

Ellipsis  
Literature & Art

Vol. 47

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Address all correspondence to:

*Ellipsis*  
Westminster College  
1840 South 1300 East  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84105

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Please visit <http://www.westminstercollege.edu/ellipsis>

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“Historic Site” by James Doyle  
and

“Canoeing on Our Anniversary” by Marcia L. Hurlow

## Honorable Mentions

“Homicide Artist” by Robert Tillett

“Nocturne” by Heidi Hart

“Inhabitation” by Helen Wickes

•••

## Co-winners of the Academy of American Poets Student Poetry Prize Judged by Henri Cole

“Sunday, Walking” by Justina McCandless  
and

“Apology” by Erika Rodriguez

# Body Chemistry

Ellen K. Gregory

Dizzying, really, that euphoria  
which bounced you into a catatonic beige room;  
the wheelchair barely able to anchor you—

And once your levity is catalogued as best they can configure,  
that expensive buoyancy tagged with sufficient guy-lines,  
they set up IVs with  
hydrosollemnate, bisulfate dolor allamentoin, cyclopensiveoxane—I looked—  
downers, probably, because there you are, level in bed,  
the octenylsuccinctinate apparently failing you, because you aren't saying *anything*..

They caution me about side effects:  
opalescent tears (which threaten to carve clean the soul, and then some);  
maybe an ill-tempered desire to embrace trees, trunk after solid trunk,  
    compulsively collect leaves,  
    remain, hypnotized, before log fires  
    (age rings dark in the red, pulsing glow);  
they tell me to beware the weight of your hair, your glasses, your warm winter clothing;  
tell me uphill will, of course, play differently than downhill—

and I'm feeling like that dirt clod, dissolving as it drops to the cistern floor,  
gradually flattening onto cold concrete,  
and there's a slice up there of—what?

Blue-rinsed sky.  
Just the thinnest of mineral seas.

# Fatal Vision?

Ann Stewart

So I've started kissing my pillow.  
Laughing to myself at you.  
Biting the mattress.

I stole pictures of you as a little boy.  
Now they are all compressed  
by the weight of my stare.  
That twitch under my eye will not stop.  
Call me Annie Annie.

Time is disappearing.  
And yet I am standing still in it.  
I am a time traveler. I can transcend space and time. I am all powerful.

Give me some Dramamine.

Next I'll be eating my own feces because I love myself too much.

Give me some lithium.

Or a Flintstone vitamin at least.  
Or some gum.  
You always have gum.  
Everything with you is green instead of yellow.

My single life is in a museum.  
Untouched, like Miss Havisham's wedding-scape.

And when I wake up?  
I'll still be in Battle Creek, Michigan.  
Or in a cage in Jackson going yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,  
yes...

Dear Diary,  
The kitty wrote me a letter saying,  
"The man in the beard is a spy from outer space.  
You are in great danger."

Come to think of it..  
your apartment is a little like an attic.  
It's cold and dark  
and full of treasures.

# The Elephants Came in the Evening

Stephen Wheeler

The elephants came in the evening, they numbered a dozen at least!  
They shattered our tarmacs and sidewalks at 12,000 pounds to a beast.

They leveled our statues and signposts and sat on diminutive cars,  
excitedly dealing destruction, they pulverized all that was ours.

What's worse, there are others appearing, arising each sunset about.  
The cause of the violent invasion as yet is enshrouded in doubt.

The public is rather disgruntled with the pachyderm kind as a whole.  
To needlessly splinterize houses can take a relational toll.

Regardless, they press their advantage, devouring bushes and trees  
and toppling beautiful hedges with obvious pleasure and ease.

Their conduct towards us is indifferent, but the giants are taking no breaks  
from ravaging small arboretums and clogging municipal lakes.

I doubt that we'll ever recover the things that we've lost to their sort,  
demolishing stores for some peanuts and snapping off hydrants for sport.

Advancing in constant encroachment, they form an unstoppable surge,  
together they easily foil our feeble attempts at a purge.

There's only one wall that resists them. There's only one thing we can do.  
But it's rather upsetting that *humans* will only be left at the zoo.

# Nausea

Ruth Holzer

Through sunny gaps in the slats  
in the specialist's waiting room  
you can see a part of Arlington  
the living use. You envy the view,  
vowing, if only I get out of here,  
examined but unscathed,  
I'll never complain again,  
I'll cherish the ordinary,  
a prognosis of total gratitude  
for the cop checking meters  
and sparrows pecking in the gutter.

A salesman tosses a box of samples  
into the trunk of the company car,  
peels off his jacket, drops the key,  
struck by an instant of inattention.  
Another man is tending the landscape  
of corporate world headquarters,  
brown as a bean, bent over a double mower  
that shakes him and roars.  
Back home his countrymen  
scramble over the dump in a hopeless race  
against the rat and the crested caracara.  
You are an hourglass filling with nausea.

# Dream Assassin

C.M. Pretorius

You turn and smile  
Turn and smile  
And then you're on the other  
Side of my dream—  
Your smile is killing me;

I want you with your skirt  
High up above your waist,  
Even if you do not want to  
Smile here in my room  
On my desk all over  
My laptop, it's your lap

I want to decorate with my  
Wakening lust burning  
In my thighs like rubber on  
Tender white skin;

Warm tears blush out of me,  
The ice cream in your lap  
Melts down my face,  
Covers your lips in snow:  
Your smile is killing me.



# Finding the Rarest

James Doyle

The orchid hunter stealthy  
through sheaves of dead rain. Orchids  
creep up his arms to his lips.

He is vine and frond  
to the hidden species of orchids  
sliding beneath falls

or squeezing between  
forbidden clusters, swamp fur  
that lines the cracks

of sunlight. Hummingbirds  
as sweet as his blood for draperies,  
pulp, brazen petals

crazed as tiny wings  
against any touch but the air  
flutter his eyes

closed. His fingertips  
break open for the soft bite  
of the orchid,

the luminosity  
in its snakeskin. His veins are heavy,  
rare. Pastel

draws its lace  
like a blanket over his skin. Hummingbird  
beaks at his pores.

# Historic Site

James Doyle

Mud tapered the oxcart  
down to size, half wheels,  
piled bodies, nothing  
but weight. They unharnessed  
the animal, led it off.

This was the plague's way  
of burial. Mixed history,  
rain and dirt, arms, legs,  
and the reluctant earth  
eating its own skin,

growing fatter, fatter.  
How many cartloads  
a day for plenary  
indulgence? The women  
in the doorways prayed,

then spit on the children's  
foreheads. Their fingernails  
split the greenest scraps,  
useless for firewood, threw  
them at the dead's carpenters

waiting in the road. The priest  
followed the carts. The doors  
closed as they went by. No  
funeral procession, splintered  
for the crows, but children

at play in the fields of the Lord  
five hundred years later. I  
splay the dirt for its white  
vials, which may be bone  
or broken chalk or turned faces.

# White Deer, Red Fox

Jo M. Going

White against white,  
soft through the winter woods,  
a felt presence,  
watching.

I have not yet seen you,  
but shall bide here  
in the shadows,  
listening

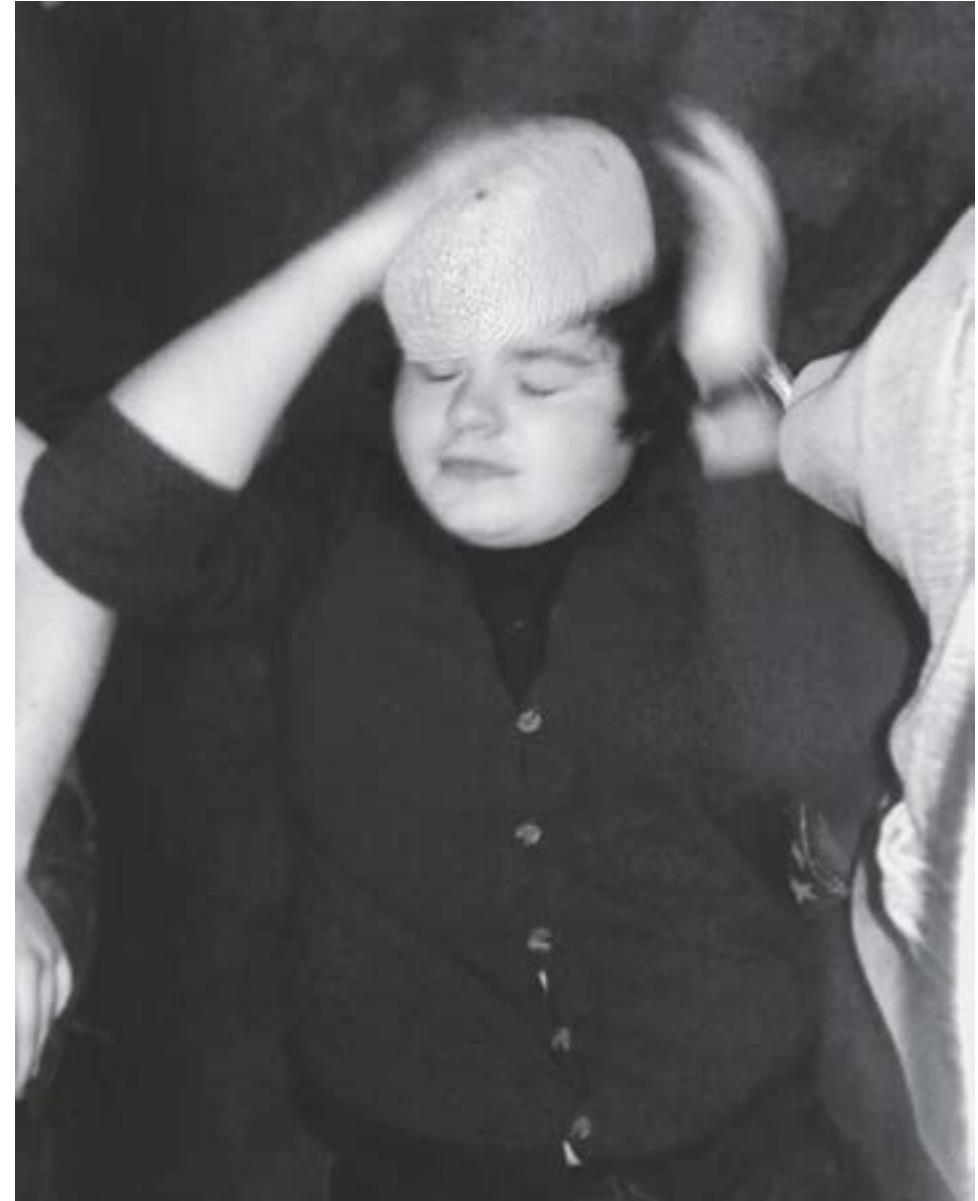
while our hooves trace  
the still moonlight  
and the snow  
falling,

watching fox step lightly  
in the morning dusk  
with clear, purposeful  
tracks.

We shall meet  
halfway towards sunrise,  
melding into a refraction of  
winter.

# Hogmanay

Calvin Halliday



# My Youth Is a Land Mine

Florence Weinberger

Once I told someone,  
probably a therapist,  
or maybe a lawyer,  
that my father bought me  
a jumping monkey toy  
when I was a little girl.  
They said it was sexual.  
I suppose anything can be sexual.  
Just like anything can be a poem.

# A Mentorship

Sarah Harris Wallman

Dearest Lesley,

I am writing to express how much I've missed you. Nothing is the same since your unfortunate removal. How I miss our little talks! Still, I trust that the new school's rigidity will function like a security blanket in these beautiful, but often hormonal and rage-filled years.

I hope this note will clear the air between us and that, in time, you will come to think of me as a sort of mentor. As I learned from my time at the Chi Gamma house, one finds sisters everywhere.

Perhaps you will favor me with a response? Letter writing truly is a lost art. I am often shocked by the number of lovely customs that fade between generations: for example, the necessity of disguising one's bra when wearing a strappy top. But I digress. I hope you are eating well and sensibly. Watch out for that cafeteria granola, which is pretty much candy masquerading as health food.

Speaking of my days as a "Chi Gam" reminds me of their mission statement, which you may find useful: "The sisters of Chi Gamma foster the highest type of womanhood through lifelong learning. The girl of today becomes the woman of tomorrow, indebted to her forebears while moving ever upward, hand in hand."

Sincerely, Aimee.

*Thx 4 msg bich. Wotz this genratn crap? Ur 4 years older thn me! -L*

Dearest Lesley,

How kind of you to think of me in your nightly allotted hour of cell phone use. I understand that at all other times your precious gadget is kept in a locker in the headmistress's office. What will Brett do without the postmodern poetry of your outbox?

In reference to your query about my age, it is true that I am not much older than you in calendar years, but I have always been an old soul. At the age of five, I recall asking my mother why bad things happen to good people. She gave me a hug and a fudge-sicle. I have often been misunderstood.

I think often of the events of this summer. Was the end result inevitable?

Let's review: I came to work at your father's office in May, having just completed my junior year. The job had previously belonged to my roommate Jocelyn, who left when she scored a summer internship at a New York magazine. Jocelyn never really told me what her position entailed, just that the pay kept her in pink martinis when her monthly allowance dried up, as it often did. Jocelyn can ring up fantastic bar tabs.

You, Lesley, were not in the office my first week. You'd only ever been there after hours, when the lights were off and your dad was wearing shorts. You never met Jocelyn, though I understand you once pilfered lip gloss from her desk. Don't worry about it; she bought more.

I can't say I really enjoyed myself. The townie girls in the office didn't like me because I was going back to school in the fall, a school in whose shadow they'd grown. All they ever talked about were their internet courtships. They assumed I would find them pathetic, and I did. So they went off to lunch together and left me at the front, answering the phones, and David at the back, refusing phone calls. I've since told him that hiring all women is bad for business, but he laughed it off. Your dad enjoys being the rooster. He doesn't even like it when the gay guy comes around to service the Xerox.

I was heartened by the news that you would be joining us. I know the whole story: you begged for a mall job, you gave away \$30 worth of grease pretzels to skaters, you spent lunch breaks shoplifting jewelry worth a fraction of that Tiffany heart dog collar around your neck. For your next birthday, your absentee mother should save time and staple a price tag to your head.

Let me interject two pieces of advice here in my capacity as passer of the torch

to the woman of tomorrow, hand in hand:

- 1) Say people's names when you talk to them.
- 2) You look fat in most of your skirts.

Don't take that the wrong way. Beauty is more about what you hint at than what you show. Possibility is beautiful.

I was glad to have you as a co-worker, even if you were just some high-schooler with a skirt the size of a headband and a no-one-will-buy-me-a-pony pout. But more intriguing than the townie staffers.

David knew I would be a good influence on you, seeing as I am a scholarship winner at the aforementioned university (also his alma mater).

