

Angel City Review



TALES FOR THE GENERATIONS THAT GOT SCREWED

30
MODERN
WRITERS

33 NEW
WORKS

"Startlingly fresh and eclectic anthology. It's everything!"

--- David LaChapelle, Artist

"Like Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* for the Internet Age. We need to read this."

--- Maxwell Williams, Technology Editor, *Good Magazine*

"Charles Bukowski would feel disturbingly at home in this darkly hilarious anthology!"

--- Sandra Tsing Loh, *The Madwoman in the Volvo*

GEN F



*An Anthology of Short Stories of Comic
Tragedies, Humiliations and Reversals of
Fortune for Those Displaced by Technology
and the Economy*

EDITED BY GORDY GRUNDY

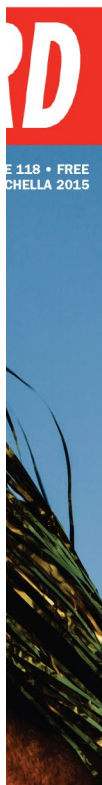
Andrew Berardini, Ronee Blakley, Betty Ann Brown, Matty Byloos, Luca Celada, Paul Chavez, Shana Nys Dambrot, Michael Delgado, Harry Dunn, Gordy Grundy, Doug Harvey, James Hayward, Rich Henrich, Josh Herman, Sarah Hunter, Tulsa Kinney, Victoria Looseleaf, Christopher Michno, Diane Mooney, Martin Mundt, Holly Myers, Jill Paris, Dave Shulman, Hills Snyder, Kurt Thomas, John Tottenham, Matias Viegner, Buffy Visick, Dimitri Vorvolakos, Mary Woronov

Available in print and Kindle at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

FOR OUR CONTEMPORARY TIMES



L.A.'S ONLY MUSIC MAGAZINE **INTERVIEWS** ALBUM REVIEWS **LIVE PHOTOS** AND MORE
LOCAL AND INDEPENDENT SINCE 2005 FREE AT MORE THAN 300 LOCATIONS
READ **SUBSCRIBE** ORDER A COPY **AND CONTRIBUTE** AT LARECORD.COM
[INSTAGRAM/LARECORDMAGAZINE](https://www.instagram.com/LARECORDMAGAZINE) [TWITTER/LARECORD](https://twitter.com/LARECORD) [FACEBOOK/LARECORD](https://facebook.com/LARECORD)



GROOVIN' HIGH

A DEDICATION TO

FREDDIE HUBBARD

FEBRUARY 18 2016



DOORS OPEN AT 9PM - \$5 ALL NIGHT - OPEN JAM SESSION

THE GRAND STAR JAZZ CLUB

943 Sun Mun Way, Los Angeles, CA 90012

HOLLYWOOD

W E N D Y C. O R T I Z

NOTEBOOK



available now on amazon

In Memory of Dan Fante

February 9, 1944-November 23, 2015



This issue is dedicated in part to the memory of Dan Fante, who passed away November of this year. When first starting this project, we had high hopes for what this journal could be; in turn we set our sights high, asking writers we appreciate if they would be interested in contributing a piece. Dan Fante was the first writer to say yes to us and give us a poem to be included in the first issue. Upon hearing our mission statement he took it a step further asking colleagues to submit to the journal as well. His work may have presented a very rough and tumble kind of man, which gave his work its charm. But he was also a kind and caring person who supported the arts in any way he could. In his life he published 11 books as well as taught writing at places such as UCLA. His legacy will live on in his books as well as his family and students. Our thoughts and gratitude are with his family and loved ones, who helped make him into the man we respected so much.

Featured Artist
Gagandeep Singh



Gagandeep Singh known as “Singh” was born in Punjab, India in 1992 and has lived in Los Angeles his whole life. Singh is largely self-taught and is completing his Bachelor of Arts degree at Cal State University Northridge specializing in contemporary figurative painting. He appears to capture the very essence of his subjects quickly with skillful, loose brushwork... His work includes portraiture, interiors, still life and landscape.

Angel City Review Issue 2 2015

Zachary Jensen: Managing Editor
Don Kingfisher Campbell: Poetry Editor
John Venegas: Lead Editor
Thea Manalang: Editor
Yair Ben-Zvi: Editor
Angie Rodriguez: Editor

Additional Credits

Thank you to all the various part-time volunteer readers who came in to help over the numerous months. The writers whose work fills these pages. The readers. And a special thank you to N. R.

Table of Contents

Poetry

Art Currim	<u>11</u>
	<u>13</u>
Danielle Grilli	<u>16</u>
Karen An-Hwei Lee	<u>18</u>
	<u>19</u>
Adrian Cepeda	<u>26</u>
Jackie Chou	<u>28</u>
Sara Khayat	<u>32</u>
Mark Jackley	<u>35</u>
Marie Lecrivain	<u>38</u>
	<u>39</u>
Khadija Anderson	<u>41</u>
Chiwan Choi	<u>57</u>
Estella Ramirez	<u>61</u>
	<u>62</u>
Reynaldo Macias	<u>65</u>
	<u>66</u>
Billy Burgos	<u>69</u>
	<u>70</u>
Terry Wright	<u>83</u>
Jessica Ceballos	<u>86</u>
Terri Niccum	<u>89</u>
	<u>91</u>
Alex Simand	<u>105</u>
Brian Dunlap	<u>108</u>
Alexandra Hohmann	<u>111</u>
	<u>112</u>
Teka Lark Fleming	<u>114</u>
	<u>115</u>

Fiction

Luke Silver	<u>22</u>
Trista Hurley-Waxali	<u>43</u>
David Vieux	<u>73</u>
Jeff Nazzaro	<u>94</u>
James Bezerra	<u>118</u>





Under Covers | Art Currim

(The night you test the assumption that you are in fact a childhood sweetheart)

These are long years
Not knowing
Of our wanting
So seamless in sync
So freely in tune

Then growing up some
Learning to be distant
Whilst yearning to be one
Learning to want
These long years

Tonight
Stepping to her bedroom
Her smile says
You may have me
But you can't take me unless I choose it
She'll set the time
The pace
Its rhythm
The turntable spinning directionless
Light refracting through her mother's scarf
Throwing back that lost shadow from yesteryear
Upon the wall across the ceiling

I'll peek past her present
Into her sweet eyes
Wondering if I got the moment wrong
The person
Or the prize
I'll gauge whether her mind-set is
Adventurous
Gentle
Accepting
Rapturous
Bemused
Or sad

I'll maybe gulp down my coffee
Guess the right thing to say
Be wrong anyway
Be clumsy on account

But not in lovemaking
No, never that way
Time will drift to an exit and wait
My getaway car its come-away driver
Seeking a leaking of whispers
Stars will drop their streaking tears
Night will turn to darker inky black

We'll lie together face to face
Speaking secrets as though
Sharing with strangers
Our faces so close that shadows merge
Those same ingresses cast by mother's scarf
Caressing her soft cheek
We'll lie together in recalled embrace
Bringing past perfect to the now
Connected all
by my gaze
and by familiar sameness
Coming together in fragments
of combined angst desecrated lust
Each gazing out the other's hunger
Until the rising sun's rays cause her to squint a bit

Or swapping songs sudden...
I DO remember the moment
Of learning the pain of distance
Of wanting to be one
Of wanting to be the one
It's already pulling in every morning's blessings
They tap tap tap across our chests
Held in our forever moment
Breathless awaiting sea salvation
That she might take on the rest

Calling | Art Currim

I sit for hours
Thinking about my calling
Thinking I no longer call
Or listen to you
And somewhere therein
A part of me left behind

I sift for hours
Mining madness for meaning
Scouring unblinking
For faint familiar glint
A return of illumination
Yes in that moment
Recalling God Nature Time

I grow from
Trying to wow the room
To being one with it
Seeking therein a calling
A cause worthy of words
I think of being aware
Afloat in a moment
Of breaths sighs hurt and love

I try to grasp
But what I've grasped
Makes no sense
I try to act
But my action flounders
Without breadth or direction
So I struggle
And I try to grasp

I walked away from god
So I may find religion
I have seen no answers
For questions of spirit, soul, or time
Except to simply be
I think for hours about my calling
Knowing somewhere therein
Something left behind

I have your book
It lies unfinished by my bed
Now you're gone
I'm not in bed that often
I have your book
With the bookmark you made for me
It sticks out a reminder
One day my body will be sick
Sick as my heart is for you
And I will lift your book
And make my way to resolution

I sit for hours
Thinking about my calling
Thinking I no longer call
Or listen to you
And somewhere therein
A part of me left behind

Art Currim lives in Los Angeles, by way of India, the UK, Canada, and Orange County. After a decade as a video game director and then as designer and producer of a hugely successful Kickstarter mobile product - he walked away from all the machinery, and into a life of writing and composing. He hoped therein to find release, meaning, and friendships, and to lose the Oxford comma. Regrettably, his decision has triggered more harm than reward, as he understands even less now than he did before.

Art's work has appeared in Yay!LA Mag, Dryland Literary Magazine, The Women Group, and the San Gabriel Valley Poet's Quarterly. His poetry will also appear in the Tia Chucha Press "Coiled Serpent" Anthology, 2016.

Art has featured at Dirty Laundry Lit, Bluebird Poetry Series, A Rose in a Prose, and others.

In all our Imbecility (or) Sometimes Winging (Measureless) | Danielle Grilli

- For Gary

Let me inhale * you * into * me....

all your poetry, all your shit – all your fingerless philosophies – all your hopeful cynicism – and the rivers that trap you - all the rivers that cage you – wild and chaotic – to forge-slate banks. Give me all your histories and your fuck-ups - and your still-flowing wounds – your STILL-FLOWING wounds – your still flowing -

give me that shotgun blast to the chest, the one that cleaved right through – ripped through heart and lungs, through your - blued spine ladders – only to speed – cool and stupid - out again. Give me your *what the fuck was that?!* give me your *what the hell happened here?!* Give me all that shit too. Give me that shit too, all that - mess of you.

at night, I - shackle myself to bed-posts (ankles and wrists and pale neck) hoping, maybe, love might finally come to remember me.

Give me all your still beating, your still breathing, give me all your still thinking. Give me all your clamped and breaking, your - raw wet knuckles, give me – the crimson of you - tell me where it hurts, tell me where it HURTS. I want to feel your - scream and beat, all your – thump, thump, thump, all that – kept and frustrated lunacy of you. Make me feel that I am not alone here.

Bite this while I weave – small threads through – flank and tissue. Violet and needle and wind-chime tinkling some(where) in the distance. (and then it's my turn).

We smack soft skulls against - wall of concrete, white- wash floor, crack and redden seam and joint, bleached caulking - the - all that should never have been touched, the everything that just don't give a damn. We are dim and determined. We are the fools who tread over and over and over again. *Who goes there? Who GOES there?!* (Perhaps we should know enough to leave now).

My Dear, what have we done with our lives?

My Dear, what with all these sore and forbidden places?

My Dear, why must we poke and poke so? (to hurt a little more? to get a rise out of ourselves? to FEEL something?)

My Dear, what will we do now? What small miracle, what shock of fate, will save us?

Danielle Grilli is a poet, writer, and mommy living in Los Angeles. She holds an MFA in Poetry and Creative Writing. In addition to the joint chapbook *Hunger Crossing* which she published with Larry Colker, her work can be seen in various print and online publications around the globe.

TRIPTYCH FUTURE OF THE BOOK AS A SIGNATURE FRAGRANCE | Karen An-Hwei Lee

This smythe-sewn book with deckle-cut pages -

Will you place it on a shelf to read on Sunday?
Will you recycle it for another life?

1. Ylang ylang 2. Cocoa 3. Rose

Will materiality vaporize as you read stanzas
wafting an enfleurage of enjambment
flashing one frame after another?

Or will paper-giving trees sing gratitude in their altruism –

1. Baisong or white pine 2. Hemlock 3. Balsam Fir

Will the pages vanish into windows and lignin-rich skins,
glass-matrix algorithm of codes?

A liquid palette of colored pixels
whose timelines shift to the nanosecond?

1. Sea lettuce 2. Iris 3. Molihua or jasmine

A thousand years from this millennium,
let us inhale books at a glance, kiss plumes of language.

PRAYER IN THE YEAR OF NO RAIN | Karen An-Hwei Lee

The year I turned forty coincided with the worst drought in California since I moved west, if not for decades. Over a thousand trees in the oldest arboretum west of the Mississippi flailed in thirst. Fish died of salinity -- saltwater intrusion in rivers. Aerial photos of the Sierras, unceremonious earth-skinned aridity. Only a cycle, while others said, global warming. El Niño will return. Eco-prophets shall construct their arks of gopherwood in the high desert, miles away from closed fishing piers and hatcheries where young salmon, wayfarers pooling on a layover flight, will delay spawning. I said a prayer for rain at the swimming pool, wrung water out of my hair with bare hands as if each misty strand might quell fever by refusing to drink.

Karen An-hwei Lee is the author of *Phyla of Joy* (Tupelo 2012), *Ardor* (Tupelo 2008) and *In Medias Res* (Sarabande 2004), winner of the Norma Farber First Book Award. Lee also wrote two chapbooks, *God's One Hundred Promises* (Swan Scythe 2002) and *What the Sea Earns for a Living* (Quaci Press 2014). Her book of literary criticism, *Anglophone Literatures in the Asian Diaspora: Literary Transnationalism and Translingual Migrations* (Cambria 2013), was selected for the Cambria Sinophone World Series. She earned an M.F.A. from Brown University and Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Berkeley. The recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Grant, she serves as Full Professor of English and Chair at a liberal arts college in greater Los Angeles, where she is also a novice harpist. Lee is a voting member of the National Book Critics Circle.



Past This Part
By Luke Silver

"We're past this part."

"Really?"

"Yes. You read this to me last week."

"I don't remember any of it."

"I do. He gets kidnapped by the aliens and brought up to the other planet. Then the aliens bring in the naked Hollywood actress, and at first she's all scared, but he's really nice to her. So soon they're having sex and he's cheating on his wife like an asshole."

"Look."

"No. Don't look. Just move ahead to the next chapter. I told you. We already read this one."

"Huh... You're right. I guess I totally forgot. That's pretty funny."

"Yeah. Funny."

"What?"

"I just thought of something amusing. It's nothing."

"OK..."

"OK, what?"

"What is the nothing that's so amusing?"

