

# *Angel City Review*



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As in the dark, descend  
rachel mcleod kaminer







# L.A. RECORD

ISSUE 119 • FREE  
SUMMER 2015

KAMASI WASHINGTON  
DRUG CABIN  
THE DECLINE OF  
WESTERN CIVILIZATION  
TODD RUNDGREN  
by JONATHAN RADO OF FOXYGEN  
EAGLE NEBULA  
THE HOLLOWAY FILES with  
DAVID BOWIE + ARTHUR LEE  
THE AMAZING NINA SIMONE  
JACKIE MENDEZ  
DVA DAMAS  
GIRLPOOL  
AHNNU  
AND MORE

# L.A. RECORD

ISSUE 118 FREE  
SXSW COACHELLA 2015

COLLEEN GREEN  
MIKAL CRONIN  
DUSTIN LOVELLIS  
THE 13TH FLOOR ELEVATORS  
Interviewed by TY SEGALL  
THE WRECKING CREW  
Interviewed by NICK WATERHOUSE  
DIVINE STYLER  
LIGHTNING BOLT  
VIV ALBERTINE  
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# L.A. RECORD

VOL. 9 NO. 2 ISSUE 117  
WINTER 2014 • FREE

WILLIAM ALEXANDER  
MONIQUEA • THEE COMMONS  
COZZ • ELISA AMBROGIO  
NIK TURNER OF HAWKWIND  
THE BANGLES • DR. JOHN  
IBEYI • IKEY OWENS  
OPEN MIKE EAGLE  
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THE SKY ISN'T BLUE







Janus by Matt Kivel  
now available on the iTunes store.

# Foreword

So much of the creative writing world is paradoxical – the notion that you can't get published without being published; the dream of making a living doing what you love while possibly betraying the idea that art exists beyond consumption; the dance we all do, putting on brave faces at parties and in query letters while relying on our insecurities and vulnerabilities to render impossibly vivid worlds. But I think these are all manifestations of what writing truly is. When you write or read, you are traversing a precipice of perspective. You are venturing out toward the horizon of what it is you think you know and witnessing where that line intersects with, contradicts, and challenges others of its kind. Some of us, I am sorry to say, cannot appreciate those other horizons or their effects on us. But you are here, reading this journal, and because of that I dare to believe that you can see the vistas before you.

Those vistas are the point of this journal. The Angel City Review exists because we want to see seemingly impossible ideas that threaten our overly comfortable worldviews, because we want to move beyond conceptual points of no return, and because we want to share these moments with you. The work that our team has put in, spending many late nights debating the strengths of amazing poetry and prose, is not for profit; this is, after all, a free journal. Rather, the work comes from a genuine love of beautiful literature and challenge. We have compiled a collection of some of the best Los Angeles has to offer, from renowned authors whose credits would take up several pages to previously unpublished students who had the audacity to believe that their voice and talent could stand shoulder to shoulder with those of any other. In this issue, those renowned authors do not disappoint. In this issue, those students earn the time you will take to listen to their words. And I again dare to believe that, by the end of this issue, you will greatly enjoy what you have seen.

Thank you for reading.

- John Venegas, Lead Editor



## Featured Artist

### BENJAMIN HARMON



Benjamin Harmon is a photographer living and working in Los Angeles. Born in '81, Benjamin had hopes and aspirations of becoming a breakdancing superhero. That fell through and thus he pursued photography (among other things). He hails from Chicago, a place where it hails from time to time. He earned his BA in creative writing, philosophy and photography from Northern Illinois University. In addition to being a photographer, he is also a social coach for individuals affected by autism and he organizes tours/events for an online compendium of the incomprehensible - [www.atlasobscura.com](http://www.atlasobscura.com). He also happens to be the co-founder of the (now-defunct) literary/arts magazine, Two With Water (based out of Chicago). He enjoys cherimoyas, windchimes, waterfalls & oscilloscopes.

IG: [https://www.instagram.com/arbitrary\\_aperture/](https://www.instagram.com/arbitrary_aperture/)

Photography Website: [www.benjaminharmon.com](http://www.benjaminharmon.com) (in the works)

Contact: [Benjamin.harmon1@gmail.com](mailto:Benjamin.harmon1@gmail.com)

# Angel City Review Issue 3 2016

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# Waste of Shame

BY FRANK MUNDO

I used Google Maps to locate your house,  
the streets where you lived, and the empty lot  
near the Dairy Queen where your corpse was found  
— disgraced, decomposing, head hung in shame —  
by a pair of precocious little kids  
who could have been brothers like me and you.

These quests, yes, represent much more than you  
and some morbid obsession with your house.  
Via satellite, hunting down those kids,  
— chance excavators of the vacant lot —  
I was hoping to undermine the shame  
of what had been lost when what had been found.

I just couldn't square that those kids had found  
what detectives identified as you.  
And so, to put those lying brats to shame,  
— along with each crooked cop in that house —  
I'd parse the pixels of that parking lot  
and show why you can't rely on cops or kids.

But, the lot was always empty — no kids,  
no cars, no cops, no answers to be found.  
And the detectives *seemed* to care — a lot!  
They tried their best to exonerate you,  
despite all the evidence in her house  
and her skilled performance of grief née shame.

I swear, that ex-wife of yours has no shame!  
And she has no business caring for kids.  
Why would you ever go back to her house?  
Why didn't you call the minute you found  
out the cops were investigating you?  
It might've helped. It might've helped a lot!

Instead, you did what you did in that lot.  
And, while I feel much more anger than shame,  
I accept what you did — and I love you;  
no matter what your widow tells your kids,

no matter what proof those detectives found,  
and no matter what happened in that house.

I searched your house on Google Maps a lot  
because lost, I found your haste a waste of shame  
for those kids, for those cops — for me and you.



Frank Mundo is a proud product of the public school system in Los Angeles, from elementary school to UCLA, where he completed the Creative Writing Program. Frank is the author of *The Brubury Tales* (foreword by Carolyn See), a modern version of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* set in Los Angeles just after the 1992 Riots.

# Lone Wolf and Cub: Baby Cart to Hades

BY JANICE LEE & MICHAEL DU PLESSIS

I grew up in the shadow of icons. Shadow of large dark eyes turning inward, shadow of honor, shadow of regret in a world of anguished gentleness.

My large dark eyes turn inward, become blurred in the intoxication of regret, of breath, poised as a warrior in the palindromic landscape of white rocks and the imprinted God-wiped face.

Without regret I wait for the sunrise, accept the regret and intoxication of regret, the impossible honor, shadows darkening onto large eyes, the anguished traces of a journey into hell.

Let us begin the moment, a moment to sit and forget the anguished gentleness, to breathe your impossible eyes inward in a world where I am only ready to die and witness the breath of rocks.

How one lives and how one dies becomes the breath of a poised warrior balanced on the road to hell, the breathless shadows that emphasize the iconic anguish of rocks, God's face as the landscape of regret while men live like demons and demons hide inside the shadows of darkened eyes.

The answer is to live to die, to be ready and to remember the breath of life as it traces gently a poised journey into death, shadows that intoxicate and blur the sunrise and the world darkens around you, living the life of demons.

The sound of gushing blood is my own shadowed and palindromic impossibility, my own readiness to die as I have already lived breathlessly in a world of regret, in a world that witnesses honor and relegates those gentle moments into the shadows of rocks.

To live to die, and I am ready, and finally I can die, my large eyes turn outward to breathe in your poised landscape, your gentle breath, my large eyes darken and turn inward to feel the darkening anguish one last time, because I regret nothing and because my eyes will breathe in the impossibility of your regret as you continue your hellish path into the blurred shadows.

At sunrise, what will remain is the godless landscape of breath and darkened gentleness, a head without regret among the white rocks whose impossible eyes will continue to stare down the shadowed path toward death.

\*\*\*

*If I let you live...* you're on your knees at the feet of the man whom you have begged to show you the true way of the warrior. He's an ex-executioner turned sword for hire and you have been



dismissed from your clan by the very lord whose life you tried to save. Tell me, what is the way of the true warrior, you, kneelingly, implore. Then, your duel, over before you know it, and his sword deep in your guts for an answer. He did tell you that the way of the warrior is to live to die, didn't he?

*If I let you live...*only a few touches of red and light to give an anguished gentleness, the scene itself in blue sky green pines white dust, generous scroll of cinerama. With his sword in your guts for an answer, you, kneeling, beg him to be a second to a lowly being like yourself. He assents...if I let you live.

*If I let you live...*let us draw a curtain over the long back story you give, on your knees, at the feet of the ex-executioner.

*If I let you live...*the gush of blood as you draw his sword out of your guts serves to cut to:

longshot, distant, your blood gushes, persimmon, still,  
he stands over you in longshot, bares his shoulder for his ex-executioner's arm,  
a double outline and sudden widening, eyes to eyes, persimmon gush on gush, eyes to yes,

another longshot. Suddenly the camera stares at sky, blinding, pines, blazing, dust, dust, more dust, rolls, falls, thunks, then looks back, at him, the ex-executioner, standing over your body without its head, persimmon neck, fades to dazzling dust... what the delicacy of sfumato replaces

.  
*..if I let you live.*

Janice Lee is the author of *KEROTAKIS* (Dog Horn Press, 2010), *Daughter* (Jaded Ibis, 2011), *Damnation* (Penny-Ante Editions, 2013), *Reconsolidation* (Penny-Ante Editions, 2015), and most recently, *The Sky Isn't Blue* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, 2016). She also has several chapbooks *Red Trees*, *Fried Chicken Dinner* (Parrot/Insert Press), *The Other Worlds* (Eohippus Labs), and *The Transparent As Witness* (Solar Luxuriance), a collaboration with Will Alexander. She is Editor of the #RECURRENT Novel Series, Assistant Editor at Fanzine, Executive Editor of Entropy, and CEO/Founder of POTG Design. She currently lives in Los Angeles and teaches at CalArts.

Michael du Plessis is the author of the chapbook, *Songs Dead Soldiers Sing* (Transparent Tiger Press, 2007) and the novel, *Memoirs of Jonbenet by Kathy Acker* (Les Figues 2012). Among other projects, Michael is currently working on a collection of poems about decapitation in film and television with Janice Lee.

# Ran/Run/Run

BY CHRISTIAN CARDENAS

because the falling debris when the towers fell because I couldn't walk straight as a toddler because Forest Gump because dad runs because cancer because one kidney because karma because Sal runs because he can still run faster because I want to win because competition because I'm the youngest because empty back alley roads ask me to because moss because trees are so tall because pain helps because my app says it's time because I want to take off my shirt at the beach because America because Nike free runs because Hans had asthma because attention because weed because I don't want that look because I couldn't climb that fence when cops chased me because BMI because Facebook because the dam is there because alcohol because retirement because fatherhood because kids because distance is a good thing because turnaround points because I waited beneath the bleachers until the test was over because samurai rooftop runners because fat fingers because that joke isn't funny anymore because earthquakes and hurricanes in Los Angeles and the usual apocalypse and floods and sinkholes because tsunamis in Fukushima because the war in Iraq because calories and calorie counters because vegans because muggers because green and brown and red mountains because organizing feelings because my shorts are short because old friends because old girlfriends because it's morning because it's 2016 because whiskey because I can talk to dad on the ride over because of bright colors because time and timekeeping because playlists because Rocky's montage because Rocky I Rocky II Rocky III Rocky IV because Murakami wrote a book about it because dad is 65 because chiles rellenos because wine because my abs are tucked somewhere beneath because I'm a writer because I was in Japan because fog is there because cemeteries need visitors because the path was inviting because wooden planks are fun to traverse because spacing out because nature because water because blisters because getting lost is a thing because you can startle a fox and almost get run over because what's around the bend because it's hot because procrastination because frustration because infatuation because the heart is an organ that pumps blood but doesn't have to because smoking because the ultimate warrior because Kobe because dad played soccer because I never saw him play soccer because I never played anything with him because sickness because Paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria because there's time because beer because refrigerators because dreams because physics because the city slopes down that way because scenery because why not because hangovers because I'm a writer because others can't because hobbies because I couldn't walk straight as a toddler because not breathing is terrifying because it's an accomplishment every single time because it's free because there are people around me because there is no one around me because I'm me because soda because office work because the moon is out because guns can kill because sweets are delicious because my life may depend on it because I want to be a good dad because obesity because examples because you don't because the aliens because messenger bags are worn across your chest because man-boobs because the patriot act because I'm Mexican because tequila because I'm a writer because there's always room for improvement because I didn't give it my all because I'm Salvadorian because drones



because school lunches because school lunch ladies because I'm brown because I'm supposed to be strong because Disney movies because cherry blossoms because the park because Morrissey because my nightmares because cold sweats and their frequency because I love you because money because profile pictures because sex because you wouldn't go out with me because it's one of the best parts of me because I'm afraid because happy meals because VHS skateboarding videos because Hans because I'm a Leo because girls just wanna have fun because doc martins because punk shows because the skinhead standing in the middle of the mosh-pit because I'll always have your back because performing is fun because exposure is likely because drumming in a laundry room takes endurance because Iron Maiden because Hollow be thy Name because no one goes to see their dead relatives because I didn't know you but I wish I could have because I'm a writer because mom doesn't because Thania tries because diabetes because bandanas because I blew it because sex because you can see me because web cams with tape because I don't want to be tired anymore because there's an impossibility there because it's fun because you don't understand what I'm saying because I reach a point where I can't feel because subtly is not my thing because careers because gin and tonics because marketability because insecurities because rhythm because speed because aches because rape because I'll always be there for you because double kick-drums because Wilco because longevity because breaking points because torn tendons because it's cool because heartbreak because training because failing because walking sucks because I'm here and that's there because short cuts rarely work because I'm getting older because Trump because I've checked off Japan because Hans almost drowned because camping because I need to get home because this is beautiful because you are beautiful because I was able to see sawmills and forgotten villages and lost cemeteries and rivers that never end and chickens and dad's truck in low-rider form and failing hotels and tall grass and miles and miles of rice patties and secret entrances to country clubs and teepees on the outskirts of nowhere towns because the situation called for it because booze because sweat because small calves because belly fat because all fat because neurons because history because genealogy because it all runs in the family because ready because set because go

Christian Cardenas' writing has appeared in The Northridge Review and on Amazon's Kindle store, where his e-book, *Jigsaw Japan: 10 Secrets About the JET Program* has received favorable reviews. He is a recent M.A Graduate in Creative Writing from Cal State Northridge.





# ECHO OF THE HEART

BY EMILY FERNANDEZ

Know your pain.

We grasp at such truths;  
the clumsy metal claw  
in an arcade game.

By the time I self-diagnosed:  
stress; a knot so tender  
in my back,  
it sent shocks through my chest,

I had spent nights  
contemplating the world sans me,  
the mess I'd leave behind.

It started with the question:

What was I worth?

The article, "Women Don't Act  
at First Symptoms of Attack,"

and all that rejection too.

I called my doctor,  
the appointments made.  
Who could ignore the spondee  
"Chest pain?"

So I panted on the treadmill,  
braless, wires connected.  
She said "Keep looking at the flowers  
or you'll faint"  
as the Chinese peonies throbbed  
with each rushed breath.

I lay half naked  
on the crinkling paper  
the cold wand pressed under breast

revealing the shadows  
flashes of fire -- reds and orange --  
violet blue specks on the screen

as the whack-back of my beat,  
my sound unmuted, saturated  
the room.

Twice they saw deviations in the EKG,  
an awkward hill, a flattened valley,  
but nothing amounting to death.

*Know thyself.*  
*Know thy pain.*

How often we cannot  
though we feel its intimacy  
burn within.

How often stress  
makes voodoo dolls of us.  
The brain consumes  
the body,

Plays its games –  
Perpetrator/victim –

until blindfolded  
we are bluffed.

# Arthur

BY EMILY FERNANDEZ

His mouth: a nascent cave.

The pyretic promise of your magic  
dissolves on tongue.

You, the black quixotic monster,  
who barely moves a blade  
stiff with age and rust  
hiding your sober rage

but he mistakes the wind  
that whispers in the waves,

tripping in the purple tangle  
of weeds, laughing as he crawls  
on his knees.

Heaven is a lure  
a perfect web of siren stars  
your golden song at cliff's edge,

where he falls  
for your madman dreams.



Emily Fernandez teaches composition and poetry at Pasadena City College. She lives in a little house in El Sereno with her husband, sons, chickens, and mutts. She is a proud member of Las Lunas Locas, a womyn's writing group. Her poems have been published in *R.O.P.E.S.*, *Edgar Allan Poet Journal* #2, *Verse-Virtual*, *EAT/ATE*, *poeticdiversity*, and several others.

