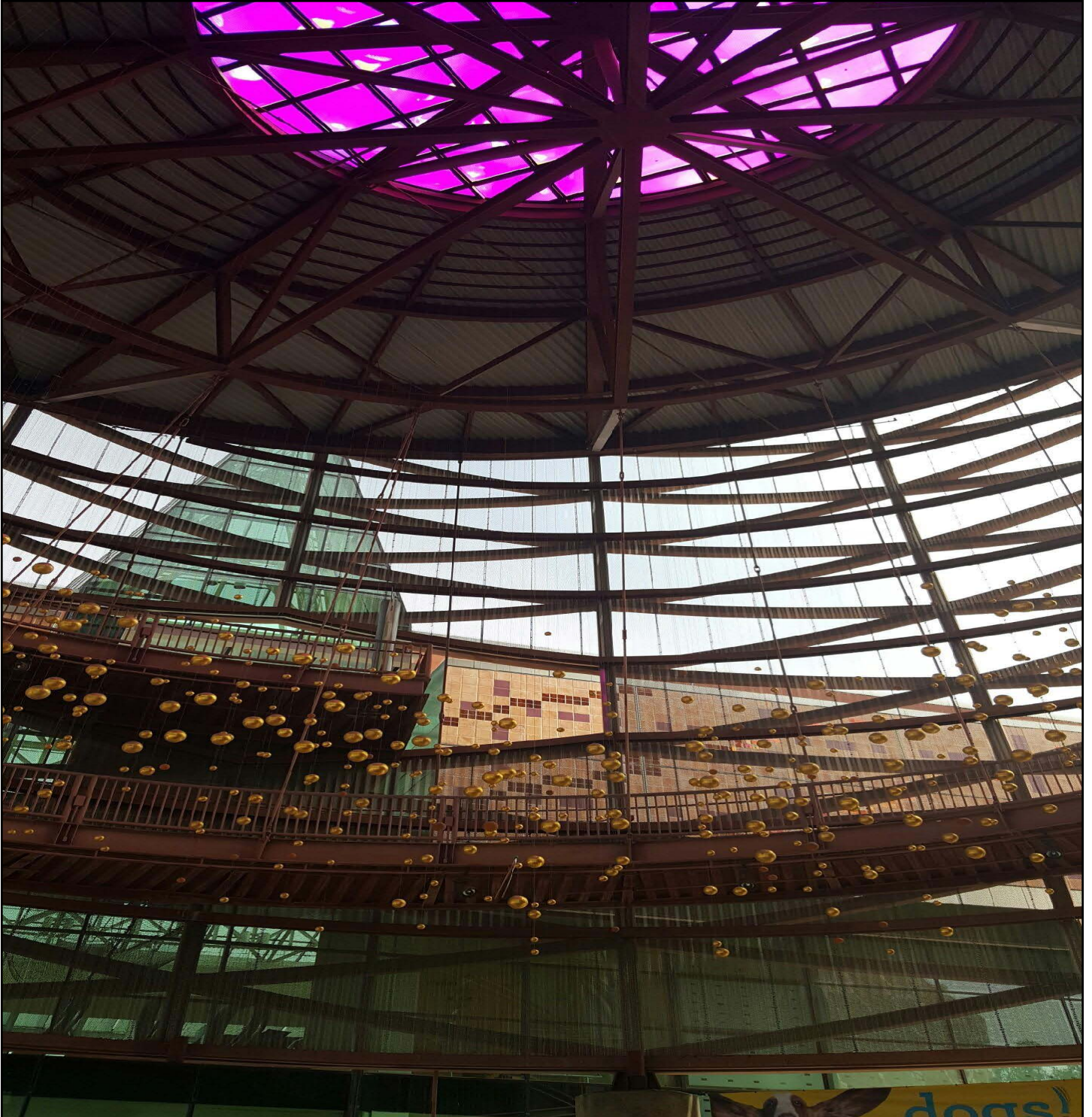


Angel City Review



Foreward

Looking through these pages I am proud to see the work of all these amazing writers. It is humbling to see all these who trusted us with their work to allow us to share these pieces with the world. There is so much beauty, and strength in the work being presented here from writers across the gamut. There is no singular perspective and yet they all create a cohesive whole as to the portrait of the human experience. I am also humbled by the amazing work that the editors have done with this magazine. They have all put in tireless hours working to mold their respective sections into their vision and to present our readers with work that excited and amazed them. I recall our new poetry editor Janice Sapigao telling me how much joy reading the submissions were – how many great writers were submitting. It is that level of passion that we all take in our own work and the same level of passion we want to put into sharing it with all of you. We hope you take as much joy in reading this as we had putting it together.

- Zachary Jensen

Angel City Review Issue 8 2019

Zachary Jensen: Managing Editor

Janice Sapigao: Poetry Editor

Kristin Kaz: Prose Editor

John Venegas: Lead Editor/Book Review Editor

Cover Photo and Art: E Villa

E Villa is a Mexican Artist and Educator living in Los Angeles California. Her work in this series focuses on finding new ways to look at everyday situations and spaces in order to find the strange and otherwise beautiful details we often overlook. She teaches English and Writing in multiple colleges around Los Angeles.

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Mayberry in June

BY E.C. MESSER

Lena Mayberry sat cross-legged in the center of William's bed, wearing one of his many plaid Pendleton shirts and smoking without an ashtray. In her lap lay a book of stories held open with her nonsmoking hand. Bits of ash fell onto his shirt and dirty comforter, leaving streaks of gray and occasionally small burn holes in the heavy wool. When it was almost too late, she leaned precariously over and tapped her ash into the earthenware ashtray on the bedside table, which Lena had brought with her because William didn't smoke.

Lena was dark, intelligent, Jewish—everything his parents hated but were too polite to mention. Her hair fell in rich curls around her heart-shaped face. At the beach this hair gained an inch of thickness in sand, salt, and wind. Her olive skin tanned easily; her eyes were a surprising green. In contrast with the largeness of her face and hair, the body underneath was compact but shapely—a profound set of breasts over a nipped waist and strong thighs. Her hands and feet were tiny, and the nails shown like moonstones without polish over her dark tan. In the plaid shirt and satin panties, she looked like the queen of Sheba dressed for hiking.

She had camped out in his apartment during the summer before William entered law school. Although his school was downtown, he had taken this tiny studio in Venice Beach in May with a plan to commute in September. He'd returned after graduation from a private university whose meager bohemian element consisted of fraternity debauches, and the occasional art or acting student brought in on scholarship to boost the school's diversity statistics. Despite—or perhaps because of—his upbringing, William fancied himself misunderstood. The beach was where he truly belonged. He first encountered Lena in the divey Mexican joint down the street, whose food was too good and too cheap not to include some kind of long-term threat to health. She appeared nightly at the back of the restaurant, washing down lengua tacos with dark beer and reading anonymous, pamphlet-bound books.

She was a student too, an undergraduate at the state university studying literature and drama. Lena was in residence for the summer at the co-operative theatre on the boardwalk, which had been founded in the '60s by one or another of the local communes. She invited William to a performance of short plays she had written—brief, dimly-lit ballets in which two dark figures met, struggled mutely, then parted. Usually one of these dark figures was male and one female, but occasionally two males or two females paired, which William found very daring and Lena found, privately, not daring enough. She spoke with confidence about the varied and diverse theatre traditions of the world, those that had inspired her and those that still left her confounded. He'd always suspected that his own costly private schooling had been scarcely superior to its low-cost public counterpart, and Lena confirmed his suspicions. She was far better versed than he on subjects upon which he had once imagined himself knowledgeable. She held him accountable. He made a silent pledge to look into legal advocacy and pro bono work during his tenure at law school.

Lena's passion and creativity became the crowning jewel in William's new bohemian existence. They slept late, ate breakfast at a diner on the pier, then she would go to work

at the theatre and he would jog along the beach or dive into the ocean in a rented wetsuit. On rehearsal nights, Lena finished early and they ate at the Mexican place. If there was a performance, William attended. When Lena spent the day writing, there was no telling when she'd show up—sometimes in an hour, sometimes so late that William had to pretend he wasn't hurt. Every day she did some kind of work except Mondays, when the theatre was dark. Then they would sneak into the costume shop to borrow dress-up clothes and take the bus downtown to see a matinée and eat Thanksgiving dinner—served every night—in a cafeteria.

After a month of this furtive bliss, William arranged for Lena to meet his parents over dinner at Johnnie Wong's, the Chinese restaurant that had become an institution in his family. It was the kind of Chinese restaurant that catered to Americans who cared more for lazy susans and deep jewel tones than actual Chinese food. Birthdays and anniversaries were toasted with syrupy plum wine over a table heavily laden with chicken chow mein, moo shu pork, sweet-and-sour this-and-that. Fortunes were read aloud with accompanying chuckles and almond cookies were discarded as inedible. Here young William had been allowed, on special occasions, small glasses of the plum wine diluted with water. Johnnie Wong's was safe, neutral territory.

Mr. and Mrs. Hastings greeted their son's new companion with cheerful pessimism. He had dated very little in college, and they had begun to speculate, not without distaste. Lena Mayberry was, however—from the top of her curly head to the heels of her slender feet—entirely and emphatically female. They wondered to themselves where she had gotten the name *Mayberry*, which sounded not Semitic but like something from a George Eliot novel or a Laura Ashley print. Perhaps she'd made it up for herself, as these artistic types often do.

Over dinner the Hastings learned that Lena was a playwright, the youngest ever to be granted a fellowship at the co-operative theater. Though they adopted an air of generous patronage, these credentials left them cold. They learned that she had grown up in a small town in the mountains. The Hastings asked after her studies, out of politeness, and she elaborated on her “process,” her influences and ambitions. Mrs. Hastings still thought of “process” as something done to hair, not something done by young women who wished to be married. William was proud of Lena's performance at dinner, feeling it emphasized his own ambivalence toward his heritage, and made him seem more exotic generally. The elder Hastings, unsurprisingly, did not share their son's enthusiasm. They were impressed with Lena's good manners and unnerved by her beauty, but they could not tolerate such self-possession in someone so young and so different from themselves. She was intimidating, though the Hastings would not have thought of it in that way.

*

This was in June. Throughout the summer, Lena's appearances at family functions remained steady and alarming. There was a Sunday brunch in July, followed by another dinner. William's aunt threw a pool party, at which the male Hastings were treated to the sight of Lena's body in a two-piece swimsuit. Lena and William showed up in costumes from the cooperative theatre's Marxist interpretation of *Anything Goes* for a cousin's August wedding. By September, the Hastings had grown sufficiently concerned with Lena's continued presence to mention it to their son, not so much in words as in action and intimation. It was time to shake off the summer's

idleness and prepare for classes, they reminded him, which would start at the end of the month. Had he bought his textbooks yet, notebooks and pens and all the other accouterments of study? He'd thrown away, or hadn't bothered to pack, everything from four years of college after he graduated. Wasn't it time to move onto more serious things and—*ahem*—more serious people?

