

2012 V^o 32
CAULDRON

“If you’re going to try, go all the way. There is no other feeling like that. You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire. It’s the only good fight there is.”

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

THE CAULDRON
VOLUME 32
2012
KALAMAZOO COLLEGE



2012 V^o 32
CAULDRON

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Amy Newday, Writing Center Director, for serving as judge for the Divine Crow Awards.

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Last but not least, we thank the readers. You are the committed audience off of which our writers thrive.

Thank you for your interest.

WRITING

- 08 Stephanie Vibbert Award: Erin Donevan '12
- 09 Preface
- 10 An Interview with Bonnie Jo Campbell
- 12 Mermen - Nicholas Canu
- 13 The Free and the Brave - Kate Belew
- 15 Artichoke Hearts - Emma Lozon
- 17 Fresh Kicks - Jeffery Washington
- 21 Grandpa - Jamie Schaub
- 22 Gangland: A History of Fruit - Rebecca Staudenmaier
- 24 Darkrooms - Paul Lovaas *
- 30 A Chennai Boy - Umang Varma
- 34 All Straight, All Flat - Zach Holden
- 38 I dreamt earthquakes - Michelle Keohane
- 40 to shatter when dropped - Fran Hoepfner *
- 41 A Little Light - Max Jensen
- 45 Letters to Those Lost and Found - Brittany Worthington
- 48 Ariadne - Kelly Bush *
- 55 Bearing - Carolyn Stordeur
- 57 Battle Hymn of the Breakdown - Kim Grabowski
- 60 Lemonade - Stefano Cagnato
- 63 Handmade Longing - Jennifer Tarnoff
- 66 De la Scène (The Scene) - Kelsey Nuttall
- 69 Measure - Kira Boneff
- 71 Absence - Kate Golembiewski
- 73 Still, These Broken Things - Max Wedding
- 74 Pool Shark - David Landskroener
- 76 Poor People Food - Cam Stewart
- 79 Holy Trinity - Stewart Finnegan

* Divine Crow Award Recipients

ART

COVER	Untitled - Nathan Gilmour
14	Colorado's Princess - Shadae Sutherland
16	Yarn and Wood - Order to Disorder - Corinne MacInnes
20	Untitled - Brittany Davies
23	Untitled - Nathan Gilmour
29	Jellyfish - Lauren Isbell
33	Jacket Girl - Zoe Beaudry
37	Les Filles - Kelsey Nuttall
39	Orange Bowl - Keeney Swearer
44	Hours - Allison Hammerly
47	xray - Keeney Swearer
56	Untitled - Brittany Davies
59	Untitled - Erika Worley
65	A Jamaican's Colorado - Shadae Sutherland
68	Untitled - Jennifer Tarnoff
70	Penetration - Taylor Stamm
72	And Mother Weaves Your Sin Away - Kelsey Gordon
78	Beauty - Joanne Heppert

DIVINE CROW AWARDS



The Divine Crow Awards are given annually to three outstanding pieces in *Cauldron*, regardless of genre, and are judged blind by a visiting faculty or staff. This year's Divine Crow judge was Amy Newday, Director of the Writing Center.

STEPHANIE VIBBERT AWARD: ERIN DONEVAN '12

The Stephanie Vibbert Award is given to an author in the magazine who most exemplifies the intersection between creative writing and community engagement. This award honors Stephanie Vibbert, an English/Psychology double major who died in a car accident returning from a peace march in Washington D.C. in her senior year at K. Stephanie's life was passionately devoted to both creativity and to community service. This award was created to encourage Kalamazoo College writers to use their creativity to reflect upon and explore issues of poverty, human rights, sexual orientation, race, class, gender and cultural diversity.

This year's recipient of the Stephanie Vibbert Award is senior Erin Donevan for her exceptional creative involvement in both the Kalamazoo community and in communities abroad.

Erin has worked with the Heart Beat Program, an after-school creative writing workshop with high school students, and has also been deeply involved with KPEP, a creative writing program to help ex-offenders.

Her contributions to the creative writing community extended abroad as well. As a part of her SIP project, she founded an after school creative writing program called Writique at a public school in Gaborone, Botswana. It is this kind of genuine interest and initiative that truly exemplifies the spirit of this award.

Her work with these different groups displays a passion and dedication to both writing and community service. We're very honored to give this award to such a strong advocate of the creative voice.

PREFACE

In January, we had the honor of interviewing National Book Award Finalist Bonnie Jo Campbell. Amongst the many pieces of advice she had for young writers, one quote stood out as especially resonant for this year's *Cauldron*. When discussing her writing process, she said, "I don't give up on people or stories." This spirit of artistic perseverance is present throughout the pieces in the magazine.

For this year's *Cauldron*, the artists who submitted their work clearly embody this mentality. No matter how tragically intimate the subject, such as the moment of decision in Carolyn Stordeur's "Bearing," or the childhood desire for acceptance in Jeffery Washington's "Fresh Kicks," these artists committed to seeing their visions through to the end. We conclude this year's issue with Stewart Finnegan's unsettling yet strangely reverent piece "Holy Trinity." It explores the grotesque in a way that pushes the boundaries of theme and form. The untitled cover photograph by Nathan Gilmour features a female vocalist under blinding lights. It is her bravery and passion that is emblematic of the pieces featured throughout this publication.

Throughout the selection process, we were inspired by the creative risks taken by the artists at Kalamazoo College. We invite the reader to take part in appreciating these risks. Thanks to the bold leaps taken by these artists, our publication has risen to a new level.

- Co-Editors Cam Stewart and Rebecca Staudenmaier

AN INTERVIEW WITH BONNIE JO CAMPBELL

AUTHOR OF *ONCE UPON A RIVER*

Cam Stewart: Your most recent novel, Once Upon a River, uses the image of water to advance the narrative. How did you plan out the various people Margo would meet along the river?

Bonnie Jo Campbell: It's a very episodic novel. Margo has to grow with each relationship and learn something new. I was interested in how this worked in *Huckleberry Finn*, which is almost a series of set-pieces. Because this novel is a prequel to my novel *Q Road*, I knew that Margo had to somehow end up getting pregnant by an Indian, which is kind of a fun way to go about writing a story. Sometimes when you put requirements on yourself it is freeing.

CS: What other effects did the river have on your novel?

BJC: Other river stories tend to travel in one direction, but mine is different because I have Margo travel up the river and then back down again because I wanted her to pass through her old hometown. Rivers are such fertile places; the plants and trees grow right up to the edges of them. There are constantly creatures coming in and out of the water, yet they can also be polluted. But that contrast is appealing. Because Margo has guts, she can love something that is a bit dirty.

CS: How important is it for writers today to have an online presence?

BJC: I think an online presence helps a lot. I am on Twitter and Facebook, I think it helps when your audience feels they have a sense of you as a person.

CS: And writers can also promote themselves through these mediums.

BJC: Yes, but one of the most horrifying thoughts to me is to be a mediocre writer who networks the hell out of herself. You don't want to spend all your energy on self-promotion; the focus has to be on the writing. As long as there is a balance of energy spent on the two,

then it can be a good thing. There are more books being published now than ever before. Few are making money but most are finding an audience. I think social media is great for helping these under-promoted books find an audience.

CS: How does writing in other mediums affect your fiction?

BJC: To me, non-fiction is very inspiring. I need to write non-fiction pieces because I love doing research. You get ideas for fiction from writing them, too. Through writing essays I learned how to keep my audience reading what I wrote. When I figured this out in essays I applied it to my fiction.

CS: Do you ever struggle to pick up a longer piece of fiction that you're working on back up and rework it?

BJC: It can be hard to continue working on a piece, but I never give up on anything I'm writing. I don't give up on people or stories. It's a kind of respect for myself. I think, 'If I cared enough to start this then I owe it to myself to finish it.'

Rebecca Staudenmaier: Your writing is very Michigan-oriented. What about this state appeals to you?

BJC: I know Michigan. I know these places and they're very important to me. Nobody comes here by accident, nobody is just passing through. We're kind of stuck out of the way here. But it's a very beautiful and inspiring place. It must be. If you line up the Michigan writers, you'll find our state is producing a lot of talented writers right now.

MERMEN

NICHOLAS CANU

Lake Michigan opened its shoreline
to smother the forest.

County lines traced in barnacles
and bent evergreens.

Unmanned probes harvested
trees but left the bungalows
alone. Rotting shingles dropped
through the living room where

my father's brine encrusted
skeleton watched kelp
take shelter in his TV. Copper scales
in his eye sockets, fish eggs

in his brain cavity. Our water-
logged bodies presided
from Alamo Hill, over the corn fields

and fuel stations, faintly pulsating
playgrounds and deep sea
burial mounds. My rural Atlantis and all
the oceans yet to come.

THE FREE AND THE BRAVE

KATE BELEW

This much I know, it was the third
of July, I was the free and you were
the brave, you threw me down
onto a bed of porch cushions, I trusted
you, the way you stabbed
the American flag into the earth at the head
of that makeshift bed where I didn't sleep
because I shivered all night under
the fireworks that split the sky into stained
glass that you said sounded like bombs in Iraq,
I asked if all bombs were created equal,
under God, you laughed, we stayed up
and melted like popsicles together
in the heat, red white and blue bomb
pops, licking the residue off our lips.



COLORADO'S PRINCESS
SHADAE SUTHERLAND

The girl was freezing; goosebumps grew on her skin the moment she walked into the vegetable section. She rubbed her bare arms with her spindly fingers. Her eyes were wide and strained as they reflected all of the colorful food arrayed in front of her. She had the sensitivity of an infant to all of the stimuli, especially to the bright lights and to the creaking of shopping carts. And if you looked closely, she even had pale, thin hairs sprouting on her skin like peach fuzz. When the people around her glanced in her direction, they forgot their wrinkled grocery lists for a moment to examine the girl the way they might examine an apple before buying it. They were as confused and intrigued by the strangeness of her body as they would have been by the sight of an extremely misshapen piece of fruit. They wanted to place her on the hanging scale, gauging she couldn't be more than 85 pounds. She lacked all of the juicy meat that fruit should have. She hid in a t-shirt, but her jeans fell away from her body like the skin of an overripe peach. It is always the jeans that lead them to reach the same conclusion. Jeans are supposed to hug your body. But if there's no body to hug, jeans are flaccid as the carcass of an animal. They wondered what she could possibly be buying. Some of them altered their set routes in hopes of catching another glimpse of her. Some of them were as disgusted as if she had reeked of rancid meat. They thought to themselves that some people really are starving out there and they don't have food in the kitchen that they can forgo. Others self-consciously stared down at the familiar scrawl that said "spareribs," "ricotta cheese," and "baking chocolate." They imagined bringing her home with them, making her sit down, and watching her eat multiple helping of their ribs, their lasagna, their chocolate cake. Yet, of course, no one approached the girl—whether to chastise her or to coddle her—as she moved gingerly through the produce section. In the end no one really wants to take home the scrawny chicken or the atrophied fruit.