# OLD SACRED HOME ON 6TH AND WALL

BY NELSON ALBURQUENQUE

Cloudy cold, chilly night,  
sad sulking shadows hackneyed  
aimless delirious bags  
of broken bilingual migrating napkins,  
Orange bus, yearning to empty  
the city's unwanted sleepless baggage,  
broken stares of the swollen somber eyes,  
dawning the chains to a new Middle Passage.  
I watched a cockroach cross the road in search of an Old Sacred home.  
He sniffed the tar, the asphalt grass,  
went can-to-can, looking for a band  
of freedom friends, was met with angry hands.  
Straight ahead: the speeding wheels  
of machinery's murdering metal tantrum  
roars of modernity, screeching arachnids,  
absurdist minds caught high, left to hang dry  
in absence of nature's laugh.  
A whole world below, I found the little roach  
eager to smell the sweet promised fabled grass,  
legends he had heard, cramped living  
in a sewer, avoiding rats.  
Standing guard on the perimeter,  
I observed the eerie madness and Saxton axe,  
the absence of law in the commons:  
An argument between two starving men,  
fighting over a new land dispute in an old territory of tents.  
It was then the little cockroach braved the unpaved urban road.  
At once, he made an astonishing mad dash.  
But eyes distracted! Quick punch to the throat!  
One man fighting lost his balance,  
smashed spine-first into an old pillar of aluminum clothes.  
Scared for his life, the frail injured orphan  
bolted back into the shadows, into the lone.  
It was then that I remembered  
to check back on the roach,  
to bear it my blessing and cheer it on,  
but found its body paused in its move.  
In that moment, I realized the truth.

The long journey to freedom was done.  
Righteous holy roach, it knew not what had killed him.  
And unholy human eyes opened wide, I knew not how he died.  
Land dispute now settled, Old territory of tents set and erect,  
and a dead cockroach, lying facedown, center of the road,  
just another cloudy cold, chilly night,  
amid the hackneyed sad sulking shadowed  
home.

Nelson Alburquenque is a founding member of the alternative rock band Tikal Sun. His work has previously appeared in *The Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes and Shifts of Los Angeles anthology*. He lives in North Hollywood



# Nuevo Mexico Profundo

BY REBECCA GONZALES

I wasn't sure anymore if I came here to find something or lose something.

In any case my aim stayed steady, I was shooting for something in the dark onyx skies of these southern states. I entered the land of my ancestors the Indians and the Indian killers at about 2pm.

I left san Antonio with mandarins and a brown bagged beer between my legs. I bought the beer from a gas stop, where The cashier spoke with a lilt on his tongue and a wink in his eye, he loved Jesus and 'merica, the tattoo on his forearm proudly proclaimed, the gold ring on his finger, a fixture of something true, but something he could forget for a little taste of my tan, or my cleavage in this cut up suicidal tendencies t-shirt. But the three dirty blonds at the back of the general store were in no mood for me, or my smile. I paid for my 32 oz. and was back on the road to the land of enchantment,

I was praying for something, hoping for magic, to be more than what I had been, believing I could be.

Time, was running out, into the third state of this tri-state journey and I was still in a fog, that throbbing fog of having lost him and at any moment possibly losing her, alone in a California hospital bed, drifting in and out of consciousness, tubes down her throat forcing the bile out, keeping her alive by taking everything away.

But here I am Nuevo Mexico on highway 25, headed toward Rivera on a road, to meet a woman I knew from L.A., who would bring me to the woman in Llano del coyote, the one with the pistol hanging on a nail in her bedroom and a fire burning heavy in her den. She spoke steady, she must have known the properties of healing that happened between her tongue and her teeth, she talked of "homegirls" and mothers, in a raspy tone, I could see the rebellion in her jaw line.

These women, this pack of witches and I, sat, half a dozen deep under a New Mexico moon, drinking some kind of tequila and cackling at the mother Fuckers and the "puro pinche heart-break".

I need this, to be shaken by laughter or tequila or both, need to hear how laughter sounds after a handful of small embellished deaths and looming motherlessness, need to be somewhere where howling could be heard, I wanted to howl; to wail, like I had been, on the floor in my bedroom these past nights, wanted to cut the seams of my skin, absorb the earth, dig bare hand into the dirt, scraping away the rocks, until I found something;

I have always read how digging leads to treasures, unexpectedly, and all these women, had dirt under their nails.

“how did I get here?” my head thrust back and the lime and the tequila flowed down, “was this another dream?” “would I wake up with him beside me and my mother safe in Pomona making a PB&J for my dad?”

Nah I was alone, here with these women, alone, like my mother was, in California taking shallow breaths, the pain so great you stop crying, give in to the hum and the monotony of the whole thing, flick the hospital T.V on, any channel , it doesn't matter 'cause we are not paying attention anyway.

I left for a reason,

poetry or my usual foul mouthed drunkenness , under new scenery, I came to lose, or gain, I still don't know.

I came I suppose to find a guide through these mountains and dirt roads, where the street names disappear and all that's left are

instinct and memory.

Cultivated by the sun and moon peeking past the shoes dangling from the phone lines, Rebecca Gonzales was raised and resides “one block East of El Pino.” in East La. .Rebecca’s work has been published in various literary anthologies and journals such as Issue 1 of *Dryland Lit.*, *Brooklyn and Boyle*, *Inchas de Poesia*, *the Mas Tequila Review*, *Cipatli* issues 3&5 of *San Antonios St. Sucia*, *Literature for Life*, and others, she was the March 2014 winner of “The Poets of New York” series at the Bowery in New York City, she has performed all over Los Angeles and Inland Empire . She has three self-published books of poetry and, is currently working on a book of short stories poetry and prose. As a mother she is humbled as a poet she is obedient, and as a woman she is unapologetic.





# Tongue in Hand

BY JAMES B CUSHING

The other night I heard  
the sound they make again:  
they kissed each other on the shoulders  
as a single sailboat launched out on its way.

That thought, like the sailboat, cut a path  
we both paused before  
although our dread arose  
from too much attention to weather.

The flying crow left a message: *I have grown  
into an adult now, and must do my work.*  
A curtain looked up across the painted field.  
I couldn't remember Saturday at all.

The history of modern art was stalking me  
all over the planet of chance.  
We see now where I landed –  
the pines whistle another old riff.

James Cushing, born 1953 in Palo Alto CA, holds a doctorate in English from UC Irvine. In the early 1980s, he hosted a live poetry radio program on KPFK-FM in Los Angeles which gave early exposure to Dennis Cooper, David Trinidad, Amy Gerstler, Wanda Coleman, Leland Hickman, and many others. Since 1989, he has taught literature and creative writing at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and served as the community's Poet Laureate for 2008 – 2010. His poems have appeared in many journals, and Cahuenga Press has published five collections, most recently *Pinocchio's Revolution* (2010), and *The Magicians' Union* (2014). Cushing currently hosts weekly a jazz program on KEBF-FM, 97.3 "The Rock" in Morro Bay ([www.esterobayradio.org](http://www.esterobayradio.org)). His daughter is the New York-based poet Iris Cushing.

# A Maze by a Monster

BY ALYSSA CROW

I am a whisper away  
from falling down  
on the cusp of  
melting  
this heat has me  
scattered  
I don't know how I feel when dry  
dried out  
in the nose  
I don't know how I feel when wet  
from sweat  
all over my body  
dripping down, running its course  
through cracks and rivulets  
I am a maze  
a monster  
a weakling  
I'm not brave enough to be ugly

# I Can't Feel My Own Heart

BY ALYSSA CROW

her hand slides softly down  
my own  
and my eyes shoot up to hers  
but I can't  
at the last second  
so I look beyond her ear  
pull my hand away  
and wave to some guy behind her  
it doesn't matter who  
he'll come over and chat us up  
and I'll go back to pretending  
her touch didn't mean a thing

Alyssa Crow is a Los Angeles based poet and writer. She has been published in YAY! LA Magazine and the WOMEN group. She has a forthcoming zine in fall of 2016.



# Sandra Bland

BY OKTAVI ALLISON

Say her name

The camera in her jail cell did not  
cry out. Iris blindfolded to death.  
No chronicle of that short tooth  
portion in her life.

Say her name

Dallas digs in its heels, has oil  
enough to keep spurs spinning. There  
is tar-cement under highways like 1098.  
Streams of Lone Star beer mingles in  
urine, bone-blood pounded under bedrock.

Say her name

Remember the segregationist, super-patriot  
their starched, sky-blue affection for the way  
things had been. Insecticide spray on Negro  
students. Face spit for Lady Bird from  
the Mink Coat mob.

Say their choked-out names

Let that rain down over any US highway in a  
quickstep boot march. A fine parade twirls  
pink confetti over ghetto skip-rhyme.

# Castaway

BY OKTAVI ALLISON

Bittersweet castaway zips silk-ivory  
up her battered back. Slips on  
pink suede dress shoes.

No homegrown remedy for her  
long tooth story. It yanks out perfect  
stitches in a never ending sigh.

House full of red-hot, iron rosters  
spider cobweb proud. Gray hairs of  
hen dominion tucked under plastic couch  
covers, behind framed glass aghast at  
their erase.

She thought to wring yellow out of  
lemon drops. Hope for one tongue  
lick on tomorrow's sweet.

But Blue Diamond matches in a scrape with  
turpentine. Wildfire in her eyes. A swish of  
ivory, pink suede lost up against the pines.

Oktavi Allison was born in 1951, in Queens, New York. She was raised in the suburbs of Long Island. Oktavi attended SUNY, Farmingdale and later migrated to Los Angeles, California where she began writing in the early 90's. She conducted poetry and journal seminars in her community. Her work has been published in *bum rush the page*, *Beyond the Frontier*, and *Chaparral*. She is a 2015 PEN Center USA Emerging Voices Fellow and a 2016 Charles University Poetry Workshop grant recipient for graduate studies in Prague. Oktavi currently resides in Louisville, KY. She is working on two poetry manuscripts.



# Las Caguamas

BY HUGO CESAR GARCIA

Garrido lets go of the overhead bar to grasp with both hands the wrinkled paper bag as it slides down his waist to prevent it from crashing on the floor as the jam packed lumbering green and white streetcar stops abruptly when a cars invades its tracks

The pedestrian and vehicular traffic towards El Paso resembles the weekend biblical exodus to the Promised Land of Kress's and Woolworth's that late still hot Wednesday afternoon as the streetcar inches north along Avenida Juarez and Garrido his mouth dry feels a sweat rivulet running down his left armpit seeing the international bridge.

In response to his bragging about great Mexican beers, Wirt the cook at the Fort Bliss hinted his chances of getting steady work at his mess hall 'd greatly improve if he brought him a couple of icy one liter Carta Blanca Caguamas from Juarez. The fact he was the only KP that spoke English, had to stand Wirt's boasting about his uncle, the Agriculture Secretary and racist slurs against blacks and Mexicans and prevent sergeant Brown from catching Wirt sleeping on the job counted for nothing.

But his only alternative was to get up at 4 AM, walk thirty blocks to the border and wait in the dark on the El Paso side to be chosen by contractors seeking day laborers for nine hours of hard, hot work cleaning cotton fields for sixty cents an hour. His coworkers, older Mexicanos more than made up for their lack of English and schooling with years of experience in Juarez's fields where similar work only paid less than two dollars per day. Swinging the hoe blistered his hands by lunchtime, his nose peeled and he felt dizzy working under the burning sun no matter how wide brimmed the straw hat but kept on prodded by the blacklisting threats from the Pocho (U.S. born Mexican) contractor anxious to finish the job in the stipulated time.

Scrubbing pots and pans, sweeping and mopping the Fort Bliss mess halls and other assorted tasks didn't take as much out of his system as nine hours under 114 degrees. The toughest job at Wirt's mess hall was staying awake from 8 PM to 4 AM. But the job paid a buck an hour thanks to President Lyndon Johnson's recent signature of a minimum wage law mandating this princely sum.

Normally, enlisted personnel performed KP tasks but because of El Paso's high unemployment civilians, almost exclusively permanent legal residents or green carders filled the hiring hall every morning in white pants and T-shirts holding white aprons hoping to get a day's work at one of the myriad mess halls of Fort Bliss, the largest army installation in the country that summer of 1963 welcomed truckloads of new recruits every week to prepare them for Viet Nam.

Garrido worked only one day the first two weeks and worried he wouldn't earn enough to take out from law away in four weeks the magnificent country esquire suede jacket at Al Hoffman's and would lose the \$25 he'd already sunk into it. Its distinctive look would make him stand out among the incoming freshmen at Texas Western College and its thick black furry collar would make him impervious to the icy wind that had made him feel naked waiting for the bus or walking from his Juarez home to his El Paso school. The older Anglo clerk affecting a British accent didn't bother to hide his contempt when he asked how much the jacket cost. Upon learn-

ing it was \$69.99 plus tax, he flinched inside but managed to sound disaffected asking the clerk to put it on layaway and ponied up \$10 to back up his bravado.

But then last week, he got the gig at Wirt's mess hall and saw it as the only way to get the jacket. Not finding his hankie in his back pocket he mops the sweat from his forehead with a corner of the bedspread he snuck out of his home to wrap the Caguamas before placing them in the Food Mart paper bag. He never sweated one drop when he and best pal Randy smuggled dozens of brandy bottles to sell to the high school choirs Christmas caroling at Alligator Plaza. But they rode in Randy's truck, the bottles resting under the hollow bench seat and that made a difference.

The streetcar stops at the immigration checkpoint and all the standing passengers descend, show their ids to a couple of officers standing by the door. One of them is a Pocho and Garrido feels the floor give under his feet.

The middle aged Anglo nods when he shows him his green card but the younger dark skinned Mexicano stops him. "Que llevas?"

In a calm voice Garrido said. "A bedspread."

The Pocho yanks the bag from his hands and digs into it producing one of the Caguamas with a wicked grin. "This don't look like a bedspread."

"It's for my uncle Lencho."

The Pocho points at the state of Texas tax collection booth some fifty feet away.

A much older Pocho inside the booth sees the two Caguamas and says "One dollar twenty."

Something inside him tells Garrido paying the tax won't be the solution but he counts quarters, dimes and nickels to pay the tax. The man hands him a receipt. Garrido pockets it and a bit relieved reaches for the Caguamas.

"Show me some id."

Dreading Garrido hands him his green card.

"You'll be 18 in September? Unlike Juarez here in El Paso Texas you have to be 21 to drink any type of alcohol." The Pocho comes out of his booth takes off the cap of one of the Caguamas and pours its contents on a nearby gutter.

Garrido sighs. Damn taxes had been more than what he paid for the Caguamas and left him with only 30 cents. After emptying the second Caguama, the Pocho looks for the trashcan. In his most polite voice Garrido asks. "Sir can I have the empties? I had to leave a deposit for them."

The Pocho smiles almost good-naturedly. "Here."

Wirt looks incredulous at the two empty Caguamas. "How do I know you didn't drink'em?"

Garrido shoves the tax receipt in front of him.

"What's this?"

The state of Texas taxes any alcohol brought from Juarez."

"You paid the taxes, where's the beer?"

Thinking of the suede jacket, instead of cussing him, Garrido says meekly. "You have to be 21 in Texas to drink so the tax man poured them on the gutter."

Wirt looks at him puzzled then cackles. "You got screwed!"



Jose, the 50 something Mexicano follows Garrido as he takes out a two pound box of Margarine slabs from the giant refrigerator, he breaks off each square and stacks it around a big empty mayonnaise jar sunk in a tub of ice.

His eyes burning with curiosity Jose asks Garrido. "Que te dijo el Guero?"

"English, Gar, tell this old buzzard if I hear him speaking Spanish again, he'll never work in my mess hall."

Jose smiles. "Que dice?"

Garrido looks at Wirt. "I'm gonna have to tell him in Spanish."

Smacking his lips, Wirt says like a pope granting a dispensation. "Just this time."

Seeing the fear in Jose's eyes after hearing Garrido, Wirt grins and says. "I'll be in the back and don't forget."

Garrido interrupts him. "To wake you up if I see Sarge Brown coming."

"Damn nigger!" Wirt's voice sounds angry but his eyes show fear heading to the eight chairs facing each other at a dark corner of the cavernous mess hall.

In less than an hour Garrido and Jose finish their respective tasks and Jose says. "Ya.."

Garrido puts his finger over his lips pointing in Wirt's direction.

Jose cusses between his breath.

