaritas and nudity and you.

I went to the window when I became
too hot in my sweater, hiding in the sun,
and opened it. At once her cold fingers
knocked me on my ass. The old
heater kicked on like a dying bus.

I slammed the window. I hated those days

but I recall that you named me cat,
bloody saccharine but I do remember.

I remember a girl I barely knew
in a red hoodie, talking to an older
man about some band or other they
and I and you liked. You told me,
too, that chocolate tastes like smoke
and that the whole town smelled
like cloves. The town of pies,
the town of those sweet cigarettes I
hated like those days. Oh, you
would say, look, it's not cold without
purpose: it's finally snowing.

A Tragic Accident Involving a Horse

Geoff Collins

The horse itself was not to blame, despite what you may have heard. It's too easy sometimes to listen to the wrong voices and get burdened by wrong ideas. In fact, the horse was a gentle creature despite its great size and it loved more than anything to go walking in the cool evenings beneath the live oaks and planetrees. If there was blame to lay somewhere among those rolling hills, I suppose it ought to lay at the feet of fate, as there's no other suitable explanation for what happened. In the end, though, the facts were indisputable. Mr. Riff Sanders lay broken and dying in the soft red clay, staring up with his last breaths at a sky full of leaves, his beloved white horse standing there with its great sad eyes and swishing tail. Certainly, nothing could change that. Just like nothing could change the face of the red sun as it rolled slowly downward into night.

For years, the boys and girls of Starlings Gap played in the woods along the Tamoka River. It was a magical place with its limestone outcroppings and cliffs, its soft carpet of rot and moss, sweetvines and ivy crawling up thick black trunks of trees. There were times in that forest when you would lose track of yourself completely, when the light would come through the branches in tiny pieces like confetti and the thrushes would be singing high above and the water would turn into pure glittering gold as it flowed past. You'd find yourself standing there alone, staring upwards at nothing, mumbling strange words to yourself. If you didn't know better, you'd swear you were in a magic show.

The children played in those woods all summer long.

They played hide-and-go-seek and capture the flag and olly-olly-oxen-free. They stripped half-naked and played cherokee nation, racing through the forest with their painted faces, whooping and hollering and scaring all the animals. They found broken-down old hunting cabins and played pioneer family, and when the girls finally got sick of the games and went home, the boys stayed into late into the afternoon, whittling down broken sticks to look like guns and playing war with a church-like intensity until it got dark. Later on, when they had grown into young men, some of them went off to war and did not return. Some, like Mr. Riff Sanders, went off to war and came back changed in ways no one could rightly understand.

There are those who theorize about the white horse and how it's the spirit of St. Jude showing us the way of righteousness. Others say it's Christ Jesus himself coming back to lead the armies of heaven. A lot of folks think its just another goddam horse and what's all the fuss about anyway. Mr. Riff Sanders once read a story back in school in which the goddess Rhiannon comes riding a shining white horse at the end when she leads you by the hand into the afterlife. Perhaps he felt that story deep inside of himself like it was a prophesy or something, because he used to say he'd rather die young on his white horse than live in a castle by the sea. Perhaps that horse knew the great sadness he brought back with him was too much for one person to bear. Perhaps they figured out together the best medicine for the pain.

They buried him in the family plot high up on the ridge, in a grove of coffetrees with a long view west over the Tamoka River and the endless hills. So many people showed up to share

condolence that their cars lined the access road nearly all the way back to the highway and the state patrol had to come in to help with the traffic. A military honor guard gave their salute and folded the flag in perfect triangles while bagpipes wailed a mournful song over near the stone wall. His young wife Dee wore a long black veil like women used to wear years ago, like in the Johnny Cash song, but she didn't cry, even when they handed her the folded flag and lowered the coffin into the earth. She just stood there staring straight out into the forest like she was one of those trees herself.

Of course it's all under water now. Progress comes along like an eighteen-wheeler with burned-out brakes and its own urgent need to be fed, and we nearly crap ourselves lining up to buy the latest thing. A few years after the accident that killed Mr. Riff Sanders, the power company came in their dark suits and fancy sedans and started buying up land from Somerset canyon all the way up to Wriggsville. People resisted but there was nothing really they could do. There were documents about eminent domain and speeches about standard of living and the common good. There were environmental studies and trust funds for resettlement, and when they finally built the dam across the Tamoka, they built it with steel bars and concrete and the foundation drilled deep into bedrock so it would last. One day with great ceremony, the engineers cranked the gates closed and the water ran up against the concrete feet of the dam, and the slow, humble Tamoka no longer flowed freely down through its canyon. It took more than a year for the reservoir to fill up to capacity. Slowly, the brown water rose up over the wooded path and the old hunting cabins, over the forest slopes covered in

trillium and dogwood, up the limestone cliffs and finally to the very tops of the ridges. Fittingly in Starlings Gap, the water stopped rising just a few feet from a stone wall that forms the edge of a small graveyard, and just a few feet from a brown granite headstone that marks the place where Mr. Riff Sanders lies resting with his ancestors. His wife Dee places flowers there each Sunday in remembrance.

It is a good place to sit and think a while, with a fine view across the sparkling water.

Glimmering Boy

Patti Crouch

The hot shop breathes and pulses like a living thing; its fires burn brighter than the eye can bear. Tattooed men in black t-shirts weave about the stage, pushing rods into portals, pulling out blobs of molten glass and blowing them into orbs. The hot shop gives the Glass Museum its iconic shape: a huge metallic cone thrusting sideways into the gray Tacoma sky. Inside, heat soothes the bones despite the unsettling surge of sound and flame. My son loves it here. Lanky and volatile, he prowls the catwalk--away from me--watching the artists' deft ballet of glass and steel.

Later, when we tour the semi-darkened galleries, weaving through glass forms as bright and contorted as a child's drawings, Noah allows my arm across his shoulders, a kiss on his shaggy hair. We're here for a recital, the culmination of another year's tug-of-war between his fire for freedom and my insistence on measures, practice, scales. The galleries and hot shop are his reward. Silhouetted against a glowing case, he smiles, shakes hair from his eyes and nods toward the next room.

In the doorway we freeze, breath hissing like steam. Towering above us, a forest of clear glass rises from stones of ice. A dozen trees--trunks wrapped in translucent bark, edges curved and smooth as sea glass but shimmering like frozen sunlight--stretch and taper to a filigree of branches. Transparent leaves waver from wires. Through the woods, over shining rocks, a stream

dances in curves of glass; hills recede to frosted clouds, layer after layer. The forest glows with the blue light of frigid dawn.

My shoulder to the shadowed walls, I circle the shining trees. Frozen and sterile, the ice sings its oldest invitation: to fade into snow, breathe icy flakes, raise hands to sky and grow crystalline, transparent, invisible. The lovely dark and deep woods of Frost's poem, they sing of peaceful sleep, of absorption into something colder and sweeter than an individual life. Branches whisper the Ice Queen's sweeping song--wind in snow on winter nights that freezes blood in veins. Everything could be frozen forever, this beautiful and this dead. I ache to enter.

In a flick of movement, Noah has slipped away, crouches so near the cordon I fear the guard will reproach him. Lost in sparkling hoar frost and the tap of flakes on ice, drawn beyond the frozen hills by the glow of sunrise, he slides over snowbanks on a white bear's back, hands nestled deep in warm fur. He barely breathes. I yearn to grasp his sweet youth--have lost already his soft form on my chest, the warm smell of his hair, his hand in mine--yet my grip would destroy what I love most. As I move to the room's far corner, illusions shatter: foliage shifts to icicles, then flattens to glass hanging from steel.

He stands now--lithe as a willow, hands quick as birds--gestures *Let's go*. For this moment, I've been leant this glimmering boy, so I leave the glass to join him, touch his warm shoulder. His turn of head one final arabesque, he leads me on like a wisp of song, eyes straight ahead but lilting gait in time with mine.

Taking You In

Sion Dayson

To open my mouth and take you in,
Is to pretend you hold a key to my deliverance.
Is to try to string moments
Together
To forget other moments.
You see, this taking you in,
These touches felt in the dark under cotton sheets two weeks
unwashed
Is to be lost so as not to remember.
Trying to be lost on hands and knees,
Or elbow and thigh,
Or back and behind—
I could make a catalogue of acts more so than Indian lore.
One would be called *It Is Not Your Heart*.
Another, *All In The Past*.
Still more, *Weaken Memory, Dull Pain, You Are Not Shamed*.
You see, this taking you in
Is to pretend you can take some of it away,
Something else brought in its place.
With head pushed down
I could kneel before some other altar
But here I am free to not hold onto tears—
They could flow into rivers of sweat and semen and blood and
mucus
And I do not need to explain why they pour from me.

Spade of Hearts

By Matthew Dexter

I used to be a pilot, probably flew you or somebody you know across the country, but now all I do is put on the uniform, drive rental cars around the west coast sitting in airport bars drinking martinis, until passengers call airport security. They question me and kick me out of the terminal. My husband died six years ago of stomach cancer. Every Sunday I sit on his gravestone and make love to the cobwebs. Baby spiders are spun around the colored leaves that refuse to blow, but I wipe them away and place a purple geranium on his clever quote about dying young.

“This is a sad day,” says the man visiting the resting place of his daughter.

We are neighbors and shall be for eternity, so might as well get to know the poor bastard. He places teddy bears and toys in plastic boxes on the grass, talking gibberish and singing songs about unicorns that live with dragons. The man has a bag resembling the one Santa Clause uses to hand out gifts, but the man only has one arm, so he asks if I can help with the presents.

“That’s a great quote,” the man says.

Everybody always comments on it. Some laugh, others just nod their heads or brush a twig off the headstone. My husband spent his last few months looking for the perfect pithy statement, searching all the local libraries, sitting in the basement late at night thinking, with the lights out smoking marijuana resin from our teenage son’s metal pipe for motivation.

“This guy was a class act,” the man says.