William protested, accused them of bigotry, but subconsciously these admonitions reverberated with his own sense of Lena's shortcomings. She was beautiful and intelligent, filled with emotion, but not as sensitive to his own needs and view of the world as he expected her to be. He longed for the indulgence that he mistook for love, and had developed such a profound instinct of self-preservation that now he had trouble recognizing real affection when he saw it. Her failure to subsume her own desires into his was her fatal, unforgivable error. He had always considered himself unromantic and so, out of stubbornness and habit, he began to allow the prophecy of failed romance to fulfill itself.

*

"You're burning holes in my shirts," said William, standing tallish and slim before Lena at the foot of the bed.

"Hmmm...am...I?" He watched her finish a paragraph and slowly close the book of stories. "I'm sorry."

"My mother noticed them," he continued. "The holes."

She looked up at him with her full, direct eyes. "Maybe you should start doing your own laundry."

"So I could find them for myself?"

She stubbed her cigarette out in her ashtray and got up from the bed. William stepped back, expecting a fight. Instead, she removed and carefully folded his shirt and laid it on the bed, brushing the traces of ash from its surface. Standing nearly naked before him her breasts, pale in comparison with the rest of her tanned skin but with dark, moon-large areolas, were almost too finely shaped for him to bear. His instinct was to grab and hold on, but he was not built for clinging to truly important things. Instead, he stood with his hands hanging limply at his sides.

"She's right about you. My mother."

Lena curved her mouth into a strange smile, but said nothing. She dressed slowly, slipped the book into her bag, and emptied the ashtray into the trash. She dampened her hands in the kitchen sink and ran them through her hair. She turned to face William, who had not moved.

"Aren't you worried I'm going to leave?"

"I want you to," he said without knowing why. A gray cloud passed over her green eyes, but cleared almost immediately. She dropped the ashtray into the bag slung over her shoulder, kissed William full and long on the lips, and then she was gone. The smell of vanilla and cigarettes followed Lena Mayberry out into the warmth of the late summer morning.

*

William went to the Mexican place every night for two weeks, but she never appeared. Then classes started again for them both, and William wrote the summer off as a loss. There

would be others, he assured himself—other summers, and other stylishly bohemian women. He had decided to keep the studio at the beach. Almost immediately he began dating a fellow law student with whom he became quite serious. Their relationship dragged on through three years of school, but from the beginning he doubted her devotion to him and the depth of her understanding. Just before graduation she received an offer from an East Coast firm, and took it. William congratulated her and helped her pack, outwardly sorry but secretly relieved to see her go.

William graduated from law school with highest honors and, after passing the bar, was immediately hired by a friend of his father's whose firm specialized in estate planning. The job was lucrative and the Hastings were proud—William included. He bought new suits in conservative colors but with wide lapels and bold ties, to show that he still had a touch of the rebel and the beach bum in him. He leased a new car and rented a two-bedroom apartment in a charming neighborhood whose cafés served Italian coffee before it was the style. He met pretty, polite women at his parents' country club, and was introduced to the daughters of important lawyers connected with his firm. He drank too much with the other newly-minted lawyers he had met in school. Occasionally he met up with a few of his Venice friends at a red-sauce joint in Hollywood that they liked, and where they were often given free chianti in bottles that would afterwards be hung from the ceiling. And later, when he read in the paper that Lena had married an avant-garde theatre director and moved to New York, where their collaborative happenings were already gaining some notoriety, William gently laid his head upon the clean surface of his new metal desk and wondered what all the remaining days of his life would be.

E.C. Messer lives by the Pacific Ocean with her husband and four cats, one of whom has a bionic heart. Follow her on Instagram and Twitter @ecmesser. She would like very much to know you.

Echolalia

BY LINDSEY NOVAK

I learned to soften my eyes, fix
my smile.

I am Lilith, fair—
the Third Mind.
I'm pocketing pieces of the mountain,
bringing them home one by one.

I'm aiming my smile at you
like a weapon, like a gun.

You had a special way
of speaking in tongues
(bright, unnameable things).

Fingers roam along a pew,
bare backs on fibrous diamond waffle-weave.
You preach to me.

You say, open up
& let the Word of God fill
your mouth.
Milk, soap, cologne.

In church I am taught
to sit
straight,
sit still,
sit down.

Blue vein rivers course Mother,
surgery scar snaking a new constellation in night sky.

Meanwhile, language is the cheap Band-Aid we put on the wound of being human.
Meanwhile, we abbreviate our names to mask gender.
Meanwhile, you break the spine of my book,

this bridge called my back.

I didn't want to be Eve.

Pray, turn me to a tree,
variations on a theme.

I dream battering ram;

I speak hammer.

"I'll pray for you,"

slicker than cum on gold teeth.

Meditations in an Active-Shooter Drill

BY LINDSEY NOVAK

I.

Joy, how do I write to you
about the years between
us? Last we met, so much space, thigh gap, we did not know it then,
but we were in our prime-

time real estate, waiting to be part & parceled, carved up
by men, by tract houses, play dates inexorable.

I want to go back to there, then,
when you would host my early 20s diaspora, effluvia. You were my friend
& we
would smoke weed
on your couch, in your living room,
& I always thought you had the most beautiful skin,
on your couch, in your living room,
& I realize I'm as confused now
as I was then.

II.

I cut you out of my hair,
& I've always been a sprinter, not a long-distance runner.
Billy Collins tells me, don't be vague about where you've been, so literally, I am sitting, folded-up paper
doll
with the tabs ripped off, at a baseball game, wondering: why boys get baseball & girls always get the soft
ball, like maybe if I can show you I can withstand a normal baseball, not a girl-sized one, to the shin,
demonstrate my value, then perhaps you will understand
I can survive other things, too—a Midwest Holocaust, self-flagellation in liquid form, winter
white reflects all the colors, rejects & refuses them, & I find something sinister about that, too.

III.

The entire year was spent in college town's downtown, piano bar & pour some sugar on me, lighter
fluid vodka crans, making our fathers proud, new dimensions—new depth new height new weight—to
the word tanking, parking garage maze I've no earthly idea how we escaped; I saw no evidence of exit
wounds when I lost my soul
to dull grief. Then, my friends started killing themselves
for real, & when he uses a shotgun, at least you know he meant it. What makes a person pull a trigger
with a toe?

IV.

Twentysomething rage against the dying of the light.
Twentysomething shame; drunk at work on something cheap
skirt blue-green wavy stripes, frills.
You wanted to know & be known. Velcro plastic rhinestones
in your hair.

Everyone who worked at Abercrombie was told they were a model, were trained in thin fabrics, puke &
rally, ratty jeans look best crumpled on a floor.

I want my body to be a perfect machine.

My mother came back, but part of her still lives there, in the tangled forest of wires & harsh beeping
things.

I go back to find her
sometimes. In drugs, two bottles of wine. I look for parts of her
left behind. I fear
every time
I'm leaving parts of my own.

V.

If you cannot draw a straight line on your life map, point A to B, don't blame the ruler you threw out.

Learn to be still.

VI.

The older we get, the harder it is to recover. I stopped talking
in my sleep about the time you started. You tell me to look for the helpers, & I look for rose geraniums;
trailing pothos; a Wandering Jew. I have always been the sea holly, the monstera—in youth group, Va-
cation Bible School. True Love Waits, while I simply studied no. Maybe witches were burned because
they befriended the fire. I do not owe you straight hair, easy things; I do not owe you twirl.

We are always little kids—
do you understand?

We are little children
-who have little children,
-drive cars,
-do the best we can.

VII.

They call it hyperfocus, when you laser your eyes so sharp you think you see the cellular level, gravita-
tional waves, feel the impending pole shift.

Something like adrenaline makes me drink, reminds me my knife
technique

is terrible, poor form, sore loser, feel free
to write me when you get your shit together.

Give up the ghost.

VIII.

I have always been the embarrassment, never the bride. Hold your purse for you.

IX.

All this love has made me soft.

Our love is cocoa butter, coconut popsicle, while you coach baseball & I pretend to write.

The truth is a moving target; run laterally & away, laterally & away. Zig zag when your trouble comes,
& my OCD is still trying to reason the order of things.

Lindsey Novak is a writer who followed the sun west from her native Missouri Ozarks to the dusty Arizona East Valley. She holds an MA in writing from Missouri State University and currently teaches composition across three Arizona campuses. Her recent work appears in The Fourth River literary journal. She is a poetry reader for Gigantic Sequins. She spends her weekends trying not to fall off mountains and appreciating the resilience of vulnerable life in harsh terrain.

Peaks and Valleys

BY ANNE STRAND

if someday I make it
beyond these

[constraints]

then I enter a world
I don't know.

I've never even seen the mountains
without the layer of fog.

who's to say
the peaks and valleys

are really there?

Bones

BY ANNE STRAND

to be exquisite
shamed
shameful
resilient

to have this body

bones
ten toes and a
curved back

so I can crawl
away

I suppose
I'll never really know
what love is
until I bury myself
in this rich soil

one day I'll see
all of them

the bodies that hold
tales of survival

carry me home

woman
women
turn me inside out

Marching Toward Color

BY ANNE STRAND

I'm marching toward color

Boots sinking in the sand
the weight of my belongings
heavy on my back

I'm marching toward a sky
of iridescent horizons
toward an abyss of
bleeding ink

I'm marching toward the color
I see in my dreams

wall-papered corridors
lipstick smeared on white paper

I'm marching from
all the poems I've left undone

pages with wrinkled corners
and blotted ink

I'm marching toward
the sun

that threatens to blind me

Anne Strand is a writer from Maine. Her poems and short stories have appeared in *Sonora Review*, *The Metaworker*, *Westwind*, and more. She is on twitter @anniestrannie.

Extraterrestrial

BY ERIKA GALLION

“Have you ever seen a UFO?”

“What?”

She paused.

“A UFO... like, in the sky?” Her voice pitched in recognition of their tension.

“What- what the fuck?”

She sighed, chest tightening in awareness. He was still raw from last night.

“Oh, I- I guess this road, you know. Being on this stretch of country road just reminds me of when I saw one. Remember? I told you about that once, right?”

He didn’t reply. His eyes were forward, pupils widening with multiple kinds of exasperation.

“Yeah, I guess it’s something about the potholes or maybe.. the salt-gray color of the road? I don’t know. It’s familiar...” The thought continued inwardly: the way the headlights show only a few trees on the side of the road at a time. She thought of all the things we couldn’t know about what was inside.

She looked dreamily out of the passenger side window, watching the ghosts of still-bare trees waving to her, impressed to be noticed.

“My mom and I saw a UFO one night out this way. We were at a high school football game and we got lost and-“

“You’ve told me this. A few times.”

“Right.” She paused again.

“Well, have you? Seen one, I mean?”

Sighing, he put his forehead in his left hand. “No. I haven’t.”

The conversation stilled. She didn’t know why she brought this up, or why she thought he might have any thoughts on the subject. She did this sometimes- resorted to the existential, the weird, the unknown, in order to bridge some kind of gap. He used to like this about her, used to find it endearing, a discrete and masked way of showing her vulnerability. Once, she remembered, in their early days, they’d stumbled upon a disagreement, one of the first that mattered, that stung them in a way that shocked, catapulting them from adoration to fragility. It was the morning after he’d met her parents, the two of them cuddled close in her twin-sized childhood bed, freezing even with sweatshirts and socks on. Hey, he said, rubbing his nose into her cheek the way she loved; you were kind of hard on your dad last night. Are you okay?

