

**Stonethrow Review**  
a journal of creative writing

**2013**



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The Literary Journal of the Creative Writing Program at  
The State University of New York, New Paltz

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### **Editor's Note:**

Experiments in form and content stretch the boundaries of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and dramatic writing collected in the eighth edition of *Stonestrow Review*. Whether writing about travel, family, food, the realms of science fiction, habitats, modes of communication, or academia, each contributor imparts a distinctive literary style and approach to subject matter. A repertoire of diverse tones resounds in their forty-four voices, producing a symphony of evocative language and keen perception.

—Pauline Uchmanowicz

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*Melissa Warren*

***Das Fenster***

Twelve p.m. effaces us.  
The magic we stomached at  
midnight has petered out,  
so we blunder to separate  
couches: I seep amorphous  
into the cracks as you speak  
a foreign language to the  
room. When at last I rise and  
fumble through the fog, senses  
dampened, I find you on the  
windowsill—wide enough to  
hold us both. My body meets  
your contours, face turned sunward  
into white, scalding light, and  
it wounds me, and it fills me  
with a lucid ecstasy.  
You are firm and warm, smile  
pressed to my slackening jaw.  
There, in silence, and by  
virtue of bright afternoon,  
we crystallize.

*Shanicka Anderson*

## **What Clouds Are Hiding**

We spend the summer trapped inside our own heads,  
and trading pomegranate kisses and mango smiles  
on a dew-soaked porch just before dawn.

Between sips of sweet tea you tell me I wear myself too thin.  
You notice how my skin gets pulled taut against my ribcage,  
how it lies waxy and translucent across the palms of hands.

I notice the way you smooth and tuck  
the hems of your shirts into the tops of your jeans.  
So that your outside matches your inside.

Nighttime finds your lips on my neck,  
leaving port-colored bruises along my jawline.  
My fingers fumble at your blouse, snapping at each button.

You whisper to me,  
a quiet mutter into the curve of my ear.  
*Thank you* or maybe *I love you*  
I don't ask you to repeat yourself.

Later we fall asleep together,  
timid and cautious.  
Like wild butterflies sealed in a mason jar.

*Colin Williams*



There's one good thing about driving against the wind...

...It's what's left of the clouds  
after they run through the trees  
like a broken comb,

Wisps left shredded  
and clinging to the blue

*Francisco Alvarenga*

## **Roadside Attractions**

It doesn't matter where you're starting from, just find your way onto I-95 and head for Brevard County. It's the center of Florida's east coast, less than an hour south of the John F. Kennedy Space Center, easy to locate. Ignore the brutal sun raining down on you, challenging the air conditioner you have blasting in your car by warming the skin you have poking out from the shade. Go ahead and use your peripheral vision (don't you dare take your eyes off the road; you're aware people die that way, right?) to soak in the vast blue ocean vista that's followed you since you merged onto the freeway. Roll down the windows a tad and inhale that oceanic, salty air. If you're from out of state, humor yourself and stare at the palm trees and compare them to the trees in your neck of the woods.

You'll be turning onto 500, or 192, or 5th Avenue, or the Melbourne Causeway, depending on which local you ask. And don't be afraid to judge a book by its cover here, because these books are most certainly judging you. If you possess even the slightest "ethnic" feature, don't take it to heart when some locals, most likely part of that indigenous group known as elderly white people, take their sweet time helping you, or pretend not to hear you at all. Southern hospitality exists, I assure you, but not here. The Hispanic population has doubled in the past year, so it's only natural for the original natives to be a bit apprehensive to see another show up. Let them walk back to their beachfront property and lock their doors behind them, back to the air-conditioned sanctuaries that remain the only possible way of living in such a despicably hot location. Wish them well with their remaining years, take a deep breath, and keep on trucking. You're almost there after all.

Now you'll make a right and head straight past several stoplights. When you've hit the intersection with the Super 8 hotel on the right, you'll make a left. When your day's events are all said and done don't even conceive of staying at this hotel. The manager has a stick up his ass so large it forces itself out of his mouth in rude and degrading language. He won't care that you're checking out at 9 a.m. on Sunday; to him that will count as another full day and you'll be stuck paying it. Don't go to him with complaints about the smell of your room; don't go to him to argue about the air conditioning that was promised but has magically disappeared in the hours since you first got on the phone with him; don't go to him or this hotel at all. You need not take my word for it, however; ask the insects that will share a bed with you. Most of them are dead, proof even creatures bred for survival find the place inhospitable.

After the left, head straight for half a mile. Just over the train tracks you'll see grass for the first time in a while on your right. Here lies a quaint little acre or so of land with only a handful of trees (palm and otherwise) standing guard over tombstones. This is Melbourne Cemetery. This is why you've come to Florida. This is where Sara is buried.



*Alexis Roura*

## **Return to Moca, Puerto Rico**

An uncomfortable stickiness lines the creases of your elbows and knees about an hour into your Ambien nap. The sad excuse for a fan with a thumb-sized opening is just going to blow other people's pretzel-smiling breaths, farts, and sweaty pit aromas into your face, so don't even bother fiddling with it now. When the deeply wrinkled Latina grandmother pulls up the window shade, watch as the lights spill onto your lap and colors the inside of the sleeping plane a warm yellow. On the ocean beneath you, a cruise is sailing toward the end of the Earth, and the burning sand is speckled with tiny humans, white hotel towels, surfboards, and candy-striped umbrellas.

Clap for the pilot, no matter how rough the landing may be because that's what the *jibaros* (mountain-dwelling peasants or hicks) do; they probably don't realize that the plane practically flies itself nowadays. Since these passengers also don't understand common courtesy, do as they do: rip your luggage out from the overhead bins and shove your way into the already filled and sweaty aisle.

This isn't your first trip to Puerto Rico—you've been here at least once every year since you were four months old—but every time you step out of the plane and onto the Airstairs, the thick humidity runs through your body and takes your breath away. Since Aguadilla's airport is so small, there is only one area for baggage pickup, but you packed light enough to have only carryon. Along with other shiny brown-faced families, you see Grandma and her friend Delia pressed against the glass of the waiting area. They are crying, yelling, embracing, laughing, and crying again because Puerto Ricans are overly emotional. Especially the older ones. But you're not embarrassed because

that's how everyone here is greeted and it's the best kind of welcome you've ever been accustomed to.

Let Delia take the front seat because respecting your elders here is just as important as following the law in New Jersey. Besides, that is where Grandpa would have sat and you know that Delia is here to take his place. The AC hasn't been fixed for eight years, so the humidity trapped in the fabric seats frizzes your tresses instantly. The open windows only make matters worse, as the air combs through your curls and turns your hair from Lucy Liu to Diana Ross in seconds. But now you look like everyone else. You can't help but laugh at the *chisme* (gossip) that Grandma and Delia heavily rely on in every conversation they have. It lasts the whole car ride home.

Strays litter the street more than gum and crumpled receipts do in New York City. Things are so out of hand that veterinarians now offer neuters and spays for free in an attempt to decrease the amount of animals in the streets. The overcrowded and miserable strays are about the only thing worth hating here. Pregnant mutts with saggy teats chase after the rear wheels, hopeful to jump in the car and find a home, but they all whimper and eventually stop. You drive away as dust builds in their eyes. The pain you feel for them is enough reason for you to pursue a career to save animals.

Grandma stops at the *panadería* (bread store) to drop Delia off and to get fresh bread for tuna fish sandwiches. Stepping in there and seeing all the intricate custards and smelling the powdered sugar makes you salivate. There are *quesitos* (cheese Danish), *flan*, *dulce de coco y papaya* (coconut and papaya candy), *galletas* (cookies), and more, all of which you don't like. Ironic. The bread, though, is like no other, and you break off the butt to eat it before you leave; the *pan sobao* (the colloquial term for *sobado*, which means rubbed or massaged bread) is pale, flakey, and smooth on the outside, but inside is soft and almost turns to goo in your mouth.

Passing the neighboring houses—houses that are glorified shacks—always catches you by surprise. They remind you of the inside of a hundred-pack Crayola crayon box; every house is a different color and not one is painted a single hue. They are shockingly bright, happy, and fitting. Grandma lives at the very top of a *monte* (mountain), and the road leading to her hacienda is treacherous, curvy, and just wide enough for a single car, which makes you hold your breath every time she takes a sharp turn. The neighbors wave to you and bless you like you're the second coming. Even the cows, horses, and goats seem to look your way. Grandma drives you proudly, but humbly invites everyone over for *arroz con salchichas* (rice with sausages). The wind here smells like laundry detergent, as it picks up smells from sun-kissed dresses and underwear hanging from clotheslines outside.

When you finally reach Grandma's house and pull into the driveway, breathe a sigh of relief. Naturally, Pin, her jealous neighbor, invites you to see her clean, internet-updated house. Help Grandma feed the chickens instead; Pin's house is lonely and boring anyway. While Grandma slaves in the kitchen, making your favorite everything, sit in Grandpa's swinging chair on the barred balcony. From here, you can see the point where the town of Moca touches the city of Aguadilla, and you can spot a cloud of rain coming your way. The orange trees are in full bloom, and you're just high and close enough to reach out and grab one. But instead, close your eyes, listen to the song of the *coquis* (tree frogs), and wait for the rain to come.



*Allison Lesbowitz*

## **My Aunt's House**

Decorated with time,  
her walls are circles and squares,  
numbers and rhythms,  
wooden carvings with arms  
thin or thick,  
and brass or gold.  
Chains hang from metal  
and clink as they sway.  
Bells ring at midnight  
and every hour in between.

A small girl made of wood waves hello,  
with tight blonde braids  
and a red-striped skirt.  
Her feet are trapped in a track,  
a pre-cut swirl.  
After her hourly announcement,  
she returns to where she came from.  
Her pre-cut world,  
hidden between wooden walls.  
Her doors gently shut.  
Her windows aren't real.  
Time is her only friend, and her only motive of action.  
Time is her escape, and her push out the front door.

Each hour, her house erupts with chaos,  
girls' giggles and birds' chirps,  
and the grandfather's loud ding.  
She's gotten used to  
marking the passing of time.

*Dana Hershkowitz*

## **Hi, Sandy, Welcome to Our Home!**

I had reconciled with the fact that I would need to go to Brooklyn for the duration of Hurricane Sandy, especially because my home happened to be located in one of the mandatory evacuation areas. Possibly because Irene had not given us any substantial destruction, my family did not seem perturbed by the warnings that Sandy would hit us hard. I was slightly more apprehensive, but because we were going to hold our ground, I felt the outcome couldn't be too overwhelming.

When I finally made it to the house that morning, Dad was angry, channeling all his panic into the only expression of emotion he understood. Although I knew I shouldn't have been surprised, he had been waiting for my arrival so he could once again depart to the beach for sandbag-loading. I couldn't carry them once they were full, so my main focus was to assuage my father's anxieties. One man stood on the beach with his dented, rusty shovel and offered to help whoever would accept it. He even had a stash of sandbags for anyone who was underprepared. His own house was right on the edge of the beach and had not been fully fortified, but he continued to dig, load, and lift the remaining sand, none of which was the preferably drier sand. My dad had been too proud to accept his labor, but not the two extra sandbags that we didn't need.

Unfortunately, our not-so-trusty van had broken down a week before, meaning our small car had to tow the heavy load. We crawled up the streets in an attempt to prevent damage to the car's suspension, but halfway home it started to emit an endearing squeaking noise. We managed to make it back without any further issues and systematically stacked our haul around the basement door. With the outside as secure as it was going to get, we should have begun moving things upstairs, but instead

decided to do absolutely nothing. Dad had convinced himself that the sandbag formation was all that could be done, and while I had items worth saving, I clearly didn't care enough to fetch them.

Dad and Mom then tucked themselves away in their room for the afternoon, trying to shut out the truth of our circumstances brewing a block away. The rain commenced once the sun went down, but the low drizzle hadn't even caught our attention. As each minute ticked by, my courage was bolstered; I felt we could remain unscathed.

While I was deluding myself, my neighbors had begun to shuffle outside. Feeling antsy and wanting to contribute something, I made my way out and peeked over the edge of our porch. Our blinding driveway light had already flicked on due to our neighbors' presence, but for once it was actually useful to our cause. Right where our drain should have been visible was a puddle about three inches deep. I could see leaves swirling in the water and deduced that was the main issue; it was finally time to gear up.

I informed my dad about the lack of suction and equipped myself with an industrial broom, a rake, and a bucket. My house, which was stocked with every bizarre tool imaginable, was as ready for a disaster as one could be without holding the title of Doomsday Prepper. I burst down the stairs and immediately made my way to the drain, where I tried to remove the debris. Dad arrived on the scene a moment later, and I followed him to where the car had been parked. The streets that my house was nestled between were flowing with water, enough to make us stare in awe for a moment. As he got into our still-squeaking car, he ordered me to clear the drain, and I retreated to our driveway, puzzled as to where the blockage was. He had only decided to move the car around the corner, but it felt like he was gone for an eternity as I became more unnerved. Although I hadn't noticed it initially, I realized that the puddle had gotten a fair

amount deeper and that the thin streams running down the side streets were up to my calves. It was around this moment that my brain pressed the panic-button, and I moved with a renewed sense of purpose, refusing to give into the obvious reality that the incessant water was coming.

I decided the chain-of-command left me in charge and directed my sister to start shifting as much water as possible with the bucket. In an impulsive moment of tension, I tore the drainage cover off and plunged my hand into the depths, reaching for a nonexistent solution. I jerked my arm back up at the feel of the bottom of the drain, scraping it along the concrete when I almost submerged my face in the green-brown mixture that the water had become. This was the moment when I accepted the futility my neighbors spoke of; the same resignation ran through us all as the water began to ominously spill down our block, slowly filling each driveway with its contents. Our house was the last, so I knew we had about a minute to move; I needed to believe there was still something that could be done. The only thing in the vicinity was my dad's motorcycle, sitting at the bottom slope of our driveway. I objected to his defeat and claimed we could move it to higher ground, but it was apparently too heavy to even bother.

We all moved onto the porch and watched for a few moments as the water was packed neatly at the front of our home. The motorcycle was completely under the murky sea and beyond any saving, but I innately knew it was too early to give in. We withdrew into the house and bounded downstairs, expecting the water to have already poured inside. Yet everything was dry and clear; the sandbags were achieving their goal. For want of something to do, we placed towels by the cracks in the doors and put down weights to prevent them from opening. Outside, the water had continued to rise and was waist-high, circulating down the street as if our block had always been surrounded by a moat.

Surprisingly, it was the backyard door that caved first, but the small amount leaking in from its edges was barely enough for concern. I took it upon myself to begin sealing the windows, fearing if the water rose any higher that there wasn't just the possibility of a leak, but the glass actually collapsing. In my far-from-calm state, the tape accomplished the feat of folding in on itself, leaving major creases, and sticking to any surface but the one I wanted it to. As I struggled, I noticed that there was ice-cold water touching my toes; the front door had been breached. I suppressed my mounting panic and tried to concentrate on my task, but in the span of thirty seconds, the freezing liquid had risen to my ankles. I swung around to report this and comprehended that nature had just given us the middle finger; the inconspicuous trapdoor, only distinguished from the rest of the dull tiles by a tacky gold trim, had been forced open, and the water was gushing inside.

From there, we operated under the assumption that anything in reach should be taken upstairs. We created a conveyor belt of arms and dumped random supplies into our dining room, stockpiling in the same manner that squirrels carry out before winter. In a last-ditch attempt to find something worth preserving, I waded to a small corner and sifted through the remains; it was at this moment that everything fell around us, similar to the collapse of old ruins at the end of a corny action flick. Of course, I took on the role of protagonist in my mind and searched for the treasure that we had accidentally overlooked, because even if we were suffering thousands of dollars' worth of damage, I was living the adventure that books had always made me crave.

