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Santa Clara University

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*santa clara review*

since  
1869



vol 99 no. 1

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# santa clara review

since 1869

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# Letter From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Today we find ourselves living in an intensely digital world, where technology has become capable of saving lives and uniting communities, allowing love and knowledge to penetrate global borders. Originally bound to traditions of oral story telling, then having transitioned to printed record-keeping, we can now carry entire histories in our back pockets with a light-weight and portable library of data. Some say that such technological advancements will lead us to a brighter future; one full of backlighting and fill-flash. Others fear that we will lose appreciation for the charming nature of simple pleasures like feeling the weight of a book in our hands, or smelling the pages of this literary journal.

Forgotten in the debate, however, is that whether e-readers and their “paper-like” displays are saving Mother Earth or devaluing that which is embodied by the Gutenberg, what remains are the words, the passions, and the hearts testifying to the minds and souls of the authors who held them and the readers who will forever revere them. The written word, either printed on paper or type-graphed with e-ink, nevertheless tells the stories it was purposed to tell and expresses the sentiments to which it was meant to be faithful.

The beauty of the world we live in lies in that despite the changes of the ages our stories, our sentiments, and our words prevail. They are timeless and universal. Today, like yesterday, we wage war against others and against ourselves. We love. We feel pain. We suffer by the hands of poverty, and we mourn at suffering by illness. We laugh at ourselves, and we cry together. We breathe in. We exhale out.

The *santa clara review*, formerly known as *the Owl*, was founded in 1869. As years went by, the editors of this publication witnessed civilian uprisings, war, social reform, and political unrest—all of which is familiar to us now. As Editor-in-Chief I decided that I wanted to celebrate the history of this literary journal. I wanted to commemorate the everlasting nature of humankind; I decided I would reprint in each issue of Volume 99 an extraordinary piece originally published in *the Owl*.

In this issue, that piece is a poem of mysterious origin, which I found featured in a fall issue of *the Owl* from 1947. Entitled “Vindication,” the poem represents the ageless and enduring experience

of soldiers, while the story that lies behind it attests to the delicate nature of our knowledge of yesteryear.

In addition, you will find in this issue a former editor's recalling of the impact his grandfather had on him, a complex story of an alcoholic's bout with death, an illustration alluding to the unyielding expectations women live up to, and much more. The stories, poems, and art contained within this publication vouch for the most human of our human experiences. I hope that you may cherish them and find that they give to the world words that you relate to.

Enjoy,

Taara Khalilnaji  
and the *santa clara review* editors





## If You See Something

**Say Something.** The poster's bold print bears down on me, pinning me to the subway seat. I don't get it, never did. My head's throbbing, Neil Young's scorching "No Hidden Path" and the rococo-deco-Indo-Chinese-whatever architecture of the United Palace scrambled on the walls of my brain. **Don't keep your suspicions to yourself. Last year 1,944 New Yorkers reported what they saw.** Like? A strap-hanging, bomb-ticking Muslim? Shoes with lifts? A powwow in Arabic? C'mon, my father's Lebanese and I wouldn't understand a word. 1,944? That number is bullshit. I say the harder you look, the less you see. It's like love, right? Just happens, or you're making it up. Look at us. We meet accidentally at Yankee Stadium, bump into each other on the concession line, talk through the seventh inning, start texting from our box seats, ninety mph fastballs. I call the next day, we're on for a date, you love just about anything playing at the Angelika, we take in a film a week, love Blue Valentine, meet up on Saturdays at Saint Mark's, huddle in the poetry section, read to each other, walk the city, up for tenure high school teachers—"we met up for tenure," we broadcast like loons—an amalgam of physics and language arts on a summer spree, sunsets at the High Line, heirs to our parents music—me singing, Stuck inside of Mobile, you, with those Memphis blues again—finishing each other's sentences deep into the Fall. Love. In love. We'll discover jazz ourselves, we pledge, stay up all night at Smalls, float our way down to Battery Park, you instruct me on string theory in the pre-dawn light, an elegant universe made of vibrating strings. Quarks, smarks, I have no idea but no matter the poetry of it makes sense because you make sense and I want every string I'm made of, inside and out, tied to you, to you. We make love on a the bench facing the Statue of Liberty, the Hudson rippling dark gray, and I tell you don't turn she's watching and we laugh away the cold, your elegant fingers pressing into my ribs, your elegant lips on my forehead, but last week I hear between the lines that you want us to slow down so I fight every urge to check in with you tonight, home quarantined with your sister, a stomach

virus, your ticket in my pocket and I'm rubbing it now, boring a hole, because I saw her, saw your sister, saw the Yankee cap first—the one I gave you I bet—across the tracks at Union Square where I switched trains not ten minutes ago, her head bobbing in the circle of her college friends, headed to an NYU hangout I'm guessing, but I'm right aren't I, and I'm going to tell you because I'm afraid, Kiva, scared shitless because you're everything I'm living for and my heart is beating so loud in my ears that it feels like it's going to explode.

## Au Clair de la Lune

*The oldest known recording of a human voice, made by Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville*

Your voice singing  
a French folk tale,  
stylus printing lines in ash.  
*Lend me your pen*  
*to write a word—*  
not the sound,  
but its shape, sloping  
lines on a graph.  
A century and a half,  
glass plates, lampblack.  
And then released  
as if through roaring  
wind, breaking waves.  
A quivering, clearing  
of your throat. And then  
your voice—*My candle*  
*is dead—*shaking.

## Sweet Mint

Former President George W. Bush ran the Houston marathon in 1993 and finished with a time of three hours, forty-four minutes, and fifty-two seconds. That's around an eight minute, thirty second split for twenty-six point two miles. Impressive. Back in his college days, the beloved "Dubya" was a known smoker and drinker. Distraught after his father lost in reelection to Clinton, he gave up his vices and started running as a form of release from the everyday stresses of being George W. Sometimes he embarks on really long runs around his ranch in Texas, no destination in mind. He just goes. He thinks everyone should get in on his running craze, even stating that corporate America should help its employees make time for exercise. The rumor is he installed a treadmill on Air Force One.