He was seriously quiet in the driver’s seat. Her fingers followed the path of the rain drops down her passenger side window, the fatter drops staggering behind the smaller ones, inching in odd, pained ways as if not wanting to dissolve. He was still quiet, the only sound the windshield wipers of the rental car, slightly sticking at the edges of the glass, pulling with a strange, begrudging noise.

I didn’t expect him to be drinking, she’d replied, stiffening her neck and backing

away from him. Yeah, I thought that might be it... The food he made though- what a spread. She sat up then, rigid with an awareness that he was not wounded in the same places she was, a dawning that he, even he, would not be able to understand, would never experience the quickened heart rate of her specific white-hot rage or conceive of the way it consumed her, bit by bit and then totally. She thought this kind of love, the largest, best, healthiest love would make that kind of supercharged empathy possible. But not even he could sit with her in her dark room of pain; the laceration would keep opening, and he would not see the blood. She'd said something harsh then, something about him being unable to understand, a dig at his happily-married parents, his attention-giving father. She left the room, walking to the bathroom in the dark, hearing her father snoring where he'd passed out last night on the couch downstairs. She sighed, stopped, climbed back into bed with him. After a few beats of silence, she whispered: so what's the afterlife look like for you?

He knew this about her now. Anticipated it, even. And that was the crux of it, right? That love could transform, would transform, from something dazzling to something grayed, from learning to knowing.

"I guess you won't be the one to finish the conversation," he said.

She sighed, her fingers falling from the rain drops at the window into her lap. He was angry with her, silent at breakfast that morning, masking his annoyance with a Murakami novel in front of his half-eaten waffle, masked again on the road with their favorite film podcast playing on the speakers. She'd left her friend's wedding last night without him, walked to their hotel room upstairs from the reception alone. They'd flown in for this, each paying money they didn't have, and she'd left him alone in a room of her friends, high school Midwesterners he had very little in common with. She'd ignored his phone calls, stripped out of her floor-length pink dress, and buried herself in the King-size bed, makeup staining the white sheets, bobby pins poking her scalp. He came to the room soon afterward, concerned, guessing she'd gotten sick from too much white wine; instead, she was crying silently, white pillow graying from her mascara, fake eyelashes crooked and bent. What's wrong he'd asked, gently, rubbing her back with an open palm, are you okay?

"I told you, I didn't mean it. I was just... emotional and a little drunk and seeing all of those people in one room again after twelve years I don't know I just. I wanted to be alone," she said.

"Yeah, I get the needing to be alone thing. Let's not pretend that's what this argument is about."

It was only last night, but it felt like months ago. Their arguments had a way of exhausting her more than anything else- their arcs were always the same, her airy disillusionment and distance from him, his sharp and cutting anger, her sharp and cutting anger back, back and forth, until there was nothing left to say, until they both rubbed the sides of their faces in disbelief, in fatigue. To her it seemed pointless to walk the same plank, to hurl their familiar bereavements with one another into the space of a rented Toyota Camry in the middle of no-cell reception Michigan- he was who he was and she was, and they would continue arguing like this, over things like this, or they wouldn't.

It's one day. Just one day in a life forced together, she'd said twelve hours ago, eyes closed. His hand vacated her back. What do you mean? She didn't say anything else, no matter how much he prodded her. Eventually, he went to sleep beside her, and she stayed awake, curled on her right side, naked, bobby pins still stabbing her neck and scalp, her sad, lonely thoughts still beating with scary, triumphant echoes.

She knew what he thought she meant. She knew that what she said was hurtful, that it was deliberate and personal even in its ambiguity. Maybe she shouldn't have used the word 'forced.' But maybe that was the truth. Maybe that's what she was scared of. And maybe that's why she needed that empty hotel room, needed to shove his suitcase and his cologne and even his computer charger into the closet, away from her sight. She needed to remember what it felt like to be alone. To be absent of the threading together that comes with love.

How could she tell him what she meant? Sometimes she wished that he could know her better, could transcend human limitations and occupy the recesses of her consciousness- there were not adequate words that would allow him to understand how much she loved him, how precious their routines were to her (coffee in the same cups in the same position on the couch they'd bought three years ago on craigslist for \$50, the sunlight streaming in and illuminating her book, glaring his computer screen, their walk to the library every other weekend, hands held in the way they liked best, no longer needing to experiment with finger positions, the positions they slept in, unconscious habits that were speckled with a loveliness almost too foreign to bear)? Had anyone ever been truly able to communicate their love? Their confusions? Their aches? She'd expected, when she was younger, when she was suffering through unimportant heartbreaks, that a love this big (and it was big- the biggest, she knew) would be a new, extraterrestrial kind of cognizance. And it was, sometimes. And it wasn't.

"I don't want to become uninteresting to you," she said, quietly. "I mean, what do we do now? Now that you've seen the mole on my ass so much that you could probably draw it dimension for dimension, now that you know what my shitty-made chicken tacos tastes like? You know people get to this point like Marcie and Taylor and it's like yeah, they love each other but it's boring and so they have this grand event and then two days later it's boring again. I don't know, what if I bore you? What if--"

A loud, impossibly loud, thump resonated from underneath the car.

"Fuck!" he yelled, car veering into the left lane and then off the road completely.

She knew that noise, recognized it from the few times she'd felt her or her friend's cars drive over animals. It was shocking, the way it almost toppled her car, set her heart into a frenzy so quick that it felt like she'd overdosed on fear. They'd hit something.

He put his forehead against the steering wheel. He looked tired. For the first time she wondered if he too had stayed awake, curled away from her on his left side.

"I really don't want to look," he said, "I've never hit anything before."

"Oh... aw, no. It's a cat. I can see the shape of its ears in our taillights."

She opened the door, pulled her unbuttoned jacket tighter against her torso. It was a tom cat, all white, fluffy with matted fur and nearly-pink ears. Something was falling out near its stomach. She swallowed her vomit.

was a tom cat, all white, fluffy with matted fur and nearly-pink ears. Something was falling out near its stomach. She swallowed her vomit.

“We have to move if off the road,” she told him, leaning into the car, her breath forming a cloud against the cold.

“What? What are you talking about? We don’t have anything to pick it up with.”

“Well, I don’t know, we’ll use our hands or my jacket or- I don’t care, I just need you to move it.”

“Oh, I have to move it? You’re the one who wants the cat off the road,” he said. She guessed that he recognized her impatient insistence. “So if you want it moved, you move it.”

Here they were, at the impasse. It was the point in their arguments when he resorted to his trusted chide remarks or childlike behavior. He knew it and was ashamed of it in his more conscious moments- but here he was not present. He was angry, and he wanted to wound.

“Fine. Fucking fine.” She slammed the door.

She walked with force back to the cat’s body. She could have anticipated that this would be his play had she known they’d be in this situation. That’s how scripted their relationship had become, a playbook that they’d both read so much that the binding had become untethered. Fucking Christ, she thought. He knows how much I hate roadkill.

It pained her to see animals in the street, to see their carcasses and their innards spread out for the world to see. It was humiliating. How could people drive by, running over that lifeless thing, pretending that death wasn’t something to be noticed? As if they too weren’t just skin and blood, awake on one day and forever asleep the next?

It was odd; she knew his tactics, knew the specific ways in which he’d attack her (almost as much as she knew her own methods). But knowing didn’t take away the pain. She found it strange, depressing, and a little bit intoxicating that he still had the ability to hurt her.

The smell was bright. The car had ripped the cat’s stomach, and something pink and wet and ugly was falling out of it. She pressed her gloved hands to her face, inhaling the scent of cheap fabric. What am I doing? She thought, her breath slowing from anger to desolation. Why does this matter so much to me? She felt herself crying, the quiet giving-up and giving-in that always felt as if she was feeling it for the first time. Her tears were hot, confused in their trajectory down her goose-bumped face. She took off her jacket- it was something he’d bought for her on her last birthday, one she’d picked up twice and put back twice at Topshop. It felt too bright for her, too obnoxious in its pattern. It’s perfect on you, he’d told her after she opened it. And it was.

She reached forward, the jacket touching the cat, and she stopped. Okay, she thought, I touched it. That wasn’t so bad. She formed her hands around the body more forcefully the second attempt, intent on picking the thing up, but she was shocked, disgusted, at the hard, flimsy form that the cat had become, and she instantly dropped it back on the pavement. Fuck, she whispered, crying harder now. She thought of the cat’s contents spilling out into the road, and knew that if that happened, she’d be doomed.

“Well, I guess this day is like your UFO day,” he said, crouching down beside her.

“What?” she said harshly, eyes downcast, mouth puckered at the smell.

“Didn’t you and your mom hit an animal that night too?”

Oh. She exhaled. She hadn't remembered that part of the story, but he was right. She was seventeen and scared out of her mind, not at the UFO sighting but at the darkness, at the fact that there were cars on the other side of the forest that couldn't see what her and her mother had seen, that there were lives that were being lived that were drastic in their pain yet unknowable. They'd hit something then, a small bump underneath their car. She remembers, then, looking at her mother, asking if they should stop, hoping that she would say no. They'd kept driving.

"You talk a lot, but I do listen," he said.

"I wish you'd talk more," she replied.

He sighed, put his hand on her knee. I love you, she thought. He thought. They knew.

Eventually, with her help, he blanketed the dead cat in her jacket, placed his arms under the mass of it as if anticipating her fear of spillage. They walked to the side of the road.

"This is good," she said, "thank you."

He kept walking. "Where are you going?"

He didn't reply. She followed him, their car still running yards away, rain still hitting the windows without her noticing. They walked into the woods, gray trees lonely in their winteriness surrounding them, the woman and the man and the dead thing in their arms.

He knelt down, delicately digging into the hard soil. She understood then that he was burying it. And this, she realized, was what she wanted, what she hadn't even known she'd wanted for the dead thing, for herself. An understanding. An empathy brighter than the orange of her jacket and the pink of the cat, larger than the potholes on that country road and the unfamiliar light of that UFO.

She helped him bury the cat, dark soil covering her beloved jacket. It was still bright under that temporary covering.

Erika Gallion is an emerging writer originally from the rusty city of Canton, Ohio. She now lives and works in Los Angeles at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Erika has been published by *Women's Review of Books*, *Entropy*, and more. She reads and writes with her cat on her lap- follow her @fictitiouserika on Instagram and Twitter to get to know her.

Wheel of Fortune

BY JENNIFER FAYLOR

That year of my life
was covered by a black amnesia,
like a boat leaving its foggy port
after midnight—
I never remembered where I was going.
I wore an elaborate sequined costume
and hid underground.
I visited the bomb shelters
and told them things were better now
even though they weren't—
I was lonely. I was bored.
I was asking the Vanna White of my heart
to cross the stage, reach up and touch
the glowing rectangle, reveal a letter
to help make sense of things.