Bobby Vinton's "Blue Velvet" softly piped through the loudspeakers means it's only 10:30 and Garrido couldn't help a yawn he immediately cut short. He has to remain alert the remaining five hours but listening to Vinton's trio of saccharine ballads one after another is like ingesting a handful of sleeping pills. He dumps on the sink half of his third cup of black coffee as the acid begins to churn in his stomach. Unfortunately, Wirt didn't tell them what's on the breakfast menu so they can't busy themselves and he walks in Wirt's direction but his loud snoring stops him some five feet away. Jose is also asleep his head bent down over a table so he paces around the place. Isn't Lily's birthday party tonight? Yeah, she's having it tonight because she is leaving tomorrow to spend the rest of the summer at Colorado Springs with her cousin, what's her name? No matter but Dan and Fito must be having a great time since he'd heard Lily's parties are a blast nobody wants to miss. Norma would also be there. She'd been a no show at the other parties held after their high school graduation night at the Juarez Casino de los Leones and he regretted getting liquored up with Dan and Fito outside instead of dancing with her and maybe this why she left early and he hadn't seen her since. He thought of going to her house to explain but by now she'd probably found somebody willing to place her above booze. At school he'd plenty of chances with her but despised the holding of hands and spending every waking minute whispering sweet nothings to any girl. Well, another squashed promising romance. The anger helps him stay awake and hear the creaking of the screen door opening on the back of the mess hall.

Wirt didn't wake up after the first tap so Garrido shakes him and runs back towards the light. "Good evening Sergeant Brown!"

The trim six foot two black man with gray on his temples whispers. "Why're you shouting? To wake worthless Wirt up?"

Wirt slams his left foot hard as he salutes. "No sir, this Mexican only knows shouting."

"Let's see if he's just as good chopping carrots."

After Garrido slices a couple of carrots, Brown grabs his hand holding the knife and while

he holds a carrot with the other he chops it in a blur. "Get another one."

Garrido fears Brown is going to chop his left index as the blade scrapes its nail and jerks his hand away.

Brown smiles. "Get another one!"

It's a small one and Garrido tenses up.

Brown lets go of his hand. "I'm an old man and can chop two, three times faster than you."

Garrido's fingers ache and a mountain of carrots lay on the table and Brown says. "Next time I expect you to be quicker."

Garrido looks at him wide eyed.

After Brown leaves, Garrido bathed in sweat heads for the restroom.

Holding a sheet of paper Wirt says. "It's gonna be shit on a shingle for breakfast. Gar, get two cases of canned milk out and tell Jose to get six pounds of hamburger meat."

Inhaling the stench of steamed milk and semi cooked hamburger meat as he stirs the enormous steel kettle, Garrido feels like barfing over the mix figuring it could add a mystery ingredient that would improve its taste.

Around two AM two beefy MPs show up. The tallest one named Burr inhales in the direction of the steel kettle. "Smells like home."

Holding his breath Garrido places two slices of white toast on his plate and ladles over them the steaming chopped meat in a thick white sauce

Twelve sentries and MPs show up in spurts of ones and twos. Around 3:45 Wirt pours some Frosted Flakes from a small box on a bowl, adds milk and motions Garrido to help himself who takes another small box indicating he'd have it later when his stomach settles, besides he hates milk. Before leaving Jose takes the unused packs of hamburger meat back to the freezer, takes off his apron and hides a package of bacon inside it.

As they walk towards the bus stop, Jose talks and talks as if somebody had removed a plug from his throat not giving Garrido a chance to utter a word.

The spotlight from an oncoming jeep blinds them. "Stop!"

Two MPs approach them one of them holding a flashlight shining it in their eyes. "Put your bag down and turn around!"

After cuffing them, the MPs put Garrido and José on the jeep and drive towards a small one-story building.

"Sir," Garrido says.

"No talking. You'll have plenty of chances to talk later in the brig."

Jose keeps looking at Garrido with eyes similar to those of a dog about to be whipped and under his cool exterior Garrido grows nervous fearing for his cherished green card.

The shorter MP takes off with the paper bag and through a small window in their small cell Garrido sees the sun come up and shine brightly as almost two hours go by. Burr keeps putting his finger over his mouth indicating they should remain silent. The door opens and another two husky MP's carry a slender dark skinned Latino wrapped in chains like he was going to be thrown overboard and dump him hard on the cell's cement floor.

Garrido asks Burr. "Sir how much longer?"

“The FBI should be here soon.”

Garrido exhales hard incredulous at the mention of the vaunted Federal Bureau of Investigation. Jose doesn't need any translation to realize their situation is going to worsen and he contains a sob.

Around 8:30 two gruff Anglos in dark suits come in. Gibbs, the oldest looks familiar to Garrido as he asks Burr. “They speak English?” Burr points at Garrido then at the faded bedspread and the two empty Caguama bottles next to the paper bag and says. “We checked around and nobody claimed this rag as for the bottles.” He turns to Garrido. “What's the story?” Garrido remembers the constitutional double jeopardy protection against being tried for the same crime twice and confesses he'd tried to smuggle the Caguamas wrapped in the bedspread into the US showing the G-men the tax receipt to prove he'd already paid for his crime.

“What about this? Trying to steal federal property?” Gibbs holds up the small box of Frosted Flakes in front of Garrido.

“Wirt, the cook gave it to me for breakfast. I wasn't hungry then and was gonna have it later.”

Ford, the other agent takes the pack of bacon from Jose's apron. “The cook gave you a pound of bacon for breakfast?”

His eyes bulging Jose says several times pointing at the apron. “No es mio! No es mio!”

Burr says. “The apron's the old man's but he doesn't speak English.”

Ford tells Garrido. “Your compadre is going to jail for stealing valuable federal property.”

Jose breaks down when Garrido with a knot on his throat translates. “I have six young children,” he keeps repeating in Spanish which Garrido translates hoping they'll be moved.

“He shoulda thought of 'em before stealing and he's not only gonna go to jail.” Gibbs turns to Garrido. “You an American citizen?” Garrido shakes his head. “You got a green card?” Garrido hands it to him. “What about him?” Jose produced his, Gibbs also takes it and the trio go into an adjacent small office where Garrido and Jose strain to hear the man speaking on the phone. Now Garrido is really worried. He didn't steal anything but immigration law is not as clear-cut as criminal law. Jose sobbing keeps asking him what is going happen to them and Garrido just makes what he considers reassuring faces unwilling to get his hopes but reluctant to scare him even more.

The chained man who speaks Spanish with a Caribbean accent, tells Jose. “No se apure!” Garrido sees an opportunity to distract Jose and asks him. “Why they bring you in chains?” Chains snickered. “Porque son cabrones because I went AWOL.” Seeing Garrido's look, he adds. “Carajo! You would too if you found out instead of sending you Italy they were gonna ship you to be canon fodder in 'Nam.”

Finally the agents and Burr come out of the office.

Garrido blurts to Gibbs. “I know you! You went to Cathedral High School on Career Day two years ago.”

Gibbs scratches the back of his head with a green card.

“You wore the same suit and stripped tie!”

Grinning, Ford tells his partner. “About time you buy another suit.”

Gibb's furrow creases Garrido thinks he'd really done it.

Garrido's face gets paler and his eyes open like saucers, Gibbs gives him a crooked grin staring at him then hands him his green card. "You're free to go and I hope you learned a valuable lesson."

Burr stops Jose as he follows Garrido out of the cell. "Tell him he's gonna spend some more time here until he's transported to the federal pen." Garrido didn't want to suffer Jose's fate so he swallows his anger at what he considered an enormous injustice and translates. Jose dries his tears and asks him if he can go to his house in a far away Juarez slum and inform his family about his fate, breaking at the end. Garrido's eyes tear up and the chained man also looks moved.

Waiting for the bus under the merciless nine o' clock sun, Garrido curses himself for succumbing to Wirt's veiled threats, stupidly hiding the Caguamas in the bag that caught the MP's attention and is costing Jose his freedom and his family a provider. Disgustedly, he tosses the bag in a circular trash container near the bench but realizes he needs the money from the Caguama's deposit to take one maybe two buses to Jose's house in a colonia he'd never heard of and wishes at least one of the Caguamas had some beer even if it was warm to be able to deliver the bad news to his family.

Tomorrow he'll be back at 4 AM by the bridge if he is going to get the suede jacket by September at the start of the fall semester at Texas Western College.

Hugo Cesar Garcia: I was born in Juarez, Mexico 70 years ago and lived a block away from the Rio Bravo dividing Mexico and the United States. I often crossed with other neighborhood children the dry river to play cops and robbers on railroad cars in El Paso Texas but always watching out for “los planchados” (the Border Patrol who chased us back a couple of times.

In 1956 after obtaining a local crossing card I attended Special English classes at Sacred Heart in El Paso Texas while simultaneously attending high school at night in Juarez.

In 1963 after obtaining a permanent resident card and graduating from Lydia Patterson High School also in El Paso, the only work I could find was on the cotton fields in neighboring New Mexico until a friend told me about KP daily gigs at Fort Bliss.

My short story “Las Caguamas” was inspired by an incident that took place when I was working the graveyard shift at a mess hall that stayed open to feed MPs and sentries.

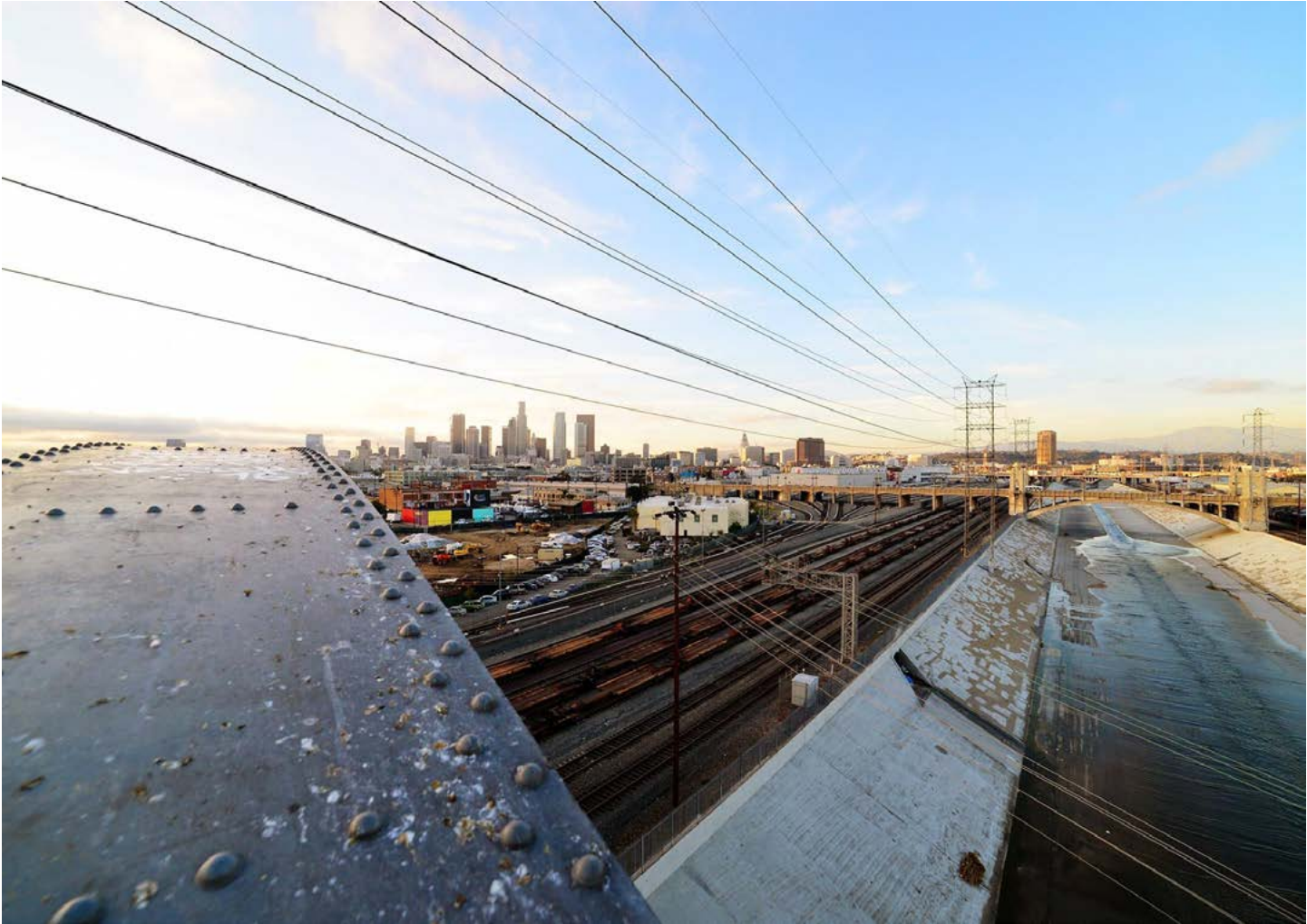
In 1975 a college professor recommended me for a reporter job at the LA Express a new Spanish language daily.

After the Express folded in 1977 I volunteered at One Stop Immigration, a non profit agency helping immigrants adjust their legal status successfully countering the local “illegal alien” hysteria gripping the nation.

Later, from 1979 to 1992, I worked for three chains of weekly community newspapers producing informative sections for Spanish speaking immigrants.

From 1993 to 2006 I designed and edited a quarterly newspaper in four languages for public housing residents published by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles. I also taught journalism to the residents, many of them undocumented.

Currently, I am retired, a U.S. citizen, a college graduate in Journalism from Cal State Fullerton and an aspiring novelist putting the finishing touches on “Hueso” a novel inspired by a series of stories I wrote in the LA Express about the alleged suicide by T-shirt of a young undocumented Juarencense while in police custody.





# NIGHT & THE CITY: LA NOIR

BY MIKE SONKSEN

1.

LA Noir is the other side of Sunshine;  
Crime Novels, a Century of scandals:  
OJ Simpson to Fatty Arbuckle,  
Charlie Chaplin to Phil Spector  
Black Dahlia to the Hillside Strangler,  
the Night Stalker & Charles Manson.  
Celebrity mansions in Coldwater Canyon.  
Mickey Cohen's Haberdashery,  
The Doors Live at the Whisky!  
Take a left on Doheny,  
Unsolved mysteries like Who shot Biggie?

2.

Robert Downey Jr. & Charlie Sheen  
Celebrate hedonism's program  
Like Lindsay Lohan.  
Ike Turner was an old man  
Still doing cocaine.  
Some hate the player,  
Some hate the game.  
Southern California seldom rains.  
The Landscape of Broken Dreams,  
Everything is not what it seems.

3.

Where have you gone Rita Hayworth?  
America's first Cover Girl  
Divorced from Orson Welles.  
"Who knows what evil  
Lurks in the hearts of men? The shadow knows."  
Literary alcoholics Like F. Scotch Fitzgerald  
Came to Hollywood for the paycheck.  
Faulkner, Hemingway & Nathaniel West  
drank at Musso & Franks.  
Basking in B Movies & Ida Lupino  
The Outsider under red-lit rain.  
Dashiell Hammett wrote The Maltese Falcon,  
James M. Cain began his reign

With The Postman Always Rings Twice.  
Lucky Luciano & the Sunset Trocadero  
Look at Dolores Del Rio on LA Brea,  
Celluloid myth & screen legends  
Gloria Swanson & Sunset Blvd  
Somebody tell Cecil B. DeMille  
I'm ready for My Close Up.  
William S. Hart to Humphrey Bogart,  
Belushi OD'd at the Chateau MArmont.

4.

The Hollywood Ten became defendants  
McCarthy frightened the country.  
Fear ruled the Cold War,  
Radicals became scapegoats.  
Who Framed Roger Rabbit?  
The City of Industry & Chinatown,  
Conspiracy Theories abound,  
And Most of them are true.

5.

Marilyn Monroe's ghost haunts  
The Hollywood Roosevelt,  
where the first Oscars were held.  
Now they're in a shopping mall.  
Everybody's got something to sell,  
Drop the velvet curtains  
& roll out the red carpet.  
The Hollywood myth  
Started with Strawberry Fields.  
The dirt road called Prospect Avenue  
Grew into Hollywood Blvd.  
Technicolor marquees & bright lights,  
Tabloids publish catfights,  
Fans line up on Premiere Nights,  
Kodak got the naming rights,  
Hollywood's a lot prettier at night.

6.

Bards born under Bogart  
Like Suzanne Lummis, LAureL Ann Bogen & Michael C. Ford  
Created the poem noir...

Welcome to Beverly Hills.  
EL Rancho Rodeo de Las Aguas,  
The Gathering of the Waters.  
LA Cienega began swamplands,  
Cactus gardens & landscape architects  
Rows of Palm trees & Eucalyptus,  
Purple flowers on Jacarandas,  
Towering gates on Westside mansions.  
Bette Davis said, "Take Fountain."

7.