\* \* \*

I went to a Green Day concert when I was in the seventh grade. An immigrant girl from Ukraine won four tickets from the local radio show and invited me and two other girls from our class. Being an outcast, I suspect she did it as a plea for friendship. It worked. I didn't know anything about punk rock so I spent the two weeks leading up to the concert studying the music and band members. I wore classic Chucks to the show. The front man, Billie Joe, came out dressed in a pink bunny costume with a bottle of Jack Daniels in hand, swaying from one side of the stage to the other in an acted drunken stupor before swinging his pale blue Fender Stratocaster to his front and breaking into the first reverberating chord.

\* \* \*

"You have to know when to kick it in, Boyle. You can't just sit back and expect a steady pace to win you a 5K; it's too short of a race." He taught me physics for two semesters in high school and coached my running every afternoon for three years. I ran because it didn't require any rules or complicated equipment. I ran because I knew how.

\* \* \*

Although not originally my home, Denver has become a place of reassurance. I fly in and out of that airport at least ten times a year, arriving precisely fifty minutes before takeoff, sipping on white hot chocolate from Caribou Coffee and reading the latest *Women's Health*. Walking from the plane towards the gate I'm happy and calm, relieved to get away from the suffocating Oklahoma humidity and giant, blood-sucking insects. I scan the waiting area of C26, noticing the bored teenage girl with subtle blonde highlights and white earphones extending from her petite ears to the green iPod in her lap, the overworked parents trying to keep their children occupied with McNuggets, the older couple holding hands and happily watching people, content smiles gracing their worn faces. And I see you. You're wearing a royal blue button up shirt with the top button undone, and charcoal dress slacks, matching black belt and shoes, with a bouquet in hand. Business-like and handsome. You stand from your seat and walk towards me, wrapping me into your chest, lifting me off the ground with gentleness, before setting me down and presenting the arrangement of opened golden sunflowers and red roses softened by baby's breath.

"You're supposed to be in Dallas already. You told me last night you were at the bachelor party. In Dallas."

You smile. "I lied. I'll apologize if you want." You kiss me hard before we make our way towards baggage claim, catching up on the weeks apart. I miss you and the way you tell stories, dramatic gestures and the excitement of wanting to share every detail. Your hands always tell a story. They tell me about your baseball glory days from high school, the way the ball was pitched just outside the box on the far side but you got hold of it and sailed the ball through the gap in right field, bringing in two and running safely to second. They showcase the way your hips twist with the swing of your bat, stepping out with your left foot and pivoting. The dip and lift of your hands tell me the way the melody moves in *The Phantom of the Opera* as Christine performs "Think of Me," bringing attention to every instrument in the pit while singing along in perfect harmony. Your hands tell me how much you crave me as you dig your grip into the soft of my sides and pull me into your lips. They roam my body to unzip, unbutton, unclasp every piece I'm wearing.

We ride the escalator down to where the tram takes us to different parts of the airport. We miss it and have to wait four minutes for the next one. Our conversation stops and you bring your outside Magnanni toe-to-toe with my black flip-flop and reach for my open hand. Your arms are slack but you hold onto my fingers with a firm grip, rotating the Claddagh ring I wear on my right hand. Your gaze is on the ground and I watch you play with expressions and eventually slip into a boyish grin, your warm eyes rising to meet mine. I think back to the night you got me drunk at a Tibetan bar in Shanghai. I didn't know the town, I didn't know the language, but you kept your arm around my waist through the night and kissed my neck between drinks. It was too early for the bar crowd, but a band set up on the small stage to the left of our booth, the plucks of the bass resonating through the room from a sound check. You pulled me up by my fingertips and placed my hand behind your neck, your own hands reaching down to my hip and the small of my back. We pressed against each other and you led my body to the in and out rhythm of the foreign notes the porcelain woman sung.

Back in the airport waiting for the tram, you say, "I think you're wonderful and sweet and beautiful and smart and I was telling a friend about you the other day and it just came out without even thinking so I knew I had to tell you. I love you." I know what you expect me to say but the words are not there. I want to laugh and pretend your line is one of the corny jokes always spilling from your lips, but your expecting stare stifles my impulse and I feel nothing. Amazingly, I feel nothing. I stare at you blankly. I look away. I offer a gentle smile. And at this moment you stop loving me.

\* \* \*

Billie Joe met Adrienne at a concert during Green Day's first tour. They corresponded over phone, but their hectic lives got in the way and Adrienne became engaged to another musician. No wedding was ever planned. Billie Joe scheduled shows in Minnesota to see her and he eventually asked her to come to California. They married two weeks later during a five-minute ceremony in his backyard and the next day she told him she was pregnant. They've been married sixteen years.

\* \* \*

Two and a half weeks after Denver, I slip on my black strapless dress, fitting tightly around the bust and flowing loosely down to the top of my knee. It's too warm to leave my hair down so I securely pin up my black curls and set my pretty pink heels by the door. You're lying on the bed in our stuffy closet of a hotel room, flicking through the channels and complaining that nothing is on before settling for a crime investigation show. I tell you I'm done in the bathroom and you nod, eyes still set on the mutilated corpse displayed on the screen.

We walk down 18th Street towards Broadway, you leading me by the hand through mobs of bustling New Yorkers. It isn't so much of an affectionate hold as one out of necessity, thinking I may get lost in the crowd or roll my ankle from wearing unstable shoes on broken pavement.

We reach St. James Theatre, a row of loud American Idiot posters lining the entryway. We find our seats and wait for the curtain to rise. Johnny Gallagher Jr. stands center stage in front of a display of televisions, all reporting various news stories and a political reel featuring former president George W. Bush at his "Outline for the Future of Iraq" spiel at the Army War College in May of 2004. The noise and commotion escalate until the cast ruptures into the opening song.

\* \* \*

The hills are unkind but they don't faze me. Colorado doesn't care that it's summer and the nights still present a soft chill. The metal wire cemented to my bottom teeth is struck by the cool air, sending flitters of pain to the nerves in my gums. I never go running without a piece of Sweet Mint to ease the stinging but I was in such a rush to get out—to go anywhere—that I forgot. Without a thought, my tongue continually scratches the inside of my right molar, my typical storage place for my favorite gum. Tonight it's different. The ache comforts me. The miles pass and my form suffers, my muscles tighten, and my limbs grow heavier. I shake out my shoulders and unclench my fists, allowing the tension to free, and inhale the biting air deeply to force myself upright. I lengthen my stride to place my feet just under my hips and focus on hitting the ground with a flexed ankle for a forceful push-off.