Ghost Note

BY JENNIFER FAYLOR

A ghost note haunts me
for a somber octave of months
long past the end
of an ill-fated affair
after so much despair
after reaching the point
where you throw your hands
in the air, and wave them
like you just don't care.

It's the little black pit
of every moment's stomach.

But when it's raining hard like this,
when the inky sky empties itself
of the weight it's been carrying,
and we can hear it hit
the neighbor's tin roof
so loud you'd think
it was starting a war
or falling in love
or anything other than just
falling—

I can barely hear it anymore.

In Sickness

BY JENNIFER FAYLOR

There is a ceremony of solitude
in sickness—the holy solo fasts,
the hazy mirage memories
of a singular life, always led poorly
in this lens, since after all it got you here
to this moment, when the fever moan
is the only ghost in yr evening. Everything
gets so lonely quiet, I know. With nothing
to entertain you but the dark theater
of your mind. You make promises,
pantomime miracles. It's no longer
up to god alone! You kneel on porcelain,
yr world is swirling, tunnels
so very far away & you bow yr head,
stitch yr eyes closed. If you can still hear me
remember that you're not alone.

Confessions

BY JENNIFER FAYLOR

Today I bought a \$13 chocolate cake
from Walmart, the world's largest gun retailer,
& brought it home to bed
despite the fact that I have a toothache
so bad I don't care about beauty anymore, and
everyone thought it was my birthday—No! I said,
I'm dying inside, and I hate balloons,
they're always trying to escape.

Jennifer Faylor is a Filipino American poet and literary editor. Her first poetry chapbook, *The Case of the Missing Lover* (Dancing Girl Press) is a choose-your-own adventure. *Edison's Ghost Machine* (Aldrich Press) is her debut full-length poetry collection, inspired by the rumor that Thomas Edison tried to invent a machine to talk to the dead.

As a freelance editor she helps others polish their rough written works into gems. She holds a creative writing BA (Hunter College), a poetry MFA (Sarah Lawrence College), and is an editor for *Milk Press*. A native of NYC's turnstile chaos, she now pens emotionally evocative, imaginative poems in Washington's Cascadian grandeur. jenniferfaylor.com

What Happens to One Bad Bone?

BY CRISTINA VAN ORDEN

every forgotten place
bears down on the bone
chalk against chafe against slate that rubs it to ash

once made of marble
sphere in orbit around my sun
places I could go

forward back
Upward to a high road
into the piston fumes

into a lover's sighs
supple and synchronized
he kissed me on the ridges on the blades

opened the windows to my warm body
we were was just a scent, then
an odd displacement

a crack of the filament
suspended in smoke
one slow demon curling up around the cliffs

of my bone that juts out into a square

Cristina Van Orden is a new and emerging artist, with work forthcoming in Silver Needle Press. She is the Associate Editor for Lunch Ticket and an MFA candidate at Antioch University Los Angeles. Her current residence is in Los Angeles where she enjoy life with her three boys, Chorkie, and husband.

The Witnesses

BY EMILY COLLINS

My mother brought me to see Miss Wendy, the lady who'd burned off her breasts the day her husband died, with a candle, or so the children say.

Mother met Miss Wendy at the market. She had grabbed Mother's hand and placed it on a mango. The best ones look like Rothko paintings, she told Mother, and had a sweet aroma around the stem.

Her chimney looked like one from a fairy tale. I'd always seen its top from my bedroom window, a stack of sullen pink bricks with a trail of smoke above the trees. I imagined doves swinging from her windows and fat tulips in mid-bloom round the lawn. But no birds waited for us as we approached her door. Instead, a stuffed coyote snarled at us from the window. Before Mother knocked, I tugged at her blouse.

"What is it?" she said, smiling.

I was afraid to speak the words Mother had used to tell me about her friend. "Mom, how did Miss Wendy burn off her breasts?"

"It was an accident," she said.

We lived in the heart of the Texas Hill Country, in a little town known for its family bakeries, burning red antique stores, post-menopausal wine tastings, and the Found Museum: a two story building that houses the world's second largest apple seed. The place ices over every several years and schools shut down because of it. One year a leaf came to be known as God's Fingernail. It had turned orange and gold, the only one, shimmering in the sun amidst all the greens.

My mother was twenty-nine the day I was born but didn't look a day over seventeen. She'd traipse the town in her overalls with me tucked in her sling. The locals knew when she was coming. They could see her from their windows as she walked down the hill and would marvel at her flowing strawberry hair.

There weren't many people who never visited our house. Mother worked at the florist and invited her customers home where they were greeted by stacks of overdue library books and, for a time, my father in the stained apron he wore while working on his statues.

I wasn't to disturb him. I could see him through the window of his shed, hunched on a stool with a strap from his overalls dangling at his waist. Mother never bothered him either. Instead, she put flowers by his door. She did this even after he left for that trip to Florence with that bug-eyed waitress who always knew how many crackers I liked in my soup.

I remember the day Father made the statue of the cherub.

"I think it's the worst thing I've ever done," he said as he set it in my lap.

"It's beautiful," I said.

"It's yours."

I wanted to place it at the end of our drive. We didn't have any pets, but I liked the idea of having something greet me when I came home. Fireflies danced in the bushes as we walked down with the statue, watching us like yellow eyes. I was about to point them out, but Father asked what it's like to be a child.

"Don't you already know?" I said.

The day Mother met Miss Wendy, I was at home eating chips and digging for buried treasures beneath the cushions on our sofa. Father's statues watched me, three-headed creatures with scary mouths made of porcelain china.

I'd fallen asleep by the time Mother returned. She woke me to say she'd made a new friend.

"She's invited us to her house for drinks." Mother had a smell that reminded me of melons and brie, and she always looked clean, even when she hadn't bathed for days. "Miss Wendy is quite the character, as you'll see."

I'd never been to a character's house. Every day, characters flocked to ours, where Mother greeted them with a tray of powdered lemon squares. One time a man who stunk of sulfur arrived with dirt on his cheeks and a toothy accordion in his hands. I sat on the couch while he played. Mother clapped and danced.

Whenever she opened the door for these people, it was as though they walked straight through me. Not even my father's statues were discussed. The people only wanted her, and she wanted them. I knew when we were done with them for the day. A silence hung about, ethereal and cold. I'd ask her if she knew when Father was coming home, but her cheeks would fade, and she'd say let's get ice cream. I couldn't tell her how Rocky Road hurt my stomach, or how I'd seen some boys destroy Father's cherub, drawing its stony blood, or how I missed Father so much I screamed into my pillow until my eyes and throat were sore. I just dipped my finger in the ice cream and put it on the tip of my nose and crossed my eyes while Mother laughed with all her heart.

By the time Mother knocked on Miss Wendy's door, my fingers were in my mouth. Mother kept clearing her throat. I'd never seen her like that.

"And please, Anna," she said, "try not to look at them."

"Look at what?" I said.

"Her breasts."

"I thought she burned them off."

"Possibly."

"Then what am I not supposed to look at?"

Miss Wendy appeared and beamed at Mother. "Caroline," she said.

I stared at Miss Wendy's heavy tongue and teeth like corn. Her chapped lips formed a grin bordered by dimples. She wore red tights and a linen blouse that fell to her knees. She wasn't tall, but bent down anyway to get a better look at me.

I could feel the sweat on her palm as she cupped my chin and feared her mustard-colored nails would slice me open. I held back my tears as she widened the door to let us in.

There were cracks in the floor and a coffee table with sugar cookies and a pitcher

of Sangria. Mother poured herself a glass. On Miss Wendy's couch, I felt small, a puppet waiting for Mother to fill my mouth with words. Miss Wendy sat in a wicker chair and smiled. I looked at the dead coyote.

"Don't mind him," Miss Wendy said. "He can't get you."

It was strange watching Mother in that house, this woman who'd never learned how to be a guest. She drank so fast that the ice cubes humming in the pitcher almost became a song. Wind swept through the house. Miss Wendy's blouse rippled like a sheet on a line. She drummed her fingers on her knee and smiled.

Two empty chairs rattled on the porch. Green hills speckled with bushes and an early wave of dancing blue bonnets framed the yard. In the distance a stream trickled in the sun. A lone fisherman thigh-deep in it kept on reeling only to find his lure had been ignored.

"Your house is so pretty," I told Miss Wendy, struggling not to stare at her chest, wondering what I couldn't see.

"You certainly have grown, Anna," she said. I looked at Mother. Miss Wendy chuckled. "This might sound strange," she said to Mother, "but Anna and I have already met. It was very brief. I congratulated you," she said, turning to me, "after the play. I wanted to let you know my great grandson was 'The Voice.'"

Two years before, my school had put on a musical about Jonah and the Whale. The art teacher had constructed a seven-foot-long cardboard whale and painted it white. As "The Tail," my part was to make the tail flip every five seconds. "The Voice" was Larry Brunson, a twelve-year old who weighed over two hundred pounds and had a gorgeous baritone that tamed the audience's whispers. He had no neck and long dark hairs on his arms and legs. He looked like a poisonous caterpillar as he swayed in his seat, the rolls of fat on his stomach shaking with vibrato.

"Sorry," I told Miss Wendy. "I don't remember that."

"I thought you kids were wonderful," she said. "Wouldn't you agree, Caroline?"

"I didn't go," Mother said, and took another drink. "The Bible doesn't belong in public schools."

"I never turn down the chance to be part of an audience," Miss Wendy said.

My father picked me up from rehearsal a few times. One day we took home another girl, too, Penny. Her mom with her faded jeans was waiting in the drive. Father turned on the radio, and they went into the house. I pressed my forehead against the seat and tried to breathe while Penny's eyes burned my face.

I followed Mother's eyes to the uniformed man in the photograph on the mantle. He had a dimpled chin and sad cow eyes that were muddled and black.

"Who's that?" Mother slurred.

"That's my husband," Miss Wendy said. "It was taken shortly after the baby was born."

"Was he in the Marines?" Mother said.

"Thomas served for several years."

"Where is he now?" I said.

"He passed away, dear."

I looked at my feet. "I'm sorry."

Miss Wendy shut her eyes and rocked in her chair.

"Did he die in the war?" Mother said.

Miss Wendy let out a shriek. "That filthy drunk died on shore leave!"

Mother's mouth moved, but said nothing. Miss Wendy poured herself a glass of Sangria and went on.

"Thomas was always such a sweet man. So good to me and the baby. Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise. But he was a glutton, I tell you, who could out-drink my own sweet mother, and that's really saying something."

I watched Mother fiddle with her wedding band. Miss Wendy pressed her hand against her chest.

"In the end, his drink got the best of him," Miss Wendy said. "That and gravity, I guess. He got so drunk one day he fell off the boat. When my little boy got older I told him his daddy fell off the boat and drowned. Not a complete lie, I guess. But it was so much more than that, of course. We couldn't have the funeral because of his condition. The boat was up against the dock. Just like that!" Miss Wendy shouted, and clapped. "My poor Thomas fell and was crushed against the dock. Clap, clap, clap! Just like that."