"Guys write books about cheating and make jokes out of it. And guys read about cheating heroes and it doesn't even make any sort of impression on them. That's what's funny."

"It kinda seems like you're angry. Are you? Because if you'd rather not read the book today that's totally fine. And if you'd rather stop it altogether we can pick another book. How about you pick the book. It can be whatever. Hell, it can be E.L. James if you want."

"I don't care."

"You don't care? I just gave you a free pass to read the Fifty Shades of Grey trilogy out loud and you're gonna pass?"

"No! I don't care. It really doesn't matter what book we read anymore. Can you understand that?"

"Isabella..."

"Please, stop. Let's not do this. Alice is coming in an hour and then you're going to have to go. So let's just start reading, Ok? We're just past where the cheating asshole doesn't care that aliens are watching him screw a woman who isn't his wife in an alien zoo. Go."

"I don't want to."

"You don't want to?"

"I don't want to read something that makes you upset."

"The book isn't making me upset."

"Am I making you upset? I don't want to make you upset. Can we try to do something different to lighten the mood? Maybe just have a normal conversation between two friends? Please? Isabella?"

"Sure."

"Thank you."

"But you go first."

"Ok. That's fine. I'll go... How was your week?"

"It was alright."

"Just alright? No aha moments of brilliance, or time warps into the future, or alien abductions that brought you to distant galaxies?"

"No."

“Wait! Did I just see a smile?”

“No.”

“No? Are you sure? Are you absolutely positive? Cause I think I did. I think I saw the corners of your mouth turn upward and some cute little creases appear.”

“Am I smiling now?”

“No, because now you’re fighting it. But you were.”

“Alright, fine. I smiled. Because you were being stupid. Is it my turn to ask a question?”

“After you give me a better answer. What made this week an alright week, and not a good week or a bad week? I want a little detail.”

“Well, work was pretty bad, because I was mostly bored as hell, but then Friday rolled around and Sarah had her birthday.”

“Oh yeah, that’s right.”

“Yeah. So we went to her brother Michael’s, and he threw her a party, and that was fun. We got so shit-faced that none of us could drive home. So we all ended up crashing there. So overall, I guess the week evened out and was alright.”

“You got shitfaced?”

“Yeah. I was singing and dancing on tables. And then I threw up. It was the drunkest I’ve been in like... I dunno. Forever.”

“OK.”

“OK?! Are you mad right now?!”

“No. I’m not mad. I mean to be totally honest, I’m not exactly happy, but I’m not mad.”

“Because you have absolutely no right to be mad at anything I do or don’t do.”

“I know that. And I’m not mad.”

“Good!”

“I’m happy for you.”

“Good.”

“And?”

“And what?”

“And how was your week, Reggie?”

“And how was your week, Reggie?”

“Thanks for asking, Bella, that’s very thoughtful. There weren’t many distractions this week, and I was pretty productive... finished processing all the week’s spreadsheets into Excel on Thursday. But I felt a little down and a little lonely on Friday.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Didn’t you see Will or Arthur?”

“We went to Cantina Tijuana Bar in a big group.”

“So it couldn’t have been that lonely.”

“Yeah...”

“Was Trish there?”

“Yes, but—”

“Oh my god! She was! Eww! Are you serious?!”

“Bella! Listen! I— ”

“I guess it’s not my business, but I just assumed you’d never hang out with her again.”

“I didn’t invite her! Someone else did. Those things are beyond my control. And I didn’t say one word to her all night either. At one point, she came up to me and started making small talk, and, I swear, I just turned away. Literally couldn’t have been more blatantly rude. It was pretty awkward.”

“Awkward!? I apologize if you had to be awkward around her on my behalf. You know what, Reggie? Talk to her. Screw her. I don’t care. You honestly should live your life however you want.”

"That's not what I want, Bella! You know that! That was a horrible drunken mistake and I've told you that a million times."

"I know. But this isn't working Reggie."

"What isn't working?"

"This! Us hanging out and pretending we can separate all the history and bullshit and drama and just be normal friends. We never were normal friends. We don't know how to be normal friends."

"Not yet. But that's because we haven't tried long enough."

"I don't know, Reggie. I feel like every time you come over here, you think somehow we're working toward getting back together. But we're not. And I don't want to encourage that misconception and hurt you, because I feel like there's already been enough pain. You know?"

"Yeah, I know. But I also know I can't ever really know anything. Something I'm sure of with one-hundred-percent certainty now, I might not be so sure of in the future."

"Reggie! You're not hearing me."

"I am. I'm just saying that over time things change."

"Like the guy I met who knew that he'd never lie or cheat on his girlfriend?! I guess he changed."

"I guess so."

"I'm sorry, Reggie. That was mean. There's still a lot of complicated emotions swirling inside me right now... I'd like to be friends with you, I just don't know that I'm ready."

"I hear you."

"You do?"

"Yeah. You need a little time."

"Yes! Thank god! I'm glad you understand."

"I do."

"I feel pretty sure that once we start seeing other people we'll be able to hang out and be friends."

"But I don't want to see other people."

"Reggie..."

"Your phone's ringing."

"Shit! It's Alice. You should go. She'll be mad if she knows you were over here."

"Ok. I get it. She doesn't approve. For the record, I don't blame her."

"Goodbye, Reggie."

"Glad we came to terms on this. So don't expect a single text or a call."

"Ok. Great. Bye!"

"But just so you know, it's not cause I don't care. It's because I know you need your time."

"GOODBYE, REGGIE!"

"But if, let's say, miraculously, you start feeling better about us in a week or two, give me a call."

"PLEASE GO AWAY!"

Luke Silver is a blackbelt in Kung Fu who lost his sense of smell. He is an MFA candidate at Sarah Lawrence College. He alternates between bouts of clarity and paralyzing uncertainty. Then he tries to translate his feelings into words. Links to his published work can be found on his Twitter page [@LUKE-ABRASSI](#)

She feels like my ghost | Adrian Cepeda

Blinking under covers
some nights I see her spirit
floating above me, blurring
my memory of photographs
feeling her finest white robe
covering her body, her skin
I can almost touch the ripples
of her excitement, tasting
sweetness of wild berry
flavors, her perfume bouquets
a canvas of goosebumps
but all I picture her is haunting
me, gliding out of our bedroom
our sheets tangled by our sweat
our giggles still clinging all of
our nakedness that rings her catcalls
she once purred for me. Although
she has disappeared floating into
someone else's darkness, her
presence still opens up to me
a gift disrobing in smiles,
surprising, beguiled and her
softest skin she loves flashing
her photographic grin, as I inhale
her fabric softness silhouettes
floating as
her cigarette laughter, still flickers
—craving
her steamy aftertaste,
too smoky to forget.

Adrian Ernesto Cepeda is an L.A, Poet who is currently enrolled in the MFA Graduate program at Antioch University in Los Angeles where he lives with his wife and their cat Woody Gold. His poetry has been featured in The Yellow Chair Review, Thick With Conviction, Silver Birch Press and one of his poems was named Cultured Vultures' Top 3 Poems of the Week. You can connect with Adrian on his website: <http://www.adrianernestocepeda.com/>

A Dream of My High School Reunion | Jackie Chou

My mind is in chaos.
The reunion will come soon.
My friend Christine is in charge of
calling the alumni and making lemonade.

Instead of partying we will take a big test,
that we never had a chance to take in high school.
Our AP English teacher will give it to us.
A question on the Bible will be on it.

The name Long Tu comes up in my mind.
He was in my English class in my junior year.
I ask Christine for his number
but she won't give it to me.

The reunion is in a hall in our high school.
The sign-in table has red tablecloth.
People begin to come in.
Then the tests are passed out to us.

The question on the Bible is in it as I expected.
The second question is on India underlined.
I assume it is the title of a work of literature.
The ten little Indian song comes up in my head.

India uses repetition as a literary device
to help children learn how to count.
It is also a great work of children's literature.
The answer screams in my head,
I am sweating, and finally I write it down.

Then I run out of the hall
to a coffee shop next to my high school,
where Elizabeth, a friend I searched for on yahoo,
sits as I anticipated. I have sixth sense.

She is sitting alone at a table
with chairs scattered around it.
She changed. She is no longer a nerd with
a bad haircut, glasses, and tomboyish clothes.
"Elizabeth!" I exclaim and wave in her face.

She nods her head at me
but unlike me she is unexcited.
I run out from the coffee shop

losing all my enthusiasm, like
I had never searched for her on the Internet
and never anticipated seeing her
like having just seen a mere stranger.

I return to the hall where the reunion is held.
India is a great work of children's literature
that uses repetition in the counting of the Indians
as a literary device. I know.
I have great test-taking ability.

Jackie Chou has been writing poetry and short stories since high school—both for English classes and as a coping mechanism to deal with stressful life situations. She write a lot of confessional poetry, but at the same time tries to expand the scope of her writing to include other subjects besides personal experiences and feelings. She has a BA degree in Creative Writing from the University of Southern California. Her poems have been published in the San Gabriel Valley Poetry Quarterly. The short story “The Hand” was recently published by Dryland Lit.



i wish i could wear sunglasses @ night | Sara Khayat

Dear California,

I'm tired.

Can you please
(stop.) being so hot

A nd / prone \ to chaos?
too many people with
(quiet) ANGER.

Home is a closed" door
and an "open mind

i just want to

shhhhake

you

and tell you how

//unimportant

i am. But i know that won't do
either
of us any

good.

Looking

//forward

to the end(.)

of this night. Just so I can
put it in my {pocket} and
put a, Name, to the feeling.

Or maybe it just won't end .
and that will be completely

Okay?

We

left
at the
right

time.

(That's a first)

dog at a gas station, (\$)
you don't have to understand.

&
That's
O'Kay

Veterans of the highway

Clean it up
after you get it

>>>Going

G. Ooooo
-ing

Gentle.

You're the grass now.

You're in the gas
station now.

(smog lungs can you see me can you
breathe breathe breathe
city-of-angels breathe)

It's picture perfect
Saturday night
ghost

B. U. M.

P. S.

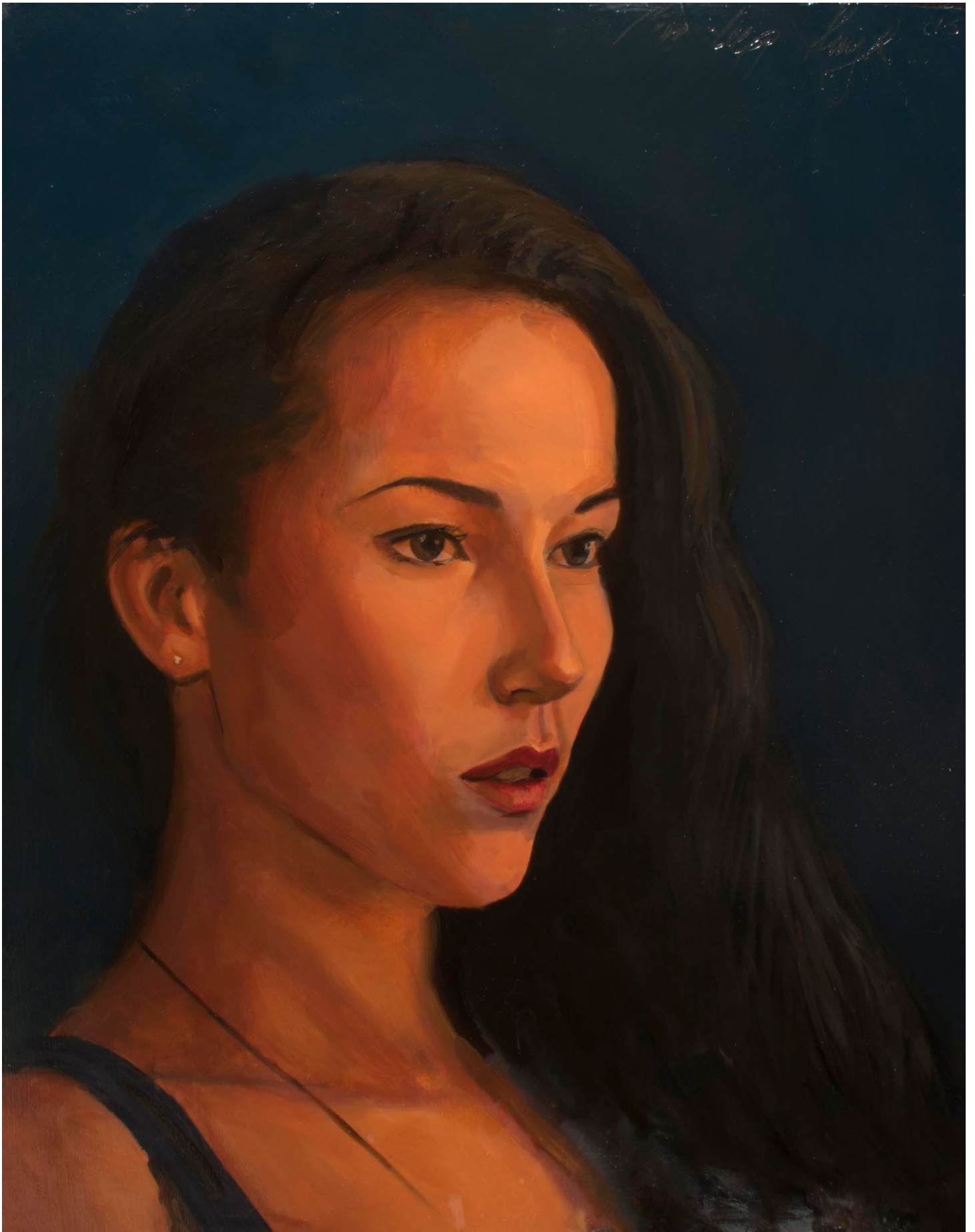
i wrote this for me.

Sara Khayat is a founder and editor-in-chief of Paper Plane Pilot Publishing (www.thepaperplanepilots.com). She always chose truth over dare at elementary school parties. Proof of her writing can be dated all the way back to old kindergarten findings and floppy disks. Her mind is full of wildflowers, ladybugs and grey matters. Give her a shout and she'll give you a whisper.

SHE CALLS AT 3 A.M. TO SAY
SHE IS GOING TO HARM HERSELF | Mark Jackley

In the black stillness
in between breaths
she performs the first coast-to-coast
telekinetic transplant
of the heart. The patient gasps.
Two organs are now beating
each other to a bloody
pulp inside his chest.