My husband was a wizard. He scrapped that piece with a hanger. Nobody says you can catch cancer, but I know it happens. Our son went down first-class over the Pacific Ocean and a few months later his father was diagnosed with the condition. His health was perfect before the accident. Everything happens for a reason.

“How old was your son?” I ask.

The man helps me clear away the dead cicadas that I do not want to touch. His arm on my shoulder is the comfort of an adolescent summer love. The stump brushes against the hairs a woman never shaves on the back of her neck.

“How I wish I could hold her again,” he says. “She was only five.”

We dig up the graves, his first and then mine. We do it for no reason and for every reason at the same time, when the sun has set behind the mountains for the millionth evening, once all the gifts have been unwrapped and the fountain of youth has fallen from the sky. We dig until the shovel hits the caskets. We pull the coffins from the earth. We have the strength of six men and a machine that can fly.

“Why do you keep a spade in your trunk?” the man asks.

I have no answer, been digging graves for years, stealing geraniums from fancy houses by the freeway, unearthing family pets. I do my business beneath tequila moonlight while their masters are sleeping, attempts at resurrecting memories, buried too soon, nostrils awakened by decaying corpses. The coyotes howl, extraterrestrials have sex in other galaxies, life goes on.

“Touch me,” the man says.

I do and we fill the holes in the ground, first hers and then his, his and mine, and the constellations warn us that two humans should not be doing it like this, but we don't care. His lips are flowers; my hips are more than enough for one man to plant himself in the dirt. We grind as insects investigate our ears, mosquitoes make love in layers of crippled flesh we have not shown anyone in years. Exposed, the fog creeps lower, his hand tighter, stronger than two palms on a yoke, the sweat, the semen, it's all the same, our voices pulling weeds from the soil.

"Jesus, this is nice," he says.

I bite his earlobe and suck the blood. An airplane is falling from the sky. A grave is being desecrated. But we are a million miles away with the children who are waiting in the wings with angels. When we finish we pull on our underwear and rise and meet those flashlights, the handcuffs around my wrists, his stump held by a deputy.

"Was it worth it?" the officer asks.

I do not answer. The words have run from my lips, they stain my panties; say more than a cunning quotation carved into granite. The drone of an engine sends shivers down my sweaty spine. Somewhere on the west coast there is an empty bar in an airport. There is a corner table where your pilot is sitting, drinking something special, wishing she was somewhere else, anywhere but here.

Offspring

Timothy B. Dodd

When he had finished, she fled to the woods behind their house for painted turtles and cushion moss. He casually put on his shoes and went outside to wash his second car in the Saturday driveway. Running on the path, no longer a girl, she found a temperature ten degrees cooler beside the skinny yellow poplars. On each side of his sudsy property there were other big-feeling, pudgy men who sucked in large gulps of oxygen between bites of ownership chores. Light made it through the oak canopy somehow, reached and held her trembling. In the hot air a peacock lurched over his rims, stood up with a this and that, gobbler without a wattle. The flora bent, formed, and grew, recognized its own loss. Pulled weeds, raked leaves, set fence posts, mowed lawn, sprayed pesticides, laid concrete, mowed lawn, mowed. No longer looking for a doorway, she calmed and listened to soft voices, roots, prehistory. Operating in a cheap sort of kingdom, his castle for blowhards required subservience. There was a safe place here even for sticky mud, dead leaves, sleet through the sunset, fire souls. He revved the engine backing out, closed the garage with a button, and thrust the car forward a few feet to an empty space. She looked up to the crowns of forest trees and they shook for her. Stepping out of his shiny sales trophy he envisioned their next meeting and pulled out his check book, writing her name for his pleasure.

Like Snow

Kara Dorris

We live on the highway for a fast getaway.
Skunks, armadillos & others small animals are hit
& thrown in our gravel driveway,
we shovel the dead bodies like snow.

I guess we shouldn't leave out the hay & oats
or watch from warm, fog windows as
raccoons have babies or stags
teach does to blend into darkness.

We should dismantle our halogen
bulbs & outlaw Christmas lights.
Use car horns as lights, as footsteps,
open the windows & stick out hands & heads,
wave downwind. But we don't.
Instead we hunt with our everyday accessories:
just like our neighbors.

One day a car hit a buck & ran, threw
that warm, lost fawn body into our driveway,
an offering. My stepdad went out with a knife
& sawed the antlers off. He said, *here, a bridegroom.*

Antediluvian

Kara Dorris

Once it flooded & the river
took the sky
from the bridge between
home & town. A family oceaned
or the closest we knew of it.

It must have been traumatic
being trapped at home,
but I don't remember.

There is a newspaper clipping
my mother framed & within
the glass she wrote our names
over our heads like specimen labels.

We're walking towards
where the bridge should be,
another empty space
that promised to be something else.

I don't need extra ink
or carefully curved cursive
to know I'm the little girl clutching
her grandmother's hand—

her knees, camera caught,
knocking in song:

You wanna be a sailboat.

You wanna be a sailboat.

You wanna be a sailboat.

On Southern Romance

Monic Ductan

There's nothing romantic about the South, unless you count its never-ending supply of kudzu vines and red clay. But I remember soaking my feet to remove that clay after my mama beat my ass with a pine tree branch. She said I was gettin' dirty and actin' mannish. Nope, nothing romantic about ass beatings.

And there's nothing romantic about Georgia, unless you count every grain of sand along the coast. Maybe if you climbed to the tops of the Georgia Mountains and looked down you'd see something romantic, perhaps the way the kudzu vines cluster and then thin out, revealing patches of red clay. Does that sound romantic?

There's nothing romantic about the New South, perhaps the South somehow lost its romance in that moment when Tara lost its grace. After Scarlett pulls up that turnip and vows to never go hungry again, maybe somehow the romance slipped away, burrowed underground. Yes, there *was* something of romance in fancy ball gowns, and there *was* something of romance in men who smelled of cigars as they waltzed in white-columned houses.

But what of the dark ones who slept in those dirt-bottom shacks? If I were to ask those cotton pickers—just after their language merged into English—what they thought about the

South's romance, what would they tell me? Would they compare it to some long African river in a tongue that I could not understand? Would they tell me that cotton fields are not as romantic as freedom? Or would those cotton pickers be able to understand me anyway? In my dreams, I always picture them as animals rather than people. In my dreams, they have unusually long fingers that are designed for separating the cotton from the stalks. In my dreams, they have stout, stream-lined bodies, and they move so freely that they seem to be all liquid with no bones. And they have skin that is...

These aren't my dreams. They were implanted from somewhere else.

I want romance to be something that I can taste or touch, like maybe a kiss, and I reckon kisses can be romantic, but once the lips are placed together, maybe the romance slips between the locked lips and floats away like dandelion seeds, and so maybe romance is unattainable, like trying to take hold of the wind in your fist.

When I think of romance, I see red hearts. I see no red hearts in my mind when I think of Georgia, unless you count heart-shaped kudzu leaves, the color of red clay.

Broken Lily Dream

Monic Ductan

I had a dream that you were always taking pictures of nature—birds, trees, flowers. You wore a white guitar shirt, low-cut and so transparent that your nipples were on full display.

And you were so generous in my dream! Every morning you brought us coffee, still warm. The liquid was rich and dark as your disarrayed curls.

You sat by the roadside and waited for me to come to you, and you never glanced at your watch. You never *wore* a watch. There is no time in dreams.

Your eyes studied me so long that I thought I must be one of your wild things, a bright blue peacock, feathers spread, or a pink ostrich looking candidly up at you as you take its photo.

And you coaxed me to lie down on satin sheets. I smelled that grass you sat in while you snapped the day's gaggle of pictures. And when you began to move, I saw a river. It was dark and muddy, and at its center stood two calla lilies whose necks reached up like oaks.

And then a heavy wind swept across that river. I saw the lilies bend so far that their flowers nearly touched the dark water. I held my breath in fear that the water would muddy our brown

faces. And when you bit my neck, I heard the lilies snap at their midsections and break in two.

I don't remember how it felt, the thrusting or even how our two bodies moved and released, but I do remember the feel of wind on my neck, the way the water shone on your thighs. I remember feeling that it been good, gentle, perfect.

You still hold my hand; yours is wet with sweat. The lines of your palm are the striated lines of the calla lily stems. I still see those lilies as I'm drifting off to sleep, how they bob in the water, how they are carried out with the current. Bodies broke in half.
Drowned.

Riding With Jesus

C. Malcolm Ellsworth

I start my car and put in some tunes and Mom comes trotting out. She flags me to roll down my window. “Wait a minute,” she says. “Jesus is going with you.”

“C’mon,” I say. “I gotta get Brianna. You’re making me late.”

“Oh, hold your horses. He’ll be right out.”

“I don’t know what to say to him,” I plead, turning down the music.

“So don’t say anything,” she replies.

“Mom, that’s so weird,” I whisper as Jesus comes out and gets in the back seat.

“Drive safely. Don’t speed.” She’s gripping the thick, smooth edge of the glass.

“You always say that,” I say.

Mom looks at Jesus and says, “He got a speeding ticket last week.”

Jesus nods.

When I pick up Brianna, she gets in the front seat and asks, “Who’s that?”

“Jesus.”

“Oh,” she says.

We’re meeting some friends at Tin Bridge, a railroad trestle over a rocky, sometimes dry, creek. No trains ever come. It’s familiar, comfortable as a childhood fort, but also dangerous, or at least precarious, walking out to the middle, stepping over the gaps like piano keys of air beneath our feet.

Now there’s standing water under us. The guys throw rocks into the pools and spit loogies. Aaron has stolen some Amaretto from his dad and we pass around the jar, taking small swigs until it’s empty. The girls clump together at the end of the bridge, their purses in their

laps, texting and talking, a nest of color and noise in the dark and quiet night. From here, I can see Jesus, sitting on the hood of the car, his face turned up to the stars.

Brianna has to be home by 11:00. When we walk back to the car, Jesus is already in the back seat leaning his head out the open window. He's watching bats dip and glide around the halo of a security light. At Brianna's house, she kisses me, but holds back.