Mother buried her face in her hands and sobbed. Miss Wendy handed her a napkin and patted her back.

"There, there. I shouldn't go running my mouth about such things. It's not good for you or the girl."

"So he was there," Mother stammered, "and then he wasn't. He just wasn't."

Miss Wendy held Mother's face.

"And he will come back to you," she said. "Look at you. How couldn't he?"

Mother nodded and excused herself. Miss Wendy returned to her chair and smiled.

"Your mother will be all right. She's just upset about a few things, but it's nothing for you to worry about."

Even then I knew she was wrong. She was wrong about me, wrong about my mother. There was no way for her to know what lay ahead. She couldn't have known everything that was going on either: how we Wright girls were stranded on the shore, ready to break into a million pieces, while my father was on the other side of the world, complete.

"That's the saddest story I've ever heard," I said.

"You have to remember neither of us was there. What happened to my husband was just melodrama. But, honey, there were people who saw what happened, the witnesses. For them, it was a performance."

When Mother returned, her face was swollen. It was time to go, she said, and thanked Miss Wendy. I wanted to ask Miss Wendy about what had caused her to burn her breasts right off her body. I imagined her showing me what wasn't there. I saw her lift her blouse to reveal her body like the trunk of a tree with the bark soaked red from rain. I wanted more from her, from

rain. I wanted more from her, from the woman who had watched me move the whale when my parents wouldn't, back when I wanted only to drown in the voice of her great grandson.

At the door, she and Mother said goodbye while I looked out at the stream.

The fisherman was in it, still. His line was still empty. He stood there with his head against his rod, as if deep in prayer. Mother kept telling me to get in the Blazer but like the fisherman, I couldn't move.

Emily Collins is a writer in Portland, ME whose work has appeared in *The Curator*, *Gone Lawn Journal*, and *The Westchester Review*. She has studied fiction writing at Sarah Lawrence College and has been a reader for American Short Fiction.



Load

BY GALE ACUFF

I love Jesus a Hell of a lot, that's
what they tell me to do in Sunday School
--that's what they tell me in Sunday School to
do I should say so I try my damndest
but for ten years old I sin something fierce,
shoplifting and cheating in regular
school, not that I shoplift in school, and I
fail my share of tests, I hate studying,
I'd rather knowledge come naturally
I guess and in the Bible it says some
-where to knock and it shall be opened and
seek and ye shall find--ye means you--and ask
and it will be given to ye, I mean
you, which sounds pretty easy to me but
not much we get in Sunday School works out
-side it but maybe that's religion, its
point that is, and after all didn't God

take a load off His feet at the end of
the week, maybe the first week there ever
was, if He has feet I mean, He can have
anything He wants, I guess, He's God, but
that doesn't make Him God and when I die
and go to Heaven to be judged and be
-fore I'm cast into Hell I might throw my
-self in there and save angels the trouble,
I'll bring it up with Him, I mean how I
might have been super-sinful, I mean when
I was alive but that I don't condemn
Him for that and when I've got Him softened
up I'll ask Him why He needed a day
of rest or is that just symbolism,
I got that word from regular school, but

just hear Him say to me What do you mean
just symbolism, not a question but
a statement, really, God's nothing if He
isn't clever, I admire that but not

enough, I guess, to get my soul saved, but
whatever's my point and if I get right
with God as for now I love Him too much
to love Him enough, if you know what I
mean, I do and I hope He does, too, but
He'll send me to Hell all the same, not that
I wouldn't do just that if the tables
were turned but if they were then I don't
want children so I won't have a Jesus
of my own to die for Him, for God I
mean, no, I'll do the braver thing and die
myself and raise myself from the dead, no
ordinary trick, so I'd out-God God.

As for His sins, the number's unholy.

Gale Acuff has had poetry published in *Ascent*, *McNeese Review*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Poem*, *Adirondack Review*, *Maryland Poetry Review*, *Florida Review*, *Slant*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Arkansas Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Orbis*, and many other journals. He has authored three books of poetry, all from BrickHouse Press: *Buffalo Nickel*, *The Weight of the World*, and *The Story of My Lives*. He has taught university English courses in the US, China, and Palestine.

Grown Child

BY HEIDI TURNER

You fill the silence in me with quiet,
so that when the trees in me fall
I know someone hears them,
and when the sunlight slants through leaves
I can feel your wonder;

I can hear your rainstorms
beating against the windows;
looking in your eyes is an adventure —
when you are filled with questions
and I am empty of my answers

there is space enough to listen
to the question you ask between the words,
wind enough to justify the way I insist
on holding you until the storm is over,
or until the tide comes in.

Driving Away

BY HEIDI TURNER

Lightning struck in all directions
around and through the sacred mountains,
inflaming canyons, highlighting the hill
I lived on, the annual letters burned
to mark the early summers.

All those distant days in the Midwest,
I dreamed we would find our way back;
and now I watch the nightmare fires
engulf the future where I leave again,
tracking time in rain and ash.

The storms of the past overlap:
my head leaves marks on window,
an iconic imprint
on my four-wheeled abbey,
while liturgical thunder rolled on.

Heidi Turner is a writer and musician from Maui, Hawaii. She holds a Master's in English from Azusa Pacific University and has been published in the Adirondack Review as well as Abstract Magazine, Cirque, and Linden Avenue Literary Journal. You can follow her work at www.hidturner.com or on twitter @hi_dturner.

vernacular

BY SHUYU CAO

ma, on your maiden voyage,
seawater soaked
your travel suit.
for your first meal here, you boiled
your clothes in a pot:
 salt collected and
 cleaved to the circular rim.
ma, how did chicken taste,
 its flavor extracted by oceanic sediments?
your child was an anchor in the kitchen sink,
cry snagged
 by rocks piped in airways.
her first breath made a plunging exchange
exchange of elements

water to air. ma,

show me how to kiss
the top of your
salt and pepper head.
whet me into lyrics worth rescuing
and i will brine your meal in fixed silence
at every port
 lining the bloated sea.

vinegar

BY SHUYU CAO

in a dream, i am in my high school gymnasium
standing in line for southern ribs.
smoked ribs wafting, glistening red in
north carolina barbeque sauce.

not the bland south carolina recipe.

im talking about a generous vinegary concoction
paprika, pepper, cayenne and dripped
in oh, that smooth
thick
golden
honey.

my mouth waters, vinegar shimmies her malty
taste down my tongue. she pauses at the taste buds, tells
me she has read all the books in the galaxy. in darkness,
she held prismatic knowledge, turned and turned, light
contemplating through.
while she bubbled ethanal and oxygen,
anticipating birth, she thought about settling as beer, a faster
process. but the secret of life, she tells me
is here.

ba ba joins me in line,
hungry for all the books in the galaxy. a
white woman behind us yells,
“this is america.
we wait in line, we wait our turn,
chink.” she yells until she is red as bbq sauce, red
drunk from power. but ba ba,

he smiles at her,
southern smile, buddha eyes,
vinegary patience.

when i woke up, my forefinger and thumb were
pinched together by north carolina

vinegary bbq sauce dripped in oh, that smooth
thick
golden
honey.

离 / forgiveness

BY SHUYU CAO

i am not ma
who smashed three fetuses for
fertilizer. from her garden,
she saved me
the largest pear.
juice melted to sugar
at the tip
of my tongue where
the second meaning gathered
its poison.

you begged me for a pear
 but i only had tiny ones,
 i want to give you globesized fruits so that
 the muscle from your thumb to middle finger
 pulsed

if you grip them.

when ma said i was muscle that fell from her heart,
i knew i couldnt keep you.
giving birth is woman
born again
from her most vibrant parts but

i only have this selfchoking heart
to give you.

a womans body leaks life like clockwork,
but my body is no longer a poem. rather, a
vessel of genetic trauma,
carrier to anonymous feeling

and anything unnamed should not pass on.

roots

BY SHUYU CAO

after ma ma left me at six months old,
i refused sleep for three days,
an ailment that shrunk me
into a mandrake root:
a plant that dreamed of becoming human.
but me, the reverse: wide awake,
i clenched around longing, receding
back into a hopeless earth.

i wanted to grow roots even
back then. searching limbs
for a thing that cannot grow lonely.
senseless desire, we were nomadic people:
my ancestors, and my ma ma.
they stay as long as the soil was fertile,
and always left behind
all that they could not take.

my ma ma could not take me forward,
so i refused sleep for three days.
to cure me, they pricked my ankles,
releasing droplets of blood into the earth.
tension was plasmaborne,
but they forgot the weight of blood,
how deep it travels,
its impermeability:
it may never be absorbed.
rather, it takes a piece of its environment
to the next stop.

so i carried my tension over the years
with me around the globe,
collecting memorabilia of belonging.
searching,

longing,

piecing
a mosaic of home.

Shuyu Cao was born in China and grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. After graduating from Davidson College with a BA in English, she made her way out west to Los Angeles to explore new storytelling mediums. Because of her upbringing, her poetics are heavily influenced by the Chinese and American Southern cultures that raised her. She carries a Southern tang and Chinese cultural references in all of her art: performance art, page poetry, and film scripts.

Throes, Con't

BY ROBERT MARTIN

Pull on a sock because those toes are cold. Put on my pants 'cause I'm supposed to. Brush my teeth to justify owning a toothbrush. Need that fluoride, mind control. Glance at my pills. Eat breakfast and smoke to justify having brushed my teeth. Full stomach, hair combed, clothes on, phone in pocket, bag packed. Drive to work, not thinking about the gun.

The world blurring past, I'm a vantage point inside myself. Cars and trucks fizz in the surrounding lanes like bullets. Habit pulls me into the mall's parking garage. Sit in my ticking car, smoke a final cigarette before clocking in. Walk past the customers, consumers, customization. Costume, façade, self-image. See my reflection, wince. Roll up the metal mesh and unlock the glass doors of the Sunglass Hut, flip on the lights, the computer, clock in just a tick before opening. Turn the radio onto the crisp, meaningless pap that the handbook requires. Can't stand it. Plug in my discman, crank up metal to keep the customers out. Pull out the green notebook and write down everything I know for sure.

Stare out the open door to the glass-walled elevator. Only the handicapped use it. All shift it's wheelchairs. Little robotic seats, steering nozzle on the armrest. I write this in the green book: "Steering nozzle on the armrest," and it has otherworldly significance, like everything. A lost patron approaches the elevator. She turns, glances at my store. Our eyes connect, and we both know that we know each other. I don't think about the gun.

"Rick?"

"Holy shit."

Rests her elbows on my counter, shouts over the music. "I haven't seen you in forever. Are you still at Lewis and Clark?"

"No. Dropped out."

"Well that explains it."

Can't think of her name. Beautiful girl, lived in the dorm next to mine. Less than a year ago. She's a sophomore, like I'd be. I slept with her roommate, I remember, and we'd stopped talking. Now I blush in the Sunglass Hut.

"You never called me," she says.

"Was I supposed to call you?" I turn down the metal.

"One time you said you wanted to talk to me, and that you felt I could understand things about you no one else could."

It was when I was in love with her, before I'd slept with her roommate and fallen out of love with her. "Sorry," I say. "I went crazy instead."