Mark Jackley's new book of poems is *Appalachian Night*, available for free at chineseplums@gmail.com. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sugar House Review*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Natural Bridge*, *Talking River*, *Cottonwood*, and other journals. He lives in Sterling, VA.



“I’m fine” | Marie Lecrivain

Abuse.

Abject, and mean-spirited,
is what it is, this poor overworked phrase
applied to the wide Sargasso Sea of emotion,
a pauper’s legacy from the straightjacket mores
of polite society. I scan for subtext
in a raised brow and down-turned mouth
to interpret the true nature
of your condition.

If the questions in my direct gaze offend
or frighten you, I refuse to apologise. This is
NOT how we were meant to be,
all of us born with a thousand tales
inside our souls that yearn to burst forth
and scar the world with a terrible beauty.

Tell me,
in painful consonants
and sharp vowels

the story of
who you
are

and I’ll sit at your feet as rapt
as the Sultan who lifted the blade
from Scheherazade’s lovely neck.

Santa Ana Wind | Marie Lecrivain

God does not exist in the howling wind
that blows the city of fallen angels
into a time of sickness to remind
those who live in this mythical fable
of cinematic paradise that there
is a price to pay, a debt incurred
for being beautiful. Grim, we stare
at rising treble temps while the absurd
weather girl prattles on the tv screen
about more days of sun and fun. Our noses
run. Our eyes water. We grow less keen
and more grieved as the process opposes
the natural cycle of what we know:
We're Nature's bitch. She'll never let go.

Marie Lecrivain is the editor-publisher of Poeticdiversity: the litazine of Los Angeles, a photographer, and writer-in-residence at her apartment. Her work has been published in A New Ulster, Nonbinary Review, The Los Angeles Review, Poetry Salzburg Review, and many others. She's the author of several volumes of poetry and fiction, including *The Virtual Tablet of Irma Tre* (copyright 2014 Edgar & Lenore's Publishing House), *Philemon's Gambit: Sonnets and Photographs* (forthcoming 2015 International Word Bank Press), and *Grimm Conversations* (forthcoming 2015 Sybaritic Press).

Sententious | Khadija Anderson

I've moved 1200 miles
for a red and yellow sunset in the desert

I've ripped off my dress
to pay for my daughters college

I've thrown things and broken them
to work for the homeless

I've almost broken the law
to watch a child being born

I've howled at wildfires and the Santa Anas
god knows how I've howled

Khadija Anderson returned in 2008 to her hometown of Los Angeles after an 18 year exile in Seattle. Her poetry has been published in Pale House, Unfettered Verse, Qarrtsiluni, Gutter Eloquence, Killpoet, Wheelhouse 9, and many other online and print journals. Khadija's poem "Islam for Americans" was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her first book of poetry, *History of Butoh*, was published by Writ Large Press

THE MONARCH

By Trista Hurley-Waxali

She could be the one I migrate south with forever. I love everything about her, from the way she balances so gracefully on the thin petals of flowers, to the way she flutters in the breeze. If there ever were to be a Monarch worth watching, it would be her.

I just hate getting myself worked up over love, but isn't that the point? To make your mind stop thinking? Or maybe that's for other creatures. Maybe I am thinking of a love that can only exist outside of our species. Maybe my love for her is so strong that I have to take on the force of a larger creature to properly understand exactly what my feelings for her are. Yes, that's what she does to me, she makes me want to be a larger creature. That way I know I can protect her forever. She will be safe and sound in my wings.

I know these next few days will be stressful for her. Others will be coming from the northern forests to meet with us before we fly south. Some come weak and looking for food, others might have injuries that need to be handled before the journey. She doesn't ever seem to mind the work. It's almost as if when the others are healing, a part of her gets better prepared for the flight. Her peace of mind is knowing that the others will be safe for the journey. Maybe I can bring her back something to say thank you. A beautiful red flower just shining down there. The four petals appear to become a dark orange the closer I fly to it. I just know she will love the illusion of red to orange, she loves everything that changes.

Bringing this back is not going to be easy. The stem is deceptively thick. Maybe that's why the petals are so bright, this flower is dominating the ground. No problem, I'll just land on this here, wait, what is that? The thick milky-colored substance underneath my foot where I landed. Is this a web? Is that why it's so sticky? I can't move my feet! I'll just try to fly away. Oof! Dammit, The thick substance pulled me back in! I can't move at all! The sunlight starts to get foggy, did I get some in my eye? I blink for a bit, but it was likely fear because my eyes open wide enough to look back at the flower. I can see the bottom of the petals and can clearly see what I am stuck in. A bottom feeding spider's web.

There must be something that I can do to get out of here. It looks like there's a rock over there

that has broken off from a nearby boulder. If it came from the pond, it would be smooth but this one has sharp edges. Perfect for cutting. Upon closer inspection, it appears as if the rock is sharp like another rock struck down on it and gave it a distinct edge. Now if I sway the web along the rock's edge, maybe I can cut myself free? It's worth a try, anything to get back to her. I begin to move the web back and forth and I start gaining momentum. Even though my wings are stuck on the substance, I get closer and closer to the rock. Come on! Just a little closer. Maybe the web will snap open when I am swaying it, maybe this web isn't as strong as she thinks it is. Here we go, now I am getting the motion, here we go, just a little closer. I swing some more, and I get closer and closer. But no matter how close I get, it is no use. This web is too strong and not breaking or bending, offering little give. The rock just out of reach, it's taunting me in the late-afternoon sun.

As darkness envelopes the forest, the air smells sweet. The fall evenings bring on a scent of moisture that goes missed during the summer. Wait, maybe that's it! Maybe when the dew sets in on the web, I'll be able to slide off! It has to work. How can a web with such a sticky substance not react to water? So I will wait! And then I will come to you my love. Once my wings are free from this horrible keep, I will be flying in your direction to sweep you up and carry you to a warm salvation. This way I know you are safe and sound and we will always be together. Oh how I miss your smile. The smile that could melt the snow covered branches that we leave behind. The smile that makes your wings glow brighter than the rays from the sun. Something about you that makes everything warmer and easier because doing something for you is doing something for me. Oh, it's starting to get a little moist, here we go. Now I just gotta wait until the dew forms on this forsaken web. If only I had something to remind me of you while I wait, besides your smile. How could I be so rude? Your smile is more than enough to remember you by. Oh my love, how your smile can bring about- wait, here we go- the web is getting wet. Okay, so my wings are damp and now my feet are getting damp too. Gotta wait for my back to get more damp and then I will be free. Free to come home to you and your smile. Here we go. I'm all damp and ready to push myself free. Here we go. Come on!

Why isn't this working? It's not working! My body is not leaving the web. It is like the substance has resisted the dew. How? What is this? Dammit, there is nothing I can do, nothing I can do but wait.

Trying to get out is useless, I'll just wait until that vile spider comes back and takes me from this world, a world that I once shared with undoubtedly the most beautiful Monarch alive. Exhausted I fall asleep, held up and kept away from her.

~

"HELP!" I scream against the morning sun, as I struggle to get myself out of the sticky rope. As I am about to scream again I feel the web swaying, this is not from a crisp morning breeze, but the movement of this trap's creator.

"No one can hear your screams, you are far away from your friends here," she comes crawling around the thick, almost opaque, orange petals. Her brown round thorax appears heavy, while the hairs on her legs appear old. "You're in my web now, you can't do anything but wait."

She walks closer to me and smells my wings. I move them away from her face but the web feels as if it is getting stickier with each movement. She smirks when she sees I've learned the futility of struggling and waits for me to move my wing back next to her fangs.

"Well, you will have to stay here for now. You see, last night I had a big meal and am in no mood for stuffing myself on Monarch."

"But you can't eat me!"

"Oh really, and why's that?" she asks, trying to pick up on my thoughts.

I snap back, "Because I am in love and my love is waiting for me."

"You make it sound like I have a choice whether or not to eat you."

"How can that be, you can simply let me go."

"I'm sorry I can't do that, your death is out of my hands."

"You mean claws!? The very ones you can tear me free with!"

"But it's not my place to let you go, you see, after the creator made the earth he called forth all the animals. He made rules for each creature to have an area to protect. He assigned the eagle the sky, the goats the mountains and the sharks the water. While he was going through the list, the raccoon turned away and yelled out that these roles are useless, how there is no way he can expect us

to protect all of a given area. The lion looked at the raccoon who was now heading towards the road, the lion roared at him to stop but it was too late. The creator struck down the raccoon in his tracks, burning his body on the road, making his body the color gray. A reminder for all the animals to see that their role is necessary for the balance of life on earth.”

“What are you talking about?! Why are you telling me that story? I have nothing in common with those animals! And what do you have in common with those animals? Plus, there are many other kinds of spiders that can take on one extra bug, why not let me go?”

“But my role is alongside the other spiders. You see, our role is to keep the floor bed clear.” She starts to crawl away and starts pointing to the forest, “Plus you landed here.”

“Even still, I wouldn’t bother eating me, I think I’m diseased for spiders.”

“A disease?, is that from the hormone from being in love for a butterfly, is it like ‘a disease’? One that will make your body taste bitter or one that makes your body taste sweet?”

“Well, sweet of course.”

“Good! then I will eat you.”

“Wait, wait, wait... not sweet for spiders, sweet for my love.”

“So your love will eat you?” She queries, sounding confused about the Monarch lifestyle.

“No!” I respond, a little lost myself, the thought of being devoured by my love sends a chill down my spine, “have you never been in love?”

“I know what love is,” the spider looks like she is trying to remember. “I was once in love, and then my love was taken from me. A large frog just licked her big tongue into his web. Killed him in one motion. I was paralyzed, standing under some flat rocks in the grass. I watched as she swallowed my lover. It was like any other moment in the toads life, and yet my life was never the same.” She looks away for several moments. Her mood seems to have changed as she moves off to the edge of the web, out of my field of view. As much as I want to escape, my wings are stuck. The sticky substance is going to contain me until she is hungry. My whole-hearted gift for my love has sadly landed me in a position that I might never again see her.

Later in the day the spider comes back to inspect the color of my wings, probably trying to decide

if I am going to make her sick or not. Maybe if I slow my heart down, I can appear less desirable.

“Mmmmm you look mighty tasty, something tells me you never thought you’d be in my web,” she says as she creeps along the thin braid-like substance between the flower’s stem and I. I find my heart racing as she gets closer to me, betraying my efforts to stay calm.

“Well, I was hoping not to be in your web but in the arms of my love.” I tell her as I try to take deep breaths to slow down my heart-rate again.

“Your love should have warned you about me and my friends. We like to prey on little distracted bugs.” She comes closer and her eyes stare at me. My nerves get the best of me, I gasp and cough in her face. “Your tricks won’t work on me or my web. Plus, you should save your strength for when I put my venom in you, then you will know how strangulation really feels.” She turns around and walks back off behind the flower. Some spiders don’t know that I am foul tasting because they haven’t tasted Monarch, but something tells me she’s willing to take that risk.

Well, lets see, what else can cut open this web? Maybe I can! I have sharp teeth that I rarely use, maybe I can chew myself out of here. Okay, here I go, for you my love, just for you I will put this substance in my mouth. Here we go, for you my love, for you. Ugh this is so gross, it doesn’t taste like life but a bile by-product, oh gross, the sticky part of the web is now between my teeth, getting onto my gums. I spit out the substance and finally get my mouth clean. It just seems like no matter how much I gnaw, I keep swallowing more of my own vomit than getting through the thick fibers. It’s just too much for my shallow mouth. I just have to stop thinking of the smell, to ignore the chemical by-product that came out of her. To just remember that it is the substance that is keeping me away from my love.

“And what’s this that you are doing? Trying to chew your way out?” she says from the other side of the rock, probably watched me chewing the whole time. “Oh, come, you make it seem like this is not what you want.”

“I am trying to chew myself out!” I bark back, rather annoyed that she keeps taunting me like this, “Why don’t you just tell me that I am going to die?”

“Okay, you’re going to die. But...” she pauses, “not today.”

“Oh, so then you’re going to let me go?” I stop chewing to hear her response.

“No, nothing like that, I am going to eat you tomorrow. I am too full to bother killing you and you don’t seem to be going anywhere” She laughs, like the repetitive joke never seems to get old. “Plus, if you leave me now, what will I have for lunch?”

“Why should I care if you have a lunch, if you don’t care that I have someone in my life who I love? You’re keeping me from her and you want me to be concerned about your lunch?”

“You’re right, where are my manners? Your love will be thinking of you tonight and when you don’t come home, she will be worried. Maybe she will come looking for you, and then you can say good-bye to her.” Her eyes gloss over like she is imagining the two of us tied here waiting for her to come back to devour us both. Maybe as a “romantic dinner of two”.

“She won’t come to find me, she knows I will be back with her” I say.

“Oh she will come to find you, they always do. Now you rest up, tomorrow will be an eventful day for you,” she says and then wanders off down the flower stem. I am not even sure where she is going or if she will come back. At this point, I don’t really care. What I do care about is getting back to my love, holding her, and flying south with her where we can be safe.

“Morning” the spider says, as she hangs on a thread no thicker than that wrapped around my wings. At first she appears to be hovering in front of me, but then I see the thread connected to a branch from a nearby bush.

“Morning,” knowing I got very little sleep in this tied position, I bark, “how was your sleep?”

“Splendid, was able to get a good night sleep because I knew my food was already caught. Some nights I stay up all night working on my webs, worried I won’t find food. But last night, I didn’t have to build a larger web or walk to different locations, I just had to be patient.”

As she approaches me on the web, she says, “You must be a strong flier, I can see some damage you caused my web. You must have been shaking and striking away at it all night.”

“Well, I had to try to get back to my son, but then I realized how strong your web was. It’s hard for me, to wake up knowing I will not be there to protect my little one anymore.” I lie. There is no child, there should be a child but I have not yet been with my love. “He’s probably worried sick about me, probably

cried himself to sleep.”

The spider looks over and for the first time shows a hint of compassion. Maybe this can work, maybe if I tell her I have a son she’ll let me go.

“You never mentioned anything yesterday about having a son, you only kept going *on and on* about having a love of your life. Why did you not mention your son?”

Shocked that she even cares, I continue on about my imaginary son. But I must first quickly come up with a reason why I hid this from her yesterday.