"See you later," she says, glancing at Jesus. She gets out and walks up the sidewalk. She doesn't turn around. I can tell she's a little pissy.

"Oh Jeez," I say. "I mean, well, crap. That's just great." I peel out of the driveway and add "Mom wants me to pick up some stuff at Dillon's on the way home." Jesus shrugs.

I get milk and eggs and coffee filters. I see Jesus in every aisle, reading labels or standing too close to people. In the checkout in front of us, a wiry, tattooed guy is arguing with his girlfriend about which cigarettes to get. Jesus moves up and pats the dude on the back, just like my dad used to do when I struck out or fell on my bike. I think this guy is gonna blow a fuse, but he doesn't even notice. He asks the clerk for a pack of Marlboro Menthols, his girlfriend leans against him, he lays his arm across her shoulder.

At home, Jesus follows me into the half-lit garage. We kick off our shoes. My hands are full and Jesus holds open the screen door. "Thanks," I say and Jesus smiles.

Bike Trails and Ash Clouds

Cheryl Anne Gardner

You just have to let the hunger take what it needs and love what it loves.

I love you.

Simply.

And I do not even know what love means or how to do it. You robbed me of that.

I hear the sound of running water, or it might be the sound of blood running down the length of me.

How pretentious, *you* offering me a light ... a drink ... and then a ride home.

How did you know I couldn't dance? I'm an introvert. But when you said it, it sounded so thin. Pointless. We were both awkward, but even so, your advances were suspect. Lewd. Just the way I liked them. But I didn't tell you that. You said, "Hey. Remember that fat girl from high school? The one they called miss kitty cause she liked to finger herself in the shower after gym class?"

And I said, "That was me."

You took my panties. Left me crying on the football field when you promised to kiss me and didn't. It was just a random moment in time. You told everyone you'd fucked me though, and that I liked it.

Everyone laughed.

At me.

Not you.

I used an alias on my name tag tonight. You couldn't have known it was me. I'm thin, beautiful now, and you're ... not. I saw you slip that powder into my drink. A few minutes ago, when I went to freshen up. Some things never change, but I am immune to your charms. You couldn't know that, either. I wasn't then. So in the end, it would be your undoing.

"Oh, how silly of me, now I'm being pretentious."

That's what I said to you. Just before I shut the trunk so I wouldn't have to hear you begging. It was the silence I was after, so I would seek comfort tonight, in the moon ... and in the dream I once had of you screaming. Just like I did all those years ago on that cold lonely football field where you and your scumbag friends scarred me for life.

You were the first, so how could I not still love you?

Look.

I'm a snow angel now. Thanks for lending me your skin to make my wings. I hope the thought of me doesn't haunt you anymore.

Animal Life

Howie Good

1

I didn't find what I expected, musk or ostrich plumes or ivory, only a room in a forlorn mansion where I paced and muttered through curiously long nights, caravans of the lost forming beneath the windows and a flesh-covered dictionary open on my desk.

2

Somewhere there's a picture of me with a different face. *Why force a giraffe into a flower pot?* I keep thinking. I pass a sixth day in bed gnawing my side, but otherwise alone. The gods respond to questions only in the summer when all the windows are open.

3

Along the dark riverbank, moans and shrieks, and nobody with whom to exchange heartbroken glances.

Breakfast in the Old House

Michele Harmeling

To distance yourself, you begin
to buy

and store

all the things you're certain
no one else has:

the cereal bowl

you ate from all those years

the couch you hid

behind while eating, the stained

and bending spoon

that held your

Lucky Charms

These things you rearrange

like limbs

place where you can

see them, stare

every day at their heft

and contour

and one morning, I come

home—arms full of purple

lupines that pour over

my outstretched hands—

and this is where

I find you

spooning air

from the orange ceramic bowl

long legs folded

so your feet don't stick

out from behind

the couch—and I place a lupine

on your spoon

knowing that you'll eat it

slowly, flower

by flower, knowing you cannot

come out

Quintillion

William Henderson

I feel they are trying to sell me the moon without owning it, he tells me. We are under a tree, on our backs, counting stars. I always quit counting stars when I get to one hundred, but he continues until I think he's making up numbers. Quintillion. Quintillion and one. Quintillion and two.

What's a quintillion?, I ask. *I always ask him what a quintillion is. Or, rather, how what a quintillion measures.* More or less than million?, I ask.

More. A lot more, he tells me.

Who are the they?, I ask.

Sometimes he talks as if I'm supposed to know to what he is referring, and sometimes I know and sometimes I don't know and sometimes I don't ask but I pretend to know because I'm afraid he will look at me in this way he has of making sure I know that I should know what he's talking about but he will humor my not knowing.

My mom and my dad and even grandma Lou, he tells me.

He rarely talks about his mom and his dad and his grandma Lou. I didn't even know he had a grandma Lou.

Of course they don't own the moon, I say. The moon belongs to each of us.

I don't agree, he tells me. *Why am I being coy with his name? I love his name. Stefan. A name of a man who could do better*

than me, though he acts as if I, well, as if I hung the moon. Which I didn't. Of course I didn't. Hang the moon. What a concept.

Then how are they claiming to own the moon?, I ask.

He looks at me, now, in that way he has, and I know what he's thinking and I don't know like what he's thinking, so I lean close enough to feel how badly he needs to shave and I kiss him. I kiss him with my eyes closed, but I expect he kisses me with his eyes open.

They're not claiming to own the moon, he says. They're telling me what I should do next.

Next. After this. After me.

I say nothing because I have nothing to say. Or, I have everything to say, but feel as if I have nothing to say because I can say nothing.

College or a year off to see the world or even getting a job.

What would be so wrong with any of those things?, I ask.

I don't want to go to college or take a year off to see the world or even get a job, he says. I want to wake up and have nothing to do, and I want to climb trees and I want to jump off of cliffs, and I want to learn what comes after quintillion.

But how much is a quintillion?, I ask. *I always ask.*

The distance from here to the moon, and the space between us, and the way I feel about you when we're together and when we're apart, and the number of leaves in this tree, and the certainty I

feel that I do not want to go to college and I do not want to take a year off to see the world and I do not want to get a job.

How can a quintillion be all of those things?, I ask.

Because it is everything I want a quintillion to be.

And I want to say more, but I don't say more, because I still don't understand what a quintillion is or how much a quintillion is or why he chooses the word quintillion to describe things the things he is otherwise unable to quantify, but I like the word, or I like the way the word feels when I say the word and when he says the word and when I think that he means the word when he says the word.

A quintillion, I say.

A quintillion, he repeats.

And I roll back onto my back and I look up and I start counting from one.

The Bully System

Keith Higginbotham

Hunt through your bathroom
heart. This is what
made the screwing simple.

Old shutter self, shameless
fragrance, ripped from oil
and metal black stars.

I framed a finish out
of order, a peeling, chipping
look, but you were a purist.

Sometimes we scrub layers,
damaged coffee clock. Sometimes
we hold our smelly hands.

What To Do In This Humidity

Alicia Hoffman

Take a silver spoon,
serrated at the edge,
large enough to slice
clean the day, wander
around, mouth the word
wonder, say it aloud, eat
vanilla chocolate chip
ice cream fresh from the ice
box, glance only at the weight
of sky that is accumulating
cumulonimbus now,
as fat strings of rain drop
to the bridge beyond
the window, lower
into the milky melted bowl,
cup it and lift and drink.

Omens and Portents

for Matthew

Brett Elizabeth Jenkins

How could we have known, then, what
would happen. Did we ignore the cracks

in the sidewalks outside our building,
did you see the feather in the empty

bottom drawer of your borrowed dresser.
We couldn't possibly have known.

That the songbirds chattering us awake
were rocking the truths of the morning

gently into us, that each rock shook
from your shoes that first Vermont summer

was preparing your body for loss.

What parentheses you recognized in her hipbones,

ones that could contain you, and could make
space inside them for another, and which could let go,

which fell sideways like boats, which now cradle nothing.

Cadenza

Brett Elizabeth Jenkins

I have been meaning to write to you for the longest time.

I need to make sure you remember the sweet grass,

throbbing with bees, the two hot hands of the sun
pressing down our wild hair. The summer you got a fish

hook stuck in your finger, the same summer I fell
from the Fettermens' swingset and left a trail

of blood all the way to the backdoor. I sometimes have
dreams in which our blood plants itself in the roots

of the backyard and the place becomes beautiful
again; the stump of the old Oak grows back

into a tree, the leaves alighting religious in the new
wind. All our lost coins hurry to the mouth

of the soil and unearth themselves, the entire
lawn shining with nickles, all turned up to show heads.

Being Georgia

Meghan Sterling Jenks

The desert became the reed of my spine;
It needed me to bridge it.
White tree bark split in shags,
Shadow of bone, showers of dust—
The fuzzy skin along the dim and heavy blue
Above red ground.
I swore against all others but you—
Dust, air, wind, sun—you,
The coming together of self
In emptiness.
Lead me onto this long road
Alone with my companions,
Myself, forever extending outward:
Black crow, watchful in the dust.

Lilies

Meghan Sterling Jenks

I encountered a riddle of my making
the glass bowl filled with milk dimmed water
from the soft sap of cut lilies
stems plunged and quieted
slowly bleeding white
rings of sun
echoing the wood around the bowl
shivering light.