She looks at the glasses in the case. "I've actually thought about you a few times. Wondered where you went."

I raise my arms. "The Sunglass Hut."

"You told me you felt calm around me. I remember it because it sounded like such canned bullshit, but you seemed to believe yourself."

I laugh louder than I should. "That sounds about right."

She leans on the glass case the way I'm supposed to tell people not to. "Can I try those on?" She points to Ray-Bans like Will Smith wears in *Men in Black*. Our best sellers. They don't fit her face, and I tell her so. She says, "I like them."

"We have to inventory the Ray-Bans, Oakleys, and Revos. Anything else you can have."

I read her mind. She says it out loud anyway. "I don't want to *steal* them. I'll pay for them."

"They're \$175."

"Ho." She sets them back on the counter. "I only have like \$20. What can I buy for \$20?"

I show her one of the lens cleaning kits I'm supposed to upsell when someone buys glasses. "Or you could go to Target. But seriously, anything other than Ray-Bans, Oakleys, and Revos are yours. They don't inventory the rest. I've taken home hundreds."

She doesn't think it over for long. "Why don't you pick some out for me?"

A woman with a stroller exits the elevator, glances in my shop, turns to her left toward Baby Gap.

Some \$79 glasses fit her better: wide-set frames, broad stems. They accentuate what's already beautiful about her, and she sees that in the mirror. "I have a few things to do in the back," I tell her. "We don't have any security cameras."

There's barely enough room in the back for me to scribble in the green book. A closet of metal shelves crammed with overstock, smell of cellophane and windex. I stay in the dark longer than she stays in the store, then a bit longer. When I come back into the fluorescents, I see the note she left. Stuff it in my pocket, then read what I'd written in the dark: "You can't stay here. Join the army or go to jail."

Then, finally, I think about the gun.

*

Years ago, only once, in Jason's basement. Listening to the Sublime song about the LA riots with Micah and Jason and Jason's enormous little brother. It wasn't loaded, but they all ducked and shouted when I waved it around. If I was to ever pull the trigger of a gun, this would be the gun. Process of elimination.

I call Jason from the checkout counter. He sounds excited to hear from me. His parents are out of town, a couple fraternity brothers are coming over to drink and burn things. I tell him I'll be there, it'll be like old times. He doesn't question which old times I mean; I mean the time when I pointed a gun at him.

Shift relief comes in at four, doesn't notice the missing glasses. I high five the guy like we're friends. Can't think of his name. In the parking lot, I light my cigarette and wander the aisles, find myself standing at the back of my car reading the stickers of bands I like. Drive straight to Jason's parents' house, where suburbs nudge the old farms and untended woods. Forty-minute drive without traffic, but there is traffic. I skip dinner to sit in it.

After sunset, pull up to Jason's parents house and sit out front in my car smelling a few years of high school life, friends I don't have anymore, everybody out of town in new lives, and left only with this halfway friend I dislike enough to consider doing what I'm considering doing.

Smell a fire somewhere in the woods behind his house and follow the scent, then spot the flames through trees and undergrowth and up and over a hill. The woods give way to three dudes sitting around, not talking, drinking beers, already loaded. Two sit on coolers, one on a lawn chair. One by one, heads turn.

“Richie! Fuck yeah!” Jason says, stands up from one of the coolers.

Shake hands with the two I don’t know yet. Receive a cold beer from one of the coolers, thank them, sit in the dirt and watch the flames struggle against each other. The conversation dead, all three of them staring at me. I’m staring back. Witnesses, I’m thinking. Witnesses are good. They could wrestle it away from me, big guys, they could stomp me out. Nobody wants to die. Nobody wants to hurt anyone, either. We’re just looking for a lock and a key, someone to tell us what to do and when, someone to give us a quiet place to read and write. They give people pencils in prison? They give people pencils in prison. Malcolm X wrote a book in prison. Martin Luther King wrote. People write. *The Green Book* would evolve in a way I never could.

Stare into the fire with their flickering faces staring back.

Then one of the brothers breaks a lawn chair by sitting on it.

The other two laugh, yelps and shouts licking upward at the darkness. Frayed nylon bands sprout up from beneath the fallen brother, warped metal tubes still shuddering from the collapse.

“Time to diet, Thompson!” Jason shouts, hilarious, and helps Thompson up. Jason warns, “This is going to smell bad,” and heaps the destroyed chair onto the fire. Sparks rush, swirl in a cloud of plastic stink. Drain my beer and let the carbonation bubble to my sinuses. Straps blacken and melt across the skeletal tubing. Steady voices now, happy and surprised, and talk turns toward where ladies will be found, whose responsibility it will be to attract them.

“I know some ladies,” I say.

“Yeah you do,” says Jason. He tells his fraternity brothers that I was constantly surrounded by girls in high school. I don’t remember this being the case.

I say, “I saw an old friend today. She told me to call her. Can I use your phone?”

Thompson asks if she has any friends.

“Of course,” I say. “I assume. Most people have friends. She’s friendly.”

“The house is unlocked,” Jason says. He shakes an empty can in the air and drops it on the ground. He smacks the several nearby empties and frowns. “Grab some more beer, too.”

*

Jason’s dad keeps a Les Paul on a mount in the living room. Fondle the strings, make an E Major, feel a slight release just at the posturing. Can’t bring myself to pick it all the way up, strum out a progression. Walk through the darkness of the house, not a complete stranger. I’ve been here before.

Jason’s old bedroom has been repurposed. No posters of bikinis, no CD tower. Just a musty bed, stuffy dresser, a couple nondescript paintings like the ones on the back wall of a Goodwill. Open the closet door and glance at the top shelf where Jason had kept the revolver. Nothing but quilts.

Use the kitchen phone and dial the number Caroline left on my counter. She’d written her name, too—I wouldn’t have remembered.

"It's Richie," I say.

"I didn't think you'd call."

"It seemed inevitable on my end. I figured why wait."

"So what's going on, Richie?"

"I'm at a party. In the woods. Beer, fire, three frat boys. I'm supposed to convince you to bring a bunch of girls to join us."

"Sounds fantastic," she says. "So why are you really calling?"

"Just buying time. Just stalling." I try to picture her on the other end, but can't imagine what she could be doing. Eating crackers. Shaving her legs. Washing a dog.

She says, "Well, I don't want to come to your party. But I'll talk on the phone with you."

"I scare you," I say. "That's okay. That's an appropriate response."

The phone's cordless. I wander through the kitchen, opening and closing cupboards. Move to the living room and do the same.

"You left an impression," she says. She means at Lewis and Clark, she means the dorms where I drank and fucked and puked and hid. "People talk about you."

"You mean Elise." The roommate.

"Elise, yeah. You treated her poorly."

"It was the best I could have treated her. I cared for her. I would have hurt her."

"That's a load of shit. You're not a selfless dude."

I picture Caroline naked, touching herself. The lust is sudden and overwhelming. I open a cabinet full of stationery, envelopes and pens. I fondle a letter opener, the tip dull as a butter knife.

"Are you still roommates?" I ask.

"No."

"Friends, though?"

"Not unfriendly, but we don't really talk."

"Elise was a beautiful girl," I say.

"No she wasn't."

Elise's body comes to mind, soft as butter. Stout and unsure of herself, but well traveled and she wrote decent poetry. "Yes she was beautiful," I say. "I treated her poorly."

"Why did you really call?" Caroline says.

"I called because I'm thinking about doing something drastic."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Me too."

I move to a different room, dark and somber. An office. The walls seem tighter, the floor heavier. Dangerous items exist in this room. I wait for my eyes to adjust, but they don't.

Caroline says, "You told me you loved me, once."

"I do love you."

"You have that reaction to a lot of women," she says. I let it lay there. She says, "If you love me you wouldn't have done what you did with Elise."

"Totally irrelevant."

"You knew nothing could happen between us after that."

"That's probably why I did it."

Open a tall cabinet in the dark room and reach inside. Still too dark to see, but my fingers find what I've been looking for.

"I have to go," I say.

"Don't do anything drastic. Call me later."

"Okay. I won't. I will. I love you."

*

Glowing metal rods protrude like a disaster from the fire. Boys are significantly drunker, all three standing now, taking turns punching each other in the chest and exclaiming at the blows.

"Look what I found," I say. They turn with wide-open faces.

"Shit. I forgot you were here," says the brother who'd hardly spoken.

"What took you so long?" Jason asks.

"She took some convincing. In the end she said no. No one I know likes fraternities."

"You only know bitches," says Thompson.

"I know you," I tell him. I stare at him hard, mirroring the slow grin on his face. I lift it into the light of the fire so they can all read the label: Jack Daniels.

Jason steps toward me and takes it out of my hands. "You can't drink that. That's my dad's."

I'd swallowed more than half the bottle on the walk back to the fire. "Shit," I say.

He sees how much is gone and tells me I have to pay for it. Then he takes a drink and turns to the other two. He must have communicated something with his eyes, because they look at me and smile.

"Come here," Thompson says. "I'm going to punch you in the face."

"No thanks," I say. "I need to go home before I do something drastic."

"Like fuck," says the other brother. He plunges a hand toward the fire and pulls out one of the rods, glowing red on one end, still dark where he grips it. A beautifully terrifying moment, makes me smile. He circles until he stands between me and the path back to my car, and he swings the rod so that the glowing tip sends a hot breeze onto my cheek. Waver on my feet because of the whiskey. Think about turning such drunk keys in my car and compare one danger to the other. Hot metal smells like something extraterrestrial, like something from deep under another ground. The heat whips closer and closer, bright red bands in the air before my face. Jason and Thompson are laughing until I lean into the light and it singes a quick stab into my neck, smoke rising from the cooked hair behind my ear. So close I can hear the skin bubbling. Collapse to the ground inches from the fire, too hot to move. Jason and Thompson still laughing, harder now I'm on the ground. My eyes are closed. Feeling rested.

"That's gonna leave a mark!" one laughs.

They roll me away from the fire, thanks. On my back, then a weight, pinning my arms to my sides. Then a blow square to my chest, right below my heart. No breath, no action in my lungs. Eyes bulge open to see Jason drop his clasped hands again on my chest, a dull thud.

Laughter. Comes down with his hands on my sternum. Gasp for breath and more air leaves my lungs, sudden, painful. Thompson lands punches on my thighs, strange, also painful. Behind them, the nameless man spins his glowing rod in unrelated arcs, spelling words that disappear before they become legible. Stunning. Wonderful. “Don’t do anything drastic,” the last thought I have before I let my eyes close slowly to the image of a dancing man tracing his temporary arcs, spelling out our wordless moment.

*

Wake up to birds singing, a chipmunk picking at a pinecone to my left. Overcast, or a little darker than overcast. The fire still hissing, a soft murmur of self defeat. Rise to my knees and wince at the pain in my neck. Touch it, covered with dirt and leaves, stuck to the skin. Nobody else is around. A note, written in charcoal on the inside of an empty beer box: “You are crazy muther-fucker.”