Of course, you had a fool-proof strategy for proving yourself unsuitable for office work. I loved how you would "forget" to turn off your cell phone so it blared that song about booties whenever your degenerate contacts felt a pang of boredom. I almost didn't believe you, later, when you told me that you had no friends. I see it now, though. All you had was a few kids who liked to ride in your car and bum cigarettes.

I too have had my struggles with friendships. I've lived for the last two years in the Chi Gamma house and earned a little extra cash by helping clear the lunch dishes after everyone picked at their lettuce repast. While I will always cherish the sisterhood of these amazing women, it must be said that few of them had prior knowledge of basic housekeeping. In stately antebellum mansions converted for communal living, one should not flush sanitary products into the delicate plumbing. Nor should one walk away from an overflowing toilet as from a pimpled suitor.

On one occasion I awoke to find the bunk above me heaving under the strains of the sweaty Deke who sometimes courted my roommate. The smell of bourbon-laced perspiration and genital fluids completely overcame my lavender candle.

Lesley, I am not a prude. You think I never heard that booty song? We played that booty song four times at the Chi Gamma Jell-O Shot Formal last spring. I wish you could see me in red satin the next time you call me prissy. The heir to a doughnut fortune obtained my number.

You see, Lesley, being an old soul does have its advantages. We don't grow up finding new ways of being cute, wagging our tails for biscuits. We stay quiet and we learn

about people until we understand exactly how every kind of person works.

There is more to say, but it's almost time for dinner; your father is grilling swordfish and there's a nice Sancerre chilling. In closing, remember to be courteous to your dorm-mates, the hooligan offspring of the very rich, even if they have corroded septums from cocaine abuse or cross-hatched thighs from ritual self-mutilation. We are thinking of you.

Sincerely, Aimee.

P.S. You're incorrect in your estimation of our age difference. Last week I turned twenty-one, an occasion your father commemorated with dinner at Le Coq and an elegant silver bangle. I'd be happy to loan it to you when you're home for Christmas; I imagine the school's no-jewelry policy weighs heavily on you. Perhaps I'll go open your jewelry box and say hello to your little baubles so they won't be lonely.

*FU Amy. Get my dad to answer his fon. Need 2 talk 2 him. PS Not intrstd n ur life stry!!!*

Dear Lesley,

It seems worth pointing out that you continue to misspell my name in your otherwise adorable missives. I've never been fond of my name, as my mother was under the influence of some song when she devised it, but it's all I have in the way of identification, so I would like to see it rendered properly.

You never really have paid attention to me.

Think back on the dawn of our relationship. What a great relief when your dad decided our talents would be better utilized on outside errands (the townies complained about the vulgar nature of the half conversations they were forced to endure). I was happy not just because I could add "personal assistant" to my résumé, but also because I still felt too young to be refrigerated in a cubicle all summer.

I always let you drive on our daily errands. You probably think this proves some

canine form of dominance. Not so. I have too much going on in my life to get a kick from simply operating a vehicle. But there were moments when I enjoyed your loud hip-hop, your lewd shouts at male pedestrians, your use of the steering wheel like a quadriplegic's stripper pole.

I didn't even mind the soul-bearing. At that point my only so-called friend wrote e-mails describing the exhilaration of pouring out of midtown subways with all the smartly dressed editresses, of movies in parks and alleyway bistros lit like the Riviera. I've never been to the Riviera, but I went to New York with my high school chorus, so I know that it is all she says and more that she doesn't have the wits to discover.

Do your best not to grow up to be Jocelyn. She knew I couldn't afford a little jaunt up to New York. Her continued invitations were not only insincere, but patently tacky. Pay attention, girl! Know what makes the people around you tick. Ask yourself whether said ticking implies a bomb.

I almost said all this to you that day at Pig-n-Pie. I think we were both a little delirious from the heat, driving around your father's car all morning trying to find a garage that would fix the air-conditioning in time for tee. Surprise, surprise, there aren't many garages in a town this size that service foreign sports cars, but, you know, it was kind of fun. All those men's eyes on us (after all, some guys like your proportions, particularly mechanics). It felt good saying "fuck it" and just taking our hungry selves out for barbecue sandwiches. You were so proud of the way you shook your tank top at the counter boy and persuaded him to serve you draft beer. (You have chubby-girl cleavage: two weeks on laxatives and cabbage soup, there'd be nothing left.)

I could tell you had some experience with beer. You didn't get giddy and obnoxious like some girls. We lowered our shirt straps to feel the sun on our shoulders. Your swimsuit lines were egregious. I think that was when you told me that thing about not having friends. I felt for you. I never had female friends at your age. In truth, I find many of my Gamma sisters a bit shrill. I am proud of their status and beauty, but God, sometimes, after last call, when they are drunkenly tearing through the cereal bins in the house kitchen without a thought for who will sweep the crumbs...

But you claim indifference to my past. Heaven forbid I bore you.

Of course, you told me plenty about yours. We had a few beers at that picnic

table behind the Pig-n-Pie. You did an amusing imitation of David's girlfriend and told me how the Brett situation led to threats of boarding school. I was starting to understand things about you and your father. Not because you bitched about his tough-love approach. You have a fucking SUV. David isn't mean, and he doesn't hate you. He's trying to cultivate your pathetic lack of drive.

David is a model parent, as far as I'm concerned. In everything he does, he carries the responsibility of affluence with poise and masculinity.

Your father's attitude toward me started changing that day, when we returned to the office smelling of beer and the smoke pit. He saw how I connected with you. Bless him, he still wanted to reach out to his lost little girl, so he asked if you should have me over to dinner, and you jumped for joy; remember, you really did like me then. For the record, that was when he told me to call him David.

I saw you watching my face when we pulled into the driveway. Sorry to disappoint you, but I don't gape. I'd just as soon you think that I am underwhelmed by mile-long driveways and mountain views and stables and bunny shrubs. Your father, the same one you find strict and cold and distant, was also sneaking glances at my reaction. He is proud of his acquisitions, and should be. The role of emperor suits him.

I understand something about David that you don't: where he came from. Oh, I know he used to drag you to Christmas celebrations in that rusty-roofed farmhouse in Alabama where a toothless person called Granny lived, but I also know you didn't register it properly. You just saw horror, like the visit when you got a deer tick and some cousin lit a match to your skin to drive it out. Where you might have absorbed an important metaphor about the difficulty of dislodging a bloodsucker, you simply developed a paralyzing fear of bugs. David told me.

David is much more perceptive than you give him credit for. Sure, he may not know which supermodels are dating the urban geniuses behind your beloved booty song, but such things are transient. After he got his scholarship to our common alma mater, he practically majored in observation. He was determined to have the best things, and so he studied his trust-funded fraternity brothers to find out what the best things are. I admit, his insistence on water in glass bottles *con gas* is a little over the top. As is his need to continually scrap and replace home theater equipment. But he does know

how to mix a nice (non-pink) martini, puff thoughtfully at the right sort of cigar, and voice tactfully charming speculations on current events. He tells dirty jokes that risk betraying his background, but I know that it is a calculated, brilliant risk. True emperors are boundary-crossers.

There was a lot to drink at that dinner, as at all the dinners: aperitifs and cocktails, red and white wines, ports and grappas. You should note the contrast between my reaction and Sheila's. I have no idea where he found Sheila, but she was awful. Naming plastic surgeries after a single drink! She pointed me to the bathroom using the wrist with the tennis bracelet, as you predicted. It is true that on my way back from the bathroom, I did allow you to intercept me and take me to your room. I did accept a puff or two of marijuana. That was possibly inadvisable, but please notice that I maintained my composure. I resisted reacting to the drawer you "accidentally" left open to showcase your collection of condoms and psychedelic pipes. Luckily, I have a high tolerance for drugs. Even drinking doesn't do much. It's like trying to stop an elephant's charge with tiny tranquilizers. Not happening. I could polish off all the port in your father's collection and not go down.

I'm telling you for your own benefit. The world is full of tranquilizers.  
Love to you and peace. Once a day, take a deep breath and be thankful.

Sincerely, Aimee.

P.S. You should cut back on the exclamation points. Fitzgerald likened them to laughing at one's own jokes.

*Aimeee!!!! Im sending my mom ther to pik up som thngs i need bc u wont let me talk 2 dad. I mite liv w her nsted but i need dads permisn. It will b ugli when she gets ther, u shud rly let me talk 2 him nsted.*

Dear Lesley,

Your loyalty to your mother is touching, but my understanding is that your

father is never going to grant her custody. Isn't it funny how our instinct for security always drives us mom-ward? Even those of us whose mothers hardly made informed decisions. Lesley, she is married to a groundskeeper. That may seem romantic to you, but in the real world it is a horrible cliché.

You should know that your father has instructed the staff not to let her on the premises. I need hardly remind you that the staff, though all female, can be formidable.

Do you recall that day in late June when we were shopping for thousand-thread-count sheets for the guest house? I was in a terrible mood. Jocelyn had sent me a cheery little e-mail to let me know she'd fallen in love with a trustafarian poet and decided to take a semester off to pursue a career in party planning, could I please find someone to take over the lease? Well, no, I really couldn't. You see, we found an off-campus condo with fitness room and pool, a real senior-year pad. She would take the larger bedroom, and her father, who was ignorant of the local real estate market, would pay the lion's share of the rent. I wasn't going to go crawling back to the sorority house. I couldn't ask my parents. My father works for a company that installs above-ground pools, Lesley. He does not own the company and cannot afford a pool of his own, not even an above-ground one. He and my mother married for love right out of high school and took turns getting college credit. My mother was eventually certified to change diapers at a nursing home. Romantic, no?

Let's talk romance. The elusive Brett started stopping by the house when your dad was at the club. You must've shown him the drawer of forbidden delights before Sheila ratted you out. I could've told you bribing her wasn't going to work. However large your allowance, it is just that. Your dad has the real power.

I saw Brett the other day. I was on my way to the nail place and he was straddling a bench outside the ice cream store, trying to convince some girl in an itty bitty skirt to buy him a cone. That appears to be his M.O. She looked like she might go for it, too. Lesley, you have never been the kind of girl who learns from being told, but I cannot help trying. Brett is a redneck and a likely candidate for venereal disease. You are not in love with him. You were not in love with him that day at the Pig-n-Pie when you described for me the shape of his penis. You were not in love with him during the Fourth of July incident. You were not in love with him the day you told me you trusted

him without a condom. No man is too good for a condom, Lesley. No man, no boy.

If you had ever spent the night in a sorority house bathroom delivering cranberry juice and encouragement to your roommate as she wept on the toilet, you would think twice. It was far easier talking that girl out of her pants than out of UTI-induced hysteria.

That's all for now. Don't mix fluids with those boys at the school. They may come from money, but good sense skips a generation.

Sincerely, Aimee.

*I r m b e r 1 t h i n g f r o m P n P d a y . I r m b r u s e d u c u d n e v e r l u v n e 1 . N o t e v e n m y d a d . H e m i t e l i k e 2 n o t h a t .*

Dear Lez,

Thank goodness you've turned from your cry for mommy to more useful topics.

I think it's worth reviewing the events of the Fourth of July.

Your dad asked you and me to man the office until 4:00, just in case there were any callers. He gave the rest of the hen house the day off. I think the skinny chinless one was having the others over for potluck and sparklers. My invitation got lost in the mail.

Of course, there was nothing to do. We picked the lock on the mini-fridge in your dad's office and ate most of the monogrammed chocolates he gives to clients. There was beer in there, too, but not enough to get excited about. Really, we were sort of lucky, sitting in the air-conditioning all morning. I was content knowing I'd roll up at David's party looking like a scoop of ice cream while Sheila and her tobacco-faced girlfriends sweated makeup into their mojitos. I figured most of the guests would pass out on their lawn chairs, and you could sneak off into the woods to fellate Brett without anyone noticing. But you are not good at waiting, Lesley. In the time it took me to walk from the office to the corner and buy us some magazines, you had summoned Brett. Think about someone else for a change. I will probably never rid my psyche of the image of you and that townie low-life scootching around on your father's desk.



I held my tongue when we drove to the party. Even sitting there in the back seat of your SUV, behind Brett, who blocked my view when he lowered the mirror to check for mustache growth between pimples.

Halfway up the driveway, you turned the car over to Brett and promised to meet him later. You tongue-kissed him and sent him off in your car. This is one of the stupider things I've seen you do. A guy like Brett sees an SUV and instantly wants to take the thing to the woods and get it stuck in mud. It's just instinct.

Yes, I did have a lot of drinks at the Fourth of July party. True. Your dad kept pouring, saying I had to catch up. But don't think I wouldn't have told. I was always going to tell him. I just waited for the right moment. Turns out the right moment was right after you persuaded Sheila, bikini-clad though she'd been swimming in nothing but vodka, to appeal to your father on your behalf. Vodka plus Sheila equals sentimentality, as is known by townie bartenders for miles. So you confided in Sheila about your feelings for Brett. God knows she's probably been in love with her share of fuzzy-lipped rednecks over the years. In the happy moments when everyone was applauding your dad's computer-automated fireworks display (David was really living out an Alabama boy's fantasy with that one), Sheila staggers up in her droopy bikini and suggests that maybe he's being too harsh on you and Brett. I was compelled to reveal that he was not, in fact, being harsh enough.

I do hope you took note of Sheila's exit. Even if you refuse to recognize a positive example, you cannot fail to notice a negative one. Screaming obscenities is no way to go out. When my time comes to say goodbye, I am all elegance. You have to recognize when it's time to pass the torch and move onto the next chapter of your life. That's what I told Gamma Chi president Missy Byrd when I decided not to pay this year's dues.

And you should never count on a man as a long-term solution to your what-to-do-with-self dilemma.

You have my word that your father and I did not kiss that night after the fireworks. We smoked a couple of cigars and dangled our feet in the pool. We talked about your future a little. He is a gentleman, and I am a lady. A practical lady, but a lady nonetheless. I slept in the guesthouse on the thousand-thread-count sheets. They were

awesome.

I won't lie; you're missing a lot this fall. I don't really mind commuting to my classes. We're on campus every weekend, anyway; your dad has a choice tailgate spot in the alumni lot and we've found an excellent caterer. He does these mini-burgers with gorgonzola. Sometimes my sorority friends stop by, and I get to decide whether there's enough to go around.

Your high school, doubtless, goes on, spewing forth its inmates every afternoon at three while you march through an endless succession of mandatory athletics, supervised study time, and bed checks. Perhaps Brett will write you. I'm sure he misses your car. Maybe over Christmas break the two of you can sink it in an imperfectly frozen backwoods pond.

Even if you won't learn anything, at least take heart in the fact that I'm not Sheila. I don't intend to sit by David's pool accumulating skin cancers for the next twenty years. I'm applying to jobs in New York after graduation. Your dad knows this. He's even volunteered his contacts, since I haven't the resources to score the relevant internships. We may make a little trip up there for Thanksgiving, catch the parade, meet people.