When she turned the corner and disappeared in the frozen foods aisle, they all went back to their lists or their self-involved preoccupations and allowed themselves to forget about her. When the shouting and the screaming came a few minutes later, they were looking at the wine and the beer, making their way to the check-out, or returning to a section again for something they had forgotten the last time. A mildly perturbed man was making a second lap to get some more couscous, having gotten a call from his wife, just as he was beginning to put items on the belt, telling him that he should pick up double the ingredients because they were to be having a guest that night. He turned his head prematurely, an aisle too soon, to the cereal and candy aisle, where he saw the girl lying on the linoleum floor like a bear skin rug. It was he who was the one to feel for a pulse, to find it beating about as strongly as an artichoke heart.



YARN AND WOOD-ORDER TO DISORDER
CORINNE MACINNES

In those days, it was a necessity for every boy to have them. Anyone who was anyone, or anyone who was worth anything, had a pair, preferably more than one. You didn't even exist unless you did. They could be worn with anything. Nine times out of ten they were complemented by three-sizes-too-big Pro Club T-shirts of the same shade, or with the very best outfit in the closet. Most liked them all white with the straps dangling from the high top rim, hanging on for dear life. The crisscrossed laces ascended up to the second or third hole, never all the way to the top. No matter how many times they were worn, they had to be kept in mint condition. No scratches. No scuffs. Perfect.

Others were rebellious with their choice of color. Some wore them in black, grey (dark and light), blues and reds, greens, even orange. There were people who liked to mix and match colors to stand out in the crowd. The most daring of all stomped in patent leather masterpieces. Even girls wore them. They all chose to wear a pair with a pink or purple painted Swoosh standing alone against the snow white background. The possibilities were endless, yet all received the same welcome, "Hey, those are some nice Forces!"

As last summer slowly crept to an end and I headed into the fifth grade (also known as manhood) I remember watching every kid on the block play tag. As I stared at the disorderly stampede of children running in all directions, I realized that I was the only kid on my block that did not exist. It was a terrible discovery, but I wasn't worried. The new school year meant one thing for me, new shoes. I ran into my parents' room, dazed from the confusing combination of my mother's Sweet Pea scented lotion with my father's manly armpits, and woke them from a lazy Saturday afternoon slumber by complaining about how I needed to exist.

They did not seem to understand. Dad was revived first. "Jeffery, how could you possibly not exist? You are definitely real. I can tell because you are annoying the hell out of me right now. Honestly, I wish you didn't exist for a few hours. That way I could sleep." Then he rolled over to disrupt my mother's dream, "Tamielia ... wake up. We need to abort Jeffery. It's not even illegal. Apparently, he never existed in the first place."

"I have the scars and stretch marks to prove my son exists. Now leave me alone."

I could tell they were disoriented; they were speaking gibberish about abortions and stretch

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marks. “I don’t exist because I don’t own a pair of Air Force 1’s. Those are the best shoes in the world. Everyone has a pair. Understand?”

“On second thought, go ahead and abort him. Hopefully Jailen turns out normal. If not, they say the third time is the charm.” Dad looked at her with a smirk molded from satisfaction. They were making fun of me ... again. I remained persistent. Eventually my father gave in to my \$100 request, because he said he would pay me \$1,000 to disappear so he could rest. One week later I awoke to a Nike shoebox on the dresser next to my bed. The box read: *Air Force 1’s*. It felt too good to be true. I crept patiently towards the box. It was too good to be true. The shoebox did not contain Air Force 1’s; instead there were black and white Cortezes. I would have preferred to see a pair of clogs.

Dad said they were a good substitute for Forces ... equal quality for half the price. So I tried them. They were surprisingly comfortable. They didn’t even need to be broken in. There was a certain charm about the beige rubber bottom and round shape. The curved front smiled at me. I smiled back. I wore them around my house, dancing and skipping in the living room until I didn’t care if they were not the most popular style. I couldn’t wait for everyone to see me prancing in my Cortezes so they could burn with envy. I was prepared to start a whole new trend.

School started and I marched down Butler Avenue, strutting in my superior substitutes. I was glad Kelly Elementary was only two blocks away. It was very unlikely for me to ruin the shoes in that short amount of time. Mr. Ison stood front and center, introducing himself to the class and rambling on about expectations. Two hyenas, Avery Cody and AJ Johnson, cackling in the back row, interrupted his speech. Avery was stomping his blue and yellows. AJ sat with his black and charcoals elevated on Maria’s desk. They were staring at me, laughing at the shoes. I ignored them. However, I couldn’t go long pretending I couldn’t hear the jeering or that I couldn’t see the double-dutchers roll their eyes.

Eventually, the hyenas overpowered me. Time passed slower each day. Every step was two mean jokes, five laughs, and one, “What the hell are those things on your feet?” I existed, although I wished I didn’t. Life became a routine. The long walk home down Butler Avenue was two blocks of hell. I would speed up when I crossed Lindsey Avenue. When I reached the Bradford house, I ran. Finally to my house. Up the driveway. Key in lock. Twist the key. Open

the door. Sigh in relief. Kick the hideous shoes off as hard as I could. At that point Mom would appear in the hallway. “How was school today?” she’d say, already aware of the answer.

“Same as yesterday.” Then she would say the next day would be better. It wasn’t.

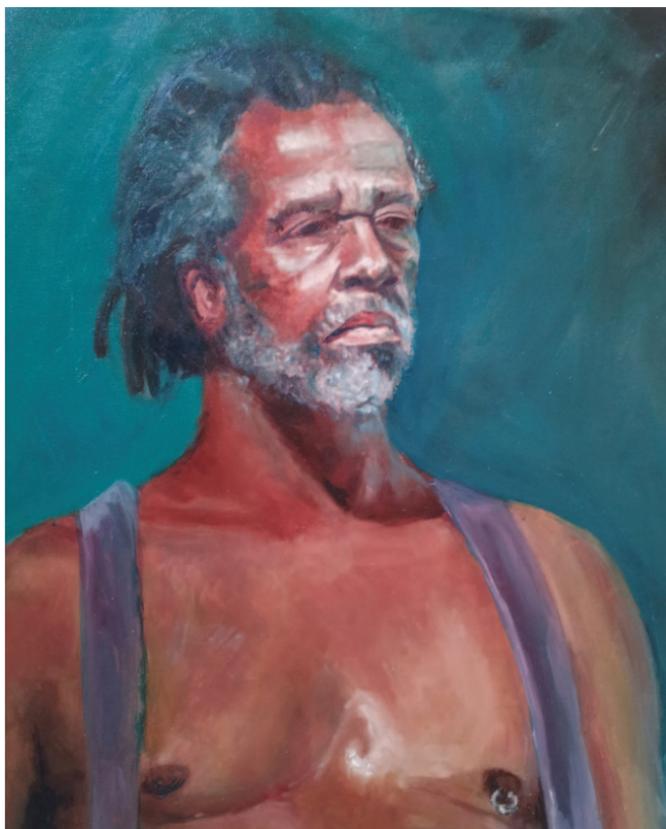
Soon the first fall rain came. By that time I had worn those shoes every day for a couple of months. They were showing signs of wear and tear, with loose hairs sticking out from the sides. Wrinkles formed on the nose. I remember stepping into a puddle on my way home, right after running past the Bradfords’ house. When I walked away, the shoes began to squeak.

I was done with them. That night I shoved them deep under my bed, past the abandoned toys and change lost years ago. The shoes could not be silenced. They were at it all night long, squeaking like two little black and white mice, forming a perfect plot to ruin the rest of my life. The next morning I had to slide back into them, with their insides still damp from yesterday’s rain. I stared down at them and their wry smirks as I walked to school. That day, none of the kids made fun of me, because it wasn’t worth it. They could see defeat and despair on my feet.

Squeak. Squeak. Squeak. Their voices grew louder with each step. But I was stuck with them for the rest of elementary school.

By the end of the year the shoes had almost deteriorated. The leather (also disgusted by the sight of these Nike Eyesores) decided to run away inch by inch, exposing the cardboard box-colored mystery material underneath. The shoes were dilapidated by the end of May. Still, I had to wear them all summer.

About two weeks before I moved on to middle school, my dad came home with a Nike shoebox. I was not amused. I had seen that trick before. He begged me to open them and when I finally did I glanced at a pair of high top Air Force 1’s. They were the perfect shade of white with the dangling strap, just like I always wanted. I looked up at him almost in tears. “Dad, you don’t even exist unless you own a pair of Bapes!”



UNTITLED
BRITTANY DAVIES

This much I know, Celestine worked in a cold factory
before he built half the houses in Northern Michigan
and had eighteen children inside a four-bedroom house
built with his hands and the hands of his sons
who had more children and made him Grandpa Schaub,
and gathered his grand-kids in that same living room
to tell them to take a look at his half thumb
that he sucked off, trying to scare us away
from being wimpy thumb-sucking babies
and we believed him, our eyes open wide
at the power of our little mouths
to saw off our thumbs.

GANGLAND: A HISTORY OF FRUIT

REBECCA STAUDENMAIER

They called themselves The Pitz. Sprayed it on overpasses in neon reds. Fear seeped sappy through the natives. Bulkied up Bananamen flexed nuts on sidewalks. Kiwipunks and Peachbums shaved their fuzz. Leaving blonde and brown calling cards floating on pools of blood. Tattooed Applethugs tossed Molotov cocktails into the windows of candy shops. Posers were called Skittles and didn't last long downtown. They rode, bruised, in cardboard boxes. Carrying serrated spoons strapped to their thighs. *Any fucker gonna dig on me, I'll dig him first.* The natives, feeling nauseous, dug a trench and set the border on fire. Westside Dayton burned for nine days. Pissed, high on DDT, they pressed their sticky hands to windowpanes. On the ninth night, they crawled into the mouths of children, wrapped neon scarves around the throats of innocents. By morning, fingerprints had rotted and nothing could be proven.