In Jason’s parent’s driveway, no cars but mine. I pull the green book from the glovebox and read the last thing I wrote. *Join the Army or go to jail.* I add: *Or do anything else at all.* There is no urgent conflict. In the rearview mirror, examine my wounded neck. It hurts like a ten but looks like a two or three. Some Vaseline, a big band aid. Clean it out first. A shower, a baptism. Then a few drops hit the windshield. I start the car, turn on the wipers. More drops then, actual rain. I step outside, tilt my neck. Stand there until my hair is wet, my clothes are wet, I’ve caught my breath. Back in the car, check my wound again. Clean, a solid glowing stripe, bright pink, angry, inch and a half long. It won’t change anything, but it will leave a scar.

Robert Martin is the director of the Independent Booksellers Consortium and the founder of www.TheIndependentBookseller.com, a resource for independent booksellers. He studied writing at the University of Montana and earned his MA from the writing program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Two Cities Review*, *Revolver*, *Golden Walkman*, *Juxtapose*, and elsewhere.

Like Nothing

BY SIMON SHIEH

When, finally, he found me.

We were drinking tea.

We never drank tea.

I was so happy

I kept adding water

so it would last

one cup after another.

We talked about David,

the cut

the broken baseball bat left

on his shin. What they meant when

they left us with a painting

of a gold fist and

a laurel wreath.

We talked long into the night

drinking one cup after another.

He warmed his hands

on the teapot.

The leaves bled

and bled.

Simon Shieh is a poet and educator living in Beijing. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Spittoon Literary Magazine*, which translates and publishes the best new Chinese writers into English. Simon's work appears or is forthcoming in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Spillway*, *Grist*, *The Journal*, *Passages North*, and *BOOTH*, among other publications.

To have been wise once

BY CHARIKA SWANEPOEL

I have wept more than I have loved,
and you know that I've loved severely.
And now, I'm looking for mercy between
the sympathies of flesh and its cruel hope.
The sympathies of flesh and sweet, dead men.
I want to live long enough to have been truly wise,
to have unglued me from myself and all of you and
your constant dying and coming back from the dead.
I'm looking for understanding beyond foreboding,
for a kind of resilience that is more than survival
and wider and fuller and deeper than breath.
I want to sit beneath a tree and not apologise
or ask for more of it, more of me, more of life.
I want to have been wise, at least once.

Love, like a skull

BY CHARIKA SWANEPOEL

I. Young Love

I had a myth once,
a wonderful enigmatic man
with eyes, blue as Shiva's skin,
arms like minarets and a mind
mad as many a wrathful god's.

Though his word was law and
His reign sublime —utterly,
my myth was flawed and full
of loopholes and lumps and lies.
Not only this, but all men die.

II. Revelation Love

Will you collapse at my funeral,
red and wet with loss?
Will you die with me, evoke me
like the gospel every night before bed?
Will you want another revelation,
more tongued flames and haloed love?
Will I have burnt your Paris down
black and cratered with loss?
Will you die with me, love
when all our holiness is spent?

Charika Swanepoel is a South African poet and literary scholar. She is currently pursuing her MA. in English Poetry at the North-West University. Some of her poems have appeared on platforms such as L'Éphémère Review, Glass Poetry, New Contrast, Prufrock, Aerodrome, Literator, etc. She founded and edits Laurel Magazine (laurelmagazine.co.za) is also reader for Helen Magazine, E&GJ Press, and Frontier Poetry.

You can see more of her work on csswanepoel.wordpress.com and follow her on Twitter @CharikaSW or Instagram @charikaswanepoel.

Some Demands

BY LEXI CARY

I'll be ready to make up with Jesus for real
 If he gives me west-facing windows for life,
 Indoor plants that never die,
 And an empty cistern for a heart
 That swirls continually with incense smoke,
 So as to repel trauma from its centrifugal force,
 So as to give trauma nowhere to lie,
 No shadows to return to,
 No silver to tarnish.

I'll make up with Jesus
 If he can prove he can make me slippery,
 Evasive, strong-kneed and ready to run,
 If he can heal my skin to make me less delicate,
 Less rose petals, less satin.
 If he can dry my tear ducts for one month,
 Make me forget the sound of sobbing
 Over what Ariana Grande must be going through,
 The fleeting feeling of young love,
 How it refreshes like lemon water
 But sours just as fast.

Jesus, I told you already I don't have time
 To fix my brokenness before approaching you.
 I'm starting to believe a narrative of healing
 Is misapplied to the heart.
 The way I miss you isn't chronological.
 I miss the blinding teen devotion,
 The certainty in the darkness of my bedroom.
 More than I wanted to make out with anyone that moved,
 I knew that you not only existed, but loved me.

All I know for sure now is that seasons will pass,
 Young love will flare out, and I'll be left sobbing about it
 In yoga, lying in savasana, fists closed tight to keep safe,
 From a world of uncertainty that scratches your satin skin to shreds
 And leaves your fragile heart in the arms of saviors
 That want you to crucify yourself with them.

Enough of that.

Lexi Cary is a bi writer (w/b)itch and musician based in Los Angeles. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in *Germinal Mag*, *DUM DUM Zine*, and *Always Crashing*. She believes all poems are spells, all songs are poems, and worries that she'll never fully understand her birth chart. You can see more of her work at lexicary.com and @_lexicary on twitter and Instagram.

Meditation

BY MARCIA ARRIETA

elusive wandering shadows flames instinct survival an angel a rabbit a cross
pilot the sun clouds oaks spider webs

I am a daffodil there are never enough continents

yesterday I organized the sewing basket so many odd buttons saved
mismatched currents the socks the handkerchiefs the aprons
raindrop the arabesque I can't organize everything

Take an Emotion

BY MARCIA ARRIETA

& type it

in a field

thunderstorm clouds

wildflowers

the solidity of time across oceans & mountains

the strength of transcendent across nouns

Houses

BY MARCIA ARRIETA

surreal abstract empty closed open
sculptures paths cupboards closets
books paintings mirrors doors ladders
boxing gloves hammers nails saws
chickens dogs ducks horses rabbits
roses sunflowers sand rivers trees
birds stars trout

There is No Need to Translate the Art

BY MARCIA ARRIETA

the blue is blue—cobalt

I attempt to mix colors—cool/warm

& in the process I discover Bernstein's *A Poetics* on my dining room table

"Poetry is the aversion of conformity in the pursuit of new forms, or can be."

Marcia Arrieta's work appears in *Anastamos*, *Whiskey Island*, *DASH*, *Eratio*, *Barrow Street*, *Ambush Review*, *Empty Mirror*, *Hobart*, *MORIA*, and *Fourteen Hills*, among others. The author of three poetry collections: two from *BlazeVOX--perimeter homespun* (2019), and *archipelago counterpoint* (2015) and *triskelion, tiger moth, tangram, thyme* (2011 Otoliths), she has three chapbooks: *thimbles, threads* (Dancing Girl), *experimental: (Potes & Poets)*, and *the curve against the linear* (Toadlily). She edits and publishes *Indefinite Space*, a poetry/art journal.



Various Loose Items

(from The Olive Drab Footlocker)

BY TETMAN CALLIS

1 bottle of Avon-brand men's cologne in a brown, translucent horseshoe-shaped bottle with a horse's head in bas-relief on one side, and a spherical red screw-top. About a fifth of the cologne is missing. It has evaporated; no one has ever worn this cologne. It was a Christmas gift from your first lover, a long time ago, the last Christmas you—what? spent together? You didn't spend it. You threw it away? Not that, either. You let her go. She let you go. But you kept this bottle of cheap cologne. You will not ever wear it.

#

1 transparent glass bottle with a plastic stopper. Taped to its side is a handwritten label, "Rocky Mountain Air, 1979," in red ink. The writing is your mother's. She lived with your father in western Colorado in 1979, and you visited. You've never opened this bottle. You wonder how much of the Rocky Mountain air it still holds. You know of osmosis, you've been to school.

#

1 brown plastic compartmentalized container with a pale white translucent lid, containing military medals and ribbons and shoulder patches, medals for performances of poetic and dramatic works, and five-and-a-half Mysoline tablets wrapped in aluminum foil. High school things, mostly, though the Mysoline came later. The military medals and ribbons and patches, those are from the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps. You could handle a rifle well enough. The Maltese crosses were your marksmanship medals. Marksman, sharpshooter—never an expert. You couldn't say what the ribbons signify. Good conduct? Personal appearance? Those were two of the most common. You were often a good cadet. You followed most orders and you polished your uniform brass insignia, ironed your shirts and trousers, shined your shoes and boots, and made sure your hair was always freshly cut the regulation length before inspections. You made it all the way to officer. But you were a skirt-chaser and you smoked marijuana. There was to be no place in the army for you.

And the medals for poetic and dramatic performances? Those would have been for second and third place, not for first—first-place earned trophies. The one you earned you gave to the high school. It sat in the trophy case near the front door, with many other trophies, almost all larger, almost all for sports.

And the Mysoline tablets? Those were toys. The game was, take anything to feel how it would make you feel. You don't remember how Mysoline made you feel. It was for epileptics.

You knew two epileptic young women when you were a young man. One wasn't much to look at. The other was a petite strawberry blonde you wanted to fuck. You worked with her older sister, a cocktail waitress. They lived with their older brother and his family, who protected them.

#

1 empty dried baby formula can with a translucent white plastic lid. The brand was not the most popular, or the best-selling, but your wife and you did the research and agreed it was the best. You wondered why it wasn't the best-selling. The wife was your first. Sometimes you've said she was your second, but if there was a wife before her, that marriage was common law. This marriage was church and was state-certified. As for the can, it is a memento. You remember that it was the last can of baby formula for the child this wife and you created. She had wanted to breastfeed and was not able. Something went wrong. You remember her distress, her tears, her fear that her baby, her firstborn, would be—what? what's the word, or words? that he wouldn't get enough of what he needed and that he could get only from her body? You told her it was all right, everything would be all right, the two of you had already bought the first can of formula before he was born, and baby bottles, too, just in case, and you and she would feed him and he would be strong and healthy and smart and it was all right, she was not a failure, she was not a bad mother, and you loved her, and everything would be all right.

#

Various primitive child's drawings on oversized paper. These are drawings made by that very child, the boy, when he was quite young. You used to have more—you kept every scrawl he made—but they proved to be too many and you did not have room for all of them.

#

1 green ceramic frog, crowned with a yellow crown and wearing a silly and friendly smile, spring-mounted on a flattened stone base bearing in ink the inscription, "Love Is A Rainbow Between Two Hearts." It may be that, a many-splendored thing. It may be what makes the world go 'round. It may be the meaning of life. This tchotchke was given you by the woman who preceded in your affections (and your bed) the woman you married and made the baby with. You never stopped feeling guilty about dumping this preceding woman. Sometimes you felt caddish. But that passed. She was a good person. She deserved better (than you) and you like to think she went on and did better. In fact, you know she did. She forgave you and you remained friends and she had a rich and fulfilling life. The two of you were to have been wed. It is likely she has long known how lucky she was. She had a—what? passion? that's not it. She had a fondness, that was it, a fondness for frogs. Not so much for the cold creatures themselves as for depictions of them, and her bedroom was decorated with—no, you don't remember anymore, except to remember

that her bed was arrayed with various stuffed and plush frog toys and pillows, though you can't see them in your memory, you can only remember that it was so. And many years after you had discarded her for her successor, you collected, for unrelated reasons, various small and colorful soft plastic models of poison dart tree frogs.