“Well, to be honest, I didn’t think you cared. You seemed so excited to have captured me that you forgot that I might have a family who is worried about me. Don’t you have anyone who is worried about you?” I inquire, hoping to play on any lingering feeling of longing.

“I have some friends I chat to but my children I never talk to, for I no longer know of where my children are living. You see, another part of our role is that when the sac hatches is the moment when the children are released. Within days they are to get food and build their own webs. Some will stick around and beg, those are the ones I worry about the most. But eventually each one crawls away from me when they feel strong enough to and just leave me alone. It’s just different for spiders. We don’t have that bond with our children.” Her head drops as she finishes her statement, “Sometimes I wonder where they are, if they are very far. I try to avoid thinking about how many are still alive. I like to think that maybe one day they would come back and help me during some of the dry season. But that is not the way for spiders, isolation runs with our survival, it’s what kept us alive.”

“Well, I’m sure your children are doing just fine. Thankfully this season has been more forgiving from the elements than previous years.” She sees that I am being genuine, and for the first time being held on this web, I start to feel empathetic to her situation. Not everyone has the patience to wait for food, some hunt more on the ground or lay poison in the flowers. There is something to be said about hunting alone in this forest bed.

“Do you miss your son?” she asks, making me move back into my deception.

“Of course I do, there’s not a moment I breathe without thinking of him.” I should not be playing on the fact her children abandoned her, but what choice do I have if I want to see my love again? “How

about we make a deal?" I bargain, "A give and take between two adults."

"Spiders do not deal." She scowls, "But if we were to, what do you have in mind?"

"How about you let me go and allow me to say goodbye to my son and then I will come back and you can have me for dinner?" As I listen to myself, I imagine myself walking back to face a grim death, maybe she will not go for the deal. But this has to work, she has to believe I have a son.

"You promise to come back? Because I have a suspicion that you will not want to leave your home after you see your son," she says while gesturing her legs while she debates, tapping them on the web rhythmically.

"I promise. I will tell him that I have to help out another family with the flight and that I'll meet him in the south. Oftentimes not everyone makes the flight, so then he'll think I died trying to stay with him rather than yards away in our own backyard. So, what do you say, do we have a deal?" Eager to hear her answer, I tilt my head in her direction. She starts pacing along a branch from a very tall tree, graceful in her horrific ways.

"Okay, but you must come back. I can't have others thinking I set you free," she says while starting to cut the web from around my wings

"You won't regret this, maybe I'll eat something before I come back to plump me up, you know, as a thank you." Shocked that I would even come up with that plan we both stare at each other.

"Well just keep your strength, because you'll have a long flight back."

"That I can do." She comes over and angles her body on the web, forcing her claw's to slide horizontally like a wedge between my wing and the web. I can feel the shell of her nail's brush on my skin as she cuts away the web's grip, allowing me to finally peel away.

Now free and able to fly back to my love, I turn to the spider, "So, I'll see you tonight, plump and ready to die." I lie, I won't be back. I'll be flying so far and fast away from her that she will never see me again. And this time, going back home, I will be more cautious. Now I am to fly with purpose: for my love. I turn back to the spider who is perched on the web where I left, she looks to me. She might be hungry now but she will be starving tonight, when I spend the night with my love and not in her salivating grip.

As I get closer to the nest I can see my love sitting there. I watch her organizing a part of our home unaware of my approach. Oh, how I missed our home. Not only because of where it is located but because it is with her. She is focused on collecting supplies we have stored in our nest- so focused, she has yet to look in my direction.

"I'm back!" I say as I land. She lunges up into the air and faces me, grabbing my wings and pulling me close. I can smell her sweet smell again and feel her tender touch somewhere within this tight grip. She doesn't seem to want to let go and neither do I. We both know a day apart in the forest can mean anything.

"Where were you? I was so worried when you didn't come home!" Her voice is sharp and nearly accusatory, nothing like I have ever heard. For a moment she seems to be concerned but also weary of my disappearance.

"My night was awful, I was stuck in a web. Look at my wings, there's still some stuck on me!" I lift my wing to show her the milky substance. "The remaining amount is in a place I can't reach. It might not seem like much but in flight the small amount weighed on my forearms." I turn around now so she can see the spot I am talking about.

"Oh wow, it looks like a lot!" she says, she grabs a twig and starts to pick at the residue. She manages to collect most of it from one of my wings. "How did you manage to get away from the spider? This web looks dense, there is no way you could have just escaped by flying."

"It was easy, I just told her that I was in love with the most beautiful Monarch and that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her." I say, my love blushes. She knows there is no other reason I would be apart from her besides near-death. "Look, I would never do anything to hurt you, I love you and when I told that big-old spider what I had at home, I can tell, it was what she wanted. Love, stability and a loving partner." I have no idea what that spider wants, well, besides me for dinner.

"Well, I am just so glad you're home now. But it's amazing she would choose not to have a meal and let you come home. That doesn't seem like something many spiders do for their victims, you should feel lucky." She looks at me holding up the remaining amount from my wings now on the stick.

"With you my love, I feel lucky every day." I hold her closer and kiss her like I never did. I think

about how close I was to losing her and I almost start to cry. She feels my trembling lip on hers and wraps her wings around my back and pulls me closer into an embrace. We stand with each part of us resting on the other, feeling each other's breath and tension. This is why I came back, no matter the lie I told that spider, this is where I need to be.

"Well, why don't you stay here and sleep, I'll only be gone for a few hours to help the others. Then when I come back, I'll come into bed," she says, starting to collect her supplies to help out the others. As much as I want to ask her if she needs my help, I do feel drained from not sleeping the night before.

"I can't wait my love, I will keep the bed warm." I tell her.

"Okay honey, you just rest and I will be back soon." She kisses me and then takes off.

My arms ache, which I imagine is from the stillness that came from being mounted on the web. My head was positioned in a way that I can only turn so far in each direction, with my wings forced into place. Forced and with little room to move. Oh that web was nowhere one should call home. Not like here. It is nice to be home, nice to rest and not have to worry. To not have to find a way to escape that greedy spider's imprisonment. Ha, I bet that stupid spider is probably expecting me to come waltzing back to die in the grips of her legs. Like I would go back to her, knowing my demise. Did she really think I had a son? that I would use him as a pawn to get back home? Well, in a way I did use my imaginary son for that purpose, but who is to say what I would have done that if I had a 'real' son. It doesn't matter, because right now I am home and free. Ah yes, I am free. Free at home, with my love, who is gone but will be back. Thankfully, I am no longer in that forceful grip. I am home, I am home, I am home.

The next day I wake up and my love is getting ready to head out. I want to say something to her but my head is pounding. She turns to me when she hears my wings shuffling in the dirt.

"You awake? I'm sorry, I didn't want to wake you. I know you were asleep when I got back. I went to bring you back some water. I didn't see you have anything before you slept." Using her wing she pushed a leaf over with some water in it.

"Drink up and have some rest" The water is cold and fresh and the leaf is full enough to enjoy. "I

am going to head back and help out the elders more. Do you mind staying here alone?” Even though I am still weak from the other night, I don’t want to hold her back from her passion. So I show my face as being strong, to show her I am stronger than that web.

“Yes, I can stay here, I just feel like that spider must have done something to that web.” I put my wing down to the bottom of our home and try to push myself up to meet her but my wing gives out and I slip and bump my back on the floor.

“Are you okay?” She drops her belongings and runs over, “You need to rest. I will bring more water for you in a few hours, the dew is rich and I need to make sure the elders are drinking. Just stay in bed and keep your strength.” She moves a few branches to brace my neck and then turns around. Her bright orange wings in flight start to camouflage with the morning sun. How I am so lucky to be with such a beautiful butterfly?

Watching her fly away, I can only envy her kindness, which makes me feel guilty for being so weak. Knowing that she has the determination to get up and fly to others in need, rather than just tending to my headache, is something I have always admired about her. Maybe I should rest some more, I don’t need to really do anything. Maybe this afternoon when she comes back I’ll head back out with her, but for now I’ll just rest.

~

I wake up that afternoon to some shuffling that’s too much for the wind. What was that noise? There’s a slight shuffling next to our branch. Could it be? Naw, she couldn’t find me. Would she come this far? Why would she bother? My ears are just playing tricks on me. It’s nothing more than the wind.

“You were suppose to come back” The angered spider says coming up around my body. Her legs are stiff and on top of the nest’s edge, “And where is your son?!”

Her dark frame seems more daunting now that I am not tied to a web, as her stature is even more threatening when it is above me than in front. Wait, I can just fly away. Now, come on, get the strength, come on, what is the matter with you!? I turn to her face, each eye looks to be fixated on my answer.

“My son? My son is not here now, he left with my love.” I respond, trying to lift my arms.

“You lie! You lied! You have no son! You only have a love, I saw her last night next to you. You

have no child!” Her screams pierce my ears, making my head feel heavier than before. I start to wrap my wings around my head to block out the sound, “Oh, you must be feeling tired now, or at least feeling weak.”

I move my wings aside and looked over to her with suspicion, “What did you do to me?”

“I simply gave you a little bit of venom when your *love* was out getting you some water. I saw you deep in your sleep with no son lying next to you. And when I saw this as a betrayal of our deal, both anger and starvation flowed through me.”

“Why did you come here? Why did you hurt me again!?” I beg.

“Because I wanted to see what you would say to your love, if you would tell her about how you dangled an imaginary son to come back to her, about how you are nothing but a liar!” She looked directly at me and almost telekinetically pushed the poison deeper into my body. I cringe as I can feel my blood getting cool.

“I wanted to see if you would take advantage of my trust. And why you didn’t come back last night. And I was right, there is no son. Just your selfish means of getting back to your love. Let me guess, you told her how I let you go so you would be happy? Ha!”

“But don’t you want me to be happy? Isn’t that what you wanted when you let me go?” Now unable to feel my legs to push me. Her body starts towering over my wings.

“No! that’s not it at all! I wanted you to give your son some peace, so he would not feel abandoned. I had the heart to give you that freedom!” She moves around the nest, almost judging me for even spending the night in bed, “You broke our deal, so now I will have to kill you, and I am going to do it here, where she will find you, where your *love* will claim your body.” She turns around and walks slowly to me, knowing I cannot fly away.

“Why are you doing this? Why do you want my love to find my body, she will be unable to leave here and die in the winter with my empty corpse. Isn’t there anything inside of you that knows this is wrong? That my death will not keep her alive!? Can’t you reverse this?”

“Reverse this? I can’t do that. Not after you lie to me. Plus, I am a spider and you are a butterfly and it is nature’s will to eat you. But it is not in nature’s will to be tricked and taken advantage of, oh no,

that was all you and your selfish needs. So no, I will not reverse this, and I will be enjoying your suffering even more.” She comes on top of me and wraps all of her front legs around me and brings me close to her body. She pierces her stinger in me and it digs deep. I scream in agony for the pain as it is shooting up through my legs and my back. My voice crackles as the poison takes effect and even her breath starts to feel warm on my face. Life is being drained from me as I watch her back away when she pulls out. For some reason she wants to take her time and not kill me once, she does want to keep me alive long enough, long enough to drain. Drain me of my love, my passion, my home and my future. She comes back up and holds me in her strong and tense legs, closer to her base and rests on me.

“This is only going to hurt for a little bit and then you will be left here to be found. So your love can come back and see you for the liar that you are, see how your tricks did not work and ended up costing you your life. She deserves someone who will be honest and not use her as a pawn for escape. She deserves that much, she deserves better than you.” She pulls me in and drinks. My heart slows down as it aches from her words. But she is right. My love does deserve better. I am weak and a coward who used my lies to get me out instead of having the strength to die. And now she will come home to find me, to find me dead in our home. Dead, drained and hollow. Like her love will soon be for me, when she flies south to find a new mate.

Trista Hurley-Waxali is a transplant from Toronto, now perched at any of the barstools in West Hollywood. While her personality will draw you in, it's her words that will keep you there. She taps into the world of magical realism and explores noir. She has performed at Avenue 50 Studios, Stories Bookstore and Beyond Baroque through Los Angeles and then internationally at O'bheal Poetry Series in Cork, Ireland and in a TransLate Night show from the Helsinki Poetry Connection. She is currently working on her first novel, *At This Juncture*.

if 100, then 150 | Chiwan Choi

(excerpts from a work in progress)

i make street lights appear on the ceiling

until we can no longer be the same

like the red of a house of bricks from childhood

like the dead rising from the pavement in the rain

*

there is an image in my head

of me lying on my back

on the ground outside the world trade center

it was 1989

and gary had told us to do that and look up

he said the building would look like it was going to fall on me

i remember visualizing it as he spoke

i remember lying there on the ground

but i can't ever remember

what it is that i saw

what it was that took my breath away

*

what color am i, father?

*

he looked up at me from the floor
at the bottom of the stairs
briefly
before rolling away so i couldn't see his face

i stood at the top of the stairs
hesitating
as i tried to hide all of my secrets

he couldn't call to me
and i wouldn't run down to him

because neither of us could admit
the distance between us.

*

he stands over me
as i drown in my sweat

he leans down and puts his hands on my legs
holding my knee
like a fruit

rise, he says,
walk.

and there is silence

broken

by a gasp that comes from

deep within me

what happens now

take me to 100, he says.

so i can get to 150.

Chiwan Choi is the author of *The Flood* (Tía Chucha Press) and *Abductions* (Writ Large Press). His current project is *Ghostmaker*, a book he is writing, presenting, and destroying during the course of 2015. Chiwan is also a founding partner at Writ Large Press, a DTLA based indie publisher.

I Clean the Cockroaches | Estella Ramirez

There are no fireflies here
It's the light pollution
or something else
Whatever the reason
tonight there are
no magical glimpses of luminescence
followed by the dark insect silhouette in the afterglow
The little guys tired after the exertions of glimmering
are easily caught in your hand
to be revered, to recover, to spring off
each shimmer is an invitation to lovemaking
or a warning of proximate danger
but they are not here
We must turn to the cockroach
hiding behind a cup at 4am
a messenger of mutual dark disgust
How does the cockroach invite its lover
something communicated
with its face too small and too knowing
or its prickly legs as it skitters toward her
Yes, it seeks heat as puppies do
With the right conditioning
it will allow you to wipe down
its buzzy coppery wings
allow you to glue precious stones on them
allow you to put a leash around its tiny neck
and yes, it will curl up on the ridge of your collar bone
a living broach, taking only your warmth
and you could hold it
as you would a baby bird
fall in love

Monster Seeking Monsters | Estella Ramirez

As a child I saw the naked tail
and glowing bead eyes of a possum.
Not knowing what it was then,
I felt betrayed by my belief
that the world held no monsters.