As I stood, somewhat trapped in the lone corner, our precariously stacked buckets tumbled and collapsed, pouring their contents into our escape pathways. The lights flickered threateningly, and I couldn't help but feel like I was a passenger on the *Titanic*. Everyone agreed it was time to abandon our fray,

chalking up our loss to the traitor drainage system that had surrendered before the tide had even come in. Even as we retired upstairs, the liquid gave chase, sloshing onto everything within its reach. The current made every item left downstairs churn and clatter continuously; at one point our mountain bikes fell over, and the loud, aggravating electric bells rang for almost two hours. For fear of the water being electrified or contaminated (despite the fact that we had already stood in it), we could only pace restlessly upstairs, unable to use the working electronics in case Sandy caused our entire house to lose the little power that remained. Any suggestions we had for entertainment were instantly scrapped once we recognized everything we could've used happened to be in the basement. Sitting around the falsely old-fashioned lantern my dad had probably purchased on a whim, I thought about how easily it could have been prevented if we had put in the work to move our belongings. On the other hand, had I not come home for the storm I never would have understood the severity of the damage and knew there was no way to anticipate the result.

When the water finally receded around midnight, it stole away any sense of human superiority our neighborhood held. We were victims of an unstoppable force, a strength that most people aren't even aware of. After all, unless you've lived it, a hurricane is one of the few things for which imagination is a poor substitute. Our cars, homes, families, and pride had all been injured in those six hours, but living through such a surreal moment, in which nature displayed its prowess, is a lesson worth more than all that was lost.



*Ryan Randażżo*

## **Pie in the Sky**

Let's build a house  
And tell our friends to build a house,  
In a place where our friends can build houses.  
We can decorate it with painted fishbowls filled with guitar strings.  
It will be open to anyone who wants to come in and embroider a  
    throw pillow.  
We will write words of insanity on the walls:  
    "Jellyfish flavored shoelaces" and "Drawbridge Excellence!"  
It will be a place where we are free to pray to fire extinguishers  
And we won't be afraid to find a Republican,  
If the fake plants finally make their moves.  
We will encourage pickup games of chess in the bathroom,  
    only if you are ready.  
The rule will be:  
    "Bring your own toast!"  
We could set fire to gold watches and freeze playing cards.  
    One day we might need the jokers again.  
Norwegian barbeques will be held on a weekly basis.  
The front yard will be infested with garden gnomes  
Who will be having just as much fun as we are  
    even if we don't provide them with orange soda.  
The backyard will be devoted to retired electricians.  
In the winter we will have the best Christmas lights of the entire  
    neighborhood,  
And next-door neighbors will be jealous of us far into May.  
The refrigerator will be filled with year-old pudding and egg whites.  
We will be sure to have full games of polo in the living room during  
    the afternoons,  
And the panda in the attic might start getting some color.  
Every Thursday will be theme night.

Our neighbors will show up with a bottle of Sambuca  
And their favorite rendition of "Johnny B. Goode."  
We wouldn't need to pay for heat,  
We could just rub empty milk cartons together and hope for the best.  
The basement would be home to dark-blue flamingos  
Who would be asked to respectfully mind the bike rack in the corner.  
Oh, wouldn't it be grand if we could build our own house  
Where we would finally be able to swing on ceiling fans.  
At night we could go to bed in our bamboo hammock,  
Look out the yellow Jell-O windows,  
And see the world in a different color.

*Roy Missall*

## **Departure**

The City is a loner. It knows nobody else. The people who live in the City have never been outside of it; those who have been no longer live there. One does not have a choice as to whether or not he or she leaves; it is the decision of the Power as to when one will leave. There is no going against that decision once it has been made, although it can be avoided for a while. This is not to say that nobody wants to leave the City. Many people, in fact, nearly everyone, is curious as to what lies beyond the edges of the City, but the enjoyment of living in the City and the absolute definitiveness of leaving the City scare most away from a premature self-evacuation. People generally try to see all the beautiful things about living in the City, and content themselves to wait as long as possible before they must leave, knowing that their time left there is uncertain, while their leaving is inevitable. Occasionally, someone will sneak out without being called on by the Power, but in so many of these cases the general public, out of jealousy, attributes the individual's leaving not to his overwhelming curiosity of the outside, but his being a coward in the face of the small trifles of living in the City, which, according to the general public, are far outweighed by the pure delights of living in the City. This social denial of curiosity is what keeps the City running.

When one is called on by the Power, a number of things happen in preparation, such as deciding what clothes will be worn by the individual on the day of his or her departure (about which others should be notified), and most importantly, the planning celebration of the individual's time in the City. The guests at the celebration are usually either sad to lose the company of the individual, or happy for the person moving on to

the outside. The individual is usually neither of those though, rather, he or she is filled with apprehension.

It is well known that there are two destinations for those on the train. The beach, with beautiful palm trees, light blue water, white sand, perfect temperature, and ice-cold coconut milk, where everyone wears fine silk pajamas and coconut swimsuits; or the desert, nearly devoid of vegetation, unbearably hot, with brown-red sand that blows and scratches the eyes, and warm water found only in the occasional cacti, who will pointedly resist you to keep it all to themselves, and where everyone wears itchy birthday suits received upon arrival, plus sandals with socks. Two very different places, though many find the commonality of sand slightly strange. The Power decides who goes where based on worthiness. Nobody is quite able to agree upon what makes one worthy, but everyone tries his or her very best to be worthy all the same.

On April 3, Marshall received a phone call. The preparations were made, partly by him, mostly by his family; the celebration was pleasant. Then there were tears, hugs, smiles, shoulder-pats, firm handshakes, and finally two thumbs up given through the glass as he sat down in his seat by the window. The train pulled out of the station and entered the tunnel. Everything went dark. In the black calm he could hear the slow breathing of those sitting around him, and the occasional rumble of a digesting stomach. As the darkness continued, the noise of the passengers grew. He heard a tapping foot, a whisper somewhere off in a distant corner of the car. He felt the brush of an elbow as the person next to him covered her mouth to cough. Marshall leaned over and put his head on the window, partly to give the person room, and partly because he didn't like being in the car anymore. He pressed the side of his face against the cool glass and looked up past the front of the train, or at least where he thought it should be. Maybe they were in a turn, and he was staring at the wall. He had no idea, but he imagined they were

going straight, and so he stared into the black at what was to come.

Then he saw a tiny spot of light. At first he wasn't sure whether it was there or whether his eyes were desperate for something to see and invented it, but then it started to grow. And it was coming closer. Others apparently saw it too, because the whispers around the car began to spread and become murmurs. But soon a calm swept over the train again, and they waited for the light quietly and patiently.

All at once it was there, the darkness was gone, forgotten, as if it had never really been there at all, though really it had only switched places with the light, and now, had any of the passengers thought to look back, they would have seen a shrinking black spot off in the distance.

After so much darkness, their eyes were starving for light, so as Marshall and his companions left the tunnel, their eyes gorged themselves upon the new found nourishment. Unfortunately, as is always the case with eyes, they never know when to stop, and so became so full that Marshall could now see instead of only black, pure white, and had to blink several times to flush out all the extra light that had been consumed. Slowly the trees and rolling hills began to fly by. Marshall was amazed, but calmed, at the vastness of what he saw. The closest thing he had ever seen to this was a park in the City, in which everything from the trees, to the bugs, even the hills and rocks, were artificially placed, and everywhere you looked, there in the background would be a building, or beneath your feet a sidewalk, upon which other people were strolling along, some with finely, and strangely, groomed domesticated animals leading them along. Here there was none of that. No people, nothing in the background but faint, blue mountains, and no sign of human interference other than the train track along which they were riding, which even itself was part of nature, with weeds and dirt slowly taking it back over, encroaching along the edges of the gravel railroad bed.

Marshall sat back in his seat and admired it all, wanting absolutely nothing to change, except perhaps for the scenery to go by a little slower, so he could observe this place a little closer. At the moment, the only thing that stayed in his vision long enough to focus on for long periods of time were the mountains off in the distance. He had never seen a blue mountain before. Really, he had never seen a mountain before, but never expected them to be blue.

And then the sensation of movement, of change, of lightness, which he hadn't noticed until now, went away. He looked around at the other passengers, then back out the window. He could see the trees by the track much clearer now.

The train stopped with a gentle lurch. The passengers were in a commotion. Who was supposed to get off here? This wasn't the desert. Everyone assumed that was the first stop. But this wasn't it. It wasn't even the beach. Not that any of them had any idea what a desert or beach really looked like—what they knew was based on what they were told by people back in the City, who were only telling the truth because they were sincere about it. They had seen sand though, and there certainly was no sand here, just dark brown dirt, probably filled with worms, just like the dirt at the park, only these worms were probably here of their own free will.

A reassuring rumor spread about the train that they had to pause for a deer on the tracks, which had for some reason chosen that spot for a nap, but it was now awake and it seemed as though they would soon be on their way again. But the train didn't move, and the once assuring fantasy gave way to a more frightening rumor, more unbelievable but credible, with its source apparently being from the front car, around where the subject of the new rumor also centered.

"What's do you think's going on?" Marshall asked the man standing next to him, who had just come in through the door

connecting the car with the one in front of it. "This certainly isn't the desert. Nobody has asked me to get off yet at least."

"I don't know. I heard in the other car that we've been disconnected. They unhooked the engine and left fifteen minutes ago, but that doesn't make any sense to me, so who knows. Maybe this is the desert and they're waiting for you to get off. Perhaps you're the only one. Whenever I would talk to people in the City about someone they were close to leaving on the train, they were always absolutely sure the person had been sent to the beach. Perhaps the desert is a very rare destination. Maybe it's even the preferred destination, since the beach is probably crowded. Maybe you should get off just in case."

"Maybe. So you are heading to the beach?"

"What? No. I'm just messin' with ya. I'm going to the desert. I've been headed there since I was thirteen."

"Oh. How old are you anyway?"

"Doesn't really matter anymore does it?"

"No, I guess not," said Marshall, and, grabbing on to the sleeve of his new acquaintance, began to push his way through the crowded aisle to get to the next car.

After about a half hour of shoving, the two made it to the front car, where the mood was much more serious than the anxious one they had left behind. Out the window Marshall could see way down the track, to where he thought he saw a bend, but it was too far to tell. Nowhere on the track was there an engine.

"They've left us to die. I know it," said a woman. "I watched them as they unhitched us. They did it as if it were standard procedure, common practice. No alarm in their actions, no malice, no exchange of words, as though everything to be said about it was said long ago."

"No, there must be some mistake. I'm sure your nerves about the trip just got the best of you. They're clouding your judgment. Maybe there was a problem with the engine, and they will return once it's fixed," said Marshall.

“Where in that direction do you think they’re going to fix an engine? You’re wrong. You know you’re wrong. Why have they never shown us any pictures of the world outside the City, a glimpse of the clear blue ocean at the beach, or a threatening visual reminder of the undesirability of the desert? And why does the train always pull into the station from a different way than it leaves? If they really dropped us off at the beach and came back, wouldn’t it make sense that they returned through the same tunnel they left through?”

“Well, yes, I suppose.”

“It’s probably a loop, a simple loop, they drop us here, and on go on ‘till the track takes them back around to the City. And I must say, these cars they send us out in always look so shiny, not a single blemish, and always so clean inside.”

“Well yeah, they use new ones. You know the slogan, ‘The best for your last. A final thank you for your time in the City!’” said Marshall, pride spreading across his face. But after a few breaths, pride gave way to spreading recognition. “Oh,” mumbled Marshall to his feet.

“The cars have been brand new for eighty-two years,” said the woman, in a tone that meant the end of the discussion.

After a brief silence, a man at the other end of the car spoke up. “I guess we better figure something out. Make a plan, because tomorrow a train is coming again and the men who unhooked the engine didn’t seem too worried about these cars still being here when the next train comes through. I have a feeling we won’t be safe in here too much longer. I don’t know what’s coming, but we’ll probably be better off braving the wilderness than staying here. Besides, there’s no food on the train.”

“But none of us have ever been out of the City. We have no idea what to do out here,” said Marshall.

“Uh, well I um,” started his companion, “I read a nature book once. It was in my grandparents’ attic. They saved it from the book burnings years ago. I might be able to help us out.”

“Really? Great! So you can show us where to buy food then?” asked Marshall.

“Well, I don’t know about that. You see, I really didn’t understand any of the vocabulary. It was all so unfamiliar. Most of the information I know comes from hunches I had as to the meaning of certain words, and since I read it when I was six, the hunches were probably somewhat fanciful. Nevertheless, I do know what I know.”

“Which isn’t anything true.”

“Right.”

“So that doesn’t help us then.”

“No, I suppose not.”

“Hmm,” Marshall sighed, but did so standing up straight, with a look in his eye that determined him the new leader of the train. “I guess there’s no use staying here any longer. The only way to change things is to change them.”

And with that, he threw open the door and jumped down, landing with a soft crunch as his shoes hit the gravel.

◇

*Gabrielle Grigoli*

### **A Regretful Colonist**

I loved you to the moon, but cannot  
get back (though I am not alone).  
Morale is low and supplies near gone.  
Too many beds are empty and  
we could not spare water for tears.

Our main chore is to forget.  
The smell of your hair is now  
the smell of cut wood, the smell  
of baking bread, the smell  
of a cigarette. I used to smoke

and I used to dream. Here on the moon  
there are no feet to trip over,  
there are no dreams to disturb.  
We drift above the landscape, limp  
balloons of delicately depleting oxygen.

We want to go home; our heads  
ache to be laid in the crook of the day,  
when the earth beats with warmth  
and drapes its children in peace.

The moon fills me with silence  
as its craters remain untouched  
by the hours. I age in this ageless space.

The radio was abandoned long ago.  
Each rotation leaves us sleeping longer  
than before. The tanks are low.  
I may not be able to return.

*Justin Knipper*

## **The Johnsmith Family Moves for the Umpteenth Time**

Pa was absolutely furious.

“Not again. I can’t believe this!”

The Johnsmith family gathered their belongings from the area surrounding their recently purchased home. They were moving yet again; the screen door of their new home was faulty. Ma and Jemma now understood why their family was not allowed to keep personal properties inside a newly acquired residence.

Steven was the most upset about the move. It wasn’t the packing that got to him, though. It was the fact that they had to leave behind his new best friend, Bacon.

Bacon was a Security Oyster that was assigned to protect the Johnsmith family a week after they’d moved in. Security Oysters are gigantic bivalve mollusks that function as family watchdogs throughout most of the Allied States. They’re handy, they’re utilitarian and they smell terrific.

Steven told Bacon all of his darkest secrets. Before it was announced that the screen door was faulty, he had just told Bacon that he liked to walk around in Jemma’s clothes when no one was home. He said it made him feel like less of a boy and more of a man, a man an oyster or his Pa could respect.

Baby Diamond crawled around in the dirt near the home while the family gathered their things. He hadn’t learned to speak yet,

but when he saw the rainbow forming in the sky, he stood upright and quoted the following:

“What’s the matter, you dissentious rogues,  
That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,  
Make yourselves scabs?”

The family turned around, stunned. Jemma shouted:

“Baby Diamond can talk! And he’s quoting last month’s *Cosmopolitan!*”

The family began to weep simultaneously. They showered Baby Diamond with kisses and snuggles and stared at the rainbow for a few long moments. Pa interrupted responsibly and asserted that it was time for them to leave.

The Johnsmith family crammed into their golden sedan like too many deceased bodies in a crematorium and drove toward the rainbow. They sporadically turned around and screamed “Good-bye, Bacon!” in unison.