\* \* \*



Johnny Gallaher Jr. comes on stage alone with an acoustic guitar wrapped around his shoulder. He sits cross-legged, licks his lips, and his fingers begin to dance on the strings in a memorized routine. *And I feel lonely for all the losers that will never take the time to say what is really on their mind. Instead, they just hide away. And yet they'll never have someone like you to guide them and help along the way. So tell me when it's time to say I love you.*

\* \* \*

Since George W. left office in 2009, he bought a house in Dallas, refused media interviews for two years, and has been working on writing books, an explanation piece on his presidency and a memoir.

\* \* \*

I want to run a marathon within the next year or so. I haven't set a goal time yet, but four hours and fifteen minutes seems like a good start. Mr. Bush doesn't sound too busy; maybe I should ask him to train with me.

\* \* \*

We stayed together for another month after the airport fiasco, but we both knew in that moment, waiting for the tram in a whirlwind of travelers, those three words were the end of us. We fought and talked, consoled and cried, and eventually walked away from one another with no resolution.

If only it hadn't been an airport. Maybe if we were in private I would have been overcome with passion and started crying and laughing and I would have echoed immediately. Or maybe as you were fiddling with my ring a stranger could have approached asking for directions and the tram would have come and the whole situation would have been postponed. Or maybe you should have just told me you cared, you loved spending time with me, you were so happy we were together, you couldn't have imagined being without me. Maybe it would have bought us more time as a couple. Or maybe we would still be together.

\* \* \*

I imagine former President George W. Bush, before leaning over to turn off his nightstand light, pulling his devoted Laura in close, kissing her good-night on the corner of her mouth, saying, "I love you." She smiles before rolling away to her respective side of the bed and says nothing. He already knows.

## The Waterfalls of Brazil

Bare water drops from a crazed height, burning  
apart with alchemies of sorrow. In all directions  
the forest sprawls. In the treetops monkeys  
cling to penny-ante dread, the shadows  
within other shadows, the once-seen  
settling to testament. The paths lead back to  
the argent plungings of water, the nitty-gritty  
of the senses, hot-foot certainty, the only test  
of truth. By various stratagems the pack mules  
loosen knots, shed their loads, scattering  
food-encrusted utensils, mothy blankets, suave  
diary petering out to blank pages. Schisms of  
light fall on skeletal fish. Vines have lost  
interest. The umber rivers betraying, like all  
geographies, the exotic self we bring to them,  
the silly notion of a second chance.

## Medugorje

The rain dripped off the face  
of the statue of Jesus.

Outside the shrine a man asked me for money.  
Dear Saint,

I'm a beggar too, sheltering at the inn.  
My hat lost its shape under the weight  
of the water.

At the top of the Jesus hill,  
I find a child's rosary  
among the thornbushes.

At the convenience store, I find  
borovička—juniper brandy.

In the church I buy  
a candle and a photo  
of the Queen of Peace.

A letter sent to Eugene,  
Oregon: *Mom, Dad,*

*look what I've done.*

## The College of Mothers

Is this not proof, this report  
from the emergency clinic  
that conducted dilation  
and curettage?  
Never mind the babies  
hours old in my arms  
that I rose to present  
to the cloister of in-laws

when that day before Christmas  
blood coursed down my legs  
and the nurse gently proffered  
the pan that contained him—  
he scallop-sized with ankles crossed

granting me admission  
to that college of mothers,  
not the one where women bear  
and raise children  
but where they carry always  
the ones that they lost.

## Cold World

I can taste my liver failing on the sides of my tongue. Nothing good will ever come of this. But I still try, every night, to see if this time will be different. I promised myself last night that this will be the first day of the rest of my life without another drink. I splash some water on my face, refusing to expel the leftover poison marinating in my stomach. Like clockwork I take a shot to settle my nerves; I curse myself for breaking my own trust.

“You made me a promise,” my reflection whispers, now silently judging me with eyes of scorn.

He reaches through the glass, grabbing the bottle I’ve come to know as my only trustworthy companion. I don’t even recognize him anymore.

“What did I tell you last night?” his voice, so soft and so cold, chills me to my core. The sweat on my brow turns to frost, my face an empty pint glass waiting to be filled with his disappointment in me. “If you can’t do this sober, you can’t do it at all. You promised me. I didn’t want to have to do this, but you give me no other option.”

He steps out and over the frame. With his left foot in the sink, he uses my shoulder to brace himself before swinging with silent perfection onto the black ice we now stand on together. He slides his hand to my other shoulder, his arm around me in a cold embrace. With an icicle finger he lifts my chin the same way he’s done to countless faceless one-night-stands. I know what this means: the kiss of death, the final goodbye. Eye to eye, we both look into the mirror. His cool reflection embraces a faint shadow where my body ought to have been, but the glass only shows him and a fragment of who I once was. I know my time is up.

He places the bottle through the frame setting it down on the dark counter, murmuring seductively, “It’s the only way.” I climb upward and in through the glass, taking my place in the cold world that’s been my home these wretched nights.

“I’ll see you in the morning.” His lips barely move. A gentle mist engulfs the glass. As he walks towards the door I place my hand

against the sheet of ice that separates me and my reflection. I clutch my companion in hopes of warmth; next time I'll bring a bigger bottle. He puts his finger on the light switch, pausing for a second to turn and smile his cruel, frigid smile. Walking out the door with his middle finger still caressing the switch, I watch in hopeless anticipation as it finally snaps down and my night turns to purest black.

## For Isabelle

I received an odd phone call the other day from a man who I hadn't spoken to in about a dozen years. At first I didn't believe him when he introduced himself and said that his wife had passed. I actually thought it was a mean practical joke instigated by my wife, Anne. She's always had a knack for not-so-funny pranks. Sometimes she'll convince me that she has smashed her finger in the car door or that her purse has been stolen. When I panic, she bursts out in uncontrollable fits of laughter. I fall for them every time. Not all are as morbid as those, but very few elicit a chuckle. No one generally likes to be the butt of a prank. But that's neither here nor there.

The man who called, George is his name, informed me that Isabelle had died of cancer. I wondered if she had suffered long or if her passing followed the diagnosis soon after. For different reasons, I wouldn't have been surprised either way. In some ways I pictured her to be a fighter, but at the same time I could see her ready to go. I didn't understand why he called to tell me, though—we had only met once, spending about an hour trapped in a cave together. When I asked, he responded, "She always spoke glowingly of you."