It struck me suddenly
brush poised midair, this slow bright death
these lilies, their fragrance like carrion
decay resting languidly along the bowl's rim
one dusty yellow eye
staring blankly as I paint the vulval folds like canyons
their stamen lolling, their petals stiffening fruit peel

I am making them immortal,
these soon dead things
making them more than they are
this giver of life— these hands,
these destroyers

Poem From My Grave

Michael Lee Johnson

Don't bring the rosary beads
it's too damn late for doing repetitions.
Eucharist, I can handle the crackers and wine;
I love the Lord just like you.
Catholicism circles itself with rituals-
ground hogs and squirrels dancing with rosary beads,
naked in the sun and the night, eating the pearls
and feeling comfortable about it.
Rituals and rosary beads are indigestible
even the butterflies go coughing in the farmer's cornfields-
Cardinal George, Chicago, would choke on the damn things;
some of his priest would have thought it a gay orgasm or piece
remote found in scripture from Sodam and Gamora.
But my bones in ginger dust lie near a farm in DeKalb, Illinois
where sunset meshes corn with a yellow gold glow like rich teeth.
My tent is with friends there we said prayers privately like silent
moonlight. Farmers touch the face of God each morning after just
one cup of Folgers coffee Columbian blend,
or pancakes made with water and batter, sparse on the sugar.
Sometimes I would urinate on the yellow edge of flowers,
near the tent, late at night, before the hayride, speak
to the earth and birds like gods.
Never did I pull the rosary beads from my pocket.
It's too late, damn it, for rosary beads and repetitions.

Death and Oreos

Stephanie Kain

That crinkly package was impossible to open
without drawing attention—having
it taken away.

Unless you crawled into a cupboard
under the counter, like my little sister
once did;
her feet catching in Tupperware and wooden bowls,
in the pitch dark.
I don't know how she managed to open the bag
with her fumbling toddler hands.

We heard rustling,
like the cat pawing through tinsel
on the Christmas tree.

We called her name.

She didn't even giggle.

My mother finally thought of the cupboard.
She wrenched it open, and
Bessy was sitting amidst the pretzel bowls,
clutching a bag of cookies,
her face dusted from lips to skinny eyeballs in Oreo crumbs.
It was 6:00 in the morning.
She'd missed her favourite commercial between cartoons

for the sake of those cookies.

It's 2:00 a.m.

I wake up, clutching my elbows.

I was promised a reprieve—

in the split moment between sleep and waking

before memory and consciousness collide.

But I don't get that.

I wake up knowing.

The knowledge is physical.

It lingers on the horizon of my mind, like the dense fog

off the river, where the silent man builds

Inuksuks

when the water's low.

I get up and go to the kitchen.

You must hear me, because suddenly you're there too—

your long red hair glinting in the dull light of the overhead

fixture

faded with dust.

in our tiny galley kitchen.

Laughably small.

You had to paint it Terracotta. You said it would make it homey.

The smallness was okay because it was just an apartment

and one day we'd own a real house.

You reach past me for the cookies—the sleeve of your threadbare

sweatshirt

brushing my face.

I want to cry, seeing you.

Instead, I pour the milk.

We stand at the counter, dunking our chocolate chip
packaged cookies, like we're nine years old.

We don't care about making noise
because he's not here to
wake up.

That makes us
even quieter.

I lick my fingers—once, for him.

You reach back into the bag.

Another Motivation for Yesterday

Nima Kian

This girl whose name

I can't remember now,

I can't remember

many things, but you,

you were a smell, and it wasn't talcum.

Your hair,

a layered blonde that sometimes slept

on my shoulder when you sat next to me –

you sidled toward me, wiggled

on tarmac.

We held hands even though other kids laughed,

at least until I honed my tongue.

You were

abandoned German homes I wandered through.

When people pass me I wait for the air

that follows them to chance a bit of you:

That good hurt where your mouth ends in your throat.

Divination

Anna King

With speaking water and searching
knives I will look
into the river.

When the current moves
it swims drinks
me through a laughing
mouth with teeth
on the edge
of the cliff where a crescent
moon is yellow
like centaur hooves
and I
am nothingness like star
sequined dusk.
A weeping sun a castrated
rainstorm paint my body
with shadows.

There is nothing
but a scream in the temple
on the hillside
made of breasts. Your voice is
a vein thrashing
among the columns of dream
interpreters deaf and mute

with knowing.

I am fading
with the light but you
are this geometric
darkness unblinking. Words
are here but my lips
are stitched
with grief.

I am made of lyric
and thunder
where there are no
jolting addendums to reconsider.

The scandalous crocus is arrogant
with economy. I mutter fragments
of cleaning supplies.
I am made of thoughts
and marble.

The color of
your soul is
beautiful and hidden
in a cave profound as time.
I write with a page
of your essence
wishing it well—

Please do not ask
for more of me when I am
inexplicable as I am now.

If My Left Eye Offends Me

Robert S. King

Down the surreal road rolls
a single eye cast out from a vision
of the self where the right eye sees all,
where a roaming eye offends duty,
spends half your soul on sin.
The light of the right eye is enough
for a pious man like you.

Still the orphan eye holds its gaze
as it tumbles away, sees a landscape
smear like a tale told in haste, rolls
like a marble with the fixed stare of death
and the frozen tunnel light of birth.

Desire cast off rides on wind and water
and still belongs to your secrets.
In the whirl of a wayward eye,
where all things are impossible but true,
rain falls upward; sun scrambles like an egg;
wind speaks in tongues you no longer understand.
Possibility wanders. Certainty stands still.
No Samaritan will pick up a lone eye,
rinse away the road dust, put it back in the hole
that held it. No one will say, "Look: For all
your spinning you have not travelled far
from the body that mourns you still.

Look: You do not need a whole body to die in,
just an empty socket, a hole to heaven,
a singularity of vision.”

Nor can half a man see the other side.
Nor can the right eye turn around
or see over the bridge of the nose.
Nor can the plucked eye look back
to see its righteous brother going blind.

The Last Tree Standing

Robert S. King

All birds are rare now, are slowly sinking
lower in the sky, weary for a tree
to build their nests, where famine feeds
so few open mouths.

An oasis glimmers ahead. A lone parched oak
somehow bears the weight of drought
and a rainbow of crowded birds
bending its limbs toward the dust below.

Nowhere else moves tree or water, scorpion or worm.
Atop a dune of hourglass sand stands a scarecrow
at the point of combustion. It guards a well head
that bobs up and down, its metal beak
gulping the only liquid left.

Fable of the ant and the plague of grasshoppers

Caroline Klocksiem

And then one day in the field their magnificent engine clacks
and putters at starry speed. The chirping mechanical cloud
its billion buzzing components. Hoppers swoop and sway, bomb
from the sky a unified wing. What God's great peacock tail demands

what trumps and struts right over you. Dazzling stroke
of display in its flapping fury. *Whoever shall be spared?* Whole fields
woosh in minutes, like *Look what I can do to you*. What little

grass you've managed and the gaingly corn
threshed and swallowed like it never was. On the line, just-
darned socks chewed up, even cotton sleeves
milled to grit in grasshopper midguts. Harvest grain
already dotted by their eggs, and in the cracks
of your home, their nests. How they chew the children's hair.

Everything an offering. Everything nothing but a gnawed-up husk.

Even as they leap in waves, you work to save what shreds you can.
Mix and cast a poison, singing—*And while the grasshopper played the
ant
worked hard*. Thinking this is not the version you tell
your children—*Whoever shall come and sing with me all summer
long?*

The version with that buzzing bastard chirping historically.
*And the ant toiled while the grasshopper ate and the ant worked
hard...*

Even as the grasshopper sucks the wood clean off the rake—

The grasshopper was content to sit in the sun and the grasshopper was glad

to take you for all that you own. And the grasshopper's heart is stuffed with green cold blood, and the grasshopper's heart is restricted in a thorny pen. And the grasshopper is content to sit singing, to die choking on this arsenic sun.

You Are the One That I Want

Laura LeHew

it will always happen this way

bone bruise

hematoma

broken voices

temporary constructs

concession scuff dusk

it is always

too late

a lifetime of dust inside you

without me

could you exist

without me

kissing you is it a lie

I have asked all the wrong questions

Please Don't Text and Drive

a billboard on Highway 40 in St. Louis, MO

Laura LeHew

no

I said no

one wrong thing

the answer

a minor stupidity

sorrow and salt

she was my something else

radiance

before the bite of the fruit

vengeance splayed

through the afternoon

I wanted her to stay

decanted

but the gun kept going off

a gun is a gun is a gun

she was made up entirely

of fixed-blade arrows

the proper weight of things

taillights in the rain

like a rifle

Animal Driftwood

Lindsay Miller

I walk to the edge of the water, I look
down into the salt and swell.

The sun comes up green in the heavy air.

I swallow and it sticks in my throat.

Here is the end of the land. Here is
the death of the hourglass. Here the sand
moves and moves without ever running out.
The shells and teeth of soft creatures washed ashore.

I come to the surface. I know how to swim,
I've grown fins by thinking about it every night.
In the future I lay eggs. Don't worry too much
about this part. Assume it's symbolism,
a biological fairy tale.

Everything from here on out is waves,
and glass, and you.

How many hearts would we have?
I've always wondered. I've been hungry.

It's a burden, this natural affinity
for coastlines, this ecosystem where my body
becomes my body. This monster.
This skin tattooed with tide pools.

What I want is to run in a straight line,
forever, across all the horizons into night.
There's all this ocean in the way,
but it doesn't bother me. I've learned
to breathe underwater.
Through the space between my bones.

The Perfect Interface

Lindsay Miller

Dear future self, your womb is made of metal. This is what you always wanted: freedom from bleeding. Coolness that radiates from the inside, helping you sleep. Your bed is the eye of a camera and you lie in its frigid curve.

You had your appendix out. It was made of bottle caps and obsolete glossy paper: no wonder. The moon can no longer achieve orgasm.

But you are not yet free from your body. The everyday tyranny of breathing and metabolism. Your heart has not been replaced by a computer chip. You love like something organic.

Dear monster, your wedding ring is implanted under the skin of your wrist, parallel to the suicide vein. You have a light bulb in your mouth like a refrigerator. It does not turn off when you kiss. Your lover's skeleton is warm at night. Hold him in the morning before he puts his skin back on.

He is spliced into your name. His body is alloyed with steel to make it more like a man, or a bridge. You still wear prosthetics while fucking, of course. Your lips have not reached escape velocity. You cannot build nerve endings of Styrofoam.

