

THE
CAULDRON

VOLUME XXVIII

2 0 0 7 - 2 0 0 8

Editor

Emma Perry

Asst. Editor

Nora Seilheimer

Layout and Text Design

Joshua Curry

Art Editor

Peter Hopkins

Art Committee

Courtney Tompkins

Julia Gartrell

Poetry Editor

Louis Jeannot

Poetry Committee

Rachel Jenkins

Danielle Badra

Fiction Editor

Pat Clancy

Fiction Committee

Amelia Estrich

Robyn McBride

Non-Fiction Editor

Ryan Booms

Non-Fiction Committee

Stacy Leavens

Katie Harlow

Finance Director

Alanna Muto

Webmaster

Komal Chughtai

Public Relations

Jeanette Lee

Thank you...

Diane Seuss, our faculty advisor, for her continued commitment to the magazine and her dedication to ensuring that *The Cauldron* and creative writing program at "K" continue to flourish and grow with each year.

Lisa Darling and Joshua Curry for helping to put our work on the page through layout and design in a stunning format. We couldn't do this without you.

The English Department for their continuing support of *The Cauldron*.

Bruce Mills and Amy Smith for thoughtfully reviewing the manuscripts and selecting the winners of *The Divine Crow Awards*.

The writers and artists who submitted to the magazine this year, ensuring its success.

Student Commission for finding value in the work of *The Cauldron*. Their funding allows us to produce a magazine of excellent quality every year.

Dianne and Rob Vibbert for supporting us in our wish to honor their daughter with *The Stephanie Vibbert Award*. This annual award is given to a piece of writing in *The Cauldron* that best demonstrates the important relationship between creative writing and political and social justice.

The readers of *The Cauldron* who we hope the works in this magazine will inspire. It is your support and encouragement that allows Kalamazoo College to publish the voices of its students. Without you, our words and images would go unseen and unread.

"You've got to find your own doorway into things"

-Paula Rego, artist

Our 2007-2008 issue of *The Cauldron* uses the extended doorway metaphor to reexamine the ordinary and reconsider the very framework that leads us from room to room. The Editors have structured the magazine's sixty pieces – including the front and back covers – to suspend time as we pass through a doorway. The pieces are grouped together in sections that guide the experience of entering the doorway.

With *The Door Knob* section, we are introduced to childhood voices, the experience of birth, and a sense of innocence. *The Door Stop* complicates this innocence with a jarring welcome into the doorway and a glimpse of what lies beyond. In *The Hinge*, the pieces begin to fold back on themselves; they are unsure of which way to swing; sometimes they squeak. When we arrive beneath the structure of *The Door Frame*, the pieces ask us to consider a new perspective and strangeness. Finally, *The Dead Bolt* pushes us forward into unfamiliar space and slams shut behind us; in contrast to the innocence and birth of the first section, we are confronted with the finality of death.

However, by no means is this collection meant to represent a collective journey: each piece and each author brings a different perspective to what we see through the doorway. And the doorway is different to everyone. It is funny, strange, thoughtful, angry, and clever. It is something all too familiar; it is something completely foreign. It is being locked out; it is locking ourselves in. Doorways open with answers; but they also close with questions.

The Cauldron is holding the door open for you. Step onto the threshold.

We invite you to find your own doorway.

The Editors,

Emma Perry
Nora Seilheimer

Table of Contents

The Door Knob

- | | |
|----|--|
| 12 | Centipede Sonnet <i>Claire Eder</i> |
| 15 | Push <i>Heather Weatherly</i> |
| 16 | Crazy Amy <i>Amy Jo Klamm</i> |
| 17 | Smelly Kid <i>Sally Warner</i> |
| 18 | Braiding Erica's Hair <i>Robyn McBride</i> |
| 19 | Thirsty <i>Peter Hopkins</i> |
| 20 | When I Was Bad <i>Amy Jo Klamm</i> |
| 21 | Pickings From Slim <i>Brian G. Barkley</i> |
| 22 | Autopsy/Birth <i>Louis Jeannet</i> |
| 25 | The rusty nails that lay on the ground <i>Maghan Jackson</i> |
| 26 | Empty Fulfillment <i>Nora Seilheimer</i> |
| 27 | Emerge <i>Elayna Snyder</i> |

The Door Stop

- | | |
|----|--|
| 30 | The Pick-up <i>Peter Hopkins</i> |
| 31 | Bad Beat <i>Jimmy Kelly</i> |
| 32 | Yoga Class <i>Sara Goldstein</i> |
| 33 | A Rebuttal to Keats <i>Rachel Jeffery</i> |
| 34 | Lorenzo <i>Bryn Davis</i> |
| * | 35 Streetz <i>Brandon Scarber</i> |
| 36 | Attack of the Spider-Woman from Mars <i>Joseph Schafer</i> |
| 37 | Expectations <i>Kira Dow</i> |
| * | 39 An Affair with Light <i>Kelly Hurd</i> |
| 40 | Where the Mouth Begins <i>Colleen Bednar</i> |
| 42 | October 7 th <i>Adam Marshall</i> |
| 43 | Preparation <i>Brandon Scarber</i> |

The Hinge

- | | |
|----|---|
| 46 | For the Haunted Happiness of Useless Time <i>Danielle Badra</i> |
| 48 | Breaks in Skin <i>Danielle Badra</i> |
| 49 | Iron <i>Jessica Bard</i> |
| 50 | Tomatoes <i>Jessica Maas</i> |
| 51 | Japanese Christmas <i>Eric Michaelsen</i> |
| 59 | Smashed <i>Dylan Seuss-Brakeman</i> |
| 60 | Embracing Diversity "Reba" <i>Rebecca Aulph</i> |
| 65 | Mirror Image of Coffee <i>Rebecca Aulph</i> |
| 66 | Baucis and Philemon <i>Sarah Shuster-Tucker</i> |
| 67 | Manos <i>Sally Warner</i> |
| 68 | Fire and Water <i>Megan O'Neill</i> |
| 69 | This is the Wedding <i>Emma Perry</i> |

The Door Frame

- 74 Fleetwood Diner [Jenneva Schultz](#)
75 Waiting on the Moon [Nora Seilheimer](#)
79 CS Lewis [Jessica Bard](#)
80 Las Peregrinas [Julia Dean](#)
** 83 Too Close to the Sun [Alanna Muto](#)
85 Negative Space [Kelsay Myers](#)
88 Living Room from Niles Senes [Dylan Seuss-Brakeman](#)
89 The Well [Maghan Jackson](#)
90 Buttons and Zippers [Robyn McBride](#)
92 Quilt [Julia Gartrell](#)
93 Fish and Chips [Jeanette Lee](#)
94 China Shop [Colleen Bednar](#)
95 Thinly Drawn [Natalia Holtzman](#)

The Dead Bolt

- 98 It Looks Like Rain [Jared Devitt](#)
99 My Brother's Wake [Melissa Burnette](#)
100 Antraq [Jillian Regal](#)
103 Casita [Jessica Bard](#)
104 Scarlet Fever [Martin Goffeney](#)
* 106 Stone Umbrella [Ryan Booms](#)
108 Dead Things [Colleen Bednar](#)
114 Obesity [Michelle Lamont](#)
115 Cancer Chronicles [Sara Goldstein](#)
116 A New Way to Kiss the Blues Goodbye [Louis Jeannot](#)
118 Time after Time [Heather Weatherly](#)

Front Cover Photo [Liz Wilson](#)

Back Cover Photo [Dylan Seuss-Brakeman](#)



* Denotes Divine Crow Award Winner

The Divine Crow Awards are given annually to three outstanding pieces in *The Cauldron*, regardless of genre, and are judged "blind." This year's Divine Crow judges were Bruce Mills and Amy Smith from the Kalamazoo College English Department.

** Denotes Stephanie Vibbert Award Winner

The Stephanie Vibbert Award is given annually to honor a piece of writing in *The Cauldron* which best exemplifies the crucial relationship between creative writing and social and political justice.

THE
DOOR KNOB

Centipede Sonnet

Claire Eder

1.

My grandmother had a procession of cats.

2.

A procession of cats: striped and spotted, fat and skinny, and they all ran away into the tall grass of the marsh. Maybe there is a colony there; I couldn't say. I once tried to ford that thing, using a two-by-four as a bridge, but even my father didn't know the way. Instead we took to the woods and found anthills big as houses. There came a point where I couldn't go any further so I sat down and watched him walk away singing into the night.

3.

Those of us who sing in the night wouldn't know applause if we heard it. We save our voices for our dreams. Last night I dreamt of the daddy long legs in my grandma's cellar, the ones even the cats didn't want to play with. Were there cobwebs or just spiders? Once I saw something with only four legs. My sister wouldn't believe me. My sister, who dyes her hair and paints her nails black, and for all that drank what I gave her.

4.

Sometimes I think I gave it to them, but how was I to know I was contagious? I'd rather imagine the box it came in – I'm sure my ancestors had it shipped over from somewhere in Europe with the rest of their belongings. The secret: the box was empty. Handed down from father to wife to daughter to sister to sister along with half a bottle of Prozac. I knew it was my turn when something sat down on my feet like a cat while I was trying to sleep. It was still there when I woke up in the morning.

5.

Every morning I would wake from dreams of many broken legs. Every morning I would see shadows of centipedes floating above me. Would you believe me if I told you I tried my best to love them?

6.

Would you love me if I made more sounds come out of my mouth? Would you love me if I took things and twisted them around with my tongue and spit them back out? I know the answer, so I stitch my mouth shut. I could paint my nails black, I could dye my hair, but that's no kind of proof. The ones I reach out to are the ones that never have to watch me bleed. I reach out to her now because her vision is shot and she can't see me. I take comfort in the fact that she will not remember any words that slip out of my centipede mouth.

7.

We mouth words to each other in this family. It is less of a strain, you see; the noise is so heavy. Unfortunately none of us can read lips. Then the day came when we all picked up things made of wood or ivory or metal and made music to force down each other's throats. Unfortunately none of us can understand music. I played for my grandmother a few times, and every time she would tell me to keep going. I am still playing for her, waiting for the day when she will tell me to stop.

8.

Stop crying before you make yourself sick. The tears might go away for a while, but they'll come back to find you: in the shower, at the dinner table, watching cartoons, petting the cat, in the car, watering the flowers, lying on the floor. It will come to the point where you will tear out chunks of hair or calendar pages, just trying to jump ahead to some painless day.

9.

There are some days when she makes her bed and some days when she throws more dirty clothes on top. There are some days when she never leaves the burnt orange chair, some days she stares up at Jesus on the wall and finally sees the shadows on his face. I come on those days. It's easy enough to balance the checkbook, close the doors on all the pills. It's harder to tell her my name again.

Centipede Sonnet

continued

10.

Again? Yes, tell it again. I should have picked up all the stories like driftwood and put them in my pocket. I should have ground them into powder and slipped them into my sisters' drinks. If I could, I would ring the strand of bells hanging over the doorway to wake myself up. But all that time I was asleep like a child in church.

11.

The church has a green carpet so there's no noise when the wheels roll down the aisle. There's someone singing but I can't see him. Pastor man recites the familiar refrain: it's hard to get into heaven, but this one had what it takes.

12.

It takes a lot of legs to run that fast.

13.

We eat fast food at the red table under the carving of the last supper. Grandma always says she's not hungry but eats her hamburger all the same.

14.

My grandmother's life could be described by a procession of cats, howling through the night for all the things she could never give them. It's easy for spiders to accumulate when you wake up every morning and can't remember their names. When love goes mute, goes deaf, how can you prove it by dying your hair black? I would do anything to bring back the stories that never left her mouth; I would do anything to stop counting my own tears and listen. I believe that someday we will meet again in the church that claims to be able to take your tears and put them away in a box, and we will share a hamburger next to the child asleep in the pew. How fast could a centipede run if a cat tore off all its legs? How fast do the days fly off the calendar when you wake up every morning and can't remember their names, grandmother?

Push
Heather Weatherly

I was three months away when she went into labor

She promised she wouldn't

But she pushed me

3:07 a.m.

3.4lbs

10 fingers

10 toes

The beginning of paper work and charts

My footprint looked like a charcoal smudge at the edge of a sketch

A wrinkled mistake to be crumpled up and started over

My arms and legs sprawled out like a dead frog in a science lab

Blue and purple with veins like ink on a wet page

If a brain is gray matter

Mine was undercooked cauliflower

Until my veins opened and watered down the circuit breaker

Tennis shoes and braces

Wheelchairs and walkers

Walking and falling

And walking again.

Crazy Amy

Amy Jo Klamm

I

No one knows anything about her. Sure, there are rumors.

Pete swore he saw her on the train tracks, balancing on the third rail like a tight-rope, and everybody knows she pierced her own tongue with an acacia thorn, not to mention the time she stole the Hendershot's old truck and drove it straight into the quarry. She never stopped, either, but drove right over the edge. And they say she just got up and walked away.

II

My mama told me to stay far away from her, a bad seed, that one. No-account, shiftless trash, shoulda been run off long ago. I thought she was lucky; all us kids did. One time I asked Father Gilbert why he doesn't pray with her like he does the rest of us girls, but he said a man of God ain't got no place fornicating with the devil.

III

She never talks to anyone. Not even the men they say she screws behind the old saw mill. I saw her there once, in the middle of August. She was perched inside, cross-legged up in the corner of one of the rafters; I would've missed her except for the black glitter of her eyes. I looked at her, and in that split second before I ran I couldn't help but think she knew. She knew, and she just sat there, looking down at me.

Smelly Kid

Sally Warner

the smelly kid doesn't know he reeks. he goes to school
each day with dung-covered boots and hair washed last Tuesday and wonders

why the other kids sit two desks away and his civics teacher stops class
to ask him to knock the muck from his cuffs. are his friends other smelly kids?

or are they regular, non-smelly kids who just hold their breaths? maybe
they feel sorry for him. maybe they like to feel better about themselves. they laugh

at his boots, and he laughs too because it's easier to laugh than to tell them that
he's up every morning at 4am to pull the teat that puts the milk

on their Honey Nut Cheerios. no one's sure how he became the smelly kid.
maybe his best friend in third grade found a new best friend and forgot

to invite him to his birthday party. maybe he waited all day for the call that never
came. the cows don't forget to call. they just look up and blink as he lumbers

into the barn, and blow green snot on his jeans. it smells warm and sweet.

Braiding Erica's Hair

Robyn McBride

Erica told me that I could do it, I swear. Erica is my best friend and she is seven too and she has long, long, long brown hair that I get to braid on Thursdays when our class goes to library and she sits on the second step and I sit on the third. Our librarian reads us all sorts of books and I don't mind because I like her voice, it is nice, and I like to braid Erica's hair. I sit at the top step to braid Erica's hair and no one ever sits behind me because there are only three steps and no one can braid my hair and no one will ever braid my hair, not Erica, or even Amanda who is the best braider in the whole class because I don't have any hair. When I first came to this school in first grade, Erica asked me why I didn't have any hair and I told her that I was special because I have alopecia. She said she didn't know what that was but she was special because she had really long hair and that we should be friends because she had very long hair and I had no hair and her mom liked to sing a song about opposites attracting and I didn't know what an opposite was, but she told me that it was when something was different, like wet and dry and hot and cold and I understood and I said that I wanted to be her friend too. So we were best friends all last year and we are still best friends now and she doesn't want me to get in trouble for what I did. See, Erica has really, really, really long hair and I have no hair and I will never have hair, so Erica told me that she would let me have some of her hair and I said that I loved her hair and she said that we could each have some of it because her mom told her that it's not good to be greedy and she could share. So when our class went to art class, Erica took the best pink scissors from Ms. Greenway's desk and she said that if I wanted some of her hair that I could take one of her braids because she had two and really she only needed one. So then I cut one of her braids off and then we decided that I should tape it to my head so I could have a braid right then and then Erica said that the rest of my head needed to be brown like the braid and we got all the brown markers out of the box and we started to color my head brown and then that's when Ms. Greenway caught us and I didn't even get a chance to put the braid on my head and she said that I did a horrible thing and that I had to go to the principal and that they would call my parents and I said that Erica said that it was okay and she didn't believe me. It's just not fair! I will never ever, ever, ever have hair and it's not my fault and Erica was just trying to help and she still has one braid and I think that one braid is still good. If I had one braid I would be happy.

Thirsty
Peter Hopkins



When I Was Bad

Amy Jo Klamm

Here is my grandma.

See? She is old.

She can't walk.

See? She is in a wheelchair.

She is wearing her

white sweatshirt

with the red flowers,

the green balloon

she got for her birthday.

I was there, too,

with Grandma,

but they cut me out.

See? She is

smiling at me.

She likes me.

She will die soon.

Her heart will stop,

they will bury her

in the ground.

My mom will say

she is better off now,

but I don't think so.

Grandma didn't

want to go.

Not like Mom.

One time she left,

but they made her

come back. And

then I had to be good.

Pickings from Slim (Findings Found Inside my Great-Grandfather)

Brian G. Barkley

They will remember a giant among great men,
but this house was bigger
when I built it.

Mr. Parkinson is such a wonderful sculptor.
I just wish his hands weren't so rough.