*Emily Feldman*

## **Declaring a Major**

IF YOU DATE AN ENGLISH MAJOR

If you date an English major  
She will read  
All the books you love  
And find pieces of you between the pages  
She will find the balance  
Between grammar and syntax  
In which you armor yourself so you can sleep at night  
She will notice all the sounds of the letters  
That speak of your life in the pages  
She will hold each fragment and clause  
And try to put you back together again  
At night when the lamplight shines  
She will fall asleep with you on her chest  
I knew a girl once  
Who said that she loved books  
More than she loved people  
Because stories had never let her down  
Or made her want to die  
I said that it was a shame  
Never to have known love  
Outside the pages of a novel  
And she told me  
That was the only way  
She knew how to love at all

## IF YOU DATE AN ASTRONOMY MAJOR

If you date an Astronomy major  
He will kiss the freckles on your back  
And tell you  
How they look like constellations  
He will say that your body  
Is made of stardust and forgotten planets  
And when he makes love to you  
He will tell you how you make him  
Burn hotter than a star  
And how he wishes he could melt into you  
He will talk of ellipses of asteroids  
And how shooting stars  
Are really pieces of space rock  
Burning as they enter Earth's atmosphere  
He will tell you that he will love you  
For as long as the universe exists  
But stargazers of all people  
Understand the impermanence of their bodies  
One night under a full moon  
I heard a young woman being proposed to  
And her lover said  
That he would love her until the stars burned out  
And I didn't have the heart to tell him  
That they might have already

## IF YOU DATE A THEATER MAJOR

If you date a Theater major  
She will show you how the way you walk  
Can be dramatized for an onstage viewing  
She will tell you  
That making love  
Is the ultimate performance  
An entire play with two actors and no audience  
At night when the stage lights dim  
She will come home to you  
And tell you how that  
When the door slams behind her  
It is the sound of the fourth wall breaking  
And how it lets her  
Slip into your arms without hesitation  
She will tell you how sometimes  
The schematics of your body  
Reminds her of a stage  
With hidden doors and levers  
That come together and let her understand you  
I knew a woman  
Who told me that she wasn't sure  
Where her roles ended and she began  
I asked her if it was really so terrible  
To not be yourself for awhile  
And she told me  
That sometimes she loved her characters  
Far more than she loved herself  
And how for the most part  
It was easier that way

*Carolyn Quimby*

## **How to Fall in Love with Someone Who Will Never Love You Back**

Pick someone whose body  
already runs on two circadian rhythms,  
who understands the slow ticking  
of a clock that does not belong to him.

Someone who knows the  
quickest route between neighborhoods,  
who realized years ago, that gravity  
and falling are not the same thing.

Someone who has become  
the pianist of another ribcage,  
who creates concertos  
of heavy breathing and whispers.

Someone whose promises  
are buoys refusing to sink,  
who writes in a language  
only he will ever know.

Someone who does not look  
longingly at doorways,  
who does not know the  
way his eyes reflect the sun,

who will not notice your attempts  
to swallow the light.

*Abby Harmon*

### **To Leonard Woolf, with Love**

I lived between the chimes that state the hour,  
a certainty flooded in moments few.  
I learned beyond that time has no real power.

In just the spring, torrents of heat can sour  
milk-white buds on vines encased with dew.  
They melt in time, like chimes stating the hour.

Come summer, leaves will crumple, falling, shower  
my stone with dead bouquets. Carry them through  
the day, my love; time has no lasting power.

When autumn's snows began, they cast a dour  
mood upon my life, my art. I rue  
the swim that stopped my clock within an hour.

But you, you have these budding winter flowers  
and empty space around them (which they grew  
from). In that space is born the only power.

It was man who made the sundial, but men cower  
to see what springs forth from the time they sew.  
Their lifetime's between hands that state the hour.  
Beyond the flood of chimes is the real power.

~Virginia

*Nat Buchbinder*

## **Red Leopard**

Smiling coolly, coyly, with red lips, she looked over her shoulder. Her cheeks were red, too, red from the cold, red against pale white skin below bright, pale blue eyes, all framed with shimmering golden hair. She wore a dark blue coat trimmed with white fur, white boots. Trees surrounded her—evergreen or bare brown—everything cloaked in snow, white and pure like a bride's gown.

"You forgot the footprints." Mr. Ethanson faced the painting, did not look at the painter.

"What?"

"She's standing in the middle of a snowy forest." Now Mr. Ethanson turned to look the young man in the eye. "How did she get there without leaving footprints?"

The artist furrowed his brow, then eased his face and smiled. "She's an angel."

"Of course. How much?"

"Forty pounds for the set."

Mr. Ethanson looked again at the painting and, yes, she was a quadruplet, hanging beside her sisters, "Spring," "Summer" and "Autumn," exposed to everything on this London sidewalk. The hems of the painter's pants were dark with grime.

"I don't want the set. Just this one." He pointed to "Winter." "Ten pounds."

"I'm never going to sell only three. It's all or nothing."

Mr. Ethanson frowned, dragging down all the scars on his face. "You're never going to sell any of them. You're a mediocre artist on a good day." His hand dug in his pocket. "Galleries won't take you, no one will commission you, your own mother is probably refusing to buy anymore." And pulled out the money. "Fifteen pounds for the one."

The two stared silently. Then the painter took the money.  
“Would you like it wrapped?”

“Please.”

And the artist covered her in brown paper and handed her to Mr. Ethanson with hard eyes and a flat expression. Ethanson held the painting tightly against his chest as he walked home. With his other hand, he tugged at his collar. It was April, 1903, and it was getting warmer. Walking up the stairs of his building, he tried to ignore the smells of cabbage soup and urine.

In the hallway, a small brown cat sat by the door to the room beside his own, looking at it silently. Ethanson knocked once at the neighbor’s door. As he opened his own he could hear the woman—Mrs. Brown or Black or Grey, some color—unlock hers, “Why don’t you just meow if you want to be let in?”

He unlocked the door, immediately unwrapped “Winter” and set her against the lamp on his nightstand. Then he took off his jacket and shoes, put them in their places, and admired his purchase. She smiled at him. Winter would not do for a name, too obvious. He thought of what the painter said. Angel, Angela, Angelica were all cloying, insipid. It had to be more intelligent, more worldly, more ethereal. Seraphina, her fire dimmed by the cold, a smoldering winter angel.

“What message do you have for me, Seraphina?”

Her shy smile answered back.

Ethanson awoke at the sound of the alarm clock. He rolled over in bed, and met Seraphina’s smiling face. He flashed a brief grin before turning off the clock. Stretching as he sat up, he got off the bed and went to the small sink in the corner of his room. He washed up, shaved and dressed. Then he went to the drawers, took out a knife and plate, and got a loaf of bread from the counter. He cut a slice from the bread and ate it standing, then put the plate and knife in the sink. Putting on his shoes and coat, he went into the hall, down the stairs, out the door.

The early air was not yet bitter, but already warm. He took his coat off and carried it for a while, then put it back on. As he descended into the underground, he felt the heat rising from the station. He wiped his forehead over and over while standing on the platform. When the train came he stood in the center of the car, lightly holding a rail. Everyone else rushed for seats, and when there were none left they stood at either end of the car. He noticed a few glance at him, then looked away. The cheeks of one or two reddened slightly. A little child standing near him stared at his hand without blinking, until he hid it in his coat pocket.

Finally he got off the train, taking the stairs up to the street two at a time. He walked the rest of the way with his head down. Then he came to a building, paused, and went in. He nodded at everyone who said “Hello” as he made his way to his office, his desk in the rows of other desks.

He removed his coat, sat, stood, retrieved the morning newspaper from a pile, stuffed it into his coat pocket, sat again. He stared at his desk, all his papers and pens and ink. When work required a typewriter, he was slow, one tiny letter at a time. But with his ink and pens work went smoothly from one document to the next. A shipment here, a complaint there. Everybody everywhere needed the Lee-Enfield. *By Industry Ever Stronger*. He remembered the weight of it in his hands.

When it was time for the lunch-break, he brought nothing to eat, so instead he went out to the street. He picked a direction and walked that way for ten minutes, then turned, walked back and sat down at his desk again. The papers and ink were more scattered now, but he pressed on, filling out forms, responding, sending, until the day ended. He had not met anyone’s eyes the whole afternoon.

He stood, put on his coat, and nodded to everyone who said “Goodbye” as he made his way out of the building. The day was still bright, and the underground was still warm.

On his way down the hall to his room, he saw the brown cat sitting patiently in front of its door. Mr. Ethanson knocked once and opened his own door. He removed his shoes and coat, and sat on the bed. Seraphina smiled at him.

“Did you have a nice day?”

He imagined her answer, “Very quiet.”

Then Ethanson took the morning’s newspaper from his coat pocket, sat in his chair and began to read. He went page by page, reading every single headline and first paragraph, sometimes completing an article. The moon had been almost completely eclipsed in the night. A doctor in New York had developed a vaccine against typhoid. When he came to the last page and put the paper in the trash bin, he noticed it was dark out. He put his hand to his stomach to gauge his hunger. Dinner.

Ethanson came down the stairs and turned into the dining room. The table was set but the room was empty. He sat at the corner seat adjacent to the foot of the table, which had no chair or place set. Then the maid came in from the kitchen, circled the table, putting a fork beside each plate.

“Nice to see you here, Mr. Ethanson.” She handed him one.

One by one the boarders descended and took their seats. Several greeted him, and he nodded in reply. Mr. Brown or Black or Grey asked how he was doing lately.

“Not unwell. How is your wife?”

“She’s—here she is now.”

And there she was, coming into the dining room, looking down as she walked. Her husband pulled out the chair beside Ethanson for her to sit, and the one next to that for himself.

“How are you doing, Rachel? Mr. Ethanson would like to know.”

She took her seat. “I’m very well, Mr. Ethanson. How are you?”

“Not unwell.”

She quickly turned to her husband then back to Ethanson.  
“You live in number eight, don’t you? Right next to us?”

“I do.”

“Are you the one who knocks on the door for my cat?”

He shrugged. “He looks like he wants to come in.”

“He does, when he sits there. He needs to stand up for himself more, don’t you think?”

Ethanson gave a brief, shallow smile. “I suppose so.”

“His name is Peter. Peter the cat.”

Ethanson nodded, watching the maid place various dishes in the center of the table.

“Do you live alone, Mr. Ethanson?”

“I do.”

“That must be very lonely. What do you do by yourself all day?”

“I spend most days at work.” He reached over, taking a slice of bread.

“Oh, what do you do?”

“Rachel, leave the man alone.” He husband put a hand on her shoulder. “It’s clear he just wants to eat in peace.”

Ethanson turned to meet Mr. Brown or Black or Grey’s eyes. “I don’t mind. I work for a company that sells guns and ammunition, primarily.”

Rachel’s eyes widened slightly. “Oh.” She looked down at her plate, which had been filled for her by her husband. “That must be interesting work.”

“I used to sell mining equipment. When I was in South Africa.”

Mr. Brown or Black or Grey, turned, gesturing with his fork. “How long were you there?”

“I lived there until last year.”

“In South Africa?”

“Yes.”

“I could tell from your accent.” He glanced at the opposite wall, then back. “If you don’t mind my saying so, there was quite a complicated situation there, wasn’t there?”

“Are you referring to the war?”

“Well, the war, of course, and the other things.”

“Yes. There was a war. I fought in it, for a time.”

“And then you came here.”

“Yes.”

Rachel put her fork down gently and looked at him. “Is that—oh, never mind.”

“What?”

“I don’t want to be rude.”

“What were you going to ask me?”

“Is that how you got. . . .” She waved her hand around her own face.

Her husband, voice raised slightly, said, “Rachel, how can you say that? Of course not!”

“No, the scars are pox marks. I had smallpox as a child.”

By now the room was silent, and Ethanson began to eat, staring down at his plate. Gradually the chatter picked up until the room was full of sound again, but Ethanson did speak or look at anyone. His face felt warm, and so did his hands, and even his feet, like the white scars were glowing red. He left as the dinner remains were cleared away, before the dessert was served.

In his room, Ethanson sat, looking out the window. The sky was a muddy, starless purple. Every now and then, a small bat would flap by, hurrying across his vision, chasing insects. He smiled at them, waved to one. He could hear their chirping, and imagined that they hung from the edge of the gutter above his room. They would talk among themselves about what they’d hunted down in the night, how well they slept during the day.

In the war, in the wild, he had heard the bats, crying unseen above the men.

There was a knock at the door. Ethanson opened it, and there stood Grady, face drawn. “Do you want to go for a walk?”

Ethanson nodded. “Let me put on my coat.”

Grady, stepped in and shut the door, wearing no coat, no hat. “What’s this?” He took a step closer to the painting.

“I bought it a few days ago.” Ethanson wrapped a scarf around his neck.

Grady turned. “You won’t need that, it’s warm enough.”

“You don’t know what warmth is.” He glanced at Seraphina. “What do you think of the painting?”

Grady looked at it again, and shrugged. “I don’t know about art.”

“Do you like it?”

“No. I’m surprised you do, to be honest. You don’t seem like one for pretty pictures.”

“I like forests.”

Grady laughed a little at that. “Are there many pine forests in Africa?”

Ethanson said nothing, but went to the door and held it open.

They walked down the stairs, out the door, along the sidewalk. Ethanson kept his hands in his pockets. Grady swung his arms at the sides. He kept his right hand balled into a fist; the left had been missing for as long as Ethanson had known him. But he swung his arms when he walked, without draping sleeves or gloves. The moon was close to half full, but golden streetlights outshone it.

“The first electric streetlights in the Southern Hemisphere,” Ethanson pointed, “were in South Africa.”

“So they were.”

The family had decided to take a trip for the event, though his mother said it was spectacle for the sake of spectacle. His father at his right, glancing around from face to face, his mother by his left, gazing at the light, and he, Ethanson, just one face

among the crowd. Still, there could be no ignoring the way that crowd parted, edged away at the sight of him, cringing and shifting. Light without fire, contained, bottled in glass orbs and strung in the sky. God made the lesser light and set them in the firmament of the heaven, but men had made the night as bright as day.



*Donald Kenly III*

## **Turning Stone**

Daylight shines through windows—  
through white shear curtains.

Aphrodite's statue wants to strike you.  
Blurs of blackness breeze off benches to  
palm trees growing in the staircase.  
Indoor fountains are friezed by marigolds.

Down the hall, stars are clinking  
and clanking together. Your eyes  
turn back toward the sun-brightened  
room, but your feet walk deeper

into the night.

*Cameron Burkhart*

## **Stage Diver**

It's a staring contest  
with the knee of a black guitar  
dressed sharp in morphine feathers  
and cooked tar  
fried under the starry  
heat of the spotlight.  
When the player dives from  
clouds of cracked smoke  
and punk rock riffs  
into a sea of gritty hands,  
a living stage eager to catch  
the ashes of a falling star,  
tread water.  
Do the dead man's float.

*Gina Ferrantelli*

## **Christmas Eve**

Lo and be  
hold the  
voiceless room  
the sound  
less crucible the  
deaf  
man's  
tomb.

Wind it up and let it resume

(for to shatter the peace  
is to rattle a womb).

*Eric Velziz*

**ashcan harbor**

underneath  
the running  
faucet,  
she held  
the universe

to invent flesh,  
warm breasts—  
a patch of seaweed—  
a seashell in  
the hollowness,  
she held her bones  
against the emptiness

to dissolve, quietly  
lapping persona  
from her hands,  
craving flesh  
and flower—  
a white orchid  
blossoms beside  
the urinal

like soft flesh  
melting beside  
her ashcan  
harbor, flowers  
from an ashtray  
bloom beside  
the swan  
wrapped in  
cellophane,  
and like darkness  
tortures a flower  
treetops sway  
and then  
nothing

*Emily DeFranco*

## **Purple Cows and Pirouettes**

Right now it may be only memory. A place I can escape to that will always exist. It sometimes even feels as if I made it up, in a simpler time. In a time when life was as simple as ice cream and dancing.

The state is Pennsylvania, the city Easton. It's where I grew up, for the most part. To put it simply, it's the place about which I have the fondest memories from my childhood.

Walking up South Bank Street I can feel it, excitement rising up inside me as we approach my favorite building. I break free from my mother's hand and add a few skips as I run for the door. The building is tall brick, nothing fancy from the outside. The signs of age and weathering are obvious, and graffiti stains its innocence. But I don't notice, not then. My mind is only on one thing, or maybe two, because there are two reasons I come to this place. It seems silly to me now, how I could have been so animated by an ice cream parlor and a dance studio. But back then the space was everything—a gathering place for my town, somewhere we could all go to enjoy one another's company and fully embrace our existence in an easy-feeling way.

The bottom floor and street entrance is the Purple Cow Creamery, a local, family-owned ice cream shop that's been around for as long as I can remember. The name comes from a poem by Gelett Burgess.