You don't need to eat anymore. Your tongue is vestigial and prone to infection, but you will not have it removed. You don't

need to speak. You never have. His fingers can read your heartbeat and your teeth.

You were sent from the past covered in grafted human skin. You were made to beget children but not to bear them. By now they can take slivers from your inexplicable body and inject them into his improbable womb. By now you have children carried to term by their father and named for their great-great-grandmother.

They are not mutants. They are cities built on the soil of human bodies. They are more not less, androgyne not neuter.

Dear eldest daughter, your family is post-apocalyptic, as in scarred: because any moment is the end of some world. You are always rebuilding in the banality of the ruins.

You wear a translucent exoskeleton in the summer. It's nearly weightless. It keeps your fair skin from burning.

Antenna Towers

Liz Minette

Their lights dance
up and down the backdrop
of an evening sky baked
like velvet.

Heartbeats over and over,
the lights are red satin steps,
a woman going out
dressed in bangles.

They are again again again,
or here I am here I go -
channel off channel on.

Commanding rubies,
the lights wink "Come"
and "Closer".

Their towers whisper and buzz
to rock and grass, to anything hiding
or wanting, as the lights pulse
their blood rhythm all night.

Until dawn rubs itself into being,
and the lights blink home home sleep.

Conversations

Shaina Mughan

Because it's convenient,
I roll up the Turkish rug
that wants a shaking—in rug dance rhythm.

I haul it,
across my shoulders
until we reach a place
where the language of
cicadas and houseflies swarms,
in cacophony through
the fingertips of untrimmed grass.

She wears ribbons.
And she asks,
pointing to a jet stream in the sky,
“Is that the Milky Way?”

“For Now”
I'll say.
Then, without mentioning physics
or the practicality of physical realities,
I'll explain
that birds fly
because they don't know about gravity.

The Slot Canyon

Megan Muthupandiyam

I.

At the end of the trail he found it —
the geography of the watermarked scar
was just as she had mapped it
on the back of his napkin —
its gaping mouth ink-black,
forming a soundless scream.

Entering the rift in the canyon wall
with his head bowed,
he suddenly understood
that every genuflection
is a gesture rooted in fear.

All his life he had disdained
sentiments of devotion —
but it all seemed so natural
within the recondite silence,
 beneath the burning flame-light
 of its throated vaults.

And yet how cold it was,
the wound within the smoldering stone —
how immense the weight of its tear.

II.

After the coffee was poured
he followed
the motion of her pale blue nail
passing over the hairline crack on the mug.

He had returned emboldened by a reverence
he could not yet name —
wanting to become a witness
to her,
 a witness to everything.

She described
how the ravine had been formed
by a tempest
that beat the dry rock free of itself —
his eyes began to court her geography,
following the blue vein
flowage that ran the length of her hand,
to its source;
countless canyons circumventing
her wrist's plateau —
dust red scars
 a maze of tributaries.

III.

After she left and the house fell
into an unaccustomed silence

thoughts of her drew him
back into that austere canyon
she had first sent him looking for –

what force had carved
such a terrible beauty,
what torrents
had so brightly burnished
the burnt desert stone.

Found

Neleigh Olson

When I found the nightmare, it was a shivering, frightened thing, a lonely thing, lost in a dirty corner of a lonely city. It didn't belong to me. Its terrors couldn't shake me. It couldn't horrify me. When it screamed, I didn't scream along. It wept for things I had never lost. When I held it, it was not the dark, sweating revelation of my own interrupted nights.

It wrapped around my arms and clung, needing someone.

I opened a jar, and it crawled inside, glowing, gleeful.

Under daylight, calm, it rested, purring inside the glass.

I turned out the lights; it kicked, screamed, knocked the glass to the floor. Wrapping around my neck, hissing in my ear, it settled cool and wet, a puddle slippery on the floor.

When I sent it away, it did not return.

My nights are silent. There are no terrors. No horrors hang from dark dirty corners in my uninterrupted life. In the space where the nightmare existed, there is only an empty jar, and now it is I who weep for the things I have lost.

Leavetaking

MP Powers

Wherever you go, the clangor of church bells
follows,
crying babies, garbage cans crashing to the ground,
leaf
blowers, cellphones, car commercials. You will never know
the quiet life, but once maybe
all the noise around you will soften
and converge,
turn slowly into something of a symphony. The allegro,
adagio, scherzo
and then, sometime before the last movement
a deep
momentary silence. Nocturnal
and still
white light, flaming lotus; reach up and take
hold; let yourself
burn.

The Night Taxis

Kevin Rabas

swarm up the streets in clusters,
in bunches, in mad flying
packs, like locusts when a branch
is shaken; they come,
in yellow speed streaks
with headlights like hot eyes
in the grey green night.

*--visiting NYC, near Lincoln Center,
seen through the Starbuck's window
12:30 am, 7/23/11*

Shuffled Cigarettes

Jade Ramsey

I found a sky blue pink finger-nail polish and gave it to my grandmother. I asked her once what she was cooking and she said *sky blue pink salmon with hollandaise*. She served meatloaf. We've painted her kitchen three times. My mother spray painted her olive stove black. The nicotine wins. Grandmother sits at her kitchen table with tea-colored liquor (or is it really tea today?) playing solitaire. If I call her, she can tell me exactly what is on TV today, all day, any day. *An American President, Sleepless in Seattle, You've Got Mail*. If those are showing on any channel, they're on, though she's seen them all dozens of times. Her youngest son, Edward, bought her a double oven three years ago because he doesn't come to holidays anymore. He also bought her that new flat screen. Too big for her two-bedroom house on Oak Street. I call her Thanksgiving week to find out what goes in the creamy middle of her traditional Jell-o salad. *Sour cream and cream cheese*. She calls me *sweet*, she calls all of us grandchildren *sweet*. She calls her ex-husband *Richard*. He believed in crystals and aliens and ESP and told me once to write down all my dreams so I could foresee my life. He said *the real world is the one you enter when you sleep*. I think this was how he justified divorcing Grandmother. She wasn't real. Grandmother wears a diamond of her mother's on her wedding finger. Her mother was an identical twin. She died in the sixties. Her twin died last week. 99. 100 this August. Grandmother told me she doesn't want to live much longer. *I never liked sex. I think I was bad at it*. She looked so happy with my granddad

though. But she aged faster. She was gray, completely, by twenty-five. He passed for early twenties in his later thirties. She taught me to make fried eggs. *Add water. Cover the pan. Let the steam cloud the glass, dreamy. Let the yolk foam over like cataracts or paint over nicotine walls, until the bubbles sound like shuffling cards.* She has a wrinkled pouty lower lip and finger nails too thick to break. I can't find lipstick to match her nails.

Colchis

Jessica Regione

All day the sun rests in my lap.
I lie with my palms facing up.

I wait for a passage
of birds outside the window,

a rush of black wings overhead.
My friends attend me at intervals.

They move their hands and
mouths. Their talking washes

around me; a rock stuck
in the ocean. Each time one goes,

a new paper parcel, tied with
twine, collects at my bedside.

Left alone, I return to
remembering; how my heart

once swung on its rust-colored
hinges, forced open by wind;

you, your body planted against
an army of fig trees guarding

my street; how I hurried from
the house barefoot so you wouldn't

leave without me; and how
the blood emerged from fresh

hurt, where shrapnel
hooked my naked foot sole.

How to Regret

Taylor Rickett

Press your chest to her
naked back—

you will want to forget this
but will not have the stomach.

Try anyway. Open your eyes
when she speaks your name,

wincing will not stop her. Smile
like you've seen it coming

even when it smacks you
like that jab you took

from Ricky McClure
freshman year. Go hard and long,

though you know better than most
that mistakes wait for you

to drop your guard. Say it,
even if you don't mean it.

Hooked

Janice Sapigao

Shhh. Don't talk. Just be. Just let the sexiness of your smile latch onto my memory. Just let it hang there, in orange slice shape, exposing the mouth's pearls. I'll watch the gates of your lips open slowly, first up and down, then left and right, the chisel of your cheeks lift like a curtain call. It's time. I watch in suspense. You lean forward, I tip toe to talk into you and we cement a connection. The shine on your lips from the bar lights makes my words shake off my tongue. I can only eye the small of your neck from where I'm standing. Your right hand rests carefully on my right hip, your cologne as the left, either way, you've found a way to pull me in. I stand up straight, resisting because I came here for the music and found you along the way.

Windowsill

Adrienne Smith

From your dress,
you sewed curtains
to hang in the kitchen.

Red and blue
checks above the sink.

The aloe
vera seemed to reach
towards the hem,
my brother's prickly
twin, its fingers
tangled in your skirts,
your body, absent.

The truth is I am afraid

Cassie Premo Steele

to leave you even for one breath. I want to suck and pull each gasp of air from you to keep you living. I am afraid if I am gone you will be, too, and this branch that bears us both will break and pull you underground. I am afraid I have made you whole myself, and if I forget you will disappear, like the flower you neglect to pick that wilts and withers. I am afraid that if I do not hear your every cry, you will go voiceless, hard and silent. I am afraid that this fire that burns in me is your only furnace, and winter is coming, and I cannot stop working, or you will go out. I am afraid that my smell is what brings you back to me daily, after the drop and sink of sleep. I am afraid that I cannot feel complete again if you are not near, that I have become a cross and you are my other beam. I am afraid, too, that it is my fear that is killing you, slowly leaking the life from you, daily, that like a balloon you are deflating, or else one day, you will, unexpectedly, pop.

Short of a decade

S. D. Stewart

Routine was a dull blade pulled across our throats. We squatted on middle ground and struggled with how to farm it. The best times were the random ones, days and weeks stitched with carefree thread. Decisions made in blinks, all caution hurled with glee. But then came these sly tugs back from the brink. Caution slid from our fluttering hands to the depths of our empty pockets. We toyed with it there for a few years, and then one day we pulled it out, ducked behind a tree, and when we thought no one was watching, we wrapped ourselves within it.