I'll show them

a fastball.

My last chance
for a strikeout.

I'm ninety years older than them,
but you can't take the fight out of the dog.

They'll never hear my wit firsthand.

I'll have to leave
it up to their parents to tell them.

All they will remember is the candy corn.

Autopsy/Birth

Louis Jeannot

I.a. "what do you think of the job title
autopsist?" he asks me one day
(or: necropsist, devastator; annihilator).

think

of the gorgeous industrial waste that made-up bodies loose:
skin stretched to alabaster;
the quicksilver spill of formaldehyde. what
do you call a blossom like that?

this is just some story of a safe, a crypt; code-cracked and
spilling secret teenage treasure.

AUTOPSY/BIRTH

can you see why
i want to place the silk ribbon of my fingers interlaced
at his neck?
fingernails pinked for
carnage? saying: *you,*
two decades old
and wishing already for the wilt?
the workaday winters of featureless morgues?

b. and how do you not dream of that?

they uncoil from the rotted fruit in my head.

i stand
at the back of the room swaying as he
shovels the sour stones of organs
from the stable of some seventeen
year-old, her legs ajar,
admitting light. and lubricated tubes snake inside.
his small reciprocation for the erection he bears is that he works
with his eyes closed, eschewing
the jeweled gleam of other
wise banal vaginal tissues.
his small gift is that he reads from the 1986
Honda Civic Owner's Manual before
dismantling this dame.

- c. because: knee-deep in that kind of poignance, anything
seems like a hymn.
- d. he kisses his fingertips; hefts the gleaming forceps and
the things chime and die.
he will tell me, we two tipping glass lips
at the haunt:
every time is like the first time.
- my penis dilates and stands up;
presses against the bottom of the table.
he will tell me of waking to wet
shorts and his own glue. what
do you call a blossom like that?
- e. each day i think of his slump
shadowing that barren bride, holding his own
racing heart as only
an autopsist could. and with each wet
clasp and collapse of the heart
he spins a thread along an abdominal laceration
in perfect 4/4 time --
chalking an anonymous body into soil sheets each night.
- II.a.** her soaped skin retreats from the climax of her pelvic bone; his
blind yet precise slice skates an arc upon her belly;
the swerve of his scalpel and gore's escape. what
do you call a blossom like that?
- b. unsayable; illicit.**
guess what hid beneath the girl's spun padlock dial?
one would expect the surface of a chicken egg
or perhaps the perfect coordination of cogs
interlocking and sighing beneath broad's
surfaces. one would expect maybe a nest of
vultures or a circuit board, but not
this. the greased silks of her faded organs

Autopsy/Birth

continued

would be a relief compared to this.

c. and he thought himself habituated to horror.

he turns away and puts his knuckles into
his mouth. i stare. through the
rough ruby coral of coagulation, beneath
the paled veils of her dried
uterine tissues, nestled inside

that starlit grove of female alchemy
where we have pried like larcenists,
we two discover what tonight's dame
had squirreled beneath her floorboards.

remus and romulus themselves,
tranquil faces just masks of neglect
blanketed beneath a translucent vault-wall --
dead and in love, these fetal

twins tessellated together and ashiver
in the dried dead riverbed of a teenager's secret womb.
these two whispering: *where is wolfmother?*

she lies on the operating table, saddled, lid flipped,
palms up in some helpless gesture of mercy.

a halo of antiseptic light glints reflected around her head.
i swallow hard. "Jesus Christ."

The rusty nails that lay on the ground

Maghan Jackson

would be hard to see through the long long grass that was slowly being devoured

by dandelions and Russian lilac and thistle, so if you went outside without shoes

Mother said it was your own fault if you got stabbed and then got lockjaw and died,

but we all knew that she would be sick out of her head if that ever happened, though

it never did, and so the threat never really scared us like she wanted it to, and we were

outside all the time barefoot like Indians, searching the ground for agates to polish

or field mice that Russell liked to roast on a fire, even though Evelyn called him a barbarian
and made him cry, and one day I was getting dried manure to help with the fire and suddenly

there was a sick orange-ish stake sticking up through my foot like it was Dracula and the nail
was Van Helsing's revenge, and the blood pooling around the hole would make the vampire

drool, and I could almost feel my jaw tightening and it's funny how threats make a lot more
sense when they actually come true, so Russell didn't use his fire to roast a mouse, Mother

used it to burn the bleeding so it wouldn't kill me and no matter how much I cried for a little
sympathy from her, all she would say as she washed it for the tenth time was I Told You So.

Empty Fulfillment

Nora Seilheimer

Before I got into makeup myself, I used to watch my mom get ready in the morning. I would sit on the toilet watching the entire process, wondering what color she would choose from the palettes stacked in the cabinet. From there I could see her fresh bare body from behind and watch her front side in the mirror as she went to work. It always amazed me how one step led to the next. Moisturizer leads to foundation which leads to concealer which was balanced throughout her face and neck with the soft drag of a tissue.

Her face started off as a soft ivory oval, but quickly broke down into sections to be filled, like a paint-by-number kit. She slid a thin black stripe of eyeliner across the bottom of section one and two that faded from a deep smoke to a light shimmer at the top. Just below one and two were sections three and four, her cheeks which she brushed with Polka Pink for that “angled look.” At the bottom of her face were five and six, two plump horizontal lips, one on top of the other, usually filled in with Baby Nude Pink or Berry Berrylicious. “It all depends on what kind of day it is,” she would say, without taking her eyes off her reflection, checking for baby or berry on her teeth. I nodded.

One time when I was ten, after a morning of my own concealing, fluffing, coloring and spraying, I remember going through the cabinet and counting a product for almost every part of my body. Volumizing spray for my thin strands the color of wet tar, mascara for my cloudy gray eyes, rouge for my lightly freckled cheeks, bronzing lotion for my marshmallow skin, polish for my perpetually dirty nails, foundation for any possible blemish or scar from being a kid. My mom’s side of the cabinet had even more: under-eye cream for bags, anti-aging cream for laugh lines and crow’s feet, lotion guaranteed to decrease the sight of cellulite, hair-dye, teeth whitening strips.

I remember standing there, still wrapped in my towel, craning my head back to take in the tiers of drug store commodities towering over head. My mom’s shelf had more than mine. I remember thinking, *is this what I have to look forward to?*

Emerge
Elayna Snyder



THE
DOOR-STOP

The Pick-Up

Peter Hopkins

From now on the story will be told in installments:

Start inventing smaller problems.

Leave sooner for convenience.

Roll over only once in bed.

Use the floor not the closet &

Take more from it for effect.

Don't bother helping.

Slower than you would expect is better.

Closed eyes more often while whispering

Less often while talking but

Look away, distracted.

Open up for attack when

It isn't worth fighting back.

Don't assume it's over until

Everyone else is finished.

Bad Beat

Jimmy Kelly

I had him. OK, you know what they say – you never remember the hands you win, it's always the ones you had and lost, the bad beats. I'm runnin' hot and on schedule, none of these donkeys can catch me. Final table? No problem. Flop the straight, all in, I send another one home, then they break the tables down again and who the hell is this guy sittin' down with three full trays of chips? He doesn't... does he have more than me? Ah, hell. Whatever, I'm good right? Catching cards left and right. Deal 'em up. Here come a couple snowmen my way. Beautiful. "I raise \$1000." Fold. Fold. Fold. Call. Got one. He's on the hook, won't be chip leader for long. Flop - 10♡, 4♣, 8♡! I got trip 8's. Check. No way he hit that, let him have the free card. Raise \$1000? Bluff? Draw? Draw, gotta be. "Call." Here's the turn – K♡, that's a scare card. Check. Check. He checks like I was born yesterday. So much for my trips. River – 4♦! Full house! Keep it all inside, you know he's got the flush so fire now, not too much, enough to get a re-raise. "Raise... make it \$2000." He re-raises, I love it. \$10,000! He thinks he's got the nuts. This is the part where I Hollywood it, pretend to count my outs, ask, "how much was that again?" You know what comes next. "Re-raise, ALL IN." He insta-calls. Of course he does, he's pot committed. I flash the 8's and a big grin, and he turns over a 10... and then another 10...

He was not supposed to have 10's, he was supposed to have the flush, an A-high flush, where the hell's the flush!? Why isn't he holding AQ suited like he's supposed to? It's not even a bad beat, I had to suck out, might as well have been drawing dead. Screw it, don't steam, don't go on tilt. "Relax, go to the sportsbook," I tell myself. So here I am, talkin' to you.

What's the line on Jazz-Spurs? I'm feelin' lucky.



Yoga Class

Sarah Goldstein

just relax and breathe, she says to me
I could if I weren't downward facing dog
ass in the air, then head to my knee
I think my esophagus may have a clog

I could if I weren't downward facing dog
I took yoga to relax – good try
I think my esophagus may have a clog
they get it, these spandex girls, so spry

I took yoga to relax – good try
breathe into the pain breathe into my ass
they get it, these spandex girls, so spry
wonder if they smoke a cig after class

breathe into the pain breathe into my ass
why would you want to bend that way
wonder if they smoke a cig after class
my awkward bent leg begins to sway

why would you want to bend that way
ass in the air, then head to my knee
my awkward bent leg begins to sway
just relax and breathe, she says to me

A Rebuttal to Keats

Rachel Jeffrey

If “beauty is truth and truth beauty” parts from my lips, you, my friend, are arrogant.

For the vessel that speaks aphoristically has been sculpted by you.

I cannot speak universally.

You forged me from marble—from clay—and saw that I was good.

I am your Eve.

I am your creation, a materialization of aesthetic convention

deemed transcendental by

mere mortals floundering about in a desperate search for certainty.

I am your mother,

though you have made me barren. You have stripped me of my purpose:

I no longer bear life, but instead I nurture death. “Dust you are and
to dust you shall

return.” Indeed, you return to me. My womb carries your ashes.

You desecrate my body with classical Greek forms.

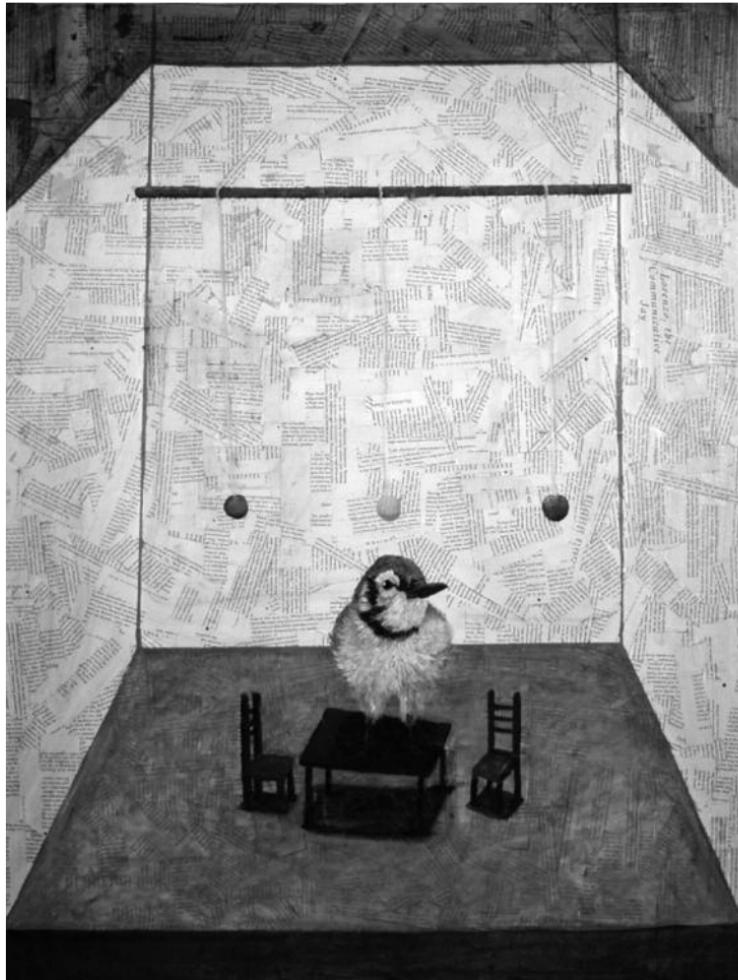
You tear into my flesh to sculpt faces and paint my skin to please your senses.

I was once a daughter of the earth, fertile and supple, tender flowers
blossoming from my pores.

I am now an empty basin, a hardened shell ripped from my home and
bitter in my brittleness.

If I be beauty, and beauty is truth, then I condemn you to ashes.

Lorenzo
Bryn Davis



Streetz

Brandon Scarber

* Divine Crow Award Winner

It's funny how streetz get their names.
Take that street right there for example.
Yea, that's the one. What is the name of that street?
Oh yea!!! , that's Hastings Street.
Hastings Street, the street of streetz,
from the 20s to the 50s, it was a street with a distinct beat.
Gangs were purple back then, bootlegging illegal liquor
prequels to gin. 10 years later, depression set in.
My first generation had no money to spend.
24 floors of unadulterated sin, Brewster-Douglass,
birthplace of families and dysfunctional kin.
You could leave your bike outside back then.
But then again it's '82 and gangs are no longer purple.
They're rockin' blue pony outfits and are incorporated too.
These young boys pushed crack through the city
with clientele coming in like whirlwinds.
I wasn't even thought of back then.
Then in '88 a group of brothers came and changed the game.
They wore chains and see-through tank tops.
They packed AK-47s with soft red dots.
Their whole attitude was hot. In '91 they became famous,
because the role of Nino Brown was sniped by Wesley.
He was the New Jack of a New City.
But the world didn't know that this was based on my City,
the D-City, Detroit City. Yea, we here NOW.
Do you see me clear NOW. Oops, let me remove my
BLACK GUVERNMENT flag, B. Yea, my pockets got ROCKEd up,
since the BOTTOM. No longer a problem in the HERMAN GARDum.
Let me turn down my LORDZ of da STREET.
Cuz IF there's a problem SPEAK UP SO I CAN HEAR THEE.

Attack of the Spider-Woman from Mars

Joseph Schafer

You may not notice it at first glance,
But people's lives revolve around me.

Around how I talk, and how I listen...

Within this small, sexy, painstakingly designed body is a whole universe,
A burning mess of stars and people trapped in one another's gravity.

I'm shocked you can touch me, let alone pick me up to talk.

Although my frame is slim, compact, and ergonomically designed
I can flexibly jackknife over myself and fold my frame neatly in half.

Watch how I'll bend over for you, anytime you like.

Within my flat, smooth belly there are no organs, guts or tendons.
There are wires; a galaxy's worth of tin cans connected with toy string,

Woven together into the booby trap of a spider the size of a tiny god.

Expectations

Kira Dow

"Excuse me! Waitress!" the man hollered, raising his right arm to signal the young woman. She turned to face him and his wife. The man finished chewing and swallowed deliberately before speaking.

"Could my wife," he drawled, "get a box for the rest of this here sandwich?"

"Certainly." She nodded with a smile, turning to leave.

"And could we get the check?"

"Right away," she replied, again turning towards the kitchen.

"Oh, and when you're calculatin' that check, why don't you take into consideration the quality of this here steak I just ate." She stood still listening, her shoulders tense. She turned slowly.

"Excuse me?"

"That was the saddest piece of meat I have ever tasted."

"I'm sorry you feel that way, sir," she said. "You should have told me right away so we could've made you a new one."

"It don't matter when I tell you. People shouldn't be payin' for meat like that. Why, it's all grislen!"

"I'm sorry, sir. If you had told me before, I could have given you a different one. But I'm gonna have to charge you for that steak."

"Why, what in the hell kind of customer service is that?" She gritted her teeth.

"I'm sorry, sir, but you can't not pay for a steak that you finished eating!"

"Why, this is some service. Don't you know your job depends on customer service, girly? Or had you forgotten that? I'm a customer. I have a right to get what I want." She raised her eyebrows.

"I'll be right back with that box." She turned on her heel sharply.

"Don't bother." His voice stopped her dead. He threw two bills down on the table and stood.

"I don't think we need to be associatin' with this restaurant no more. C'mon, Mary," he said, "we're leavin'." She stared as they brushed past her.

"Have a nice night!" she called as the door slammed, jerking the bell on its top sharply. Looking away from the door, she began to clear the table, stacking the remnants of the woman's BLT on the empty plate which had held her husband's steak. She placed their silverware in the nearly empty glass of Diet Coke and reached for a crumpled napkin.

"Excuse me, waitress!" She heard a woman's voice coming from

Expectations

continued

the corner booth behind her. Throwing down the napkin, she strode over to the booth where the woman and her husband had just begun to eat.

“What can I do for you?” She smiled at the woman.

“This chicken fajita just does not taste right,” the woman said, shaking her head and pointing a long, red fingernail at her plate. The waitress frowned.

“What do you mean?”

“A chicken fajita is supposed to be spicy, and this one tastes sweet.”

“You’re probably tasting the taco sauce. It has kind of a tangy flavor.”

“This is not what I was expecting when I ordered a chicken fajita!”

The waitress inhaled sharply and forced a smile.

“I’m sorry that you feel that way.”