Her funeral is this Saturday at Arcadia Baptist Church just up the road. I'd really like to go, but, as my wife reminded me, I do have a long list of chores that need to be done. The hedges need to be trimmed. Our shutters need painting. I've promised to re-caulk the windows. Our daughter's science project is coming due, and she has yet to begin, citing my lack of assistance as the cause of her procrastination. For weeks these honey-dos have waited idly by, chiding me as I ignored them.

And I will stay and do them instead of saying goodbye to my old friend. My wife, my dear wife, I should say, would argue she wasn't a friend at all, but merely some woman met many years ago who couldn't catch a hint that her friendliness was, in my wife's words, a bit off-putting. Sometimes it's easier not to argue.

We met Isabelle on a mountain trail deep in the Rockies of all places—one last getaway before our baby was born. As we hiked



I remember thinking that the air seemed crisper here, as if light travelled with greater energy, nothing like the yellow haziness of home. But then the clouds came, and the birds dropped from the sky, all dead, like a hailstorm that arrives without warning. I took a beak to the forehead. Blood seeped from the wound, and I dabbed at it with my fingers, for a few seconds looking at my stained prints as if I didn't recognize them, and dabbed once more at the wound, testing the difference in temperature from just a few seconds before.

"We should really get you to a hospital," Anne said. "You probably need a tetanus shot."

Dozens of birds simply lay there. Their eyes bugged out, beaks pried open, feathers singed. They had all been simultaneously electrocuted. Being late fall, they had been flying south for the winter, all grouped together when the dark clouds snuck up on them, too, and then, in a flash that killed them before the light could even register on their pupils, they fell all at once, accelerating at the same rate until they exploded onto this trail.

"Is this not the craziest thing you have ever seen?" a woman said. She and her husband had taken cover under a nearby elm when the birds suddenly fell. She was much older than Anne and I, somewhere in that inconspicuous middle-age where she could be anywhere from mid-forties to her late-fifties. She was in remarkable shape, though. Her calves were much more toned than even mine, despite being in my mid-twenties. "I've never even heard of anything like this."

Thunder rumbled in the distance, and lightning flashed across the sky.

"Should we take cover?" I asked, blood now trailing down my forehead and becoming caked in my eyebrow.

Before the woman or her husband could answer, a downpour unleashed, gushing buckets of raindrops so big they hurt. The older man pointed down the trail and took off sprinting, and both Anne and I followed, our newly bought boots crunching the fragile bird bones as we ran toward the entrance of a cave.

"We're going to be here a while," the old man said. "Name's George. This is Isabelle." George, like his wife, appeared to be in great shape. A former athlete probably. I guessed a cyclist.

Anne and I shook their hands and introduced ourselves.

"Sweet Mother Mary," Isabelle said to Anne. "What're you doing out here? You look like you're about to pop!"

"I told her we should've done something a little less strenuous," I said, smiling at Anne. "But stubborn as always, she said she could make it."

Anne punched me playfully in the shoulder. "And I didn't complain one bit, now did I?"

"No. But I could tell you wanted to."

"May I?" Isabelle asked, indicating she'd like to touch Anne's belly. Anne hesitated but consented, and Isabelle rubbed my wife's stomach. "Ha! It kicked. Amazing. Just amazing."

"Do you have any kids?" Anne asked.

"No, no. We were never able to."

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

Isabelle waved away the apology. "Everything happens for a reason, right? Or, at least, that's what I always tell myself."

My wife cringed at this remark, although I didn't register a hint of self-pity. It was more a statement of faith—resolute, but without the slightest shred of evidence. George smiled good-naturedly and inspected his cuticles, perhaps avoiding eye contact out of embarrassment.

The temperature dropped ten degrees almost instantaneously. I stripped off my sweatshirt and handed it to Anne who struggled to pull it over her swollen belly. Isabelle and George gathered wood for a fire. I tried to help, but each piece I found was rotted and wet, no good to bring any warmth. I had never been an outdoorsy type, much unlike my wife who had been raised a tomboy and who hadn't changed despite my many attempts to get her to wear lipstick regularly or to grow her hair out. She has beautiful hair, soft and the color of leaves those few weeks in autumn when the world is ablaze with red.

George struck a match and cradled the precarious flame next to a bed of kindling. Soon, the small cave became enveloped in warmth, like a favorite blanket, comforting and familiar. We sat in a circle and listened to the logs crackle and the thunder outside rumble.

"You two from around here?" Isabelle asked, her face cradled in calloused hands.

We told her no, that we were from Oklahoma.

"You don't say! We're from outside Oklahoma City originally. Still have family there in fact."

"What a coincidence," Anne said, and I agreed.

“What made you move here?” I asked.

“Is that a serious question?” Isabelle asked. “Have you seen this place compared to Oklahoma?”

“Good point.”

I could feel more blood seep down my forehead, thicker this time so that the stream resembled the consistency of syrup. I wiped it away with my hand. Or tried. Instead, I could feel the warmth spread across my forehead like finger paint.

“You need stitches,” my wife said. “It looks pretty bad.”

“It hurts pretty badly.” The wound throbbed in sync with my heartbeat. I worried about infection and gangrene. I never before had such an urge to take antibiotics.

Isabelle scooted closer. “Turn towards the light.” She studied my wound. She had the expression of a worried mother, distraught, yet at the same time visibly pleased at being needed. “Hand me my pack, George.” Inside her backpack she pulled out a handkerchief and a sewing kit. “I never go anywhere without it,” Isabelle explained. “I may be a walking cliché, but I don’t care. A woman needs a hobby.” She pressed the handkerchief against the wound and applied pressure, attempting to stop the bleeding.

Anne rolled her eyes. George pretended not to notice.

“I think everyone needs a hobby,” I said.

“I couldn’t agree more. What’s yours?” She released the handkerchief from my head. “Now this is going to hurt.” She plucked a needle through the swollen flesh; she was right—it did hurt.

“I suppose I don’t have one.”

“That’s a shame.”

The feeling of the needle puncturing my skin felt odd, like my forehead wasn’t really apart of me anymore. It felt disconnected in a way that made me question if Isabelle indeed touched it and not some silicone imposter, glued there for her, and my, enjoyment.

“How come you two couldn’t have kids?” I asked.

“Tom!” my wife scolded. “I’m sorry,” she said to Isabelle and George. “My rude husband can be a bit nosy sometimes.”

Isabelle smiled. George didn’t.