*I never saw a purple cow,  
I never hope to see one;  
But I can tell you anyhow,  
I'd rather see than be one.*

Once inside, a big smile instantly spreads across my face as I use each of my senses to take in the surroundings. It's cold—no surprise for an ice cream vendor. The smell of cones baking and hot fudge is overwhelming. The bricks on the insides are painted with murals depicting generically beautiful scenes of flowers and vast grassy fields, one with a giant purple cow holding about ten different-colored ice cream cones. Bright colors trim the storefront windows with overflowing flowerboxes. There is an overpowering chatter of children begging parents for money or permission to add “just one more scoop!”

To an outsider, an out-of-towner, it may seem merely an ordinary shop, somewhere to stop after a soccer game for a treat on the way home, nothing worth mentioning. But to the people of Easton it is a place where, no matter the time of day or day of the week, you always recognize someone. It was an ideal spot during my girlhood, because if friends of mine stood in line there were also parents who would smile at mine and start up friendly conversation about local news or what we were currently doing in school.

Through the wooden door near the back corner of the room another novelty awaited. I would open the door that let out a creak and head up the dark stairway, my parents mounting a few steps behind past gallery-lit paintings. I can see beautiful images of ballet dancers, their arms and legs appearing to stretch for miles, the extravagant stage backdrops putting them in a real scene; they're dancing for themselves and no one else. At the top of the stairs, on the right, Studio B is set up like any dance classroom you've ever seen in movies. Continuous mirror panels line walls from the ceiling all the way down to polished, glistening hardwood floors. A few feet up from the floor, a ballet barre hugs the perimeter of three walls, leaving the back empty except for a director's chair for our instructor to sit in while she teaches us and critiques our performances. My dance teacher is preparing music for our lesson with the CD in the corner and the other

girls are warming up at the barre. I can't help but be jealous of the flawlessness with which she moves, tall and slender, across the studio during demonstrations.

I am the youngest, bumped up from a class with girls mostly my age to an advanced one. The other girls don't seem to care about dancing as I care. They wear old jeans with holes and baggy white tee shirts. They don't wear shoes and they let their hair hang down loose around their shoulders. I've come in what our teacher describes as "the proper attire" with my leotard (skirt attached), tights, and specially-ordered ballet slippers, hair pulled back in a bun so tight I can feel the skin around my eyes being stretched to the back of my head. As I sit on the floor, stretching, then practice my twirls in front of the mirror, I smile.

\*

Though I return to Easton every now and then to visit friends or family, the deep connection I once had for the place has diminished. Strolling down South Bank today, one might not recognize that very same street. The Purple Cow still beckons, bright as ever, inspiring a new generation of children and adults with its endless list of flavors and sweet-satisfaction aromas. Out of necessity to the building's aging structure, its storefront has undergone minor changes. Brightly colored trims grace windows outside and in, and in a side yard a small patio has been added with picnic tables, umbrellas, and quick-order window for people to enjoy desserts outdoors in nice weather.

The ballet studio today is another story, abandoned like my passion for dance. It's closed now, completely shut down. The door still creaks open, but paintings have been removed from the stairwell, where broken lights remain. Doorframes are so rotted I can barely push the latch to Studio B. A half-inch blanket of dust coats the floor. Mirrors have cracked in several places. Water damage has ruined a large, corner space. Mostly intact, the ex-

ercise barre sags on its bolts, one slanted section resting on the ground. A window on the back wall is weathered, shuttered with a sign facing out to the public. From my perspective the letters are backwards, but I can still read: *Space for Rent*. Cobwebs hanging from the ceiling combine with other new features of the room to create a creepy aura. It's as if this derelict upper floor still holds a haunting presence. I can almost see the reflections of children lined up to do stretches—see them sashaying across the floor in groups of three, hear the classical music, follow the steps of a difficult choreography. I think how the carefully maneuvering toes of the dancers would weave in the now dust-covered floor strangely lovely patterns, like purple sprinkles dotting a scoop of vanilla, pirouetting toward the sky.



*Niko Polizzi*

## **Camping in the Later Years**

Swimming pool showers;  
Campfire's smoke and chlorine  
In shorts and boat shoes.

Without underwear,  
Tank-tops and tattoos impress  
The opposite sex.

Now obsessed with the  
Melancholy of good times.  
The desperate rhyme—  
A writer in summertime  
Lingering on divine nights.

*Matt Markle*

## **A Cabin in the Woods**

Turning onto the old dirt road, I become hypnotized by the tall grass that lines its boundaries. The graceful stalks sway and bob in the cool spring breeze like a musical audience gathered to welcome me back after a long winter. The shocks squeal and the tires moan as my dad's old Jeep bounces along the rocky trail, producing a magnificent cloud of pale dust that billows out in our wake, as if the rusted car were a rocket taking flight. I have a bond with this humble little road. This rocky strip of earth bore witness to my first moments behind the wheel of a car. This is where a fifteen-year-old boy, under the experienced guidance of his father, had first put his hands on the wheel and his foot on the pedal. It is hard to imagine now, as I pilot my way towards the simple gate that marks the entrance to my grandparents' property, how only two short years have passed since that momentous moment. This place holds a special spot in my memories, in my present and in my future. I have been coming here, to this beautiful place, for more than eight years now, and the road leading to it is not the only thing I have come to bond with.

Once the cable, strung between two cedar posts, is lifted from the nail it rests upon, I can proceed through the gate. I begin to ease the old vehicle along the stump-covered "goat trail" (as my grandmother calls it) that weaves among the sandy hills within the lush, evergreen forest. As we rock and sway along the washed-out path I recall the smell of gas and oil from my father's chainsaw. As if it were just yesterday, he had led my brother and me along these hills clearing this path by the sweat of his brow with the aid of his two young sons. The meager trail ends in a wide circular patch of sun-bleached sand. A small wooden wagon lies upturned beneath a dark blue tarp at the far edge of the sunny lot. A puddle of water still sits where the snow that had

covered it just a few months earlier has melted away. Off to the left I see, for the first time since the end of fall, my family's humble cabin in the north. It has sat there, beneath the outstretched arms of countless pines, which silently stand guard over its weathered surface, for only three years. Yet, it looks a part of the forest. With its brown tin roof that echoes droplets of rain, and its gently sloping stairs that run along its western edge, sunken into the earth as if Mother Nature herself had put them there, the rustic building blends into its surroundings.

I pull up to the door, parking in the shadow of the big rock that sits not ten feet from the small wooden stoop. The giant stone stands twice as tall as my mother, who has scolded me many times for teetering too close to its lofty ledge. It is only after I shut off the Jeep's engine that I can hear the soothing gurgle of the two brooks that fork not twenty yards from the back porch. I get out and stretch my stiff legs. The air is thick with moisture and tastes of sap and dew. I stand unmoving for a long moment, breathing in the forest air. I cannot wait to go running through the woods along the meandering water's edge. Like an adventurous child, I long to leap from shore to shore and enjoy the beautiful melody of the many falls that churn the frigid, clear water. Work, however, must be completed first. I put aside my ambitions, for the time being, and begin unloading the old car of its luggage. As almost always, we have come to spend the weekend. But however long I stay it is never long enough.



*Eli Siems*

## **Composition**

If here was a child sitting  
Under some nut tree with bark  
Smooth and gnarled, like an acorn,  
The trunk with that acorn skin  
But twisted and wrung out, dark  
Bumpy scars, and cold to touch;  
If sitting where the roots grow  
And spread slowly, low, and far,  
With the heel skin of her hands  
Pressed, thinking of the hard floor  
Of some cool room in summer,  
Then she remembers dance class  
In the propped palm of her hand,  
Which was only summer camp  
Three months before. It is fall.  
If she is there at the tree  
She slides across the slow roots  
That are wide, a shining stage,  
And out to the far edges  
Where they plunge and then are dirt  
And the dog barks and tunnels  
Since his pad-feet clacked and slid  
Where the gecko skin—thinly  
Etched and also deeper creased—  
Of her hands could hold sure fast  
Because they kept static air  
Braided in them. If she grows  
Into the smooth spreading roots  
While her parents gone ahead  
As she feared they might, like dreams,

And the dog would slide right off  
On soft paws and not save her;  
If she is there at the tree  
On hardwood acorn, polished,  
With good air beneath her hands  
As she becomes like glossy  
Bones, like wooden glass, it is  
Because she grew that texture  
Out through her feet and wailed like  
Branches shining when she danced.

*Taylor Steinberg*

### **58 Willits Road**

I lingered there but decided not to stay  
in that dried up garden plot  
behind the house where I used to play.

The dirt was cracked and dry and gray  
where a half-buried terra cotta pot  
and I sat, deciding whether or not to stay.

I thought about that one Bastille Day  
when all the fireflies simply dropped  
to the ground where I used to play

and how I wished for them; I prayed  
for fireflies never to be caught  
again, letting them go astray.

The grass was greener, where I lay  
in the sun, just out of earshot  
from the house where I played.

I tried to scream, but had nothing to say.  
I just wanted everything to stop  
so I lingered but could not stay  
behind the house where I used to play.

*Samantha Spoto*

## **Daughter**

With fastened eyes  
I weep, while my father,  
with brooding blood,  
howls at splintered walls  
and guides a bar of soap  
up to the lips of the girl  
who enjoys nothing more  
than the taste of acid.

*Nicole Chiverton*

## **Derind**

*(A father and daughter sitting across  
from each other at a restaurant table.)*

GABRIELLE

Wow, Dad, that was surprisingly quick. All good?

ANDRE

Just business.

*(Hesitantly.)*

All Good. But do you know what has not been quick?

GABRIELLE

Let me guess—to you, not to me, but to *you*, the cheese plate is well overdue.

ANDRE

It is just cheese. Derind it, cut it, plate it, and garnish it. Nothing to it.

GABRIELLE

Know what I think is overdue?

ANDRE

I bet I do. But it's more of an entrée kind of conversation, you understand?

GABRIELLE

Okay, well then consider this cheese plate my entrée. And for the record, Brie is a major pain in the ass to derind.

*(Giggling, saluting hand gesture.)*  
Major Pain in the Ass! It's a *How I Met Your Mother* joke . . . the kids would get it.

ANDRE

Huh.  
*(Pause. Andre inspects and begins meticulously polishing the water stained silverware.)*  
So, how are your studies? Is your Arabic improving?  
*(Wait staff enters, places a cheese plate in the center of the table, and exits.)*

GABRIELLE

Well,  
*(Clears throat, politely.)*  
Marhaba! Ismii Gabby. Kayfa halook?

ANDRE

Kayfa Ha-aluk. Stress the "ah."

GABRIELLE

Ha-ah-luk. Hah-akuke. I mean, ahluk. hA-aluke. Noted. See, I appreciate constructive criticism.  
*(Shy smile.)*

ANDRE

Noted.

GABRIELLE

So, you said we had to talk and with the absence of Andy and Ethan, I take it to be . . . not PG?

ANDRE

The kids will be meeting us around seven. Theresa is bringing them here after swim practice.

*(Staring down at the wooden cheeseboard, hesitantly scraping a thin layer of Brie.)*

We're leaving.

GABRIELLE

Leaving? What's the matter? Did you see a bug or something?

ANDRE

No. No, it's—

GABRIELLE

*(Perplexed, examining the cheeseboard.)*

Some cheeses are supposed to have mold on them, Dad.

ANDRE

No Gabs, we are not leaving. *We*, as in the kids and I are leaving, back to Qatar. They need to grow up around family and since your mother's death, there's really nothing grounding us to America any longer. Our roots have been severed.

GABRIELLE

*(Shaking head, holding back tears.)*

No. Andre, no. Fucking no.

*(Pause.)*

Mom's dead but you can't say you don't see her every time we walk past that pierogi vendor on 72<sup>nd</sup>. Can you deprive your children of that, of memories? You can't say I'm not rooted to this family.

ANDRE

Rooted is strong, you're more supplemental.

GABRIELLE

Supplemental.

*(Beat.)*

I think the kids, my only siblings, would consider me more than supplemental, Andre.

ANDRE

Families can survive and function from continents apart with months of separation and do you know why?

GABRIELLE

Save it. I don't wanna hear your thin-air fabrications.

ANDRE

The kids love you, as do I. When I married your mother, I inherited everything that was once hers. That's where you come into play. I believe I've been graciously providing—or should I say supplementing—your lifestyle since your mother's passing.

GABRIELLE

So, I'm important enough to financially patronize but not important enough to play an active role in my siblings' upbringing?

ANDRE

That's not what I'm say—

GABRIELLE

Not important enough to be there to help Andrea with her makeup before prom? Or be around to hug my baby brother when he has his heart broken for the first time?

ANDRE

You, (*Beat*) you're important to us Gabrielle. You're your mother, in the best and worst ways. But the kids deserve to be back in Qatar where they can be surrounded by family and friends.

GABRIELLE

(*Deep breaths, silence. Gabrielle flattens her moccasins to the ground, refining her posture.*)

It's not back to Qatar for them, Andre, this is their home. They're blood, my only two blood relatives that remain on earth and you want to take them eight thousand miles away?

ANDRE

It's roughly seven thousand miles and really it's just a plane ride. Feels the same as a red eye to LAX. You wake up and hey, you're there!

GABRIELLE

Yeah, *there*. Not here, not home. Not on the continent where they grew up.

ANDRE

America is highly overrated, Gabrielle.  
(*Reaches for a chair-side combination brief case.*)

GABRIELLE

Family isn't.

(*Pause. Reluctantly.*)

What's this? What now? Official stepdaughter-divorce-papers?

ANDRE

Don't be silly, it's more of a care package.  
(*Opening folder.*)

Open dated tickets to Doha, so you're free to visit whenever you choose. And of course, I will continue to fund your tuition and books. If you need any extra, I'm just an email away.

GABRIELLE

Andre.

*(Beat.)*

Dad, just please give it time. Dust settles. Mom's only been gone a year. The kids are already readjusting.

ANDRE

As a matter of fact, time is something I can give you, Gabs.

GABRIELLE

You can?

ANDRE

*(Reaches once again into chair side briefcase.)*

I was going to save this for when the kids got here, but. . . .

GABRIELLE

*(Opening box, confusion turns to anger and disappointment.)*

A watch?

ANDRE

A multiple-time-zone, Tiffany watch! Set for Qatar. I just bought you eight hours.

◇

*Zoë Krumanocker*

## **Whale Watching**

“Why did you get this Special-K shit again? It tastes like astronaut food.”

Marian looked up from the weekend paper.

“You taste like astronaut food.”

“When is that joke going to stop being funny to you, Marian?”

Rolf stared at her, but she had already dropped her eyes back to the Baby Blues comic.

“I’m not sure it ever will.”

“I was afraid of that.”

She watched a drop of coffee slide down the side of her mug, stopping on the hip of the hula girl printed on the side.

“Do you think we’ll ever go on vacation again, sweetie? Maybe we can go whale watching.”

He picked up his bowl of cereal and drained the milk into the sink. After stopping a moment to look out the window, he scraped the soggy bran flakes into the garbage.

“I’m going to get some lucky charms.”

He grabbed his car keys off the hook next to the counter. A lanyard holding Marian’s keys swung back and forth before sliding off the hook and landing in the dog’s water bowl. Rolf kicked the dog’s bowls across the kitchen sending kibbles and bits in every direction.

Outside Rolf could hear the mail-truck speeding up and stopping at each mailbox. He unlocked their used Honda civic and slid into the front seat. It was a nice morning, and he wanted to put his hand out the window and feel the wind under his fingernails. But the electric windows had stopped working weeks after they bought the car. Marian said she liked it better anyway; she said it made it feel like she was driving a submarine, the only

problem being at tollbooths when you would have to climb out of the sunroof to hand the toll collector the change.

It was Saturday, and the supermarket was packed. Rolf loathed crowds, especially Saturday morning supermarket crowds. He loathed the soccer moms, swinging kids on their hips, shuffling through coupons, looking for a bargain on canned tomatoes. He loathed the eighty-year-old women, creeping through the aisles in their tan tennis sneakers, picking out fancy feast for their sixteen cats at home. He loathed the squeak of shopping carts and the shuffling of indecisive shoppers. But at this particular moment he loathed Special-K most of all.