“As much as I appreciate your remorse, I’m afraid I have to ask for my money back,” the woman said, folding her hands resolutely on the table. The smile melted off the waitress’s face.

“You know what,” she told the woman, “I’m sorry that you don’t like what you ordered, but there’s nothing wrong with your food. You got what you ordered, and what you ordered is what you’re going to pay for. If you want a spicy chicken fajita then why don’t you go make one yourself. And furthermore, the next time you—”

“Amy!” The waitress spun around to face her coworker, the crumpled napkin still in her hand.

“You okay out there? You’ve been cleaning off that table for, like, ten minutes.”

She sighed and picked up the stack of plates.

“I was just thinking,” she said, heading towards the kitchen.

An Affair with Light

Kelly Hurd

* Divine Crow Award Winner

The darkroom kept us sane. We barely slept, got up early, hung-over maybe, but fought our bodies so we could feed our minds. It was worth it. It was the only element of our lives we had this much control over, and still it seemed to control us. If the one-night-stand could have an artistic equivalent, something where intense and focused passion was directed and harnessed, it would be our summer darkroom days. In flip-flops and frayed jeans we mixed chemicals, aligned enlargers, and watched silver halide crystals dance.

Bare bulbs hung just inside square window frames waiting to be sealed by glass. I drove by them every night. This was one aspect of my affair with light. You told me it wasn't trespassing if it was in the name of art, so we braved the dark armed with tripods and kinetic energy, while slow shutter speed calculations flew through our brains. We wove ourselves in and out of the wooden skeleton of the constructing building and its shadows. Bare wires burst from walls like blood vessels. We captured the whole circulatory system on film.

Cars on Interstate 94 became red and white lines of light under our feet as we stared down through the metal grate of the overpass. Above the world we stood gripping the machines we trusted to take us out of it, and loaded our film. We breathed in fading fragments of summer music that escaped through the rolled down windows. A firework exploded, we placed it within the context of the month, and then thought about celebrating independence.

Where the Mouth Begins

Colleen Bednar

Ten years from now, I'll see you from the window of a house on the lip of the desert, where everything solid – the sidewalk, the street where the cars go – isn't solid, but made of sand. I'll see you jogging, shirtless in the dry heat, and something dangerous, heavy from sleep, will shift its snake body in the pit of my stomach. I'll rush out to the steps of my porch, recognizing the familiar stretch-and-give of your muscles, and quickly then, your name from my lips, loud enough to stop you while I stand with bare feet singed by hot cement. *Ten years*, I'll say, ignoring the sick feel of hope, now awake and hungry, because who knows what will be moving in your stomach when you turn to see me.

Ten years from now, and six hours after that, you'll come back to the house for drinks wearing a blue shirt that's dull and soft from washing. But before you come, there will be white wine in a large plastic cup, and mint toothpaste to deny it.

I don't know you anymore; not now and not that day in ten years when I'll see you jogging along the edge of the desert. Not since seventeen when you were my first kiss and then my first everything after. I remember your face, tan and smiling beneath the butterfly spread of my hips. *You taste like colors*, you said. Then later, *No, not colors. Bittersweet, like those little clovers between the paving stones at my house.*

A boy came to the restaurant where I work who could've been you when you were seventeen the way I remember you, with identical dark hair curling carelessly behind his ears. The idea was too much, like something wedged against my tonsils waiting for me to choke. He could've been you and both of us one year older – eighteen – when I saw your mother drunk for the first time, cooking dinner with her hand in a lobster-shaped oven mitt, bright red with only one beaded eye. She moved the mitt like a puppet when she talked and I laughed, not thinking or understanding your hand falling from mine. I understand it now, all the dying in that reckless moment between us.

When you left for college I got a job waiting tables and tomorrow I'm quitting because I can't breathe when I'm near the table where that boy sat. It's been five years since I last talked to you and I've been wondering

about the desert, how fast the sand moves towards the things that we build and believe in.

Ten years from now I'll pour you a glass of wine, a small one, in a house where the desert eyes me like a meal. I'll be careful with my words, aware of the space between us. You'll want to know about my old dog and I'll say: *Gizmo died. She was eleven. That's pretty old for a dog. My sister is fine, and my mom. I'll tell them you say hi. They still go to the lake in the summer but I haven't been back in a while.*

It'll be easy to talk that way with you, and when it's my turn to ask about your life I'll go to the kitchen for another glass of wine. I don't want to know if there's a woman who sleeps where you sleep and takes mail from a box that you share. Don't tell me if she has a particular taste in cereals or cuts of beef. When it was me we couldn't eat, our bones and lungs so heavy with each other. Now when I eat it doesn't matter, my skeleton has become like cobweb. Everything falls through.

I'll lie when you ask what I'm doing, living all the way out here. It might ruin the conversation if I'm honest, saying, *I've been watching the ground creep closer to my porch, month by month, and someday when I'm tired of standing I'll lie down and wait the years out, dreaming the grit of sand in my mouth.*

Instead, I'll talk about how strange it is that we'd end up living so close, on the lip of the desert, where the mouth begins and the sand is slowly swallowing.

October 7th
Adam Marshall



Preparation

Brandon Scarber

I'm not ready to build the crib.

The pieces remain inside
the plastic. The bed lies still,
untouched, against the wall

as if it was bought
for no reason at all.

Something inside of me is held
captive by the safety bars.

When we shop, I grow

nervous and become plagued
with anxiety. The numbered rows
and aisles of clothes give me goosebumps
beneath my soul.

I feel an eerie sensation
gripping my bones,
like the morning after a storm.

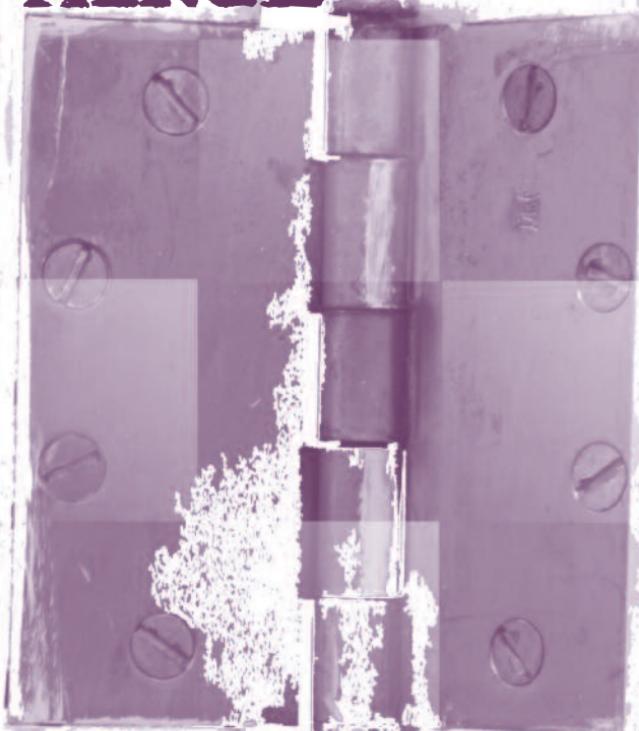
I ignore her question of: "Bey,
isn't this cute?" All while

thinking and feeling
stuck, she continues to move.

I call my mother and ask her
to explain. She says plainly,
"There are no instructions
for this crib." Two weeks
left, and the pieces remain

unassembled.
The baby is on the way.

THE
HINGE



For the Haunted Happiness of Useless Time

Danielle Badra

The puzzles I play

mother says are useless time

as staring out at twisting limbs

There were my finger ends

shriveled from the damp

and hands already calloused

And when my cheeks

begin the sag

that follows

forged and faulty smiles

where lips perk and eyelids

Happiness

of useless time

lost inside the labyrinth

of needle-pulled thread

*knocking on
the window left streak less
by my wet rib*

*blistered from the force
of scouring
my wet rib clean*

*droop like tears
for my wet rib
for the haunted*

*when creation kept captive
is cross-stitched
in my wet rib*

Breaks in Skin

Danielle Badra

**Stephanie Vibbert Award Winner

*By the Rivers of

Sinking Ink,
cracking skin,
melting into ink,
expanding a map.
finding an x,
marking that spot:
inking in
running blood.
seeping in crevasses,
Breaking sin,
scraping on concrete,
Spilling a drunken life
spoiling on the pavement,
skinning ink off the page.

Babylon,
we sat down,
and wept,
When we,
remembered
Zion.

breaks in skin

How beautiful if
nothing more than
to wait,
at Zion's door.

I've never been,
in love.

like this,
*before***

*The Bible (*Psalms 137:1*)

** Lauryn Hill's *To Zion*

Iron
Jessica Bard



Tomatoes

Jessica Maas

I saw my mother today. In the grocery store, the one on the other side of town, far away from where my castle looms behind its stone wall. My mother was perusing the blood-red tomatoes. My father loves those tomatoes, or he did when I knew him. From where I'm standing, frozen at the end of the meat aisle, next to the butcher with the gloved hands, it seems as if she is caressing them, her eyes sad as she stares, fixed on those fruit, but with that glazed over look that people get when they're staring at you, but not really seeing you.

I move away from the meat I haven't touched in years before she can see me and become lost in the crowd again, just another shopper. But for a moment neither of us had been in that store. I had been eleven again, thrown down in the garden, and when he was done my blood was indistinguishable from the ruined tomatoes beside me.

Japanese Christmas

Eric Michaelsen

Christmas Eve was nothing special—we tried to spike eggnog with plum wine, but it tasted like shit, so we just got fucked up on a hot bottle of sake and a couple cans of Sapporo. I tried to explain the irony of drinking lager from the snowiest island to Kenji in Japanese. Like Santa brought them. He didn't get it. I don't know whose fault it was.

Kenji wasn't as far gone as I was. He had to go to a family gathering with his girlfriend in the morning and then somehow pull together a magical evening for her. That's standard operating procedure in Japan. It's a romantic holiday, and women love it. For men, it's just a pain in the ass. The magic left Japan two hundred years ago. Kenji said he was taking her to an Italian restaurant. The Japanese love Italian food. Christmas is bigger than Valentine's Day for couples in Japan, so I was surprised Kenji was even allowed to hang out with me on Christmas Eve. I figured it was sympathy. When his girlfriend called him, I got jealous and tried to dial up my ex, Christine, and wish her merry Christmas, but either I couldn't remember her number or I couldn't figure out the right sequence of digits to call the States. One or the other.

That night, when we pulled out our *futon* and spread them sloppily on the floor, I asked him if he knew the song "White Christmas."

He sang, "I'm doh-reaming of a white-oh Ko-ristmas."

I sang, "Just like the ones I used to know" in my faux-operatic basso.

He asked, "Why?" and laughed.

I said, "It was Christine's favorite Christmas song."

When I woke up, a little after 10, Kenji was gone. I heard jingle bells in my head. My eyes wouldn't focus and they slid to the right whenever I tried to keep them still. I knew that the second I got up, I'd feel it in my head, the implosion, the pressure, the feeling of being crushed by the alcohol itself from the inside out. So I decided not to get up. Then my bowels started chanting, growling, making their shitty presence known. I'd have to bite the bullet or ruin my *futon*.

I stood up, thinking it was harder to get up from a *futon* on the ground tired and still tipsy than it was from an American bed. It was amazing that the Japanese used *futon* for centuries without thinking of the benefits of a raised bed for hangovers. After a moment, the pressure came on instantly, violently, like a wave. I smiled at my ugly, disheveled image in the

Japanese Christmas

continued

mirror: "So this is Christmas." I made an angry face: "And what have you done?" I called myself handsome, chuckled to myself, and went and took my shit. It looked like a human brain in photonegative.

I made *natto* and rice in the microwave, my own self-proclaimed hangover cure. It smelled sick and sour and old, like rotting socks. Sludgy stalactites of the fermented soybeans and sauce hung down from my chopsticks and clung to the rice. I washed down every bite with half a glass of wheat tea, probably the real remedy. I thought of Mom's eggs Benedict, our Big Christmas Tradition.

Out the window, it was nothing but brown and dusty death and cement. There's never really snow in Kyoto, and there isn't as much nature as everyone thinks. So I just fantasized about home, about the snow-covered expanses, about climbing huge snow mountains in mall parking lots, or driving and nearly dying in some uncontrollable slide. Or being on the river with Christine, complaining about my cold, chaffing nipples and kissing her while the snow fell and melted in the current.

I went to a Starbucks downtown for its homey feel and ordered a hot chocolate, tiny and three times more expensive in America, and I gave my mom a call. We talked for a while because her insomnia was bad and it was Christmas Eve and she was lonely. I told her I was having a pretty terrible Christmas, and she said hers wasn't shaping up to be great, either. Our dog was going to die. This was her last winter. Mom was as alone as I was, and she praised the invention of devices that helped close that gap, but I wasn't really listening. I was staring at a display, trying to make out the roots of the Chinese characters, making responsive noises. When I made the Japanese elongated "*fuu*," she said "what?" and pulled me back into reality. She told me how the snow was falling, the dusty kind where the flakes fell huge and melted on the pavement. She said she wished she were in Japan with me. I told her it was boring. She didn't think that was possible.

When we got off the phone, I pulled out my computer, checked email, played sudoku, did the Yahoo! crossword puzzle. I thought of my old Christine. I thought of the Japanese chick from orientation week, and then the one in November. I had taught the latter one about Thanksgiving, the gluttonous prequel to Christmas. In the morning, she apologized. I hadn't seen her since.

I left the café and wandered the streets, staring into the lonely, self-contained eyes of the Japanese and eating hundred-yen bowls of noodles wherever I could find them, reading my Murakami translation at lunch counters. I wasted a couple thousand yen on pachinko at one point. The lights and buzzers and nationalist gaiety of that perversion of pinball and slots only made me lonelier.

By six, I started looking for a place to sit down and have a beer, maybe polite conversation. Someone might want to practice English. It was dark out, but I couldn't see the stars. There were strings of white Christmas lights all down the street, shop-owners trying to tap into the consumerism of the holidays.

Walking past an *okonomiaki* vendor, I said, "Stick to paper lanterns."

He said, "*Fuu.*"

I walked to my favorite downtown bar, a place I never learned the name of because it was written in kanji I couldn't read, and so I just called it "the place across from the Lotteria" as if there weren't dozens of Lotterias. Outside, two Jamaicans were standing on the pavement smoking some skank weed, not an uncommon site in Kyoto, regardless of the strict Japanese drug policy. They were looking at me and gesturing to one another. The shorter of the two had a guitar strapped across his back. They were Rastafarians, I could tell by their hats, and because they were in a pair. The Rastafarians in Kyoto always come in pairs, and one of them always has a guitar.

The tall one said, "Hey, man. Merry Christmas. You look like you could use a 'Merry Christmas.'" His lilt was heavy, sounded like barbecue sauce and chocolate. Like Molé.

"Thanks," I told him, "but, and sorry if I sound like a dick, but don't Rastas not celebrate Christmas?"

The shorter one said, "Irie. It is not a dick thing to say. But how many of these Japanese cats really *know* what Christmas is about either, man? They think it's Santa Claus' birthday. For us two it is not about Christ, it is about goodwill towards men and that. But anyway, here it is about getting your girlfriend hot and bothered. You want a hit, man?"

I took it from them. I didn't know why. One hit off a skank weed joint wasn't even enough to get buzzed, and definitely not worth the risk, but I figured, but I would've done anything for some interesting company. They

Japanese Christmas

continued

offered it as a good omen, and I'd take it as such. I asked them, "Do you know the song 'White Christmas'?"

"Do we know 'White Christmas?'" the tall one said with some indignation. The shorter swung his guitar to the front in a fluid motion, squeezed a capo onto the first fret. He made barre chords but only strummed the bottom four strings, and only on the upbeat. They sang together their reggae rendition, filled with a more complex emotion than I'd ever heard in that song. I wondered if they'd ever seen a real white Christmas, or could they just imagine the nostalgia, the lost sense of magic. The magic that comes from the loss of magic. Maybe, I thought, that was the problem with Japan: They were too busy making cameras and trains and shit, too busy trying to have the US's pop culture or Germany's technology or Italy's fashion to realize the magic was gone.

I forgot about Japan as they kept playing. I forgot about Jamaica and the Rastafarians. I forgot Christine and Mom and Kenji and eggs Benedict and *natto*. I thought about my magic dying dog playing in the snow in the back yard. I thought about the birds that didn't fly south and the squirrels not hibernating but eating from the bird feeder, dropping seeds and seed shells into the ground, burrowing tiny black holes in the pristine white snow. I wanted to see all of it. My stomach clenched, my eyes started to well up, and the singing nudged me, tried to push me to tears, kept me teetering on the edge of my feelings.

They finished the song. I clapped, less to celebrate, more to keep the street from going silent again. I thought to ask them if they'd ever heard "Blank Expression" by The Specials, another winter ska song, the one I wanted to hear next and did hear in my head. But I didn't want to make an ass of myself, so I just said, "wow."

"Yes, of course," said the tall one. "Now, will you come in and have a beer with us, or are you on your way somewhere?"

"No, I was just coming here actually."