“It’s no problem,” Isabelle said. She glanced at me as if I was just a curious kid. “We tried for quite some time. Years even.”

“Six years,” George said.

“Six years,” Isabelle repeated. “We went to fertility doctors. We

had treatments done. But we never were blessed.”

“Did they find anything wrong?” I asked. My wife scowled from the other side of the cave as she cradled her belly like a breadbasket.

“No. Not a thing,” Isabelle said. “His little swimmers swam, and my eggs were ready for fertilization.”

“And so you just gave up?” I asked. “After all that time?”

“I don’t know if I would say that we gave up.”

“Well,” George said. “We stopped trying. Whatever you call that.”

“But why?” I asked.

Isabelle shot me a look as if I just didn’t understand. Her eyes were wet and soft, and her nostrils flared with her even, slow breaths. No one answered my question.

Isabelle tied off a tourniquet on my stitches and then cut the string. “Good as new, sweetie.” Isabelle said. The way the word “sweetie” rolled off her tongue seemed so reassuring, like I could curl up inside it, cared for by this nice older lady forever. “You’ll have a nasty scar probably, but at least you won’t bleed out on us.” She winked.

“Thank you.”

“Isabelle always has been a mothering type,” George said.

“Not Anne,” I said.

“I figured you’re a big boy,” Anne said. “Take care of yourself. I do.”

She shifted and then straightened her legs; she was uncomfortable sitting on the ground. Being seven months pregnant, that was hardly a surprise. I knew she wouldn’t say anything, though. She’d rather suffer than ask for help.

“I know, babe. Autonomy and whatnot. I’ve heard it a million times.”

“That’s just a bunch of phooey,” Isabelle said. She was sewing now what looked to be a picture of a large, white bird. “Everybody needs some help now and again. I mean, look at us here. What I wouldn’t give for a nice young man with a sandwich and some feet warmers. What I wouldn’t give for just a little bit of help.”

We went quiet for some time, each of us lost in our own thoughts. I couldn’t help but think how this would probably be Anne’s and my last vacation for several years. After the baby’s birth we would become homebodies, taking turns sleeping and watching the baby. This, unlike most of my friends who had become fathers, didn’t bother me so much, though I knew this worried Anne. She’d always

been the social one.

Anne rubbed her belly with a slight grimace. Isabelle looked on longingly, as if pining to replace her own suffering with that of my wife's, if just for a moment, while we sat here, trapped in a cave.

Soon the rains let up, and rays of thin sunlight illuminated the mouth of the cave. The birds were still there as we all four emerged back onto the trail. The only difference this time was that their bodies sounded a bit squishier, like soaked sponges, underneath our heavy steps.

\* \* \*

At the time of Isabelle's funeral I am standing in a murky river with my daughter, now twelve years old. We're testing the acidity of the water, hypothesizing that the PH balance is slightly acidic, but, on the whole, safe for drinking. I'm a biologist for the state who tests air and water quality, so I'm sure my daughter chose this topic so that I would do most of the work. This would bother me if it wasn't exactly the same sort of thing I would've done when I was her age.

It's just the two of us out here, and it is a hot spring day, much more humid than usual, too, so that the cicadas buzzing about in the brush make me think of the sound of simmering grease. We chose the spot because the water, we presumed, would be free from human contamination. We'd be dealing with natural water. Not pure water, of course, but water free from our influence, whether good or ill.

We wade out, she in galoshes, me in hip waders. I have never worn them, a gift from my wife a few years back that has been stored up until today in our attic, collecting dust.

"It's nice out here," Esmé says.

"It's miserable."

"I just mean it's peaceful."

"I'm sweating in spots I didn't even know could sweat."

"You're gross, Daddy."

"Feels like we're in a hot tub for Christ's sake."

"Daddy, stop, geez."

"Seriously, I think I might be getting a rash."

"Oh my God, Dad. Really?"

It's been a few months since Esmé and I have gotten a chance to spend any time alone together. We've both been busy. During

the school year she travels constantly with the drama department, competing in one-act plays and comedy duet troupes. I don't get to see her perform too often because of work. I spend most of my time on the road, averaging only about twelve days at the house per month. Last summer she was off to some Bible study getaway and a youth leadership forum that sounded like a two-week foray into adolescent boot camp.

When I have been home, I've noticed a change in her tone toward me, one of annoyance and exasperation, the way her mother sounds sometimes when I do something I shouldn't have. When her friends come over, she scurries them upstairs and locks the door before I am allowed to introduce myself. She avoids my smile and wave when we are in public, at a school function say, when I spot her from across the room. Perhaps it was a gradual change, this transformation from dependent child to independent pre-teen, but that's not how it seems to me. Just yesterday she poured over me with love, climbing on me like I was her personal jungle gym, and today she can't stand to be around me, as if embarrassment is a natural side-effect of being in my presence. I pretend this doesn't bother me and suffer silently like my wife, but this is a façade. Her shame at being my daughter is the hardest thing I've ever had to endure.

"Hey," I say, "What do you think about going to the movies this weekend? We could get a whole bunch of your friends together, and I could take you out to dinner, wherever you want, like we used to."

She snaps me a look like I've just offered the stupidest suggestion in the history of mankind. "It's been like years since we've done that."

"I know," I say. "That's why I thought it would be fun. Old times."

"Old times? Dad, come on, really?" she whines. "That would make me look so—I don't know." I expect her to tell me the reason why this would not be the definition of fun, but she doesn't, although I get the idea—nobody wants to hang out with Esmé's dad; it just wouldn't be cool. She turns her back to me and runs her fingers through her short, cropped hair. She cut it that way at the beginning of summer, reasoning that her long hair would be too hot. Practical, sure, but I don't believe that's the real reason. She knew I loved her long hair.

"Holy cow! Dad, come look at this!"

Esmé holds a vile of water, the solution for testing the PH already mixed in, turning the liquid an orangish color. This means the water is highly acidic, like lemon juice, which should've been impossible.

“Are you sure you’re doing it right?”

“Mix the water in the solution—what could I mess up? I’m not retarded.”

“I didn’t say you’re retarded. And don’t use that word. It’s offensive.”

“Okay, whatever, Dad. But you implied it.”

“You don’t even know what that word means.”

“I do too, Dad! Quit calling me stupid for Christ’s sake.”

“I’m not calling you stupid. Just let me see it.”