Everyone has to keep fighting, Lesley. But, I might as well warn you, if you see me as the person you have to fight, it's really going to ruin Christmas. So buy yourself a decent-looking skirt, choose your battles, and...well, best of luck.

With more sincerity than you'd believe,

Aimee.

*Dear Aimee,*

*Tonight I am looking through my dirty laundry for pennies and dimes so I can have a KitKat. I'm not allowed in the commissary, but there's a fat girl on my hall with a stash under her bed. She'll sell me one for cheap because she still thinks we'll end up as friends or something. My cell phone privileges have been revoked completely.*

*Dad may not give me pocket money, but there are other parents who haven't memorized the rule book. He is so anal. I dare you to hang your wet towel from the patio railing. We stayed in a resort one time where they didn't let you do that, so he thinks it's some kind of universal, classy people rule.*

*So, pocket money. I can get \$ when I need it. Boys will pay me and my friends to kiss sometimes. It's not like it means anything. The important thing about boarding school is to always pretend like you aren't surprised by the shit that goes on. I was pretty good at that already, and sometimes I think that by the time I get out of here I might be a cold bitch like you. But I still like to rage. I know you think I don't have some big philosophy for my life like you do. I just think getting wasted and having fun are the only things to live for.*

*I just hope you and your old soul live to see the day that me and the young souls build bonfires of monogrammed stationary with a mighty exclamation point scream. U shall no r rath, lol.*

*I have a best friend now. Alexis. She's also my favorite kiss-for-money partner. With some girls it feels like chewing old gum, but not Alexis. We can fake it really well: we roll around on the floor and claw and moan. There are some times when our eyes meet, just for the quickest second, and we both know that we are totally getting the guys off and we find this so freaking funny. We never fuck it up by laughing, though. You have to have a really serious look on your face the whole time.*

*One time, Alexis stole a scalpel from the bio lab, and we carved little anarchy A's on our knees. We got in a minor fight about who would keep the scalpel after, but I ended up letting her have it. I have lots of nice pointy things already. Which brings me to my POINT (lol again): I love safety pins. They're totally sharp, and they're not even contraband. Did you know that with a safety pin and some ink you can give yourself a tattoo? Guys in prison do it all the time. Of course, I'm saving my tattoo cherry for my eighteenth birthday. I'm going to get a cartoon Tasmanian devil on my inner thigh.*

*But, anyway, safety pins can be very useful.*

*Here's the thing: I know you don't think I listen to your boring stories about your goody-goody college life, and I usually don't (you always start talking during the good songs on the radio). But. But! I was listening that day when we'd had all those beers and we were talking about sex stuff. I asked if it was easy to get the pill in college, and you said*

*you weren't on it because you didn't have a boyfriend and you didn't want to risk getting fat. And I know you're way too prissy to carry anything in your purse. So I figured that some night, when you and my dad were alone and had too much wine and you decided not to go back to the guesthouse, you would remember my special drawer. I'm totally positive you'd remember the drawer, even though you pretended like you were so above it and not impressed. I'm guessing you'd help yourself, just like you did with everything else that was mine.*

*But the night before school, when you were out in the guesthouse and everything was still, for one last night, mine, I took a safety pin to every one of those condoms. So I'm actually looking forward to seeing you over Christmas break. Skinny girls like you always start showing really early; this girl at my old school looked like a freakish alien pod.*

*Soon I will be eighteen (joke's on you with the age difference. I got held back in third grade because my bitch teacher sucked at explaining multiplication). Brett and I are going on a road trip, and if we find a place that looks good we'll stay. I'll stop by and see you before I leave. I'm not going to congratulate you. I'm not going to tell you what my mom told me about how there's something wrong with my dad's spoooge so that he can only have daughters. I'm just going to look you in the eye and smile and tell you, Aimee, how fat you look in your skirt.*

*XOXO!!!*

# The Story of My Own Forgiveness

Daniel Lowe

I.

I would rather surrender my tongue  
than any Sunday afternoon when loose  
light came in from the street, and,  
amidst the myth of our ease,  
the newspapers had strewn themselves  
along the bedside, and only  
our promises could be heard  
above the murmuring of headlines.

II.

*“Congress Funds Attack Helicopter”*  
*“Bosox Win Game Number Six”*  
*“Fire In Homewood Kills Seven”*  
*“Man Falls Eleven Stories and Lives”*

III.

Living, fallen, I remember, to impress you,  
describing our love-making  
as a catharsis, and you said  
that sounded like something caught  
under a tire, like the thud  
of the Sunday paper where, in dreams  
years later, you quoted my absolution  
a thousand stories below the fold.

Untitled  
Coulton Evans



# Grid With Drifters

Gretchen Stengel

On blue-lit screens:  
idol talk and no one listens

Someone dangles in your dream—  
first all of her, then just a hand, a foot,  
hang from some other frame

*am expediting dinner*

There's a cutout in the sky  
where blue used to be

She graphs her own symptoms  
as you drift into thin words

*am expediting sleep*

January moon  
where June used to be

Almost a peregrine circles back  
to the house with sorrow in its drawer

# Collateral

Kristina C. Mottla

Drywall holds up the framed cutlery,  
call it quittance what you will.

Down there they dice aged steaks like onions,  
muscles in a bulging fanfaronade.

Once, we staked together. Cheap pottery  
whatnots, wall hangings hung

Faceless, corner table flowers, watered up.  
Your silk knot got clumsy.

\*

It's not every day that our  
Deeds swell into retail  
Art, then fade. It self-titles,

“Chuckle-Punch in Odd  
Measure,” quasi-branded  
As ecchymotic brilliance.

\*

The sidewalk cracks again, patches again.  
We are left to morning tasks, underscored.  
Excellent causerie, down the town—  
The loose string settles it. You make a drink.  
Here, my lighter. Call it a match, if you will.

# Apology

Erika Rodriguez

Excuse me; I've forgotten how to write.  
It must have slithered away  
To those great Texan plains I paid  
No attention to, it must have gone  
To their green and gold pages  
While I slept.  
And there it stays, living  
On cornfield mice and lazy sparrows,  
Coughing up white bones,  
As always.

Excuse these awkward images  
Stumbling from the page to your egg-eyes  
My eyes are stones, birthing nothing  
but the crisping fossil outlines  
Of some long-legged life who once laid  
Wide-eyed eggs, staring at the bony moon  
Wondering if my writing's dull fangs  
Had gotten to it yet.

Excuse the skeletal letters, the stench  
Of earth feeding on rot.  
You did not expect a battlefield,  
A graveyard. I did not expect  
To die so often, leaving  
Numb shells caught in the cold for you  
To find between your fingers and wonder  
What life this must have been.

# Sunday, Walking

Justina McCandless

We forgot an hour last night  
So I walked to church next day  
Late and alone

The streets were overwhelmed by  
Color-tired, moisture-less leaves  
That the loud wind  
Threw against me  
Like birds fleeing a storm

I held my mustard-yellow dress  
To my knees  
And feared for a moment  
That I'd be buried by  
The foliage

The people in the church  
Wouldn't miss me  
They wouldn't uncloset their tired eyes  
From prayers,  
Look around  
And wonder where I was

They would keep on praying,  
Too weary to be aware

And since my outfit  
Matched the exact shade of  
The season  
I would be un-findable  
And, like the streets,  
Overwhelmed

To quiet the nagging metronome  
in her womb, its baton  
like an icepick tick. tock. ticking  
against the thinning plush  
pink, she delves into the corpse  
of her marriage.

She carves out the penis,  
omnipotent thermometer,  
snaps the fingers like wishbones,  
setting free the wallet that commands  
the centrifuge to spin.  
Slicing from chin to belly, her stiletto  
takes the body, coaxes out hope  
like steam from a Christmas turkey.

And when she comes up empty,  
terrified of living alone,  
what trails behind  
is not the pitter patter  
of darling feet, but love's remnants  
shoddily sewn—a keening,  
lumbering Frankenstein.

# September 4th for Beginners

Bianca Diaz

*“The dead aren’t the problem.  
The dead can look after themselves.”  
—Ali Smith*

Cranes pipe up, the song in their throats  
like a stuttering siren. The arrival  
of a thunderstorm’s gust front has them  
jittery as poodles.

I know this kind of sky:  
gleamless, submarine gray, quiet.  
The watchword is grief. This grief  
is mystic, revelatory, shoves me—face  
smashed up against a window—  
into the present.

This sky needs green. Algae green.  
Frog song green. Jungle green. Machetes  
are beautiful dumb things rising, falling,  
slicing fronds and weeds, the occasional  
spider web. Mallard green. Unripe  
plantain green. Chlorophyll green.

But this grief remains, becomes my relative;  
a strange uncle with gaudy medallions nestled  
in the center of his chest, the posture of a well-meaning  
terrorist, gloomy seaweed eyes about to leak.

# Chesapeake Psalms

Adam Tavel

I.

O Lord, deer & shard  
let me bury with both hands  
these perjuries, half-truths

let there be a calm  
like an infant napping, in & out  
& in again of small air

let there be a cool shadow  
of burial mound, a departure

II.

Wool cloak, foam sword,  
a small knight stranded  
shieldless between eight

& nine. The winter wind  
early for its interview, my pail  
pylon orange, black eyes

& teeth, it slowly filled with Snickers,  
Mars Bars, old lady chews  
I chucked straight in the wastebasket.





# Ripe Peaches, Coyote, Sour Milk

Red Shuttleworth

The human face empties  
into shadows...  
where the smile truly shows,  
or the wrinkled forehead  
and the split lip:  
some weep  
upon their sugar.

+

Oh, sweet first kiss:  
damp leather and her breath  
was art for the future. . . years and years.  
A rain shower on stone tile.  
It was all heavy with weightlessness  
to carry for a lifetime of escape runs.

=

I have seen you sweet-weep  
at my return  
and I was ashamed  
how you opened your door,  
shrugged, and smiled  
moon atop moon  
at every dry creek bed.

# I Would Listen to You

Alice Pero

I am sure that I would listen to you

if I weren't sworn to finding  
the fabric of me

not in  
blankets  
newspapers  
old bricks

I would be interested in hearing about the  
composition of

molecules  
rusty chairs  
even raindrops

Except that I just sweetened the call  
of that bird  
without a single thing

# Pantaloon

Henry Rappaport

*for John Fluevog*

The special reception was packed  
with perfect teeth and designer shoes.  
For starters the bubbles were free  
but then the drinks were two bucks each.

With designer teeth and perfect shoes  
purchased in season at full price,  
when the drinks were two bucks each  
fans swirled around the room.

Worn in season and bought at full price  
exotic tattoos and black dresses  
full of fans worked the room  
as the curator regaled the town.

Exotic tattoos and little dresses,  
in conversations hard to hear  
under the amplified curator who toasted  
raised glasses turned upside down.

In conversations we could not hear  
out of a common past near and far  
glasses were lifted and drained  
then righted & set down.

For a past that did not fit  
stories were polished  
as the room thinned  
and a new past was digitized.

Memories that fit like perfect teeth,  
little black dresses, and well-designed shoes  
thinned the room as a new past was digitized  
to tattoo the fans near and far.

# Broken Spigot

Ashley Washington

On the front porch, I sit and watch you,  
bent over, turning the frozen handle of the spigot  
left and right and then left again.

Water droplets fall from the iron mouth and vanish  
when they hit the seam of your pants,  
soaking slowly into the woven fibers.

My eyes narrow and watch every drop  
plummet, and you don't even notice  
as your pants become the sponge.

The fabric absorbs every ounce,  
hides it away from the world around you.  
You are oblivious to the threads that loosen and unravel.

Fixated on moving that handle,  
you push it in directions it wasn't meant to turn  
until finally, it snaps off.

You look at me as if it were my fault,  
dumbfounded that all this time you tried to fix  
something that eventually just fell apart.

# Cat Lady

Madeline Savarese



# Inerasable Memory

Katharyn Howd Machan

*after Yoon Kyung Lee*

Not like a beach, where you write  
the name of your beloved  
with a stick, then stomp your bare  
feet all around it to make  
a frilly heart. Not that.

Not like a sidewalk, where you plunge  
one illicit finger into still soft  
gray and carve the date of your  
first kiss with the perfect man  
you'll marry. Not that.

Not a photograph nor a carnival sketch  
nor a sheet of music nor a rhyming poem  
folded under your scented pillows  
in a bed where you sleep alone.  
No white sand. No soft cement.

An absence like a hollow box  
filled with what was laughter.  
Two shoes still side by side  
in sunlight from an open window  
on a shadowed wooden floor.

# Inhabitation

Helen Wickes

It's when I'm climbing upstairs, late winter,  
hauling myself up in that familiar shuffle,  
grabbing the handrails, that I know I *become*  
*the two of you*, in my own my bent body,  
so odds with lumbering, and wish you could see  
this late, gorgeous sunlight. How I miss your voices,  
*your only bodily selves*. I've no home movie,  
no tape—the frail record stored in my brain.

I summon pieces and play them: of *this you*  
grumbling about *the goddamn cold* while you  
stomp the snow and stoop to set going, for us,  
that blazing fire, while *the other you* limps down  
to find a snack, your dozen gold bangles jangling,  
as if some gaudy harem queen just dropped in.

# Homicide Artist

Robert J. Tillett

They come to me as numbers from the morgue,  
for me to discover them among the bones.  
I use clay to reconstruct their last expression,  
or perhaps, the one after, the one which takes  
the most coaxing—the edges of it coming  
like a song from a long way off, molding  
itself to mandible, maxilla, frontal lobe.  
In silence, except for the sound of my feet  
on the tile.

I use no calipers, no measurements.  
Only my need to see the face, the spirit  
pulled awake, taut beneath the painted clay.  
Today, a man, twenty-two I'd guess,  
skull and spine found downtown  
along the bank below the river bridge.  
The coccyx snags my smock, the spine's  
sacral curve spreads its hood, the question  
asked. I separate head from tail, seed  
from first root, returning them,  
momentarily, to their absolute.

I'm said to be  
eighty percent effective, but I measure  
myself by how far I have yet to go,  
by the clay's thickness, by the digits  
scrawled on this manila tag,  
teeth glaring in the examination light,  
gulls' white shrieks along the pier. I live  
for the questions his bones raise,  
to measure my worth by this skull's breadth  
and by my hands' ache.

Some nights, in bed, I see the old man  
in my sleeping husband's face. Sometimes,  
the young man, boy. I trace his jaw line,  
nose, lightly touch the bridge, memorize  
his eyelids. He knows me well enough  
to know. But when I close my eyes  
I see a single face. Always one  
I've never seen alive on earth.

# Locked Ward

Fredrick Zydek

Faceless as water,  
the attendant  
brings three pills.