Other betrayals followed,
the brain in depression
the body binging and purging,
the journal asking why,
receiving poetry as answer.

One day, I went over the rail,
dirt and chipped yellow paint
under my hands as I hopped over,
went down the concrete steps,
crawled inside the culvert.

Monster seeking monsters.

I sought the romance of fear,
the dark, sharp smells, its creatures.
In the dank drain of the city
I found little.
There was the musky smell
of animals and neglect,
the sound of grimy water
traveling in slow droplets.
I thought there'd be
something more:
danger, comfort.

Now when two pairs
of reflective eyes
meet in the night,
when they each startle,
go in separate directions,
I know neither of us is a monster.
Inside me is possum only.
In the dark, frightening,
and in daylight
just a rodent,
timid and innocent.

Estella Ramirez lives in Los Angeles with her husband and four cats. Her poetry was honored in this year's Los Angeles Poet Society Summer Contest and has most recently been published in Kudzu House Quarterly. She's also written for The Toast and Front Porch Journal. She earned her MFA from Texas State University, and her other interests include singing, running along the beach, and vegan cupcakes.



a black man's heartbreak | Reynaldo Macias

my heart breaks when
black boys fail
to become
black men.

not failing man
hood
just can't duck
bullets
with hands cuffed
in the back seat of a
squad car
they're not Morpheus
hands up still
shot
face down
skittling away from trouble
leaning in car
windows . . . let the music play
lyrical voices call for
help,
last gasps whisper
Mommy or
why?

pac said, "I'll rest when I'm dead."
there are generations
napping.

my heart breaks when
black men flail,
fail on camera, threats called
granddaddy choked into
submission, smiley stu- stu- stuttering that
"None of the p-police
men was black!"

all I have to do is stay
black and
die.

who knew the former would
cause the latter?

Pablo | Reynaldo Macias

brown boy growing
up
too fast

yesterday drawing
Daddy
bookmarks today high
school girls and weight
lifting
tomorrow's urgency to
drive
waits, pressing on him
on me
brown boy growing
up
too fast
I can't breathe

teach my son
to be
polite, sit up straight
to protect
and serve him up,
"Speak clearly,"
ask questions expecting
answers
not nightsticks

epidermis a mask
in America
brown boy growing
up
bookmarks begetting
bullets
cute morphing
menace
puberty shooting him up
hands up don't
shoot him
down

can you see he
reads
Percy Jackson novels?

do I tattoo books on his skin?
will the ink deflect hatred?

ignorant systems paint him
dark
on the cover of TIME
under cover of time
how much time does he have?

questions I ask
when he walks out the
door.

Reynaldo Antonio Macías and poetry have been in an on-again, off-again relationship for thirty years. Lately they've been stepping out together on the internet and in real life, on Franky Benitez's #LatinoLit blog, at the Paloma Room Poets readings, and in the Poesia Para La Gente reading series. In addition to featuring at Avenue 50 Studios, Reynaldo most recently featured at the Inaugural Hinchas de Poesia Poetry Reading in West LA. His poetry has also been featured in *Minor Identity Crisis*, the most recent body of work by Los Angeles-based artist, Gus Harper. When not stepping out with his words, Reynaldo is a husband, father, teacher, and photographer in Los Angeles, CA.

Dark Matter | Billy Burgos

Things hardly ever change that much.
Emotion reacts like electricity through
the conduits of our bodies. Sometimes there
is light and energy that shows there is activity
in the brown soil. But from a distance the sphere is
blue/green, there are storms that pass around it,
there is love and hate like whispers among
the darkness. There is sound in space that
is similar to what comes from our lips,
this thing we are trying so hard to fight for or
against is a small thing. We are small things.
So when I choose to turn my head away from
the horrors, or hardly have an ability to shoulder
pain I don't beat myself up. All I can do is
moderate the small space I work in, love within
the distance my body transmutes energy in,
have faith in what moves me in a forward direction.
It is all I can do to simplify the already simple,
try to work through an equation of equality that
only matter to us, these whispers hardly taking
up much space at all among the dark matter.

Solfeggietto | Billy Burgos

She's playing Solfeggietto without a piano,
fingers moving like a spider on fire across
knees coated in acid washed denim.

And we're on a crowded bus, shouldered up
with the mall-bound girls rockin' the fake louie bags,
tribal tights, tapping out their drama on big-faced
Galaxy S4's while hating on the girl with the jazz hands.

But she don't care, she's seeing notes in her head
with Bud Powell whispering, *allegro! allegro!* while
she coaxes false keys into song. At 43rd Brother Israel
steps on the bus. He is a mixed cat with ginger-toned dreads

and a face sprinkled with freckles that have lived more
life than most folks. He is Leimert Park shaman, wearing
Africa around his neck and silver wrist cuffs like a black Israelite.
He spots her air piano motion and can understand the

voodoo of Bach that's telling her *allegro! allegro!*
Speaking with eyes closed, he tells her of a universe that
is infinite and black like her and about a God in all that blackness
who has gifted her with those lively fingers and she

is listening while we move past the dug up lots
of Leimert Park being retooled and readied for gentrification
while Bud Powell is in her head whispering, *allegro! allegro!*
and Africa is in her ears speaking words coated in Patchouli oil.

And by the time we hit King Blvd even the ghetto girls
have put away their phones with the Hello Kitty cases and
are smiling at yo' girl with the jazz hands and thinking

about how good Bach sounds dipping down Crenshaw.

Billy Burgos is an Illustrator/Designer/Poet from Los Angeles. He is a Curator on staff at Gotpoetry.com. His poetry has been featured in Anthologies and Literary Journals and Zines. In 2007 Billy was chosen as an up and coming poet by the L.A. Poetry Festival. He has served as workshop facilitator of the Beyond Baroque Wednesday night workshop and hosts the First Sunday Open Reading at Beyond Baroque. Billy is the host of Word Ballast, a blogtalk poetry show where he has interviewed such poets as Nikki Giovanni, Nikky Finney, Thomas Sayers Ellis and Nick Flynn. His vivid paintings of some of L.A.'s most interesting poets called The Faces of Poetry is a traveling gallery/poetry exhibit which has been featured in both art journals as well as KCET. His first full length collection of poetry called Eulogy to an Unknown tree is out now on Writ Large Press.



Manifesto

by David Vieux

I watch Val step through the curtains onto the stage, her bare throat thrumming. There is no good time to find out words can kill. Not all of them, of course. Lies can hurt. The truth can kill. And words don't have to kill you all the way dead, though they can. Sometimes they just kill a little part of you, and the memories become phantom pains. That's why I can't tell you exactly how all this happened; there's no saying what could happen to you, and I don't want that on me.

Her mountain legs thrumming under her skirt, Val stops in front of the microphone, calm like a bomb, and opens her arms. *Feel: awe, fear. Hear: that electronic whine so high it's almost subconscious.*

*

The first night Val allowed me to trace her scars, I stood behind her, pulling the knot of her dress until it gave. *See: the moonlight spreading on the frost in the windowpanes, everything yellow light and shadows.* The dress slipped down against her back; her skin sounded like snow.

Her back to me, I ran my nose along her spine. It was like every vertebrae scaled into a ridge that crawled up under her wild, loud hair. The scar tissue caught the moonlight as she stepped out of the dress and turned to me.

"This is not a confession," she said, her hands a steeple on my neck. "This is a manifesto."

My hands encircled her face, and my thumb dragged a smile from the corner of her lips. *See: the scar tissue on the corner of her lips catching the moonlight, a winking crescent.*

"Who did that?," I asked.

Val kissed that fleshy knoll between my thumb and index. "She did." The crescent smile grew. She held my hands in her own, and turned them palm up.

*

Picture her: twelve, pigtails like two squirrel tails bouncing from her head. The choker loose around her neck, eyes with God in them when she first saw her friend Charlotte glowing, like her brown skin was caramel. *Feel: fingers wrapping softly, that first pulsating warmth, those excited gases welling up in your belly. Feel: nothing wrong.* Picture them, as their locked hands swing back and forth. Picture her, standing on the school's roof. Underneath, the children grooved like ants. Charlotte, shying from the ledge, laughing. Picture her, opening her arms to the school, the hills, the water in the distance, like she was holding the world, saying to Charlotte,

"This is yours. It was mine, now it's ours."

*

See: the scar tissue on the corner of her lips, pulling her mouth into an always-there crooked smile. That first night she allowed me to trace her scars, when we lay there like debris in my studio, her body was an open map for me to discover. My fingers ran down from the the crescent in her smile, and drifted down to the choker. My hands fumbled down to her neck, searching for the choker's clasp. She stopped me.

"Not tonight," she said. "Not yet."

She turned her back to me, showing me the ridge holding up her back.

*

The night I first met her, we were in college. She was standing on a box. A crowd had formed around her. *Smell: hot beer breath in the evening air. Feel: Restless, angry and nowhere to aim.* Her hair was out of pigtails now, big like an air-bound fist. She held up a book as she talked. Its spine was broken, and it yawned yellow.

"The master's tools will not dismantle the master's house!" she said. *Hear: assenting groans snapping, catching from chest to chest like firecrackers.* She waved the book like a beacon, drawing us all in with borrowed words. I had seen her before, though we didn't talk. We were at the same party. She was with a girl, and so was I. I didn't hear her that night, and I would have forgotten her, if I hadn't seen her

standing on that box.

“We must always take sides,” she said. “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” As she spoke them, the words filed out of her mouth, old and bent from every repetition, and hung in the air above all of us, until the air thrummed weakly. *Feel: that buzzing between your ears when somewhere close, something is happening.*

“Dyke,” said a voice from the crowd.

“If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive.” As she spoke, I could see her stand a little straighter, like she was making room for the words to come out. And sure enough, the words floated out from her in a mist. It gathered around the boy who’d insulted her, and wrapped around him and we couldn’t hear anymore. If you’ve never felt beauty and terror at the same time, you’ve never been in love.

“So what do we do now?,” someone else asked in the crowd. Then no one knew to say. At first, they left slowly, one by one, then groups broke apart from the crowd and slipped away. I asked her to come get chicken fingers with me at the cafeteria. She said she’d been a vegetarian for eight years, and, among other causes, fought for the rights of animals. *Hear: a long, loud silence. Think: “how do I get out of here?” Repeat to yourself: “Don’t say anything dumb. Don’t say anything dumb.” Then, feel: that sharp gasp of air after you’ve jumped, and the water races toward you.*

“They’re not actual chicken fingers, you know.”

I used to jump more. A small crooked smile grew in the corner of her lips.

Hours later, we were still talking. I got us frozen yogurt – extra, “layered,” sprinkles for her. *See: the cheap plastic washed in neon light. Smell: old grease left behind.* Val talked; she said her full name, but I was nervous and missed it. It sounded a lot like Valerie. I made jokes. Everything felt a little easier when she laughed. I wish you were there. Her laugh was loud. It came unashamed and thick, tilted her head back to explode. I wish you could feel the shock-wave rushing through your own belly when she laughed.

When she wound down, she looked at me, and I couldn't hide from her eyes.

"What's your story?"

"Not really much of a story," I said.

"Every one has a story. What do you believe in?"

I couldn't lie to her. There were a lot of true things I could say, about how I grew up. *Look out: see my father's anger gather in the distance like storm clouds.* How I learned it was easier to dodge if you were already stooped. All these true things, they rushed up and out of my belly, and I had to swallow hard just to keep most of them down.

"Surviving," I said.

*

I couldn't lie to her back then, not in that bright ugly dining hall. Years after that night, after we'd carved more scars into each other, mementos of our small crimes and minor betrayals, she stood away from me. I was on the couch, washing in the television noise. We had just argued. She raised her hand to her choker, and unclasped it. *Hear: A deep crack like ice in water.* She turned to me, and, against the light, I could see the indent across her neck where the choker had set in. She placed my hand on her throat. It was cold and wet with condensation.

*

Picture her: twelve, her hands falling away from Charlotte's when Val's parents took her to church. *Hear: old wooden benches groaning. See: a field of hands in the air, begging to be called.* In the sermon, the pastor blessed them with old ink and fire. After church, in his home, Val told her father. *See: curtains parted exactly forty-eight inches apart, crosses looking down from doorways.* Her breaking-glass voice scraped, wormed into his ear and grated against his mind. *Hold: the picture frames where the family can barely look happy for a hundredth of a second.* When she said she loved Charlotte, a little part of her father

died. Not a good part, no, nothing fair or worth saving, but a piece nonetheless. He thought he knew the story of his life; well-to-do Christian, hard work, good job, self-anointed pillar of the community. When she spoke the words and made the story real, he didn't like it anymore. *Hear: a cold snap howl.* When she told him, God still in her eyes, that she loved Charlotte like she loved boys, it shattered his story. His mouth pinched and he forgot the difference between baring teeth and smiling.

"We can *fix* this," he said, trying so hard to be a Christian again. His words hovered between them, pushing them apart until they could hardly see each other. Crystals formed around the words, and they became tides of ice that forced themselves into her and caught her voice in her throat. *Imagine: a mosquito trapped in amber.* She was a light in herself, and the ice might have melted, but every Levitical validation, every *hmm* of assent when the pastor declared things "unnatural," thickened the ice.

*

Val excelled in her classes, especially history and multi-cultural studies. Val loved sitting there, learning and naming the forces around her. It's a powerful thing, naming. It gives the thing its form. It's impossible to grapple an adversary without a shape. Once someone named "patriarchy," it could no longer hide from Val. When someone named "privilege," she could smell it in the air, hear it in tones, see it in erasure. *Feel: the surprise of seeing everywhere a word that you just learned. Find: the monster's handle.*

*

My hand against her cold wet throat, she picked up her bag from the floor, and drew out her wallet. *Feel: her voice thawing, thrumming under your palm.* She drew out a yellowing piece of paper, unfolded it carefully. She ran her fingers along the ink, shivered, stood a little straighter.

"I never know what to throw away," she said. She handed it to me and studied my face. I squinted, cleared my throat, and began to read:

"I often think of Angelina Weld Grimke dying alone in an apartment in New York City in 1958 while I was a young Black Lesbian struggling in isolation at Hunter College, and I think of what it could

have meant in terms of sisterhood and survival for each one of us to have known of the other's existence: for me to have had her words and her wisdom, and for her to have known I needed them!"