Rolf grabbed a box of Lucky Charms, tucked it under his arm and headed for the refrigerated section. He picked up a six-pack of Coors Light and cracked one open before arriving at self-checkout. Rolf only ever did self-checkout. Not just because he believed most supermarket cashiers to be incompetent morons, but he also got a tiny snippet of satisfaction from scanning each product and hearing the accompanying beep after every successful scan.

At home, three of Rolf's favorite pairs of shoes sat by the door, filled with Special-K and 2% milk. A bottle of expensive whisky sat on the countertop half empty, a glass filled to the brim sweating beside it. Marian sat at the counter in her underwear, tracing her finger around the edge of the glass. Her cheeks were a shade darker than pink lemonade. A Paul Simon record echoed throughout the house. One of Marian's arms hung over the countertop, swaying back and forth as she hummed to herself.

\*

Marian had insisted upon having a Paul Simon tribute band play at their wedding. Rolf obliged, as he did for most of Marian's eccentric requests. Marian told Rolf on a regular basis that if Paul Simon wasn't so short, she would have married him

instead. The tribute band put on a good show. However, the bongo player had apparently been sneaking Dirty Shirleys from the bar all night, and threw up on Rolf's great aunt Mildred in the middle of "You Can Call Me Al." Marian thought it was hilarious, and despite the disapproving scowls from Rolf's family, laughed for nearly ten minutes. By the time she was done laughing, great aunt Mildred had already received her coat from coat check.

Rolf remembered driving home after the reception. It was the summer of 2000. They had survived the millennium, and Rolf had just landed an investment position at the Trade Center weeks before the wedding. Rolf remembered Marian fiddling with the radio knob—the moon shining on her bony pastel fingers. She had painted her nails lavender for the wedding. There was still some paint smudged on her cuticles. Rolf brushed his fingers gently over hers. Marian leaned over and nibbled on his ear whispering gently, "I like when you touch me in the car."

\*

Rolf walked up to the house, cereal box in one hand and beer in the other. The neighbors yelled to each other from across the yard.

"Did you put chlorine in the pool? It's Saturday!"

"No, that's the pool-boy's job."

"We don't have a pool boy!"

"Exactly!"

Rolf gave them a polite nod before opening the front door. For once he actually envied the neighbors, bickering over chlorine and lawn trimmings.

"Marian, I can smell the booze from outside, put the bottle away."

"Oh, and you're much better Mr. Coors Light."

"Marian, you're drunk."

"And you're an inconsiderate nimwit."

“Marian, stop.”

“Rolf, apologize to the dog for kicking its bowls over.”

“You’re being ridiculous.”

“Apologize!”

“I’m not apologizing to your stupid dead dog.”

It was then that Marian plopped herself onto the floor, laid her cheek on the tile and sobbed. Rolf paced back and forth, his fingers twitching nervously at his side. He puffed up his cheeks and blew the air out a few times, blowing his bangs straight up.

“I’m sorry babe, I didn’t mean it.”

“You did mean it, that’s why you said it!”

“Babe, why don’t you get off the floor, and I’ll put you to bed.”

“You get off the floor!”

Marian let him pick her up like a child and carry her to their bedroom. Rolf tucked the sheets around her and under her toes because he knew she liked sleeping in a cocoon. Rolf placed a glass of water on their bedside table and drew the curtains back in. He gave her a kiss on the forehead before shutting the door behind him. Once Rolf went back into the kitchen he filled the dog-food bowl with more kibbles and bits.

\*

On Marian and Rolf’s first date Marian asked him if when he showered, he stood facing the water faucet, or away from it. He replied that he faced away from it. She sighed in relief. They continued to have a ten-minute conversation on the stupidity of facing the water faucet in the shower. From then on Rolf was enchanted. He was tired of dating girls with big tits and small wits. And that’s what he told Marian, who took it as a delightful compliment. Later that evening Marian took Rolf home with her to her apartment in Westchester. It was late, but neither were ready to part. One thing led to another, and before you knew it

Marian had cooked an entire breakfast feast—eggs Benedict, cinnamon French toast, Canadian bacon and a pot of dark roast. Marian told Rolf she wouldn't sleep with him on the first date, but she would certainly make him breakfast. Rolf reluctantly behaved, and agreed that if he couldn't see her naked, bacon was the next best option.

\*

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when Marian finally came out of the bedroom. She had taken a bath and changed into a fresh pair of pajamas. She had put her dark damp hair into a long braid, curving around her neck and reaching her shoulder blade. She curled up next to Rolf on the living room sofa. Rolf scooped Marian onto his lap. He kissed her forehead, and the tip of her nose, and then he gave her a whole row of butterfly kisses along her freckle line running across her nose. Marian sunk her head into Rolf's shoulder. Her hair smelled like peppermint and clean towels.

“Marian, what's going on?”

She pulled her pajama shirt over her head, creating a miniature cave, and held onto Rolf tighter. Rolf let her. He rocked her back and forth gently until he could tell she was asleep again. He laid her down on the couch, once again tucking a blanket around her sides. In the bathroom a tiny orange bottle sat next to the tub, its white cap sitting next to a bar of Irish Spring. Rolf put the cap back on the bottle and placed it in the cabinet behind a tube of Neosporin.

\*

On their honeymoon Rolf and Marian went to Maui. Rolf got to pick the location since Marian chose the wedding band. If Marian had chosen their honeymoon location they would have

gone to Nova Scotia or Bolivia; she despised any kind of tourist trap—which is not to say she didn't have three Mai-Tais, get on stage at the resort's luau and dance with the fire blower. Luckily Marian did not catch fire, was kindly removed from the stage, and cut off from the tiki bar. Marian always woke up earlier than Rolf on vacation. One morning when Rolf woke up he rolled over into a sandcastle that Marian had built on the bed. Each window of the castle had a miniature scallop shell pressed into it. At the top of the castle was a flag that Marian had made out of a plastic sword from one of her frozen margaritas and a piece of hotel notepad paper. On the flag Marian had drawn a pineapple and wrote in her finest cursive "Marian and Rolf's pineapple fortress of love."

\*

Marian quietly snored on the couch. Rolf watched her for a little while—her chest rising and falling with each breath. Rolf wanted to lie next to her and press his ear to her heart, but he was afraid of waking her. As long as she slept, she wouldn't be awake, thinking. Outside, Rolf could see girl scouts walking up the front lawn of the neighbors, clipboards in hand, their mothers waiting in the car. Rolf closed the curtains and shut off the light in the front hall. He went into the kitchen and opened another Coors. Marian hated that he drank Coors because of their affiliation with anti-gay associations. Rolf had no problem with homosexuals, but was still not willing to give up his favorite cheap beer.

Marian had laid a newspaper open to the classified section. Some of the page had been highlighted in three different colors. Marian had drawn a key at the top of the page so Rolf could decipher what the different colors meant. The first box that Rolf read was an accountant position at the local dog grooming shop—who apparently despite the recession, were doing great

and needed help with the books. Rolf did not like animals; and even though he would probably be in an office, he couldn't help thinking of all the pet dander that would make it back to his office and into his nostrils. The next highlighted job was a position at a bank in Manhattan. It was similar to the job Rolf had before. He wouldn't be getting paid as much, but it was something he knew. However Rolf would not go back to the city, and Marian knew that. Rolf scanned the listings that Marian hadn't highlighted. Most of them were manager positions at various retail stores, gas station attendants, and secretarial jobs. At the bottom of the page was a box with a pineapple, a phone number, and a request for someone with a good ear. Rolf knew the person meant it figuratively, but he still rubbed both of his earlobes between his fingers.

\*

Rolf remembered that day in September. The neighbor kids were back to school. He watched them get on the bus through the living room window—their backpacks bigger than their miniature torsos, their hair freshly combed by their mothers, their stomachs full of oatmeal and brown sugar. Marian was already waiting in the car, honking the horn every thirty-eight seconds. Marian was in her second trimester and insisted that Rolf come to the check up with her. In the waiting room Marian studied a baby food cookbook—she had already decided that her baby would not be a Gerber Baby. A short nurse with salt and pepper hair and wrinkles around her mouth entered the waiting room and called her name. Rolf rolled up the newspaper he was reading and tucked it under his arm, putting his hand on Marian's lower back as he followed her into the examination room.

Dr. Woodman was an older man—over seventy—but he still had steady hands and a full head of hair, as well as nostrils.

“Well hello there Marian, I see you’ve brought the trouble-maker with you today.”

Marian smiled and winked at Rolf. Rolf looked at the door.

“So how have you been feeling?”

“Like a bloated and bruised empire apple.”

“Ahh well not too much longer Marian, patience is key.”

Dr. Woodman took out his stethoscope and placed it on the side of Marian’s swollen belly. He moved it around to the other side, raising his eyebrows. He tried the upper and lower belly. For five whole minutes he moved his cold stethoscope around her.

“Marian, I’m so sorry.”

\*

Rolf picked up the phone and dialed the number that was listed below the pineapple. After two rings a woman answered the phone.

“Hello.”

Rolf could tell that she smoked cigarettes. For a moment he forgot why he was calling. He looked into the living room. Marian still lay there in her cocoon. Her hair was nearly dry now and Rolf could smell the peppermint from the kitchen.

“Hello?”

“Yes, hi, I’m calling about the ad you posted in the newspaper.”

“Oh, alright—I almost forgot I posted that. No one else has called yet, so the job’s yours.”

“That’s it?”

“Are you free right now?”

Marian would probably be sleeping for another two hours. Rolf left a note on the refrigerator that he was running out for milk. The woman on the phone asked that they meet at the laundromat on Clark Street. Rolf didn’t ask questions. He was tired of asking questions.

A woman sat outside the laundromat, a cigarette in one hand, a leash holding a miniature dachshund in the other. When Rolf got out of the car she stood up.

“Are you the man that called me?”

“I think so.”

“Okay, the first thing I need you to do is put my laundry into the dryer. Washer number three.”

The woman handed Rolf a pile of change and opened the door for him, holding the cigarette pursed between her lips. Rolf obliged. When he returned the woman was sitting back on the bench with the dog in her lap.

“Did you put it on the delicate setting, or regular cotton?”

“They were sheets, so I put it on regular cotton.”

“Good, you passed the first test.”

Rolf wasn't sure what to say so he didn't say anything. The woman turned to him and studied his face. The dog licked his hand. He let it. The woman lit another cigarette. Her face was thin and she looked tired.

“So why did you call?”

“I don't know.”

“You're not going to be working for me. I just had you switch my laundry because I'm lazy. I need you to check on my mother every day for a few hours. Talk to her. Let her make you sandwiches and iced tea. You just have to put her eye drops in for her and make sure she takes her medicine. Also make sure she doesn't jump off the roof because she's been threatening to do that.”

“Should I ask why you can't do that?”

“No.”

Rolf knew he shouldn't have asked. The woman gave Rolf her mother's address and a key to the house. Rolf put the key in his front pocket, waved goodbye to the woman, and drove home. When he got there Marian was awake. His soggy shoes were

stuffed with the morning newspaper. Marian stood by the stairwell.

“Where’s the milk?”

“I got a job.”

“I’m leaving.”

“What do you mean you’re leaving?”

“In about five minutes I’m going to walk out the door, and shut it behind me.”

Marian had changed into her traveling jeans and a zip-up sweatshirt. The light in the hallway shone on the top of her head. Rolf could see a grey hair peeking out of her dark wisps. A moth flew around the light, bouncing off the bulb over and over.

“I don’t understand.”

“You don’t have to.”

Rolf stared at her. Her freckles were no longer cute. His fingers twitched at his sides. She watched them. He put his hands in his pockets.

“It’s not like I want to go. I need to. I need to do something besides lay on that stupid fucking ugly couch.”

“You picked that couch out.”

“Rolf. Goodbye.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know—go whale watching, track down second cousins, learn how to cook—not be here.”

“Marian.”

Rolf watched her turn the knob, her bony fingers wrapped around the brass, her knuckles white.

“Marian, I like whale watching too.”

The door shut. The windowpane rattled.



*Clifford Venbo*

### **The Fire Burning in These Walls**

Waking parched from dreams, I go to the kitchen  
for a glass of water. Moonlight soothes the darkness  
in the room like water on my tongue. Outside, the yard  
is white with snow, silver with moon, framed  
by tall elms, all bare in the brightness of this night.  
The day seems like a dream I once had ages  
ago, and this night is like a waking dream,  
too vivid to be made of memory and lost  
in the glare of day. Memory is itself a shadow  
of the undiscovered fire burning in these walls.  
I step forward and my breath fogs on the window  
pane. Suddenly, I sense I am not alone.  
Dark figures move in the trees, warm bodies, eyes,  
antlers—deer. Their silences meet mine and unearth me.

*Rachel Bailey*

## **Berries**

In this vast landscape  
Of things to have  
You appear  
And are immediately had  
By eyelids that are teeth  
And pupils that are stomach.  
They will devour you whole  
Like a handful of berries.  
You smell of berries  
And look like a car-wreck.  
Your gaze is razorblades across thin skin.

*Max Geisenheimer*

## **Dog-Day After-Evening**

I will never forget the crisp March evening when I broke up a dogfight that started when a pit bull attacked a Rottweiler across the street from my parents' house. Spring had supposedly arrived, but it was still jacket-weather. I was in my second year at the community college in Middletown, New York and in the midst of reading William Faulkner's "Barn Burning" for an explication paper due the next day. This was one of my first encounters with Faulkner's writing, and the words made it hurt to think. My frustrations mounting, I decided to retreat to my parents' front porch to try and mend my wounds with a nicotine fix. The sun had already set, and I was comfortably in my pajamas. I threw on some slippers and a bathrobe—they were closer than my sneakers and jacket—and took my fight to a different battleground.

Soon after I settled in on the porch, my mother walked out the front door with the family dog and told me, "I'm taking Sydney for a walk." I tilted my head upward and grunted, too preoccupied with the massive ball of confusion consciously streaming through my head. My mom took Sydney around to the backyard of our house, while my neighbor across the street took a Rottweiler to her car so she could return the dog to the owner, her sister. Both my neighbor and I were oblivious to the fact that simultaneously, an 80-pound pit bull was walking a petite 85-pound girl up the side street, on the right-flank of the Rottweiler.

I heard the bark of a dog. I looked up and saw a white blur dash across the lawn opposite from my house. I went back to reading about a man dragging horse manure through a house and smirked as I thought the canine comrades were saying hello to each other with a gentle nudge of the nose in the rear. Then I heard my neighbor screech.

“GET YOUR DOG OFF MY DOG!”

My neighbor’s plea was denied as man’s best friend let out writhing shrieks shattering my soul. I gladly placed the book down and stood up to see if I could get a better view of the action. My neighbor’s parked car blocked my line of vision; I could only hear the evidence of another animal’s pain. I didn’t know what breeds were fighting, only that they certainly were not friends.

“GET YOUR DOG OFF MY DOG!”

Nothing was being done to end the assault. The shrill cries for help echoed in animal and human alike. The sounds of absolute agony resonated throughout the neighborhood. I was on the front porch, alone. The only thought on my mind was *I can’t just sit here; I have to help; I have to do something*. I prematurely extinguished my cigarette and hastily made my way across the street.

Here I was, in my bathrobe and slippers, frantically wading through my neighbor’s muddy front yard. A young girl stood like a spectator, in shock and awe witnessing a primal rage. “Is that your dog?” The young girl answered my question with a timid gesture of the head; it was her dog. “Go and get some help.” Without hesitating, she ran back to her house. Arriving on the scene, I realized this fight was a heavyweight bout. The pit bull was solid muscle; it had white fur and a reddish-pink nose. The Rottweiler looked like it could have been in the movie *The Omen*. These were notoriously vicious animals and they lived up to expectation. The red-nosed fury locked onto the right hind-leg of its unsuspecting victim, the leg completely parallel to the ground. I grabbed the leash connected to the brick of muscle, wrapped it a few times around my arm, and entrenched my slippers into the mud.