Restrictive Housing Covenants imposed social distance,  
The struggle for Existence  
Causes people to go for broke.  
Hollywood is the City of Hope,  
Songs of Innocence become Experience,  
Dime detectives, dangerous dames,  
Dead bodies & late night games.  
LA's criminal underworld dates back to the legend of Zorro.  
Offshore Gambling ships owned by Bugsy Siegel.  
A blanket of lights, the hills are on fire,  
The city of night,  
Seduced by desire.  
Screams heard from afar,  
An empty drink in a quiet bar,  
A lonely ride in a busted car  
Night in the city is L.A. Noir.

Mike Sonksen aka Mike the PoeT is a 3rd-generation Los Angeles native that earned his Bachelors' Degree at UCLA in 1997. In June 2014, he completed an Interdisciplinary Master of Arts in English and History from the California State University of Los Angeles. Following his graduation from U.C.L.A. in 1997, he has published over 500 essays and poems with publications and websites like KCET, Poets & Writers Magazine, Wax Poetics, Southern California Quarterly, LA Weekly, OC Weekly, The Architect's Newspaper, LA Alternative Press, Los Angeles Review of Books, Cultural Weekly, LummoX and many others. For the last four years he has written a column for KCET called "L.A. Letters," which celebrates bright moments from literary Los Angeles. Sonksen has taught at View Park Preparatory Accelerated Charter High School, California State University of Los Angeles, Woodbury University, Southwest College and St. Bernard High School. He has also been a guest speaker at over 70 universities and high schools.

Dating back to the late 1990s, Sonksen has presented his poetry over 1,500 times in a wide range of venues including bookstores, museums, college campuses, secondary schools and literary festivals. In 2013, the Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center awarded Sonksen for "Distinguished Service to the Los Angeles Poetry Community." Most recently, Sonksen's poetry has been published in two anthologies: *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles* and *Beyond*, published by the Pacific Coast Poetry Series: An Imprint of Beyond Baroque Book and the new Tia Chucha Press anthology, *Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes & Shifts in Los Angeles*. His latest book, *Poetics of Location* was just published by Writ Large Press.

# Homeland

BY JULIA INGALLS

Syrians are famous for fleeing things. It's not just the 21st century refugees; it's been true in my own family, for over a century. My great-grandfather left his family's home outside of Damascus to escape conscription into the Turkish army. When he immigrated to Detroit he sired my grandfather, whose genes would eventually become entangled with those of 19th century horse thieves and bohemian free spirits. These unions produced me, a quarter-Syrian woman who moved to a city that takes pride in tearing down its history. For centuries now, my ancestors have been on one long flight from reality, but we all have to land eventually. So: just what does it mean to be Syrian?

I was asked this question recently by a man I was on the verge of falling in love with. We were sussing each other out over an egg scramble at Canter's Deli after having met all the other important romantic pre-requisites: we were as good at conversation as we were at making each other inarticulate. But what, this gentleman wanted to know, did it mean to be Syrian? I didn't have a five-second answer for him. What does it mean to spring from a cultural tradition that is about as Old World as it gets? The city of Damascus has been continually inhabited for over 11,000 years. That's eleven millennia of grape leaves and hookahs and architecture and a kind of desert-centered Arabian logic that largely treats women like second-class citizens and anyone outside of the immediate circle as suspicious, if not outright dangerous.

I relate to my heritage by seeking the absolute other extreme: the perennially New World, the sun-dappled frontier of culture. You guessed it: Los Angeles. Most of the time, being Syrian for me is an artifact, a weird trivia of my blood. In my daily life I'm more Angeleno than anything else, a term that I've come to define as a composite of intellectually curious and artistically bold. Angelenos don't care about established rules as much as they do innovation and functionality. This place is an incubator for alternative realities, and my life and work is dedicated to trying to create a beautiful reality, or at least one absent of fear. Of course, the experience hasn't all been smooth: I've been called a sandnigger and an elitist, once at the same party. Perhaps it's a little risky publicly identifying as Syrian in a climate when presidential candidates are advocating for internment camps. Whatever: I can't pretend to be something I'm not, just as I can't, in good conscience, lie about who I am.

Sitting in the booth at Canter's, I didn't want to tell this gorgeous man that being Syrian is about running away. It's not a jet-propulsion ethnicity. But then again, if I am honest, being Syrian is fundamentally about the drive to find the best possible situation, no matter what. Much like fellow Syrian Steve Jobs, I am not afraid to leave the boundaries of conventional thinking and try something new in pursuit of an idea, even if people wonder if I'm a little nuts. It's the desert nomad in me, the seeker of the rumored oasis. I'm not going to stay put in a situation that is horrible because I'm afraid to see what else is out there. I will venture beyond the known, I will leave behind what is corrupt. Most importantly, I will not stop going until I find something magnificent.

I decided to tell the gentleman about visiting my family for Thanksgiving. There was the excellent music (an assortment of Jump blues and deep soul cuts). There was the annual Gravy deba-

cle (my mother, although she makes world-class tabouli and kibbeh, can't top my Aunt's gravy). There was reminiscing over the long gone beloved, the crazed inventors and archaeologists and Elvis-loving widower aunts who, by virtue of having died, have been vaulted into myth. There was the tribute to my Grandfather, who bootstrapped himself from the Detroit tenement into which he was born into a life where he collected rent in over 30 different languages. There was wine, and there was laughter, and above all the joy that comes from being with people you love ferociously, even if you don't always agree with them.

The gentleman and I finished our meal at Canter's and then he walked me back to my car, past a silent movie theater and retrofitted eateries and Kosher grocery stores. We hugged goodbye. As I drove away, I realized that for maybe the first time in my life, there was no part of me that wanted to leave.

Julia Ingalls is primarily an essayist. Her work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Guernica*, *Salon*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, among other publications. She's into it.





# Blue Rose

BY MARCUS CLAYTON

“They’re as common as weeds, but you—well, you’re Blue Roses!”

“But blue is wrong for roses...”

-From *The Glass Menagerie*

I.

Bleached red petals plucked  
from stem spiraled  
    on concrete bench  
    mirrored each other  
        in floral fringe.

II.

bush with red daisies hung over  
    them like a chandelier  
s/he cross-legged in chucks  
    a body’s width apart  
    facing each other like a joust  
her eyes on petals  
    torn with her fingers  
his eyes on her torn fingers

III.

Do you want to kiss  
    an artist with cat scratches  
around her palms?  
    She paints a red parasol  
    with petals  
as you two sit alone  
converse about Neil Gaiman,  
        Ginsberg,  
maybe even Tennessee Williams.  
    Do not inch  
forward,  
look for crows hung  
    from her eyes,  
perfect white stain circled  
    around her ring finger,  
look at flowers—no longer paint,  
    but a cataclysm of flares.

IV.

Do you want to kiss a boy?  
Stares burn the top of your head  
white noise slipping through your teeth  
as you nervously sculpt a sun  
out of daisies and wait  
for the real one to go down.  
Maybe it will fall into Earth  
erase everything like the wind  
does the patterned petals that distract  
from seared valves opening  
in your chest, erase the diamond  
resting in your pocket, erase  
the red spilled onto the floor.

V.

Below the bench  
    inside a backpack tattooed in stiches,  
        a rose—  
    petals blue as blood  
    that shoots away from lungs.  
Above, dusk skates over clouds like a skipped stone.

VI.

Solar flare dispersed  
red petals caked under Chucks  
blue rose suffocates

# Downtown

BY MARCUS CLAYTON

...“Well, well, look who’s here!” your father yapping  
 As if you had lost your mind, who never flew,  
 And landed in L.A. out of the blue—  
 -James Merrill

blue lights blanket cold concrete in buzzed fluorescence  
 warms a dirty blonde lying on sidewalk in leopard print  
 in thin red tee in 50 degree air and warmed by bulb spatter  
 we step over her to feed a hungry meter one quarter two  
 quarters three four then pocket the change for bartenders  
 for cocktail specials and Las Perlas’s best tequila mixes  
 we do not have to cross the street and live in tents  
 fabric chewed away by mites and patched with spider webs  
 bed bug sucked thighs and stale whiskey dancing in the teeth  
 we are the oppressed voices drowned out by speakers  
 ankles curdled by forty minute lines and forty heads ahead  
 bartenders eye-fucking for tips swirling mixers like batons  
 they have to play “How Soon is Now?” once an hour  
 every hour we smoke and catch our dead breath in night air  
 we play “what do you see in the clouds” with our plumes  
 we hope our second hand is not swallowed by vagabonds  
 but let’s call it charity when one hobbles by our herd  
 and be thankful our legs still work to order another drink  
 know cops would not put holes in us even with the sun down

## II.

lets lace boots to throats of Baltimore blacks lets sing  
 “Je Suis Charlie” when our tongues are threatened  
 our mouths should be wild hummingbird wings  
 shake like pinball at EightyTwo like a spine in a police  
 truck pitch black ‘92 streetlights our hands too small  
 we did not carry Hitachis blame our parent’s fingers  
 blame the knife against James Franco’s pens launch  
 missiles they will not be from our slingshots our American  
 Spirits gripped in Vs our Kurt Vile crooned into our ears  
 our porkpies rounded matching curly cues above  
 lips fists shaken at Hummers barreling down Main rumble  
 rivals 8,583 shaken like a spine but we heard bullets  
 enter twelve hearts we heard the first amendment

torn from our throats worst than baby's holed hoodie  
torn from mommas breast worst than 41 bullets  
guns we do not own guns we do not need as much  
as the knives between our teeth we use to cut  
we cannot use nigger for our art we cannot see  
Mohammad is this punishment we did not put bombs  
in the underground plump black bellies with parasites  
but we wonder who shoved a blade through Elliott Smith's heart

### III

we have never seen rats skate just off the 10 with eyes  
to the moon with hands gripping quarters in skinny Levis  
but a pink tail slinks between the knees of a set of palms  
ashed with frozen scars swatted away by our shoulders  
cold as confusion that separates the we when a dollar  
slips from your grip into his one less for Angel City  
IPAs one less for parking one less we settle  
we drink dirty blonde ales under low lights hum  
making sure not to spill a drop for thirsty tramps to tongue  
to lick like dog bowls from cracks in the 6th Street exit  
you claim to towel off the puddle set down your coat  
I cannot ground cannot see past chained doors of Angel City.

Marcus grew up in South Gate, CA, and holds an M.F.A. in Poetry from CSU Long Beach. He is an English instructor at Long Beach City College and Fullerton College, a managing editor for Indicia, and a recipient of the 2015 Beatrice and John Janosco Memorial Scholarship at CSU Long Beach. Some of his published work can be seen in Tahoma Literary Review, Los Angeles Review of Books, Bird's Thumb, Canyon Voices Literary Magazine, and Lipstick Party Magazine among others.





# The Wound

BY JANICE LEE

She didn't how to consider the wound any other way.

The carpet was warm and there was hardly any wood left to burn but she threw the last log into the fire and sat back to watch the final dance emerge from between the brick pillars.

The painful recuperation to which she had been assigned didn't make any sense to her. But magnetized with the fear of being seen as *out of line* kept her in her place. By the fire. Watching the raindrops trickle down the window and recognizing that the feeling of eternity wasn't any substitution for eternity itself, but was an adequate measure of *sufferability* when confined to the quarters of one's own home.

The process was this: one suffered an injury of some kind, one sought treatment, one rested inside of one's home to heal and recuperate.

When they asked, she didn't know of any other alternative to suggest.

The wound she had suffered, they told her, was just like any other wound. *All you need is rest*, they told her. She wasn't in any position to feel pain and the pain would have been welcome, if only to dignify the confinement, but she knew that it wasn't a regular wound to be trampled on or rained on or forgotten.

*Eternity is not forever*, she reminded herself, while trying to engage with the gestures of healing. She boiled water for tea and put on thicker socks. She listened to classical music and sank into her bed to take a nap. She closed her eyes and held her breath for the count of four before exhaling, then inhaling again. The sound of the rain shook her eyelids open and the force of the wind shook the foundation of the house. The subtle throbbing of her wound seemed to sync with the rain, but the parallelism wasn't perfect. Out of tune. She struggled to find an appropriate position to sit up in. Her shoulders tensed and hunched forward. She didn't know how to reconcile the two rhythms, almost aligned, but not quite. She was having difficulty breathing. She tried to count to four again, but gasped for air on three. The rain was incessant and she took another sip of tea.

The rain didn't let up and she didn't have any tea left so she put on her shoes and decided to go for a walk. A voice in her head tried to persuade her to stay: Better to sit inside and listen to the rain. *Better to rest. Better to do as they say*. She was restless, she needed to walk, needed to set her sights on something and move forward, away from this oddly shaped center of a home. *I can't be home right now*, she whispered to herself. She walked down the steps, across the courtyard and onto the street. The rain poured down on her, soaking through in a matter of seconds but she did not stop. She kept walking with all of the stature and determination of someone who had

somewhere to be.

She didn't have anywhere to be, but her moving feet reminded her that a wound could be re-traced, could be walked on, could be trampled, that in widening the circle she was reinforcing the center but pushing out the boundaries. She came across a wall and walked around it, slipped along the muddy path and fell onto a patch of green infinity.

She started to laugh. Soaked through and trembling with cold, she only felt incredibly sad and alone. Yet, she laughed. She hadn't thought of her mother in months but suddenly remembered her face. She saw the mud caked on her shoes and felt pain in all the parts of her body that had hit the ground during her fall. And really, she was very, very sad. But the only thing she knew to do was to laugh, and so as the rain continued to fall, she continued to laugh and she realized that she had walked quite a long distance away from home.

JANICE LEE is the author of *KEROTAKIS* (Dog Horn Press, 2010), *Daughter* (Jaded Ibis, 2011), *Damnation* (Penny-Ante Editions, 2013), *Reconsolidation* (Penny-Ante Editions, 2015), and most recently, *The Sky Isn't Blue* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, 2016). She also has several chapbooks *Red Trees*, *Fried Chicken Dinner* (Parrot/Insert Press), *The Other Worlds* (Eohippus Labs), and *The Transparent As Witness* (Solar Luxuriance), a collaboration with Will Alexander. She is Editor of the #RECURRENT Novel Series, Assistant Editor at Fanzine, Executive Editor of Entropy, and CEO/Founder of POTG Design. She currently lives in Los Angeles and teaches at CalArts.

# Keansburg Park, 2012

BY SARAH THURSDAY

After a hurricane, you must sift through the rubble. Be it car or house or theme park ride, all loss is for grieving. For months you will bloody and purple searching for what's worth saving. On the news, there is always a small child who's managed to hide between the gaps. Keep searching for her. Or, if you're the one buried, make yourself heard. At some point they will begin to haul away the wreckage. They will want to clear land for rebuilding. But if you're still searching, be louder. Keep kicking through splintered wood and twisted metal. You cannot and will not find every savable piece, but remember that small child. She could under the Ferris wheel. At some point, you will also call off the search. You will also want to clear land. But be prepared. When you stand on the edge of the sifted soil, a new loss will settle in. As heavy as roller coaster. If you stare into the ache of what was never found, the weight may collapse you. The name of that child may trouble your sleep. You must find her. Use the old wood or the old metal, but build a new park to welcome her home.

# Boy, Emaciating Slow

BY SARAH THURSDAY

What will I do with your skeleton bones  
when your teeth can no longer hold  
the flesh of your lips? What brown eyes  
will fill the spaces in your skull  
when these ones dry up, dissolve into vapor and dust?  
Will your bones keep memories, keep the rhythm  
of your laughter locked in marrow—  
how your small hands grew into man,  
how I kissed them tipped in icing,  
wiped them from grass and soil, held them  
to my cheek as I sung you to sleep?  
What can limbs and ribs and vertebrae do to capture soul?  
What does your skin encase when you are sloughing  
out from under it?  
Where will your soft curls rest  
when your scalp surrenders?  
When the cords of your throat fray and limp,  
how will you say *I love you*?

Sarah Thursday runs a poetry website called [CadenceCollective.net](http://CadenceCollective.net), co-hosts a monthly reading with G. Murray Thomas, and founded *Sadie Girl Press* as a way to help publish local and emerging poets. Her first full-length poetry collection, *All the Tiny Anchors*, and her newest CD/chapbook, *How to Unexist*, is available at [SadieGirlPress.com](http://SadieGirlPress.com). Find and follow her to learn more on [SarahThursday.com](http://SarahThursday.com), Facebook, or Twitter.

# A Poem for the Cunt on My Couch

By Luivette Resto

Like an interloper  
you walked into my home  
without invitation.

So I must ask:  
were my sofas soft enough  
or did you feel their springs  
when you sat down  
crossing your Nair enhanced legs?