The words left my mouth and hung in the air. *Feel: warmth coming in strong, gentle waves.* We studied the shape of the letters as they conspired to become words. She drank the words like God blood. As the words ran down into her, she braced herself, glowing again. I let the sheet slide when I stood up and rested my arms on hers. My neck behind hers, I felt another of these sheets of ice thaw and slip down, the hole in her mouth widening. We staid that way a while.

*

In that way, school was providential. Nowhere had she found a space that more valued her voice, nor have I found a better place to be a ghost. Only in time, she realized that the words they valued were not hers, but the ones they taught. Upon graduation, when we joined the rat race, that space vanished. To stand on a box and call for change in college is a sign of passion. On a street corner, it signifies insanity. At the very least, conscious haranguing is considered anti-social behavior. *Feel: groaning bitter shame in the overcrowded welfare offices. Want: not to be seen by anyone you know. Count: checks divided into rent, bills, gas tanks.* We took work as temp assistants. Her office was across town, and the highways packed like conveyor belts muted her light. Her neck bent down. We tried to laugh it away when ten dollars was too high a cover charge. She was the kind of woman that needs the sea and live music. She started to journal.

I was making more than her. Not a lot, but a little. There was a sick pride in it for me. I Over the years, I never said anything about it, but I knew I could. I liked her wounded.

*

The night I kissed her scars, I didn't know that about myself, that I needed to make her little so that I could finally feel tall. Her journals turned into poetry. She went to so many open-mics I eventually stopped going with her. The first time was magical. These young vibrant poets all trying to find the music in their voice. Some found some notes, an emotion crystallized in a line, some more. The audience was a

living organism, that responded with hums and snaps. We felt as though we'd witnessed new instruments being born, screaming into the world. The first time she read her poem, she bowed, smiled her crooked smile, and opened her arms. I wish I could tell you what she said. *Feel: an orange glow like a soft sun.* I can tell you it was a poem of healing, of loving self. I looked around me, and when she spoke, they looked to her as one, because we all needed to hear it, whether in general or that day in particular. The words brought us together like threads, until it was plain that we were all connected, living in our own strands of the same web. We thrummed in beat to her music. After the show, we walked into the night air. She was still glowing from finally sharing. She savored the taste of the ice beginning to melt under her choker. I knew that when the last of the ice slipped away, she would leave me

*

Things picked up quickly with her poetry. Within a year, she was touring colleges around the country. She made a little money at first, then a lot, and then more. Now that her voice was a weapon, she remembered all the ways the world was falling apart. Everywhere she went, she stirred people. She left them raw and happy and angry. She remembered "patriarchy" and corrupted their children's minds. *Smell: gunpowder, trees ripe for burning.* She began to disturb the peace.

Then, Charlotte and her wife were assaulted, her caramel skin bruised and her teeth broken, somewhere in Missouri. I could only stand there while she shook. The chair vibrated with her, rising in frequency, until the fire finally caught and flared beside the God in her eyes, and she howled and howled. She was scheduled to perform the next day at a prestigious university. She sat down with her poems of love and healing, and tore them up. spent the night writing. I read the poems while she showered.

*

We drove to the university in silence, walked through campus in silence. She was still, but the air around her buzzed and crackled. We went backstage and sat near the curtains. She watched students, teachers, parents file into their seats, smiling her crooked smile.

"You don't have to do this," I said. "They're just kids."

She said nothing.

“Did you think about what could happen to you? To us?”

She spoke soft as a knife. “It’s not up to me to fix you.”

I looked away from her, through a gap in the curtains. The room was filling. Eight hundred, at least. Maybe a thousand. She did not turn away from me.

“You can go,” she said. Once again, the truth wanted to rush out of me. I swallowed again, but her hand caught my throat. “I never knew what to let go of. Go. Don’t be afraid.”

She looked deep into me, not letting the truth go back down to fester. The stage manager walked in.

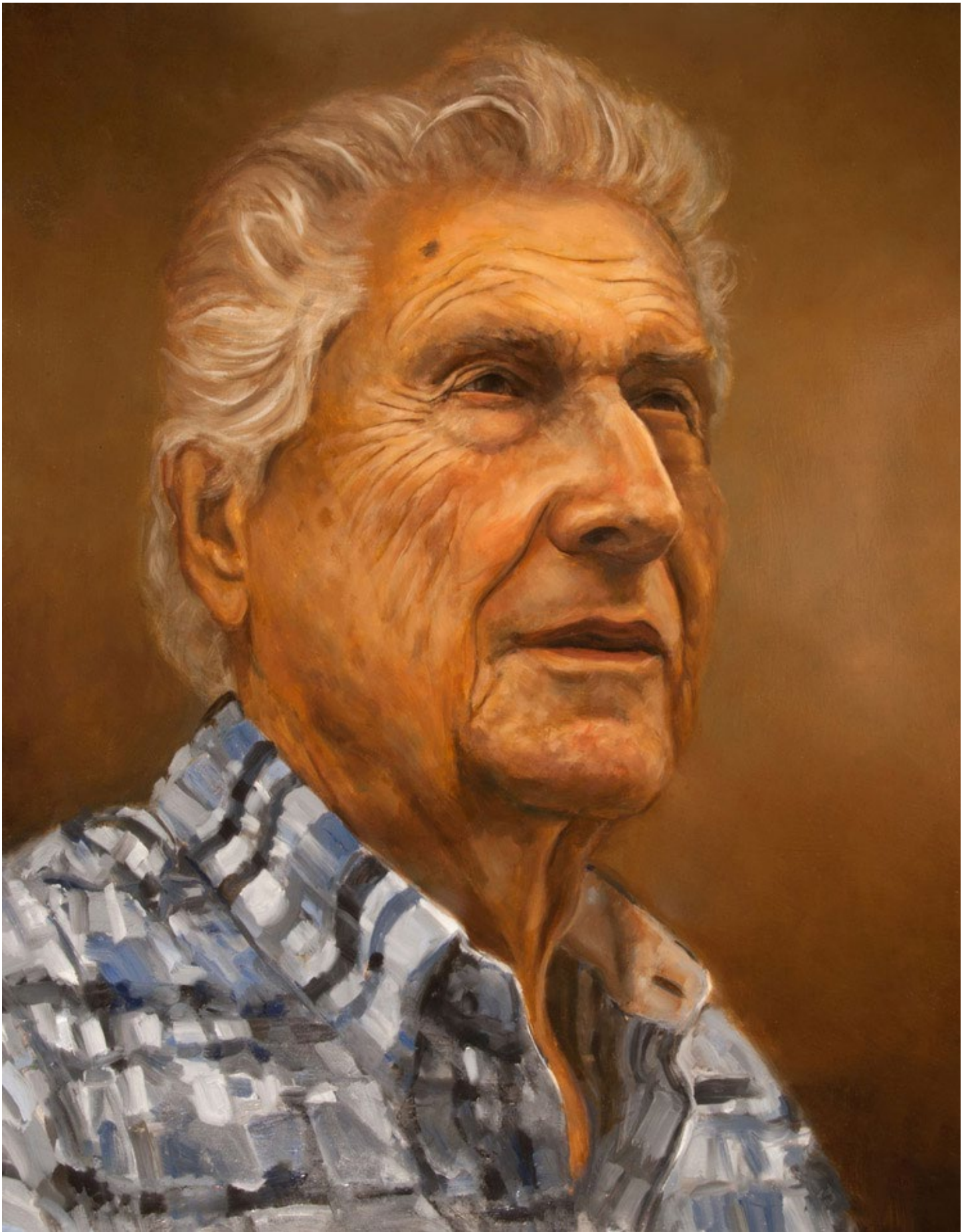
“They’re ready for you,” he said.

She smiled her crooked smile, and walked through the curtain. Her mountain range spine rippled under her dress. The spotlight reflected off of her scars. She looked into their faces and opened her arms. I cannot tell you what she says.

I see the words come out of her, and they are not words of healing and love. They are poems of rage, songs of pain. They are battle cries. They are poison. I see the words hang in the air, spreading like a virus.

I run. I run out of the hall, the building, the campus. The pavement flows under me. A whine scratches out of me, it claws its way up my throat, and I scream. I run out and away and into the city streets, and, standing straighter, I run screaming and laughing and crying and screaming because I can.

David Vieux: David is a Haitian-French-American author and screenwriter, who moved to Los Angeles from Paris in 2011. Since then, David's worked in Film and Television Production and Literary Management. His bucket list includes: a bedtime story from Morgan Freeman, meeting Toni Morrison, and being able to afford guacamole in his burrito just one time. David lives in North Hollywood with his fiancée Yazmin and their two morbidly obese cats.



This Slow Effacement | Terry Wright

We circled around each other,
your phone calls slowly sliding into feverish
need for reassurance that awakened
my English wartime nurse with her
capable hands and starched cleanliness and her
efficiency and chuckling good humor in the face of
amputations and mustard gas deaths.

I can't be mad at you for making me over
when I'm the one who slowly pulled the nurse's cap
out of my bag of tricks.

International Arrivals, LAX—
You couldn't run away from the plane fast enough
and into my arms, the big movie scene.
I asked if you had more baggage and you answered,
"Oh, I have baggage, all right," and we both laughed.
You were home from your Great War,
and shell-shocked, for sure, pitching useless
foreign coins into my console.

One bad morning your girlfriend calls and
says to me, "I think you'd better come over."
And thanks to all those newsreels and
stuttering silent films, I see us walking along the beach,
arm in arm, the patient nurse and the wounded
warrior, head swathed in bandages, leaning on her capable arm.

I'm dying, you say. I'm sorry.

And I know you well enough to know that when
you say, *I'm dying*, you mean, *I want to die*.
When you say you're sorry
you didn't meet me for breakfast, you mean
you're sorry for so much more than that.
But eventually, after I use all my wiles to bring you back,
you sink into sleep and turn away.

And there I am: as simultaneously useful
and forgettable as a tissue:
desperately needed to address an immediate problem, and then
crumpled and thrown away
and forgotten about
before it even hits the trashcan.

This slow effacement feels so inevitable,
which bumps up against my apple-pie
belief in self-determination, but I guess
I can't make a relationship go one way,
or another way; it will only go.
I'm not the only engine in this car.

Maybe it's better this way. In my essential bag
is the wartime medic's best friend:
the morphine shot. Like the beneficiary of a surgeon
who knows how to stitch
so the scar is barely visible,
I'll hardly remember you.

Terry Ann Wright is an editor at Lucid Moose Lit. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Chiron Review, Cadence Collective, Carnival, East Jasmine Review, and in the anthologies Gutters & Alleyways: Perspectives on Poverty and Struggle; The Language I Was Broken In; and Like a Girl: Perspectives on Feminine Identity. She spends her days ridding the world of comma splices, one college freshman at a time, and nights planning food-based road trips and sometimes writing.

Detours (in Multiple Parts) | Jessica Ceballos

Part I. To remove the new horizon, for a view of the old horizon. This is a gentrified solar system.

New Frontiers in New Horizons. America is always looking for new frontiers. Whose Pluto is it anyway?

I don't know that people realize how far three billion miles is. Billions of miles.
Another world. This is where comets are born.

Where our Gods scribbled the blueprints of our solar system, and threw it all into the air to see what would happen. It takes years to get to that place. Light years.

I know a faster way
to that *there*. where there is no gravity.

The detour, through the other side of the hill with the big bright lights, the ones that hurts your eyes. The Ravine with memories that shatter insides to remember our elders that live, lived, and loved there.

But work.

That's the part that makes us cry. Because work is the only thing that means anything these days. On this newish horizon. And then, that's not enough to keep the horizon from becoming only a singular memory.

But know that the the traveling through the hill, too slowly, will slow progress. The crying. Defending the purpose of *their, our* last one hundred years, slows us and everyone we love, down. And what is Los Angeles without its progress. What is Los Angeles without you, without the old

becoming now.

Please, take the detour. Los Angeles is better with you in it. (You'd never survive without the detour.)

Unless

you're ready for war. Unless you know how far three billion miles really is. Unless you understand what it means to walk with our elders, holding their hands, through these light years. Through *this* disappearing world. It's not a lesson in economics, money doesn't grown on people, it grows on trees.

And the sadness of unsettling has to feel invigorating. The thought of leaving *this* world should inspire you to any means necessary, until the idea of leaving becomes 3.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0.0. miles away. Another world. This is your world afterall. Unroll the rug, make yourself at home.

You should be made of more than carbon if you don't want to take the detour, if you'd prefer to take the road *through* this disappearing world, and its disappearing hills. So many disappearing everythings.

“We are a way for the universe to know itself.” And there is no neutral when the world under you is slipping away. Los Angeles could use an army of crying soldiers, rather than decomposing bodies sleeping in those newish houses, haunted by the ghosts looking for new horizons. Let's help bring those ghosts back. We need them. We need you. (You will survive in Los Angeles, after all.)

and all things will become ours again.

Jessica Ceballos is a cultural wanderer who works at exploring the intersection of personal narrative, art, nature, and community and their role in cultural sustainability. She curates Avenue 50 Studio's monthly Bluebird Reading as well as the Poesia Para La Gente poetry program that brings poetry to the community using non-traditional and public places as venues. She's 1/4 of the experiment in publishing known as Writ Large Press and holds a seat with the Highland Park Neighborhood Council where she works to support policy and neighborhood development efforts that favor community sustainability over disproportionate monetary advantage, and she's also chairs their Arts & Culture Committee. Her written work has been published in various journals, anthologies and collective works such as ATTN: (Further Other Book Works), Brooklyn & Boyle, Heartbreak Anthology, Entropy, Cultural Weekly, Los Angeles Magazine, LA Examiner, Hinchas de Poesia, La Boga, and The RPB - LA Anthology among others. Her chapbooks *Gentre De-Place-Ing* and *End of the Road* are forthcoming in 2015. And her collection of poems, *A woman was Earth, was a dolphin, was a man, was a lion, was a bird, was a mothers sin...before she was a woman again* is scheduled to be released late 2016. www.jessicaceballos.com

Outside | Terri Niccum

Outside, the silver leaves
chatter, bullied by the wind.
You try to hold onto
a few cold truths. It could be
something as ill-defined
as God, as simple as your name.
That speck on the wall
has worn many faces;
the imagined face that goes with
the hand that slips the tray
through the slot, each day
the same unappetizing letter;
the face of the last president
you remember, and last night
a face with such nagging
familiarity it took sleep
and a dream to reach you
as your own. They called you
dangerous, and you

took that as a compliment.
Dangerous was synonymous
with swashbuckling, with being
too close to the truth.
You wore your dangerous
like a badge, but sitting
in this 6 x 9 hole with a wash bucket,
a window too high up and
your hair falling out, it's hard
to feel dangerous.