UNTITLED
NATHAN GILMOUR

DARKROOMS

PAUL LOVAAS
DIVINE CROW WINNER

In high school I was two things:

1. Unsure
2. Unpopular

I was a smart student but none of my teachers remembered my name. My two favorite classes were chemistry and photography. I got poor grades in chemistry but I loved learning about how the universe ticked. The class was taught by a petite Englishman who never missed an opportunity to criticize his students. His name was Mr. Wright and, besides living up to his name, he was famous for two things:

1. Weeding out the lazy students
2. Inspiring generations of future doctors, engineers, and researchers

On the first day of school my junior year, the infamous Mr. Wright began chemistry class by explaining some “fun facts.” He started by telling us that God does not exist and ended by teaching us that we are all made of stardust. The only things I remember from that chemistry course, the only important things at least, seem to have very little to do with science or the laboratory. I got a C+ in the class. A year later, Mr. Wright had forgotten my name but I still remembered some of the things he taught. I remember his prim accent as he stared across the lab bench over his goggles and asked, “How could you forget that?”

Light is created as Hydrogen and Helium, the two most abundant elements in the universe, collide, compress, and combine under unfathomable pressure in the cores of stars. The remaining 88 naturally occurring elements are formed by this enormously loud, light-giving fusion. When stars run out of fuel and finally die, they scatter their ashes to the solar winds and from the debris, planets are formed. Our world is made of stardust.

I always loved darkrooms. Years later, in college, my girlfriend would tell me that she had romanticized them growing up. She thought it was strangely fortuitous that she should now find herself in a darkroom with the boy she loved. I just liked making photographs.

I always loved making photographs. I was often tardy to fourth period junior year after spending my lunch break in the darkroom and losing track of time. Of course, I never really lost track of time because, as anyone who has ever worked with film knows, printmaking is all about time. For starters, it takes 35 minutes to develop a roll of 35mm film. Later in the process, the quality of a print comes down to the exposure time, the balance and amount of light burning into the paper. Later still, the image can be altered by the precise timing of various chemical baths. Too little or too much of one chemical can result in an image

becoming fuzzy, discolored, or blacked out.

I got an A in photography junior year. It qualifies as some kind of irony, I think, that I could barely pass chemistry yet manage to thrive in an art class that was based on applied chemistry.

Photography at my high school was taught by a stout Polish man whom I knew as Mr. Lemanchacoftka. Everyone just called him Mr. L. I loved listening to Mr. L ramble on about art. In part, I think it was because he defied every assumption and stereotype I had about professional artists. Mr. L was two things for sure:

1. A talented darkroom technician
2. Bat-shit crazy

Mr. L taught me everything I know about photography. He also clipped his fingernails in class. I worry sometimes that I'll end up like Mr. L – weird and alone.

I lived in the darkroom for most of senior year. There wasn't much waiting for me out in the hallways or on the athletic fields or even in the other classrooms of my high school. I was a nobody out there.

In the dark I had something. In the darkroom I made beautiful prints for the girls I liked. Of course, I never showed them to anyone. During the winter of my senior year I snapped a picture of a girl named Katelynn. I was in love with her. Mr. L saw one of the prints I made of her and nominated the picture for a prestigious district award in the arts. The picture won. Katelynn never saw it.

It takes eight minutes for light to travel from the sun to the earth. That means the photons – the particles of light – that you are experiencing right now came into existence 480 seconds ago. God could flip a switch and turn off the lights right now and you wouldn't realize it for another 8 minutes.

I will always remember the first time I drank alcohol. I felt like I was standing in a peer pressure public service announcement. It was a classic scenario; at least I imagined it probably was. It was the second night of freshman orientation at the college I had chosen, five hundred miles away from my high school. Five hundred miles away from my teachers, and five hundred miles away from girls like Katelynn. I found myself in the dorm room of a guy who would later become a good friend of mine. In those first awkward days of college, I hung out with whoever I could, desperate not to end up as I had in high school – alone. On this particular night, I was with a small group of other students. We didn't exactly have a lot in

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common other than that we were all new to each other and all incredibly uncomfortable.

Only the first-year students were on campus and there was a dance party on the quad as part of the “orientation experience.” It was advertised as a “foam party,” and none of us knew what that entailed. Since it was a school organized event where “the consumption of alcohol was not permitted,” we were in the dorms consuming alcohol beforehand.

My friend poured shots of vodka into Dixie cups and handed one to everyone, including me. It was the first time anyone had offered me a drink. We all raised our paper shot glasses and one girl toasted to freshman year.

“No,” I said, “to a fresh start.” My heart was pounding as I tipped back my paper cup. Nothing was out of place to these new people. They didn’t know the scrawny, unpopular kid who smelled like developer and had never tasted alcohol before. To them I was just a new face, someone like them who needed to get drunk to enjoy the awkward inaugural ball of freshman year. To them I was an anyone.

Four shots and a short walk across campus and I was feeling:

1. Nervous
2. Strangely eager to dance

As we came down the hill of our campus I could hear the music rumbling. Then, as we came around the corner, I saw it: the foam party.

It was intimidating at first, a sea of bodies, so intimate yet also entirely unfamiliar. Puffs of pearly white foam bounced off the tops of people’s heads catching the flashes of strobe lights. The students themselves looked like they were boiling over. Perhaps they were. I felt a bubbling within myself as I took a minute to stop and take in the sight. After I took a deep breath, I decided it was no longer intimidating.

A hundred young, eager, inebriated college students bounced and swayed together in a sea of foam. This was college: a sparkling, bubbling, pool of potential where nobody had yet forgotten my name.

The dance was both beautiful and bizarre. A hundred people squeezed onto an inflatable dance floor, covered in suds and left to get acquainted under an ocean of pop music. It was strange yet comfortable, elegant yet awkward.

Everything was smooth and shining and there was nowhere I would have rather been. It seemed like we had only just arrived when I found myself surrounded by strangers in the pool. At some point I made contact with someone under the tide of white foam. I didn’t realize what was happening until we were dancing. I didn’t know her name, but she had alcohol on her breath too.

My old life, the life of a straight-laced suburban boy with few friends and fewer accomplishments, had left me with so much desire. I didn't care that I didn't know her name.

It takes a fraction of a second for light particles to travel from the surface of an object to your eyes. It then takes a further fraction of a second for the cells in your eyes to make sense of the particles of light and a further fraction of a second for the necessary neurons to fire and jump the necessary synapses required for that image of reality to dissipate across your brain. By the time you "see" something it no longer exists in the same way. You will never see the world as it truly is.

In high school I spent my lunch hour alone in the darkroom. In college I spent my nights surrounded by people, many of them friends. In high school I didn't have the courage to express myself to Katelynn. In college I lost my virginity. In high school, Mr. L worried me. In college, the memory of Mr. L reminds me of the person I used to be. In high school, Mr. Wright taught me that I was small and insignificant. In college, the memory of Mr. Wright reminds me of two things:

1. The people I ran from
2. The person I am

Everybody looks better in the dark, more attractive, smarter in the dark. The world looks better at dusk and in basements, through fake Ray-Bans, and smoke. Everyone feels better about themselves in the dark. So who says that darkness is bad? Without the dark where would teenagers taste their first kisses? What would we sleep and stargaze and hide in? Without the darkness nothing can glow. Without darkness photography is impossible. The footprint of light is preserved in the dark. In darkness a picture can be stored forever.

I had been home after my freshman year of college for just under 36 hours before I returned to my high school. A part of me was disappointed that I couldn't stay away from the place any longer than that, but I needed to pick up my little sister and I think in the back of my mind I wanted to see how things had changed. Surely, things had changed.

My sister was a junior, taking chemistry. She had stayed late to complete a laboratory assignment. As I went inside to find her, I found myself enjoying the walk. The hallways of my old school seemed smaller somehow. It was late, class was out for the day, and most kids had gone home. I was no longer unpopular, or a virgin, or afraid of any high school teachers.

I walked past the photography classroom and peered in the window. It was dark inside.

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The door was locked. I wondered if crazy old Mr. Lemanchacoftka was still around. I would have liked to go inside, to see the darkroom again, to smell the chemicals, to laugh at Mr. L. I kept walking.

On my way to the chemistry wing I passed a display case featuring new photographs taken by this year's students. I don't remember any of the pictures and I didn't recognize any of the names under them.

When I reached the chemistry room I walked in quietly and sat down at a desk near the front of the room. Mr. Wright, my sister, and a half dozen other students were standing in the back of the room, huddled around a Bunsen burner, watching some piece of matter flash into flame. It took Mr. Wright a second to see me.

"Paul!" he exclaimed, "Paul, good boy, what a pleasure to see you again." I'll never forget his smile. He hurried over and shook my hand. "How's college treating you?" I was a little surprised that he was so excited to see me. "Haven't forgotten about us back here at home now, have you?" he asked.

"How could I forget about you?"

"Well, I've been wondering when I would see you again."

You will never see the world as it truly is.

"Well here I am," I say bashfully, "back, and the same as ever I suppose."

"Same as ever." He nods. Smiles at me.

In darkness a picture can be stored forever.

"Say, I stopped by the photo classroom on my way in and I didn't see Mr. L. How's he been? Still crazy as always?"

"I'm afraid Mr. Lemanchacoftka is no longer with us."

God could flip a switch and turn off the lights right now and you wouldn't realize it for another 8 minutes.

"Oh my God. You mean he's dead?"

"No, no. Don't be silly. He just moved on."

We are all made of stardust.



JELLYFISH
LAUREN ISBELL

A CHENNAI BOY

UMANG VARMA

My only suitcase was tucked under the blue berth of the compartment on Indian Railways train #2073. I sat beside the window and stared outside at the platform. My parents had come into the train with me to make sure I was comfortably seated.

I glanced down at my watch. "Almost time," I said. I hugged my parents. "Take care," they both said, before getting off the train. A minute later they were outside my window. "Don't forget to chain and lock your suitcase," Pa said. "I won't," I replied, "I've got the keys in my pocket. The chain is in the suitcase."

Pa was always nervous. The first time I rode a city bus by myself, he was so hesitant to let me go that I was afraid he was going to come with me. Now, I was on a train, making a final trip up north to visit my grandparents before going to college, and I could sense the same panic inside Pa. He was always afraid of terrible things happening to me, but did not care about my feelings. He probably didn't know that I too was concerned about my trip. The last time he understood my feelings was when I was five.

I put my hand through the window grill and waved. Ma waved back.

Ma. Ma always knows what I was thinking about and shared my concerns. She knew that I was nervous about my broken Hindi, my strict grandfather and the very traditional behavior expected of everyone who enters 284, Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi.