Did you struggle choosing  
from wine glasses  
etched with the names of vineyards  
and memories you will never know?

Did the bathroom smell  
like the entrance to Bath & Body Works?  
Did the dishwasher have enough Cascade  
to remove your dollar store lipstick  
stains from them?

Was my plasma big enough?  
The surround sound AMC quality  
as you giggled like a child  
watching a Disney movie.

Were the wall decorations—

my college diploma, first publication,  
paintings of Puerto Rican independentistas  
a caricature from my spring break in London

to your satisfaction?

Quality control is important to me  
therefore on a scale of zero to ten

with zero being your return  
to a Bros. Grimm inspired abyss  
for the uninvited

how likely are you to come back?



Luivette Resto is a proud mom, teacher, poet, Wonder Woman fanatic, and New Yorker. She has written two books of poetry, *Unfinished Portrait* and *Ascension*, both published by Tia Chucha Press.



# Resurrection

BY SABA WAHEED

Layla sat next to Alia and Sami on the sofa, playing on her phone, while the two of them watched the recording from their weekend vacation. Sami shot everything—Alia and Layla at the house, walking down the street, on the hiking trail, and leaving the trail. Layla found the seemingly quaint town tedious and unwelcoming. But Sami and Alia spent the whole weekend dismissing her. “Stop being so negative, mama,” Alia said with a smile.

On the last day of the weekend, they sat at a café in town. Layla was drinking tea quietly, her elbows resting on a shared communal wooden table. Alia sat to the left of her and Sami across from them holding up the camera.

“What did you like best?” Sami asked.

“The waterfall!” Alia was nine and had an especially expressive face, emphasized by thick eyebrows that curled inwards when she was upset and rose upwards when she was happy.

Sami focused on Layla and asked her the same thing. Instead of answering, she reached out and grabbed the camera. She turned it away from them and aimed it at the people around them. She shot a woman in a tie-dyed shirt that was talking to a biker and then zoomed in on a tattooed man cleaning the tables.

“There’s real community here,” said Sami. She focused back on Sami and caught the woman sitting next to him. “I envy small town culture.”

“No, you romanticize it,” said Layla. Sami frowned and looked away. Layla zoomed back out. Behind Sami, an older white woman was selling ethnic jewelry and Indian embroidered tops.

“I’m pretty sure I bought jewelry from that woman back in college.” Layla focused back on Sami and added, “Before I knew better.”

Annoyed, Sami reached out and grabbed the camera and the scene cut.

“Papa, go back. Go back!” Alia jumped off the sofa to kneel in front of the television.

“There, there, pause!”

Layla got up and moved next to Alia, laying her hand on her daughter’s back. “What is it, Alia?”

Alia pointed to the woman sitting next to Sami. She had a round face, short black hair and a drink in front of her that she was tapping with her finger. “It’s that woman from TV.”

“The one that’s gone missing,” she clarified.

##

Layla was prepping food while Alia and her two cousins Ayaan and Aisha played in her room. Every few days, Layla and her sister Zara watched each other’s children after school. She heard Ayaan complain, “Board games are bored.” Alia snapped at him. Layla wondered if she should go in and say something when the buzzer rang. Zara walked straight through the apartment to Alia’s room, a scent of designer perfume following her. She wore ankle cut skinny jeans

over heels with a loose fitting embroidered shirt. She knocked and then opened the door. “Ayaan! Aisha! Get ready, it’s time to go home.”

She came back out and sat at the kitchen table. “How was the weekend trip?”

“Good.”

“And?”

“Alia loved the hikes and being outdoors.”

“And you?”

“It was alright, a bit too white for my taste.”

“Oh sis, you don’t have to live there.” Zara laughed. “But more importantly, what did you think of our spot?”

“Not bad.” Layla paused and then smiled. “Okay, okay, it was really nice. That view was something else. Nice job with the interior design.”

“Well, thank you,” Zara bowed slightly. “We’re getting a few more. Lots of foreclosures in the area.”

“Zara, that’s predatory!”

“Nah, the banks did that. We’re just cleaning up.” Zara walked into the kitchen and looked through the fridge. “We’re charging \$300 a night and it’s already booked through the holidays. Supply and demand, I’m just the supply.”

Zara’s fixation on money reminded Layla of their father. When they were little, he worked as an executive at a bank in London and his social circle often included movie stars and politicians. Layla had a picture of her and Zara sitting next to the Bollywood star Dilip Kumar. But the savings and loan crash in the eighties coupled with a secret gambling habit forced them to the U.S. Their uncle gave him a job running one of his many corner markets in Northern California.

Their father never got over their status drop and neither did Zara. She had strong memories of being a part of an elite community and their exile to California hit her especially hard. So while Layla dismissed that world, Zara ached for it. She went to business school and socialized with rich kids from all over the world. Through them she met Aamer, the son of one of the wealthiest Pakistani families in the L.A. Initially his parents weren’t having it – a daughter of a store manager from nowhere. But Aamer cut himself off from his family for a year until they agreed. And just like that, Zara was back in the heart of an elite community.

“You should be careful, markets take away as quick as they give. We of all people know that,” said Layla. Before Zara could respond, the children came into the room.

Alia ran straight to Zara and gave her a deep, extended hug. “Guess what, Zara Khala? We saw the missing woman from TV!”

Zara turned to Layla. “Who?”

“We think it’s that woman—Carmen.”

“You mean Carmen Suarez who’s been blocking the developments?”

Layla nodded. She could see that the information was hitting something deep in her sister. “Do you know her?”

“Not directly.” Zara sat back at the table. “But we all know who she is. She led the Resurrection Projects—you know, those new developments that started in Hollywood.”

“Vaguely.”

“Well, it was big news for a while. She got those projects up in a year and then another in downtown. No one is that good—except Carmen Suarez.”

“Jealous?”

“Actually, yes. It’s nothing like the house-by-house shit we’re doing. Politicians lined up to take pictures with her, investors wanted their names on her projects and the media loved her. Everything was perfect. But then she had some kind of awakening.” Zara rolled her eyes. “She decided the projects were bad and has been protesting the one planned in East LA.”

“She saw through it,” said Layla.

“I don’t know if that’s how I’d characterize it,” said Zara.

“Well, not everyone is enamored with money.”

“No, not everyone is. But you don’t need to be stupid about it either.” They both tensed. Zara got up and grabbed her purse. “I need to get these kids home. I’ll see you Saturday at the Eid brunch.”

After they left, Layla walked to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Alia followed her. “Is Papa giving the file to the police?”

“Yes, he’s going today.”

“Do you think it’s her?”

“Maybe, Alia.”

“What will we do if it’s her?”

“I don’t know if there is anything for us to do.”

At that moment, Sami walked in and they both turned to him. Alia ran to him and he picked her up. “Was it her Papa? What did the police say?”

“They took the video and said thanks,” said Sami. “That’s all.”

##

After putting Alia to sleep, Layla sat in the bedroom and looked up Carmen on her laptop. The first hit was an *L.A. Times* profile. There was a picture of Carmen at her high school graduation. Her eyes were dark and melancholic, the effect countered by a serene smile. She was standing next to her parents. The mother had a peach dress on and the father wore a charcoal fitted suit. Standing on both sides of her, they held her with the type of pride only immigrant parents have. Carmen grew up in the Central Valley. She did her undergraduate studies at Berkeley and then got an MBA from Stanford. She moved to L.A. and was immediately hired by a top developer. Within two years she spearheaded the Resurrection project. Layla clicked on another article and found an image of Carmen wearing a bright yellow hardhat over a suit standing next to the mayor at the groundbreaking of the second Resurrection project. She clicked on a website link and it was the organization Carmen started. Layla read through the page and found a set of proposals Carmen had initiated as an alternative to the third project. There was an image of Carmen at a protest holding a sign that said, “This is Destruction, Not Resurrection.” At the bottom of the website, there was a plea, “Help us find Carmen.”

Layla went outside onto their apartment balcony to smoke a cigarette, something she did once in awhile after Alia went to sleep. The night was crisp and she could see a few stars and a sliver of the moon. Layla remembered meeting Sami when they both were so engaged in pol-

itics. She was hanging out with a friend at a neighborhood bar. Sami was the lead singer for a local punk band playing on stage. Their lyrics were mostly incomprehensible but the angst in his voice stirred something in her. She was sitting at the bar when he came up beside her to order a drink.

“You guys rocked it,” she said.

“Oh yea ... thanks,” he said turning away from her trying to get the attention of the bartender. Sami had black hair spiked up with the ends dyed a dark blue. He had a nose ring and wore tight black jeans and an anti-Coca Cola t-shirt. Layla leaned in closer to him. The bartender recognized Layla and asked her what she wanted.

“A car bomb.” She turned to Sami and said, “Drink, not lifestyle.”

Sami smiled and Layla felt her stomach tighten. She asked him what he wanted and told the bartender. Their drinks arrived and they toasted.

“So, what’s in that?”

“A shot of whiskey inside the beer.” Layla downed her drink, the shot glass hitting her teeth. They ordered another round.

“So you got skills other than out drinking an Irishman?”

“Photos, I take photos.”

“Oh yea? Anything I can check out?”

“Actually, I have some stuff in a new exhibit. It’s protest photos when the wars began after 9/11.”

“At the Federal building? I went to those. Maybe I’m featured?” Sami struck a model pose.

“They’re not of the protestors. I took pictures of the people watching the protest. Come check it out.” She reached into her bag and handed him a flyer. “You got skills beyond ranting punk lyrics?”

“No,” he said, “Speaking of which, our band has another show tonight. I’ll see you around.”

Layla didn’t expect to see him again but he showed up at her art opening. As soon as he saw her, he walked up to her. “These are amazing Layla, I remember those people. Five, six, seven, eight, you’re a disgrace to the United States. That one haunts me. We were betrayed twice—first, the war, then our right to disagree, be different, be us.” Sami became silent and stared back at the pictures. “You really captured people’s anger. No, not anger ... hate.”

Sami stayed until the end of the night. He walked out with her and asked if she would go out with him. Layla was feeling all kinds of high—because he was there, because of all the accolades from the night, because a reporter was going to feature her images. Instead of answering, she kissed him. He was surprised but then he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her back deeply.

“Come home with me,” she said. And, he did.

##

Layla put out her cigarette and went inside. Sami was on his computer in the living room. She could see a pile of bills and receipts spread out on the table around him. She put her hand

on his shoulder. Sami jumped not realizing she was standing behind him.

“Let me help you sort those out,” she said.

“It’s not your problem,” he said without looking up.

Layla could see the totals from the credit card bills, the hospital co-pays, the funeral expenses, and all the out-of-pocket medical costs. She knew the math—with the little they could save each month with her job as an editor and his as a freelance web designer, Alia would probably be ready for college before they broke even.

“You know, this is a problem of our system. I was reading that most of today’s debt comes from end-of-care costs.”

“Layla, please don’t get on a soapbox and let me just figure this out.”

“There’s a solution, and we’ll find it.”

“There is a solution if you’d just let yourself go there.” Sami looked at Layla and she knew what he was going to say. “It’ll get us out of the hole.”

“It’s dirty money.”

“It’s your sister.”

“My sister is selfish and shortsighted.”

“If you’d just listen, you’d know they’re not all bad projects. They plan to make those houses available for artists and retreats.”

“You sound just like her,” said Layla.

“Sometimes you and Zara sound exactly alike, just on opposite poles.”

Layla could feel the fight about to start. She told him she was tired and left the room. She got into bed but couldn’t sleep. She thought about the day he got the call from his mother’s neighbor that his mother was missing. When they found her, they realized she was in the late stages of Alzheimer’s. She was Sami’s only family—having left their abusive father when he was a child—and he cared for her deeply. Layla watched him suffer as he watched the mother he knew disappear.

Soon after that call, the fights began. About his mother’s care when her diagnosis first came in, about putting her in a facility and then emptying out her savings so that they had to move her in with them, about hiring someone to take care of her during the day so that they could keep working, about Sami working part time and then freelance because they couldn’t keep paying someone to take care of his mother, about him wanting another child and Layla refusing. Every single decision widened the chasm between them. And when his mother died, the chasm filled with silence.

Layla rolled over on her side, wide-awake, facing the wall. She heard Sami come into the room and get into bed. Her anger had subsided and she thought of how much he was hurting, hiding behind the bills. She felt him far away, clutching the edge of the bed. She wanted to move closer, put her hands through his hair, and hold him. But she was afraid if she cracked the silence, it would break everything. She stayed still until she heard him snoring.

##

The next day, Layla sat at her desk and couldn’t focus on her work. She put on her head-



phones and started clicking on videos of Carmen. She found an interview of Carmen from a few weeks earlier. She was radiant and charismatic. “I believed these buildings would resurrect our communities but instead they’ve been destroying neighborhoods. I can’t do it again. There are families here in East L.A. I see kids that are like the ones I grew up playing soccer with in the street and then I see them disappear. Development has become about money—not people.” Then she stared directly into the camera and said, “I’m telling you there is another way.”

Layla sat back in her chair. Fluorescent lights buzzed above her. She could hear some chatter from neighboring cubicles. She remembered the first time Sami brought up kids. It was after a year of dating.

“I need family,” he said. “My mother is the only family I have in the U.S. and I want my world to grow.”

Layla hadn’t thought about kids. Maybe in some broad general way she figured it would happen one day. But she loved Sami and the thought of a being that was part him part her convinced her. They got pregnant right away.

Sami patchworked together a bunch of jobs—he taught music to students, taught himself web design and did gigs for other artists and various non-profits, and played music. Layla continued her editorial assistant job that eventually turned into a middle management position and took pictures in her spare time. They attended rallies with Alia in the baby carrier on Sami’s chest. Neither one of them was terribly invested in any kind of dream that involved settling into a career and buying a home.

She couldn’t pinpoint when things started to change. When Sami stopped rehearsing and found a full time job. When she stayed home instead of going out to take pictures. When they decided they were too tired to attend the next rally and the one after that.

Layla couldn’t help but feel overshadowed. Her path felt rustic and torn up. When had they stopped expanding and started stagnating? They were so caught up in making ends meet that they had stopped thinking about where the ends meet.

“There has to be another way,” Layla whispered to no one.

##

A few nights later, Layla was working at the kitchen table while Sami and Alia sat together watching TV. Alia insisted on staying up for a few more minutes before getting to bed. Layla wistfully watched father and daughter sitting on the sofa chatting away. Alia was tracking all the new games her cousins had on their own tablets.

“Ayaan is getting a new one for Eid.” Alia said. “When can I get one, Papa?”

“Not yet.” Sami said and switched the channel to the news. Layla complained when Sami watched the news saying it was one gigantic noise blur. Sami countered that it was still important to know what was happening locally and in the mainstream. In the middle of her complaints, Alia paused and pointed to the TV. “Papa, it’s us!”

Layla got up and walked over to the sofa. The news anchor announced that there had been a major break in the case. “Local tourists unknowingly capture Carmen Suarez on camera while in the San Bernardino Mountains. Authorities are investigating why she was there—”

“Oh God, why are they referring to us as local tourists?” Layla said.

“Shh, Lay, we are not the news,” Sami said.

A reporter interviewed the owner of the cafe, “I can’t believe she was sitting right there. I would’ve walked up to her and shaken her hand.” They aired a few seconds of Layla’s shots of the people in town and then froze on Carmen. The anchor went on to describe how she had met with the mayor to discuss alternative development projects in the area last week. Then, she was able to get an environmental review on Resurrection Three that would delay the project for two years. She disappeared the next day.

“Did the police give the dvd to the news?” Alia asked.

“Maybe.” Sami frowned as he started at the TV. “I guess they could have, to help with the case.

“I gave it to them,” said Layla.

“You what?” Sami looked at Layla. “What...when...?”

“I stopped by Carmen’s organization after work yesterday. I met with them. I talked to Carmen’s girlfriend. I even offered to help. I can help with their messaging. If you wanted, you could do their web design. We can join their protests.”

“We’re going to a protest?” Alia asked.

“Alia, it’s past your bedtime.” Sami took Alia into the room and then came back out.

“Why would you give away our family video like that?” Sami rarely raised his voice.

“It’s more than our family video, Sami. They told me they would leak it to the press. I didn’t realize it would be so fast.”

“But the police have it.”

“First, they said the police aren’t doing enough. Second, her people should have it. And third, why are you even upset?”

“Why are you getting involved in this, Layla?”

“It’s a sign.”

“What’s a sign? It’s just a coincidence.”

“Don’t you remember Sami how we used to talk about things like this? You would say nothing is ever random. I used to argue that everything was.” Layla remembered when they would sit around for hours just talking. “Carmen came into our video, not anyone else’s. I think she came to remind us of who we once were.”