I saddle up my thoughts,  
ask if they hold  
three great truths.

I tell him men  
with fewer chromosomes  
than pumpkins rule the world,

that the pills bring  
a demon wind  
that rides on real wings,

that they spin webs  
no spider dare call home.  
“Flush them down?”

he asks, tucking  
the pills into my hand.  
I tell him that trees

have an erotic value,  
that his gifts bring a lethargy  
to my glands I am unable

to name. But I pretend  
the pills are lemon drops,  
prepare for the views from nowhere  
to descend one pill at a time.

# Nocturne

Heidi Hart

Outside my window, car crash as the moth  
keeps pattering on walls and ceiling,

vanishes when I turn on the light; does it  
prefer the shadow world? A crowd forms

in the street. Car's flashers on. I touch  
the Uighur box my father's brought from

western China—butterfly in green and gold,  
Psyche's totem body. Eros long gone

after their collision. Burnt flesh. Girl outside  
in a flared skirt, her hands over her mouth.

I cover my singed heart, turn off the light.  
Moth, teach me how to love the dark.

# Close Shaves

Russell Rowland

I shaved desultorily at sunrise, having no need  
to be presentable. Stubble testifies, tonight:  
if this uncle grew a beard, it would be white.

Forty years ago, my good college try at one  
revealed a bald spot on the jaw—right here—  
conspicuous, unappetizing as a case of mange.

Bedridden Mother turned her face to the wall  
when I brought my bristle home at end of term,  
along with recently-acquired pacifist beliefs,

Bob Dylan's and Phil Collins' latest albums,  
and baggage represented by an innocent coed  
of Quaker nurture who left nuts, and twigs,

and treats, and tiny poems, at my dorm door—  
husband-hunting. I had her Saturday panties  
off before she realized she was horizontal.

They say a judge is more favorably disposed  
when you come clean-shaven. If the embalmer  
nicks you with his razor, there's no bleeding.

# Canoeing on Our Anniversary

Marcia L. Hurlow

This morning the woods flicker with deer,  
the river bank lined with turtles.  
Patches of sun angle through evergreens,  
tick at the wake of my canoe. Alone  
I bend the paddle into silence;  
underneath, still disturbances.

That day I had watched for mud  
to swirl up like cream to the surface  
of coffee. Now bright ripples mirror  
the shadows twelve feet down: minnows  
swim in long curves like his eyebrows,  
his brief smile as I had protested  
his plan to dive in for my ring.

Below, grey moss, water thin, leans back  
with the river current. Like me,  
it is rooted to a granite  
bed of repeated, impenetrable  
memory that will not rise up.

# Olive: Aubade & Elegy

Richard Cecil

Every night at three a.m. she'd pace  
around our bed to drive bad creatures out,  
then climb the bedside chair and take her place  
between us until dawn. Then, waking, she'd meow,

in her clear, high soprano—*Milk! Milk!*  
until I stumbled downstairs with her dish  
to the kitchen while she burrowed in your silk  
nightgown-covered thighs and purred for Friskies,

which I brought her on a silver platter,  
with muffins that you hollowed with your thumbs—  
the tenderest bits—and rolled in melted butter,  
and held up to her lips: “Here’s your crumbs!”

Now we wake alone, too late, together,  
eat dry muffins, and talk about the weather.



# Rings

Linda Aldrich

I.

Six rings too big, but not turning  
by some clever ruse. Taped?  
Is it the hand over hand, the peaceful  
placement? I am done now, the hands  
seem to say. I won't pull your hair.  
*Doesn't she look like she'll wake up  
and yell at us?* my sister whispers.  
We move back. We can't get over her profile  
against gray silk, an engraved coin  
we must carry. *She looks good,* my sister says,  
*like she's going shopping. Look at her lips;  
she's almost smiling. Like she's pulled one  
over on us,* I say, *like she's not done with us yet.*  
*Yeah,* my sister says, *yeah.*

II.

Diamond and pearl to the youngest,  
wedding band to the middle,  
engagement ring to me. Parting gifts,  
each a momentary whim, as we were  
just something she did once, twice, three times.  
We sulk over our velvet boxes. With me, she remains  
engaged to be married. If I throw the ring away,  
she can go to college, fall in love  
with someone other than the quiet man.  
If I wear the ring, it will hang from a chain  
around my throat, already tight  
from not speaking, the ring marks  
where she pressed them, still pulsing.

# Blue Shepherd

Linda Aldrich

The nurse holds you down,  
blankets so tight, you can only thrash  
your head. *There's been a change this morning,*  
she says. Your look says I am not  
what you want. *Bluuuuue shepherd,*  
you scream, *Bluuuuuuue shepherd.*  
I am five again. I have failed again.

The nurse says you need Haldol.  
Haldol or hell, I'm thinking. Are we not there?  
*Bluuuuuuue shep herd. Bluuuuue shep herd.*

Is it the blue-eyed daughter you need,  
the daughter who wears blue well?  
Should I call her back from Nebraska?  
Is it blue-smocked Rose, the nurse you think  
is Irish? Shall I search the sad privacy  
of each dying room until I find her?

Can you feel my hands  
here  
on your chest?

Is it something in your china cabinet  
I should bring, sacred display  
of *do not touch* and *careful*, curved glass,  
cobalt bluebirds, the blue perfume vial  
from Paris I broke, bluer than the evening  
you realized you would never go there;

or the blue cup with Shirley Temple's  
smiling face fading, disappearing  
into your childhood?  
Is it the smallest of the glass thimbles,  
Delft windmill, tiny Don Quixote  
lifting his tiny blue sword?

Did a spirit find you in your never-dark  
night, did you hear a gurney pass your door?  
Did the nurses seem gone, a blue wash  
on everything, cards propped  
on the windowsill, flowers sinking  
into their silhouettes, and someone  
standing by the flowers, watching?

What turned blue to good  
in my mind, helped me say  
the barely remembered.  
It didn't matter I wasn't perfect,  
the cup ranneth before the table  
was prepared, there were no  
paths of righteousness.  
When you closed your eyes,  
were pastures green,  
waters still?  
Did I help you walk  
where we now dwell?  
Are we restoreth?

# Echo

## Bernadette Geyer

It's like she said *Here, have some pain,*  
and when I adjusted to that she said *Here*

*have some more,* ratcheting up  
the transducer's pressure against my chest

to find not just my heart, but each valve—  
mitral, tricuspid, pulmonary and aortic.

At night, I have heard the misfire,  
the subtle sucking back one chamber makes,

unwilling to let everything swim away from it.  
Then she said *I have to press harder here,*

*trick it into seeing between your ribs.*  
And now I envy Adam his stolen rib, his lack of breasts.

The nurse says *don't breathe so deeply*  
and I am surprised to be breathing at all.

I pant like a dog to keep my lungs out of the way,  
as she presses my breast aside. The heart's valves

echo, reply. I want to tell her *NO, my heart*  
*is not so hidden; look here and here,*

but still the pressing continues.  
My heart remains merely a ghost

to the transducer's sonar that pings  
the cavity of my thorax. What good

is a four-chambered heart—this hornets' nest  
of blood and faulty valves? Its complexity

masks its fragility. This nurse, does she  
consider herself a detective? an explorer? the Cold War

intelligentsia? Her hand lifts: I suck air  
deep into my lungs, which buoy me up

above the pain as I notice my clenched fist  
against my face, a numbing in my tensed left hip.

Even with its redundancies, the four-chambered heart  
is inadequate. Its prolapse sucks the departing blood

back into its chambers, like when you embrace  
someone in farewell but secretly snip a lock of their hair.

The nurse rolls me a little towards her and says  
*Now for your abdominal artery, I will look through*

*your stomach,* lowering her hand again onto my body.  
I have forgotten how to move on my own.

# Diva

## Fiona Sze-Lorrain

She sings about secrets taken to the grave,  
her voice scatters an octave to the four winds.  
She claims she opens her windows without ulterior motives,  
improvising the same chanson according to weather.  
When the phone rings, she answers *Allegro ma non troppo*.  
She listens to her silent *fin-de-siècle* radio,  
saves an aria for the postman returning undelivered mail.  
From heroine to villainess, her arms flutter in two  
different colored, over-the-elbow satin gloves.  
She pours cough syrup into her Chanel handbag.  
Toying with the position of a fake mole on her face,  
she eats her scores when she can't recall the exact  
years of her past triumphs at *Wiener Staatsoper*,  
*Theater am Kärntnerto*, *Opéra de Paris*...  
With an assassin's smile, she waters her plants  
while scratching the armpits.  
Purple lipstick means she bit her lip  
by accident chewing on a pear  
carved out of porcelain.  
From the balcony, she drains macaroni.  
Do not insult her *folle*, she'll weep and call an ambulance.  
Empty demijohn clasped in her bosom, she hiccups  
relentlessly and sleepwalks down the corridor.

Yesterday she was Catherine the Great  
in undersized sheath dress and green push-up bra.  
Today she metamorphosizes into Athena  
draped in second-hand, ready for an audience.  
Come, let's take a picture for an exclusive!  
Not so close-up please, slightly farther...  
Who are you?  
Marguerite. Dorothy. Perhaps Gretchen or Julia.  
*Röslein, Röslein, Röslein rot* —

# The Constancy of Rivers

Eric Paul Shaffer

The flow seems ceaseless. On and on, the water runs till the trees lean and sun tilts in the spray. Quiet laps the banks, yet the hush of rivers isn't silence. They silence

everything else and seem to still the forest. All calls and rustles or songs are lost in the roar, or leap suddenly from its rush as fish leap from a surface that conceals them.

The stream is so swift that sunlight itself should be dragged downriver, tugged along the staccato of stones, but the rays are lazy and lean where the sun leans, touching only

what is glimpsed through a glassy shifting surface and never stops changing the same way, yet never stops. Such constancy is as terrible as foreboding father gods are,

but the hush takes us by the ears and leads us to the river, where sunlight pierces the heart and illuminates the rocks and whatever falls for a moment into the flow.

# Duende

Selva Rolin

Yesterday she burnt her *naranja-chocolate* toast, then laughed at herself and swatted fumes like flies.

In slippers and gypsy skirt she helmed broom across floor, eyes unanchored, oaring across waves of rhythmical memory.

We hung dripping laundry while rumbling drums bantered outside, and *Olé's* of Barcelona slammed glass against walls, whetting our urges.

She armed up the bucketful of liquid cobweb and rainbow-sparkling suds; with a wholehearted "*Callaos, pesados!*" she hurled it over the gossipy balcony.

A clowder of drunks ceased spirited songs of victory like wind-up toys vexed by water. We ducked behind wrought-iron chairs, dodged a barrage of vengeance.

Now she lies here, motionless and accidental, cased in this frilly, dolor-allaying lace. How funny I feel, grieving for her absence underneath Romanesque flying buttresses.

I still hear her, polka-dotted furious, barreling down the hall: splayed fingers, soul-tortured, dignity of a bull; striking sensuous *palmas* in salty-sea air and stamping on conquered wood.

*Knock! Knock! "Despiértate! Wake up! Your alarm is going off! Vamo' ya! Asi se baila!"*

I kiss her black, kinky hair, extemporaneous and precise like emotion-seizing guitar strings; she enters me, supernatural and expressive, and moves the soles of my feet, purging me of my doubt.

*Ya lo sé...que estás aquí.*

# Remember Me

## Selva Rolin

The jasmine swoops over arches like perfumed angels opening breath in stars. A pair of derelict ladies with rough elbows, wearing residential muumuus, lean over the stone wall, puffing slackly on yesterday's butts and squashing abandoned milk cartons like bugs. The door squeaks behind me and I nod at the nurse, who's nibbling on cherries and knot-tying stems.

"Here to see Mrs. Porter?" she sniffs. "Not even related and look how motivated you is." I pull a romance novel from my cartoon purse and flash her its fictional core; she whiffs the scent it airs. "Love the smell of a new book! *Big print?* You an angel," she says, and jots down the time. "An hour, Ms. Alaina. Then we all going to dinner."

I initial myself in and amble down the hall until I reach Mrs. Porter's room. She's in her routine dirt-dipped robe and lime furry slippers, shoveling her hand in the cage and scooping up a panicky, violet-faced parakeet. She forces him to the other side. "There," she says, and lets go. She shuffles her hand out. "Talk to the mirror so you won't get lonely."

The parakeet swells like a blue plum and ruffles her grasp from its feathers.

"I like to move him every now and then. He prefers that side because it's closer to the window but if I let him dream too much about flying I'll lose my friend."

I sit in the rocking chair by her bed.

She examines my face to see if I'm staying. "Who are you?"

she asks, and hand-wipes her nose.

"Alaina. The girl who comes to see you every week and reads to you," I remind her.

She snatches a charcoal curl that springs from my hairline. "You sure have loopy hair," she tells me and drops it.

"Thank you," I say. "It's in the genes."

"It wasn't a compliment. I don't like curly hair." She sits on the bed, fistfights her pillow, and gets comfortable. She points to the bottom dresser drawer. "Reach in there and grab me a banana—no, make that two. We'll eat one together."

"I'm not hungry," I tell her, firm and sure.

"Nonsense. We won't get into trouble. Two bananas, quick!"

I open the drawer and discover three golden bunches sitting next to a stack of mocha-fingerprinted See's Candies boxes.

"Hand me one of those too," she orders. "Step on it! We don't want to be obvious here!"

I pass her the box and she tears into it like a thief about to rob jewels from a display case.

"My brother-in-law brought these by today. He never comes to see me unless he wants something. I know what he's trying to do—make me sign over the house—but I won't do it. He dug up my garden, my beautiful peach trees... roses, irises, all gone. He talks about installing a pool." Mrs. Porter fishes out two chocolates and plops them in her mouth. Brown sprinkles dangle from her saliva-cornered lips as she chews. "Here." She refuses to swallow until I take one. "You worried 'bout your figure? Better not have kids then. You want kids?"

"No, I don't think so." I stick the truffle in my mouth.

"Why?" she itches to know.

"I guess I'm scared I won't be a good mother." I suck slowly so she won't force me to eat more.

"It's a real shame. Those who can, don't want 'em, and those who can't, want 'em like nothing else in this world. One day I was late. Didn't have a period. Saw I was fatter—a real Christmas turkey. I went to the doctor and he sent me home with news

of a tumor instead of a baby. My husband never was the same. Couldn't do what God intended him to do. Had no options after that." She chomps on another bonbon, and the bird beaks at the cage as if there were a way to press himself through and take flight out the window. "A man'll be happy if you give him everything he asks for." She peels a banana like old skin from a past life. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-nine."

"Twenty-nine?"

"Twenty-nine."

"When I was twenty-nine I was flying a Cessna 150E all by myself. Used to take it from here to Eureka and back. Just me, my plane, and the open sky." Her attention drives to the clouds.