Over the last few days, Ma spent many hours reminding me how to respond to each of the delicate situations that arise every hour at my grandparents' house. This time, Ma wasn't going to be there to help me out every time my uncle insisted I go grocery shopping with my cousin while my grandfather demanded I eat lunch with him, but I secretly wanted to meet with a close friend. There would be no telepathic messages and nobody to save me when my grandparents' fragile calmness breaks.

The train's loud whistle broke the tension. "Text me in the morning," Pa said as the train began moving.

After two days and 1300 miles, the Tamil Nadu–New Delhi express crawled into New Delhi Railway station. My cousin had come to pick me up from the station. We rode the Delhi Metro to my grandparents' house.

When my grandmother opened the door, I let go of my suitcase, brought my palms together and said, "*Pairi pauna*." Right from these first words, I was an outsider to my grandparents. My parents always bend down and touch my grandparents' feet with their hands, then say "*Pairi pauna*." As a North Indian born and brought up in South India, I was neither proficient nor comfortable with North Indian traditions. *Pairi pauna* means, "I bow to your feet." I, however, had always said "*Pairi pauna*" standing straight with my palms against

each other. I wondered if this tension would be diffused if I decided to touch their feet. It's too late; I have never bowed to touch anyone's feet in the eighteen years of my life. Not only would it set a precedent I might regret later, but it might make this even more awkward.

"Bless you, son. We are very proud of your distinguished accomplishments." Having learned almost all the English he knew while in the army, Grandpa spoke very formal English. Grandpa spoke to everyone else in Hindi.

I took my suitcase into the guest room, taking special care to make sure it didn't hit anything. I left it at the far end of the room, so that it didn't come in anyone's way. It was barely a minute before I heard my grandfather yell from the dining table, "Go wash your hands, son. Lunch has been prepared."

It was two days later that Grandpa spoke to me about the recent demonstrations in New Delhi. The two of us were the only ones at home. Grandma had already left for her morning walk. Grandpa had just finished his breakfast and picked up a copy of the *Times of India*. "Nowadays there are so many South Indians in Delhi that we North Indians don't have any jobs left," he said. "They're coming and taking all our jobs away. Jobs in Delhi need to be reserved for Delhi people."

Nod, I heard my mother's voice echo in my head. *Don't argue. Just nod*. I looked at Grandpa and nodded reluctantly.

He looked back down at the newspaper. Suddenly, I heard a loud scream. "Aaah!" He grabbed his chest with his right arm.

Grandpa was in pain.

I helped Grandpa sit up and ran to the telephone. I waited for the dial tone and then pressed 1-0. I hesitated. 100 for the police, I thought. Is it 101 or 102 for ambulance? 101 for fire, 102 for ambulance, I remembered. I pressed 2 and waited for a response.

"Emergency," I said. "Two eighty-four, Punjabi Bagh. Fifth left from the intersection; then third house on the right after the park. I think it may be a heart attack. ... Yes ... No. I'll do that."

I ran back to the couch Grandpa was lying on. "The ambulance is on its way," I said in Hindi. "It will be here in a few minutes. It's going to be alright." I must have repeated those words fifty times before I finally heard an ambulance siren.

Within a minute, I was in the ambulance with him staring out of the window, hoping that we would get to a hospital quickly. I kept turning around every few seconds to watch the first responder give CPR. Suddenly, I saw what I had been hoping not to see.

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Protesters blocked the intersection. The signs shocked me. *Jobs for North Indians. No more Tamil in Delhi. Telugu is for Hyderabad.* I dropped my eyelids, then neck in disbelief. Without having thought through any plan, I shoved the door open and jumped out of the ambulance.

“We cannot let you go through,” yelled a protester in Hindi.

“This is an emergency! My grandfather is in a critical condition.” I tried hard not to sound South Indian. The accent felt unnatural, forced and difficult. I wasn’t used to speaking multiple sentences in Hindi without English and Tamil words interspersed and couldn’t tell how genuine my North Indian accent sounded. “Are you actually going let a true North Indian die in that ambulance?”

A combination of panicking, shouting and shock left me feeling dizzy. Four concerned-looking men were engaged in what appeared to be a discussion about the ambulance. I could smell burning rubber and it was only a few seconds later that I caught a glance of a stack of rubber tires behind some of the protesters. Amid the noisy chanting of slogans, the ambulance’s high pitched siren wailed tirelessly. I nodded when the four men began clearing a gap in the road.

—

Four days after the heart attack incident, I finally saw Grandpa again. It was only when I came close to him that he recognized me. He smiled. I closed my eyes, and thanked every god I knew for helping him survive.

Despite the relief of seeing him alive and happy, his first words disappointed me. “The doctor had informed me about your courageous efforts,” he said. I had hoped that he would speak to me in Hindi. After all, had it not been for my short speech in Hindi, I may not have seen him getting discharged today. He knew exactly what happened. Yet, I remained a Chennai boy to Grandpa.

“I’m leaving to Chennai on the train today,” I said in Hindi. “I’m glad I had the chance to come up to Delhi before going to college.”

“I wish you all the best, son. Your outstanding accomplishments will make all of us very proud.”



JACKET GIRL
ZOE BEAUDRY

ALL STRAIGHT, ALL FLAT

ZACH HOLDEN

Q: ...

A: Well, I guess my story might begin when I first started seeing her. I knew I was in love with her, or at least in love with the idea of being in love with her. Girls next door can be real puzzles. She had that sort of beauty that gives girls next door their punch. Look at me. 28 years of comfort have not treated me well. My hair already thinning, my jowls already unfolding, my skin already showing lines. Her, though, she was a sum of mundane parts that worked out strikingly. Her hair was black and flat, simply framing her face; her skin was unblemished and soft-looking but the color of paper left in the sun. Her eyes, ineffable. If you could have seen them, you would have known I had no choice.

Q: ...

A: Actually, I think the story might start when I left my job. After that, I was spending a lot of time gazing out my window and she caught my eye. Curiosity gave way to imagination to will. Things just didn't end well. I'm in here after all.

Q: ...

A: No, I don't want to talk about this morning quite yet. Like I said, if you really want the story Officer, it starts earlier. At work, where I lived a life of lines and planes. I walked out the door each morning to the Market-Frankfort line, hurtling in a cramped car parallel to the straight streets above, then walking a block to a glassy box on 10th street. Not much different from this concrete one, if you ask me, but I digress. Every morning there was always a neat line in the lobby for the elevator. Up on the floor of my firm, I struggled each morning to find my cubicle. Back in school, I got my degree in rhetoric and I thought the 'rat race' was a figure of speech. I filled my days with Seneca or Plato or Pliny until without knowing how I started wasting them writing press releases for an insurance company. Everything was straight, flat, interchangeable and fluorescently lit. My desk and the perpendicular computer screen, even my pants' crease, all straight. I had to do something.

Q: ...

A: I quit last month, no incident. My bosses were sad to see me go. They said I was efficient; I feared that they were right. I said I was going to see the whole round world. In actuality, I just laid in bed, looking down into the street. Not at her, not at first. Just the city, looking for something new. I was disappointed so I started watching her, took an interest, you know.

Q: ...

A: Well, not to bite the hand that fed me lunch, but officer, this is supposed to be a dirty city, a messy one. Filthadelphia. I was disappointed by how wrong the stereotype was. It's still all lines. I quit to see the round world but I just saw cars sticking to their lanes, making identical turns at perfectly perpendicular intersections. The leaves fell and I saw lonely and straight branches making neat angles. Even the drunks in this city make beelines from lamp to lamp. I wanted something else; I knew I needed something else, a radical change. That's why I did what I did to her.

Q: ...

A: No, let me explain. The more I stared, the more I knew I had to do it. She kept her bangs curled on her forehead and her mouth in a sly smile. She spent more time at her window than me at mine. I dreamt of the curves I could see in her silhouette and spent my waking hours hoping she would turn and show me herself in her fullness. I thought I could see depth in those eyes; a full woman who could save me. A romance of many dimensions.

Q: ...

A: Fine. Here's my confession: This morning, I decided to bite the bullet. I showered, I shaved, I brushed my teeth. I figured all I needed was to get my foot into the door. I counted windows, floors, did the math, accounted for the stairway. This would be the ending to my ordeal of lines.

Q: ...

A: I made it as far as the front step of her building. I had a bouquet; I was going to break the ice and go back home if she didn't want a date. I was bracing myself for the possibility of rejection when I looked up to see if she was in the window. From that angle, I could see the tape. I sat down on the smooth and segmented sidewalk. I could plainly see the brown line around her. A cardboard cutout. I had fallen in love with cardboard. A plane, flat and lifeless; certainly not the path out of anything. So officer, that's when I saw the brick.

Q: ...

A: It just sort of happened. I didn't expect it out of my atrophied arm or will. I'm not denying anything. I take responsibility. No matter the price, I'll pay for a new window. It was worth

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every cent for the arc the brick traced through the morning sky, the way it lingered for a second against the pane before the glass shattered, the way the chaotic mess glittered as it fell in the light of the rising round sun.

Q: ...

A: I'll also admit I shouldn't have struck the tenant when he confronted me. That was unpardonable, but at the time all I could think about was how he misled me. Now, I see the truth—I mislead myself. Even if she had been real, until I bent the line of the brick and shattered the pane, I was a cutout myself.



LES FILLES
KELSEY NUTTALL

I DREAMT EARTHQUAKES

MICHELLE KEOHANE

a thousand tremors like mounting thunder
rumbles, ocean waves that stack then explode
into liquid dust. the lamp chattering across the
bedside table stopped by its collision with the
floor, bed shuffles across wooden floorboards
nevermind our naked weight anchoring it.
notmybedroom would collapse upon itself.

I dreamt the fetal position as tectonic energy
accumulates I lay self-contained but
anticipated the house of strangers would
protect me as their guest when we huddled
under doorframes and watched framedpicture
glass shatter in the hallway (aren't I running
home yet?) trembles intensified, breath
quickened, (pulling the string of pearls around
my neck until it snaps and they scatter across
the floor popping like fryingpan grease but
the cord won't give), vertebrae curved up
away from mattress I waited for intimacy on
the tips of tongues (he'd not bothered with
pads of fingers) but it never came.

didn't realize until I woke up that laying
shaking was tranquility and bony arm draped
across bare torso, breeze rattling
windowframe, was me restless. relaxed
muscles unfulfilled, clothespins pinching
underneath hipbones, wanting to sleep but
forgetting how to do anything but get halfway.
I dreamt physical (must have been a dream;
earthquakes don't explode, they just growl for
a while at their given magnitude) and it left me
confused about in which real world I forgot
to say no.