Inside, it was quieter than usual. It was never noisy, really. Japanese bars are as noisy as American libraries; Japanese libraries are like American graveyards. But tonight it was nearly empty. What faces there were tonight, I'd seen before, which made me wonder how I'd never come across these Rastafarians. I ordered a Red Stripe. They ordered Asahi. I felt

foolish, alluding to them in my beer choice.

I thought I'd strike up conversation, flex my Jamaican intelligence, make up for ordering the Red Stripe. I said, "Americans, they all just love Bob Marley, they call him the father of Reggae. The Japanese, too. It's ridiculous. And they think Ska is this suburban white garage band shit. So I play people the Skatalites and Cedric Im Brooks and the Light of Samba and all that shit, try to educate them on the roots. Everyone thinks ska came after reggae, and that it's old. It's like the Beatles copying the Kinks and shit."

"What you say is true, my friend," the shorter one said, "but this is also true: nobody cares. Bob Marley means more to Jamaicans, too, than the Skatalites. He may not be the first, or even the best, but it is the most popular. His music means the most to the people. So when they find meaning out of it, it is useless to tell them it is wrong."

The tall one looked over at the other tables. He wasn't going to intervene. He didn't care. Why did I? The shorter one was right. I told him as much, but something turned sour in the air. My beer tasted like their voices, tasted guilty. I felt like an ass, and when I finished the Red Stripe, I ordered a Heineken, hoping they'd reevaluate the situation, thinking I was just a high roller who liked international lagers. After a minute thinking this, I believed it myself, and I told them how much I liked pilsner, the beer of Bavaria, the hoppy taste of Beck's, but not St. Pauli Girl. That brand was fake shit, just an import. The shorter one glared at me. The tall one was still disinterested.

We just listened to the music over the radio, American carols. When I was halfway through the second beer, I asked if they'd ever heard the Jimmy Buffet reggae rendition of "Jingle Bells."

The shorter one sang the backing vocals, "Jingle-jangle, jingle bells." They laughed. We talked about the ridiculousness of it, about whether it was Jamaica or New Orleans Jimmy was singing about, which got us on Kanye West and how George W. Bush really felt about black people.

"Why is it," I postulated, fingering the rim of my fourth beer, an Asahi, "that everyone knows everything about America, but America doesn't know shit about everyone else? Imperialism, I guess. But it seems strange that imperialism makes us stupid. It's like a double-sided mirror, you know, and I'm on the wrong side of it as an American and you're on the right side. And I can

Japanese Christmas

continued

see me. You can see me. But no matter how hard I want to, I can't see you."

The tall one grabbed a pouch and a glass piece with psychedelic carvings, deliberately phallic, from his bag. The shorter put on some Carmex, slammed the rest of his Asahi. We were drinking from the party cans, the cans meant for sharing, but we each had our own. From the time it took him to finish it, he must've had an American can's worth all at once.

He said, with urgency and gravity while collecting his things, "I don't think any culture can see out, man. It is all of us. I think it is like this: Whoever is the minority is obligated to be the exotic one. So we are all exotic to the Japanese when we are in Japan, and I am exotic in America, and so are the Japanese."

The tall one said, "Christmas is almost over. One last Christmas present," and lifted his piece.

I paid the tab with a credit card, more money than I wanted to spend, but I did it as a gesture for the weed and for the company, and to reinforce my imagined high-roller attitude. They didn't argue. I made the upside-down "A-OK" symbol with my hand, the Japanese equivalent of rubbing fingers together to show wealth. The Rastas laughed.

Outside, the taller one packed the bowl tight and grabbed a long butane lighter out of his sack. Butane lighters mean good shit to my way of thinking. I was never much of a pothead, but I knew that a hotter flame meant more chemical release. The tall one lit the pipe, hit it, passed it to me. It burned in my lungs and when I let off the choke, the smoke and cold air overwhelmed me. I coughed hard, passed it to the short one. We watched a Japanese girl walk by in short shorts wearing stilettos she couldn't manage, waddling like a crippled goose or a child with rickets. The shorter one exhaled in her direction, tried to pass her the pipe, but she said "*fuu*," and then "*nandeane*," regional speech for "What the fuck?" The tall one had it next. I had it again. This time I started to feel it. The neon lights above the bar got more orange, their radiation growing thicker, blending with the tubes constituting the sign itself. The white and red of the Lotteria across the street got more white and more red, more sterile and more impassioned. After my third hit, my sense of time gained reverb and echo, every action I told my body was delayed a second, and every motion I witnessed was delayed another second before I processed it, putting me two seconds behind the

world. It reminded me of Internet Telephony, never synchronized, so I said, "This is Skype," and when I said it, the world turned green and sky blue before fading back into midnight.

Another hit. This one made me feel lucid again. The streets of Kyoto around us were a ghost town. There were no walkers, no bar-hoppers. We might've been the last three people on earth. "So this is Christmas," I said. "It wasn't much of one. Sometimes I feel like I'll never get it back. The magic is gone, I've been thinking."

The tall one cashed the bowl, knocked the ash out on the heel of his Timberland. The short one brought his guitar back around. "Oh," the shorter one let the syllable hang for a bit. The tall one joined in:

"The weather outside is frightful, but we can make it so delightful. Since nobody has a place to go, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow." The tall one took off his hat, laughed his rich laugh, and said, "Make a wish, man." He reached into his hat and pulled out a handful of white powder. Coke or dandruff. My stomach clenched up. My knees went weak and I thought I was going to fall down. He threw it up into the air and it expanded, spread out and covered the sky. Betelgeuse and Polaris, the only stars visible, were eclipsed by the tall Rasta's powder. It seemed to hang there. I wanted to cry. I wanted to beat the shit out of the tall man for being so damned beautiful. The short man said "Oh..."

"The world is surely dying, but as long as we're still trying, since we ought to not get low, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow." The first flake fell on my nose. The second on my tongue. A flurry started, and a white blanket covered the Kyoto streets within a couple minutes. I let myself fall and make a snow angel. I imagined my dog again, my beautiful dying golden retriever frolicking with me, licking me, crushing my chest with her paws. But she wasn't there. The snow was, the dog wasn't. She was in her own snow. Christine was in hers. Kenji probably wasn't under the snow with his girlfriend, but a space heater and a pair of turtlenecks were providing them a kind enough surrogate. There was peace on Earth, and for just a second, the void in my heart was gone. I felt tears start to well up again as the Jamaicans finished the song. This time, I cried. I felt faint. I felt the energy start to flush from my body with my tears. I lost all sense of time and space. Images of people and places, thoughts, words, they all left my mind and were replaced

Japanese Christmas

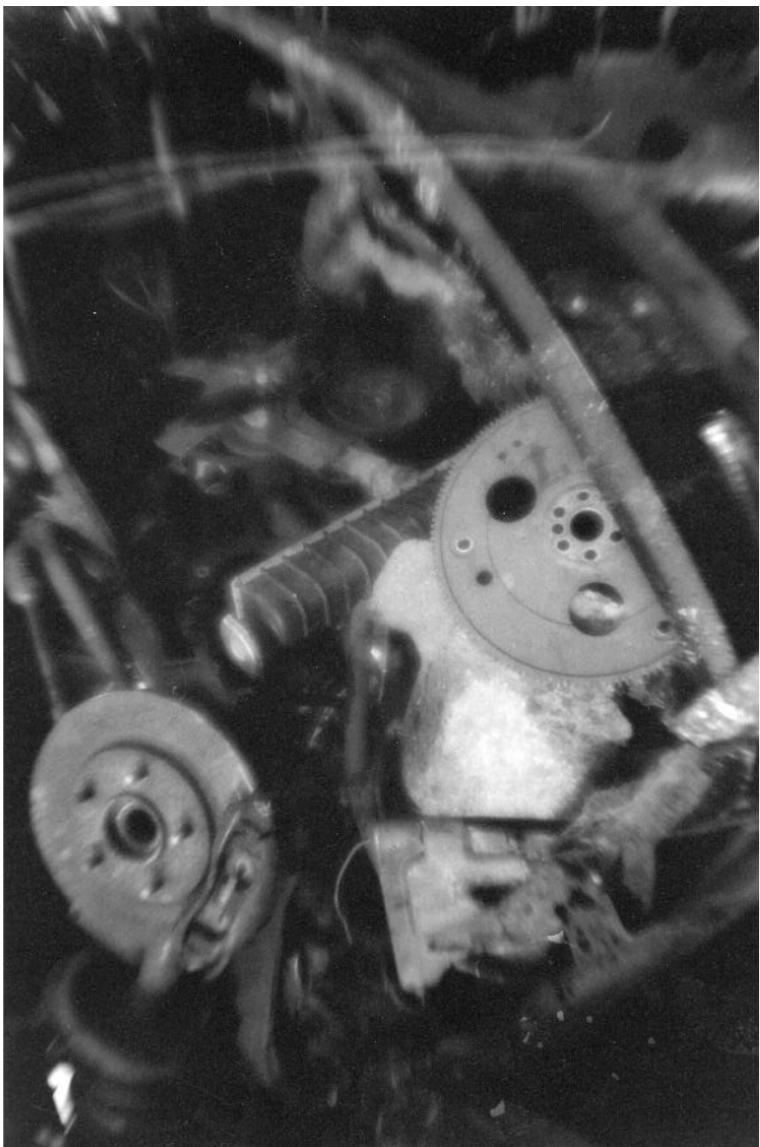
continued

by white space. My hands were in the snow, freezing. I stretched them out, submersed them, let the coldness take over. “What does frostbite really mean?” was my last thought before I lost consciousness.

When I woke up, the snow was gone. The Jamaicans were gone. It was daylight. The 26th. I checked for my wallet and phone. Still there. No missed calls. No new emails. I walked to the nearest station and boarded the train back to campus. There was a pair of Rastafarians in the corner. I thought of telling them about what happened, see if they knew about it. But I decided not to make a fool of myself, so I stared at the wall, at the brick of the tunnel just a foot out from the car, rushing past in a brown-and-white blur.

Smashed

Dylan Seuss-Brakeman



Embracing Diversity

Reba Rebecca

CARLA – A marketing JERK for a small liberal arts college

DENNIS – An admissions advisor

DARREN – A Latino student

MRS. REBECCA – The parent of a prospective student

(open in admissions office break room on DENNIS. Enter CARLA)

CARLA : Any prospective students coming in today, Dennis?

DENNIS : Yeah, one. She should be here any minute. . . How are those promotional mailings going?

CARLA : Pretty well, I've got a student coming in today to ask him about using his picture. (Enter DARREN) Here he is now. Darren, thanks for dropping by.

DARREN : No problem Mrs. Piccadilly.

CARLA : I have a question for you. I have this great photo of you and I want to use it in some promotional material for the school. Mailings, that sort of thing. Is that alright?

DARREN : (excited) Yeah sure. That's great!

CARLA : Awesome. Could I maybe take a few more?

DARREN : (ecstatic) You want multiple pictures of me in it?

CARLA : We just want to get you from a few different angles, you know...

DARREN : That's fine...

CARLA : Great, let's step outside. For better light.

DARREN : Sure.

CARLA : (while exiting) And could you put on this wig for me? (DARREN takes the wig hesitantly. MRS REBECCA enters)

REBECCA : Excuse me, is this the Admissions office?

DENNIS : Yes, hello. Are you Reba's mother?

REBECCA : Yes.

DENNIS : Hi Mrs. Rebecca, I'm Dennis.

REBECCA : Nice to meet you Dennis.

DENNIS : So what other schools is your daughter looking at, Mrs. Rebecca?

REBECCA : Albion, MSU, and Oxford.

DENNIS : Oh, ok great. Well, I'm sure she'll love it here! Where is she now, anyway?

REBECCA : Well, she's waiting outside. We couldn't find the wheelchair ramp out there... (DENNIS, who is taking a sip of coffee, chokes on it)

DENNIS : Oh, sorry (grabbing a map). Here's a map of the campus (both looking over map). So there's where we are now and there's the ramp into the building.

REBECCA : Well, actually, we were going to see her cousin in the Van Buren residence hall, so could you tell us how to get there and we'll meet with you later today?

DENNIS : Oh, sure. (figuring it out as he goes) weeellll... Ok, take her up the hill to Waverly Square past the fountain and into Edwin. Um... take the elevator up to the second floor, go around the CPD, it's the big, round office with glass windows, and go out through the back doors... there's a ramp

Embracing Diversity

continued

there. You should be able to take the path across the lawn right up to the front of Van Buren Hall.

REBECCA : (taking the map, thoroughly confused) Ok... got it...

DENNIS : (almost forgetting, handing her a manila envelope) And here's your visitor's packet, it has your itinerary for the afternoon, name tags for you and Reba, and two meal tickets for the cafeteria.

REBECCA : And how do we get to the cafeteria from Van Buren? (DENNIS sighs)

(CARLA and DARREN re-enter, DARREN is wearing a basketball jersey, a lab coat and holding a viola, CARLA has a camera around her neck)

DARREN : Ok, are you almost done? I have a lot of homework I need to take care of...

CARLA : Oh, yeah, we're almost done, just a few more.

DENNIS : (to REBECCA) Go out the emergency access door towards the main road...

DARREN : Well, I refuse to take any more dressed like this! You're trying to make me look like I'm a bunch of different people!

REBECCA : The main road? M-51?

CARLA : Nonsense! The jersey and viola are totally you!

DARREN : (Taking off costume pieces, putting down viola) I like watching sports! And I play guitar, I've never even seen a viola before!

DENNIS : You're right... so take the underground tunnel into Burbage Hall basement.

CARLA : Well, you ARE a chemistry major, right?

DARREN : Yes...

REBECCA : Wait, that's going in the wrong direction.

DENNIS : It's the fastest route, trust me.

CARLA : Then there's nothing wrong with the lab coat then, right? (handing the coat back to him)

REBECCA : But that's a staircase?

DENNIS : Just four or five steps...

CARLA : And what would look great with that lab coat... a false beard and a bald cap!

DARREN : That's it, I'm leaving!

REBECCA : So, what do we do once we're in the boiler room?

DENNIS : Make a ramp up to the open window with a plank and launch your daughter into a wheelbarrow.

CARLA : Darren, baby! Just one more!

DARREN : No! I took the picture in front of the first year experience banner, I took the picture in the graduation cap and gown, I even did the one in front of the green screen and showed you how to Photoshop the Eiffel Tower in the background, but I will NOT pretend to be some raggy old balding Chemistry professor! (exit)

REBECCA : Dennis, you've been very kind, but if attending this school means my daughter has to be transported in a wheelbarrow, I think it's simply not the right school for her.

Embracing Diversity

continued

DENNIS : No, I'll go get my car! I can just drive her everywhere!

REBECCA : No, Dennis! (DENNIS exits despite REBECCA's insistence)

CARLA : Not the right school for your daughter, eh?

REBECCA : No, I'm sorry, this school just isn't right for a disabled student.

CARLA : Oh please, no worries. What do you say we head down to the bookstore to buy her a tee shirt, compliments of the Admissions office, to thank you both for visiting?

REBECCA : Well, that would be wonderful, thank you.

CARLA : Don't mention it. (CARLA and REBECCA exit)

(CARLA re-enters, grabs her camera, exits)

(SCENE)

Mirror Image of Coffee

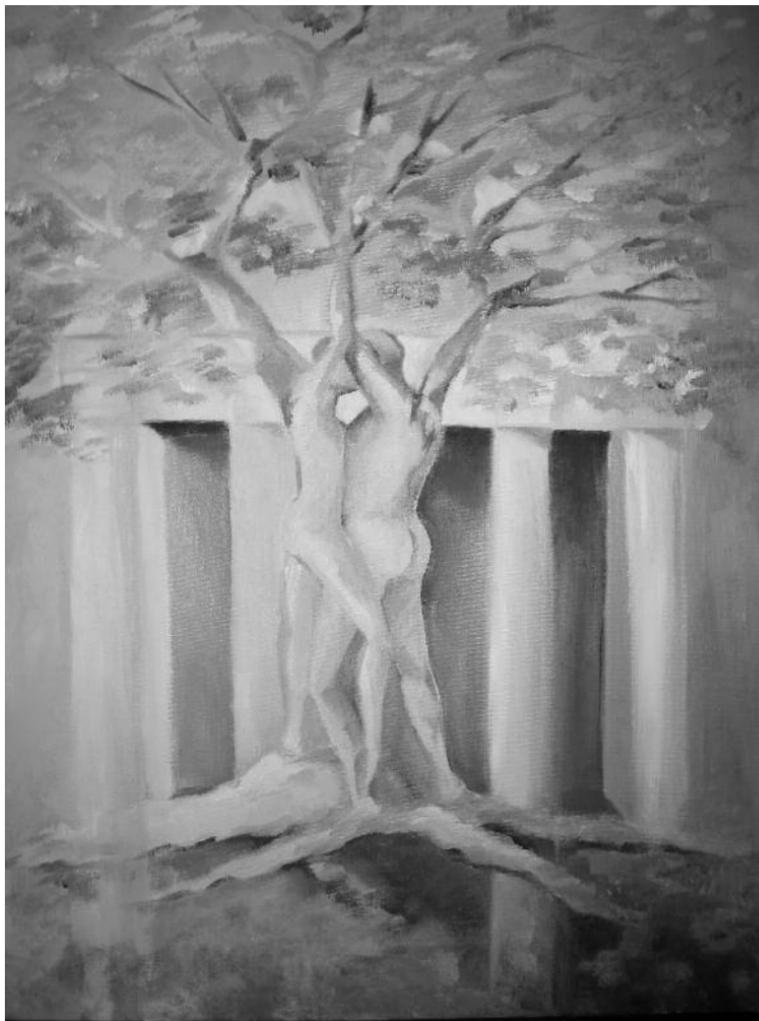
Rebecca Aulph

I watched myself dance last night,
creating images in the mirror with my stomach.
There was something about the mirror—
pale skin, a red shirt with a blue basketball, a blue diamond navel ring.
My skin became damp.
My body became the mirror,
and it longed to be fogged.
I hate the way my stomach perspires.