Pit bulls have “lock-jaws”—their jaws can lock up when they bite down to stabilize their grip as the dog thrashes about. There are basically two ways the animal will release its grip at this

point: if the prey has died, or if the animal gets punched on the bridge of its snout.

As I secured my grip on the leash, I measured up my shot at the beast. I wanted to be precise and forceful, but I had to be cautious. I didn't want to hit that red nose too hard and risk damaging the Rottweiler's leg any further. Keeping my own safety in mind, I didn't want to throw an untimely punch and risk becoming a second victim. I landed a stern jab in perfect unison with my command, "Let go." Maybe I felt those words gave my fist the added force I couldn't actually use, or I thought the ivory assailant would respond quicker to me with words than without. My first attempt failed as the pit bull maintained its grip. *I have to try again; I'll punch him a little harder this time.* "Let go." My second jab to the top of the red and white snout triggered the internal mechanism that unlocks the beast's jaw. For a brief moment I thought I had diffused the situation with minimal casualties, but that's when the Rottweiler snapped around 180 degrees and sank its teeth firmly into the jowls of its attacker. *You've got to be kidding me! I can't say that I blame you though.*

I gingerly moved the entangled dogs out from behind the cars and into my neighbor's yard. They clasped face to face, positioned like two people would be if they were kissing.

My neighbor maneuvered to her driver-side, backseat door, opened it, and shouted, "GET IN THE CAR!"

I started to gently tap the demonic-looking victim on the top of the nose as I whispered, "It's okay, let go, I have this under control." The dog obeyed and ran into my neighbor's car; she closed the door once the pet was safely inside. After the fight ended, the pit bull sat down next to me with its bloodstained snout and a peculiar docility. A vicious, primal beast only moments beforehand, now gazed obediently at me, as though I were its master. I turned around and the young girl stood behind me with an older man—an uncle or brother.

“Here’s your dog, you really should be more careful. . .” *you piece of shit scum*. I handed the leash over to the man and walked away; I felt dirty just being near the so-called “pet-owners.” I went to check on my neighbor, while she stood by her car with the victim inside.

“Are you okay? Were you bitten at all?”

“No, I’m fine. Is that your dog?” She pointed at the assailant.

“Me? No, I live across the street in that yellow house over there. I happened to be on my front porch and I just came over.”

“Oh, my God, thank you so much! I’m so horrified right now, I can’t believe what happened.”

“How is your dog?”

“Shit! This isn’t even my dog, it’s my sister’s. There’s blood all over my backseat. She’s gotta’ be cut somewhere and she keeps licking her foot.”

“Yeah, when I got over here the dog was biting her foot, didn’t look too pretty. What’s her name?”

“It’s Mika.”

“Hey Mika, I’m Max. Everything will be alright, just sit tight. . . . You should probably take her to the animal hospital.”

“Shit, are you serious? I was just about to take her back to my sister’s.”

“Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you should probably file a police report too.”

“MAX . . . MAX . . . WHERE ARE YOU?” My mom stood shouting in her front yard. She had taken our dog indoors, and noticed I was neither inside nor on the porch.

“Hey mom, I’m over here, across the street.”

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING? ARE YOU OKAY?”

“I’m fine mom, don’t worry. I wasn’t bitten.”

“YOU WERE BIT—”

“NO, I WASN’T—AS IN WAS NOT.”

“Okay, good, did you call the cops yet?”

As soon as my mother posed that question, my neighbor called the precinct and everyone involved gave their account on the police report. I crossed the street in my muddied slippers, but I took them off before I walked back into my parents' house—Faulkner taught me something that night. While I removed my slippers on my porch, I summarized the turn of events for my mother. She told me she noticed the pit bull walking on the sidewalk and decided to take Sydney to the backyard. After I mentioned I still needed to write my paper, my mom barked at me to finish my homework. *No good deed goes unpunished.*

“Barn Burning” in one hand and my wet, dirty slippers in the other, I entered my safe haven to tell my brother what had happened. His girlfriend had come outside for a cigarette after I crossed the street to stop the fight; she saw everything. My brother told me, “All she saw was you, in your bathrobe, holding the dogs and punching them in the face!” Half-jokingly, I told him to call me the beast-master.

“You saved that dog’s life! You’re a hero!” my brother said.

I admit I was definitely shaken by the experience, especially immediately after it happened. I’m the type of person who would cry if an animal dies in a movie, but I couldn’t care less if a person gets hurt. I later found out Mika had a broken hind leg. Lacerations on her back and neck had required stitches. I was able to finish my explication of “Barn Burning” on time and received a B.

A story’s protagonist need not be its hero, for whom a defining trait is courage or bravery. Me, a hero? No. I was incredibly lucky. I did something stupid breaking up that dog-fight; something no rational individual would have done, and fortunately can live to tell about it. People say, “There’s a fine line between bravery and stupidity.” I just think to myself, maybe a hero is someone who knows how to walk that line.



*Ja'Lisha Higgs*

**mind enslaved**

i look around and see blank slates  
wishing to be a blank  
slate, but instead am a smudge—  
a smudge of ignorance lying  
in the middle of a cotton field  
where the history of my ignorance begins.

looking to the cotton feeling  
envy and discouragement,  
i try to grow like a seed, learn  
to bloom into something useful.  
then my ambition begins to  
bleed from the dried bristles—  
the dried bristles of my confidence.  
i am a slave to the limits the  
sharecropper places over me,  
a slave to the vacillation of my mind.

*Jade Asta Quinn*

**my brother, the pansy**

the boys used to call  
my brother a pansy,  
the locker room  
had the metal twang  
of that word.

he wore bruises  
he didn't speak about  
and carried scars  
I could not touch.

they called him a pansy  
and he wintered it.

my brother's botany  
dug pansy roots  
in their frost.

they called him a pansy  
but pansies are survivors,  
even when planted  
in the fall.

they used to call  
my brother a pansy  
but he reseeded himself  
and grew

through the rot  
of their withered ambitions,  
my brother, the pansy,  
bloomed.

*Melissa Nau*

## **Q & A**

By the stop sign where you never bother to stop  
You said, "I have to ask you a question"

Instead, you started kissing me:  
The oldest trick in the book

I released the ninth cigarette to the sticky jaws of summer  
Dropped the beer when I saw headlights; I never had you alone

We weaved on and off the sidewalk  
Together then apart, like a stitch through a wound

You mentioned depression and I asked you a question  
Pulling you in by your arm's loose flesh

TRUE and BLUE tattooed on each of your wrists:  
The words held me in place as your lips lifted to lie

I left you standing in front of your house  
I hopped off the porch; you thought I dove off a bridge

Years pass and you ask why I didn't stay,  
"If I spent the night, you would have all the answers"

*Vanessa Pavelock*

### **Leave-taking**

City buildings lean forward to listen,  
but they cannot hear the whispered  
nothings you tossed around the night  
before—*mi mariposa, mi pajarito*, but  
never simply *beautiful*. Taxis beep,  
tourists *oo* and *ah* wildly, drills and  
cranes echo through the Big Apple  
brigade, as men with hardhats fix the  
broken streams we swim along. Stepping  
back for a moment, I search for caesura  
in the mix of this chaotic composition  
unfolding before us, while your body  
spirals downward, drowning in a  
cacophony of empty orders and  
obligations. We split at 40<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>  
Avenue. It's 1400 on a Sunday afternoon.  
I watch as you mindlessly glide through  
rows of people, marching to the rhythm  
you never stopped to hear while the  
music runs through my veins, and  
I flap my wings to the spontaneous  
syncopation of the unplanned day.

*Aaron Kravig*

## **A Brief History of Humankind**

Adam stepped off springy moss and out of the sun-dappled forest into a sparse clearing where shade broke apart between stunted box elders and prickly crawling spinosas. The sun struck full upon his head and made steam rise inside his mangled straw cowboy hat. He paused and, blinking up at the sun, pulled off his hat, smearing with a dusty plaid sleeve his pinkish brow and the sweat that had formed against the brim. He could hear sounds of a road ahead. It had been nearly three days since he had crossed a road one might spot a car traveling down. The woods he traveled were deep. The road-noise was loud against the chirruping garden behind. His face felt hot and red. Shuffling beneath the blotchy shade of a squat ash maple, he released the clasps of his camping pack and, resting it against the trunk, sat facing the choked shrubs obscuring his view of the motorists beyond. Adam cooled himself with the last of the water in his canteen. He caught the scent of hot pavement as a breeze, chilled by tree shade, wheezed over his legs stretched out on the itchy dry grass.

After having sat for a time, he rolled a cigarette from his pouch of American Spirit tobacco. With the unlit cigarette hanging from his lips, the hiker picked stringy bits of fallen tobacco off the strong fabric of his tawny Carhartt overalls, then dusted the bits back into the pouch. Adam had been hiking north through the country for quite a while. He lit the cigarette and pulled the map from his chest pocket. A warm breeze whisked sweat from his back, ruffling the map he spread across the grass and held in place with small river stones. The bold black line ran east to west, cutting clear across the flat continental plane. Ten miles north of the interstate, near the dot a quarter-inch above the line, family waited for him, gathering at their makeshift

commune in the tall pine timberland. It would be good to see his old friends again. It would be good to see new ones.

Stirring from the thick canvas overalls, the happy white rat Lavinia poked her head out Adam's second chest pocket. She had slept peacefully since the morning, rocking softly all through the hike, snug against his chest. The highway was noisy. Lavinia sniffed at the din bombarding her solace. She scuttled up his knee as he scratched beneath her chin. Nibbling affectionately, she grasped his thumb the way a kid embraces an entire watermelon from out of the icebox.

Adam rose to stretch his rested legs, Lavinia propped atop his shoulder, burrowing into his lanky dreadlocks. After circling the tree a few times and finishing the cigarette, he hoisted the pack onto his shoulders, securing the straps around his waist that balance the pack's weight on the legs and off the back. He held open his chest pocket and Lavinia scabbled into her den, turning over and twisting into comfort. Adam plucked his hat from the knot he'd hung it on while sitting, put it on, and stepped through the thorny bush obscuring the busy interstate.

The six lanes he faced were jammed in utter quagmire. The sun beat down on the tops of cars and left no shadows. Sweltering waves rose from the burning black asphalt and from the sick overheated engines idling, spewing exhaust, making the swelter-waves grimy and distorting the sky above the road—fibrous air stretching then disappearing on both horizons east and west and the magnified heat dancing back up towards the sun again. Traffic heading west was a swift blur, a constant rattling whistle and roaring blast once the rushing vehicles met and rocketed away past the place Adam stood upon the grey roadside dust, watching from the opposite shoulder, the throttling speed shaking up through his feet and rattling his knees despite the mire backed up in the eastbound lane standing in-between.

Adam twisted his arm around the pack and pulled out a bit of cardboard from the pocket where he kept the canteen. Nice folks from Utah sitting in the car closest to Adam stared down at the traveler—curious and discerning within their Escalade—until he unfolded his piece of cardboard and looked up. The Cadillac’s windows slid closed and Adam heard a muffled click and the man and woman screwed their eyes and pretended to see the trees on the far side of the highway. The drifter stepped into the road and around the front of the white Escalade. He smiled warmly to the man and woman and passed on.

**RAMBLIN’ MAN LOW ON  
BREAD AND SALT.  
ANYTHING HELPS. GOD BLESS!**

The panhandler passed in front of a Buick, whose driver, wearing a white collar, sneered. Adam looked forward at the trees on the far side of the dense road. A squirmy grin jolted from the man who sat in a matte-silver Volkswagen station wagon beside the Buick when he saw the gypsy sauntering in the blinding noontime light. The passenger-side window slid down and Adam leaned into the window, smiling toothily.

“How are ya!” the man shouted. He sweated profusely despite the air conditioner blowing full-blast. He squinted hard at Adam and fumbled his worn brown-leather wallet for a twenty.

“Thanks so much, sir!”

“It’s no problem at all!” the man squirmed and grimaced, his thin sweaty lips curling with delight. “Ha Ha! I sure do wish I could just hop out right now and join you! Ha Ha!”

“Heh! It sure is a scorcher out here, today.”

“I know! It’s killing me even in here. . . .” The man smiled, twitching and staring with wide watery eyes.

“Well, thanks so much sir! I really need to be getting on to the other side of the road soon. God bless!”

“You’re welcome! Good luck!”

Adam passed a minivan and ran up the line of cars that had piled in a grotesque daisy-chain fender-bender together as far ahead and behind as Adam could see. His breath quickened; he needed to cross the road and get into the woods. He did not understand how so many cars could have gotten so piled up. He tried to hop over the hood of a navy Ford Taurus.

“What in the HELL do you think you’re doing, buddy? Get the HELL off my car!”

“This guy is definitely not my buddy,” Adam said to no one, hopping off from the car to find a break farther up the line. Furious motorists seethed at him, swearing and glaring and full of spleen. There were no breaks in the line. He could not pass between any two cars and the honking at him rose with the rumbling of the westbound lane and the seething pavement scorching at his legs. Panicking, the nomad released the clasps holding his pack to him and kneeled beside an SUV, setting the pack down on its back. He pulled Lavinia from his chest-pocket, and stroking behind her ears, pushed her inside the pocket with the canteen and map. Adam scrambled beneath the SUV, pulling the pack behind him. Poisonous neon-lime pools washed over the baking black asphalt and Adam’s hands and arms blistered and singed, antifreeze popping and sinking, sizzling into his skin where it touched. Black grease smeared in Adam’s hair and over his back while he crawled beneath the disfigured metal wreckage.

Emerging from beneath the vehicle, Adam hoisted himself on one knee and struggled to loosen his pack from beneath the frame. Lavinia sprung from the pack and into the sun. The scorched asphalt burnt her feet and, as Adam lunged, a hawk diverted its trajectory, slamming into the SUV’s driver-side mirror and twirling end-over-end onto the ground close by. The raptor squawked and screeched and hobbled, stunned. A man opened the door and stepped from the SUV as Adam secured Lavinia in his chest pocket, hoisting his pack from the ground onto a shoulder. A racket of screaming-children and piercing-

woman edging him on and with mirthless authority, the man struck with a tire iron the hawk's head, killing the hunter with a swift swing and spit.

"Stay in the car, kids! You too, Linda!"

"Did you kill it, Harold? Is it rabid? Oh, God! I hope it's not rabid!" the abrasive woman shrieked.

"Don't worry, dear. It's dead." Harold smiled.

"Oh, Thank God!" the cursive siren wailed.

"Hey! Didja see how it almost got me?"

"No, I didn't see," Adam told Harold.

The man eyeballed the vagabond, snarling noiselessly, and mounted his static, mangled steel colt. The hawk's dark-honey corpse ruffled and twitched under the brutal heat and Adam turned away.

"Hey!"

Adam turned to the young woman in a dilapidated Honda.

"Hey! Get in!"

"Thank you! People are crazy today."

"Tell me about it. Here, have some water." Adam set his pack on his feet and took the water. He took a gulp and looked at the brown flecks floating and swirling in the bottle.

"I have some fruit back here, if you want it. My name is Angie."

"Mine's Adam. Thanks a lot, Angie." Angie handed him a yellow plastic grocery bag, heavy with a ripe pomegranate. He peeled away the plastic and the fruit was mostly molded through. Adam picked seeds from the side that wasn't moldy. Nirvana's "In Bloom" played on the radio. The seeds were tart, fermented, and stung his lips. The stuffy air in Angie's car made his head swim and she sang along with Kurt: "Sell the kids for food . . . Weather changes mood . . . Spring is here again . . . Reproductive glands. . ."

\*

“Hey! Hey! Are you asleep?! God. . . .”

“Huh?”

“I was just saying how nice it is that you’re here. It was getting pretty lonely out here on the road. Oh God! Listen to me! I sound so crazy! You must think I’m crazy!”

“No! No! Not at all! I really appreciate it. It’s crazy *out there* today!”

Angie interrupted. “As soon as this traffic clears up we can get off at the next exit and have some pie, maybe? God! I’ve been stuck in this shit forever! It’s so nice that you’re here now!”