ORANGE BOWL
KEENEY SWEARER

TO SHATTER WHEN DROPPED

FRAN HOEPFNER
DIVINE CROW WINNER

we did not expect fellatio
in fruit bats but then again
we did not expect to put a man
on the moon and for
what it's worth i did not expect
you to be a bastard but i
guess nature will surprise us.

we did not expect there to be
wasps that lobotomize
cockroaches to feed its young
no more than we expected
one in every four who climbs K2
to perish but while we're on that
topic, i did not expect you to like
that bony bitch in those shoes.

we did not know
what is most likely to blame for
killing the dinosaurs nor do we
yet know what lies just around
the corner from the milky way except
i *expected* to know that i could trust
you but i expect that you
knew you were an
exception to that rule.

we did not expect monarch butterflies
to cross this bloodliberty&freedom
continent for love and we did not expect
tarantulas to shatter when
dropped but
i wonder why we have expectations
about anything when it would
seem humans can shatter too.

1.

Cuts

through the grey fog

like a burst

seam in that black

bag around our sun, threads

streaming.

2.

I've watched actors

die like marines, face-up, eyes

sparking, and I've heard

a musician speak about jazz

on the radio and my skull filled

with winging birds and I trembled

to play it.

3.

He rolled the

bike and discovered furrows in

his knees and hands and above,

the corduroy unscathed.

4.

The wind howled through

the empty longhouse at Majdanek,

before we walked

the gashouse. We had to shelter

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(Continued)

in our belching tour bus
when the guides locked
us in that place.

5.

After the fog at
the beach – a shuffling, first
down and back and away from
the breakwater – the white steel
propane tanks outside
the church shone. A pinhole,

I hoped, and a clean, sharp
flame.

6.

On the farm in Israel there is
a tree that smells like semen,
a bus stop, and a cat with a jar
screwed on its head.

7.

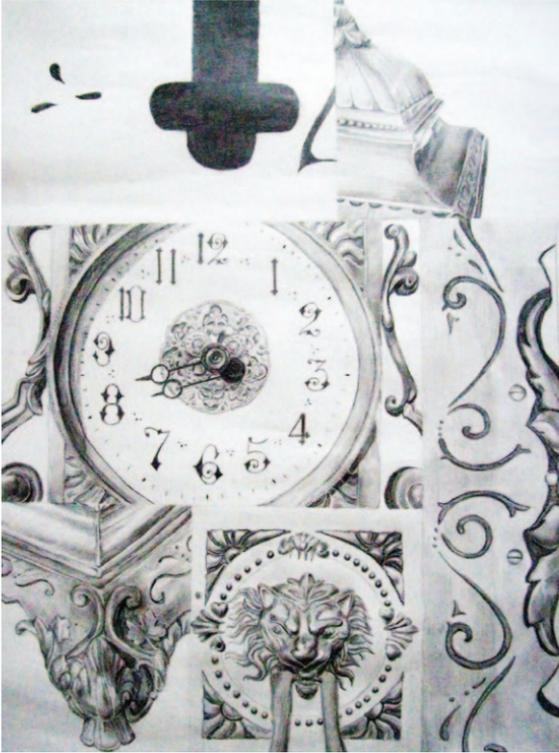
Lo! Once there was
a great tearing open and angels sprung
upon this world with darkness
and light and beasts and many
signs and thunderous man and
my son greys his hair
with baby powder to play
God in
the school play.

8.

If you lean over a dead
light bulb and peer beyond
the shattered silvergrey
filament – a hiss and surge and
liquefaction of metal – and deeper,
past the soft glass and erect
metal, into the vacuum, your

breath will fog up the bulb.

Wipe it off and keep delving.



HOURS
ALLISON HAMMERLY

LETTERS TO THOSE LOST AND FOUND

BRITTANY WORTHINGTON

Dear Natalee,

I am sorry they never found you. I am sorry that the bright future promised in speeches at your high school graduation disappeared along with you. It should have been the beginning of something, not the end. Though I suppose the future is uncertain.

They looked everywhere for you. People got the day off of work so they could help search for you. I hope you know they tried their hardest to find you. The island is so small, how could they have hidden you so well? You were paradise lost.

I am sorry they never found who hid you. Was it the boys who bought you a drink and danced with you at the bar? Did they make you go swimming? Was the water cold? Either way, I am sorry that whoever did it thought you were disposable, that you were nothing more than a pretty face. And you were beautiful. Everyone thought so. They thought it was a shame that such beauty was misplaced.

I am sorry that you missed your flight home.

Dear Laci,

They found him before they found you. Time of birth and time of death: one and the same. You wanted to be a mother, I could tell from the pictures they showed of you, the ones where you are smiling and cradling your swollen stomach. Your family said that you were ready to be a mother, that you would be the best thing that little boy would ever know.

When they found you washed up on the shore, parts of you were missing. They could not tell if it was you. Water is supposed to be cleansing. It is supposed to allow things to grow and flourish, it is supposed to nourish the fertile. But a lot of things do not do what they are supposed to.

I am sorry you wanted to be a wife and a mother and he did not want to be a father or a husband.

He did not get away with it. I hope you know that they found him out. Crocodile tears did not wash away his sins.

I am sorry he did not actually go fishing.

Dear Elizabeth,

When I heard they found you, I thought it meant that they found your body and nothing else. That what made you, you, was gone. But I was wrong.

Nine months you were gone. Did you come back reborn? Were you able to sleep through the night or did every creaking floor board sound like him?

Were you thankful you were not born an only child, that you shared a room with your sister? Your sister played his voice over and over and over again, like a record glued to a turntable, and she remembered his name.

I saw pictures of him. He looked like Santa Claus, Jesus, Osama Bin Laden; but he didn't deliver like St. Nicholas, he stole; he wasn't your savior, though he called himself Emmanuel; he didn't destroy any buildings, but he was a terrorist.

I am sorry for what he took from you, for what you lost.

Dear Me,

I am sorry that you are afraid whenever you are home alone. When the old house takes a deep breath and stretches its creaking bones do you wish that you were not old enough to stay by yourself?

I am sorry that you have been having intruder dreams since the age of five. You have visions of doorknobs rattling with a stranger's intent to enter, even though no man has ever tried to touch or take you. But your room is the first one at the top of the stairs. There is a good climbing tree outside of your window. There would be no warning. It would be so easy.

When you go out at night, do you listen for footsteps behind you? I am sorry that you are still afraid of the dark. I am sorry that when you go anywhere, you worry when you see the same man more than once. Your doctor tells you that your blood pressure is fine, but your pulse is racing. Are you nervous about something? They tell you that you need to relax.

I am sorry you are afraid of someone stealing that which you have not yet lost. I am sorry you would rather be shot, stabbed, beaten instead of *that*.

Every six months, it seems like a new game of hide-and-seek begins. You were always good at that game. You could make yourself very small and stuff yourself into tight spaces. Your friends could never find you. You always won the game. If your face is ever on the evening news, I hope you will lose instead, lose without being lost.

I am sorry, Natalee, Laci, and Elizabeth, for being glad that it was you and not me.



XRAY
KEENEY SWEARER

ARIADNE

KELLY BUSH

DIVINE CROW WINNER

"You are a *goddess*," he said above the music, just a little too close to her face. He swayed slightly, supporting himself with one hand against the wall she was leaning on.

She snorted. "Oh yeah, I'm a model of heavenly perfection." She swallowed another mouthful of the swill that had been handed to her in a plastic cup as soon as she had walked into the house and thought about leaving.

"I don't mean those fucking virginal goddesses, though. They're all pissed off all the time, have you noticed that? I mean, Artemis kills *so many guys* for just like, walking around. Girls too."

She stopped staring at the lethargic partiers sprawling across the living room furniture and turned to look at him. "What are you talking about?"

"Goddesses. The virgin ones. They're probably sexually frustrated."

She stifled her laugh and replied, "You think?"

He grinned widely. "Definitely. All the gods are running around, fucking everything in sight and these poor ladies don't get anything. I'd be pissed too."

"Maybe they aren't interested in sex."

His smile softened and he leaned towards her. She watched him come closer for a moment before she tilted her face up and let her eyes slide shut. When she felt nothing, she opened her eyes to see him smiling.

"That," he said, "is nonsense."

She was important once. A king's daughter. Now she is lost.

Water surrounds her. Endless. Deep. She stares into her own reflected eyes.

She calls out, hears her own voice echo back.

She needs to know something, but she doesn't know what it is. She has no question to ask.

The wind fills her ears until she can't hear anything else, not even her own voice.

"We're going to the top of the world," he had told her when they started hiking.

He led her to the shore of a lake. Nearby, a massive sycamore grew, its branches extending over the water. She watched as he easily pulled himself onto the tree's low branches.

"I'm not going up there," she told him. "I'm afraid of heights."

He looked down at her from his branch. "Don't you want to see the top of the world?"

He climbed higher. Eventually he settled on a thick branch over the lake and waited. She took a deep breath and began climbing.

When she reached him, she was shaking. He pulled her close. “Look,” he said.

She looked. The lake was spread out below her, dark and still. On the opposite shore, hills of pine trees rolled beyond her sight.

“It’s beautiful,” she said, no longer shaking.

“It is,” he replied. He pulled a flask out of his pocket and took a long sip. “Now we’re going to fly.”

“What?”

He handed her the flask. Then he jumped.

She could hear him calling for her from the water below. She looked out at the lake, at its calm, glassy surface and decided she wanted to fly. She drained the rest of the liquor in the flask, threw it onto the shore, and jumped.

“I am the god of wine,” he says. “The god of ecstasy.”

His naked body is wrapped in vines—they are trailing off his arms, winding through his hair.

“Come, dance with me. We will be gods together,” he says, holding out his hand. She takes it.

Vines sprout from his fingers and twist up her arm.

They begin to dance. It is slow. The beat rises and they dance faster. She knows there are more of them now, more people moving with them. The women are shouting as they undulate, meeting and separating over and over. She dances, faster.

“My father doesn’t want me to see you anymore,” she said, lying in bed with her head rested against his chest.

“How Shakespearean,” he replied. “I’ll contact Friar Lawrence.”

She flicked him in the nose. “I’m being serious.”

“Sorry.” He took her hand, brushed his thumb along the back.

“He keeps saying that no daughter of his is going to throw her life away with some worthless drunk fool.”

“That’s rather unfair. The fool can be quite valuable.”

“He’s changed so much since my mom died. Sometimes I think he wants to disown me.”