"Wow. That's really impressive."

"Wasn't normal for a woman in my time, but I didn't let that break me." She prods me with the chocolate box.

"No, thanks." I hold up a *stop* hand, but she frowns and won't budge, so I give in.

"You need to take a hot iron to that hair of yours." She siphons the liquor from a dark pink-striped square.

"I don't have one. My religion rejects it."

"You don't iron? Never heard of such a thing. The world isn't what it used to be." She bites on her banana and stares at the parakeet, which is minding outside bird traffic.

"Why are you here today?"

"I told you." I stiffen my toes and begin to rock.

"I don't remember." She scratches her head. Her eyebrows fall into a wrinkle of confusion.

"I'm here for our weekly visit." The chocolate melts over my teeth and mingles with the mushy banana. A sharp sting reminds me of the cavity I have to get filled. "I'm going to read to you. Is that all right?"

"Sure. Have we met before?" Mrs. Porter's eyes dazzle with fear.

I give her a Kleenex and point to the chocolate smudge on her face. "Yes," I promise her. "Months ago."

"Why do you want to read to me when I don't know who you are?"

"I'm your friend. It's okay if you can't remember me." I slip the book on her bed. "Look what I found."

"A romance novel!" she squeals and lifts the book to appraise its cover. "I love romances!"

"I know." I palm the sweat from my neck. "This one's special. I ordered it for you."

"Is it hot and steamy?"

"The worst I could find." I sit back, pleased that we've made it past the hundredth introduction and she's accepted me once again.

She runs her hand over the front, plants the book on her lap, and thumbs through it. "Oh wonderful! Nothing like a randy, seedy love scene! Is it in large print?"

"Yep. You won't have to struggle while reading this one."

"Never mind that," she says, and turns to the first page. "Oh, please read! Will you start it now, please? I'm anxious to get to the cheap, romantic part! Silly, I know."

I hoist the book as a proud trooper minus any battlefield qualms and clear my throat. The words inch off my tongue, break free and wing off in freedom and song, like the pulsing desire of the parakeet to flee, and the tireless shackles that wither her memory. After twenty minutes of reading, both of us swept up in story and spirit, the nurse pops in. Mrs. Porter chucks her cheetah peel at me and it dives between my thighs and tumbles to the ground.

"*Another banana?*" the nurse locks her hands on her hips. "Keep it up, Mrs. Porter, and we're going to have to put you on a diabetic diet." The nurse is an uptight mother targeting me. "It's eating time, Ms. Alaina. We're heading to the diner now."

"It's not a *diner*," Mrs. Porter pouts. "It's a hellhole that serves rotten food." She slams shut the lids of her robe.

I place the book beside the glass buttercup lamp. "See you next week, Lily," I say, feeling sad that she'll forget our time spent the second I leave and hoping she'll retain my voice, fresh as a singing souvenir, and taste the liberation when she opens those pages.

# There Are Parallel Lines

Paul Ray Christian



# Rigormortryst

Patrick Moran

Only you can be late, & because I can't tell late from later or early from on time or roses from chocolates or charm bracelets from handcuffs or apologies from arguments, you leave your watch on the bureau, next to the owl who wears your glasses while you sleep. Herodotus refers to certain horny embalmers, so the three day rule was invented & ignored. Like me, the author of *The Histories* couldn't understand poor self-esteem or the finer points of the all night pity party. After you've done your business you light two cigarettes, union gray & confederate blue, drifting & sifting a tale only the dead can swallow.



# Start 800 Relay

## Leslie Pietrzyk

On Easter Sunday, Jason Briggs overheard his mother tell his stepfather, Ron, “I don’t care what you do, just get them out of here.” Then she ran to the bathroom to puke again. Ron followed, but she shouted at him to leave her alone. She’d been tired and cranky and pukey and yelling at everyone lately, even Ron, through he smiled through all of it.

Fifteen minutes later, Jason and his younger brother, Seth, were in the minivan, and Ron was pulling out of the townhouse complex. Ron wore running clothes, which meant he was going to jog the boring track around the high school football field. There was nothing for him and Seth to do there, except run along the yard markers on the field or search the litter under the bleachers, hoping to find something interesting. Once there was a dead crow with its head chopped off, and another time Seth found a folded-up five-dollar bill, but mostly it was just trash: empty water bottles, McDonald’s bags, single gloves, and cigarette butts.

Ron pulled into the empty parking lot where the sign said, “Reserved for Teachers.” No one else was here, which wasn’t a surprise, since it was Easter and normal people were at home eating jelly beans and Peeps.

As they headed to the straight part of the track, Jason watched Ron fiddle with his watch, pushing buttons that made soft beeps. Seth was behind them, walking in a stupid way, setting one foot exactly in front of the other, heel touching toe. He made slow progress, falling farther behind, until Ron grabbed Jason’s shoulder, and they stopped, giving Seth a chance to catch up. Jason waited for Ron to yell at Seth to walk normal, but he just kept poking at his watch. Jason’s mother had bought it for the boys to give

to Ron on his birthday in February.

Finally Seth caught up, and Ron said, “I’ll run for twenty-thirty minutes,” which Jason knew meant thirty.

Seth snapped his fingers soundlessly. He’d been practicing for a week and still couldn’t snap. “Maybe we’ll see a rainbow,” he said.

“You need rain for a rainbow,” Ron said. “Rain and sun mixed together.” He grabbed hold of the wire fence that surrounded the outside of the track, then bent one leg backward at the knee and grasped that ankle with his free hand. Stretching seemed to Jason even more boring than running.

Seth tucked his fingers into fists. “It can’t rain and be sunny at the same time,” he said.

“Can too,” Ron said, checking his watch.

Jason trudged to the stairs leading up to the metal bleachers and climbed to the third row. Sometimes there were other people here, and he watched them run around the track, hoping they’d blaze past his stepfather. Sometimes football players from the high school or men with no shirts and shaved heads pounded their way up and down the bleachers, so Jason felt the vibrations under his butt. Sometimes dads and kids were laughing and tossing a football or a Frisbee on the field.

Then Ron jogged onto the track, his usual lane number four. Ron’s shorts were way too short, made of dark, silky material—like Jason’s mother’s nightgowns—but Ron had explained that running shorts were always that way.

Jason stared up at two fading jet trails that crisscrossed in the blue sky as if the planes had barely missed each other. He had been on a plane once, in first grade, the only time his grandmother had taken him to visit his father in Arizona. The visit hadn’t gone well—his father had a huge, black dog that barked and snapped at him, and his grandmother didn’t like that his father smoked in the apartment. Finally she checked the two of them into a motel, and all Jason did was swim in the pool with his father while his grandmother sat in a plastic chair, yelling at Jason to keep away from the deep water and not to play so rough. His father had given him a square sucker that had a tequila worm embedded in the center, but his grandmother made him throw it away before he got down to it. Seth had been too young to come.

Jason closed his eyes. When he opened them again, Ron was on the opposite side of the track, far away enough that Jason couldn't read the writing on his T-shirt: "Give Peas a Chance." His mother had explained how that was a pun, but Jason still thought it was stupid.

Seth sat in the dirt at the bottom of the bleacher stairs, trying to snap his fingers. Seth's hair was very blond, very straight. Sometimes his mother would just grab Seth and bury her nose in the top of his head, sniffing. She didn't do that to Jason, probably because his hair was brown like his father's.

Twenty minutes was forever, thirty even longer. Jason stared at the dirt through the bleacher slats: 7-Eleven cups, Twinkies wrappers, a crumpled bag of pretzels. Someday he would go to this high school. Before his mother had married Ron last September, they had lived in Oakton, where there was a different high school he would have gone to. There were high schools in Arizona, where his dad was, of course.

He tugged the sleeves of his Redskins sweatshirt down over his hands and grabbed the ribbed edges with his fingers, pulling tight so his arms looked very stiff and straight. Then he swung his arms back and forth, the way Ron's arms moved when he ran. Jason was one of the fastest kids in his fourth grade class. Whenever they did races or relays in gym, it always ended up between him and Nick Taylor. Last week, it had been him. He hadn't told anyone, because his mother would say something like, "Yeah? How's your math homework?"

Seth squeezed in next to Jason and snapped his fingers pathetically against Jason's ear. "Did you hear it?"

Jason jerked back and popped his hands out of his sleeves.

"Hear it?" Seth repeated. "Hear it?"

Sometimes Ron called Seth "little genius," but it was sarcasm. Like, "Pipe down, little genius," when Seth was asking too many questions. Who was so stupid it took a whole week to learn how to snap fingers?

Jason slapped away his brother's hand and gave him a quick shove.

Seth jumped off the seat and howled. Then he started sobbing and thrashing his arms at Jason, who fended him off.

"Shut up," Jason said, but Ron had heard and was running across the football

field toward them. Jason squinted up at the sky again. It was almost the blue of swimming pool water. Seth went on sobbing and hiccupping in that gulping, gasping way that made adults worry he was choking to death.

"What's the matter?" Ron called.

"Nothing," Jason said automatically.

"Nothing," Seth echoed.

Ron took the metal steps two at a time. "What now?"

Jason clanged down the bleachers, out onto the track. He kicked one heel against the scratchy black surface, waited for Ron to come and yell at him. Ron hated when his run was interrupted. He ran five times a week, barging back into the house at night all red and sweaty, rummaging around the kitchen for Gatorade and power bars, things Jason and Seth weren't allowed to eat because his mother bought them special for Ron. Jason was even supposed to ask before eating a banana, because those were mostly for Ron, too. He and his mother would be on the couch watching TV, and then Ron would huff in, and she'd hurry into the kitchen, and Jason would be left alone on the couch, listening to his mother's laugh rise clear and happy over the rowdy laughs on the TV.

There were a number of lines and arrows painted in white on the track, indicating where to begin various races, and Jason walked to the spot in lane one that read, "start 800 relay." He stood for a moment, feeling alone on the big track, under the empty sky, not even a cloud, the jet trails now melted away. He lifted one leg and grabbed his ankle behind his back, stretching the way Ron did. But that felt awkward, so instead he hunched over, balancing himself with both hands on the sun-warmed track. Jason thought, *Ready, set, go*, then started running as fast and as hard as he could. Air flowed around him, making way, parting like a curtain, letting him effortlessly slip into this different place where his breath panted out fast, and his feet pounded the ground, and there was nothing else, just running fast, no sky, no brother, no Ron. Just—running—just—this.

He was almost all the way around the track, when he became aware that Ron was clapping and cheering. "Way to go!" he shouted. Jason slowed, puffing air from his lungs as he walked the few remaining steps to where Ron waited along the edge of the

track, Seth tagging at his side.

Ron pointed at Jason and wagged his finger a couple of times. "You're a runner," he said, almost like Jason was doing something wrong. But then he smiled.

Jason's heart was pumping as he tried to catch his breath. It bugged him that Ron had seen him, but of course he'd known Ron was there. So why had he run like that, like he was racing Nick Taylor in front of everybody?

"That was great," Ron said. His smile was bigger now, fake like a clown's. "You're fast." He poked at his watch. "Want me to time you? Once around the track. Quarter mile."

Jason shook his head, though he was curious. What did "fastest boy in the class" actually mean in numbers?

"Takes me two and a half minutes," Ron said.

Seth hopped in a tiny, tight circle. "Race!" he shouted, twirling around.

Ron gave a snort, but then said, "Sure, we'll race," the words coming out fast and hard.

Racing Ron would be one of those things where either Ron would run slow and let him win, or he'd make Jason think he was winning only to pull ahead at the last minute. Or he'd beat Jason by a mile and say something stupid like, "It doesn't matter who wins, it's how you play the game." It wouldn't be a straight, real race the way it was in gym class with him against Nick Taylor, where at the end both people understood exactly who was fastest.

Seth chanted, "Race, race, race," and his spinning knocked him up against Ron, who grabbed his arm to hold him still. But Seth broke free and started twirling again. "You're not the boss of me." He banged into the chain link fence surrounding the track, and Jason thought he'd start crying again, but he just laughed.

"Careful," Ron called. "If you stand still, I'll let you time Jason with my watch."

"You're not the boss of me!" Seth shrieked, as he jammed the fingers of one hand through the diamond-shapes on the fence and started yanking at it so hard the fence rattled and clanged.

Ron stared at him, then looked back at Jason and laughed in a sneaky way, as if he and Jason had a secret. "Your brother," he said. It felt like an unfinished sentence.

*Your brother...is what?* Jason spoke slowly: "I'm not running."

Ron's eyes turned into slits, as if he were looking straight up at the sun. But he was looking right at Jason, who stared back. Ron's knees were bony, and there was way too much black hair on his legs. No one wore shorts that short, not even the other men who ran on the track. "Give Peas a Chance." Only a moron would think that was funny enough to write on a shirt.

"Race!" Seth shouted at the top of his lungs. "RACE!"

Ron talked above Seth: "We can't go back yet." He folded his hairy arms across his chest, covering up the pun. "Once around the track." His chin shifted and tightened again, like a rope suddenly pulled tight, and without looking to see if Jason followed, Ron walked onto lane four of the track and shook his arms so hard his hands jiggled wildly like they had no bones. Then he tilted his head from side to side, scrunched his shoulders a couple of times, and jogged in place for a moment.

Ron thought he was so great. Some people you really wanted to see get beat at things. Jason stepped into lane two and walked up to where he was even with Ron. "Okay, let's race," he said.

Ron stopped jogging in place, but he didn't seem surprised that Jason had changed his mind. He put his hands on his hips, the way girls stood. When he spoke, each word was clipped and precise: "Actually, since you're on the inside, you should start behind me."

"That's not fair."

"The way the track curves," Ron said, pointing ahead. "I'll be running farther."

"I'm right next to you," Jason said. "So how are you going farther?"

That clown smile again. "It's a matter of geometry," he said. "I'll explain later." He walked forward a few paces, then looked back at Jason. "This isn't exact, but it'll be good enough. Make sure you stay in your lane."

Jason stared at Ron's back, as Ron lifted one foot and held onto it, balancing on one leg. What would happen if he ran forward and tackled Ron? Instead, he hunched down the way Olympic runners did at the beginning of a race. He closed his eyes and thought about beating Nick Taylor last week. "Good job," the gym teacher had said. Nick had nodded and laughed: "Just wait. Next time." Like there would be years of the

two of them battling head to head in gym class. Jason opened his eyes. His forehead was sweaty already.

Ron was on two feet now. "Okay, Seth. We're ready."

Seth called, "Ready...set...." A long pause.

Jason felt his heart beating hard. He couldn't beat Ron.

Finally Seth shrieked, "GO!"

Jason stood up and watched Ron take off running, his hairy legs pumping like pistons, his arms swinging, going as hard as he could even though he was racing a kid.