From walking to running to darkness

S. D. Stewart

The moon hung white and low in the sky. I stared out at it from the unhinged window of no sleep. Behind me were the sane and the simple. Ahead was a steep decline, were I to accept it. And next to me she spoke words to soothe, masking barbs and jabs, small they were yet enough to make a difference. I was almost alone already as they began to ever so slowly pierce me through.

Out there in the dark you never know. Do you choose wide open sky with stars and nothing below. Or do you take security above and fear below, with only a narrow space between in which to crawl around. Maybe you give up on all of it, sketch out clear boundaries to step lightly over, only gazing forward.

When daylight comes, there is always that one moment, it's like a prism that you look through at all the places to which you could have walked. And if you turn the prism a little more, as the hour when you must leave approaches fast, you see yourself running. But if your wrist twists past a little too far, you don't ever see a thing.

Love Song
Tim Stobierski

There's something out there
something
in the night

I can see it
in the green-black yard
when the clouds contract
just so
standing hunched
in the starlight

It's munching grass and bones

The grinding of its teeth
calls my name

It smells like dirt

I want to love it

Sadomasochism

Tim Stobierski

I peel paint-chips with my teeth

The longest strips come off with some finessing of the tongue
an open-mouthed kiss
with a stranger

Yesterday the wall of the old bailey
I couldn't help myself
it was yellow
mustard-baked

Old walls make the best kissers
I've found
they've got experience
know when to break
which is a lesson well worth learning

My favorite
is when the wood beneath
is riddled with worm holes
rat bites
abuse

The best lovers are those who've been used

They know how to give you what you want

Spice
Emily Stokes

The whiskey
that falls
down the chambers
of the infected
throat,

bless it
and bless you

for all that reminds us
we are flawed

and full of switched-off
illness—
the kind that smells like the spice cabinet
of a dead woman,

who promised too long
a dinner party of saints.

The Blood of My Darling

Kathleen Tyler

I see it everywhere

circling the eye of the night-hunting
heron in the first splice
of scissors through poppy
satin

the narrow cut gapes

birth wound ringed
with ruby

in this *Painting With Red Spot*

pulsing across paper/canvas another
clot entirely not quite attached

black combed from the central
metaphor we know the dead
will be dead forever still

rows of bodies wrapped
in white a frilled tutu
crimson-edged

rust bridge rising from the speck

of red my little darling

crosses

not yet not yet into

the painting's inky rorschach

its brush strokes --

a vertebrae in shambles

that is not

sunset broken

over the bent back

of my darling

digging in a bloodless territory

you who will come for her

guided by smell

the green keening

the paint not yet dry

Mr. Yamagawa re Fallen Tree

Kathleen Tyler

Dear Sir I have a sweet bruise I've been meaning to show you I got it when I was licking the scarlet off pomegranates and the whole tree fell down just like my life and you looked so kind I saw you once through a crack in the fence collecting rent in a bucket walnuts shiny pennies bread crumbs and there is a war going on after all though no one here is getting blown up unless you count the little things idiots at work neighbors who play K-Earth full blast and it is the earth that terrifies me the way sunlight thrums the veins of birds of paradise and when the tree fell a thousand bees rose and swarmed into a ball buzzing I thought it was a bomb the sky darkened and scattered the world's honey lost and just then four horses galloped by riderless they'll never return so I ducked into the forest and what did Hansel and Gretel want if not to disappear you know how the body begins to consume itself it starts in childhood quivering on the edges of fiddlehead ferns and little by little it becomes aware that nothing will take hold so when I realized this I held my head in my hands a dead moon and the moon said the river will never be faster the canoe will never be more inclined to be a canoe and what are paddles anyway but a moving prayer so I was swept along the dark water the jungly bank owl pellets moss little bones dropping nothing is clearer than speed and even I could see something white streaked with purple coiled at my feet an albino snake or intestines the gut-wrenching fear that it would be day soon and the wild gaze of the stars would just be light in more light that's when I threw it overboard and the canoe tipped I

dragged myself to shore days and days later a muddy bank a
cottage I don't mean to suggest that the river is time though you
might understand that sort of thing furthermore I know the tree
has fallen onto your property as I have fallen into a certain lust
for color and dear sir I want to tell you it was never the
diamondback or the twelve-foot alligator or the water-filled lungs
that scared me rather the spider lily that scrapes moonlight off
cypress knees the clapper rail whose cry unknots cord grass and
all the things that dream themselves into existence mullet red
drum long-nosed gar yellow-spotted river turtle sliding off a log

Lunar Eclipse

Michelle Valois

Three in the morning and I stand on sidewalk under street lamp looking for 1638, the last lunar eclipse to appear in the winter solstice sky. All that day I imagined English peasants, French haystacks, Dutch tidal pools, heard the distant clang of Swedish sleigh bells as revelers took advantage of a moonlit evening to visit distant cousins and exchange what was needed for what was not, the way I sometimes look at my lover, weighing her gifts.

All that day, as I drove to my obligations, I saw bonfires and the promise of shoulders communed in dark huddle, chants to bless the return of a sun god who has forsaken but not forgotten only acquiesced to something equally powerful, though less benevolent. My lover back in bed, a howl from a distant dog, I look up, longing to feel the jolt of humanity connecting me to the seventeenth century; I look up, a thumb drive ready to download another imagination. Scramble my programming so I might witness again those celestial bodies that once shaped the journey of our lives. I look up but see only clouds, shape-shifting white masses, a grey lonely sky.

The next day a surgeon would enter me and discover a constellation of traveling cells emanating from some mysterious, primal source; she would call them something else. “Did you see it?” my children ask that morning at breakfast, as I sip my tea.

“Was it there?”

**Poem Composed Entirely with Last Lines in Linda
Pastan Poems**

James Valvis

sky
in its arms
in our arms
is our only prayer

I regret everything

in the swelling dark
in its nocturnal wings

have to say goodbye again
the purest form of love

wings
I hardly understand
ready to fly

that old thirst in the genes

I'm dropping out
to go out
to the steamy city
to set it to music

I wave goodbye

I think you forgive me

for dinner

burning

Green Shadow

by Mark Wagstaff

In a job I don't want to do, I go places I don't want to be. Last time, waiting to clear security, a woman passed me at the turnstiles wearing green shadow. She was maybe blonde, modelling next year's labels; I wouldn't know. Perhaps she had eyes like stars or quilts or ships or drops of frozen blood. All I saw was green shadow. Above each eye: a questioning, Doric impasto; country hills to roll down over and over, my long black coat tight round me, laughing out loud at rapid grass and sky.

Her eye shadow stood apart, barged me on the shoulder; told me to watch where she was going. That's when I caught a smile, a face, a walk leaving the building. My feet got every itch in the world to follow. But I had a meeting, a briefcase of papers, a mouthful of lies. I sat in the room with people I don't know, being someone they didn't care for, as close to wretched as likely in the digital age.

When they let me go I slipped by the side of the building, quickly off-radar, to steal a few breaths doubled-over, my hands to my knees, my coat fallen around me in undead batwings. Straightening, dabbing from my eyes the thoughts that congeal there lately, I saw her. Smiling at nothing, smoking, the door behind her wedged backfoot. Each nicotine breath a long, extravagant gesture, arm flung forward: sculptural smoking. She flicked the stub in a lipstick arc, slipped backward in through the door.

Its hollow slam left no hinge, no handle, no way in. I traced its steel edge, laid my face against it. Closed my eyes and waited for the sirens.

After

Kat White

After I die,
let it be said
that my pussy tasted
of children's unspoiled dreams.

May eunuchs charcoal sketch
me and Miles smoking
brown cigarettes and drunk-swaying, broadcast
every night, all night on Barcelona TV.

After I am scattered,
let it be said
that I ate joy.

May the universe not regret me:
clumsy, tip-toeing, gripping, self-involved, now stumbling
with thick-treaded boots and wide steps through
the constellations and laughing, knowing
I knew nothing.

I ferociously knew nothing.

Grandma Was An Aesthete

Amy Wright

Grandpa may have been a carpenter, as John Prine's song says, but grandma was the connoisseur. I don't know if Prine's song was autobiographical, but my father's father *was* a carpenter—long enough, anyway, to help my father build a playhouse in our backyard on 4x4 stilts with a screened window and a shingled roof. But it wasn't from him that my father learned how to recognize wood grain. In fact, this expert of hammer and nail once sawed through an oak hall tree, committing an atrocity against hard wood that would sink anyone's stomach who recognizes it, which many people do not, any more.

My father and mother both learned to read wood grain from my mother's mother, who took them to auctions and flea markets and estate sales. Helen Johnstone could shave a bargain off a rattlesnake, the art is which is know-how and the reap of which is burl walnut picture frames. To know ash from beech is not information she came into the world with. She acquired it, as she acquired, with my grandfather, acres of old-growth forest on mountain land. Wood was her medium, along with glassware, and she impressed upon this young couple starting out the importance of buying furniture that would deepen in color or mellow with age, like a quality corked pinot grigio.

My parents made a serious game of their material knowledge. Oak was the first wood my father learned and taught me. An open-grain, with alternating areas of density and porosity, oak is so grainy and distinguishable almost anyone can

tell a golden oak headboard from walnut or mahogany. Fewer discern an oak dresser from a maple one stained with an antique oak finish, and rare is the eye that can differentiate a chestnut oak from a white one, in trees or lumber. Oak is a harder wood and trumps chestnut in value, although chestnut's appraisal rose due to a fungal blight that hit the American species in the 1900s. Mass devastation in the south-eastern forests where it once proliferated took this wood off the market for decades.

Recognizing “wormy” chestnut thereafter became as easy to spot as a chardonnay bottle on a merlot winerack, due to the pock marks that riddle its surface like a pond during a hailstorm. The furniture crafted from reclaimed barn boards has such coveted personality it is reproduced by furniture makers who indent the surfaces of stained-pine coffee tables with a lightly hammered nail tip, and it takes an educated eye to notice the difference. Pine trees are so fast growing and its grain so lacking in distinction, it's shameless. Pine board will soak up stain like the carpet of some over-accommodating hostess.