He tightened his grip on her hand. “He wouldn’t do that.”

She was silent for a moment. “I don’t know anymore. Just the way he talks. Like he’s already done with me.”

The island is deserted. She doesn’t remember who she expected to be with her, but she knows

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she shouldn't be alone. There's no way home, no home left to return to. She knows this too. The salty waves lap at her toes as she stares out to sea. She is naked, but that is no matter. This place is warm, and she knows no one will find her. She was abandoned, and she will die here. She turns to look at the man standing next to her. He had not been there before, but he is there now, and that is enough. He is naked too.

"I've chosen you," he says. He calls her by name.

"Take me away from here," she replies. She knows him. She knows him well.

He takes her hand and walks her into the sea. They open their mouths and the warm water floods their bodies.

"Have you been drinking already?" There was an empty bottle of wine on the dining table, and his glass was half full.

"Starting the celebration early," he said.

She put down the box of her childhood things that her father had left on the front porch. "What is there to celebrate?"

He came over to her, held both of her hands. "What is there to celebrate? What about the air in our lungs? The sun on our skin?" He twirled her around the room.

She couldn't help herself from laughing as she relaxed in his arms. "Stop it!" she gasped, squirming as he blew raspberries on her neck. "You're being ridiculous."

"I'm making offerings to your divine skin."

"My skin is divine now?"

"Your skin has always been divine."

She smiled and leaned against his body, at a loss for what to say.

Then, he whispered, "Marry me."

She stiffened in his arms. "What?"

"Marry me," he said. "I want you to marry me."

"You're not even going to ask, you're just telling me to?"

She could feel him smiling against her neck. "If I asked, you could say no."

He is presenting her with a crown. She is a princess, and the crown is a proper wedding gift. She tilts her head and he sets the crown on top of her curling hair, pulled back into a knot. They turn to face the celebrants. She knows them. They raise their cups high. They begin to drink.

She swallows her sip and turns to her new husband. He is still drinking, his head tilted far

back. She watches him drink and drink, the cup bottomless and inexhaustible. She knows he will never finish, there is too much, he will drown first.

He's no good. He's never been any good. Her father's words repeated in her head as she unpacked the cardboard boxes marked "kitchen." She put the pots on top of the refrigerator before moving on to the silverware. She had to step around the box labeled with "nectar" to navigate the small kitchen.

When he came back, the box was still sitting squarely in the middle of the kitchen floor. "Left this one for me, eh?" he said as he knelt to pull bottles out.

Go. And don't come running back here for help when you come to your senses. She wondered why she could remember her father's voice so well when his face had already faded.

"You said you wouldn't bring that here," she said, clutching her glass of water.

He looked up from his unpacking, holding a bottle of red liquid. She guessed it was a cabernet. "Yes, yes I did say that." He put down the bottle and walked over to where she was curled up on the couch. "I guess it was just force of habit," he said, sitting on the floor in front of her, his hands resting on her knees.

She snorted and stared down into her glass. "Yeah. Habit."

"Hey, hey. Look at me," he said, taking her hand. She looked up. "I promise, they'll go in the liquor cabinet and they'll stay there."

"Just throw them out."

His mouth dropped open in exaggerated horror. "What! You ask me to waste the nectar of the gods? The Furies would be after us for sure." He grinned up at her, and she couldn't stop herself from smiling back.

He's with the Red Woman. She knows. She knows he wants the Red Woman, wants to taste.

She knows.

She searches for him. She walks for days and days. She finds him by the sea.

He is holding the Red Woman, licking into the Red Woman's mouth.

She watches them kiss and begins to scream.

He turns, looks at her. He lets go of the Red Woman. The Red Woman splashes into a puddle on the sand, leaches into the ground.

She keeps screaming.

"Are you drunk?" she asked, staring down at him with her arms crossed.

(Continued)

(Continued)

"Nope." He was spread eagle on the kitchen floor, palms towards the ceiling. An empty glass rested near his right ear.

"Don't lie to me."

"I'm not lying."

"Look at you!" she said, gesturing at his body. "You're lying on the floor."

"I like it down here. It's very even." He turned his hands over and moved them across the tiled surface of the floor.

"It's even," she said, raising her eyebrows.

"Flat."

"I know what you mean."

He pointed a wavering finger in what he approximated was her direction. "Exactly."

"What?"

"I'm making sense."

"So?"

"Can't be drunk."

"You can be drunk and still make sense."

"That's a lie." His arm thumped to the floor again.

"What were you drinking?" she asked, refolding her arms.

"Juice."

"And?"

"And more juice?"

"I know you were drinking. How much did you have?"

"You're so untrusting. Distrusting? Undistrusting would be trusting again. You are not undistrusting."

She bent down to grab the empty glass and smelled the inside. Her face contorted.

"Ugh. This must have been straight bourbon. What is wrong with you?"

"That's not bourbon. You've never even had bourbon. How would you know?"

"What is it, then? Huh?" she called over her shoulder as she walked toward the liquor cabinet.

"Cranberry juice."

"Yeah, sure. Okay."

"Why do you never believe me?"

"I have no idea. You've never given me any reason to have anything but total faith in you," she replied, holding an empty fifth.

She stands with him in a desert of red sand.

"I will make you immortal," he says. "We will be gods together."

She can feel herself sinking into the sand. It is wet and cold.

"What is the price?" she asks. She can say nothing else.

"Death. The price is always death."

She looks up at his face. It is familiar, and yet she has never seen it before. She does not understand. "I have to die to live forever?"

"We all have to die."

She is sinking deeper, the red sand is swallowing her knees. She does not want to die.

She was throwing up into the toilet when he walked into the bathroom.

"Hey, now, that's not the way this works," he said, slumping down onto the floor next to her. "That's supposed to be me."

"Shut up," she said, resting her face on the cool porcelain rim.

"It's okay if you had a little too much. It happens to the best of us." He leaned over to kiss her cheek and she smelled the wine on his breath. She barely managed to move her head before she threw up on the floor.

"I haven't been drinking. We can't all be functioning alcoholics," she said, wiping her mouth with her hand.

He wasn't smiling anymore. He carefully rose to his feet and left the bathroom.

She turned her face back to the toilet and waited to see if her nausea was going to resurge. She whispered, "Fuck."

She is giving birth, squatting on the floor. There are people moving around her, whispering, but she can't make any of their voices out.

She knows she is exhausted, that this has gone on for days and days. She knows she is in danger.

"Please!" she screams. She doesn't know what she's pleading for, only that she is desperate and afraid.

He is behind her, his body supporting hers. She leans against him.

"Pour," he says, and red spills onto the floor between her legs, gushing from her womb. She knows she is in agony.

He fills a wine glass with their red child and drinks.

(Continued)

(Continued)

She left while he was still out, packed the car and drove away.

She left a note on the liquor cabinet. She wanted to make sure he would find it.

*I love you, she wrote. I love you so much that it's drowning me. But I'm rescuing myself now.
I'm rescuing our daughter.*

Come find me if you save yourself.

-Ariadne

Children are not allowed in the waiting area.

I stare at the sign knowing it was put up for women like me. For women who are waiting to have their uterus purged. To protect us from the gnawing, corrosive pangs of guilt society tells us we must be feeling. Trying to make the situation less tragic than it is supposed to be.

I rub my hands down the faded, hundred times washed purple irises covering my thighs. Hospital chic. Every time I shift, my ass causes a minor earthquake of paper bedding and rattling stirrups. The doctor walks in, smiling to show that she accepts me. Pleasantries are exchanged. It is just like any other exam until a cold, stiff wand reveals my inner secret, validating my appointment.

By taking these pills I agree to an abortion by vacuum aspiration in the case of incomplete expulsion of the products of conception by medical means.

I swallow five times: once to dilate my cervix, once to terminate the pregnancy, once to cause my uterus to contract, once to prevent infection, once to help with pain.

The world tells me this will be the hardest decision that I ever make. That this day will impact my life forever. That no moment will go by when I don't think back to this day. That what I've done is shameful.

And yet the only worrying burrowing into my brain as I stare blankly into the reddened toilet bowl is that I'm too terrified to tell my best friend. Scared that despite his far left politics and love for me, this will be the one thing he cannot forgive.



UNTITLED
BRITTANY DAVIES

BATTLE HYMN OF THE BREAKDOWN

KIM GRABOWSKI

I.

My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of my own soul, out of my mouth like the
organs of a fish too quickly pulled from the salt water,
thrashing opalescent pink pouring through the spaces between my fingers, slippery
and resistant,
spearing its edges with my fingernails, destroying it to extract the hook.

My eyes have seen the glory of the deer in spring, distended bellies set in brown
skeletons, bones for counting,
that doe I've been keeping an eye on, the one who kept all her weight off one foot
through winter and the time of the guns,
now carrying two more in her belly like gold bullion. Fulfilling her purpose on three legs
instead of four,
they won't notice when she dies: there are two where there was one.

II.

I am trampling out the vintage where four-letter words decay, where they are fed into
machines and wait restlessly for tasting,
rolling the rotting barrels one through another, intoxicating graves with pitch dark
wine, liquid separating into molecules and fusing with soil.

I am trampling out the synapses, the neuro-pathways popping and singing and wheezing
beneath my boots,

I am scooping their shards into my hands and sliding them into my mouth,
past my tongue and down my throat, moaning with the growth of them pressing against
my hips from the inside out.

I am trampling out the body of it, bringing the insides to the palm of my hand to examine
the tracks beneath my feet.

I am trampling out the heart of it, reconciling the arrhythmic disagreement between right
and left ventricle and aorta.

(Continued)

(Continued)

I am making a Valentine of this, weaving scissors into and out of the red foil, opening it
like an accordion, forcing from it new human beings with hands linked in a chain.

I am trampling out the corpse of it, arranging it into a single account of flesh still faintly
pink,
snapping the tension of tendons, releasing bones from sockets, relieving the aching
intention of skin.

III.

Glory, glory hallelujah—I left my handprints here in the mud, risked my life for a
temporary mark on the earth from inside the eye of a tornado.

Glory, glory hallelujah—the windows shake and stretch with violent rain, there are no
laws of physics.

Glory, glory hallelujah—freak hail the size of my kneecaps for the entire month of
March.

Glory, glory hallelujah—the river billows, swallows more bank with each breath.

Glory, why didn't you tell me
glory, why didn't you lay on the ground beside it as it died,
glory, where is the warm rock now, where you heated your blood before you could move.