Adam was taking rapid breaths and felt the supple copse across the westbound lane.

“Ya know, this water was great, but I think I’d better keep on. . . .”

“You’re leaving? No! Don’t go! It’s been so long! I can’t! This traffic will go away and I’ll buy us some pie and. . . .”

“I’m sorry, really, Angie. Thanks for the water and. . . .”

“NO!” Angie, eyes like black obsidian chips, clawed at the front of his overalls. Lavinia bit Angie’s finger, drawing two crimson pinpricks. Angie wailed horrid curses at the loner.

“Get out, you creep!” she shrieked. “Get out! Get the hell OUT!”

Adam scrambled out again into the oppressive heat, Lavinia scratching and gnawing at the brim of his pocket. He leapt in frantic bounds toward the large concrete blocks making the median separating the directions of the superhighway; he saw the eyes of the man who wore a suit and idled swampily in a black Mercedes next to Angie.

*He’s not taking my goddamn spot!*

The rubber burnt on the hellish road and the Mercedes jerked forward. Adam leapt, forward and high in front of the

Mercedes, seeing himself landing safely on the wall. The Mercedes smashed with a steel thunk and crinkling-tinkling crunch against the next bumper, shattering and bouncing Adam's knee between the machines. He fell to the searing pavement and dragged himself to the thick cement wall. The Mercedes driver howled in ecstasy while the tramp crawled up the wall to stand.

Adam leant against the concrete blocks separating the eastbound lanes from the westbound. He released the straps and hoisted his pack over the divider, then lowered the knapsack onto the ground, leaning it against the concrete wall. He looked back through the tree line at the obscured undulating valley they had left behind. Using his arms to raise his body, Adam lifted himself onto the concrete median. Hoisting his twisted leg by the overalls fabric, Adam placed his injured limb upon the wall and rested it flat and straight atop the blockade. The grove visible just across the westbound lane emitted emerald shadows that spiraled and darkened further into the wood. Reaching down, he began to pull tent rods from his pack.

Automobiles barreling westward came and came and came. Every few seconds two or three raced by, spread across the six lanes and vying for first-place glory; then another howled by, screaming and cutting into the trembling wake, pursuing all preceding itself, raging to close the distances in-between. The pilgrim sat atop the low concrete wall, gritting his teeth and ripping a dirty t-shirt into long strips. Lavinia writhed in her pocket, choking on exhaust and dust, silent and imploring.

◇

*Benjamin Burgholzer*

## **Phone Records**

The sweat from your hands left the steering wheel glistening. A quick glance in the rearview mirror: your undead eyes with sockets of purple blues on lily white skin stared back at you, reminding you again that this was still real. It was one of those hot August days when you heard the heat hissing in the air and saw it steam off the road as the stream of white lines flowed past the car. I'm sure you were still wearing that long-sleeve shirt you bought three years ago, covered in old sweat stains. You had gotten used to the hot-cold-hot-cold game of sweat chess you had to play to be a part of that bitter thing; the body aches are what you could never get used to—the feeling that the bones are on fire, your marrow incinerated within a shell of muscles that have been tenderized by the swing of hammers. Every hair on your body was creeping like worms wriggling from screaming pores. But you were used to the sensation by then; it had all become as routine as eating and sleeping, neither of which you did much of anymore.

The green exit sign you'd ached for was finally in your sight. You arrived, and an entire three minutes faster than yesterday. You picked up the phone to call him again to let him know you were close. He was in your address book as "J" and the "Recent Calls" section was more dedicated to him than you were any of us. His face was unknown to you, but you were a fish squirming in his net.

The clever little jingle beat of his ringtone always made you anxious—how could it not? There were still so many things that could go wrong. You were the wrong color for this part of town. A friend of a friend's face was greeted with the cold kiss of the butt of a gun instead of his favorite toxin on this same block once. Another friend of yours got shot at driving away for being

short seven dollars. You told me about all of it, and how dealers sometimes let you get away with being a few dollars short as if you were actually friends. You didn't think of any this though, you just wanted the screaming and the squirming and the sweating to stop.

J picked up after four consecutive phone calls—37 seconds.

The conversation that followed was something like:

“Ups o downs?”

“Downs.”

“How many?”

“20.”

“No shorts this time motha fucka. Give ‘em a few extra minutes. You know the spot.”

The phone went silent and left you staring at the pixels of black that spelled call ended. Anxiety levels peaked; I'm sure you wondered: “How many minutes was a few?” You thought of the time you waited three hours in the summer heat with no air conditioning, drove from backwards streets to upside-down dead ends with all those disappointed people staring at you. They knew why you were there. You were the wrong color for this town. They looked at you like you were poison because you were, a vermin, a leech, the reason why so many try to leave, the reason why so many try to stay to sell poison to poisoned people for profit. You had gotten used to their backwards stares; it had all become as routine as eating or sleeping, neither of which you did much of anymore.

You drove past block after block, ignored the stares, and parked. On the wrong side of town for all the wrong reasons, you waited, waited, and waited. That stolen money had burned a hole in your pocket as if it was your own, and you just wanted the worms to stop squirming and the marrow to stop melting. A few extra minutes passed more than a few times. Your long-sleeve-shirt-in-the-middle-of-August was soaked and you were freezing now. There were small amounts of blood on the sleeves, on your

jeans, on your car seat. You lit a cigarette and inhaled. It tasted the same way you'd imagine the garbage on the street would. You looked around at the people who walked to nowhere. In between drags, you noticed for the first time that there was a middle school less than a hundred yards away from the dead-end street you frequented every day.

In between drags you finally saw him. You had seen him hundreds of times. He knew your car. He knew your plates. You saw his eyes weaving through a maze of other students like a snake until he spotted your silver Ford.

He walked through the fenced-in gates surrounding the basketball courts of a playground.

I hope you wondered about the things he would never see nor do only because he was born in the wrong city. He met the wrong people and confused them with being the right people just like you did. I hope you thought about your own childhood with a luscious green yard and a pool in a decent house in suburbia. I hope you thought about your college fund with thousands of dollars, started up by Dad when you were born that through a series of lies and tall tales, had disappeared in direct correlation with your friends, girlfriend, and all your short-lived jobs. Every day after you get what you need, you get to go home in your silver Ford to a place where you need not worry about stray bullets, where you could walk around at night alone without fear and sleep without bars over your windows and three locks on the doors.

He came up to the car and ended your daydream. He leaned in, his extended, open hand saying everything that was necessary. With a quick handshake, you each handed each other the things that you both had shattered your lives for. For the first time you looked at his young eyes—a wall of brown iris void of hope and innocence, a wall of brown iris built with the mortar of the horrors of a life spent in poverty, pieced together by endless tragedies.

He had given you your poison and walked away. You almost didn't notice. You sat in your silver Ford stunned—maybe you even forgot about the worms for a moment. You took a deep breath of the rotten city, left the taste of sorrow's sweat on your palette, and opened your hand with a smile.

\*

Now that the venom flowed through your system, you started the car and headed back home to suburbia, everything forgotten, as you ignored the stares of the flypaper people.

“Poor fucks,” you thought, and shook your head with a grin, almost convinced that you wouldn't find yourself stuck on the same block at the same time the next day with a pocket full of stolen money and an anxious look, but you would. You had to. It all had become as routine as eating or sleeping, neither of which you did much of anymore.

The day after you finally decided you had enough, the routine had gone sour. Too many of those tomorrows and tomorrows for you I guess. You had grown tired of the close calls and almost overdoses. Too many cold nights spent on the cold floor. Maybe you were tired of feeling like dying all the time and praying that someone else would kill you to set you free from the life you never quite learned how to live in, the life you never got the same rulebook everyone else seemed to have. You had tried to kick alone a hundred times at home; you never made it more than a few days.

But this day was different. You had called around. You spent hours on the phone with insurance companies, detoxes, hospitals, rehabs, halfway houses. Anyone that would take you anywhere. Anywhere with an open bed. Your calls and hours on the phone probably sounded like this:

“Sir, sorry we don't accept that insurance here, sorry.”

“Sir, you are unable to be pre-certified at this time for inpatient rehabilitation, sorry.”

“Yes sir, the only outpatient program you can apply for is closed for the weekend. Try calling again on Monday. Once you fail the four to six-week program, as long as we are given the proper paperwork from the appropriate certified counselors, we will potentially be able to pre-certify you for inpatient rehab.”

I’m sure they all addressed you with that pleasant monotone secretary rhetoric, referred to you politely as “sir” while they indirectly sentenced you to die. This probably made you smile. You always thought things like that were funny.

But there was nothing funny about us finding you there lifeless and still two days later.

It doesn’t matter how much time has passed.

“I was just dealt a shitty hand,” you always used to say to me with that crooked grin and as a cigarette dangled from your mouth. “Some people build houses, some people sell cars, some people hunt, some people fish, and some people get high. That’s just the way it is.” We both always shared that same dark sense of humor.

All those questions and all that pain you left us with flow through our heads and hearts, a river of black with rising waters and strong currents. We all try to find the shore through the blackness, but the current keeps getting stronger as we float downstream underwater, dodging rocks, logs, and eddies. Our endless swimming and that broken feeling has all become as routine as eating or sleeping, neither of which we do very much of anymore.



*Diana Regal*

### **On My Cell Phone**

Outside, hunched atop a bench the  
blueness I feel remembering the ocean in hues of lilac  
petals, soft like comforters pulled over your face  
my fear is that my thoughts meander, only to  
return to a conversation about happier things or  
competitive children in gym class, invigorated by a wanton  
game in which I was always lagging behind; I never felt  
united with my own team  
with you I always felt a subtle  
tint of being very much alone with doubt.

*Haley Bloom*

## **Voicemails from My Grandmother**

I am four days late to my own masquerade,  
I'm shielding myself from what may come naturally to others.

They say nothing good comes after midnight, but now  
I find myself caught up waiting for the phone to ring,  
(please ring) throughout the midnight hours.

It's 4 a.m.  
I'm trying to remember now that every moment lived in jest  
Become the moments we would never trade for any chances.

We catch ourselves counting the folded lines in our faces like tree  
rings,  
Holding our years and our secrets.

I press on.  
Because like the wind against any given sail, leaving any given  
harbor, on any given night,  
We must press on.

People are telling me that's okay now.  
(But the phone still hasn't rung.)

I come to grips with my own reality as I listen for voices,  
*One voice* (I fix myself).

It's 5 a.m.

I reach for the phone—I have no one to dial.  
I play back lost recordings one by one, responding back to the  
machine.

With no one around, my own voice makes no sound.

And so, every morning in the early light,  
I put on my mask and dance in my personal masquerade.

*Maggie Rose Melito*

## **Notes from God's Desk**

It used to be easier to sit here and look over my art and what I've created. I mean I didn't fully create it, there was help obviously. It used to be easier to say things like that, like "look what I made," but now people don't want to hear that. They don't want to know about the magic of what it is they live on. It used to be easier to understand people and how they treated others. I designed this land with that intention. With the intention all beings are good and kind-hearted. The world has always been a scary place. I mean long before I got this job. When they asked me to specialize in the northern hemisphere I was delighted, you know? What an honor! All though I wish I came up with the name for the equator—what a magical idea. We were all raving about that for weeks. I mean it really did get warmer underneath that imaginary line. But back to what I was saying; it used to be easier. People didn't always want to deny how beautiful their beings were. They didn't want to hide the fact that they were a part of something much bigger than any Cosco they've ever stepped foot in. They weren't so dead set on knowing every answer. Even if you know every answer you don't have to deny me, and this desk and these colorful little shapes that decorate my office.

I'm not this guy in a robe . . . don't get your ideas twisted. I don't hold myself above anybody over there. I've been wearing the same L. L. Bean jeans since 1912 and I can't even remember what I had on before that. Something for the scrapbooks, I'm sure. I didn't create this place alone or with a "magic paintbrush." I crafted it according to the way I felt it should look, according to what was already there.

There are a few of us that were and are in this line of work. It's obviously longer than a lifetime job but I love it. I love it with

every fiber of my being—am I even a being? I love it with every fiber of my soul—that’s better. Even now, I’m feeling the need to explain myself to you. Maybe that’s not such a bad thing . . . to clear your name, or to be able to establish yourself in a line of work. But explanations get old. And if you wrap yourselves in the “how come?” questions, you’ll find life moves a lot slower than you’d hoped. We get a bad rap in that sense. People only establish belief when there is no one else to blame. We have no control of natural disasters—or which men buy guns. I am hopeful for humanity. I don’t think the end is near, to be honest I know it’s not. It may have been easier that way, for it to all to be over with, but that’s not how we designed the universe. This job has perks obviously, perks that no other job has. I have the ability to watch and observe and to regret. I wish I made New Mexico a little easier for a kid to navigate and sometimes I think Wyoming is sort of out of control, but I was having one of those days.

Last night during the storm I watched over a man in Long Island. He sat in a dark living room with a transistor radio waiting for the high tide to pass. This wasn’t his house; I could tell he had evacuated. Bags of clothing were next to him and he kept his boat shoes close to his feet. I figured this was his mother-in-law’s house, his wife asleep in a bedroom down the hall and an older woman next to that one. He was in some pictures on the mantel but not all of them. Every couple of minutes he’d get up and shine the flashlight out the window. I heard him whisper: “Only one more hour till it goes down.” The men on the radio reported fire after fire and how bad the damage had gotten; they were unable to get the trucks down the flooded streets. He held his breath. One of them could have been his house. How would he know? I watched him sit in the dark and pace the floors. I watched him try time after time to get comfortable. I related to this man. And I prayed for him. I prayed he and his family would remain safe, I prayed his house wasn’t one of the many in the

ruins. I sat with him last night, and I think he may have been the kind of man who could feel me. I don't know why but I was drawn to him like a bug on a warm lantern. God bless him, I thought. God bless him.



*Monica Volpacchio*

## **Here's That Rainy Day**

I always believed that my first encounter with a freshly dead body would be in the midst of a spontaneous, chaotic event. Maybe I would be driving on the highway and the motorcyclist in front of me would lose control of his vehicle. The wheels would wobble and teeter and trip over one another like a drunk running full speed downhill and the man would be catapulted head first from the cycle as it flipped nose over tail, cartwheeling out of the lane and onto the shoulder. I would make a move to pull over and drive past the out-of-control vehicle, which would come to a halt on top of the cyclist's torso. Leaping from my Honda with a 9.5 safety rating, I would sprint to the victim's aid while dialing 9-1-1. I would keep him company in the presence of death as he bled out into the rumble strips.

Or possibly it wouldn't be spontaneous and chaotic. Maybe my fears and fantasies would come true, and I would stalk my target from afar for weeks, closing the gap of distance as his time drew near. I would skulk into his life like a shadow cast by a sunset, growing more powerful as night wore on. Scythe drawn during the blanket of nightfall, I would creep into my carefully chosen victim's home without alarm, and rob him of his life.

Perhaps my first experience with the dying would occur as a result of the gradual decay of my capability to socialize. I would indulge in an unhealthy, reclusive lifestyle and brood in the corners of my darkened mind, crumpled in the fetal position of an equally dark room. I would go mad and become obsessed with serial killers, eventually leading to my emulation of them at the expense of a stranger.

Or maybe, my role as the Time Keeper would be an accident.

Uninhibited rage would consume my logic in the heat of a fight with a friend and fists would be thrown. Maybe a forceful shove would knock her off balance and on the way down her head would slam into the corner of a coffee table that we had found on the side of the road together months prior.

Although I had prepared myself for a plethora of possibilities, I never anticipated that my first time rubbing elbows with death would be at a family member's bedside.

\*

The air in the Intensive Care Unit of New York Presbyterian Hospital was lethargic and thick. Twenty minutes after the ICU nurses jump-started the body's heart and failed to rewire its brain, I slogged through the level, searching for my family's vigil.

She was already dead when I got there. My mother was hysterical, and my father, whom I hadn't seen cry since our ten-year-old dog died five years prior, wore a brave face damp with tears. They were there when she died, when my grandmother transitioned from human being into a body with a name.