Oak has only recently begun to come into its own, in antique years. My grandmother told my mother when she was buying her first bedroom set, “Just wait, you'll see the price of oak in your lifetime rival walnut and cherry.” Her stocks-and-bonds logic was insider information. One of the reasons oak can be cast as a slow developer is because it takes a hundred years to get gorgeous. New oak still looks like a Broyhill floor-room. It takes maturity and patience to stipple its buttercream caramel color with molasses.

Ripened oak's beauty is often hidden. The rolltop desk my mother inherited, rewarded for her years of balancing

checkbooks at it, was the color of a Royal typewriter. It looked a great ominous elephant shadowed in the corner. My parents took it to a vocational teacher in town with the skill and willingness to refinish furniture during his school holidays. His face beamed when he returned it to them, proud that he had found beneath the years of stain and accumulated finish a flock of blonde goats cascading down a hillside. Alive with movement, it glowed—a Pietà sans narrative, the silent character in a movie. The s-curve of the roll top shaped from oak slats glued onto baize, drawer pulls carved like lobster claws—the piece echoes some faint anonymous assembly. If sturdy, delicate, if practical, subtle.

In Scott Russell Sanders' essay "Buckeye," he says his father, when taken to a museum, would study the handrail descending a spiral staircase, the panels below the artwork. My parents speak his language. They make out the strains of dialect in Madagascan chocolate walnut, calculating cacao percentages, measure the years of silver straws in a birch washstand, inhale the cinnamon of mahogany and sniff out a lemon of locust. They weathered the fashion of covering wood with white coats of paint to herald the future of chrome appliances, and chipped its articulations free from the layers that muffled them. It's a kind of vision. Once you learn it, my father says, you have. Sometimes I do—see the potential for a blackened rocker to strip to the copper light inside it, but I am also conscious that many hickories go unnoticed, retiring in the background, accepting barristers unseen among poplars.

Contributor's Notes

John Andrews was born in Sacramento, California and grew up in rural Sheridan, Arkansas. Currently he is working on an MFA in Creative Writing - Poetry at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

Matt Bender is a writer and part-time catastrophe theorist. His memory is like a fish in that it has trouble swimming backwards. He grew up in the American South and is currently trying to make a new home in Hawaii.

Rosebud Ben-Oni is a playwright at New Perspectives Theater, where she's developing her new play *Shamhat*. She enjoys exploring language through code-switching, urban slang, and Hong Kong movie subtitles from the 1980s/90s. Preoccupied with Mexican bordertowns, her story "A Way out of the *Colonia*," set in Matamoros, won the Editor's Prize at *Camera Obscura*, and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is inspired by sparrows and Johnnie To's films, especially *Throwdown*.

Ariana D. Den Bleyker resides in a small town in New York where she is a wife and mother of two. She graduated from William Paterson University in Wayne, NJ with a B.A. in English. She is passionate about poetry because it speaks to her, influences her daily life, and encourages her to write. She draws much her energy from her own life experiences. Her most recent work was featured in *The Homestead Review*.

Sivan Butler-Rotholz has been writing poems since before she learned to write; as a young child her mother took dictation on her behalf. A believer in the Spicerian notion of the poet as radio transmitter, she feels poetry is fed by a timeless communication between artists. Born in Israel and hailing from San Francisco, Sivan is pursuing her MFA at Brooklyn College. Her work can be found online at www.sivanbr.com.

Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time she has either reading or writing. She also takes care of an army of snakes, all very spoiled, very sweet, and very needy. You can find her here: <http://carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com>

Emily Capettini, originally from Chicago, is working towards her PhD in English at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. She is fiction editor for *Rougarou: An Online Literary Journal*, and her work has appeared in *The Battered Suitcase*. She is inspired by the possibility of urban summer evenings and nontraditional storytelling. For better or worse,

friends and colleagues commonly associate Emily with her love of *Doctor Who*, about which she has an upcoming scholarly publication.

Susana H. Case, professor at the New York Institute of Technology is particularly interested in narratives and social relevance. She is the author of *The Scottish Café* (Slapering Hol Press), *Anthropologist In Ohio* (Main Street Rag Publishing Company) and *The Cost Of Heat* (Pecan Grove Press). An English-Polish reprint of *The Scottish Café*, *Kawiarnia Szkocka*, was published by Opole University Press in Poland. Forthcoming is her *Manual of Practical Sexual Advice* from Kattywompus Press.

Ha Kiet Chau is born on a hot summer morning in Sacramento, California. Her poetry reflects truth, human emotions, and imagery through her unique Asian voice and style. Chau finds inspiration in art, children, love, and change. Her words flow more deeply in the early mornings hours. The first poem she ever written is inspired by her mother's firsthand account of surviving the Vietnam war. She currently teaches art and literature to elementary school children.

Tony Colella: I was on the five-year plan - three-year bachelor's, two-year MFA. But in my summer degree hiatus, I realized that fast-tracking wasn't what I wanted. I've spent the past two years working at a rural town's community college, and I quite like it. In my writing, I try and access the rurality - the honesty, the knowledge of neighbors, and - depending upon who I talk to - the happiness or the regrets of the people who have moved there, too.

Geoff Collins is either a poet who occasionally writes stories or a storyteller who sometimes breaks his stories into lines. He lives with his wife, two daughters and a book-eating dog in a small farm town in southern Wisconsin where he works in the local schools. He does most of his writing before 6 PM or after 10 PM, when the world is quiet. He is inspired by the way the leaves of a Japanese Maple arrange themselves so perfectly along their branches.

Born in the most wind-swept corner of Wyoming, **Patti Crouch** has spent her adult life in the Pacific Northwest. She is inspired by landscapes, the half-remembered stories of childhood, and--for this piece--the glass installation entitled "Glimmering Gone" by Ingalena Klenell and Beth Lipman. She teaches at an independent school in Tacoma, where she lives with her husband and two sons. She does most of her writing in the calm before sunrise.

Sion Dayson is an American writer living in Paris, France. Her life is not as clichéd as that statement sounds. She just finished her first

novel, a process which she likens to giving birth (not that she can compare). During the ordeal of such a long project she turned often to poetry to revive her spark. She holds an MFA from Vermont College. You can find out more about her work at <http://siondayson.com/>.

Matthew Dexter lives in Cabo San Lucas. Like the nomadic Pericú natives before him, he survives on a hunter-gatherer subsistence diet of shrimp tacos, smoked marlin, cold beer, and warm sunshine.

Timothy B. Dodd is from Mink Shoals, WV and a good part of him will forever be happily lost in those hills until he makes it back. In addition to writing, he enjoys oil painting and late nights in forgotten towns. He has never owned a cell phone and would rather be contacted in person at a cenote, on the Tbilisi Metro, or in front of a loving Olmec head.

Kara Dorris is a PhD candidate at the University of North Texas and the editor of the online journal, *Lingerpost* (<http://lingerpost.org>). She lives with her historian boyfriend and their four dogs, and is obsessed with the desire to enter the hearts and imaginations of others, to know and be known—to break through the walls that hold those same hearts and thoughts separate and closed. She needs to write poems to understand herself and this life and everything between.

Monic Ductan is a Southern fiction writer and poet from rural Georgia. She has an undergrad degree in English from Georgia State University. Monic writes to quiet the voices in her head, and she has found that writing is therapeutic. She loves her son, reading, and Cherry Coke. Monic is currently compiling a chapbook of short stories, working on a fiction novel, and searching for an agent. Reach her at monicductan@yahoo.com.

C. Malcolm Ellsworth would like to apologize to anyone she worked with when she wasn't writing: she was a bitch (because every job besides writing sucks). When she isn't writing, she feels besieged, compressed, mean. When she is writing, according to her anyway, she's really quite nice.

Cheryl Anne Gardner is a hopeless dark romantic, lives in a haunted house, and often channels the spirits of Poe, Kafka, and de Sade. She prefers writing art-house novellas and abstract flash fiction to writing bios because she always seems to forget what point of view she is in. When she isn't writing, she likes to chase marbles on a glass floor, eat lint, play with sharp objects, and make taxidermy dioramas with dead flies.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the 2011 poetry collection, *Dreaming in Red*, from Right Hand Pointing. All proceeds from the sale of the book go to a charity, which you can read about here:

<https://sites.google.com/site/rhplanding/howie-good-dreaming-in-red>.

Michele N. Harmeling began writing as a teen, but it was in working with mentor and poet Derick Bursleson that her writer-ly self finally matured. The landscape of Alaska, and of countries like Australia, Japan, and Poland, has inspired her poetry; the concentric circling of family, relationships, natural phenomena and the exploration of Self help guide her imagery. As an avid hiker and backpacker, forager, competitive boxer, and artist, she is intrigued by a wide variety of subject matter, all of which appear in some fashion in her work. Currently she resides in quaint Snohomish, Washington, and works as the volunteer and outreach coordinator for a Seattle-area regional fisheries enhancement group. Her spare time is still spent hiking or backpacking in the North Cascades and on the Olympic Peninsula, where she also forages regularly for wild edibles including salmonberries, wild ginger, and valerian root.

William Henderson lives in Boston where he is often tooling around with his children, Avery and Aurora; musing about love and writing and parenting on his blog (hendersonhouseofcards.com); tweeting (@avesdad); practicing yoga; and waiting for his ever-after ending.

Keith Higginbotham lives in Columbia, SC, home of the worst drivers in the country as documented by *Men's Health* magazine (April 2007). He likes gnomes, wild boars, mountain biking, and surrealist cinema. His most recent poetry e-chapbook is *Theme From Next Date* (Ten Pages Press, 2011).