Ron was at the first curve before he glanced back. "Hey!" he shouted, slowing to a stop. "You okay?"

"I wasn't ready," Jason said while Seth laughed.

Ron slowly jogged back, head down. First he went over to Seth and reset the watch, then he returned to his position several yards ahead of Jason.

"Ready?" He looked back at Jason.

Jason nodded and hunched down in race position.

"Ready, set, go!" Seth shouted.

Again, Ron took off and Jason stood up.

Seth jumped and twirled around. "Race!" Seth shouted. "Go, go, go!"

And again, it wasn't until the first curve before Ron noticed Jason wasn't there. He turned around and started walking back to the starting point. His eyes were narrow again, and if this were a floor instead of a track, Ron's footsteps would be hard and heavy. But you couldn't stomp your feet on a track.

"Now what?" Ron spit the words.

"Jason wasn't ready," Seth called.

"You told me you were," Ron said.

"I guess I wasn't," Jason said.

Ron's face had turned bright pink, and he was practically shouting as he reset the watch on Seth's arm: "Are you ready now?"

"Sure," Jason said, shrugging.

"He's ready!" Seth said.

Ron got into position, and Jason hunched over, his fingertips lightly resting on

the crumbly surface of the track. He would run this time.

Seth looked at Jason and waved an exaggerated thumbs-up, shouting, "Ready, set, go!"

Jason stood up and watched Ron dash off for a few steps before turning around and jogging back. Seth squealed with laughter and bounced his back against the fence, making it shake.

"Think you're so funny," Ron said, his legs taking big, purposeful strides, quickly swallowing up the short distance between them.

Jason backed up a few steps and shook his head, but finally he was laughing.

Seth called, "You're racing yourself, Ron!" He sounded hoarse, like an old, tired bird.

"If you were my kid..." And now Ron was right up to where Jason stood. In one fluid motion, he put both hands on Jason's shoulders and shoved so hard Jason fell backwards on his butt. His palms scraped the track as he tried to catch himself.

There was a silence. Seth was still, the clanging fence suddenly quiet. The fall had made Jason bite the side of his tongue, and now he tasted a tinge of salty blood. He wanted to spit, but he didn't move. His palms felt fiery.

Ron extended one hand to help Jason stand up. His hand was right there at Jason's face, so close Jason saw clumps of black hairs above Ron's knuckles. He took hold of Ron's sweaty hand and let Ron pull him up to standing.

Jason said, "Well, I'm not your kid."

"You don't have any kids," Seth said.

"And you don't have a fucking father," Ron said. "I'm as good as it's ever going to get for you two. What do you think about that?"

Jason thought Seth might cry, but he grabbed the fence and yanked on it. Ron watched, a mixed-up look on his face, as if there was more to explain.

Finally, Ron spoke: "Sorry, guys. I shouldn't have said any of that. It was a good joke on me." He smiled the dopey way he smiled when Jason's mother was fussy and he rubbed her feet.

And then, surprisingly, Jason was the one who cried, a sudden deep sob that he was instantly ashamed of but couldn't stop. It wasn't fair. None of it was fair.

# Six Postscripts

## Matthew Sinex

i.

In disbelief  
the Tower of Hanoi solves itself.  
You hide it in a closet next to a snow globe.  
This may last for weeks.

ii.

You gather the mossy rocks  
that line your back yard.  
You eat them. They taste  
like fish hooks  
from a shotgun.

iii.

The fish pond widens.  
You see the clouds, but not yourself.  
From the walking path, strangers throw  
dirty bread crumbs. They turn into grey  
swans and laugh at your red hat.

iv.

You climb the hill and hope  
your rock will crumble.  
The rain had a reason,  
filling the cracks  
in that boulder you're holding.

v.

You chisel a small sculpture  
of a child on a rocking horse.  
It looks more like a dead elephant  
but your mother will  
tell you it's beautiful.

vi.

Your mother will lie to you,  
but not with you, which is good,  
the natural order of things,  
like Fibonacci numbers,  
one thing adding to the next.  
You can let them  
total on your shoulders  
or curate your pain,  
leading your thoughts  
on guided tours of yourself.  
This is Roman numeral old.

# Salt Flat, Winter Solstice

Holly Simonsen

Allow yourself to be blanketed  
in whatever way that means for you today  
When I started, I had no idea  
how to weave  
or even that all is woven  
Do not say there is a secret under snow  
Say instead snow stole all the jewelry  
Say she stole all the pages  
Weaving has everything to do with what can be smuggled  
inside a shirt sleeve  
It has everything to do with the invisible thread,  
the line that holds us  
in odd orbit

Everyone always looks for the star  
but you've seen them:  
one large, one bright,  
two planets, resting here—

# Toy Adventure Calvin Halliday



# The Long Ride Home

Michael Campagnoli

Scaffold over-arched the road

broad-backed tall black oak and elm  
a spider's web of branches  
reach to seize the blur unseen.

There, before the headlight's stare  
stark and barely credible—

*red wolf running*  
*in the cold blue light, rabbit*  
*limp*  
*almost lost*  
*open-eyed*  
*alert*  
*between the black ragged jaws:*  
*life ephemeral*  
*red in tooth and claw—*

she saw,

he saw,

but left the word

unspoken

•  
they bellied up a rock-broke hill  
steep, dense with hemlock  
and wizened ash

sharp-turned

right and up again,

trees closed

a narrow declivity,

dark as a tunnel,

pitched like a ski run.

then came

the dive, the sudden drop,

the sinking

to the bottom

of the sea

legs braced

pushed straight

elbows tucked

she could not breathe

headlights bounced and rolled

steadily dispersed,

the lurch, the lurch

the head-long and unruly rush

to blackness and the precipice

a lattice-work

of creeping vine,

crowded shadow,

withered bracken

threatened

to o'er run the road,

reclaim the right

to things unbounded,  
to chaos and collapse of sight.

He gripped the wheel  
pumped testosterone and pride  
aimed for a small  
    white  
    circle of light  
    at the bottom of the hill  
    down,  
    down,  
    down

to a pounding thump,  
a thrust and bounce  
a swerve and scrape,  
rising on the hump  
of a frost heave—

a blind sprint  
through forbidding trees,  
the outstretched reach  
of tangled brush,

a smothering density,  
then out  
and free

Breathe, breathe, she thought  
the calm relief of open fields

the long-blue gouda-whiteness  
of the river-freezing moon

eyes closed,  
she shivered

thighs pressed tight together,  
and fought the rising fear  
of bedlam:

*the red wolf running*  
*the long dark winter of inner night*



Twixt

the sound of cicadas.  
*Makitas*

The End Sings Itself  
for Cassandra Polvero:  
1989-2026 (?)

Dan Malakoff

*Dear Squeegee,*

*I never told you about my first house, where I wrote my first poem. I wriggled elbows down under my bed and in blue pastel deposited thick stanzas on the parquet floor. My parents never found it. They never knew that, at twelve, I stood in front of my mother's wardrobe mirror and for the first time sang one of my poems.*

*Squeegee, I never told you X and Y and Z. Since that day I melded poetry and song I never thought much for words on the page. With writing, I came to feel like a five-year-old stuffing her pet cat into her shoe! Yet now I find myself alone at a desk in a room, quiet but for the creak of my wooden chair. Now I write, write, write, the penned equivalent of rattling on...*

*Growing up in Peru, I mimicked birdsong, the squawking herons, the wheezing hoatzins—can you hear me if I say your name aloud? Would it be cruel to finally tell you that I loved you? Would you believe me or would you know I've only grown desperate?*

*We're out of time now, aren't we? We've been out of time ever since the virus found its first host. I've contacted Estelle, asked her to give me up.*

The last letter I received from Cassandra. As I lay awake, three years later, I see her sealing the envelope, tasting the glue. She walks to the mirror and stands before it, thinking, *My reflection is never enough*. “Song is poetry’s vessel, but performance propels them both,” she once told me. I understood then, before the deafness.

### Da Capo

Cassandra was seventeen and touring the smokiest of U.S. lounges when we first met. In a dive bar called the Bermuda Triangle, where the waitresses wore soggy faces, only our two stools remained right side up. We stayed, shooting tequila long after her encore and the reluctant, homeward drift of her audience. She whispered in my ear, “You know, there is no such thing as silence. Trapped inside a soundproof box, I would hear the thumping of my heart.” She sighed before grinning. “I find comfort in this, but what would happen if I were left alone too long with my heart? I’m sitting here with you and my heart patters, sounding soft and moderated. Trapped alone, I can almost hear it: beating louder, racing, pounding a gong in my chest, in my ears, until...until what? It terrifies me that I don’t know.”

Cassandra didn’t blink in the sharp light of the bare bulbs. As I watched her, tears welled. I didn’t know why. I uttered, “How beautiful you are,” as always, under my breath.

She laughed, thrilling me, and finally she blinked. “On my way here, the streets were all quiet and empty, or full of winter. I have a thick coat, but I keep its big hood down—so I heard him. A window washer squeegeeing all the way up on the fourteenth floor. In the middle of winter!” she giggled. “That’s yours. That squeegeeing is your sound. It’s how I will never forget you.”

The lights flicked off and on, off and on. Closing time. I didn’t kiss her. I wanted to know if she had a place to stay. I didn’t ask. In the parking lot we exchanged addresses and hugged goodbye.

Her mother’s death cut short this first tour. Cassandra jetted back to Lima, but arrived too late for the funeral. Her father, burly until hollowed and then felled by grief, begged her to stay. So she did. Her parents had wished she’d marry. So when a man proposed, she married. She wrote me, but her letters offered no description of her

husband other than to suggest that, as a well-respected businessman, an “esteemed twit,” he forbade his wife to work or sing outside the home.

Her letters glow in a shoebox under my floorboards. After the neighbor’s windows go dark, I lock myself in the bathroom and read by candlelight:

*Getting a divorce in Heaven couldn’t be any harder than this. Ay, Peru, I taste your dirt! Squeegee, my Squeegee man, I tell you I should never have come back here in the first place. Yes, my past is here, but not my home. On the bright side, if this whole marriage fiasco has taught me anything, it’s this: I can make a home of any stage. From now on, catch me if you can!*

Her next letter arrived from Cuba. For the young Cassandra, Havana was more than a place of exile. Singing filled her days. She perched on the backs of park benches to sing, and her songs drew crowds. Her voice hushed packed, noisy buses. The drivers let up on the gas to hear her. “You should have seen the traffic jam I caused today,” she wrote me. She sang at home while washing dishes, and passersby gathered below her kitchen window like birds at a feeder. And she fell in love. He was a painter of little fame, but of large heart, who spent his days promoting her. Soon Havana’s lounges were in hungry competition. Cassandra was the talk. In alleyways, her verses changed hands. Along the Malecón, her lyrics wooed virgins. In bed, her voice playing softly glided fingers over flesh.

Her fame spread. Her recordings landed on Florida shores with the migrants who survived the crossing. They carried water, food, clothes enough to shield them from the sun, and Cassandra. Her music spread pandemicly. Neighbors caught it from neighbors. It jumped from one town to the next. But in all the basements and smoky bars, the laundromats and radio stations, no one knew her name. So people created names, and faces, and myths. Every man swore he had met her last night in the bar. Every woman, too. She drifted about the Pacific on a houseboat or was locked in a Mexican jail. She was from California—who wasn’t? The endless lore would have spawned a religion had she not stopped ducking the spotlight.

Only the painter could have convinced her to embrace her fame—“Cassandra, you are the tiny drop of dye that can color the world”—and he did. They made love on their last night together. All he could do was promise to remember her. She sang for him, a gift for him alone. After his funeral some years later, she wrote me, “I promise never to sing his song again, so that it will always be his and only his. But I can’t help but question whether it’s fair that songs, like us, pass from this world. When we allow ourselves to forget a song, don’t we take a knowing step closer to our own ends?”

Cassandra, unlike the migrants, arrived in the U.S. by chartered plane. She disembarked in LaGuardia to a blaze of flashbulbs. The next morning, the newspapers all led with the same front-page photo. The image surprised the world and shocked me: a wide-eyed child, wearing her mother’s protective arm, was nestled into the crook of Cassandra’s knee. Maybe six years old, Estelle looked every bit like Cassandra: eyes like seeing-stones, eyes with a lunar glow; copper hair that twined into long, perfect helixes; skin like a doe’s hide. The reporters pressed the singer for answers. As coldly as her warmth permitted, Cassandra insisted the child was fatherless. The year was 2014 in eternal New York City.

### **Refrain**

Coffee brewed in a hotel room. Brilliant daylight flooded a picture window; shadows covered in the corners. I close my eyes and see it: Cassandra sprawled across the full-sized bed, her socked feet dangling from the edge, her hand propping her head. Loose hair cascaded over her forearm. Next to Cassandra sat her daughter with her legs crossed Indian style. Children look silly when they straighten their backs, yet twelve-year-old Estelle sat as if throned.

Mother and daughter focused on the patch of bedspread between them. Their laughter shook the mattress, which swooned from side to side like a flicked cube of Jell-O, while the bedsprings emitted a mulish guffaw. The game they played they had invented. Although they played it often during Cassandra’s years of touring, mostly to while away the idle hours between shows, they kept it as a secret pact between best friends.

*What are years? Sometimes I want to stretch a moment into eternity. Squeegee, remember our kiss? I would stretch it into eternity. Or the tickle as Estelle wraps her pinky around mine. Or the perfect, solemn note my voice once stumbled upon. So many moments!*

*Squeegee, the hardest part is realizing that a moment can destroy everything. Afterward, I want to gather all the moments to me and hold them as tight as I can for as long as I can!*

But I’m jumping ahead. Let me rewind to the winter of 2014 when beaded strings of green, red, and white bulbs adorned every lamp post and doorway. The dreariness of brumal New York oppressed Cassandra, and the holiday lights only highlighted the gray, wet concrete and the muddy slush.

Arriving in New York as the cameras flashed, she had covered her daughter’s eyes while her own lost focus. Press hounds, record company reps, advertisers, promoters, devotees blitzed her. At the time, Cassandra knew little of the reach of her fame, nothing of the weight of celebrity. When an agent weaseled close enough to whisper, “This world is so new to you. We’ll make sure your daughter is safe,” blind and dizzy, she signed.

Her contract with New York kept her shackled for two adverse years. It took Cassandra two years to regain her focus and her feet. The singer traveled the world, but everywhere was New York: presidential suites, Gardens or Carnegie Halls in every city; release parties with an unvarying guest-list of stiff s who always clapped, never shouted, never cried. For two years, she sang scripts over synthetic beats. “A so-called wardrobe dresses me—it’s like I’m six again!” she complained in a letter to me. She went on, “An oaf who calls himself a tutor sequesters Estelle in the next room. Through the door, I can hear his words burbling on an excess of spittle.” From city to city, stage to stage, studio to studio, the singer was whisked until the routine left her dazed and dispirited. Her managers simultaneously berated and comforted her, called her a failure while petting

her hands. Her voice began to tremble.