UNTITLED
ERIKA WORLEY

LEMONADE

STEFANO CAGNATO

And a breeze breezes like a windy knot, the branches the thimble and the sickle and the hammer, because when a tired man dreams, his muscles grow in the night, Ferdinand told his nephew, and one of them ignored the other.

"I just don't understand," said the nephew, "how life can give you lemons."

"Ha!"

He boomed across the room with such volume that a light bulb shattered above them, leaving their conversation in the dark. Ferdinand closed his eyes tight, then stood up and opened them. He could see well now. He strolled away into the kitchen and brought back a green Christmas candle that he lit while sitting in his old armchair that belonged to his father and his father's father and his father's father's—well, you get the picture.

"Now, where was I?" He usually got lost. "Right, life. Lemons. You get them. From life."

"I know, Uncle, I know. I've heard the saying. But I came here to see if you could enlighten me. You've always been great at explaining things."

"Of course I have. And you've always been great at understanding them. Good advice is not good unless it is followed. Remember when I explained the Jabberwocky poem to you?"

"Do I ever."

"I really outdid myself there. I don't think I can improve—"

"This is more important, Uncle."

And this last utterance made Ferdinand stop talking, something he usually didn't do for anyone other than himself. The wind blew against the windows and shook them slightly, a light tremor that helped remind them of the frailty of glass and other things. Ferdinand stared at his nephew, who broke the silence.

"You see, I've been seeing this person. For a while."

"Have you?"

“Yes. I have. And I wouldn’t necessarily call him a lemon.”

“Then what would you call him?”

“Ziggy.”

“Ah.”

Ferdinand didn’t like to preach. He was more of a storyteller, and in his stories, when the opportunity presented itself (and it most often did), he would teach a lesson because he knew things that other people didn’t, like why the sky is blue and why the sea is blue and why his own eyes were pine green. His nephew loved to listen, but now he was old enough to pick and choose what to listen to, and he chose lemons. And life. They did not mix well together, unlike brown sugar and water and lemons; those mix very well together.

“Ziggy wants to move out of state. He wants to get married and he wants kids.”

“And you don’t.”

“I do.”

“Then what’s the problem?”

“I don’t know if I want kids with him.”

“Ha!”

This time the window in the study shattered, letting in the wind and its whispers and its whistles, and the waning moon shone brighter on them both as Ferdinand got up to close the curtains. When he did, the wind blew through them shapes of a ghost and they decided to move the conversation upstairs where no ghosts would go because it was too dark, even for lost souls.

“Isn’t it funny,” said Ferdinand to lighten the mood, “that colors always have a hidden connotation?”

(Continued)

(Continued)

And that is when he noticed the look of fear on the nephew's face. Ferdinand hated being too blunt, but sometimes the situation begged for such a thing.

"Kill the Jabberwocky."

"Kill the Jabberwocky?"

"Yes!" shouted Ferdinand as he stood up. The house was empty. "Don't be afraid. Kill it!"

The nephew sat still in his seat, not a word escaping through his lips (and not a word that wanted to). He had not the heart to ask the question he had come to ask, the real question. But Ferdinand was wise, if not from his extensive knowledge of things, then by the whites that had grown into his hair, evicting the red that shone there once in more youthful times, because more knows the Devil for his age than for being the Devil. Ferdinand sat again, having lost the energy to stand.

"What if you never get another chance? Then, my dear nephew, you can be an uncle."

"I don't want that."

"Nobody does."

They could barely see each other in the penumbra of the upstairs room.

"Tell Ziggy the time has not come yet. But don't wait too long to be ready, either."

The nephew thanked his uncle for his advice. Good, as always. They both stood up and sauntered downstairs, where the nephew grabbed his coat and his scarf. They wished each other well and hugged, because that is what family does. Ferdinand's Christmas tree stood proudly in the living room, near the front door of his house. He had decorated it with blue lights that matched his blue snowflake sweater because he hated the green and red of Christmas.

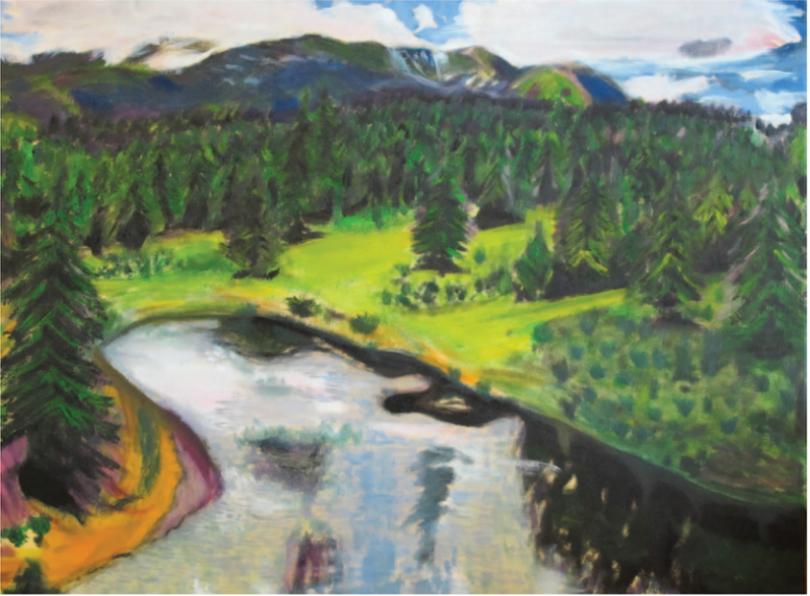
"Some branches are missing from your tree, Uncle."

If I held,
if I kept every string
from every tea bag
I've ever drank,
the peppermint for energy,
the lemons for lift,
the chamomile for soothing and
the strawberry for summer,
the ones in winter snowstorms,
fall's chilly evenings,
summer's breezy nights,
spring's crisp mornings,
the tea drank on car trips that sloshes in the cup holder and burns my tongue
when the car lurches to a stop,
the early morning tea with breakfast,
the late night tea with dessert,
the green tea staple at Grandpa's,
the ones by the roaring fire,
by the windows with a book,
up in the mountains in the middle
of a thunderstorm,
down in the basement listening in on
a piano,
made over a fire in the middle
of the woods,
the array in the little wooden box or basket in a restaurant,
the collection that sits on your kitchen windowsill,
the tea drank on your front porch swing as soon as
night begins to fall,
the tea sipped carefully on a walk though
the neighborhood,
while we're waiting for the train
during a blizzard,

(Continued)

(Continued)

sitting at a cafe, browsing
the paper and passerby on
a lazy crisp Sunday,
the tea sweetened with honey to soothe
your raw tickley throat, steam
rising off to loosen your
sinuses,
the spicy, simmering chai you
made us during that summer time sleepover,
enlivening us
in your air-conditioned
chilled house,
the tea I hurry
to put on the stove on those
dusty stale-aired days
when no else is home,
the tea in the styrofoam cups after services
or during meetings,
the standard english breakfast
and bitter lipton
for the hotel rooms
and doctors' offices,
the tea drank while we're staying up
for no reason at all—
if I collected all their strings,
tied them together one afternoon,
I wonder if I could reach you.



A JAMAICAN'S COLORADO
SHADAE SUTHERLAND

DE LA SCÈNE (THE SCENE)

KELSEY NUTTALL

En effet, Paris is a suf-fuck-cating promise. It's like a diet drogue.
Pointalized paintings are pill-reminiscent propaganda, faces mugging
off the stage of the Opera House. The bail-let. I've been promised
love, she shrugs. The Seine looks toxic in the winter. Remiss,

to jump in.

Voilà. It is like this: *vous* will never speak the same language
Because you never did. Etiquette/informality? Math/pen&page?
French/English? Trying, trying to not try, not trying? Or,
Dreaming, counting, counting on dreams? Opposites. Alors.

Shock; is realizing things are exactly what *vous* always expected.

Mais non. 'cause you haven't seen how cold they are, Monet's lilies,
Until you've blurred them with hot-plate, baubled tears. Too still,
otherwise. Cold. You can only be truly at home in the world
If you can find little comforts. But here your raindrops are on curled

roses. (And they're *teardrops*.)

Parce que no two different words in any language are ever *la même*.
We will never speak the same language. —never did. On the Seine,
She found a man who'd cut her hair. Terrorized, because their accents
Were only penultimately understood. They each heard the sense

of the words. Almost. Then tried again to clarify. Clair.

There there. With a [bad] blonde bob she stuck here feet in the muck
Expecting to be pricked or pulled down by the un-re-attach-able tuck-
-able strands of old hair. --mused: *If only he'd understood my 'R's*
As if her 'ARE's were her biggest problem. Donc, it's like tar —

— it sticks. Heavy like tar. She's wearing 'weres'.

She hadn't lied, (nor had Paris, though, maybe) exactly. Not exactly.
They just hadn't had the verbs and the tenses. *Trop* much tacked
on. They'd made it too heavy. Strapped the words on too hard.
Hair is strong. It wraps through her toes. She's pulled tight by the snarls.

The Seine stings like shears down there. She tenses.



UNTITLED
JENNIFER TARNOFF

How many millimeters of rainwater
Can fit inside your liver?
How many tumultuous midnights
Can pass before your eardrums rend,
And you clap your hands around them
And scream a sky of violet stars?
How long can your heart hang
Above the open flame in your chest
Before the pink flesh chars
And flakes of ash settle in your lungs?
How many lovers can kiss on a park bench
Before it collapses with jealousy,
spasming among the frozen forsythias?
How many cups of tea can a snake drink
Before someone snatches off its mask?
How high can a sequoia grow
Before it punctures the firmament like a balloon
And its griefs collect in birdbaths?