Alicia Hoffman, an avid reader, grew up near Philadelphia, PA and the outskirts of Ithaca, NY and now lives in Rochester where she teaches and writes. A graduate of the MA Writing Program at SUNY Brockport, her work has been published in a variety of print and online journals, including Redactions, Red Wheelbarrow, Oak Bend Review, Breadcrumb Scabs, Boston Literary Magazine, Poets/Artists, Pirene's Fountain, etc. She also has two broadsides, *Losing Duende* and *Good Fortune*, out through Ink Publications.

Brett Elizabeth Jenkins: I grew up in Oak Harbor, Ohio, and have recently been writing lots of poems about growing up, for some reason. Cadenza is one of them. I studied poetry at the Writing Seminars at

Bennington College, and since I graduated in June of last year, I never stopped writing. I live online at <http://brettejenkins.blogspot.com>.

Meghan Sterling Jenks is a writer and teacher living between Florida and Vermont. She writes poetry as often as she can, with the occasional play thrown in, and strives to live a beautiful life. Her poem, "A Dying Kind of Morning" was published in The Chronogram's June 2010 issue.

Michael Lee Johnson is a poet, and editor, from Itasca, Illinois who lived 10 years in Canada during the Vietnam era, published in 24 countries. He runs five poetry sites, his website: <http://poetryman.mysite.com>. His published poetry books are available : through his website above, Amazon.Com, Borders Books, iUniverse and Lulu.com.

Stephanie Kain is a professional writer and editor. She holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from Lancaster University (UK), and is interested in the grey spaces and defining moments that classify the art of creative nonfiction. Stephanie's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Beltane Papers*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, and *Sleet*. She can be reached via her website at www.StephanieKain.com. Stephanie's debut novel is currently under review.

Nima Kian's writing, much like his life, deals with detachment and dislocation. He was born in Tehran, Iran, but left the country during the early years of the Iran-Iraq War. He spent his childhood in Germany where he witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet Union, after which he immigrated to Los Angeles just in time for the L.A. Riots. He writes from a place of constant longing—for something indefinable and, ultimately, unobtainable.

Anna King writes because beautiful things must be documented. Often inspired by new settings, she starts poems by scribbling down eclectic images, then translates the ideas into poetry. Anna teaches first year writing at Clayton State in Morrow, Georgia, as well as working as a full time high school English teacher. Her daughter Aralyn is the reason she believes the absurd and the dazzling coexist.

Robert S. King thinks he was born with a poet's blood. In the early 1970s, he must have received a transfusion of publisher's blood. He has not only been writing for decades but also has published and edited several literary magazines. Currently, he directs FutureCycle Press (www.futurecycle.org). Poetry has never paid the bills, however. Before retirement, Robert worked as a Software Engineer. He now lives in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains of North Georgia.

Caroline Klocksiem's poems have most recently appeared in such journals as *CutBank*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *The Pinch*. Her chapbook, "Circumstances of the House & Moon," is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press. One of her earliest language memories is the day in kindergarten when she realized that "pots" is "stop" spelled backwards. She's been entranced by words and language ever since.

Laura LeHew loves zombie movies, Dexter and Anne Carson [in a purely platonic-poetic way]; she has one husband [they met at a science fiction convention], seven cats, Tessa, Mr. Socks, Baby, Dorian (yes he is grey), and the Army of Darkness (Raven, Shadow and Smoke)]. Driving the Avenue of the Giants, through old growth redwood groves, shadow and light, a puppy leapt in front of her car. That horrific incident thrust her into writing. www.utteredchaos.org.

Lindsay Miller won the Denver Citywide Spelling Bee in seventh grade, kicking off an illustrious life of being a total word nerd. She studied creative writing at the University of Arizona, is a Founding Mama of the Tucson Poetry Slam, traveled the country with Doc Luben as the Smaller Shark Poetry Tour, and has never really mastered the art of the indoor voice. She is now an MFA Writing & Poetics student at Naropa University.

Liz Minette lives in Esko, Minnesota, near Duluth and Lake Superior. This is a very beautiful part of the United States. Liz works at a community access television station and enjoys creating videos! She also announces for The Women's Music Program on KUMD-Duluth. Oh, and she writes poetry too!

Shaina Mughan is a bird stalker who has recently moved her dance to Tianjin, China. She is currently finishing her second manuscript in Tianjin, where she finds urgency in writing about the dirt that breaks curbs, the very dirt that would otherwise be lost, unnoticed, caressing locals' soles and harboring hatred for acid rain. She is finishing her MFA in poetry at Columbia University when she, one day, finds the way back to the States.

Megan Muthupandiyam likes silence, according to her daughter. It's no wonder, really . . . as she tries to balance vocations as an artist and writer, a professor of literature and a parent, her home — and her mind — are filled with cacophonies existing on par with Grand Central Station's. Within her poems she seeks to sculpt silence into bas-relief — to give depth to the unarticulated moment that becomes the measure of a life.

A graduate of Eastern Washington University's creative writing program, **Neleigh Olson** now lives in and writes from either south Florida or Louisville, Kentucky, depending on where the ponies are running. An exercise rider for thoroughbred racehorses, she hopes to someday be able to write with as much honesty and poetry as she finds in the stride of an early morning gallop.

M.P. Powers lives in Berlin, Germany. His poems have been published in The New York Quarterly, Rosebud, Existere, Main Street Rag, Third Wednesday, A Cappella Zoo and many other fine places.

Kevin Rabas lives and writes in Emporia, KS, hometown of the renowned Progressive journalist William Allen White. Rush hour's not bad here, and for a semester Rabas walked to work. Rabas doesn't see taxis that often in E-town, but when he does, he knows they most hold someone important in them or someone without a car on a trip to Wal-Mart.

Jade Ramsey, a native East Texan, doesn't know why she is compelled to write; it isn't because she wants to be understood, maybe she hopes to, but perhaps she wants to understand and she wants others to discover some answers with her. She teaches English at Heidelberg University in Tiffin, OH.

Taylor Rickett received his MFA in Poetry from Drew University. He takes great joy in finding and reading good cookbooks, along with fishing the waters of central and southern Indiana. His poems have most recently appeared in Gulf Stream Online, among others. He resides in Bloomington, Indiana where he works as a kitchen manager and head cook.

Janice Sapigao is a Pinay (Filipina American) writer born and raised in San Jose and schooled at UC San Diego where she earned a B.A in Ethnic Studies. Janice writes for girls and youth of color. She has taken her favorite pair of braided brown sandals with her during extensive stays Washington, D.C, and Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is currently living as an MFA graduate student in Writing at CalArts in the Los Angeles area.

Adrienne Smith, a native of New Mexico, lives and writes in Jackson, Mississippi. During her time in the Deep South, she has developed an affection for shrimp and grits, southern poets, and phrases such as: "this ain't no church, so don't say amen." She was recently awarded the McCabe poetry prize by Ruminare Magazine.

Cassie Premo Steele, Ph.D. spent many years as an academic studying the healing power of poetry, and her first book was *We Heal from Memory* (Palgrave). After becoming a mother, her creative writing took off and she has since published seven books of poetry, fiction and nonfiction. She works as a creativity coach with individuals and groups from her Co-Creating Studio in Columbia, South Carolina. Her writing combines the themes of balancing motherhood and creativity. Her next poetry book, *THE POMEGRANATE PAPERS*, will be released by Unbound Content in April 2012. Her website is www.cassiepremosteele.com.

S. D. Stewart reads and writes in a cramped city, even while his mind dwells in open spaces. Mostly he walks in the woods and watches birds. He probably lives too much in his own head, which informs his writing, for better or for worse. He's a librarian by day.

Tim Stobierski is a fan of black coffee, scrabble, and the word 'defenestrate.' If you don't know what that word means, just track him down and he'll demonstrate it for you.

Emily Stokes was raised in Pennsylvania, where she wrote some of her first poems at age ten. Much of her writing shows an inspiration that grows from the modern pastoral experience and aims to fuse the personal with the public, the horrific with the hopeful, and ultimately to unite that which is most deeply human in us all. Emily is currently living in New York and pursuing an M.F.A. degree at Sarah Lawrence College.

Kathleen Tyler: Writing poetry is to me a response – to other art, to the world around me, to the visionary, other-world of dreams, to the past. Not in an attempt to recreate it, or to inhabit it again, but to view it from a different perspective. I believe we are all outsiders to our own histories, which like all exile can be both mournful and enriching. I've had two books published: *My Florida* and *The Secret Box*.

Michelle Valois: My writing has always been inspired by events from the distant past: my childhood, my mother's childhood. "Lunar Eclipse" was a departure for me, as it was one of the first things I wrote after my recent cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment. Was it age or illness that prompted this urgency? Either way, I have welcomed the challenge to write about the present day, in all its raw immediacy. I blog at <http://www.readmelikeabook.net/>.

James Valvis is the author of *HOW TO SAY GOODBYE* (Aortic Books, 2011). A former US Army soldier, he won the National Defense Ribbon and the Army Achievement medal before leaving the military to

pursue writing. A native of New Jersey, long-time resident of Florida, he currently lives near Seattle with his wife and daughter and large toy robot collection. He's not nearly as good looking as his Facebook picture, but of course nobody ever is.

Mark Wagstaff was born on the south coast of England, in a town that shut down in winter. He reached London in the 1980s but has little waking recollection of that time. It was while shaking off costly habits that Mark began to write: aiming to clear nagging thoughts from his head, writing became the one solid thing that made sense. Years later he keeps on trying just to tell a good story the right way.

Kat White is an MFA in Creative Writing candidate and Instructor at the University of Memphis. She writes to get to the truth of the matter and finds endless inspiration in the moxie of her three-legged wonderdog, Gracie. She is currently at work in Memphis on her nonfiction novel, *A Personal Cartography*.

Amy Wright still has \$300 in a bank account in Virginia from the first calf she bottlefed. She is the Nonfiction Editor of Zone 3 Press and Zone 3 journal and the author of two chapbooks, *Farm* and *There Are No New Ways To Kill A Man*. She also teaches her students to question themselves and, as importantly, answer themselves at Austin Peay State University.