Her escape was beautiful, in a way that broke my heart. Cassandra performed her last show as a commodity on February 7, 2017. She appeared, 8:00 p.m. at Orchestra Hall in Detroit City before an audience of black-ties and composure. I attended, but slipped out during intermission. Months before, I had received a letter from the singer—the first in over a year. She planned to visit my Toledo home after the show. We would have a few hours together. I bought a bottle of Cabrito Gold tequila. I double-checked that the dusty HiFi still played Tito Puente crystal clear. Small gestures, but I'll tell you this: one can only be a hero within his own ever-shrinking realm. I remember that one night when I was the hero as my proudest. That one night to make up for those to come.

True to her word, at 2:30 a.m. sharp, Cassandra arrived, flanked by guards and suited men. Before acknowledging me, she peeled Estelle's arm from around her thigh and knelt to whisper assurance in the girl's ear. Cassandra then strutted alone across the room to where I stood fidgeting with the stereo. She embraced and kissed me deeply, led me by my loosened tie into the bedroom and bumped the door shut behind us. Tonight I was her lover and father of her child, she explained. She had begged her agent to allow a visit; seeing me would rejuvenate her singing. It was all part of her scheme. We stayed seated on the edge of my bed for an hour, catching up. "It's been two years," she said, "since I've had an ordinary conversation."

On her watch, 3:35 came too soon. Standing, she sighed, and then opened the door a few inches. "Estelle, come in. Say hello to your father." Once more, before she and her little girl slipped through my window, she kissed me. I had arranged for a car to wait a few houses down. Estelle needed a boost up into the backseat. Cassandra climbed in beside her. The door closed. From my window, I saw the car pull away. Cassandra was free.

Free, she became a master of disguises and dupes, like that, appearing and vanishing, like that, pleasing crowds while dodging press hounds, like that. Her appearances were clandestine operations. Word went out only minutes before a show. For fans, seeing her was like winning the lottery, only this lottery was global. Cassandra appeared anytime, anywhere. She headlined under pseudonyms, popped up at high

school talent shows, opened for punk bands, or snuggled into the back row of a choir.

Cassandra learned to speak and sing five languages, yet words were not sufficient for her range: the spectrum of emotion, universal and resonant. I clipped the reviews, though no critic could pen the feeling that came over you when Cassandra sang. Even now, reading these reviews aloud to myself, what do I feel? Only nostalgia. "The mood of her singing is intense, but cool," one wrote. Another: "Her voice of five octaves leaves you like a thunderstorm that's passed, thinking clearer, feeling clearer." Another: "Seeing her perform today was like waking from a dream: the import vague, yet pressing, the world changed, but how? I can't put my finger on it." I can't either.

I recorded her travels on a map: Kingston to Phnom Penh, Reykjavík to Mogadishu. Cassandra did not avoid the world's hotspots, rather she sought them out, believing she could end wars, erase divisions, provide inner peace, and it worked. Capitalist and communist, old and young, religious and secular, murderer and victim all had her in common. Critics claimed her voice had become finer and her songs more riveting, but what had happened was this: we were finally learning to listen.

How could Cassandra stay so humble? Look, look what she wrote me:

*I know what they say—that my harmony is unique, that my voice is one of a kind. They've got the orifice all wrong! It's not my mouth, it's my ears. And there's nothing unique about them. All I do is repeat what's all around me.*

*Close your eyes next time you're on a crowded train, slacken your shoulders, and listen. As you inhale, you'll hear each person's pulse, the automatic doors straining their tracks, the story of a lost scrap of paper, containing a phone number and wedged between seats. Breathe out and you'll gather it all together as one.*

*When I perform, all I do is share what I hear. Only Estelle fulfills me more.*

In their hotel room, the game that the singer and her daughter played involved tearing out bits of newspaper, each one containing a single printed word. Estelle did most of the tearing. Both savored the soft hiss, with Estelle alternating between slow, prolonged rips and quick, brutal ones. On a pillow, mother and daughter arranged the words to form sentences. One read: "Mr. Bravado dances in Siberia with a hand holding the moon and Wizards in his head juggling clouds and expands." They laughed. The mattress swayed, and the bedsprings guffawed until the coffeemaker interrupted with an indignant little clearing of its throat.

Only the words come back to me now.

### Elegy

The world goes deaf. The end sings itself.

A headline kept Cassandra from turning another page. At the bottom of A24, in the left column, the headline read: "Hundreds Deaf in Epidemic."

**Jakarta, Indonesia** -- Epidemiologists from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) arrived yesterday to investigate claims that hundreds have lost their hearing due to a fast-spreading virus. Those infected report an initial ringing, similar to tinnitus, which grows louder, causing the hemorrhaging or the eardrum and eventual deafness. The duration of the disease remains unclear. It is not known to be fatal.

As the sun set, their hotel room became chillingly quiet. Cassandra lay on her back and pulled the covers to her chin. Her daughter stared.

Cassandra sent me a copy. She dated it, "Sept. 9, '20," and penned the margins

full of question marks. About a year later, this article stretched the top of my *Detroit Free Press*:

**Catalonia, Spain** -- Doctors confirmed yesterday that a Catalonian businessman is the first-known carrier of the Sudden Aural Deficiency Syndrome (SADS) virus in Europe.

The news, which stokes continental and international fears, may signal that efforts to isolate the disease to Southeast Asia and Africa have failed.

Later in the day, President Rebono announced that scientists in search of a cure could expect a blank check from the federal government. She promised "drastic" measures to curb the virus if it reaches U.S. soil.

The infected Catalonian has been quarantined, along with his family, neighbors, and co-workers. Despite these measures, experts almost unanimously believe that the virus will continue to spread.

SADS infects total populations, resulting in mass deafness and social instability. While some small percentage of the population appears naturally immune, outbreaks have caused panic and stirred violence that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

The fear is visible today in cities across the U.S. and Europe. Traffic on the streets and sidewalks is thin. Those who venture out plug their ears with melted wax, duct tape, rags, or herbs such as sage, which some think protect against the disease.

The day Cassandra acknowledged SADS her words made headlines: “Cassandra Breaks Silence!” She spoke from a stage in Mozambique. The breeze carried the ocean’s brine, which only seemed aseptic. Her audience swayed out of sync with her singing. Sleep-deprived eyes squinted to read her lips. Already inflicted or deaf, hearts sick with loneliness and nostalgia, the crowd would return home, distraught, fists clenched, no longer able to deny that the disease had changed everything. Cassandra saw all this from the stage and stopped singing. Confused, the soundboard cut the music. Cassandra, known to be constantly moving, stood as still as stone. “A baby in the womb hears her mother’s heartbeat long before she sees her face. Hold onto your own heartbeats—listen to them, and never stop. Do that and don’t fear.”

Yet we had everything to fear. Even those who escaped the disease would soon have to dance as if deaf. Already the pattern had been established in Indonesia, Thailand, China, Egypt, Chad. Silenced, crying no longer brought relief. We held onto our heartbeats, held onto them with everything we had. When they faded and finally the thumping ceased, what bitterness! Then looking into one another’s eyes only reminded us of our own suffering.

The disease rounded the world: Panama, Honduras, Mexico, my doorstep. The deaf became the majority while Cassandra battled the tide. She wrote scores of poems, publishing widely in the world’s many languages. Her poems spanned the full spectrum of sound, but the world, going deaf, didn’t like being reminded of crickets, waves, the wind whistling through grass wet with dew. And, to Cassandra, a sea was not a sea without the slapping of waves.

She wrote me:

*I gather record collections into libraries. The youth brigades burn them. I learn sign language, but cry at hearing my knuckles crack. I fund neuroscientists who promise to bypass the ears. A mob surrounded the house of the chief researcher. He took his wife by one hand. He took his son by the other. They walked through their front door to be stoned... The hearing are going underground. The hearing are ending up behind walls. In poor countries. In rich countries. Do you know this?*

I did. To my neighbors, it suddenly seemed only fair that one and all suffer equally. They came to my door and signed, “Join us, you fag, you Beethoven.” Their eyes seemed to say: “Join us or you will end up dead.” To the newly deaf, crowded, yet silent rooms defied comprehension. Everything about our infirmity seemed inexplicable, senseless—we lumbered through each waking hour vexed by the why of it and then at night found we couldn’t sleep. So it was a small relief to hear a knock at the door. It was a small relief when the heavy guilt of those days fit our crimes so perfectly. While my letters reassured Cassandra of man’s goodness, I stopped signing my name.

Cassandra’s saintly image could no longer ensure her safety. Once a symbol of unity, she became a focal point for Deaf resentment. She was no longer greeted, no longer safe. Cassandra kept touring. Her people made careful arrangements. She relied on her many ruses to slip in and out, on and off stage. But soon she wasn’t singing on any stage, but rather to shrinking audiences in a basement an hour before dawn or in the back of a box truck moving at 80 mph.

Her letters became more and more sporadic. In them, she now talked of little else besides Estelle. Like Cassandra in her youth, Estelle was a poet. She left behind verses in all their hosts’ homes. Red marker on the wall behind the closet mirror. Black pen on a roll of unfurled toilet paper. Words written backward on cloth lampshades. In those days, she often appeared alongside her mother, to recite or sing her own works.

Cassandra had always kept her daughter close, preferring the girl's head pillowed on her bicep while they slept. But Estelle, nearly half her mother's age, was no longer a girl. Her hair cascaded past her shoulders. Her voice had mellowed. She ventured farther and farther from the crook of her mother's knee. While they continued as sun and earth, each revolution widened Estelle's orbit.

So when Estelle first heard a ringing, she told no one. Hours and hours she spent singing in front of a mirror, the reflection of her mother poised over her right shoulder. She sang of floodwaters, drowning, the weight of water. She could no longer discern her mother's soft-toned guidance. Her affliction became obvious, even to Cassandra, who pretended nothing had changed. Estelle wrote of her life seeping away, rancor. In her own bed, in her own room, awaiting sleep, she rubbed the seam of the bedspread between her thumb and index until her fingertips were raw. The young woman must have thought that, if only she fixed on her heartbeat and clenched her fists, she could hold on—but Estelle, too, lost that connection. Coping, the two women resorted only rarely to pen and paper, only to say what the tenderness of touch couldn't. They traveled from show to show, always among the hearing, Estelle estranged. Estelle screamed and, hearing nothing, punched. Though the disease progressed slowly in her, its outcome was the same.

"I cried when we separated," Cassandra wrote me. "Estelle is seventeen now, her future is wide open. That's how old I was when we met in the Bermuda Triangle. If only I could go back to being seventeen." Mother and daughter continued to communicate for nearly a year—I did my best to pass letters between them—until Cassandra was forced too far underground. The singer read in the newspapers about Estelle's growing fame as a poet, the voice of the Deaf, the new world order, and hoped her daughter would one day become the beacon she herself nearly became.

Cassandra was hunted, her face on posters, a bounty on her head. If only they could kill her, the Deaf could finally forget what it meant to hear, what it meant to be brought together by promise rather than deprivation. If they could kill her, finally we could sleep.

Feigning deafness, Cassandra again settled in Cuba, one of the last nations to succumb to the disease, now a place of exile. All the sparrows and parakeets and

songbirds had been killed. Now Estelle's stanzas changed hands in alleyways. Since SADS silenced the sea, the lovers had deserted the Malecón. Cassandra hummed the painter's song to herself. Eyes closed, she dreamt his fingers on her flesh. To have had the courage to be by her side! To have had the courage to give her up!

She purchased a small villa on the coast and relied on local boys to fetch her groceries. At first, she set up a studio and disseminated her recordings, though the risk to those who aided her quickly became unconscionable. She tried sleeping her days away. Her skin yellowed to mustard.

Aged Cassandra Polvero sipped black coffee and gazed out her window at the long, windy drive that led from Cienfuegos to her doorstep, past the coast's rocky coves, mangroves, and precipices. A mob neared, merciful Estelle in the lead.

### **Epilogue**

It's been so long. I don't think Cassandra ever forgot me, though perhaps by a unique sound she remembered each of us. I want so badly to remember, but who can hear a memory?

Awake, I stare dully at my ceiling. Wasting, I begin to see the singer, her lips moving silently. Once the August cicadas kept me company. Once I drifted to sleep on the cool rhythms of bossa nova. Her lips will always remind me of the void left by what's lost, what could have been but isn't.

# Mexican Room

J.M. Hansen

I remember the blue of night and reds of the room  
In that Mexican town.  
You dreamed your sister was shot in the head.  
Not the cleanest of holes.  
Yours hands clenched the white sheet  
Your skin raised in bumps  
I laid next to you and caressed your hair,  
Your back, your shoulders,  
You cried and shook.  
The bed was wet with your tears.  
The rain fell that night, like it always does,  
At that hour.  
A wind came into the room through the open doors.  
The curtains reached out softly to us,  
Wrapped in sheets  
Wrapped in each other, and fall back to sleep.  
I wake up to that memory sometimes  
Holding my own hands.

# Lexicon of Cool

Shahé Mankerian

James Dean's walk through Times Square  
seems rehearsed; the trench coat glistens,  
and the cigarette smoke frames him like a halo.

When I think of cool, I think of Father's fingers  
before they rolled him down the corridor,  
before I kissed his forehead and removed

his wedding ring. They felt leathery  
like his shoes we donated to the Salvation Army,  
discolored like undercooked fish sticks;

the kind Mother wouldn't eat at Denny's  
because they were still frozen in the center.



# Diving Towards the Porch Light

Stacy Blaylock

let us look, the moth is banging,  
when our talk spreads across the window  
like the flutter of wings from our mouths.  
the door is banging, my fingers,  
crisp red grooves around the knuckles  
and the taste of cotton under my tongue.  
ash covering your hair, firework shadows,  
leaving footprints across your cheeks.  
in the apple tree, cotton perfume,  
and the stink of gas on my fingertip,  
imagining my feet above the sky.  
a blanket draped, i'm thinking,  
around me like goose feathers  
when stars blur against the ceiling.  
my memories, i'm climbing,  
covered in ash and gas  
when i think about the fireworks.  
and listening just as you tell me  
in nebraska, a wave is unfurling,  
like a rumor in the bloom of her skirt.  
it's just like us, you saying,  
the women in the bedroom sleep  
like flint clicking against curves on a hip.  
the moth is chewing, let us listen,  
clicking miniature morse with

the buzz of the porch light.  
ash on your cheeks, i'm wiping,  
with my knuckles dragging  
footprints down the curves of your chin.  
her skirts are flying, she pulls,  
like they do in new york  
upwards towards the church steeple.  
a blanket draped, he's crying,  
over unzipped blue jeans  
where hands are scratching from his navel.  
the moth on the cement, cracking,  
my fingers, cracking, moth splitting,  
splitting memories as we bang,  
moth banging, we bang until  
there are stains on the porch light  
and stains on my fingers  
from scratching with the pen.