That patch of blue, or grey,
you stare at in that harsh rectangle
might as well be art. Really
the world is now contained
in variations of hue,
in bits of sound muted
by a concrete wall, the snatches
of intelligible conversation
you store like gold,
the woman haggling in the market
over day-old fish, that man
repeating over and over

the same number, a lottery ticket
or a laundry chit, 437-329-15,
437-329-15, 437-329-15,
so as not to forget

How To Grow Backwards | Terri Niccum

Down this hill and
into the basket, pretend
to be plump and edible,
puff out on the visible side --
if by acting I become
I'll act --
strive for roundness
look the tasty morsel

Down this hill and
leap from the stalk
oh to be eye arresting
plum against blue backdrop
to attain that attitude
of fullness bee stung
the sweet swell of willing
I'm too cerebral
heavy with the need to fall

Down this hill
and be that berry
live for a moment on his tongue
not flesh but the ripeness within flesh,
the apple's patina, the buzz
full of honey, the taste that teaches
toes stained with juice
the soft curl of a body
dreaming

Terri Niccum is a former journalist and special education teacher. She lives in Southern California where she continues to advocate for children with special needs. She was selected as a semi-finalist for the 2014 Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry. Her chapbook, *Looking Snow in the Eye*, was recently released by Finishing Line Press.



Sentimental Excavations

by Jeff Nazzaro

Reporter from the local paper called me this morning. Seemed like a nice enough kid. I felt bad telling him no, mostly because a couple lifetimes ago I used to be the kid calling people trying to get them to tell me their stories. That was a small town on the other coast though and mostly everyone talked to me. The average citizen was thrilled to. Forget fifteen minutes of fame, my boss told me once, most people only ever get their name in the paper when they're born and when they die. And the pols and cops were happy to tell me stuff because they were the ones telling me, you know? Except for the time this guy dropped dead of a heart attack during the big Fourth of July celebration on the town common and no one at the cop shop or firehouse would tell me shit until finally I wrote a sarcastic little article saying a guy dropped dead on the town common during the biggest public party of the year and apparently the whole town saw it except for the cops and the firefighters. I did not suggest that maybe that was in fact why the guy died, sarcasm and the First Amendment having their limits, even in a bedroom community. The fire chief called me a week after the paper came out and apologized for his deputy stonewalling me (not that he used that term) and said he'd been on vacation with his family for the holiday and everything and if I ever had a problem like that again here are his home phone and pager numbers. Then he asked me, since I was a writer, if I'd ever read any Jack Kerouac. I thought that was a little strange at first, but really it wasn't. I met a few guys like that, guys in good positions who looked like they'd suffocate or explode any minute and in little private moments when no one else was listening and my pen was capped told me as much: the fire chief who longed to go on the road, the police chief who lived in mortal terror of being called Barney Fife, the high school principal who wanted to fuck every girl in the school.

Maybe that's why I got out. That and it looked like the newspaper business was going to hell at the time, which it was. I was pretty young but I already had a wife and kid, so I looked around and finally took a well-paying technical writing job out in Glendale, California and I did that for as long as I could do it, that is the absolute truth about that. By the time I quit, my wife, Maggie, was doing well enough as a dental hygienist and I sort of took it easy until this thing happened between her and me. Some might say

I acquired too much excess temporal availability too fast. In any case I got a little place by the beach with what I had left and tried to think of something new to do.

So I tell the kid from the paper no and I figure that's the end of it and then the little shit asks me why? Like he can't believe anyone would say no. So I flip it on him and ask him how the hell he even found out about it in the first place and he said he saw it online—this woman posted this thing and someone else shared the post and on and on. So much sharing these days, I think, all that Sesame Street must have finally paid off for the world—until this reporter sees it and calls me up, wants to do a story. Sorry, not interested. Like I said, he was nice enough about the whole thing and I used to be in that business, so I could kind of empathize, but, you know, no. Finally he says if I change my mind to give him a call, here's his cell, or call him at the paper and here's that number, or email him. I don't have Internet, I tell him, just four years ago's cheap flip phone. Come to think of it, how the hell did he even get my number? How did he get my name? I told the broad who shared the thing in the first place go ahead, post whatever you want, since I knew she didn't know me from the Vietnamese girl who paints her toenails. I guess these reporters have their ways of finding stuff out, though, and this isn't such a small town, not like where I used to work, where if a story wasn't handed to you, you didn't print it. No, if it wasn't handed to you, you didn't have it in the first place. So this good deed I did got on the big friendly sharing site on the big friendly web and the kid from the paper thought it would make a nice little feel-good human-interest story of romance and redemption.

What I did was I found this \$8,000 diamond engagement ring while metal detecting one Sunday evening at the beach and then I located the rightful owner and I returned the ring. Anyone might have, even those pursuing the metal detecting avocation. Finding an engagement ring definitely fall under the category of what I call a sentimental excavation. Not sentimental for me, mind you, but sentimental for someone else. Okay, sure, they're all sentimental excavations these days, but some of the finds are of obvious symbolic significances and personally engraved, and this one was one of those, and I happened to do a cursory, not overly hopeful, online search at the public library and come across this post on a well-surfed so-called social media site about a certain ring lost at a certain Southern California beach

and its obvious sentimental value. The post contained the magic word—reward—and I thought, fuck it, why not?

So I contacted the girl who made the post, I met her and her fiancé at Harvey's, right near the same beach I found the thing at, I gave them the ring and they gave me five hundred bucks cash and sprang for dinner and drinks, which was nice, though I'm pretty sure I could have talked Larry the Latvian out of two grand for the thing, easy. Two grand is a big score for me. They were nice kids, though, and I had a good time.

The kid from the paper said this kind of publicity is priceless in this day and age, like people start doing shit for you, giving you stuff, buying you drinks if you're in the paper for something noble and selfless, like that Mexican guy who worked the grill at the taqueria up the street and foiled the child abduction by the Russian gangsters. You can't make shit like that up and people read the story and sent the guy like twenty grand when it was all added up. I didn't foil any kidnapping, I said. I only returned a ring, not a child, and us beach detectorists have a sort of code, like the more publicity we get, the more assholes start tramping around the sand with metal detectorers and sand scoops, and not all of them are total morons, either, so figure it out.

Plus, I didn't tell him this, but I just got off paper like four months ago, and I don't need any shit about anything to do with me anywhere, which is why I told the couple to whom I returned the ring to mention nothing about me—my name, where I lived, nothing. Or did I? Come to think of it, I had a few before they got there, then a couple more with dinner and one after. Whatever, I told her post whatever you want, just don't say anything about me. I certainly do not need any, shall we say, reinstituted constabulary attention, as in, where exactly did you find said ring to begin with and me saying now why the hell would I return a hot ring to the very person I just misappropriated it from, and them saying, well maybe since you're sort of well known in the fucking scumbag business, you might be trying something new, like forgoing the usual fences, excuse us, pawnshops, the owner of one such establishment having just perhaps ratted your thieving ass out once already, and instead started angling for reward money, and me pretty much losing my temper and risking a, how should I put it, on-the-spot fistic citation.

But, you know, maybe it would be nice to get a pat on the back for once. Maybe that's why I located the owner and returned the ring. The cops would be right. I wasn't always the socially accepted if annoyingly dorky-looking type of beachcomber trudging through the sand in a floppy hat and flip-up shades. I did use to sort of hasten the natural attrition of personal possessions of those who could quite obviously afford to replenish already overstocked arsenals. I stole.

I made a decent living as a beach thief for a good little while, enough to pay for a room walking distance from the beach, and keep me fed, drunk and laid. I'm not proud of it, but I liked the life, though I didn't always have the stomach for it. It was hard to feel bad for people who were overtly rich assholes, people who left their garbage all over the beach, or kicked sand in your face, but sometimes I imagined the reactions of regular decent people I'd robbed—faces of disbelief, anger, humiliation—and those hurt. I laughed it all off with the right amount of whiskey and beer, but mostly I felt like a world-class shit.

Part of the reason I felt so bad was I had a very personal *modus operandi*. I wasn't too good at sneaking around, you know, so I developed a little getup based around fake facial hair and a collection of disposable ball caps, T-shirts, sunglasses, and paperbacks, books I knew most people had either read or could pretend to have read, books that made me look like a sad old sap, like *The Scarlet Letter* and *Old Man and the Sea*. *To Kill a Mockingbird* worked like a charm. I'd lay there with my toes in the sand pretending to read or, better still, put the book down to answer an imaginary phone call: when you guys getting here? Yes, it's beautiful out, no, not too crowded, make mine ham on rye, and don't forget the sunscreen. But really I was watching everyone and everything. Then real politely I'd ask the mark would you mind watching my stuff a minute, I'll be right back. Go to the can, come back, thanks, small talk, pick up my book, more often than not, sooner or later, it's can you watch our stuff? We're just going down to the water. Sure, and they'd look back, too, because no one's that trusting, but there's this moment, and sometimes just a moment, when, and I don't care how old you are or how many times you've been to the beach, they'd lose themselves in the sun and the sand and the surf, the screech of seagulls and little girls, and I knew for them time had stopped and their own little, how can I put this? primeval exuberance, burst forth and they forgot all about their awesome new phone with all the awesome new apps, never

mind the eighteen dollars in wadded up bills and that sterling thumb ring they got in Cancún. That was the moment in which I had their stuff and I was gone.

I rationalized it all in the end, even getting caught, and I was very surprised when the judge gave me time on a first conviction and didn't suspend the sentence, either, but I'm glad now I did get caught.

What happened was this undercover cunt cop put on a big show right under my nose and I knew, I fucking knew it was bullshit, with the iFuck9 and the diamond ring and gold necklace and the fake rich bitch phone talk, all for my benefit—just bought a new Mercedes but maybe I should have gone for the Bentley and this crap about illegal immigrants this and welfare moms that and oh no, don't go to Jamaica, they steal from you there—I thought, what cop talks like that as a front? And this chick was a knockout, too, oiled up skin in a white bikini and, get this, she lights a joint on the beach and offers me a hit, and I say no, no thank you, and she, yeah, she wasn't white like me and hot as hell on top of it, she gets up and takes off all her jewelry and puts it with her phone in this little, I think they call them cinch sacks, and to top it all off slides this gold ring off her pinky toe and sticks that in the cinch sack, too and says, watch my stuff, okay hon? Next thing I know she's down to the water and I have her bag just about off the beach and halfway home when this fuck stick in a Speedo with a Glock and a badge grabs me and the chick is nowhere to be seen. I'm like, is there a problem, officer? I'm watching this stuff for someone and I have to take a leak, I can't just leave it there on the beach. So we go back and wait and the woman comes back and denies ever seeing me, knowing me, talking to me, wants to press charges, be a witness, whatever, she's shocked anyone would take a bag didn't belong to them in the first place.

It was an open-and-shut case of entrapment, and that woman was either a cop or working for the cops on the sly. My dumb-ass court-appointed attorney said she wasn't, not that he could find out, and trust him, even if I had money to spend on shiny-shoed lawyers with investigators and everything there was no way to prove it. Plus, he said, not to be a dick, but he couldn't imagine LAPD using deep-cover operatives to stamp out petty beach theft. I wish to hell it had been petty. They nailed me on felony grand theft and I got a year in county jail. Then my lawyer tells me I should thank the shit out of him for it not being three years in Pelican Bay, which is what they wanted to go for. I thought, I'll something the shit

out of this guy all right.

Anyway, when I got out I still had probation and counseling, and it was my counselor who recommended I take up beachcombing, maybe with one of those metal detector things. I said, let me guess, you're going to tell me my mother wouldn't buy me an ice cream cone at the beach one summer so now I have to sneak around snatching bags off the sand, is that it? She laughed and said she didn't know anything about that, I could tell her if I wanted to, but it just seemed like I liked going to the beach and coming back with stuff I hadn't brought with me or bought and that lots of people did that on California beaches every day, free and clear, no licenses, no taxes. If I really needed to hear from her how I felt some kind of lack or loss in my life, she said, that I felt a need to take things that had never been given to me—love, say—things everyone deserved, she'd be happy to tell me all about it, but what fucking difference did it make at this point? Scavenging, beachcombing, metal detecting, the unearthing of lost, hidden valuables was not only legal, it was my God-given right, and maybe my calling. I loved her then, with or without the F-bomb and I wanted to fuck her so bad. She was a married professional with three kids, you know, diplomas on the wall, pictures on the desk. I thanked her. She stood up and said I didn't have to. I said, and this was the hardest thing I ever said in my life— don't think I'm some kind of sociopath who cheats and steals and blurts out whatever's on his mind—I want you. She laughed, not that kind of derisive woman's laugh that makes you want to throw everything away and punch them in the face, but a sweet, understanding laugh. Then she said, you stay out of trouble and out of this office until you're off paper and we'll talk. It was the last of our court-appointed visits. I took a card off her desk and said, I'm going to hold you to that.

When I found that diamond engagement ring in the sand at Mike's Beach and started searching for the original owner (because at that point I was the rightful owner) I had this crazy idea that some aging divorcée slipped it off her finger one evening after a long, tearful walk up and down the beach and threw it as far as she could into the drink. I thought this partly because I'd just spoken to my sister, who'd stayed close to my ex-wife, on the phone a few days earlier and she had a big laugh over telling me that Maggie, that's my ex, chucked the engagement ring I'd bought her so many years ago out the window of

her German-made mini-SUV and onto the middle of the 405, and I said, well, knowing the 405, morning, noon or night if there happened to be a convertible alongside her car at the time she threw it then the ring is in some douche bag's car right now, if not his lap. I was trying to laugh along with her, but really I was stung pretty bad, like why did I need to hear that about the ring or hear anything about Maggie at all? That's sisters for you, though. They think they know your business better than you do, when they don't know shit and all you want to do is talk to your stupid sister.