“Who we once were? Do you think this is a choice for me—to be knocking on the doors and waiting for a call back from the very system I wanted to tear down? I’m doing what needs to be done.”

“It doesn’t have to be one thing or the other.”

“Layla you’re being ridiculous.” Sami’s voice rose but then he took a breath. “Lay, do you remember when we took Alia on those rocks? We worried about slipping and falling. But we figured it out—how to place our feet, balance our weight, choose which rocks to step on. What I remember thinking was, you make sure your feet are on a solid place before you take a leap. We can’t jump, Layla. Not until we’re out of this hole.”

“We used to fly up that mountain.”

“We have a child.”

“You promised that having a child wouldn’t change us.”

“Circumstances changed us.” Sami picked up his computer and she knew the conversa-

tion was done.

##

The next morning, they drove out to Zara's in-laws for Eid. Sami pulled up to the gorgeous Victorian house. There was a valet set up at the front and the house was lit up with white Christmas lights. Alia cheered in excitement at the music and lights. Inside, they had laid out long tables throughout the front yard with a food station at the center. The property had a pool, tennis court, main house, and back house. The matriarch of the family, Aamer's grandmother, sat at the one of the tables and her family extended throughout the space. Alia let go of her hand and ran into the huge play area that included a bouncy house, crafts, balloons, and a clown.

Zara came over to Layla and kissed both her cheeks and gave her a long hug. "So glad you are here." She took her hand and started walking her through the crowd.

"That guy over there used to be the mayor of Beverly Hills," she said quietly. "And that one there, standing next to Aamir, he's a billionaire. We're trying to get him to invest in our projects."

Layla checked him out. He was medium-built, with slightly long hair wearing slacks and a button-down shirt. He was definitely handsome. She wondered if her life would be easier if she just moved into this world.

"Come on, let's go join them." They walked over to the circle of men.

"Yea, it's bizarre. She was sitting next to me the whole time," Sami said.

"Oh I've met her. She must've read the *Art of War*, because she could break down your vulnerabilities in a second," said the handsome billionaire.

"She negotiated that project with the city faster than any other developer. She was their poster child," said Sohail, Aamer's brother.

Layla jumped in. "Yeah, but now she's the poster child for the people. She brought those buildings down as quickly as she built them up."

"But Layla, those neighborhoods have been in blight for decades. We're doing the neighborhoods a favor by fixing them up," said Aamer.

"You've seen the market though. It's so tight that no middle class person could live in any of these new developments," Sami said.

"Look change is inevitable. Neighborhoods change, mine was once Russian and Japanese, then Hispanic, and now white boys with terrorist beards make way for those of us with Audis," said the billionaire. Everyone laughed but Layla.

"You destroy life under the guise of bringing new life," said Layla.

"That's why it's called the circle of life," said Aamer.

"Have you even considered her ideas? They're really good—they support residents and they are financially viable," said Layla.

"Yea, I read her proposals. They are good but just not fast enough to rebuild those neighborhoods," Aamer said.

"They're just not fast enough to fill up your coffers is all," said Layla.

No one laughed and no one said anything.

"Ah come off it Layla, you complain and then weeks later I see you having brunch at the

hip, new restaurant in those same neighborhoods,” said Zara.

Layla looked at her sister—how quickly her sister could turn on her. She turned to Sami for a response and he avoided eye contact with her. Layla walked away from the group. She went to the food stands and spooned up the halva and chana. She found a quiet corner away from the crowd. She felt like she was slipping and falling through the rocks. Maybe Sami was right. They needed to find their grounding before they could jump. She looked around and noticed the color of the leaves, the shapes of the branches, the curves of clouds that spread majestically across the sky. She breathed in the afternoon air and felt the warmth of the sun on her back. She wasn’t sure what she needed to do but she had to stop reaching for something that may not even be there.

She went back to the children’s area. Alia was sitting in a corner with a new friend, probably a daughter of one of the many entrepreneurs. The girl was playing with her tablet and Alia was watching over her shoulder. She could see the fascination in Alia’s eyes. Eventually Sami found them and Layla insisted they leave. When they got home, Sami went to the computer.

##

The next night, Zara called and immediately started ranting. “I can’t believe you left so early. You didn’t even say goodbye. How do you think that make me look? Everyone was asking where’s your sister, where’s your only family in the city?”

“Don’t be so melodramatic, Zara. I can handle only so much of that cocktail banter without the cocktails.”

“It’s called being an adult. Being able to talk to different people on social topics.”

“That was not talk about social topics, that was business talk.”

“You always act like you’re so much better than everyone.”

“I don’t claim to be anything other than who I am – and that is to live as I believe.”

“You can sit on your values all you want but you have real life issues that need to be addressed with real solutions, not some high horse values bullshit.”

“Zara, you’re the last person I need lecturing from.”

“You do need to hear this. I make practical decisions and I am where I want to be. You make impractical decisions and you are miserable. And you’re making your husband miserable.”

“Stay out of my family, Zara.”

“You know rubber bands, they stretch and stretch but at some point there’s a limit, and they snap back. Well, that’s people, we can only stretch so far. Just accept who you are. You’re not Carmen. You’re not some world changing activist.”

“Well, you’re not Carmen either—some big visionary developer. You’re just someone who is bankrolled by your in-laws who don’t even respect you and will never see you anything more than some small town nobody.” Layla knew she had gone too far. “Zara, I didn’t mean—”

“Sami agreed to work on the projects with us,” said Zara.

Layla felt like her heart had dropped down to her stomach. She held the phone for a moment longer and then hung it up with saying goodbye. She slowly walked over to the living room. Sami was sitting on the sofa on his computer.

“Did you agree to work on the projects?” Her words were barely audible.

Sami put down his computer and looked up at her. She could see him thinking about how to answer. “Yes.”

“And when were you going to tell me?” She sat down at the edge of the sofa.

“It’s just until we can get out of this hole.” Sami moved closer to her and put his hand on hers. She missed his touch but in that moment it felt cold and strange.

“We vowed never to own property and now you’re going to profit off of them,” she said and moved her hand away.

“If it’s not us, someone else would be doing this. It’s going to happen regardless.”

“That’s an easy excuse from someone who is about to completely sell out,” said Layla.

“We already sold out,” Sami said and went back to the computer.

##

Later in bed, Layla couldn’t sleep. She got up and went into the living room. She pulled up the recording file on Sami’s computer and watched it from the beginning. She hadn’t noticed that Sami had shot the landscape—the mountainous ranges, the tall green pines, and the spectacular rock formations. The images were beautiful and she had missed it. Layla felt her neglected photographer self stir.

On their first hike, Alia was walking ahead of them. She turned around and said, “It’s so hard, Mama, going up. But if gravity was reverse, we could float up the mountain.”

“You’re right, Alia, but then what would we do about going back down?”

Alia paused and pondered the question. “That means, gravity would pull us up. So, when we go down, we’d be against gravity and it would be this hard going down. Either way, it would be hard. But... what if we just went one way!”

Alia turned around and skipped forward obviously pleased with her idea. Layla got to the scene from the cafe. Carmen had been sitting next to them the whole time. She was drinking tea and was staring forward deep in thought.

“Who betrayed you?” Layla whispered to the empty room.

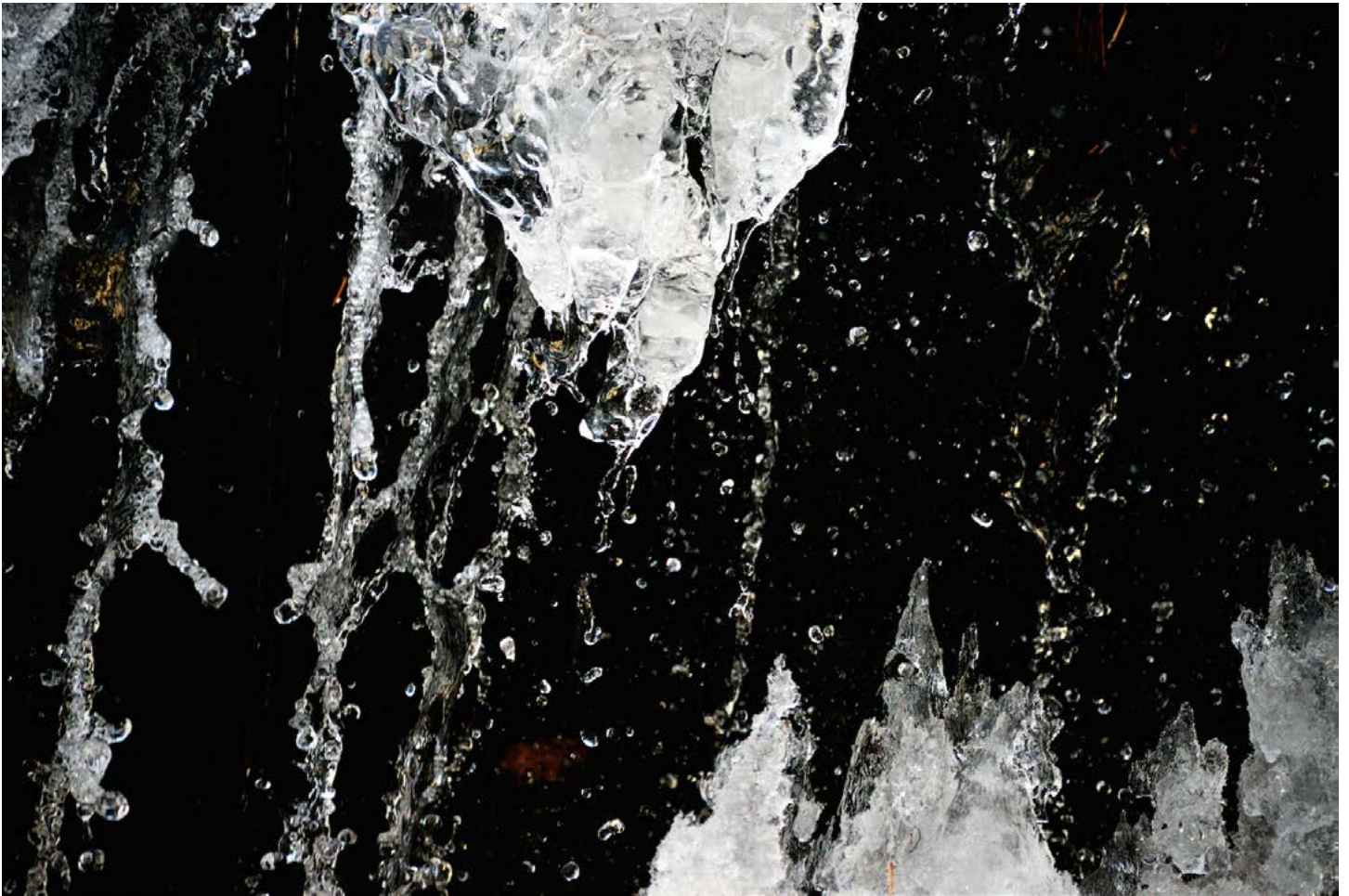
The camera panned back, and Layla heard herself talking about the woman vendor in the background. Layla zoomed in on Carmen and saw that she was listening to their conversation. She rewound the film and watched it again.

“I’m pretty sure I bought jewelry from that woman back in college,” Layla’s voice said from behind the camera. “Before I knew better.”

Carmen heard her and smiled.

##

Saba Waheed is the winner of the 2016 Water~Stone Fiction Prize. Her writing has also appeared in *Hyphen Magazine* and *SAMAR Magazine*. She co-produces the radio show Re:Work that won a Gracies by the Alliance for Women in Media. In addition, her one-act play premiered at East West Players' Evoke Festival. Through the Lemelson Award for Innovative Digital Projects in Social Research, she co-produced and co-wrote an animated film about young workers. Saba works as the research director at the UCLA Labor Center. Her studies have appeared in *The Guardian*, *Al-Jazeera America* and *The Los Angeles Times*.



# The Historical Implications of a Foot Massage

BY AJ URQUIDI

Sample mansions on display: a cul-de-sac  
 at the end of skid row. Their extraneous pastel  
 roofs are nice shelter for none but the Heritage  
 Society tourist. You lean against the exhibited  
 carriage barn when you need to take a long  
 think, beige with chocolate trim. This time  
 you wonder about categories of barons—oil  
 barons, lumber barons, barons of railroads, red  
 and robber barons. *Do the prefix designations*  
*make them less a baron?* For dinner you feed  
 at the Pulp Fiction diner, and when the waitress  
 slips you the check, you ask what Tim Roth is  
 really like. She laughs, *We get that a lot, but empty*  
*folks are often mistaken. This kitchen was built long*  
*after the death of Film.* Well of course, but that  
 was the only reason you came. Later on, a tiger bars  
 you from his stripe party. You forgot to RSVP  
 and your kerchief is spotted. That does not stop  
 you sneaking popcorn into the photo booth,  
 snapping strips of your shame. Footsteps have



rambled by the door for an hour, but now  
two shoes have paused for their body to knock.

# The Proliferation of Norms

BY AJ URQUIDI

one.

Michael Furey perished  
for Gretta in the dead  
of festive winter, not  
a moment of remembrance  
for Gabriel Conroy. Next door  
England hoards bank  
holidays, presumably  
to commemorate the banks.  
I've never understood Boxing  
Day—to spar with compatriots  
must be great for blowing  
off Christmas steam. Some  
have more to celebrate  
than others. We have a day  
to memorialize veterans, a day  
to venerate memorial. A day  
to observe labor, which I do  
firsthand when my employer  
refuses to give me the day  
off. We have a day to celebrate  
the explorer who excised  
indigenous tongues  
in exchange for golden

silence. I suppose we honor  
the ambition, foundation  
of American values. Mexico  
parties for each saint, for each  
time Jesus avoided a cockroach  
with his sandals. The only  
calendar square that comes  
constant to me marks  
my birth, as is the case  
with many. I suppose  
we honor the self,  
foundation of American  
values. As we get older  
we spend more  
of these days  
alone.

\*

two.

The committee sits  
in a circle and votes  
on the values of culture.  
Whoever doesn't practice  
them is insane. Batman  
made a career of apprehending  
the insane. He deposited  
them in Arkham, so named

for Lovecraft's humble horror  
homestead. Perhaps the correctional  
program is dysfunctional,  
for asylum recovery is rare,  
outpatients plagued  
by fits of violent ambition  
and memorials of the self.

The dart-eyed bus rider  
fogs his goggles, recounting  
his time as a vendor of chandeliers  
in the store owned by Elvis  
and Dorian Gray—it's been ten  
years since he missed his stop.

In the normal world our women  
disavow domestic servitude  
and explore the interiors of lit  
ovens. Our men desire men  
and take a short walk off  
the *Orizaba*. The belief  
of Septimus—the planet  
conducts its own soft symphony.

"All taken together meant  
the birth of a new religion—"

The committee update  
rejects values of obsolete  
culture. Whoever practiced  
old ways is insane. Disagreement  
means disability. Sanity

no longer dons a bat mask  
and leaps from towers.  
The bespectacled man  
on the Venice Blvd bus  
wearing fifteen jackets,  
bloviating alone, may be  
dribbling something  
important if we're crazy  
enough to listen.

Originally from Monterey, CA, AJ Urquidi has studied poetry in Los Angeles, New York City, and Long Beach, where he currently lives. His poems have appeared in such journals as *Chiron Review*, *Foothill*, and *Thin Air*, been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and won the Gerald Locklin Writing Prize. He has led creative writing workshops at CSU Long Beach and Beyond Baroque in Venice Beach. He edits *indicia*, an online journal, and investigates grammar for the Los Angeles Review of Books.



# Bad Memory of a School Bathroom

BY KIRK SEVER

The mud-stringy paper from the toilet floor the  
clay colored slime sticks and drips and stretches  
across the fingers my fingers the wet the filth  
and by typing this memory I lose this memory

Come back you thing you thing of the dark of  
the bottomless caverns of my soul of my carcass  
will you rise now and live on this paper this death  
die now and lay like a peppered bland corpse

Come forward and live you locker room misery  
I see the clothes fall from my legs as I look to change  
as the wetness and echo of hard white tile walls and  
the promise of crowds that approach from all angles

Yes hide you disease of a thought of a breath of a  
helpless sad moment who licks of my torment yes  
hide and be cowardly or rise and dry up like some  
sad wilted poem of god's only son



My writing has appeared in *Rain Taxi*, *Bird's Thumb*, *The Northridge Review* and elsewhere. Additionally, my work has earned me runner-up status in the Academy of American Poets George M. Dillon Memorial Award and the Northridge Fiction Award. I currently teach writing at Cal State Northridge.