Sometimes, I cannot distinguish my own body from my environment,
and I start to take on the form of my coffee,
which is always cold and sweating in the glass
leaving a ring next to my handprints on the table.
I try to fold my arms across my stomach
to hide the wet evidence of my discomfort.

Baucis and Philemon

Sarah Shuster-Tucker





Manos

Sally Warner

If they can't learn English, my grandfather says,
they can damn well go back where they came from
and stop taking jobs away from hard-working Americans.

I want to say, most of your hard-working Americans
don't want those jobs.

He tocado sus manos.

I'm just amazed at how much we cater to
those people, he says. I can't even call RiteAid pharmacy
without someone asking if I want Spanish, and if I press
the damn button, I've got some Miguel rattling off in my ear.

I want to say, so why do you push the button?

He oído sus voces.

He tocado sus manos.

You just can't teach those people, he says.
They'll never know what it means to be an
American.

I want to say, isn't your America the land of freedom
and opportunity?

He visto sus ojos.

He oido sus voces.

He tocado sus manos.

But I have seen his eyes, too, behind thick glasses, beneath bushy white brows.
And I have heard his voice, deep and gruff, with a familiar whistle, like a cow's bell.
And I have touched his hands, and he has touched mine, held them both in one,
the day I was born.

Fire and Wine

Megan O'Neill

I. Skylight

Kilauea is a shield volcano, not like the stratovolcanoes that many people think of immediately. Unlike Mt. St. Helen or Vesuvius, it does not explode. It simply oozes slowly and steadily as it has since 1983, adding to Hawaii's coastline. The massive cloud of steam rising where the lava pours into the sea impresses hundreds of tourists yearly. The lava forms round "pillows" under the water; at night, you can see it from the water, glowing red through the steam along the coastline.

The most impressive are the skylights. Lava tubes—places where lava has hardened across the top of a flow but not inside—occasionally collapse. These places are called the skylights, and you can see the glowing red lava moving through the tube below, like a porthole into the underworld.

II. Happy New Year

The Germans have a tradition around New Year's: they make a drink, essentially hot sangria, called Feuerzangenbowle. Last year, my tutor Katharina and her roommates Nancy and Anne made it for us in early January. Several of us trooped over to their German apartment and watched as they cut up apples and oranges, dropping them into the hot mulled wine steeping on the stovetop. They poured the whole concoction into a big glass bowl, then laid a metal sieve with a giant cone of sugar on it over the top. We were warned not to try making it until we had seen it done at least once first. As they began to douse the sugar in rum, we could see why.

Once lit, the rum blazed up along the sugar, melting it into the wine below. Sometimes the rum dripped along with the sugar, making little flare-ups on the surface of the wine before flickering out. They handed mugs around and told us to drink up, especially the fruit. It was delicious.

This year, I made Feuerzangenbowle again – it was a quiet party. Quiet enough to hear the oohs and ahhs as we turned off the lights and watched the rum burning its way from the sugar to the wine.

This is the Wedding

Emma Perry

This is the wedding bouquet:

She chose the arrangement
from a Georgia O'Keeffe coffee table book.

All the women in the pews
nudged their husbands in the ribs
with their elbows
as she passed.

He doesn't understand
the metaphor.

She is hoping to instruct him
in simile.

This is the receiving line:

Like a conveyor belt in an assembly line
or a disassembly line in a slaughterhouse
grinding the lambs into mutton
shredding the calves into veal
de-beaking the poultry into uniform nuggets
pre-packaged into shrink-wrapped plastic
bloody against the pale plucked skin
shaking the white gloved grips of the butchers
offering their stained aprons as consolation
to these factory-farmed fiancés
these faceless wives-to-be
who ponder the meat hook like a marriage bed.

This is the Wedding

continued

This is the wedding recessional:

They are releasing butterflies,
keeping them comatose in coolers.

They believe this is more humane;
birds were choking on the rice.

So now these butterflies who were never wild
are set free like women in pants on bicycles.

The couple emerges from the womb of the church

and the cooler lid is slid to the side

while the vibrant specks push up and out,
fluttering through the glass of a theoretical ceiling.

and a brown bird catches one in its beak:
and the groom takes his bride by the
mouth with his tongue

and the coldest yellow butterfly waits
in the corner of the cooler
for the lid to slide back on again

This is the wedding cake:

She is watching her waistline
for the photographer
and the bridal suite.

But he smothers her gloved hands in his,
sliding the sliver-plated cake server
through seven layers of yellow butter cream.

He smears it on her face
so she can almost taste the frosting
with the tongue she's learning not to use.

They will keep a commemorative slice
tucked deep in their freezer for one whole year.
He will throw it out when he determines it is stale.

She will peek inside the freezer every night
to confirm whatever nightmare she stores there
beneath the ice cube tray, next to the hamburger meat



THE
DOOR FRAME

Fleetwood Diner

Jenneva Schultz

Ashtrays skritch on the gritty tables,
black plastic with a rim of chrome
and a red basket of fries comes
for a dollar sixty seven with
endless coffee and conversation interrupted
by drunk drifters kicked out of bars.

The boys drown eggs in ketchup
and sorrows in black notebooks,
gesticulating with toast,
philosophizing while they smoke.

I draw on a redhead's neck, vines and tigers
crawling down her clavicle
as we talk about touching:
who is allowed to, and when.

"That's what it's really about, not love,"
she insists, stealing my sandwich.

"We're all just dying to touch
and be touched, calmed like kittens, held
like horses, looked in the eye
so fierce you can almost feel
the other eyeball against yours."

We clink fingerprinted glasses
and run the calendar-year kiss-count,
coming in at seven, even, with a salute
to lucky numbers as the storm
forces the side-walk sitters in,
crowding their backpacks at our feet
like a pack of wet dogs
and the whole place is a festival of elbows
and smoke, and I lock ankles
with a stranger and we both look up
and look away.

Waiting on the Moon

Nora Seilheimer

It is winter of 1964. Leslie hangs her head over an empty sink in her dark kitchen as the clock in the living room strikes twelve. She braces herself against the edge of the counter, its cool surface chilling her skin through her pink satin nightgown. She looks out the window over the faucet at a still winter night. The untouched snow sparkles beneath the front porch light she left on for her husband, Gene, who still hasn't returned home from work. The bare trees stretch skeleton shadows across the sidewalk. A full moon hides behind thick dark gray clouds that glide steady across the sky like freighters. She can only see a few stars.

Her five children, Nancy, Terry, Tim, Kelly and Tracy have been asleep in their warm beds for a few hours. During dinner Terry asked why his Dad wasn't home from work yet. Leslie scooped a second serving of mashed potatoes on his plate and said, "He will be home soon." Nancy, the oldest at fourteen, rolled her eyes and took her dishes to the sink.

Leslie slides a long black wool coat on over her nightgown and tucks her purse under her arm. She tip toes to Nancy's bedside and rubs her arm until she wakes up.

"Nancy, wake your brothers up and get them in the car. Make sure they grab their coats this time," she whispers.

Nancy rubs her eyes with her fists. "Are we going to get Dad again?"
"Yes, please hurry."

While Nancy takes care of the boys, Leslie retrieves Tracy from her crib, careful not to wake her. She wraps her baby in a blanket and meets the rest of her children by the front door where they stand in a sleepy row.

All the children pile into the backseat, Nancy holding a sleeping Tracy close to her chest. Leslie starts the car and pulls out of the garage in reverse, trying not to notice how tired her children look as she watches for oncoming traffic out the back windshield.

"When Daddy gets in the car he will be very mad. So when he gets in the car stay quiet so we don't upset him even more, ok?"

The children nod slowly with their eyes closed, except for Nancy. She is wide awake with Tracy in her arms, watching the clouds pass in front of the moon.

It is 1:30 in the morning when Leslie pulls into the parking lot of the sports bar one town over. She walks in, the pink trim of her nightgown

Waiting on the Moon

continued

peeking out from underneath the hem of her coat. Gene sits at the bar by himself, staring deep into the empty glass mug in front of him. He spent all of that week's paycheck on beer after beer with his buddies from work, who had all returned home hours ago. The bartender dries a glass with a white rag and gives Leslie a familiar nod. Leslie stares at half a pretzel underneath a barstool.

"I'm not going home, Leslie," Gene says without looking up from his glass.

"Well, you can't stay here, Gene," Leslie says. Gene pushes his mug away with the back of his hand and glares at his wife.

"I can do whatever I want!" he yells. Leslie stands still.

"The kids are in the car. Please let me take you home," she says.

"You brought the kids here? Why the hell did you bring them here?" he says, standing up from his seat. "What kind of mother are you bringing your kids to the bar?"

Leslie wraps her coat around her body tighter, crossing her arms in front of her chest. She hopes that Tracy is warm enough in that blanket. "Please, Gene," she says. Gene looks to the bartender drying beer mugs with his back turned.

"She brings the kids to the bar and expects me to come home and make it all better," he yells to him. The bartender picks up the full rack of mugs and slips through the kitchen's swinging doors.

"Well someone better take care of these kids," he says, storming past his wife. "It might as well be me since you obviously can't do it."

Leslie follows her wobbling husband out to the car, knowing better than to help him walk straight. She waits in the driver's seat while he struggles with the passenger door's handle. The cold metal pieces slap against each other, waking baby Tracy from her sleep.

"Your baby is crying" Gene snaps once he makes it inside the car. He grabs his wife's upper arm in one tight handful, shaking her. "Make it stop! Now!" he yells.

Without saying a word, Leslie puts the car in reverse. Gene lets go of her arm and slumps in his seat. Leslie watches for oncoming traffic through the back windshield. She pretends not to notice the warm sensation pulsing in her upper arm, throbbing in the shape of her husband's grip. She



pretends not to notice baby Tracy's shrilling cries. She pretends not to notice how cold her bare legs are underneath her nightgown. In the backseat, the boys pretend to sleep, leaning against each other for warmth. Nancy pats baby Tracy's back and pretends not to notice that she can no longer see the moon behind dense winter clouds

Finally back at home, Leslie tucks Tracy into her crib while Nancy makes sure her brothers hang their coats back up in the front closet before heading back to bed. The boys shut their bedroom doors behind them as Nancy leans against the kitchen wall in the dark. She watches her father raid the fridge for a beer, knocking a dish of butter to the floor.

"You're making a mess," Nancy says. Gene slams the fridge shut, kicking the cracked butter dish across the linoleum floor on his way to the kitchen table.

"Shouldn't you be in bed, little girl?" he says, the brown bottle pressed to his lips.

"Shouldn't you clean that up?" she says.

"Cleaning is your mother's job," he says.

"It's your mess," Nancy says, crossing her arms over her chest. "You clean it up."

Gene shoots up from his seat, pointing his bottle at his daughter across the room. The only light in the room comes from the moon outside, outlining Gene's silhouette from the window. Nancy can't make out his face. He looks like one big shadow.

"You better watch it, girl —"

"Nancy, go to your room!" Leslie yells, walking up the hallway. "NOW!"

Nancy glares at her father, at the bottle in his hand, back to his shadowed face. With arms still crossed, she marches to her bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

"You teach that girl to talk to her father that way?" Gene says. Leslie ignores him and grabs a wet rag from the sink.

"I'm talking to you, woman," he says. Leslie bends down on her knees to wipe the streaks of butter from the kitchen floor. Gene steps closer to his wife, towering over her like a tree.

"You better look at me when I'm talking to you!" he says, grabbing her face with one hand, his hot breath stinging her eyes. Leslie's body

Waiting on the Moon

continued

stiffens. The wet rag falls in a heap next to the butter dish.

"YOU BETTER LISTEN TO ME!" he says, striking her across the cheek. His blow sends her to the ground.

Gene storms out of the front door without grabbing his coat. Nancy cracks her bedroom door open just enough to see her mother's body on the ground next to the cracked butter dish and wet rag. Her mother holds her own face with a cold, damp hand, eyes closed in the dark. Nancy hears her mother inhale and exhale a few times before sitting up, resting her back against the refrigerator and pulling her nightgown over her knees. Afraid to help her own mother, Nancy closes her bedroom door without a sound. She grabs *Little Women* from her nightstand and tip toes back to bed. Her Grandma always told her she could go anywhere with a good book; that's all Nancy wanted.

Leslie reaches for the butter dish next to her. She examines it in the dark from every angle, turning and flipping it in her hands. She scans its new long crack with her forefinger, as if reading braille. She brings herself to her feet and tosses the butter dish into the trash basket underneath the kitchen sink. She rests her hands on the sink's edge, her wedding ring clinking against the metal surface. She gazes out the window at the skeleton trees, waiting for the moon to reappear.

C.S. Lewis
Jessica Bard



Las Peregrinas

Julia Dean

Our first break of the day on the *Camino de Santiago* came after passing through another tiny Galician community. The farmers greeted us with smiles as their trios of little herding dogs tried to herd Annie and me out of town as soon as we entered. Somehow those dogs must have known we were foreigners, because when we were walking with the Spanish pilgrims, the dogs would be wagging their tails and licking the dirt off the pilgrims' boots. As the dogs barked at us all through town I felt even more like I had intruded into the intimacy of this farming community as they completed their daily work of hanging their laundry or feeding their livestock. These were the parts of a culture that I had never witnessed within my own country. It was as if we slipped into the backstage of a theater, watching the show from the other side of the curtain.

Coming out the other end, the path stooped down through the pastures lined with little stone walls. It was a glorious day and we decided to take our break at the halfway-mark of our entire journey on a little bridge that looked ancient as it connected the banks of the creek at the bottom of the hill.

The sky was filled with good-weather clouds, and I almost slipped, falling straight on my face in the mud-filled center of the path, but luckily I caught myself. Annie made fun of me, telling me to save my complaints until we at least sat down. The stone was cold as it seeped up through our rain gear and through the long underwear, causing a vague sting on our legs while we sat on the very highest point of this bridge shaped like an upside-down V. We thought that the cold might help our muscles, like putting ice packs on swollen ankles. Our legs almost stretched across to the other side of the bridge. With both of us spread wide we threw our food between us, deciding what our lunch should be for the day. Slicing her croissants in half, Annie smeared one of our Swiss-cheese packets in between the two halves, and then, almost devouring the whole thing in one bite, gave a sigh of relief. She had managed to come up with a technique for slicing the cheese packet in half with a string. I, on the other hand, did not care to do any slicing. I would squeeze the cheese out of the packet on top of the croissant, then add a layer of *membrillo*, attempting to mimic the fancy fruit and cheese sandwiches I had eaten with my parents in the Balearic Islands. Annie and I traded her *membrillo* for my candy bars and my juice for two of her cheese packets. We both loved the dried apricots so we saved those for dessert. Our ability to

take over whatever space we inhabited was clearly expressed here as there was barely any space left on the bridge. Once a cycling *peregrino* came through, which proved to be a problem as we scrambled to pick up our stuff before he tripped over our packs and landed head first in the other side of the creek.

On this day particularly we had to know why we were here because we knew that our will was going to be toyed with. We had to know why we had chosen to hike more than we had ever before, without a map and only arrows to guide us, in a foreign place where we were the outsiders. Each arrow became like a symbolic act of faith – we didn't know when they were serious or a mean joke. Our mile marker (really kilometer markers) had become like another person on the journey with us, laughing at us in our exhaustion. I even tried to ignore the mile-markers after awhile so that I would stop thinking about how far we had gone. Annie and I were surrounded by faith, whether or not we were talking about it. In every town there was a church, a cemetery, or homes all filled with the image of the cross. Each pilgrim that we met was there for spiritual reasons. When they asked us why we were there, we replied the same. There was no questioning or a deeper explanation needed. An overall air of respect for one's personal spiritual journey was a given, understood by all. It was nothing like our experiences growing up, where the expression, "How's your relationship with God today?" was just as acceptable as saying, "What's up?" This understanding of spirituality began to come into the silences Annie and I shared as we struggled with the path. The path began to hold more power over our spirits than either of us had ever expected. When we were walking behind a factory or along side of the highways, our conversations seemed to follow into the darkest parts of our lives, but then when we would come into the pastures we would talk about the love that has filled our lives from family, lovers and each other.