The body was half-propped up in the bed and half-sunken into the sheets, as if it knew it were time to lie down and rest permanently but didn't want spectators to notice it slip out of life. A mechanical ventilation system rhythmically filled an artificial lung with air, then forced oxygen through the plastic tube that disappeared beyond the body's ashy, chapped lips. There were no identifying marks on the yellow, swollen sack of hide and bones decorating the mattress that made me recall the woman who taught me how to play Scrabble when I was five years old, or tried to explain my three degrees of separation to its founder, Alfred Mosher Butts. The shape of the figure was bloated with stagnant fluids, and the head was more like a bullfrog's than my grandmother's, whose face I would eventually wear in a locket on a daily basis.

The nails that protruded from the inflamed pale fingers donned chipped gold polish, as if the hand's owner had ruined the manicure while struggling with the Reaper. I tenderly placed my palm over the body's limp appendage that was bedewed by needlepoint-sized droplets of blood that had seeped through the engorged skin. This was not one of the hands that I had clutched onto as a toddler during autumn walks, or grasped to help my grandmother up the two steps into her apartment porch. This one resembled an inflated latex glove that I feared would burst under the weight of my touch, spewing coagulated blood and futile IV fluids across the room.

It was January 22, 2011, and although weather anchor Lonnie Quinn on *CBS Saturday Morning* warned the city about below freezing temperatures, it wasn't snowing. An unusually rainy winter day in the northeast, the sky wept with my family for the five hours that we gathered behind the eggshell curtain.

Like my mother, uncle, two sisters, and myself, the androgynous body we stood beside owned blue irises. But our eyes were different. That day, our irises refracted the overcast day against red, rheumy sclerae. The body we stared at had eyeballs that were nothing more than ill, expiring organs. Unlike my grandmother's, there was no brilliance to the baby blue eyes. Never again would they twinkle with reverence amongst the mention of the real Ol' Blue Eyes, Frank Sinatra, whom my maternal grandmother adored. Wrinkled lids sagged over the translucent orbs like soggy beige berets, lending the face an expression of boredom. It was apparent that the person who occupied the body had died hours before.

Audrey Atkins passed away twenty minutes before my arrival at the hospital. What I witnessed dawdle towards death that Saturday was the framework she inhabited for eighty-nine years. The organs began to fail in the early morning, and in the early afternoon a cardiac monitor emitted the heart's final resounding mark of life. Death did not act spontaneously,

chaotically, or allow me to hold the hourglass. But perhaps if I had seized the timepiece, my grandmother would be in her apartment sharing homemade cranberry bread with my mother. Maybe they would be listening to “Here’s That Rainy Day” from Sinatra’s 1959 release *No One Cares* while the two of them prepared to visit me behind iron bars.



*Jaclyn Houlaban*

## **A Sight to Be Seen**

“He was a sight to be seen,” Aunt Peggy says. This has to be the twelfth time she’s said that in the past ten minutes and if she says it one more time I think I’m gonna get sick too. Every time she says it she gets this look in her eyes, like she’s getting the life sucked right out of her. The whole thing’s just so sad and I can hardly stand to see her like this anymore, but since Ronnie got sick I’m all she has. Anyway, the fact of the matter is that she’s right. He was a sight to be seen, and every time I think of him that way I start picturing him the way he is now and something happens to me that I can’t even explain. It just hurts.

Aunt Peggy’s face breaks my heart. It’s red and blotchy and pale, clearly because she’s been crying, but that’s understandable. Of course she’s crying, but that’s not what’s so sad. It’s the way her eyes have glassed over from something that’s not tears. I always wonder about that. You’re so sick, and you wouldn’t exactly say you’re sad, just really sick, and your eyes go on and cry for you. Anyway, her eyes got glassy with sickness and they sunk right into her face the moment she found Ronnie shaking downstairs. I told her it would be okay but to be honest, I was lying. To be honest, I never heard him whimper like that before, and I never heard his paws drag along the wood of the kitchen floor like they did that night. If he dies, Aunt Peggy will die. It’s something I’m sure of.

I force myself to look Aunt Peggy in the eye and I tell her to keep thinking of him that way, that he’s strong and he’ll be strong again soon and there’s no good in speaking in the past tense or picturing him so weak and helpless.

And suddenly a smile’s all over her face, and I honestly think it must have come from outside of her. “You should have seen the way people stared in restaurants,” she says. “Awestruck.

They were wonderstruck, in awe of my Ronnie like he was a miracle or something. I mean, just picture it!”

I don't want to picture it, but I already am. It's a terrible feeling when your brain doesn't listen. I keep picturing these strips of film spinning around my brain playing this scene and I try to shut it off but the button's broken. So I picture myself trying to rip out those strips of film, trying to rip all the little fibers apart, but they're stuck and it feels like I'm trying to rip nerves in half, pulling at them like wire, and my head's about to explode now.

So picture a polar bear. It's not exactly a fair comparison, but no description will do Ronnie justice, so this is what we're gonna have to work with. Put yourself in wooden booth at a corner table in a local country western-themed restaurant sharing an appetizer with your date. You're exceptionally happy right now simply because everything's exactly how it should be. You and your date are laughing and getting along, and the waitress is sweet and pleasant and the food's great so far. It all just makes you feel comfortable and completely at ease. And then a polar bear walks in. Actually, a Great Pyrenees walks in. But he's huge as a polar bear, white as a polar bear, and as out of place in this restaurant as a polar bear would be. He's exceptionally beautiful, and you can't take your eyes off him. And the woman at the door holds his leash in one hand and holds up a card in the other, and it takes you a moment to realize that this card must say something along the lines of “service dog” because he just walks right in and sits right down next to the woman, at the table right next to you, and suddenly your evening is not about you or your date or your job promotion. It's about a giant dog.

This is a hypothetical scenario, of course, because Ronnie is now lying on the floor of a veterinary hospital, cold and shaking as his fur falls from his body like snow. Ronnie is covering the floor in clumps by now, and I bet he's all alone. I bet he's all alone because no one can stand to look at so gentle a creature so

sick. No one can look at Ronnie without hating himself, and no one can hold on to any faith when such a pet is whimpering on the floor. Ronnie will die tonight. I know this. Ronnie will die and Aunt Peggy will die because I can't save her. And I'll die a little too, but with much less dignity.



*Vicky Prashad*

## **The Day the Crocodile Ate the Sky**

he sees through her as if she were a chandelier, always only glimmering by artificial light. he watches images dart across her face, her eyes lighting and dimming like clips from a movie reel thrown up against a blank (white) wall. her skin, like ivory; he wishes to steal her away, but only to then sell her, cheaply, on the black market. she's unaware, golden poppies adorning her wreathed hair, a goddess with a coarse harrowing laugh. she shatters crystal and smiles.

the day the crocodile ate the sky, she decided to marry the morning sun, dancing her days away in the winded desert . . . forgetting who she was, who she was supposed to be. it is far more easy to forget, to forget and dance, than to remember. though an angel hides just beneath her chest she drifts away (shallow breath by shallow breath).

she had the accidental body of a ballerina, tall and thin, her spine a train track one could spend months traveling. her lips had skin like the delicate flesh of a cherry; supple, full, and juicy. she licked her lips and pursed them to speak, revealing a row of perfectly straight teeth. to this day, her mouth, which was painted red with lipstick, smells metallic, like iron and blood.

her eyes are glazed over as she gazes through and past everyone outside the bar, reflections made blurry from her hunger gaze. she steadies herself against the wall, clings to it like wet morning petals against nature's windowsill. her sweet, smoky shadow of a breath fills the outdoors as she exhales, savoring each departed moment until she can savor the emptiness instead.

she's pressed her back into so many of his walls, just hoping to find a seam, like in wallpaper, that would allow her closer to his being.

there are clementines lining her bed, uneaten, unpeeled, waiting for hunger to strike in the middle of the night. it pains her to realize, how beautiful and sad life can be, all at the same time.

some days, she can feel the sea hiding itself beneath her naked body. foaming at the mouth, unsure of what to say, she unfurls herself like the peeled skin of clementines.

now it is winter. the sunflowers are dead, the birds having pecked all their seeds out and yet, their stalks like skeletons, are hanging from the sky, snow collecting on the tips of their barren heads.

he left her with sticky skin, hot and sweaty, ablaze with the heat of a thousand burning suns and crushed cinnamon sticks. she rolled his name throughout her mouth, shaped her coral lips to every vowel of his name and then shook her head in disgust. he had left that morning into the red haze of early light, a ghost with apparition-thin skin.

she had a figure like a thousand broken cities, something once so grand, beaten and left to ruins. now, there are violin strings inside her body, tucked beneath the right side of her ribcage.

*Aaron Tremper*

### **The Devil's Wife**

I know she has arrived  
when her heels clap down the hall.  
Her favorite stilettos are soled  
with the molars of lawyers;  
she loves the way they chatter  
even after the widow maker.

I recognize her by the  
padding of ripped-out bible pages  
sticking out of her bra.  
She likes to joke that she's a size  
E-zekiel.

At the table, I notice how  
the pendant of Job's finger  
taps her chest, an anniversary gift  
that pokes the heart as one would  
a worn out watch or a paling corpse  
to see if there is more

life inside than just a fistful of worms.  
The bruise on her lips is also an  
endowment, fresh as a crunched up  
stink bug. The lipstick of blood  
is dabbed on too thin to hide  
the swelling.

I've come to buy the songbook of Sirens,  
feathers the same glint  
as their father's, the most beautiful of angels.  
The melodies themselves melt male muscles,  
make men mutter, murmur, mumble, moan. . . .  
"They got their voices from me,"

their mother says, "but the song's soul lies  
in knowing how sharply love hurts."  
"What would you know about love?"  
She laughs. Lips spread, her bruise gleams  
like a welt on Eve's apple. She asks,  
"And what would you know about men?"

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Francisco Alvarenga** was born in Paramount, California, where he grew up dreaming of becoming a novelist. A December 2012 graduate, he concentrates on fiction and poetry as his main genres. His travelogue is an excerpt from the memoir “Unquote,” his first attempt at nonfiction.

**Shanicka Anderson** is a Creative Writing major currently in her last semester. When not writing, she enjoys eating oatmeal in bed and watching reruns of the *X-Files*.

**Rachel Bailey** was born in New York City and currently lives Upstate. She is working on a novel featuring a lesbian werewolf bodyguard. It’s an autobiography.

**Haley Bloom** credits all of her words and life inspiration to JB and the Great Gatsby . . . and EBH for *everything always*.

**Nat Buchbinder** is an English major with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in history.

**Benjamin Burgholzer** is a senior English major interested in modernism and the outdoors.

**Cameron Burkhart**, a junior studying Creative Writing, was born in Chicago but has spent the past five years living in New York. He is both a writer and musician, vocations that intersect in his work.

**Nicole Chiverton**, age twenty-two, lives in Poughkeepsie, New York.

**Emily DeFranco** is a sophomore Journalism major and Photography minor, working to get her work published and out in circulation.

**Emily Feldman** is a Creative Writing major graduating in May 2013.

**Gina Ferrantelli** writes, “I am a senior in the Adolescent Education program concentrating in English. I have written for as long as I can remember. One day in community college, I wrote a poem about not knowing what major to study, and from there realized my passion for English.”

**Max Geisenheimer** writes, “I graduated in December 2012 with a bachelor’s in English. My narrative was written for a Craft of Nonfiction class, my first encounter with writing nonfiction. I am currently working on a novel and screenplay.”

**Gabrielle Grigoli**, a junior majoring in English with Philosophy and Creative Writing minors, was born and raised in Staten Island, New York. She has spent the better part of her life writing.

**Abby Harmon** is a senior Creative Writing major from Wappingers Falls, New York. This is her second appearance in *Stonethrow Review*.

**Dana Hershkowitz** is a sophomore majoring in English with a minor in Creative Writing.

**Ja’Lisha Higgs** writes, “I am a sophomore majoring in Secondary Education/English. Through my poetry, I try to capture feelings I have in college as an African American woman. I also write about everyday experience I witness.”

**Jaclyn Houlahan**, who has always loved language, double majors in Creative Writing and Spanish. She spends her time daydreaming, people-watching, and reflecting on the oddities of everything in between. She loves penguins and hopes to meet one someday.

**Donald Kenly III** holds an associate's in Early Childhood Education and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Creative Writing. Also a diabetic, many of his poems are about food—his forbidden fruit.

**Justin Knipper**, a May 2013 graduate, has studied Music Theory/Composition and English at SUNY New Paltz. He is interested in experimental forms of expression.

**Aaron Kravig** is an old school DJ and social activist. In fall 2013, he will enter the New Paltz Graduate School and the English Master of Arts program.

**Zoë Krumanocker** earned degrees in Anthropology and Creative Writing in December 2012.

**Allison Leshowitz** is a junior at SUNY New Paltz with a major in English and a minor in Creative Writing. Passionate about writing, she invites readers to view her growing body of work at [attemptsatfiction.tumblr.com](http://attemptsatfiction.tumblr.com).

**Matt Markle** is a local student of the Hudson Valley and a spring 2013 graduating senior. He came to SUNY New Paltz as a Physics Major and has since found vocation in writing. His work has been previously published in *Sparkbright* magazine and *The Slate*.

**Maggie Rose Melito** loves mornings on the Great South Bay, stories about Billy the Kid and breakfast. She wishes lightning bugs stuck around all year long and is currently studying Journalism and Public Relations. She is thankful.

**Roy Missall** writes, “I am a Creative Writing major from Hemlock, New York, where on visits home I endure the pangs of unrequited love. Our dog only has eyes for my brother, and my brother enjoys reminding me.”

**Melissa Nau** is an English/Creative Writing major, who is minoring in Spanish and spending the spring semester of her junior year studying in Spain.

**Vanessa Pavelock** is a Creative Writing major from Eastern Long Island.

**Niko Polizzi** is a Secondary Education major with a concentration in English. He also cuts his own hair and paints.

**Vicky Prashad** is a junior majoring in Adolescent Education with a concentration in English.

**Carolyn Quimby** is a twenty-year-old Creative Writing major. She drinks too much coffee, does not sleep enough, and watches more British television than anyone should. She lives on Long Island and has wanted to be a writer her entire life.

**Jade Asta Quinn** writes, “I am a Theatre and Creating Writing major. I cook when I get bored and think that darkness is more beautiful than light.”

**Ryan Randazzo** is a third-year Public Relations major with a ripped coat and yellow pants. One day he will live happily on a beach.

**Diana Regal** is an English and Philosophy double major with a minor in Religious Studies.

**Alexis Roura** graduates as a Creative Writing major in May 2013 and then begins working at the Bronx Zoo. She plans to continue writing in the future and hopes to attend Veterinary School in 2014.

**Eli Siems** is a senior English major. He lives in New Paltz with his girlfriend and cat.

**Samantha Spoto** is a junior, majoring in Creative Writing and Sociology.

**Taylor Steinberg** is a senior English major, intending to pursue a master's in English. He is a founding member of the literary journal *The Fugitive*.

**Rachel Szarowski** is a photographer, artist, and writer from western New York. She will graduate with a BFA in Photography, a BS in Art Education, and a minor in Creative Writing.

**Aaron Tremper** is a senior studying English and Creative Writing. His work has appeared in *The Legendary*, *Avosting Alchemy*, and *Stonethrow Review*.

**Eric Velzis** majors in Creative Writing. In his work, he attempts to reinvent the medium of surrealist poetry and fiction by unifying grotesque and ethereal imagery in a cohesive experience that articulately reflects the essence of modern existence.

**Clifford Venho** is an English major with a focus in Creative Writing. He writes both prose and poetry and has recently been exploring short forms and sonnets.

**Monica Volpacchio** is a Digital Production major with an affinity for coffee. She hopes to be reincarnated as a unicorn in her next life.

**Melissa Warren** is a third-year Creative Writing major from Brooklyn, New York. She would like to become fluent in German and return to Berlin, perhaps to experience the city for a few years.

**Colin Williams** is a graduating senior who appreciates his third publication in *Stonesthrow*. He intends on the continuing development of his writing while embracing the tonality of transitory life present in his work.