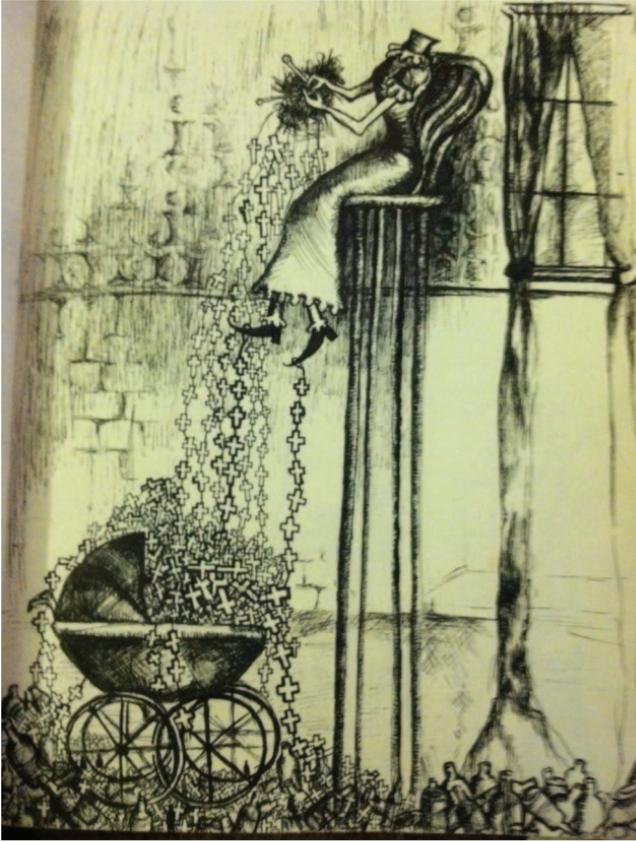


PENETRATION
TAYLOR STAMM

ABSENCE

KATE GOLEMBIEWSKI

Peaked and domed
Like the onions at St. Basil's,
Powdered with gently falling snow,
The black umbrella bobbles through the night.
The old man weaves to and fro, hands clasped tight
Around the cool slender pole of a refuge
Clearly made for two.
A grim circus tent
In which he is the ring master
And the tinkling crystals, the rustling audience,
The night, the hush that comes over it.
The roaring, sweeping silence,
The still, the scream.



AND YOUR MOTHER WEAVES YOUR SIN AWAY
KELSEY GORDON

Dog

I screamed and played the last four seconds over in my mind. I had seen the flash of gold prance underneath the rearview mirror on my side of the car, heard the *thump* and then the tumbling. I imagined his skull bouncing off the tire and smacking onto the pavement, the spinning of the wheel vaulting his young body back into the mudflaps. My dad steered the car onto a side street parking lot. I watched in the mirror as he staggered up from where he fell in the street, swaying chaotically before his owner clasped her arms around his neck. We got out of the car, and from far away, I could already see him shaking, his eyes rolling in their sockets while a stroller with quiet twin boys rolled to a stop on the sidewalk, their brittle heads unknowing.

Dolphin

Mike took its lower jaw in his sunwashed hands and pulled down, the rotting skin at the back of its throat stretching and then slapping apart. It smelled like fermenting flesh. With the jaw gaping wide, Mike stabilized the bones, took a pair of pliers, and began ripping out the long, pointed teeth. Some came out easily; the others held on with their light blue roots. He asked me to hold a rusty tin can we had found and began dropping them in. As each tooth plinked down, the smell got worse— I ignored it by nudging the oily green organ sac hanging out of the hollow gut with my foot. The contents sloshed around on the sand like water in a bathtub.

Chinchilla

She curled herself into the crux of my elbow, burrowing into her favorite spot in my side while I stroked her grey body. She stayed there for the whole science class while we discussed the anatomy of a plant cell. When class was over, I went to put her back in the cage and my grey fleece was dewed with blood that had come from the inside of her. I watched her spring back into the cage and cower in the corner, watching her mate chase their son around with fearful eyes. Years after I graduated, I returned to visit. My former teacher showed me the empty cages, then inside the freezer. Ice crystals feathered the lid of the container labeled *Livers; Kidneys; Hearts*. The cold held all of them still, kissing my skin like a breath.

POOL SHARK

DAVID LANDSKROENER

Kyle hurt his knee getting out of the pool and he was crying loudly and it was really annoying. I asked him if baby was alright and if he wanted his rattle but he got really mad at me. And then he started punching me and his mom came and made him stop and then she saw the blood on his knee and she grabbed him and told me to stay put and not to get in the pool and she dragged Kyle all the way around the pool to see if they maybe had a Band-Aid at the concession stand.

I sat next to the pool on the concrete which was really warm and almost too hot to sit on but not quite. I looked at my fingers and they looked like raisins and I laughed and I sucked on my pinky to see if I could make my finger smooth again but it didn't work and then I looked at my toes and they were raisins too.

"Hey buddy you look like you were having fun in the pool" a man who was really tall said and he had a black bag on a strap around his neck and he was standing so close to me and I hadn't even noticed him. "Yes we were having fun" I said "but my friend Kyle hurt his knee so his mom brought him over to the concession stand to see if they had a Band-Aid." "Oh" the man said "that's not good." I said "I hope he gets in trouble because he was punching me." "That's not very nice" the man said. "Yes" I said "he was being really mean and punching me for no reason." "I meant that it's not very nice to hope your friend gets in trouble" said the man. "Oh" I said. Then the man asked me if I wanted ten dollars and I said "yes I want ten dollars that's so much money and I could be rich so where is the money?" He told me to come into the locker room with him and he would give me the money because he left it in there. I said sure and if Kyle and his mom came back I could just say I was using the bathroom.

I followed the man into the locker room and he went into one of the shower stalls and I went in there too. He closed the door and then took the bag off of his neck and took out a really fancy-looking camera. "That looks like a fancy camera" I said "but where's my ten dollars?" "I'll give it to you" the man said "but I was wondering if I could take some pictures first. It won't take long." "What kind of pictures" I said and then I thought that maybe he was one of those men that Grandma always talked about who wanted to touch my penis and take pictures of me naked and then I got scared. But the man said "I just want to take pictures of your feet because I work for a shoe company and we need all sorts of different pictures of feet so we can know how to design our shoes."

"Okay" I said. The man turned on the camera and then he squatted down and asked if it was okay if he touched my feet. I said sure and then he picked up my right foot and started squeezing it and rubbing it and it tickled and I laughed. "You have very nice feet" the man

said and then he said he wished he could play with them all day. And I said he could play with them all day if he gave me ten bucks an hour and he laughed and said he would gladly do that if he could. Then he had me put my right foot on his knee and then he began to take pictures of it and he moved it around in different positions and kept taking pictures. Then he did that to my left foot too and then he had me lay on my back and put my feet in the air and then took all sorts of pictures that way.

Then he asked me if I had ever sucked my toes and I laughed and said “when I was a baby” and then he said “I’ll give you ten more dollars if you suck your toes for me.” I laughed and said “sure but before you do that you need to give me both of the ten dollars.” The man laughed and took his wallet out of his back pocket and pulled out a twenty dollar bill and gave it to me and I stuck it in the waistband of my swimsuit. Then I started sucking my toes and the man took pictures of that and it was really funny and I wondered why the shoe company wanted pictures of me sucking on my toes.

When the man was done with those pictures he said he was done with taking pictures but he would give me five dollars if I let him suck on my toes for just a little bit. I said “no but for ten more bucks I will” so the guy took out his wallet again and gave me a ten dollar bill and I stuck that in my swimsuit too. Then he had me sit on the little seat in the shower and he lifted up my left foot and started sucking on my toes. It tickled a lot more when he did it because he had a small mustache and I laughed and was squirming around and he looked up at me.

Then he sucked on my right foot toes and it tickled again and I laughed again and soon he stopped and said he was done and said “thank you for helping me with my work” and I said “thanks for the money” and then he opened the shower door a crack looked out and then left and then I went back out to the pool and Kyle and his mom were back and she got mad at me for leaving and I said that I was just in the bathroom and she said “tell me next time.” I said “okay” and then thought about what I could buy with ten plus ten plus ten I think equals thirty dollars.

POOR PEOPLE FOOD

CAM STEWART

You put it up to your face and it crumbles to the floor. You pick up a chunk the size of your pupil and insert it into your mouth. The taste is ordinary, but you convince yourself otherwise.

It sticks to your decayed molars. It seeps between their gaps and cements itself there forever. In a futile attempt at extraction, you pick at it with your index finger. But it just feels like poking cold teeth.

You put more in your mouth. You swirl it around like a mouthwash and then swallow. It sinks into a corner of your stomach and you feel nothing.

But there is still more scattered across your floor. So you scoop it up in your palm and let it fall gently into your open, tilted mouth.

Each time is different, how it enters and reacts with your mouth. This time is nearly chaotic. Heat swells your gums into an inflamed, rubbery mass that throws tears into your eyes. The burning is consistent throughout your mouth and cannot be given a specific origin. You begin to think you coated your mouth in chili paste.

You begin spitting everywhere. The wall four feet in front of you becomes splattered with bursts of saliva. For a second you forget the hunger and burning, and instead regret spitting on the wall that you and your dad painted four summers ago, back before he gave up on you. But then the dripping spit guides your eyes downward and back onto the floor, reminding you of just how desperately your stomach aches.

You kick at it. Your fury of shoe stomps disintegrates what was left of it into a fine white powder.

And now you're licking at it. You push your tongue into the floor, directing its movement from the back of your skull. Your tongue reveals the black floor beneath in wide stripes. It looks like you're tonguing the underbelly of a dead zebra.

You now see yourself in the third person: knees aimed at the ground, your back arched and exposing all of your vertebrae.

You see your own face. You see your tongue lapping at the floor like your old cat did at its empty saucer. And this, this image of desperation puts more tears in your eyes. But you don't stop licking.

In a crazed panic you lick at it and cry. The tears absorb the parts they land on. But you suck at the moist ovals in a series of blind kisses. You keep crying and you dig your nails into the floor, hoping to penetrate down into the residents who live below you. But there is only the bending of nail at a right angle, back into your skin. You yell.

And you keep licking, crying and yelling. You think this is the taste of



BEAUTY
JOANNE HEPPERT

HOLY TRINITY

STEWART FINNEGAN

Lisa should have gotten that tattoo, you think, as you rim her, that one she was always joking about, you think, as you spread her cheeks wide the tramp stamp of a cross, you think, and she should have washed better, you think, and am I doing this right, you think, and you lower your head in anyway like a lion tamer, you think, despite the animal smell but the set is too well-lit for a circus tent, you think, and suddenly you're in Rome, you think, or someplace like it and they've let the beasts out, you think, though the director is giving you a thumbs up and you're thumbing Lisa and Lisa's moaning a bit too much, you think, and now your tongue is lashing, you think, like it could be hurting her, you think, like you're the tamer again, but then you're sucking on her, you think, extracting a thorn, you think, and almost chuckle and then you're biting at her then you're opening your mouth wide too

wide you think, your lips are going to snap, you think, and your ass looks good in the stale light, you think, but you can't be sure and you look up seductively and you only see the camera and it's a creature pupil ringed with a piece of silver, you think, as you look through, see me, I think, see me, I think you think, see my body stretched

wide and I feel it, I think, and it rends, you I think, it rends, it rends, eye to eye in a moment of doubt, we think, God in three persons, you think, God, in three persons, I think, God, in three persons, you,