After our lunch break, the landscape changed once again from farmland to forests. The trees were tightly packed in with each other and they towered high – higher than most of the buildings in Madrid, though they never exceeded more than what we considered five stories, just enough to frame the sky. The path changed too. Now it had woodchips mixed in with the soil, and it felt like cement. Our limps were becoming trademarked, my waddle and Annie's hops. I would shift my weight from side to side and Annie

Las Peregrinas

continued

from front to back, never fully letting her heels touch the ground or else they would send shocks of pain all the way up to her hip joints. The path began to decline, down a slant, and to the right was a cleared grove with three men in the process of taking down the trees. The layered greens of this backdrop filled me with joy as green usually does, the lime green grass, the dark mossy green of the tree trunks fencing in the grove, then the canopy a tropical green acting as a roof. The classic red tractor was plowing away, but looked a century older than the ones we usually have back in America. Those men actually laughed at us while we passed, their yellow teeth glistening. The sunrays passed through the hole in the forest's canopy for a few moments as we crossed over a creek on a fallen tree trunk. I remembered thinking how strange it would be to be watched every day of your life, and your parent's lives and grandparents' lives, pilgrims walking through your community in search of enlightenment and transformation, as you continued hanging your laundry or cutting your grass. It would make me a bit prideful, knowing that my land was somehow more holy than all the lands that these travelers had left behind.

Too Close to the Sun

Alanna Muto

I woke up too late that day. I was forever doing that. Everyone else woke with the sun – as if Helios himself called their names each morning as he crested the horizon or Dawn’s rosy fingers tickled them into rising. But the gods always forgot about me.

Most people did, actually. In the thousands of years to come, I was forgotten to history as swiftly and cleanly as the wax melted. Everyone remembered my brother – he became an icon for so many things: losers and dreamers and lost hopes and failed attempts and hubris and daring – and his death counted for so much. My father too was remembered; he was so skilled and wily.

Mother, like me, was forgotten. She was kind and skilled at her weaving, but eternal glory was reserved for the men in my family. The women made less than a ripple in the waters of time – the men, and my brother especially, made a splash.

That day, like the day before it, I woke up too late. Icarus and father were already on the cliff, wings strapped to their backs. I knew father had leapt as soon as I ran out the door; his black wings were a dot in the blue sky. I wouldn’t reach them in time, but I ran as hard as I could – I wanted to see them fly.

I was at the bottom of the cliff when Icarus leapt. His white-winged figure dropped a bit before he flapped his wings; he rose in the air as I climbed the cliff. I reached the peak and saw my father and brother twining together in the air, a swirl of white and black. I was about to shout with glee when suddenly Icarus’ white wings rose high above father’s black in the sky. The pumping, zigzagged flight of my father caused the shout to catch in my throat.

Icarus was flying too high.

Helios never seemed like a jealous god – not like Hera or Hades – the sun saw the whole world and knew all that happened; Helios was already higher than everything. But he was jealous of Icarus – of his high flight and joyous squeals. I imagine my brother was yelling about being as high as the sun. Icarus wasn’t that smart – I was always the one who took most after father.

I saw father’s black-winged body jerk higher as he noticed the white wings of Icarus straining so far above him. Maybe he was shouting a warning for Icarus to come back down. Maybe Icarus pretended not to hear. Maybe Icarus’ own screams were too loud. Maybe father couldn’t bring himself to shout – maybe his mouth was clenched closed with fear like mine.

Too Close to the Sun

continued

They were too high for me to know.

In the end my father's arms weren't long enough to reach my brother's youthful feet. I could almost hear the cries of Icarus as I watched his tall body begin to fall. Father tried to catch him, a low dirge bulging from his now-freed lips. From mine, Father told me later, came something like a shriek – but there was too much pain in it. Like a young bird that sees its mother felled from the sky by a hawk, knowing that it is about to be devoured. I didn't know I'd even made a sound.

Icarus hit the water and the splash was so small. His head followed his arms; his body went straight into the water – a perfect swan dive. The white feathers of his wings floated down slowly and landed gently in the ripples of his death.

Icarus was so stupid, the son of an island kingdom, and he didn't even know how to swim.

Father flew down, far too late, and dove into the water. I could see him there; his huge black wings were like the shadow of a fish just beneath the surface. But then they were cast away and he was floundering in the water. I watched the wings sink and wondered if Icarus saw them coming toward him, if he thought he might be saved, if he thought he wasn't going to die. I imagined his face when he saw the black wings were empty and saw his eyes, grown large with hope, close and his lips lock with despair. I imagined that he opened his eyes once more and struggled toward his father's wings. He grabbed them as his last breath shook him and he stuffed his open mouth with the crow feathers and chewed until his eyes closed no more and his mouth clenched forever around a mouthful of his father's success.

I saw my brother sink down and Poseidon smile when he embraced Icarus in his arms. I watched as they turned together, the sea-god with his trident pointing into his realm on the sea floor, welcoming my brother inside his seaweed kingdom.

I saw my brother turn back, just before he walked into his new home, the glory of his flight reflected in his eyes.

Negative Space

Kelsay Myers

** Stephanie Vibbert Award Winner

Sitting in a chain restaurant at three o' clock in the morning with a friend, eating theoretically international pancakes, and playing *Scrabulous* on Facebook, I am taken back to a time when life was simpler. When it was pancakes that were theoretically international, not my existence. Syrup was sweet, and words fit into square spaces.

*

My mother told me that I could be anything that I wanted to be [except be elected president of the United States of America]. A singer, a writer, an actress, a witch, an independent film director, an academic, a revolutionary...but it's not true.

I really just want to be white and blonde, and no matter how many chemicals singe my scalp, or how many hair stylists I see, my hair will never be blonde, and my skin will always have yellow hues.

*

At the doctor's office the other day, a little boy came in with his mother. He sat down on one of the stiff wooden chairs and looked around him. He said, "Every time I come in this place something's changed. This plant wasn't here before, those pictures were over there, that plant wasn't here before."

I kept thinking, *this feeling of being watched every second because of my race wasn't here before, those struggles were over there somewhere, that freak-out about existence/ space/ politics wasn't here before.*

I worked on the yearbook my junior year of high school. The theme: Retro. The hook: Song Titles. I was in charge of the "hanging out" pages. I needed a song title. Someone said, "What about 'The Space Between?'" Ok, I said. I thought, *the space between what...*

*

Between existence and essence, re-birth and resistance. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

Go to <http://www.inthirdspace.net/main.html>.

Negative Space

continued

This E-magazine is by and for transnational adoptees. It is titled after third space, a conceptual area that exists in between conventional categories of race, gender, and national identities. It is a state of hybridity and fluidity.

I think, therefore I am. [Insert: a *kad*, a kid, a blonde, a battleground of sensory experience, a tautology.]

*

I had my runes read a few weeks ago. The chicken scratch etchings of the ancient druids that can be transformed into a language or code I used to be able to translate. I got the signs for breakthrough, fluidity, and ice or stillness. The space between what is and what used to be.

*

Found from Marion Boddy-Evans in “Negative Space in a Painting”:

Negative space is very useful when confronted with 'difficult' subjects, such as hands. Instead of thinking about fingers, nails, knuckles, start by looking at the shapes between the fingers. Then look at the shapes around the hand, for example the shape between the palm and the wrist. Laying these in will give you a good basic form on which to build. Negative space requires you to concentrate on the space around the object rather than the object itself.

I hated negative space in art class. Not a patient person, I didn't have the time to detail the subject without directly observing Her. Him. It.

*

What needs to be found and what ought to be created? What temples should be erected in the mind? Who even said that? It sounds like something from a movie, or a book, I read [watched] once.

It reminds me of *Bee Season*, a movie [that was first a book by Myla Goldberg]. I was most attracted to Juliette Binoche's character, Miriam, who sees the Jewish concept of *Tikkun olam* differently than her husband who teaches it. For her, making the world whole again comes from stealing shards of glass, or shiny objects, that she sees as hers to fix what is broken. She says, “Yes, I created a poem.”

Yes, I create poems too. The words take up spaces.

*

Create spaces like Asian America.

In *Immigrant Acts* Lisa Lowe says:

"Rather than attesting to the absorption of cultural difference into the universality of the national political sphere,...the Asian immigrant—at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation—emerges in a site that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation. This distance from the national culture constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative formation that produces cultural expressions materially and aesthetically at odds with the resolution of the citizen in the nation. Rather than expressing a 'failed' integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this distance preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy."

A third space – carved out of the railroad chisels, beat out of the sweatshops, shouted on the street corners of Chinatown, spoken in the white homes and families of little Asian American children. Asian America – an opening.

*

Sitting in a chain restaurant at three o' clock in the morning with a friend, eating theoretically international pancakes, and playing *Scrabulous* on Facebook, I am taken back to a time when life was simpler. Syrup was sweet, and words fit into square spaces. There were no temples erected in minds with tautologies and metaphors. Poems were poems, and there were no negative spaces between.

Living Room from Niles Senes

Dylan Seuss-Brakeman



The Well

Maghan Jackson

The night Mother demanded that I go to the Ereaux farm was dark and green, the kind of night that comes right before a storm that could ruin the crops and take away the chance for anything good at Christmastime, so of course we were all nervous, but she barked at me like Jay Jay the mutt that Russell found beside the highway and who had only one ear and had been the murderer of Lorraine's precious doll, and she looked anxiously into the other room where I could see Marie sweating and heaving, her belly jutting out in front of her like the pumpkin that had won her ten dollars at the county fair where she had met Roy Parpart and gotten herself into this mess in the first place. I knew by the look on Mother's face that tonight was going to be the night we knew whether or not Marie could survive her mistake, so I ran out into the night without even taking my sweater, hoping to get to the well and back fast enough to watch Marie's bastard being born, and I flew down the road without even watching for the broken bottles that the bums threw out of the trains, and I could feel the tiny pricks in my feet that meant I should have worn shoes; the muggy air started condensing on my skin, and I could feel it trickling down my back like fear. A figure looming up out of the ditch beside the train tracks reached out before I could scream and dug his nails into the arm holding the water bucket that I dropped as I fought to sink my teeth into the hand that was reaching for my face, and I remember thinking as he wrestled me into the tall grass beside the road that I had seen that beaten up hat somewhere before, though it was hard to tell because of the hot green dark and the tears that clouded my eyes; but the next week in the churchyard where we were burying my sister and her bastard child together in one wooden box, I saw that hat one more time, when Roy Parpart clutched it in one bandaged hand as he came to pay his last respects to the girl he had promised to marry.

Buttons and Zippers

Robyn McBride

Jack pressed Emily against the wall of the bathroom stall. He kissed Emily's neck and she giggled. He pinned her hands above her head. They did not have much space. They kissed on the mouth for a minute, but neither cared much for kissing. Soon enough there were the sounds of buttons and zippers and pushing and pulling and maneuvering. Jack may have said a few things in between moans, but neither would remember later. A few moans and oh gods and Jack's head hitting against the wall once or twice and they were done. There were some sounds of both trying to normalize their breathing. Then more sounds of buttons and zippers and pushing and pulling and maneuvering.

"We're late," Emily told Jack as she smoothed down her shirt and put her "Hi! My Name is Emily" name tag on. He nodded. "You want to go in first this time?"

"Sure," Jack said. He fixed his hair, spiking it up into its usual style. "You lead the way," he said as he unlocked the stall door.

"And Emily, would you please tell the group why you are here today."

Emily shrugged. Jack, known as Dr. Martin, The Therapist, to everyone else in the group, stared intently at her. She did not want to answer the question. She believed that she did not need to be with the others in the group. She believed that she didn't have a problem. The only reason she was there was because her boyfriend threatened to break up with her if she didn't "work on her problem."

"Now Emily, every other person in the group has admitted that they have a problem. Annabelle admitted she had an alcohol problem and she has been in this group for three years and is extremely stable in her illness," Dr. Martin said as he motioned to her. Annabelle smiled at Emily. At that moment Emily decided that she hated Annabelle. "You are the only one who has chosen not to. The only way that you will ever be able to fix the problem is to admit that you actually have one."

The others in the group were staring at Emily, anxiously awaiting her declaration of addiction. She sighed. "I am here because my boyfriend thinks that I'm a sex addict," she said as she rolled her eyes for effect.

"You have a boyfriend?" Dr. Martin blurted out. He had been unaware of this boyfriend and was quite shocked to hear the news. Everyone

in the group was now staring at Dr. Martin, wondering why he cared so much about Emily having a boyfriend. Dr. Martin realized that everyone was staring at him and regained his composure.

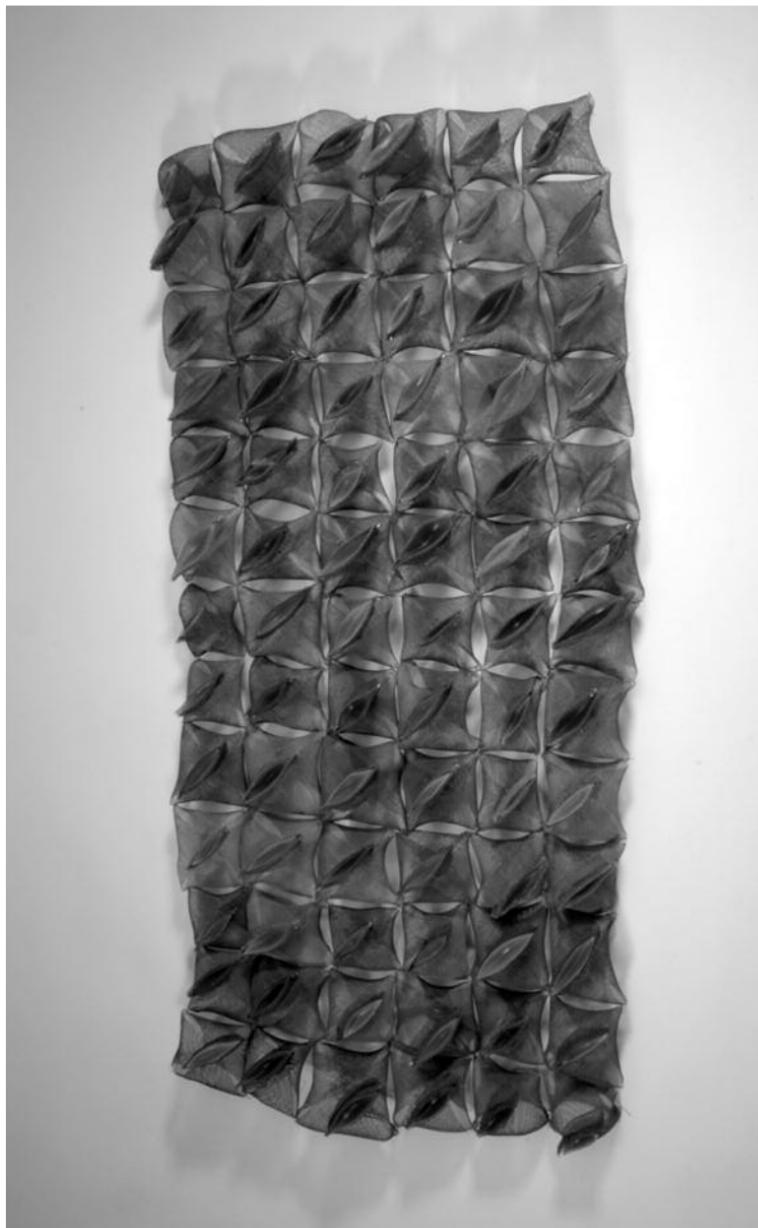
He cleared his throat. "Now Emily, you have only told us what your boyfriend thinks. You still have not fully realized your problem. I will say this one more time: The only way you will ever be able to fix the problem is to admit that you actually have one."

Emily decided that the only way that she could get Dr. Martin off her back was to admit that she had a problem (which she did not). She sighed again, this time drawing it out to yet again show her discontent. "I am here because I am a sex addict."

Everyone clapped for Emily, but it was Dr. Martin who clapped the loudest.

Quilt

Julia Gartrell



Fish and Chips

Jeanette Lee

Flat like deflated flan like fried flakes are the chip fish on Lake Michigan beaches

Beachcomb for special rocks across
stretches of
shore becalmed. Lined with dead
silver fish.

You become disgusted by the smell
of the smelt
in the melting sun.

Shoulders stooped, stopped staring over smelt fish.
Angry eyes flash like scales of darting bate,
beat and between breathing,
hooked by dead fish crisping, crying, drying – rising.

Rinsing

rushing
Russian
d

on a Rueben

in the rain

hishss

Steam rises from the dehydrated dead.