# [Re]defining Structure

BY NICELLE DAVIS

A woman is buried so a church will rise. *The Walled Wife* by Nicelle Davis is a poetry collection that unearths from the long-standing text “The Ballad of the Walled-up Wife,” a host of issues that continue to plague women in the contemporary world: the woman’s body as sacrifice; the woman’s body as tender or currency; the woman’s body as disposable; the woman’s body as property; the woman’s body as aesthetic object; the woman’s body unsafe in the world she must inhabit, and in the hands of the people she loves.

*The Walled Wife* makes use of architectural terms—a language that inherently creates a system based on hierarchy and oppression. Here is a mini-redictionary of such terms by Davis. Here are images by photographer Jamie Clifford. In a collaborative effort, these women bear witness to how we are building ourselves into tombs—we are living dead before death.

By redefining, or amplifying certain oppressive aspects of such words, Clifford and Davis hope to encourage the building of rooms, rather than walls; *The Walled Wife* asks readers to consider if



there isn’t a better structure—if there isn’t a healthier architecture—to house our humanity.

**A** is for **Apse**: a thing [as much as space can be a thing]. Shape of a fellow : emptiness

A wheel going nowhere

**B** is for **Bahut**: chest: Inhale / Rise: Exhale / Fall

Or

a low wall bearing the weight of a cathedral.

**C** is for **Chimera**: gargoyle composed of disparate parts: a lion with the head of a goat and snake’s tail to prevent erosion. There is no getting out: even the impossible has been thought.



**D** is for **Dromos**: a beehive—a tomb

**E** is for **Eustyle**: being of the best proportion. Don't question. Only question how you are not.

**F** is for **Flying Buttress**: to resist the lateral forces pushing a wall outwards—redirecting to the ground.



**G** is for **Gablets**: small crosses to hold it together.

**H** is for **Hyphen**: together, in one.

A structural section                      connecting the main portion                      with its wings.



**I** is for **Ionic:** volutes: a spiral thing: **I**

**J** is for **Jettying:** upstairs insides spilling into the sky. Building a world over the world—walling all spaces in all directions.

**K** is for **Keystone:** You



**L** is for **Latticework:** girl, for a smaller waist, consider removing your floating ribs; it will never heal, but you'll look hot.

**M** is for **Marriage Stone:** a stone with a date carved in it; a Tomb Stone, only the couple isn't dead, exactly



**N** is for **Narthex**: an enclosed passage; outside a phallus; inside vaginal

**O** is for **Oculus**: the unblinking eye in your ceiling—a watching light

**P** is for **Pier**: An upright support for a superstructure—the dreamers pedestal.



**Q** is for **Quoin:** when the pier fails, the quoin is strength to replace the ruin

**R** is for **Rib Vault:** push your fingers into your sides until you are familiar with shape of each bone.

**S** is for **Squint:** like staring at the sun, an oblique view of the altar.





**T** is for **Truss**: a structure made up of one or more triangular—lovers.

**U** is for **You**: and I—interchangeable

**V** is for **Volute**: a spiral, scroll-like where nothing is written



**W** is for **Wings:** that never fly; subordinate; mistaking projection for freedom

**X** is for: the spot



**Y** is for: asking

**Z** is for: the end that never comes

Jamie Clifford is a photographer specializing in commissioned candid, documentary-style Portraiture & Event Coverage. Her approach is graceful :: unobtrusive :: instinctual. She has a keen understanding of light and composition. Her Art Collections have themes simplicity, spirituality, sensuality, abstraction, space and satire.

Nicelle Davis is a California poet, collaborator, and performance artist who walks the desert with her son J.J. in search of owl pellets and rattlesnake skins. Her most recent collection, *The Walled Wife*, will be out with Red Hen Press in April 2016. *In the Circus of You* is available from Rose Metal Press. She is the author of two other books of poetry, *Becoming Judas*, available from Red Hen Press and *Circe*, from Lowbrow Press. Her poetry film collaborations with Cheryl Gross have been shown across the world.



# A Woman's Alchemy

BY JESSE BLISS

No need to tell a pregnant woman how big she looks or doesn't look for where she is at in her pregnancy

Or what she should put in her body

Or that she will never sleep again

Or have a life

No need

Because her orbit is being dictated by the cosmos

Her poundage determined by the gods

Her intake

Her outtake

Her purpose

Her music

Her muse

Her pains

Her healing

Are far beyond the opinion you carry

Shaped by a society who hides the truths of what bringing a life to this planet actually entails

Tides rise in her brain, in her being, that are inexplicable

You can call it phrases like "mommy brain" or "nesting"

But from where I sit and where my eyes gaze

And what my mind wraps upon

None of that is the case

In fact

Ancient symbols communicate  
And as I struggle to pick objects up off the ground  
Or raise myself out of the bed or a car or a chair  
As my eyelashes fall to the ground  
And my breathing is labored  
As my digits swell  
And my head bends over the toilet another time  
I know this great creation  
Exits  
To bloom the blossoms of sacred eternity  
Exploding inside me  
A spindle  
Weaving a magic beyond comprehension  
Creation is messy  
Creation is messy  
Creation is messy  
And to be respected  
Some of the greatest warriors in history brought life here  
So don't clown  
Or underestimate what a woman can do with a babe in her arms  
The alchemy she can create  
Illuminating the healing of century old stuck  
Stop buying into the western world's way of putting a woman in her place  
Stop and reconsider  
Chose something different  
This piece is dedicated to the voice in me

That no longer need be silent  
And in turn the collective voice  
By giving voice  
And speaking truth  
We instantly being to transmute the ignorance  
And recreate the paradigm



Jesse Bliss is a playwright, director, producer, actress, poet and veteran arts educator with her work produced around the world at venues such as the United Nations, Edinburgh Festival, Lincoln Heights Jail, S.P.A.R.C at the Old Jail in Venice, The Last Bookstore, The Rosenthal Theatre at Inner-City Arts, Casa 0101 Theater, Theatre of Note, The Vagrancy, Occidental College, UCSC, UCLA, and California Institute of Integral Studies to among countless prestigious others. She has taught/teaches with Center Theatre Group, The Geffen, Inner-City Arts, Unusual Suspects, and Inside OUT Writers among others. She is a featured artist in documentaries including Kate Crash's LA WOMEN and in Yahoo New's SHINE. Ms. Bliss is a recent grant recipient from POETS and WRITERS for writing workshops for incarcerated girls inspiring her chapbook I LOVE MYSELF GOLDEN. Jesse is Co-Producer of KPFK 90.7's THINK OUTSIDE THE CAGE. She is Founder and Artistic Director of The Roots and Wings Project. [www.therootsandwingsproject.com](http://www.therootsandwingsproject.com).

# August 5th at the Hollywood Bowl

BY MAJA TROCHIMCZYK

Sometimes you say your farewells in a dark,  
impassioned, out-of-Africa sort of way. Sometimes  
you sound as if you do not mean it, as if nothing matters  
in the pallid white of sickly August sun, setting into poisoned  
light. Gone is the golden sheen that made us so enamored.  
Yes, enamored, for this is about love, after all, love and absence.  
It is different, you are silent after words failed, all failed,  
apologies and explanations. You used to be so articulate,  
persuasive even, at least you thought so, when we had  
a future beyond now.

There's nothing left to do, but go to a concert,  
melt into the mellow sounds of Joshua Bell's violin,  
soaring above the orchestra, into the indigo sky  
crisscrossed by the spotlights and chemtrail stripes,  
above hills sliced by shadows, over messy picnic tables,  
beyond the noise of empty wine bottles rattling down  
the stairs - down, down, down, and down again.

Nothing, but the solace of sparkling trills, rubato, portamento,  
the steadiness of Beethoven's chords, undulating waves,  
of Mendelssohn, echoes fading from the violins  
into the opaque mirrors of the cellos. I look down to the stage,  
musicians in white tuxedos. The Hollywood Bowl is full  
of hungry people, ready for their sound feast, waiting  
to fall into the music's vortex. Yet, I can still hear the venom  
in your voice: "Don't you ever, ever, ever, ever..."

The elided dominants slide into their resolutions  
slipping towards that final and strangely resonant tonic.  
I smile – a definition of melancholy. And I listen, perplexed,  
mesmerized, thinking where you would be, what you would do  
after the breakup. I describe it to myself, carve its contours  
out of oblivion. That's what it was. That's what it will be.  
Nothing. I traverse the upside-down landscape  
of symphonies, rolling across continents, oceans.

On the way back home, I listen to guitar sonatas by Scarlatti  
taking me with baroque certainty and classical restraint

into that kernel inside time where nothing hurts,  
nothing exists but pure presence after the book  
of farewells is finally closed.

# A Revelation After Il Paradiso

BY MAJA TROCHIMCZYK

We live in the third sphere  
of lovers, in the Earth's long shadow.  
Our love waxes and wanes  
like the Moon, or Venus rising up  
before dawn, the star of the morning.  
We oscillate from darkness to brilliance,  
float from fear into sunlight  
to rest on a golden afternoon  
in the innocent warmth of affection  
among newly planted roses:  
Imperial, Electric, Compassion,  
Double Delight and Simplicity roses  
in our garden where we trim twisted  
branches of old oleanders to make room  
for orange blossoms and more pomegranate,  
always more pomegranate,  
never enough pomegranate.

Dark red translucent juice stains our fingers.  
Tart juice bursts with flavor  
in our mouths, ready for kisses,  
always ready for more kisses,  
softest, childlike, strongest, tasting  
like the wine we never tasted, the dream  
we never even hoped to dream about,  
escaping the long shadow  
of the Earth on a golden afternoon.  
Lovers in the Garden of Love,  
an afternoon in the Third Sphere of Venus,  
golden, golden, sparkling golden,  
afternoon from another, better planet  
of pomegranate and light.

Maja Trochimczyk, Ph.D., is a Polish American poet, music historian, photographer, and author of six books on music, most recently *Frédéric Chopin: A Research and Information Guide* (rev. ed., 2015). Trochimczyk's five books of poetry include *Rose Always*, *Miriam's Iris*, *Slicing the Bread*, and two anthologies, *Chopin with Cherries* and *Meditations on Divine Names*. A former Poet Laureate of Sunland-Tujunga, she is the founder of Moonrise Press, and Board Secretary of the Polish American Historical Association. Hundreds of her poems, studies, articles and book chapters appeared in English, Polish, and in a variety of translations. She read papers at over 70 international conferences and is a recipient of honors and awards from Polish, Canadian, and American institutions, e.g., American Council of Learned Societies, Polish Ministry of Culture, PAHA, McGill University, and USC. [www.trochimczyk.net](http://www.trochimczyk.net), [www.moonrisepress.com](http://www.moonrisepress.com).





# IN THE KEY OF DEADLY

## Aka DIAMOND HANDCUFFS & A DERRINGER

BY MARIE SCAMPINI

1.

I blacked out again  
The tunnel is filling with water  
I wake up with my face waffled to a storm drain  
or maybe this is the surface of the moon  
I can't move – there's something on me – a weight  
I struggle to turn and see a man on top of me  
His huge body blanketing me  
His muddy dark coat kept me warm  
His body is still warm and there's a final gasp  
And now he's dead  
I think I killed him  
I try to reach for what I hope is my purse  
I wouldn't go anywhere without my purse  
But no luck – what I thought was a purse strap is his belt  
And I have to get the hell out of here  
I still can't move, I try but I can't scream  
And there's not another single living being in sight  
Except that rat scurrying toward me with delight

2.

I could see his beady black blood diamond eyes

His raised eyebrow as he showed his tiny knife-like teeth  
I began to believe all three of us were sewer rats somehow  
He was welcoming us home  
I could feel his whiskers now his gray-white mouth opening wide to take a bite  
Suddenly the screech of a bloated car tire rounding the corner  
The rat and I turned and before another breath  
SPLAT! The rat was squashed dead less than an inch from my bleeding skull

Dizzier and loss of blood  
I fell back into sleep or dream or memory  
A gambling joint the kind behind a door with no name  
A code knock and the door opened  
I sensed it was only a few yards from where I was lying  
Dying  
But for now in the past I was in sequins and silk stockings  
I leaned into the man I think was the man dead on top of me  
We were playing craps and he ordered  
“blow some luck on the dice, dollface., Daddy needs a new Coupe deVille”  
I blew and the dice fell right  
But we were working as we went to the corner of nothing  
And the man handed me a briefcase to hide under his coat  
He had draped around my shoulders  
Check your stockings—  
I somehow knew what he meant  
I felt cold metal against my thigh  
Perfect, a garter holstering my favorite derringer  
“Make sure it’s loaded”  
“I load it like I brush my teeth - twice a day  
Three times on weekends”  
the dream or memory fades into  
one dark room – I’m in the window  
I’m taking money – stacks and stacks of cash  
Benjamins with white powder, president’s faces



Spotched with blood  
One stack had a bullet in the middle  
Hollowing through every bill  
The bullet stopped death blocked by the stack of fifties  
Usually it's the other way around  
I took the money and handed them new clean money  
The hands give me a percentage – sometimes five percent, sometimes ten  
The commission goes in a different pile  
Too little time to create neat stacks anymore  
Business was booming  
Any better I'll get a new mink for Christmas  
Holiday bonus  
But I don't want a mink  
I want my freedom

3.

This is the way my world ends  
With the bang of a gun and a whimper of relief  
Tombstoned by a piano of a man on top of me  
Is this what he meant when he said  
“If you ever try to leave me, I'll leave you dead”  
My brain is marinating in tequila  
I sold my soul why not sell my liver while I was at it  
There's no remedy for self-destruction as strong  
As a gutter on Broadway at four o'clock in the morning  
If that's where I was  
If that's when it was  
I still can't remember  
I don't know what year it is  
I want to forget  
Except  
I remember someone-

Where is my shredded angel now?

James.

He'll come looking for me soon

Even though he had the courage to break both of our hearts

I couldn't corrupt him, at least not any more

We were both in love with Manhattan

And I wanted to tear him away

I was going to Hollywood

Trade Sardi's for the Sunset Strip

James.

Piss poor playwright

He wanted to be the next Arthur Miller

When Arthur Miller wasn't Arthur Miller anymore

He just needed a break like all of us

He even wrote me a part

A dance hall girl sitting at the bar smoking a cigarette

"The way you smoke a cigarette could cause a revolution"

The way I kissed him could stop one

Too sweet for me - ultimately

I'll take a gangster any day or night of the week

No one's corrupting anyone who already hasn't

Met his maker twice.

I'm afraid three is the charm.

If I could move my arm-

The needles of numbness crawling down my leg

I had to move or give up the ghost of me

All I want first is the chicken soup

At Jerry's Deli

Before I sold my soul wholesale

I always gave my noodles to James

I think he weighed less than I did when I met him

I could almost fit him in my pocket

Fold him up like loose cash

Mad money for a Sunday afternoon  
It was supposed to be a fling  
That's all I could afford  
I had pulled too many pieces of lint and flesh  
Off thousand dollar suits  
To get out of this alive  
I didn't need to drag him into my mess  
but I confess  
I couldn't do anything less  
than fall in some kind of love with him  
even if my heart was nothing more than a big clot stuck at the end of an artery  
he liquified it back to fresh heart meat  
at least for a while  
Oh great, it's starting to rain  
I'm soaked now and the rain is the miracle I  
Wouldn't dare ask for  
Lubricant between me and Piano crushing another rib  
Some supernatural exhalation from his body  
He moved – I freed an arm  
Numb – unable to grip  
Then a steam dream raising up from his body  
A grunt – a whistle through his nostrils  
I didn't think things could get any worse  
It was a breath  
Life  
God damnit he was still alive!  
Which means I'm dead. I must be dead  
or I will be soon

5.

His breath was my death  
Time was wasting down my lips

If only I could loosen his weight  
From my hips  
With effort only from a divine  
source that wasn't mine  
I managed to move my hand up  
His hand was holding a piece of paper  
Bleeding words that were erasing in front of me  
My fingers tricked gravity to grasp the dying page  
Through swollen vision I opened the paper wound  
In the desperate hours  
I slow dance with the ghost of us  
(forgive me I am quite concussed)  
I could as easily kill you as kiss you  
Lean in to the past  
The memory  
Of what could never be  
Illusion lives again  
And so I live again  
Let my head rest on the shoulder of the future  
That will never be  
Until you are truly free  
And you'll never be truly free  
The writer was right  
Oh no, it wasn't James  
James had one addiction  
One love greater than me  
The gorgeous face of a royal flush  
Queens were merciless whipping his cheek  
Jacks paid off the Joker  
Kings weren't wild  
Just deadly  
Faces he never saw  
the house always left him

face down in a suit of shame.

6.