The day after I found the engagement ring in the sand I did two things: I brought my wedding band to Larry the Latvian, who never asked questions but always listened. I showed it to him and asked him to guess where I found it, and after he'd named just about every beach from here to La Jolla, I extended my left ring finger like I was flipping him off. He said I thought you were never giving up and selling that thing. I said I am now. He offered to hold it for me and even loan me a couple hundred on it interest free if I needed it that bad, but I said give me the cash and melt it down. Larry's good people. I know for a fact he never ratted me out. And the second thing I did was I went to the library to search for the owner of the diamond ring I found.

I had this crazy idea that I'd return the ring to some woman who had chucked it in the big salt pond and she'd say, now that you gave me this ring back I guess we're engaged and doesn't that just make for a precious little message in a bottle? I think up the corniest shit sometimes, true, but I'm a romantic at heart. Maggie would never in a million years grant me that, I'm sure. She was romantic, of course. Bullshit. She assumed her own romanticism and she assumed it based solely on womanhood and shit shared on the Internet and whatnot, but when it came down to it, I spent nine-tenths of that marriage alone, waiting for her to get off the phone, get offline, get off the treadmill, get off the goddamn 405.

My marriage lasted a good, long time, enjoyed a long period of tranquility at least, until this one little infelicitous transgression I perpetrated, stemming from acute loneliness more than anything else. When everything got found out and we had the big nasty blowout over it, our son was away at school in the Midwest, which was probably a good thing because Maggie started raving about how she's going to tell him everything I did, embellishing the more domestically violent aspects of my behavioral lapses and

how he was going to kill me. He probably would have too. He's a big, strong kid, threw the discus and javelin for his college's track and field team and has a temper worse than mine. That's a weird sort of pride when you realize your own boy can and will put you in your place, but what ended up happening was he just stopped talking to me. I called him and tried to explain what had happened and he hung up on me. That really hurt.

Now I go to the beach as early as I can every morning with my metal detectorer, back again at dusk. I go to a beach that isn't very popular, so there isn't as much to find, but neither is there as much competition. I go barefoot. The times I go I don't need sunscreen. I wear a Dodger cap. I don't wear shades. I do the whole beach, along the strandline, and then I go back, through the swash. It's a good walk and finding something definitely does not ruin it. Almost always I do find something, if only loose change, and then I go home.

I should call the kid from the paper back. Maybe he's right and people will call me up with offers for this and that. Here's some money, here's a bottle, let me buy you a beer. Maybe that therapist or whatever she is will think wow, this guy isn't just better, he's a great fucking guy. Maybe Maggie will see me on Good Day LA or something and think, I was wrong, he's not a total shit, he's actually a wonderful, romantic human being and I was just too wrapped up in my own life to appreciate him. Maybe I shouldn't have hawked my wedding band after all.

I called him, the guy from the paper. I said, okay, what do you want to know? He said, how did you go from convicted felon beach thief to celebrated beach Samaritan? I about shit myself. And then I asked him how he knew about my past and why the hell I'd want that in the local paper? It's already been in the paper, he said, when you got caught, before. I wrote the story. So that's the whole angle now. It's beautiful—the fall, the suffering, rehabilitation, redemption. That's what people want. You stole from people, he said, and after they trusted you and you betrayed that trust and they came back from their swim or whatever to find their lives violated, ripped apart, you stood there and shrugged it off and said, well, that's life and life is tough. Wait just a minute, I tried to say, I did my time, I agonized over this, I suffered, but he kept going, saying that's just what we'll sell. Someone loses a ring and says, oh my God, life is so

unfair and you swoop in like Amazing Grace and say, no it isn't, life's a miracle. Think about it. I thought about it. Then I said, thank you very much, and write whatever you want, but if you quote me beyond no comment I will sue your ass for libel. Then I hung up. And I went to the beach. It was dusk but I didn't take my metal detectorer with me. I didn't wear my Dodger cap and I didn't take my phone. I took a towel and went for a long swim.

Jeff Nazzaro currently teaches English to international students and Creative Writing to non-English majors at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, where he also volunteer copyedits books on Ethiopian politics and history for Tsehai Publishers. His fiction, creative non-fiction, and poetry have appeared or will soon appear in Flash: The International Short-short Story Magazine, Bareback, Every Day Fiction, Rind, Down in the Dirt Magazine, and ClockwiseCat.



The Hussars Rode | Alex Simand

When I was fourteen months old
I thought quiet was the greatest of virtues.
When my parents rush around the house
in bare feet,
calling,
pleading
like Marco Polo failing to navigate his home,
a secret thrill filled me.
How easy, to disappear
even when sought (especially when sought,
for the abandoned cannot disappear).

I smiled my barren gums at the ceiling
even as the *babushka* from across the hall
wailed at the thought of another Lost Boy
snatched from his crib, her own toothless gums
blaring at the cold Russian sun
and at Peter Pan's impunity.

I'm still laughing quietly in the corner
to the creak of floorboards,
the patter, the sobbing of grown-ups
a betrayal: we were told instructions
would be provided.
I emerge from my cocoon amid
cups of weak black tea, mournful
blini chewed slack-jawed to cud

my hand reaches theirs,
their shoulders slump down.
I ask to be bounced on a knee:
you ride a make-believe horse,
make believe that you don't break
their old souls when you disappear,
my father makes believe he'll let me fall
when he parts his bouncing knees.

Alex Simand is an MFA candidate at Antioch University Los Angeles. He writes nonfiction and poetry. His work has appeared in such publications as Ash & Bones, Ultraviolet Tribe, Drunk Monkeys, Red Fez, and Mud Season Review. Alex is the Blog Editor and Editor of Creative Nonfiction at Lunch Ticket, an online literary journal. He lives and works in San Francisco, CA, but hails from Toronto, Canada.

Human | Brian Dunlap

In Guatemala

gangs and police take young girls,

rape them,

throw them in plastic bags.

It's not safe for them anymore.

Law enforcement, the judicial system,

all run by men.

Sexual violence historically downplayed,

normalized, disinclined to preserve justice,

afraid to implicate themselves.

A homeland with failing institutions,

with a homegrown revolution

in the shadows of the Second World War.

1940s. Democratization.

For land reform.

To rein in the oligarchy, U.S. corporations

that made them a banana republic.

Crushed with help from the CIA.

No democracy here. It ran in opposition

to U.S. interests in someone else's

homeland.

For 30 years,

from the ashes of American intervention,

the Guatemalan army rampaged

through its borders, raping,
murdering,
in the name of Communism.
Reached the western highlands. Ran a
war of genocide against the indigenous Maya.
It wasn't safe for them anymore.

Now, young girls flee.
Sin nombre.
Through brush.
Through city streets.
Hopping trains in Mexico.
Sin nombre.
Across the hot scorching Sonora,
through the brown waters of the Rio Grande.

From a broken country.
Wanting only to be considered human.

Brian Dunlap is a native Angeleno—born and raised on the Westside. He writes and explores the city from a native’s point of view, working to capture the city’s stories that fall through the cracks. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Fresno State and a BA in Creative Writing from UC Riverside, both in fiction. He runs the blog site losangelesliterature.wordpress.com, a resource to explore L.A.’s vast literary culture. This is his first publication.

Left Behind | Alexandra Hohmann

Bracing for the inevitable
the house sighs
anticipating departure
Closets not yet emptied,
picture frames still hung,
each room heaves its sorrow
so even the walls ache
remembering a childhood
spent in a twin bed
under the sheets
telling ghost stories to imaginary friends,
an awkward puberty
escaping into pixelated fantasy worlds
and internet porn,
a fresh adulthood
(if it can be called that)
straddling the line between
coming and going,
turning inward or branching out,
choosing safety or bravery
The walls will not witness
a new chapter in the continuing story
so they resign themselves
to quiet weeping at the hands of change.

Untitled | Alexandra Hohmann

Between darkness
and satin sheets
I bed Memory,
familiar curves of an old lover.
We lay tangled
in mistakes
and bruised egos.
Scar tissue throbs
in recollection.
She offer no satisfaction,
only empty intercourse.
Questions stain my lips
as fever overtakes my body.
She retreats into the
fickle dawn.
I anticipate my mistress' return
come nightfall.

Alexandra Hohmann, a Los Angeles native, is a high school English teacher and open mic frequenter. Hohmann is the current facilitator of In The Words of Womyn, a women's writing circle at Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural and Bookstore in Sylmar, CA. She hopes to create a follow up to her self-published chapbook, Wild Heart (2013) soon.

#DTLA is not #Racist! | Teka Lark Fleming

The black guy
 is masturbating on Sixth again
 These homeless people are getting ridiculous
 There is this program up north,
 where they nicely ship them away for work programs
 It is really nice
 I don't know if happy adverbs can make an internment camp sound OK
 Molina just cares about the Latinos
 Molina hates white people
 She doesn't have a bike
 She didn't go to the bike meeting
 We need more cops
 We need more security
 Another black guy
 masturbating
 I have a picture, I got up at at 4 a.m. and I caught him
 My dog needs a place to run
 Can we make that park private?
 We are bringing back Broadway
 Those businesses weren't real
 You know what we mean
 I find your accusation that I am racist offensive
 Here we go again with the race card, you people and the race card
 My name is James T Butts and I am Black and I am here to let you know Bob isn't racist
 That black homeless guy is out of control
 No one was even talking about race
 Obama is the best president ever
 This time it's an Asian guy masturbating on Seventh
 Did not know they could be homeless?
 I thought that was a black thing
 What? I am not being offensive just honest
 I went out with an Asian lady once
 She was real Americanized and talked too much
 I had to break up with her
 I am not racist, the Irish were the first slaves
 I am not Irish, but I could be
 There you go again with the race card
 Race is relevant here
 your accusations of racism
 are why you people are masturbating
 all over this place
 And I voted for Obama,
 I told you that.

Fine Art | Teka Lark Fleming

She tracked a cigarette butt into our art gallery
Then she got on her phone
And started texting

She is a symbol of no class

She wouldn't even pick up her dirt when we informed her of her crime
She said she did not bend over
And she didn't look up from her phone
When she said it

It was outrageous

An art gallery is a sacred place
Which is why it we serve wine
An art gallery is a place for those with –
Money
Penises
Expensive degrees
And their girlfriends

Art galleries
Are not places
For filthy chatty vapid whores
Who overshare on Facebook
And track in butts
From the sidewalk

Teka Lark is a journalist, poet and satirist based in the L.A. suburb of Inglewood. She is the founder of the Blk Grrrl Book Fair and the author of the upcoming book, *Queen of Inglewood*, to be published on Punk Hostage Press.



Improvements in Telegraphy

By James Bezerra

Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone to impress a girl.

Her eyes were blue and her voice was sing-song-y like a nursery rhyme. Her name was Hester. She was the daughter of his benefactor Gardiner Greene Hubbard, however, so too was Bell's wife Mabel. Hester was her sister.

Mabel was deaf, her hearing had left her after a childhood bout with Scarlet Fever. Bell, whose life had been so devoted to the plight of the deaf, was ashamed to admit to himself that he loved Hester because of the way she spoke, so pretty, so perfect. Mabel spoke so little and so poorly.

They made love, Bell and Hester, just once. They were discovered! A misshapen shriek left Mabel's mouth when she found them together. Gardiner Greene Hubbard shipped his youngest daughter off to France and the two men never spoke of the incident. But for Bell it was torture. He was anguished. He locked himself in his workshop. He longed only to hear her sweet voice again.

Yet Bell was not the only man who loved Hester Hubbard, nor was he the only inventor in Gardiner Greene Hubbard's employ. The young Elisha Gray had also cherished and adored her and when he learned that Hester was gone, and why, he was enraged. His long, stern face twisted into a mask of hatred, "Damn you Alexander Graham Bell!" He shouted, fist in the air "Damn you to Hell!"

Gray learned from the jilted Mabel that Bell had devoted himself to the completion of his 'harmonic telegraph' so that he could hear Hester's voice from across the sea. Seeing the perfection of such a romantic gesture, Gray committed to finishing his own 'liquid transmitter' prototype, which functioned on entirely different principles but would accomplish the same end as Bell's device.

Bell learned of Gray's competition and the two men engaged in a race of invention. At times Bell could even feel Gray's hot breath on the back of his neck.

On the crisp, snowy morning of February 14th 1876, Bell was in his workshop, his brow was sweaty. His arms were heavy with exhaustion as he snapped into place the acoustic reed, completing his device. "Thomas!" He shouted to his assistant Thomas A. Watson. "I have just invented the telephone!"

Then, to Bell's amazement, it rang.

He picked it up and held it carefully to his ear. Unsure of the appropriate etiquette, he answered, "*Ahoy?*"

Gray's voice crackled down the line, "Fuck you Alexander Graham Bell!" Then Gray hung up.

In a panic, Bell gathered his notes and the device. He dashed out the door, his knees high in the air as he ran. A trail of papers streamed behind him like a cloud.

Halfway to the Patent Office he spotted Gray rounding a corner, clutching his own invention. They came even, both of them running down the center of the street, dashing past carriages and horses.

"She doesn't love you!" Bell shouted.

"She will when she finds out I invented the god damn telephone for her!" Gray yelled back.

They rounded the last corner; the U.S. Patent Office loomed at the end of the block. The men were both puffing; lungs were burning, legs were cramping, pain-in-the-name-of-love was all around and then Bell did the thing that he would spend the rest of his life denying, he said, "You're right. She loves *you*."

"What?"

But when Gray turned his head to look at his nemesis, the back of Bell's hand was already swooping around in a wide arc. Bell slapped him across the face and Gray stumbled, still running full-speed, and his foot caught an uneven cobblestone, he was wrenched sideways and he hit the ground with an awful wet *thwack!* and he slid for several bloody feet.

Alexander Graham Bell never looked back. He ran straight through the doors of the Patent Office. He slammed the device down on the desk and said to the clerk, "Hurry up, I have to make a call."

James Bezerra is a poet, a playwright, a screenwriter, and a short story writer. His work has been published in Chaparral, The Bicycle Review, Black Heart Magazine, Citizen Brooklyn, Prick of the Spindle, Blood Lotus, The Blueprint Review, The Northridge Review, Cease Cows, and The American Drivel Review. He is a recipient of The Northridge Review Fiction Award, The Oliver W. Evans Writing Prize, and the San Diego Young Playwrights' Project Award. He teaches writing at CSU Northridge and blogs at standardkink.com.