China Shop

Colleen Bednar

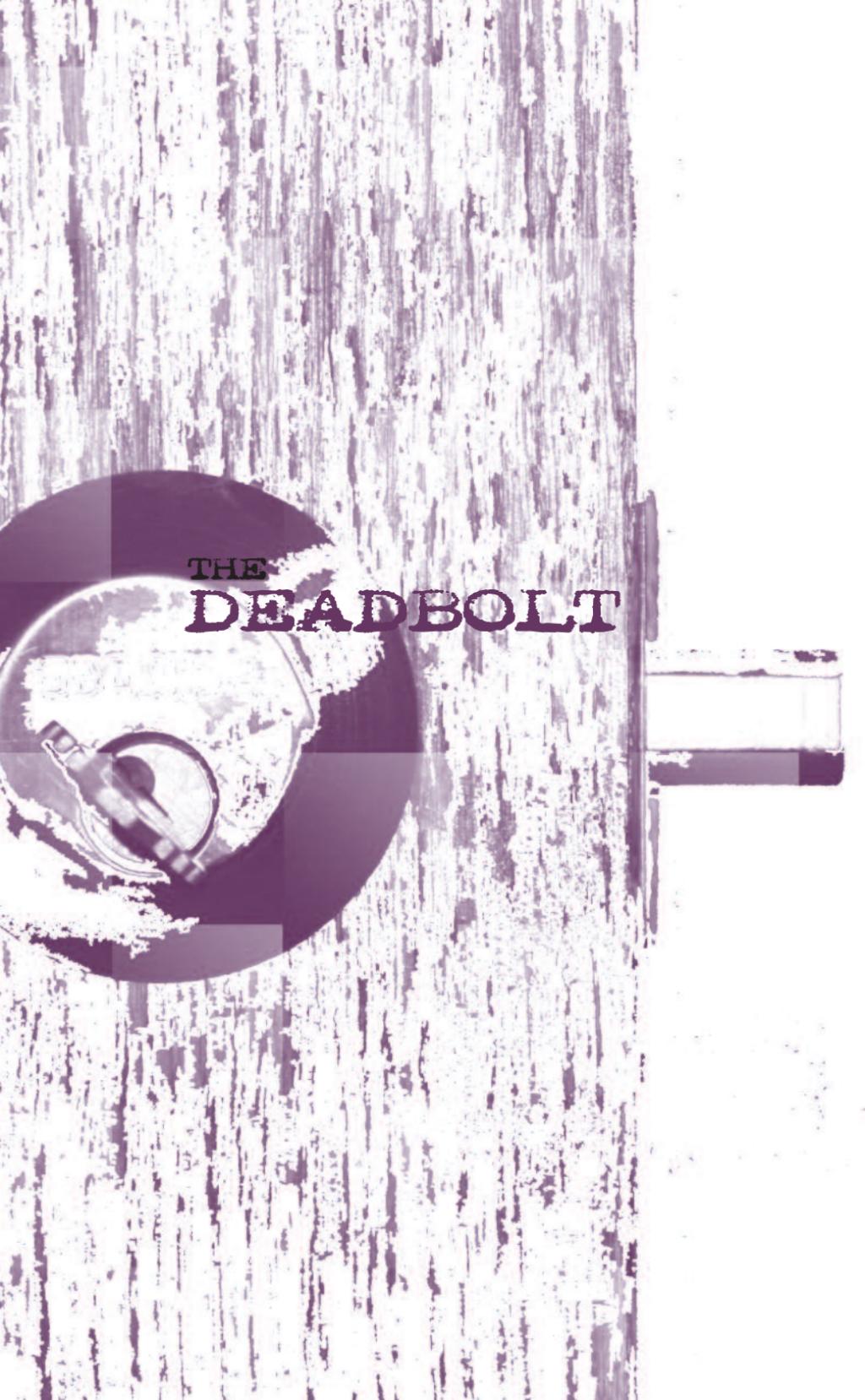
He always
chooses the bowl first
crushes it with his hooves
I've told my father
he is not welcome here
but he is so strong
when he comes as the bull
and flicks his tail
at the teacups.

Thinly Drawn

Natalia Holtzman



Maybe it was all too much. You pressed your dry fingers into the jelled centers of your eyes and the living tears began to run. All I could remember was the time at the counter when you were shining the stainless steel and even when you saw your dirty fingerprints bleeding through the paper cloth – like thimbles pressed in oil – you kept spraying and swiping in hand-sized silver crescents until the paper wore through and your palm drove flush up against the metal and you shrieked at sunset pitch. We'd have been too thinly drawn, you and I, if all the world were sketched at birth and smudged before the next part. Every time you touch your face or hide it I think of drawings of old ships, the ink fading, the sails merging into the horizon, as if the artist had laid leeches to his work, as if he'd bled it. Now I pull the mask-strings tight around me; I keep you by my side. We watch the others walk, their black hoods drawn, as if they all were mourning. When I look down I see the lines that form my heels begin to blur, and I fall fast into winter.



THE **DEADBOLT**

It Looks Like Rain

Jared Devitt

It looks like rain, you say when the lull becomes unbearable, and she tells you that you said those very same words on the first night you met some years back, which is a funny thing for her to say because you have never seen her before this morning in the bookstore café, but she seems understanding when she says 'I never expected you to remember, really, so I just played along and pretended that we had never met before. I can't forget Chicago, though, and the time we spent there. Just that one night, but I can't forget like you've forgotten.' She doesn't cry. She looks like she wants to, and of course you sweep her to your apartment on a cloud of *I'm sorrys* and *I was a fool to forgets*, and she gets to relive a night that has plagued her, possessed her, and you, you retreat a little more into yourself, because when the time came to tell her that you have never been within a hundred miles of Chicago, you instead kissed her lightly on the forehead.

My Brother's Wake

Melissa Burnette

There was just so much pressure, and I
know that I never do well under those kinds
of extreme circumstances, and well, it just came out;
all of the laughter just came spilling out,
it filled the funeral home even more than it already was
with all of your friends pouring out into the streets, with all
of the people crying in my parent's arms, but not mine
since I couldn't deal with everyone telling me they were
sorry,
and why were they saying that since they didn't
kill you, unless they were doing something that
Thursday night that I'm completely unaware of,
but when he said that about the helicopter ride,
and I thought about mom losing both of her children,
well that was just putridly hilarious to me,
and it just came bursting out,
quite like you did through the windshield I would
assume, but with less blood and yet still the same amount of death,
and they looked at me and judged, somehow they judged me
when I had never seen the majority of them before,
so I knew that some of them were not close to you at all,
and they were judging me, when they had no idea what loss meant
beyond the meaning that reliable ol' Mr. Webster had supplied them
and possible what Father Orr told them to feel,
but I kept on laughing even as people tried to quiet me,
because my mother couldn't hear me over the crying,
and besides, you would have laughed too.

Antraq

Jillian Regal

I think that the ants are taking over the world, and I think that their command center is in my dorm room, behind the trashcan.

The queen sent out orders yesterday for her infantry to assemble, ready for attack. I know this because hundreds of ants just came spilling out of my Oreos and scurried for cover underneath my printer. I spend an hour screaming and ten minutes doing damage control with Ivan the Terrible, my ancient—and angry—vacuum.

"How many times have you vacuumed today?" my roommate says.

"Four," I reply.

I spray the exposed top of the nest with Raid after the siege, but I am still shaking. I just killed hundreds, maybe thousands, of innocent ants. I feel terrible about killing the poor worker ants, who are just following orders, but they are the only way I could get to the queen. They have to be sacrificed, innocent or not.

Well, they were innocent before they infiltrated my Oreos. Now, they must die.

My mother calls after my Oreo incident, crying again. My Marine brother is going back to Iraq.

I spray some more.

They are still here, and I am too afraid to buy more Oreos. Ivan the Terrible has been overworked the past few days, and he's starting to bellow; I don't think that he particularly likes the taste of ants.

I haven't eaten a cookie in weeks, partly out of fear and partly out of spite. They just mill around, waiting. Maybe they're trying to assemble again, and I just don't know where. I don't know how they could still be alive. Maybe they're super ants with gas masks that are too tiny for human eyes to see.

Or maybe they're just too smart.

I try laying out those Combat traps, the ones that look like make-up compacts lying innocently on the ground. The traps supposedly attract the ants, and the ants are supposed to pick up some sort of poison and carry it back to the queen. Once the queen dies, I will have the entire colony.

"What is this? Did you drop something?" my roommate asks.

“Don’t touch that!” I say.

I don’t see her for three days after that.

But the ants don’t take the bait; instead, they congregate around the entrance to the trap, mocking me. I can’t blame them; I wouldn’t sacrifice myself for some distant higher authority either.

My mother calls again during one of the many rainy afternoons I spend staring at the commotion, to tell me that my brother’s deployment date is moved up to April 1st. Between snivels she says something about Congress passing some new law that extends soldier’s deployments and eliminates leave time.

I throw away the traps in the same trashcan by which the ants have their command.

I begin to step around them when I need to go to the bathroom or walk to class. I leave my crumbs on the ground and watch them slowly carry the morsels of food back to their queen.

But they begin to come to me, offering the crumbs at my foot. Soon there is a pile by my stack of *New York Times* I need to recycle, back where they came tumbling out of the Oreos weeks ago.

“Aren’t you going to recycle those?” my roommate said.

I grunted.

I don’t see her for another few days, but I never liked her shrill voice anyway.

The crumbs begin to pile into an almost invisible pile; I don’t know what to do with them, so I let them sit and mold, or whatever it is that crumbs do when left unattended, and they start to spill over on top of the *New York Times* article marking the four year anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

Ivan sits in the corner, gaining dust. I sat with him, watching the pile grow inch by inch. Bread crumbs are the favorite, but they also like pieces of soggy fruit and dried banana chips. And cheese; they love cheese.

Mom calls again, this time while I’m watching one ant single-handedly carry an entire Goldfish cracker, one of the cheddar ones. But there is really nothing left to say. I have never lost a brother before, but I have five, so I guess God thinks I can spare one.

Antraq

continued

The pile begins to migrate, and she calls every six hours, starting at six in the morning. I never have to say anything; no words can alleviate her crying. I just watch the pile move closer and closer to my bed, not even wondering anymore why they chose me to replace their real queen.

I guess that the poison did work, and now they're coming home to roost.

"Okay, well, that's the last of my stuff," my roommate says, bracing a large box marked "STUFF" on her hip.

I don't reply.

"Okay, whatever." She gives her hair one last toss on her way out the door. She lets it slam, and the sound reverberates throughout the room.

It is the third time my phone rang that rainy day, and the third time I hear incessant sobbing on the other end. I don't even remember what her voice sounds like. I sit, silent, checking the time and watching the remarkable pile procession.

It's midnight, but I don't bother falling asleep; my phone is due to ring any minute now anyway. I stare, waiting for the red and green lights that signify an incoming call to start flashing.

I don't know how long I stare, so I don't know how long it takes me to feel the tiny brushings on my cheek. When they won't desist, I sit up, brushing my dirty hair from my face.

And then, it happens: hundreds of food-bearing ants come tumbling out of my hair and onto my black cotton pajamas.

I run screaming, the first real sound that escapes my mouth in months.

Casita

Jessica Bard



Scarlet Fever

Martin Goffeney

This city has been my home for the past thirty-five years. I was transferred to the mission here immediately following my graduation from the Seminary. Throughout these years, I have seen all manner of drunkards, vandals, and drug addicts. I have done my best for the worst this city has to offer, and the needy only seem to multiply with each passing season. These days, I spend most evenings in Palmer Park, handing out sandwiches to the junkies. At eight o'clock every night, without fail, I seat myself on the same bench. They soon begin to arrive, lazily creeping out of the bushes and piles of debris surrounding my perch. I spend precisely one hour in the park, handing out sandwiches to the drug-addled crowd seated at my feet.

I have studied the mannerisms of these desperate folk quite a bit, these past few years. Simply watching one try to remain still can be a powerful lesson on misfortune. It is always quite a challenge for them. The one sitting at my foot right now, for instance, is staring up at me, his pupils threatening to overtake the surface of his eyeball. His mouth is hanging slightly open, and his eyelids are threatening to droop down to his collarbone. And yet, as he sits there, his body apparently frozen in stupor, he is furiously contorting his hands. He runs them up and down the length of his greasy forearms, the fingers flittering and reaching for a hidden prize of some sort. The hands probe with an enthusiasm devoid in the rest of the junkie's shriveled frame. They work as if possessed with a mind of their own, acting on impulses and desires kept secret from the rest of the man's body.

This sort of behavior is quite typical of my flock. It is thus entirely unsurprising that many of these men would be utterly incapable of feeding themselves, if not for my stewardship. A single missed meal would certainly bring at least half their number to the very edge of death. These melancholy sinners need me. Always keeping that purpose in mind, I walk every night to this dimly lit park, and sit. The junkies huddle at my feet, stretching their arms toward the peeling paint of the park bench. There is no creature so plaintively polite as a man coming down from a large dose of low-grade heroin. "Bless you, Reverend. Spare some pity for a poor sinner?" They are always painstakingly civil, addressing me as "Father" or "Reverend." I have heard that they refer to me, in hushed tones amongst their peers, simply as "The Priest." Of course, this respect is always rewarded – any man who sits at my feet and politely waits his turn receives his nourishment from the



picnic basket and thermos I always carry. I slowly pour the coffee into small paper cups, and stack the peanut butter sandwiches beside me on the bench. The junkies never take their eyes off me while I prepare their meal. At times, their hollow gaze can actually be quite piercing.

That is not to say, however, that I find their stares unsettling. Quite the opposite, in fact. I never feel so close to God as I do when I look down upon those dirt-smeared, expectant faces. There is something profoundly holy in the questing movements of their skinny fingers, in the shockingly cloudy stare of two-dozen dilated pupils, eyeing the picnic basket with that perfect balance of hope and resignation. It fills my body with joyful, heavenly warmth. These men *need* me. And as long as they do, I will bring them that little salvation they all so desperately lust after. It truly is a pitiful sight.

Precisely one hour after my arrival, I pack up my things and leave the park. The junkies slither back into the shadows, and I walk to the small flat provided for me by the mission. Despite the cold air, I fling open the windows of the apartment. It wouldn't do to have a visiting parishioner catch the odor of tobacco in the air, would it? I smoke a while before I begin to drift off, dreaming of tomorrow's meal. Behind my eyelids, I see their hands, trembling, gliding up the length of their slender forearms. Every morning, I wake from this dream, my cheeks splashed with crimson.



The Stone Umbrella

Ryan Booms

When the sky collapsed upon the couple, Melvin realized it was not motorcycling weather after all. Squinting to no avail, he rode blindly through the rain. At least he could feel the road beneath the tires. If he veered off the road, he knew the gravel would send vibrations up his spine. He worried about oncoming traffic, too, but trusted that he could hear a blaring horn above the rhythmic pounding of raindrops against his helmet.

He told himself to pull over, but with Sidney straddling him, he could not work up the courage. The pressure of her legs against his hips, the exhaling of her breath against his neck, the beating of her heart against his back—these frantic things fused their bodies together. Her muscles forced him onward, forbidding him to stop. Her body smothered him with guilt; he was the one who had disregarded the ominous swirling of the clouds. He was the one who had insisted upon taking the motorcycle rather than calling for a cab. He was the one who had wanted to play hero and boldly weave through traffic jams. He was not the one, however, who risked stumbling upon his mother-in-law's deathbed drenched—two minutes too late. Melvin's guilt culminated in one strange thought: he almost wanted Sidney to let go.

Sidney ached to see her mother one last time. She imagined that her mother would babble about all of the days she spent at the beach as a young woman, pretending to read magazines while her eyes, hidden behind sunglasses, stalked the bodies of men tossing balls along the shoreline. Her mother loved to let her pale body redden beneath the sun; later on, the ocean winds would sweep away the peeling skin from her bare shoulders, and she would watch the delicate flakes float through the air until they settled inconspicuously into the sand. "Perhaps," she would tell Sidney, "when you and Melvin have children, they will build a castle with pieces of me."

Sidney gagged at the idea of having children with Melvin. With her arms wrapped around his waist, she realized it was the first time she had even touched him in months. It was no secret that he spent more time in the garage than in the bedroom. On the rare occasion that Sidney felt like making love, Melvin was busy polishing his bike. She assumed that he did not even care about the hospital visit but instead concerned himself with the rain's threat of corrosion to his bike. She almost wanted to let go.

Both of them pictured Sidney tumbling down the wet road, limbs flailing in disarray. Melvin cracked a grin at the morbid image, which Sidney

detected in the rear view mirror. She was enraged to see him smile, so she squeezed him even tighter, digging under his ribcage and into his kidneys. He could hardly steer the motorcycle.

The rain stopped as the couple was devoured in darkness. They had reached a haven from the storm, what Melvin liked to call “the stone umbrella.” Melvin, aching from Sidney’s grip, slammed on the breaks, and the motorcycle skidded to a halt. Sidney scrambled off Melvin’s back without speaking a word. They were trapped between four walls—two of cement, two of rain. The overpass cast a merciless shadow on its two occupants. Sidney was thankful for this; it prevented Melvin from looking at her face, now a blur of running makeup. Melvin waited for her to stir so that a shirt sleeve or a tuft of hair would leap from the darkness. But she remained motionless. “I’m sorry. You were right. We should’ve called for a cab,” Melvin said.

Sidney’s face flared up amidst the darkness. Mascara dribbled down her cheeks like spider legs. “Melvin, the next time I see my mother, she’ll be dead! We should’ve called for a cab.”

“Look, honey—if we just wave, I know a car will pick us up,” Melvin said.