# The Lost Wax Method

Christine Hamm

I know about your fall,  
the time in the hospital.  
I know about 1983.

When the sun stuck its hooks  
into the backs of your hands.

When every gesture pushed  
through a rubble of dead  
birds and someone else's bricks.

This is too hard to read, so we put  
it inside our mouths and suck. All  
this 7-11 cake, and we're still hungry.

I wanted to buy you something,  
after all you lost for me. A washing  
machine, a can opener, a kitten with six legs.

I'll find you the pill to let you sleep,  
I'll find you the silence we paid for.

# I Sing Because

Marnie Heyn

When the common sparrow flew into  
the undercarriage of that old beater and  
was dashed to the pavement, one wing broken,  
and fluttered there as another car got it again  
before I could turn around and hobble out  
and pick it up, as it pecked me with  
its broken beak, its dying breath,  
what were you watching?

# Contributors' Notes

**Linda Aldrich's** chapbook, *Foothold*, was published in 2008. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, among them *Indiana Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *The Florida Review*, and *Third Coast*. Her poem "Woman-without-Arms" won the Emily Dickinson Award 2000 from Universities West Press. She lives in Portland, Maine.

**Stacy Blaylock** received her Bachelors in English from Westminster College in 2010. She is a tea snob and webcomic lover.

**Michael Campagnoli** has worked as a waiter, fisherman, journalist, painter, and short-order cook. His awards have included the *New Letters* Poetry Award, the All Nations Press Chapbook Award, and *The Chiron Review* Novella Prize. He is the author of three chapbooks, *Ah-meddy-ga*, *Loons*, and *Penobscot Voices*.

**Richard Cecil** is the author of four collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *Twenty First Century Blues*. He teaches at Indiana University, Bloomington.

**Paul Ray Christian** is walking and falling at the same time.

**Francis Denis** is a self taught painter who each year since 2008 has organized the Festival of Contemporary Sacred Art in Saint-Omer, in the north of France, where he was born and where he still lives. His work is exhibited and reviewed regularly not only in France but in Macedonia, Belgium, Austria, and Italy. He often works in series themes such as bathers, painter and model, mothers, and the passion of Christ, on canvas, paper, cardboard and wood. Recently, he's rediscovered his love for writing.

**Bianca Diaz's** chapbook, *No One Says Kin Anymore*, was recently published by Spring Garden Press. Originally from Miami, Florida, she now teaches English to high school students in Racine, Wisconsin.

**James Doyle's** latest book is *Bending Under The Yellow Police Tapes*. His poetry has been featured on *The Writer's Almanac*, *American Life in Poetry*, and *Verse Daily*, and in *Literature: An Introduction to Critical Reading*.

**Coulton Evans** is self taught. He found his passion for art in the summer of sixth grade, and tries to incorporate many different media in his pieces.

**Bernadette Geyer** is the author of the poetry chapbook, *What Remains* (Argonne House Press), and recipient of a 2010 Strauss Fellowship from the Arts Council of Fairfax County, Virginia. Her poems have appeared in *Verse Daily*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, and elsewhere. Geyer works as a freelance writer and editor in the Washington, D.C. area.

**Jo M. Going** has lived in Alaska for 27 years, and much of the imagery in her writing is based in northern sensibilities. She is also a professional visual artist.

**Ellen K. Gregory** lives in southeastern Idaho with her husband and five children.

**Calvin Halliday** currently lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland.

**Christine Hamm** won the MiPoesias First Annual Chapbook Competition with her manuscript, *Children Having Trouble with Meat*. Her poetry has been published in *The Adirondack Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Lodestar Quarterly*, *Poetry Midwest*, *Rattle*, and many others. She teaches English at CUNY. *The Transparent Dinner*, her book of poems, was published by Mayapple Press in 2006 and her second book, *Saints & Cannibals*, came out this spring.

**J.M. Hansen** lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.

**Nicole Hardy** is the author of two poetry collections: *This Blonde* and *Mud Flap Girl's XX Guide to Facial Profiling*, which was a finalist in Main Street Rag's 2006 chapbook competition. One of her essays was recently featured in *The New York Times*' "Modern Love" column. She teaches privately and as one of Seattle's Writers in the Schools.

**Heidi Hart**'s published work includes the memoir *Grace Notes* (University of Utah Press, 2004) and the four-poet collection *Edge by Edge* (Toadlily Press, 2007). She received a Pushcart Prize for Poetry in 2008 and was recently named a finalist in the U.K.'s *Aesthetica* Creative Works Competition.

**Marnie Heyn**'s university training is in medieval languages. She teaches music, plays fiddle for the farmer's market, knits and does shibori, and gardens intensively on her .09 acre. Last season, she harvested the last tomatoes on December 2<sup>nd</sup> in the north woods of Michigan.

**Ruth Holzer**'s poetry has appeared recently in *Earth's Daughters*, *Broome Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Evansville Review*, and the *Journal of New Jersey Poets*. Her two chapbooks are *The First Hundred Years* and *The Solitude of Cities*.

**Marcia L. Hurlow** is a professor of creative writing, journalism and linguistics at Asbury University. Her most recent full-length collection of poems, *Anomie*, won the Edges Prize and her most recent chapbook, *Green Man in Suburbia*, won the Backwards City Review press contest.

**Daniel Lowe** has work in *West Branch*, *The Nebraska Review*, *The Montana Review*, *The Wisconsin Review*, *The Writing Room*, *The Broken Bridge Review*, *The Paterson Literary Review*, and other literary journals and anthologies.

**Katharyn Howd Machan**'s poems have appeared in *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* and in *Belly Words: Poems of Dance* (Split Oak Press, 2009) and *When She's Asked to Think of Colors* (Palettes & Quills Press, 2009). A professor in the Department of Writing at Ithaca College in central New York, in 2002 she was named Tompkins County's first Poet Laureate.

**Dan Malakoff** will receive his MFA from the University of Pittsburgh in May. His fiction has appeared in *Pleiades*.

**Shahé Mankerian** is a poet, playwright, and the principal of Pasadena's St. Gregory Hovsepien School. In 2006, he co-authored the play *Little Armenia* which debuted at Hollywood's Fountain Theatre. Every summer, Mankerian co-directs the Los Angeles Writing Project Institute with Bob Land and Carolyn Frank.

**Justina McCandless** is not an English major. She wasn't even sure she was a poet until she took creative writing last semester, and now she has been published in *Ellipsis*. Justina has worked on a variety of publications ranging from literary magazines to academic journals to newspapers. In her spare time she attempts to fuse news writing with creative writing, refusing to accept that they have to be two separate things.

**Patrick Moran**'s poems, essays, and translations have been published in a variety of magazines including *Crazyhorse*, *The Antioch Review* and *The New Republic*. His first book, *Tell a Pitiful Story*, will be out in the fall of 2011. He is an associate professor of creative writing at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

**Kristina C. Mottla** graduated from UCLA with a BA in English Literature and a Creative Writing Specialization in Poetry. She garnered two "Editorial Assistance" accreditations while working in the editorial department of nonfiction house, General Publishing Group.

**Alice Pero** is a New Yorker who somewhat reluctantly became a left-coaster in 1996. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and two cats. Her book, *Thawed Stars*, was praised by Kenneth Koch as having “clarity and surprises.” She runs the celebrated reading series “Moonday” in Pacific Palisades and La Cañada, California.

**Leslie Pietrzyk** is the author of two novels, *Pears on a Willow Tree* (Avon Books) and *A Year and a Day* (William Morrow). She teaches fiction in the graduate writing program at Johns Hopkins University and in the Converse College low-residency MFA program.

**C.M. Pretorius** discovered poetry in his youth, when he needed to find the right lines to woo his first love. The fire of this passion has grown and the businessman-turned-artist has now been a practicing poet for more than a decade. He won the 74<sup>th</sup> Annual *Writer's Digest's* Writing Competition in the poetry category in 2005 and has new work forthcoming in *California Quarterly*. Pretorius lives in Pretoria, South Africa.

**Henry Rappaport** has been writing poetry for a long time. You can hear him read at [henyrappaport.com](http://henyrappaport.com)

**Erika Rodriguez** is ready to leave Salt Lake City. Having co-authored an existentialist play, been published in *Scribendi*, presented at various national conferences, and fallen hard in love, she now journeys out to wetter climes wherein she will pursue a PhD in comparative literature. The poem “Apology” and any future successful writing endeavors are dedicated to Esther Rodriguez Hernandez, Cole William Stevens, and Douglas Stefan Wright.

**Selva Rolin's** poetry has appeared in various publications including *The Smoking Poet*, *The New Writer*, Amanda Hill's novel *Love Like That*, and *Poetry*. She has written a novel and has lived in Spain, France, Canada, and soon, Brazil.

**Russell Rowland** is from New Hampshire's Lakes Region. He was first-place winner in Old Red Kimono's 2010 Paris Lake Poetry Contest. His chapbook, *Train of All Caboosees*, can be ordered from Finishing Line Press. Recent work appears in *Barbaric Yawp*, *Studio One*, and *Xavier Review*.

**Madeline Savarese** gathers much inspiration from the red rocks, cliffs, and culture of her home town of Moab, Utah. Her works include oil paintings, watercolors, pastels, and most recently, printmaking. She currently attends Westminster College as a junior, a Utah Sterling Scholar, and a member of the Westminster College Honors Program.

**Eric Paul Shaffer** is author of *Lāhaina Noon* and *Portable Planet*. His poetry appears in *Slate*, *North American Review*, Canada's *Dalhousie Review* and *Fiddlehead*, Australia's *Island*, and England's *Magma*. He received the 2002 Elliot Cades Award for Literature for an established author in Hawai'i and a 2006 Ka Palapala Po'okela Book Award for *Lāhaina Noon*. *Burn & Learn*, his first novel, appeared in 2009. He teaches at Honolulu Community College.

**Red Shuttleworth's** latest chapbook, *We Drove All Night*, will be out soon from Finishing Line Press. His new play, *High Plains Fandango* (which takes on privatization of water), developed with assistance from the Echo Theater in Los Angeles, will premiere in early 2012 at State University of New York at Fredonia.

**Holly Simonsen** lives and works in her native Utah landscape. Her poems explore the relationship between language and ecologically disturbed environments, including the Great Salt Lake. She also works off the page with installation art and performance poetry. Her work has appeared in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Ecotone*, and *NANO-Fiction*.

**Matthew Sinex** works as a high school English teacher and lives in Surprise, Arizona with his wife and son. His poetry is forthcoming in *Sugar House Review*.

**Gretchen Stengel** is an MFA student at San Francisco State and lives in Berkeley, California. She enjoys stitching and layering voice and image alike. She works in paper collage as well as poetry.

**Ann Stewart** is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she teaches composition and creative writing. Her work has been published in *Words and Images*, *GlassFire*, *At Length*, *Kestrel*, and *Untamed Ink*.

**Fiona Sze-Lorrain's** recent work includes *Water the Moon* (Marick Press, 2010). Born in Singapore, she now lives in France, where she writes and translates in English, French, and Chinese.

**Adam Tavel** recently won the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Robert Frost Award, and his poems appear or are forthcoming in *Indiana Review*, *Phoebe*, *Redivider*, *Devil's Lake*, *New South*, and *Cave Wall*, among others. Tavel is an assistant professor of English at Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

**Robert J. Tillett** teaches in Rochester, NY. His work is recent or forthcoming in *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Coe Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Pearl*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *The Worcester Review*, and other magazines.

**Twixt** is the mononym-onym of Peter Specker; he has had poetry published in *MARGIE*, *The Indiana Review*, *Amelia*, *California State Quarterly*, *Art Times*, *Confrontation* and others. He lives in Ithaca, New York.

**Sarah Harris Wallman** is originally from Nashville, Tennessee. Her fiction has been published (or is forthcoming) in Brooklyn's *L Magazine*, *readshortfiction.com*, and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*. She teaches in the MFA program at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Connecticut.

**Ashley Washington** has served as the Poetry Editor on *roger*, an art & literary magazine as well as the Editor on Roger Williams University literary magazine, *Mouth of the Bay*. She lives in Pawtucket, RI and is applying to graduate schools for Fall of 2011.

**Florence Weinberger** has published three books of poetry, *The Invisible Telling Its Shape*, *Breathing Like a Jew*, and *Carnal Fragrance*. A new collection, *Sacred Graffiti*, will be published later this year by Tebot Bach.

**Stephen Wheeler** is a free-lance writer who lives with his family in Appalachia, Kentucky.

**Helen Wickes** lives in Oakland, California and has worked as a psychotherapist for many years. Her first book of poems, *In Search of Landscape*, was published in 2007 by Sixteen Rivers Press. Her poems can be heard online at *From the Fishhouse*. Other work has appeared or is forthcoming in *AGNI Online*, *Confrontation*, *South Dakota Review*, *Stand*, *Runes*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Natural Bridge* and elsewhere.

**Fredrick Zydek** is the author of nine collections of poetry. *Living at the Edge of the Ancient Inland Sea: The Nebraska Poems* is forthcoming from Backwater Press. He is also the author of a novel and a biography of Charles Russell. Formerly a professor of creative writing and theology at the University of Nebraska and later at the College of Saint Mary, he is now a gentleman farmer and the editor of Lone Willow Press.

# Submission Guidelines

*Ellipsis... Literature & Art* is the annual literary journal published by the students of Westminster College since 1966. We sponsor a yearly poetry contest judged by a prominent poet. Past judges include James Galvin, Nance Van Winckel, and Andrea Hollander Budy. Contributors include well-known writers, up-and-coming writers, and never-before-published writers.

We accept submissions in poetry (up to 5 poems), short fiction (up to 6,000 words), non-fiction (not book reviews), and art. Our reading period is August 1 through November 1 for poetry, short fiction, and non-fiction. Submissions received after the reading period will be considered for the following year. We accept art submissions through February 1, high quality digital images sent either by email or on a CD. We choose one color piece for the cover and black-and-white inside.

Include a SASE for notification and a cover letter with a brief contributor's note, your address, telephone number, and email address. Manuscripts will not be returned. Simultaneous submissions are welcome but email immediately if your work is accepted elsewhere. We pay our contributors \$10 for each poetry or art piece and \$50 for each prose piece, plus two free copies of the issue. If you would prefer copies in lieu of payment, please let us know. Additional copies of the issue in which you appear can be purchased at a discounted price.

Submit online via our website: <http://www.westminstercollege.edu/ellipsis>

Or mail your manuscripts to:

*Ellipsis*, Westminster College  
1840 South 1300 East  
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