#

1 old and worn blue Mickey Mouse T-shirt. This belonged to your best friend. He lived with you and your first wife—the church-wedding one, not the common-law—and he left it behind when he moved out. He got it when he went to LA for a few days to visit with a trick. You wore it until it was no longer wearable. You don't remember if it reached that point before or after he died.

#

1 old pair of cotton young men's briefs, size medium, faintly stained in front with a rust-colored splotch. The things men keep. You were sixteen and she was sixteen and you were both virgins. She was the one who gave you the bottle of Avon cologne.

#

1 white t-shirt bearing the logo of the Old Plantation discotheque (with locations in Dallas, Houston, and El Paso). The Old Pantation—the OP—was a gay bar. You frequented, and then worked at, the one in El Paso. Your best friend introduced you to it. He was gay. You were not, but you liked the place. The drinks were cheap, the music was loud and was the latest, and no one there wanted to beat you up. Straight women would come in, see all the good-looking young men, get a little drunk and want some action, and find out you were the only straight man on the premises. You got laid by a dozen different women your first year there, including the first woman you lived with—that arrangement didn't last very long—and the woman who became your common-law wife. Also, you made a lot of money, much of which you spent on drugs and trinkets. Inflation was bad and you thought it made more sense to spend the money rather than save it. Also, much of the money was stolen—skimming was endemic in a cash-based business with literally liquid assets—and your conscience wouldn't let you save it. You did declare it on your income taxes, though, which you came to regret. It took you months to pay off the back taxes and penalties.

#

1 battered, coverless, and spine-broken copy of the paperback edition of *Ripley's Believe It or Not!*, combined 2nd and 4th series. This is from childhood. Your mother gave you this. You

don't know why you kept it, except possibly that you kept it for so long, the keeping of it became the reason for keeping it. You read it over and over when you were a child. Believed every word.

#

3 broken cameras—1 Instamatic, 1 Polaroid, 1 Brownie. The Instamatic was your first camera. Your father's older sister gave it to you when you were ten. When you were in high school and had a job and could afford film, you took scores of pictures with it, many of them of girls you knew. You were girl-crazy from the get-go, from way back when, from for as long as you can remember up until the day after tomorrow. You don't remember where the Polaroid and the Brownie came from, or if you even ever used them.

Tetman Callis is a writer living in Chicago. His short fictions have been published in various magazines, including *NOON*, *New York Tyrant*, *Wigleaf*, *Atticus Review*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *The Gravity of the Thing*, and *The Columbia Review*. He is the author of the memoir, *High Street: Lawyers, Guns & Money in a Stoner's New Mexico* (Outpost 19, 2012), and the children's book, *Franny & Toby* (Silky Oak Press, 2015).

A Bug Does in a Jar What It Can

BY MICAELA WALLEY

and I watch. It doesn't seem to mind the company.
Neither of us knows how we got here, together,
so I ask it what good is one rose to me? Only rich
people have small vases. I put the rose in a beer glass
which is kind of like a jar. It doesn't seem to like
that joke—the bug, not the rose. I offer it the rose.
I figure they will both die, but one could die with a mouth
full of petals. That would be so much cooler
than dying hungry. I am also in a jar, understand?
But not hungry. No, I am not hungry hungry. I will not
eat a bug in a jar. Like the rose, I will die standing
still, a kept woman. Everyone mourns a rose but no
one remembers it later. I am nothing like the bug. See?
There is the door. I am not crawling towards it.

Micaela Walley is pursuing her MFA in Poetry at the University of Baltimore. Her work can be found in *Oracle Fine Arts Review*, *Gravel*, *Occulum*, *ENTROPY*, and *Huffpost*. She currently lives in Hanover, Maryland with her best friend -- Chunky, the cat

Love Letter for a Lotus

BY SABRINA IM

Fear and uncertainty once held me back,
but I am learning there is strength
to be found in being vulnerable

A daily incantation to be repeated
I've reached a point
Where I can finally tell myself...

I am coming home to a reality
Where everything and everyone
That exists in it
Enter and exit
Staying in my line of vision
Only long enough to show me

I have not yet split away from myself

My return,
is a return to nothing easy,
but something necessary

I am the being that sheds,
Great naga, serpent strength
Gatekeeper of the sacred

The spirit that will set you free
As you rise from the mud,
Open your buds,
And show your face to the world
beautiful lotus that you are

You have been reborn
with the courage to imagine
a different world

Its cycles and rhythms
nurture you with so much love
these lullabies embrace you,
soothing you to peace

Body Memory

BY SABRINA IM

today I woke up crying
from a dream I couldn't remember

laying still,
humming to myself
why do I always let fear
eat away the heart in me?

since two years ago,
restless October nights have become
a regular occurrence

but,
to hold onto what is my own,
I have resolved to speak
what is true for my own sake

time cannot wait another day
for darkness to come again
so it is here I find ground,
I find voice
however shaky and imperfect,
I speak

so my memory doesn't lose
what deserves to be saved

uncover your ears,
you will learn the way
darkness cannot swallow
the roar hiding in my throat

An August Musing

BY SABRINA IM

when dusk arrives,
the air holds its breath
in anticipation
and I remember
to hold myself again.

here, in this moment,
I begin to build myself back up,
as I roam this landscape
of dreams
and fears

I find the courage
To write this space
between languages

Sabrina Im is an emerging poet, dabbling artist, and diasporic storyteller. The daughter of Khmer refugees, she hopes to continue using storytelling as a means for mediating and cultivating inter-generational narratives, as well as mobilizing others to explore their art too. Her most recent work can be found in Issue Seven of *TAYO Literary Magazine*.

Home Video

BY EMILY BANKS

I never asked her if she loved it too—
the way our faces looked made up all wrong,

the crooked false lashes, drugstore lipstick
ringing our lips like clowns, still preserved now

in the shaky frames of VHS tapes
we'd watch until they felt like real movies.

Somewhere we must have learned to aim our eyes
straight at the lens like that, our nostrils flared,

our tank tops scrunchie-rolled to belly shirts,
plump skin unmarked and bright from years concealed,

our bodies young enough then to pretend
we didn't know the way our nipples swelled

beneath the thinning stretch of outgrown clothes,
costumes we wore to make it all a joke

so her mother, filming, wouldn't know
our brimming new excitement as we stared

squinting into the mirror, sucking the fat
of cheeks between our teeth, practicing

till I forgot the play and lost my face,
dissolved into the longing to be looked at

New Hope

BY EMILY BANKS

We followed a boy around
her father's town, the kind of boy
we only knew from pop-punk songs,
sk8er boi rocking up MTV, his hair
gel-spiked, oversized pants
covering all but the tips
of his sneakers, fat and scuffed
from evenings in the park,
where we imagined there were more of them,
speakers bumping Good Charlotte
as they spun and soared through the air,
their shouts the only thing
breaking the chilly peace
of suburban fall.

We told each other stories, how
if we lived there we'd sharpie their names
on the white parts of our Converse's,
safety pin patches with their band names
to our backpacks, white-out pen
our initials and theirs in hearts
on our black UFO's.

But he got away from us,
disappeared into his mother's car,
and anyway, we were city girls
who'd never learned to skateboard,
never knew the backyard bonfires
and basement concerts we longed for
secretly, giggling in the dark
that night about The Sk8er Boi,
vowing we'd find him again
someday, maybe *some place*
off Ocean Avenue, and he'd burn us
CD's, climb trees into windows
for us, and we'd sneak out to let him
drive us down hedge-lined streets
when our parents were asleep,
nothing watching but the shadows
of old lawn ornaments.

Emily Banks is the author of *Mother Water*, forthcoming from Lynx House Press. Her poems and essays have appeared in *Superstition Review*, *The Fourth River*, *New South*, *Cimarron Review*, *Yemassee*, and other journals. She lives in Atlanta, where she is a doctoral candidate at Emory University.

Him

BY UZOMAH UGWU

“him”

I kept screaming but he would not let go
Who let him in and why

Crying with my insides on the
outside bleeding like fountains
At water parks and inside malls
with coins thrown in them
He broke my feet so I couldn't

leave what I had become

His facial hair cut me when
it touched my skin

Wrapped tight his arms squeezed
every type of fight out I had in me

Unable to understand his plan
that he whispered
Until he was not there,

Just a knock at my door with my mother's voice
Demanding
If I was ok

Uzomah has a way of capturing a scene and the feelings that allow you to follow and flow within the realms of her poetics as you read each line filled with metaphors. Her placement of ideas and images leaves you dangling all the way throughout the poem, line by line with trauma, pain joy or a mixture of both that reveals some type of solitude. She surprises you in end with something she does not even may mean to say at all, that we all might be feeling, and had not felt until reading one of her poems.

LIBIDO in a time of flood

BY ALRISHA SHEA

*--let go, then. let
go and say you were always
falling--*

some days the gas station
smells like refuge. flooring the

pedal just to be on empty.
I am the accountant of my
own sorrow. Jerk off and check
the finances

again. Penny-pinching from
day to day. In debt to the gas pump.
Grieving in front of the shower, the--
the hiss of water against floor. Again,

the groan of it all reminds me of you.
The hubcaps sea-touched in a landlocked
state. Some days I'll lick my lemongrass

sugar scrub just to taste you again.
The bathroom counter a dashboard
into sin. I wish I could find another
call to prayer. Another road into

ruin, one last pedal to push. Gasoline
trickling down my chest for months,
my mouth suckling the pump, spewing
from my lips. The asphalt

hissing against my knees, my hands
clasped. My hands clasped,
after all this.

Alrishia Shea is a 17 year old student going into Bioinformatics in undergrad. They can be observed in their natural habitat @alrishia_s on Twitter. Their work is published or forthcoming in Outlook Springs, Crab Fat Magazine, Dirty Paws Poetry, and others. Their chapbook, “Cicada Girl / Locust Boy” is forthcoming from corrupt press.
(they/them)

Pine Mushroom, Lamb's Kidney, Pickled Marigold

BY ERIC STIEFEL

This time we'll use soft butter, three of everything else.
The mushrooms have to be perfect, about twelve centimeters,
peeled with the intimacy of a paring knife.

The rest is simple. The flowers and the buds pickled so
they'll always be less than fertile. Arrange the caps
into half-moons, the marigold into a kiss.

The lamb becomes another half-moon— closer,
now.

There is no one, the snow on the limbs
of the trees. Everything still. The morning won't bloom,
until it does. A cloud of warm breath floats between us.

Eric Stiefel lives in Athens, Ohio, where he is a PhD candidate at the Ohio University. He received his MFA from Washington University in St. Louis, where he served as Junior Fellow in Poetry. He was recently named winner of the 2018 Sequestum New Writers Awards and finalist of the 2018 Penn Review Poetry Prize.