Hanging on the edge of the road, Sidney lit up a cigarette. Tracing the path of its glowing, red tip, Melvin observed the long interruptions between each nervous puff. As the smoke filled the overpass, an ambulance wailed in the distance. The siren’s crescendo riveted a yearning within Sidney, and she dropped her cigarette into a puddle. The ambulance lights entered the overpass and illuminated the graffiti upon the walls. Amidst the chaotic blend of scribbles, a face lined in charcoal captivated Sidney. She could not look away from the face, swirling in hue from white to crimson. Drooping with wrinkles, it beckoned to her. She wandered wide-eyed toward the face and into the path of the ambulance.

Dead Things

Colleen Bednar

* Divine Crow Award Winner

My big brother, Jeffy, has a box of animal bones tucked behind a cinder block in the garage. I know there's at least one raccoon, a squirrel, and Beastie, the neighbor-girl's old cat. The raccoon and the squirrel were dead, squashed into road kill pancakes when Jeffy took his pocket knife and scraped them off Route 27 where it runs by our house. I know because I followed and watched him. He's got this crazy thing he does with his knife before the bad stuff happens, and I watch for that sign like a dog listens for the curdled wind of a distant tornado. Before the bad stuff, Jeffy gets all sunk-eyed and staring. He scratches the knife blade along the outside of his jeans pocket real slow, back and forth, sort of like grinding his teeth or running a fingernail down the metal screen on our porch door. It drives Dad nuts and he's always slapping Jeffy upside the head, telling him to cut it out. It's pretty irritating, that sound.

I followed Jeffy, one morning in mid-June, with his knife going *scruff, scruff* in his pocket as he wandered through the woods to the shoulder of Route 27. He was kind of in a daze and I knew he wouldn't notice me, but I was still careful, sensing that something was coming.

Out on Route 27, the raccoon wasn't very big and it definitely didn't look like a raccoon anymore. The only way you could tell was by looking at the tail which hadn't been run over; it was still fluffy and round like a bottle brush. I could see the fat brown and black stripes from the edge of the woods where I was crouching. I could also see the darker mound of matted fur where the rest of the body used to be. The *scruff, scruff* stopped and Jeffy pulled the knife from his pocket, crouching by the raccoon, breathing heavy. I saw his shoulders move up and down, his skinny chest move in and out. There was a strange whistling coming from his nose as he ran the tail through his fist and suddenly lifted, pulling the tail up and the body with it. Where the fur refused to let go of the cement he scraped with his knife until most everything came free and it was a strange, stiff thing, hanging from his hand.

Behind the garage he scraped his knife against a stone, *scruff, scruff*, until it was sharp and he peeled raccoon flesh from bone. I crept away, back to the house and the room where Jeffy and I sleep, kind of sick over the sight of that mess of dead animal flesh in my brother's hand. I kept thinking there wasn't anything beautiful about it; it wasn't like a girl's skin, the way I imagine it, warm and smooth, maybe damp from the air and breathing. It

wasn't anything like that, just an ugly, dead thing.

I guess that raccoon must've taken him all afternoon behind the garage, because he didn't come back to the house until dinner. From the dining room we heard him come loudly through the back door into the kitchen. "Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer, don't slam that door!" Mom said. Dad was chewing roast beef with his mouth open, keeping an eye on the TV where the Cardinals were catching a beating from the Cincinnati Reds.

A few weeks later, when Jeffy started doing the crazy thing with his knife in his pocket, I followed him out to Route 27 again. I don't know why I went; I was sort of fascinated I guess. The way sick stuff will catch your eye; I was like those people who stop and stare at a car wreck, hoping to catch a glimpse of splattered blood. Jeffy walked a ways down the road before stopping, crouched above the mashed outline of a squirrel. The body wouldn't come up so easy this time so he hacked away but only got the head to come free. That night I dreamed of the squirrel head with its torn ears and crushed eyes. It'd looked asleep almost, like the weight of the air must have pressed it down the way a giant, invisible hand might deflate a balloon, leaving it all smeared tendons and skin across the highway. I convinced myself that it wasn't so bad what Jeffy was doing, thinking: *It's a weird thing but no one's going to know.* I hadn't found out about the box in the garage yet, of course. Beastie was the one who found out first.

Crystal was the neighbor-girl who lived in the grey house down the road half a mile, but her family moved away at the end of the summer. Her mom and dad tried to make a big fuss in the paper and on the news about how Crystal came home from walking in the woods one afternoon with her dress ripped and a bad bruise around her neck like someone had been squeezing her there. I guess she wasn't saying who did it though, and the news people ran the story but it was just a tiny blurb before the commercial break. Probably her parents were pretty scared for her, and angry that no one was doing anything. They moved away pretty soon after that.

Beastie was Crystal's cat. He was old and fat and liked to wander over to our house sometimes to sit in the driveway and roll in the dusty gravel. Crystal would come searching for him, through the woods, real quiet,

Dead Things

continued

the way I would follow Jeffy. She'd crouch and watch the stupid cat getting all dirty. After a while, she'd walk over and scoop Beastie up, hanging him over her arm like a sack of potatoes, cooing as though he was some kind of big, hairy baby.

Mom used to call Crystal *the slow girl*, not in a mean way, but in the hard, honest way she has of talking about people. I never could tell if Crystal was stupid or not, but I never heard her talk, not once, besides the funny noises she would make at Beastie. I asked Jeffy if he knew anything about her. I couldn't get her out of my head ever since the beginning of summer when I'd seen her creeping through the woods. I started having dreams about her; I'd wake up stiff and throbbing, pretending my hand was her hand, small like a child's. Jeffy smirked, smart but mean – maybe he guessed what I was thinking. He called Crystal a *dumb bitch*, and I would've punched him in the face, even though he's three years older, for saying something like that, but it's no use punching Jeffy; he's got that knife.

If I hadn't been busy following Jeffy all June and July I would've liked to follow Crystal through the woods on the days she came looking for Beastie. I wasn't one to care if she was slow; talking isn't everything. Sometimes when I'm bored in school I think about the blue ribbons she wore to keep the blonde strands of hair off her face. She had skinny chicken legs covered with half-scabbed mosquito bites where she scratched all summer, and she had a funny mouth. Her top lip was cut down the middle, right below her nose. It lifted up a bit so you could always see a hint of teeth, even when her mouth was closed. Often when I saw her crouched along the edge of our yard watching Beastie, I felt my pulse speed up, knocking against the skin of my wrists and neck. My head would get all full of racing thoughts, and I bet I looked a lot like Jeffy then, only no knife.

In July, a couple of weeks before Crystal's family moved, I saw Jeffy getting that crazy, dazed look, so I followed him around back of the garage and crouched low in some bushes a ways away. Jeffy brought a big shoebox out of the garage and sat down Indian-style beside it to sharpen his knife. Beastie must've seen Jeffy from the driveway, and started towards the garage, a stupid, curious animal. Beastie rubbed his whiskers against the

corner of the shoebox and I saw Jeffy go still with his knife. I heard something behind me and turned to see Crystal standing, watching. I slowly stood and crept towards her, hoping Jeffy was too crazy to hear me moving, but when Crystal saw me her eyes got all wide, the way a deer's eyes get when Dad catches them with the headlights of his truck, and I had to start hoping she wouldn't do something stupid to give us away.

I got her by the hand and pulled her with me behind the bushes. She couldn't have been that stupid because she understood right away and didn't struggle or anything. We saw Jeffy take the rock he was sharpening his knife on and he held it in the air, poised above the cat. The moment dragged on and we watched Jeffy playing God, his arm muscles pulled tight into thin cords. Then, quick-like, he smashed Beastie's skull with the thick, ripe sound of a summer squash breaking beneath your feet. Crystal was breathing heavy – I'd put one hand across her scarred mouth without even knowing. I could feel the smooth curve of her teeth where the lip was pulled up funny and I started to get hard, right there in the middle of everything, with Beastie lying broken and my body pressed against her back to keep us both still.

Jeffy put Beastie in the shoebox and rinsed the ground with Mom's garden hose before putting the box back in the garage. I worried, how long would it take for Beastie to start to smell? Once, when I forgot to clean out the traps in the basement, I could smell the dead mice rotting; Beastie would be like that, but worse.

While Jeffy was in the garage, I followed Crystal as she snuck back through the woods until we were far from my house. She didn't ask me to come with her, but she didn't stop me either, and when I grabbed her hand she only looked at me as though from far away. There was something about her skin and the soft trembling of her shoulders that started me aching and made my eyes go funny. The sharp outlines of the trees and the ground bled into one another until the woods looked like a charcoal drawing left out in the rain. I wanted to say something to her. Maybe an apology because my brother killed her cat, or maybe I wanted to say sorry, not because of what had happened to Beastie but because she had seen Jeffy being crazy. Crazy is something for a family to deal with. Crazy isn't something other people need to know about.

Dead Things

continued

Crystal was crying, trying to be quiet. She took her hand from mine to wipe her eyes and I saw that she had something dark-red staining her fingers. The same dark-red stain seemed to be seeping through one of the pockets of her dress. Distractedly, she reached into the pocket and pulled out a couple of squashed blackberries. She tried to put the berries in her mouth but her lip shook so bad she couldn't manage. Her fingers gave up and let the berries fall, rolling from her chin to the ground. I was getting hard again, thinking about her lips and the berries against her mouth. I wanted to say something to her but I couldn't. Not a thing came to mind. I didn't want to scare her, tell her about how my head was getting, standing next to her, watching the skin stretch over her thin arms and legs. My vision was all blurry – something, maybe blood, pounded in my ears. I couldn't stop thinking about wanting to reach out to touch the ugly, stained fabric of her dress – just one good yank to see how strong the buttons were.

They weren't very strong and popped from the fabric into the brush like a scared group of round, black beetles. She didn't like my hands on her, on that beautiful skin. I pushed her down, just wanted to see, wanted to pinch her arms and thighs till they flushed pink and angry. She was quiet and perfect beneath me, spine cutting into the ground, still crying for Beastie. I thought about telling her sorry for Jeffy being crazy. Thought about a lot of things, like the way her skin would move between my teeth. Thought about how the ribbons in her hair would look hanging from the pine branches around us if I were to hang them there. Couldn't hear anything with all the blood in my head beating against my skull like a trapped bird, and that fucked-up lip of hers. Couldn't see anything but that lip and the small gleam of teeth, said, *Can I kiss you? Can I...are you gonna bite?* Pressed my face close, moved my finger against her scar. She screamed then, so loud I heard it all the way through the boiling mess in my head, like the banshee wail of a trapped animal when it finally understands the snare's metal teeth snapped hungry into bone. I couldn't stand that screaming with the woods so quiet around us. I closed my hands around her neck, just to keep her quiet, the dumb, beautiful girl. The shivering, gentle body. *Crystal, you hearing me?* My lips against her ear. *Everybody says you're stupid...Jeffy called you a dumb bitch – I coulda killed him. You're not slow, right? You gonna remember this tomorrow, how I was the only one who wanted you.*



I left her in the woods. She was playing dead with shallow breaths and fingers tangled like claws in the grass. Her dress was ripped and there were purple-bruised thumbprints below her jaw. The backs of my hands were stained red but it wasn't blood, I knew that. I figured it must've been blackberry juice that rubbed into my knuckles when I was holding her hand. It took a lot of walking to clear my head and get so I could hear the woods and my own breathing again. I got a little lost with all that walking and started to be afraid I'd bump into Jeffy coming back from Route 27, going *scruff, scruff* with his knife.

I didn't see him though, and when I made it back to our yard I quickly slipped into the garage to check for the shoebox. I found it behind a cinder block, far back in the corner. I looked in it but didn't see Beastie, just bones. Jeffy must've put Beastie somewhere to wait for the smell and the falling apart before keeping him in the bone box. It was fine by me, I guessed, as long as that stupid cat wasn't lying around, smelling up the garage. A stinky, rotting cat would get Jeffy's secret found out real quick, and that wouldn't be right. Crazy is something for a family to deal with. At night, crazy curls up at the end of the bed like a faithful pet, only worse because it has a smell, like the musty stench of bur-tangled fur. That smell will find you anywhere, even in dreams. Or the sound will find you. Crazy has a sound and I listen for it, lying in bed, knowing Jeffy is only two feet away on the bottom bunk. He thinks the sound is just the wind, or the tired creaking of our house, but I know better. What I listen for is quieter than that.

Obesity

Michelle Lamont



Cancer Chronicles

Sarah Goldstein

curly brillo hairs
not quite covering your sores
red and oozing pus

I was in philly
you, a hospital bed in
ohio too far

red prunes hanging off
your grey skin sucking all the
fluid out of you

the incision scar
the leftovers of your right
breast hang and fester

I found your hair all
over my sweater, thanks for
washing it for me

when the door bell rang,
we'd wait to answer until
your wig was on straight

A New Way to Kiss the Blues Goodbye

Louis Jeannot

A jet of urine soaks fingers and the plastic apparatus that they clutch, as directed on the back of the box. “Oh, God,” she whispers, cringing.

“Look at these people.” Nick is cross-legged on his unmade bed, beneath the placid gaze of the cruciform wooden Jesus. Watching CNN on the thirteen-inch television atop the bureau, he speaks to his girlfriend through the adjoined bathroom door. She calls back, “What?”

“There’s this thing about a pro-choice rally on the news. All these people with signs. God, it makes me sick,” he says, “just imagining that kind of...murder.”

A physical surge rises within her. As Mary draws her arm out from between her legs, as she sees again the mysterious divining rod of the O.B. applicator’s white plastic glistening with piss, she feels her diaphragm kick like a tensed stone apron.

Five minutes is all it takes!

Nick gets up from the bed. “I mean, don’t you agree?” he asks her.

Wide eyes staring at the applicator, Mary nods and says, “You know I do, baby.”

His knuckles brush the bathroom door so softly and the door bows inward as his weight presses against it. Lips inches from the wood, Nick persists: “Doesn’t it make you sick?”

Despite having taken the class in high school last year, as a junior, Mary doesn’t know anything about chemistry or the workings of a pregnancy test. Strings of words like *Lateral Flow Immunochromatographic Assay* mean nothing to the girl. And the instructions say nothing about the content of a pregnant woman’s urine, they deal only in colored absolutes: *If testing area turns blue, you are pregnant*-- congratulations!*

Eyes scanning downward, she finds the asterisk couched at the bottom in even tinier print: *To an assured accuracy of 89.5%.*

Nick doesn’t wait for an answer. “And...speaking of sick, did you throw up this morning? there was some...junk, like, floating in the toilet.”

Sweat is collecting, percolating up amongst the dark stubble in her armpits. Mouth dry as a bucket of sand, she can taste the alkaline aroma of her own urine on the air, which, to an assured accuracy of 89.5%, may or may not contain a disastrous truth. “Yeah...I think I’m getting sick...or something,” she says, breath bicycling at a rapid rate.

"Well keep away from me...I don't wanna get whatever you got."

Mary's eyes are clamped shut so tight, she sees tiny circles of color winking against the backs of eyelids. "I don't think it's contagious, Nick," she says, voice aquiver on a taut cord of terror.

"Are you okay?" He puts his hand on the doorknob and the weight of Nick's hand rattles the thing. She is staring at it.

It is imperative that the test be read between the suggested window of 3-5 minutes, as evaporation lines will appear on testing area soon after.

"I'm fine. I just feel a little sick, that's all."

After urination, do not set the applicator down on any surface as environmental contamination may cause unreliable results.

"Well what do you think is wrong with you?"

She stares at the still-white testing area, listening to the angry mantra of the protesters, hundreds of female voices shouting: *It's up to us! It's up to us!* "I'm not sure yet."

"Yet?"

"I should probably...go to the doctor," she says, bordering on hyerventilation, as fleet puffs of breath pass around what feels like a clod of dirt stuck in her throat.

Nick sighs. "Well...do you need anything? Something to eat, some soup or something? You get anything in your stomach yet today?"

Chapped lips, attached to a head that's between Mary's legs form the words: "No. No. I don't want...anything in my stomach." Long blonde hair hangs down, tickling her legs. Salty water breaks from her eyelashes and falls; washes warm over slender feet. Through a hazy filter of tears, she sees color blooming slowly across the testing area.

A Zoloft commercial on the television informs the audience of *a new way to kiss the blues goodbye.*

As Nick hears his girlfriend's voice dissolve into sobs behind the muffler of her hand, the clueless kid moans sympathetically; says, "Baby..." He tests the doorknob and finds it locked.

Time After Time

Heather Weatherly

Little Father Time wouldn't finger paint in Kindergarten,
He sat in the corner reading *Are You My Mother?* upside down,
He ate saltines at snack time instead of vanilla wafers,
He got off the school bus and pushed his little brother and sister on ahead.

Little Father Time wouldn't play with the other kids in middle school,
He hung from the monkey bars instead,
He hid under the jungle gym,
And dragged all of the gravel home with him in his shoes.

Little Father Time wouldn't read *Lord of the Flies* in high school,
He sat in the back writing notes on his jeans with a Sharpie,
He looked up how to make a bomb during study hall,
The kid next to him asked to borrow a pencil,
He pointed a toy squirt gun around his room that afternoon,
And kicked his yearbook with his combat boots,
He carried in the groceries for his mother that evening,
And went to sleep with a plastic Wal Mart bag on his head.