Sure enough, the water and solution is orange. The river is tainted somehow. Could some sort of fish do this? With their waste? For fifteen years I’ve been studying water quality, and I’ve never, even in the most extreme cases, come across anything like this.

“Get out of the water.”

“What?” Esmé asks.

“For safety’s sake.”

“It’s not a flesh eating virus, Dad. Look.” Esmé splashes me. “See? Just fine.”

“Stop putting words in my mouth. I never said it was a flesh eating virus.” I hold the vile up to the sunlight. This river trickles into the drinking water for the surrounding areas. This could possibly be a countywide catastrophe. The governor may even have to declare a state of emergency, ship in water from someplace else, like the Arbuckle aquifer maybe.

Something smacks me hard in the back. Turning around, I see a lemon floating.

“Gotcha,” Esmé says with a laugh.

“Jesus, Esmé. You scared me.”

“Scaredy cat, scaredy cat, you are a scaredy cat,” she taunts, looking just like her mother.

“It’s not funny.”

“Oh, come on. Just a little bit?” She holds her thumb and forefinger so that they’re almost touching.

“No, Esmé. It wasn’t. A lot of people could’ve been in serious trouble.”

“Jesus, Dad. Nobody was in trouble. Quit worrying so much. It was a joke. Do you know what that word means?”

“That’s what parents do, sweetie. We worry.”

Esmé shoots me a puzzled look. “Sweetie?”

"Huh?"

"You've never called me 'sweetie' before."

"I haven't?"

"No. Never." Esmé twists her torso, shooting out ripples of water.

"I like it. Sweetie..." she repeats to herself.

I pick her up like I used to do when she was a toddler, and to my surprise, she doesn't fight me. She's much bigger than I remember. "Sweetie it is, then." Her hair tickles my face and smells of sweat and river water. "How about a milkshake?"

"What about the science experiment?"

"We'll fake the data. No biggie."

"But, Daddy, that's cheating."

"It's only cheating if we get caught." I wink at her, and she giggles like she used to the last time I held her like this.

"I love you, Daddy."

"I love you, too, sweetie."

As we make our way back to our car, I can't help but think of Isabelle. George is probably saying his final goodbye right about now. I wish I could've said farewell, too, but Isabelle would probably scold me for such an impulse, telling me instead to enjoy my time with Esmé. I'm sure she would. And she would be right. But I still feel guilty. She'd probably tell me to knock that off, too, though. With a bright, motherly grin, she'd reassure me that there's no need to worry, that everything happens for a reason, and that she had no regrets at all when that bolt of lightning struck out of nowhere and she fell suddenly to the ground.



## Daphne's Premonition

She stands inside its shadow  
mugged by quick breezes,  
and a spring fever creeps upon her,  
day by day all April, into May,  
as her vision blurs into the tree's aura  
and arms of warmth slip under her clothing,  
each flush of petrified unease  
heals her into a rooted, monkish stillness,  
a vibrant photosynthesis  
dresses her in a twist of summer's urge, believing  
stillness is a kind of motion  
and the thrust of chlorophyll that surges  
from groin to sky-brushed green hair  
tastes like liquid youthfulness  
while understanding grows  
on how to wear rough and wrinkling skin,  
a gift of graying scars and scabs covering  
like love bites left  
from tousling with all kinds of weather.

# Ezequiel Expressionism

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Ezequiel Olvera  
watercolor on paper  
8" by 11"

## The Birds Still Scream for El Salvador

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Melina Alexa Ramirez  
acrylic on canvas  
36" by 48"

## From Homemaker to Modern Kitchen Tool

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Cynthia Leyva  
graphite pencil on paper  
16" by 20"

## Vietnam Woman

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Sara Lebeck  
pencil on matte paper  
24" by 36"

For a Friend

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Cristian D. Rubi  
solarplate print  
6" by 8"

# Purple Weight

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Charlotta Kratz  
digital photography  
7.5" by 5"

# Thug

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Kassie Mattia  
acrylic on canvas  
12" by 12"



## Strawberry Seed Holder

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Alison Morse  
copper  
2.5"

## My Mother Finally Speaks About Her Younger Brother's Decapitated Fiancé

Seatbelts, she said, weren't always around.  
When we were young we rode without them,  
to Nevada in the heat of Dad's station wagon, driving at night to  
stay cool,  
bouncing around like gumballs but still falling asleep on the bags,  
on each other.

*The heart, she said, asks pleasure first.*  
She was a hairdresser and he was an electrician,  
(and here I thought *Village People* and felt the burn of insincere  
remorse,  
already knowing the story, having watched a different convertible  
skid out on CSI the night before).

That was a long time ago, she said, and of course things are better.  
Sure, and it was rough for a while, but we all pulled through,  
(and here I thought *no, there is no pulling through a wardrobe with too  
many clothes,*  
*a kitchen with too many plates, no one to wash their hands and turn the  
shower glacial*).

I need to stir the sauce, she said, don't ask about it again.  
I didn't, because I knew that it wasn't about speed limits or  
Stranger Danger or Vitamin C.  
It was about holding something so tightly that it became a part of  
you,  
a seatbelt pressing against skin until it disappears.

## Pilatus Praefectus Iudaeae

It is said the gods take human form to pillory us,  
Inveigh upon us our mistakes, while they drink to excess,  
Rage with jealous passion, in lust rape our mortal sisters,  
For sport set Ilium on fire, smash Carthage into sand.

*— You are the one they call Messiah?*

Like the test of Baucis and Philemon: Jove in disguise  
Could stand before me or the Emperor's mad nephew,  
His eyes clear, empty, as a cloudless sky over Capreae,  
Or the Emperor himself, that gloomiest of men.

*— Why do you not respond to their accusations?*

How do I know identity in a world of magic,  
Where the spirit can drift severed, apart, from its corpus?  
Amidst talk of miracles, how do I know what is truth?

*— Do you not hear the charges they make against you?*

There is rhythm in the crowd's chants—crucify, crucify him—  
That sways like wind, in the way the chief priests and scribes point,  
Gesture their hands like fish and denounce with a vehemence  
That sprays shards of spit onto the mosaic marble floor.

*— What evil has this man done?*

My wife burned, in a dream, because of him. But what is truth?  
Alexander crucified Callisthenes, grandnephew  
Of Aristotle, for not prostrating to him the way  
The Parthian subjects did for their ancient king of kings.