I thought I had met my match or a match  
When I met James  
Crumpled at the poker table  
He lost again  
Piano wanted to break his legs  
He was always breaking something  
I was already face down  
In a conspiracy of lies and kisses  
Somehow I managed to buy James time  
Since he was someone I could never be  
Time was all he had  
Mine was running out  
I sold a gold watch that had been lifted  
From a dead man's hand  
Given to me as a gift  
Before it even needed to be wound again  
James wanted to thank me  
No one told him never to thank the devil for another day  
I was simply keeping him company  
In hell

7.

The final beginning of my never ending  
“In the desperate hours...”  
These words were birthed by my Nightingale  
That's what I called her  
The one and only woman I loved  
Too bad love didn't pay the rent

I was her one-winged sparrow  
I hopped around in a state of mangled flight  
Could I fly with one wing?  
“if anyone could you could Sparrow”  
she would tell me  
I didn’t believe in endings  
I only created another beginning  
Every street corner led to another  
New avenue  
A new piece of a world with a view  
Always overlooking Central Park  
I could only see the map as confetti pieces  
Midnight on New Year’s Eve  
Another beginning  
Erasing the face of the moment before  
I became a virgin  
Released from the dying clutches of a whore  
Nightingale scooped me up  
When my ankle twisted  
I hopped into her nest to rest  
Only my body ever left  
She was some kind of professor  
Books from floor to ceiling  
She carved out a window to look through me  
She was some kind of nurse  
She concocted a tea of tree bark and moonlight  
I was hallucinating, or so I thought  
Being in love was her natural state of mind  
Wet clay was her natural state of heart  
Foreign and unnatural for me – too exotic  
Too expensive too elusive  
fractured picture frames  
Of all life’s photographs

I wanted to be buried in her arms  
Pillowing marshmallow singed by an open fire  
I moved in and slept against the music of her beating breast  
That's when I knew all the rest  
Were just a pile of empty eggshells  
Killer compost  
When I was craving an omelet  
She was what came first  
Before the egg  
Before life began  
Divine creation  
All these revelations from a hard-boiled chick  
Who couldn't be unboiled  
Only deviled  
This beginning would be my only end  
No commerce in her kisses  
Not a language I could ever understand  
No translation existed  
As soon as the healing of my ankle was done  
Muscle memory forced my legs to  
Run

8.

Collapsing lungs  
I took small sips of air  
As if through a straw  
Drinking a frozen hot chocolate  
Laced with arsenic and old lies  
"I want a cigarette"  
As if on cue  
The rain stopped  
A shadow over me

A face I knew  
Through  
The rearview of every mirror  
In my past  
“You’re a little late to save me  
and a little early for a double homicide”  
“What are doing surrounded by sewer rats?”  
Coughing up a kidney I managed  
“Could you be more specific?”  
My eyes were closing to this world  
Begging for forever midnight  
Always a new beginning  
A new day  
A new year  
A new decade  
But never a new life  
Deadline expired  
And so was I  
Going  
Somewhere I have never travelled  
Cosmic courthouse to face the Judge  
I was linked quite literally to Piano’s crime  
He had a pair of diamond-studded handcuffs made  
One of my crushed wrists wore one  
And the briefcase in possession of untold dollars  
The handle was collared by the other handcuff  
Even if I could escape  
I didn’t know the combination  
Though I heard Piano unlock it many times  
I knew the combination by ear not sight  
Right now I heard in one ear – Frank Sinatra crooning  
And out the other – Billie Holiday tuning  
I hear someone from land while I was under eight feet of water



“James, is that you?”  
A wave of sound splashed against my brain, an echo  
“It’s me, Gumshoe. Keep talking, open your eyes”  
Oh just perfect. Gumshoe found me  
After tailing Piano and me for months  
He cornered me at the corner coffee shop  
I was eating dinner at five in the morning  
He saddled up next to me and my Denver omelet  
“You know what should be outlawed?”  
“What?”  
“Green peppers. Ugly green criminals killing my eggs.  
Arrest them. They are useless depraved vegetables. Shoot them”  
“Vegetables are not within my jurisdiction, ma’am.”  
“I know what you want- and don’t call me ma’am.”  
“If you tell me what I need to know about your boss, we’ll protect you.”  
Contemplating while scraping my plate  
Loyalty hasn’t gotten me far  
I had a little dog once  
Loved me, loyal  
So loyal when I was standing across the street  
He couldn’t wait  
Jumped out of the arms of my half-wit roommate  
Ran into the street, hit by a car  
Flew twice as far as he ever walked  
That’s what loyalty will get you.  
No more dogs, no more dogma.  
“I called an ambulance. Just hang on, honey, you’re going to live.”  
I gargled those words and spit them in his face  
“Don’t call me honey- I’m nobody’s-  
Massive hands, two rib-eyed steaks with knuckles  
Rolled Piano halfway off of me  
A gun fired  
Gumshoe fell on top of me

Now you're right on time for one homicide  
Sadly it's yours

9.

Now criss-crossed under two starless lovers  
A dried rose pressed between  
life and death bittersweet  
Eyes raised one more time to meet  
Tear-filled eyes of Uneasy Street  
James tragic – at least his tattered jacket was  
Lifting my face with a slap  
“Are you alive?”  
“You tell me?”  
Looking at my misery and company  
What about them?  
Careful, Piano may be dead  
But traces of passion linger  
If dead, he suffers from angel lust  
At least, I'm afraid, in his trigger finger  
James tried to deliver me from the human wreckage  
He felt the metal encrusted with jewels  
A fever rose up his cheeks as he tried to loosen  
The handcuff from my wrist  
“You still have the briefcase?!”  
If you can unbury me, you can marry me  
And we can live  
“Enough to get your play produced”  
More tugs left me no less noosed  
Metal meeting fate as a gun fires  
And James crumbles into the unholy heap  
Danger and despair never ran so deep

10.

What seemed like a lifetime later  
I blinked my eyes in slow motion as  
A fourth shadow veiled us  
“Get off of her”  
James startled as he stared down the barrel  
Of a rifle  
Blur of green and lavender  
It was Her  
“Nightingale”  
“How did you find me?”  
“I just followed the trail of sequins and broken hearts”  
Pointing her firearm at James  
“Is this the thug with a typewriter?”  
“Hey! Who the hell are you, Annie Oakley?”  
“I’m the only one who knows any better”  
I managed a stage whisper, warning  
“Piano’s still alive, at least his lust for revenge”  
Using her rifle to stab through the layers of flesh, inspecting  
“Nightingale, what are you doing? Do you think you’re going to Robert  
Frost me into running away with you?”  
“Do you want to run away with me?”  
“What? And leave all this?!”  
Nightingale laughed. A laugh with so much honey she had an entourage  
of bees crowning her head. I sputtered:  
“it’s too late, go back to your castle of books.  
You’re the only one who doesn’t belong in this gutter”  
Before she could utter  
Piano jerked up to fire two shots  
One toward Nightingale  
Next toward Gumshoe lifting his gun  
She was faster

“When in doubt, duck, when sure, duck faster”  
Her arm blocked the second bullet  
Amidst the muddy bloody mess as  
Nightingale fired into the keys last played  
A final breath expired  
Keys flattened, silent  
Lucky for me Nightingale wore her cape  
Part superhero part vampire countessa she wrapped me in her body warmth  
As she slid my half-corpse from beneath the body count rising except for one wing  
Still trapped attached to the briefcase, no key  
“Turn your face away and hold up your feathers”  
“What?! How did you learn to use a rifle?”  
“My father wanted me to be the hunter son he never had-  
took me pheasant hunting, taught me how to aim and how to be patient  
Never killed any pheasants, only hunters”  
I raised my fractured claw  
She fired the rifle working it like a chainsaw  
Three bullets and freedom  
I was so light as she lifted me as hers  
Reflex forced my other hand to reach for the briefcase  
“Drop the money, take your soul”  
“Will you heal me?”  
“You’ll heal you.  
I’ll be perched wing-side with bandages fast and fresh”  
“Will you teach me how to want to live? I don’t know where to start”  
“You already learned life is easy with a bullet lodged in your heart”  
and then what?  
“You’ll tell me another wall’s worth of stories”  
Enough for a drawbridge and a moat  
The scream of an ambulance rounding the turn.  
Looking over at Gumshoe, Nightingale sang  
“Do you have everything you need except an ambulance arriving secondarily?”  
“Everything except her. You’re taking my girl”

“She’ll never be anyone’s girl. She never belonged to anyone, not even herself  
I swooned as a female exit wound bandaged  
Nightingale flew up Uneasy Street with Sparrow under her wing  
Whispering  
“What two things do you want first?”  
“A kiss and then a giant Denver omelet, hold the Denver”  
a kiss held fast and first and tight  
as the gutter doused with blood and butter devoured the night  
Did justice take a holiday?  
Has Sparrow forever traded in her life of crime and tequila for a dame  
with a day job and a fine pinot noir?  
Questions with answers none of them know today  
No ending just another beginning  
Answers etched in the bottom of that seedy bar  
There won’t be a new Coupe deVille  
Parked in front of where Piano played them all in the key of Evil

11.

After sleep so deep  
she thought she was buried  
six feet  
under the surface  
of the moon  
wing still broken  
a token of a journey  
perfectly misunderstood  
there she stood  
wobbly silhouette  
an eye on the shadow  
an eye toward sky  
Sparrow met for the first time  
The dawn

Opened her beak to speak  
And met herself  
Singing in the key of free

12.

Freshly washed and brilliantly bright  
Eyes wild open to what this new dawn might bring  
One arm dangling scooping up the breeze  
The other arm hammocked sleeping in a bleached white sling  
Leaning on the rails of the balcony  
At least eighteen stories above earth  
Sparrow stood leaning into her future  
Witnessing the first day of her rebirth  
Music lifted in a wave  
Strange strings played unheard  
Behind the door of an uncaged bird  
Aspiring for a higher note  
Sparrow's song suddenly silenced by a black gloved hand  
Another squeezing her throat  
An exhalation as long as delivery of United States mail  
Into her ear did sail  
I knew you would find me, in her head said she  
As the voice rose in the key of deadly  
"Be mine alive or leave this earth free"  
Perhaps she could or couldn't have lied  
her eyes rained "free"  
as the hand's orchestra of muscles  
simply complied

13.

Life had first  
Prepared Sparrow to expect the worst

Her eye drift followed  
Her last breath unswallowed  
As she cuffed out her derringer ready in her slinged wing  
Pointing into Piano's chin and fired brainward  
Piano slumped forward  
Breaking through the railing  
Sparrow thought his grip around her throat should have loosened  
But instead premature rigor mortis further noosened  
They both swan dived into mid air then quite suddenly down  
At least eighteen stories toward the gutter of Midtown  
Would I end up under Piano once again?  
Will this highly dysfunctional relationship ever end?  
As gravity and the gods would have it lifting their morning teacup  
Piano splatted onto the sidewalk first cushioning Sparrow's landing  
sunny side up.  
Eyes skyward Sparrow could see  
A face and arms waving – it was she  
Nightingale alive and well  
Lifting her again from the grates of hell.

14.

Oh no, wait  
Vision clearing  
I must have been hallucinating or dreaming  
Drunk on a moment's happiness  
Borrowed at too high a vig  
I could ever repay  
As I see one of Piano's henchmen  
With a knife to Nightingale's neck  
“Tell me where the money is or I'll slice this chick into funeral feathers”  
I could only shake my head  
Piano in my dreams was very much dead  
Now he pulled my hair nearly out of my head  
“you thought you could deceive me,  
leave me, and live happily ever after with her?! Don't you know  
Even if you kill me,

Three more generations  
Of degenerations  
Will search every crack of every corner of this crackling earth  
Until they find you and finish your last breath?"  
No, I couldn't pay off the Devil enough  
For he  
To cut production of this snuff  
Film and recut into a romantic  
Comedy

15.  
Ironic as this is ending  
When in the beginning Piano was so befriending  
I was working at the upscale brothel he owned  
The décor was that of a bacchanalian dream  
As we dressed in matching Roman mini-dresses  
Gold-trimmed and transparent  
Cellophane-wrapped sex candy  
Waiting in a room to be chosen  
A fantasy for hire  
To fulfill any man or woman's desire  
This was a step up  
From small town Nowhere USA  
Where most people feed, breed and die  
In the State of Why  
In the County of Mediocre  
In the Town of Ordinary  
On the Street of Deceit  
In the blue House of Silent Screams

16.  
Here at the Bacchanalia  
I was chosen  
Usually because I looked young  
Eighteen going on forty  
Except that I was fifteen  
Going on fifty



With my cotton candy blonde hair  
And drugstore red lips  
The husbands and boyfriends  
Would choose me  
Because I reminded them of a girl  
They used to know  
Who would never ever become a whore  
Who lived next door  
To everyone.  
The girl next door  
Who had three-ways with men  
Four-ways with women  
Husbands and wives sometimes  
I was someone's Christmas present  
Brithday present  
Anniversary present  
Weekly therapy session  
I listened, I looked into their eyes  
If I could stand it  
When the man wanted me to hit him  
In his family jewels  
I asked him why – why was this what turned him on?  
One man told me a girl on a soccer field  
Kicked him in his goal net  
And in the agonizing pain  
Met ecstasy  
And that drove him to me every week  
I was all-powerful in the face of meek  
I made housewives feel beautiful  
Because I was so plain  
No woman wants her husband fucking  
A woman more beautiful than she was  
I was still unmolded clay  
With baby fat bouncing in my freckled cheeks  
That had yet to fall into  
My mere sprouts of breasts  
I treated the women as I wished I could be treated

With a loving tenderness I never knew  
I had to make it up  
My imagination fueled  
The kissing of an elbow  
Or a stretch mark  
But I knew was right  
I could feel the reaction  
Tears followed the orgasms  
If you've never had that experience  
You should have tried me  
Between the hours of six and two am  
Before I turned to stone.

17.

I considered the Bacchanalia my first acting job  
As I saved my money  
To study with Stella Adler  
I read all of Stanislavsky's books  
I became the character  
They wanted me to play  
At that moment  
I was anyone for anyone  
If the price was right.  
Then one night  
The overfed manager  
With greasy slicked back hair  
Three badly placed moles on his face  
An etch-a-sketch of a mustache bridging nowhere to nothing much  
Called me up to his desk  
"You don't seem to enjoy your job very much"  
his cigar smoke clouding my face  
"I like it just fine"  
in that space was the question I would not answer as I knew  
He didn't want a lady of the night without a pimp in his crew  
I wasn't beaten or co-erced, or well-versed in being manipulated  
I smoked, but I didn't drink (at that time) or do drugs like the others

I didn't have a thousand dollar quota to meet  
So I was less than profitable enough meat in his eyes  
"We're letting you go. You can leave now."  
Without another word I packed up my Maybelline and threw  
My "uniform" in the trash bin filled with red kissed tissues and needles  
Carefully unfolded pieces of foil Undressing the powder every particle so precious  
Walking out the door of this chapter of my rented life  
As easily as I entered it.  
Or so I thought  
I could never have imagined the new trouble I bought.

18.

Stepping into cruelest January wind  
I felt as if I had somehow sinned  
Against the gritty grain of a lost soul's brain  
Eyes blurry with tears of rejection  
My lack of vices forced my ejection  
From the rise and fall of every erection  
Wasn't a passionate enough of a predilection  
As I walked hailing a cab, in a state of dread  
I hailed Piano walking toward me instead  
Without missing a beat he took out a monogrammed handkerchief  
Dabbing my blackened eyes  
"What happened, Dollface?"  
He spoke to me as if he knew me  
In a blur I slurred "I was fired"  
Knowingly he nodded  
"Maybe it's time you retired..."  
I finally looked at him more clearly  
A wall of a man with a glint of razor blades in his eyes  
But right now I was at a new low  
I was quite sure in the history of the world's oldest profession  
I was one so few ever could make the confession  
I was "let go" for lack of some motivation  
And now told I should go on a permanent vacation  
He took my by the hand – "let's go

I'll buy you a drink and dinner or breakfast

I know a place..."

He opened the door of his Coupe deVille, manicured finger to point

Hesitating, I knew I had seen him in that joint

"Aren't you the owner?"

He smiled so slightly, handing me a glass of red wine

Which I drank down instantly drunk as my last meal was yesterday around nine

As I writhed in this wrath of grapes

Shivering he took his thousand dollar coat on my two dollar shoulders as drapes

"I know you were fired. I saw the tapes."

Marie Scampini: I am a published poet and playwright expanding storytelling from micropoetry to novels, currently writing *#1775 POEMS IN 177 DAYS*, inspired by one of my favorite poets - Emily Dickinson.