*— Behold, my hands are cleansed of this man's blood.*

They see their prophets' beards and faces billow in the clouds  
High above the deserts of Iudaeae. Their god's power  
Transcends our pantheon's combined might. I shall free the thief.

—*Why do you not respond to their accusations?*

## The Patriarch

My grandfather was a military man. For me, as a young boy, this fact awarded him the power of God. If I had been asked whether my grandfather or the Holy Lord sat as supreme commander, I would have been left in quite a quandary. I remember close to nothing that was said at the sermons I sat through as a child; sitting in the pews, struggling to stare through stained glass. I vividly remember all the time I would spend looking at my own youthful reflection in my mirror, imagining my most desired likeness.

I would wade through a plethora of comics, toy cars, and costumes until I reached my mirror. I would then stare through the glass, captured in trance. Anyone else staring at that image would have seen the bright eyes, innocent face, and fragile frame of a young, prepubescent boy. My perception was quite different. My eyes were dim and squinting, my face rough and rugged. I looked strong and I felt strong.

In the mirror I wore high black combat boots, ones like my grandfather kept buried in his closet. Head-to-toe my body was dressed or dyed in varied shades of green and brown. I would close my right hand so only the middle and index fingers were left extended and I would pretend to slowly spread battle paint across my face.

The backyard, too, would transform before me. I had a mantra, which I whispered while patrolling my mother's garden, "March, shoot, kill." I would softly recite these words, my tiny finger curled around the orange plastic trigger of my toy rifle. The words meant nothing, nothing beyond the extended connection they seemed to draw between a young boy and his idol.

I always kept my weapon aimed. I knew that certain death could be hidden just beyond mother's white roses. The gun was just a simple toy. The black was simply painted plastic, the metallic silver some bogus enamel. The magazine didn't eject anything; it was incapable of holding bullets. Yet, it was very much a loaded machine. What mattered to me was that when I pulled my finger back and that small plastic trigger clicked, I entered a world of pure fantasy. I held the

power; I had control; everything a gun symbolized became mine. I was like my grandfather: an army man.

I remember the visits to my grandfather's house. The night before sleep would be painfully trying. In the morning I would thrust myself from the sheets, wash up with utter alacrity, and we would get in the car were I would sit, unable to halt the bouncing of my knees. I wouldn't speak the whole ride over. I saved my words for his ears. When we arrived I would sprint up the brick staircase to the front door. Then I would pause, waiting anxiously for my mother to ring the bell.

When grandfather opened the door I wanted to jump on him, hug him with all my strength. I knew not to. I knew he wouldn't like it. When the door opened, for a moment he would just stand there, his white hair always blowing softly in an otherwise unseen wind. He was not tall, just commanding. He would first embrace my sister with a tender hug and a kiss on the cheek, followed by my mother. He would then change face. Pure tenderness transitioned into a powerfully unassailable gaze. He would look at my father, his son, grin and nod. Then he would turn to me, bend his knees and extend his hand. I knew to grip with all my might as I shook. If I did, he would smile.

I would ask him a lot of questions on these visits, too many. I knew this. I just couldn't hold my tongue. It was hard because sometimes he would choose to share. He would show me things: compasses, binoculars, magazine clippings and Medals of Honor. He would tell me stories about the items as I stared intently with absolute admiration. Other times when I would ask for him to show me his treasures he would simply say no.

I remember once asking him to see his Bronze Star. He said no. I asked why we couldn't go see it. He responded sharply by saying, "The reason now, is that I just said no." So, I asked, "Why do you keep something like that in your sock drawer anyway, grandpa? You should hang it up."

He turned and looked directly at me, "You think I need its recognition?" His eyes stayed fixed on me for a moment as I sat without words. He then turned and headed into the kitchen. I went home that day and ripped everything of mine off the refrigerator door; finger paintings to spelling tests, anything with my name scribbled on the page.

As I grew, being in the Army lost some appeal. However, the insatiable desire to be a strong man never faded. As a young boy I would brag through wiggling teeth and I would march with boastful swagger, because my grandfather was an army man. Entering my teenage years my ignorant pride fell to the rise of self-doubt. I began to forge my identity around bravado. I stood behind the constant guise of a tough and dangerous adolescent. I forged my persona through the actions I erroneously noted within the popularizations of those like my grandfather. The true mold of a composed, strong, and capable man that I knew and cherished was altered within my whirlwind of confusion.

My portrait of manhood and of morality was weathered and warped by unmanageable teenage desires. I made my mark through intimidation, fear, and aggression. This was how I chose to be a man; prove I was no longer a boy. Negative results always followed my harmful actions: groundings, suspensions, expulsions, and lock-downs. I hated what was happening, I feared what would happen next, but still I couldn't contain that which I knew was wrong. How else could I be a man? My world was spinning so fast, it felt as though the next time I cocked back my fist and swung my arm I would be shot right off its surface. I had to talk to someone. I needed time with my grandfather.

Grandpa was terminally ill at this time. He was dying from lung cancer. I remember as my mother drove me over she kept telling me that it was okay to be sad or to cry. I knew her sentiments, though I thought ill conceived, came from the heart. I nodded as I exited her car. "Your Dad will be here in about a half an hour, but he said he would stay parked in the driveway until you come out." I again nodded, shut the door, and headed to the brick staircase leading up to the front door. I walked up slowly, feeling the movement of each muscle upon every step I took. I thought back to how fast I used to fly up those same stairs just a few years prior. I reached the door, took a deep breath, and rang the bell.

A nurse came to the door to let me in. She said in a frustrated tone that my grandfather was outside by the pool. I went to meet him, walking through the living room and then pulling open the sliding-glass-door. And there he was, dying of cancer, and balanced between two fingers he puffed away at an abnormally large, dark, and potent cigar. A pair of sunglasses with deep rose-tinted lenses

sat on the tip of his nose. His shirt was half open and his hairless, scar-riddled chest was exposed to the sun, his heart challenging the heavens.

I didn't ask him what he was doing, what he was thinking smoking in his current state. What right did I have? And what good would it do? I just stood there. He took the cigar out of his mouth and rolled his head over to face my direction. He looked white, tired, and weak. He was still a soldier though and anyone would have known it. "You're looking at me; so you know, you can tell, smoking this cigar doesn't mean a thing." He pounded his chest with a balled up fist. "Nothing left to salvage in there." These words took me dangerously close to tears. I stifled the sound in my throat and blinked my eyes quickly. I then walked over and sat in the patio chair across from him. We started talking. He knew how I had been screwing up, where I had been, he knew the full extent of everything. He never mentioned any of it. We just talked.

At a certain point it became clear that his energy was diminishing. I stood up and I told him I'd go and come back in just a couple days. He shook his head profusely in protest and he said that he had one more thing to share with me. I remember that I didn't like the way he said this, but I sat back down and looked at him. "You know that Bronze Star you always loved so much?" I nodded slowly, my eyes transfixed on the fading blue irises of my grandfather. "Well, I resurrected it from the old sock drawer. Framed it. I'm giving it to you." I couldn't speak. I couldn't do anything. I just sat there. "Oddly, I think you appreciate it more than I do anyways." His eyes then searched mine. I couldn't respond.

A typhoon of thought and emotion spiraled in and around my body, an effect that was only halted by the echo of my grandfather's voice again entering my crowded mind. "Here's the thing. I value the way you appreciate that medal. I do. But, in reality, it isn't worth a damn thing." I stared at him, still unable to formulate my thoughts into statements. "It's just steel, son. They're given to honor actions. Steel or no steel, I remember all mine pretty damn well." He paused to take a labored breath. "What I'm proud of isn't that I have a medal, or a title, or anything like that. I'm proud of the things I did." With those words a heat rose up from within my body. I wanted to be nowhere else in the world but there, but my veins fought to escape my skin.



My grandfather saw me struggling, I could tell. He then exerted what looked like every ounce of energy left in his body, so that he could move his chair closer to me. He leaned forward and spoke again, "I'm giving you a medal. But you need to know that I really only gave you one thing that at the end of the day should mean anything." He struggled to take another breath, composed himself, and said, "Our family name." I kept my eyes on him, taking in his presence, fighting worming tears. "That's our collective legacy. Do something stupid it's tarnished, something of greatness it shines brighter. You can do whatever you want with that medal; if you're going to shine something for me, make it our name." I knew then, this was the closing monologue of our family patriarch.

I gazed at my grandfather. In his nose, cheeks, and coloring, I saw my father, I saw myself, and I cried. I cried without hesitation or control. It was the first time I even remember letting go. The tears just came down in an unfamiliar and awkward avalanche of relief. I slowed my breathing and tried to focus. I looked at my grandfather and in that instant came a fleeting moment of clarity. I noted all the things I so justly admired about the man before me, and all the things, too, that I could shine. I hugged him, unsure of how he would respond; I didn't care. I hugged him like my father or mother would hug me to calm me down, to say everything would be okay. On this day, he let me; a quick embrace, and I whispered to him that I couldn't have asked for a better grandfather.

I left his house that evening, still a boy, confused, with endless lessons to be learned. I walked down the brick staircase and entered the car of my waiting father, my head filled with new thoughts and perspectives. I closed the car door, turned, and embraced my father. I hugged him with my eyes closed and heart full. I unfolded my arms and sat back, buckling my seatbelt. I turned my head to face my father; he looked back and smiled in a way I had never seen before. He asked if I was ready to go home. I grinned and pointed my finger in the direction of the street.

There was a palpable pause, and I noticed my father's eyes staring intensely into his rearview mirror, looking back at his father's home. He then turned to me. He placed his right hand on my shoulder, with his left he turned the key, and we started the drive home, the sun slowly falling behind the hills. My father turned the car, exiting the cul-de-sac and closing a chapter in all our lives.

## The Calling

The woman making her vodka flask into a phone  
at the bus port, to use it to talk to her past,  
sewed her playtime into a quilt, back when she was a girl,  
that she pulled up over her eyes  
Her horizon blows further away every time it hears another hymn  
that no one will blame her for singing, even if she doesn't mean a word,  
after all,  
The knuckles on her White Russian and the  
clean paper cut of her mouth  
are more than proof of her greed

## Vindication

*“The Owl is pleased to be able to present, for the first time in print, the following poem which was made available by William Garrison of Salinas, a student at the University of Santa Clara before and after World War II. He received it from Lt. [John] Lee [died 1942, Cabantuan] while serving with a tank battalion on Bataan during the first months of the war. He was captured and spent more than three years in Japanese prison camps in the Philippines and in Japan. The Owl has been unable to find any record of this poem having been copyrighted or having previously appeared in print.”*

These words were written by former editors of Santa Clara University's literary magazine, *the Owl*. Searching for a piece from our publication's past worthy of reprinting, the note, in a fall issue from 1947, caught my eye—as did the poem it prefaced.

I am not sure why I felt compelled to type into my web browser a few lines from the poem. But after I did, I found a strikingly similar poem written not by a Lt. John Lee, but a Lt. Henry Lee, on a website dedicated to the U.S. soldiers who were held as prisoners of the Japanese during WWII in the Philippines. Confused, I contacted the Linda Dahl; Omuta POW History Project Manager.

Even with Linda's access to army databases, we found no record of a Lt. John Lee. There is, however, evidence of POW Johnnie Lee who died in 1942; though his death was recorded at Bilibid Prison, not in Cabanatuan. Henry Lee, on the other hand, died in Cabanatuan. Interestingly enough, his parents published a book of his war poems in 1948, one year after this poem was printed in *the Owl*.

The author of the following poem remains unknown...

\* \* \*

They said we were soft, we were aimless,  
They said we were spoiled past reclaim,  
We had lost the American Spirit,  
Were a blot on America's name.

We were useless, weaklings and drifters,  
And the last census reveals  
We had lost the Faith of our Fathers—  
We had sacrificed muscles for wheels.

The old men wept for their country,  
And sighed for the days of yore.  
And somehow we half believed them—  
But that was before the war.

Before we had heard the bombs shriek  
And the howlings ugly and shrill  
That ripple across the rice fields  
When the “Nippy” comes in for the kill.

Before we had lived on hunger,  
That hopeless defense on Bataan;  
An advance guard with no main body,  
Yet a thorn in the side of Japan.

So now we can laugh at our leaders  
And now we can give them the lie;  
We held the “line that couldn’t be held”  
When they struck us at Abucay.

Soft and Weaklings and Shameless?  
Go where the steel was sowed,  
Ask of the endless fox graves  
That dot the Hacienda Road;

And ask of the tangled trails,  
Deadly and green and hot,  
And the bloody Pilar River  
And the forward slopes of Sumat;

Ask at Limay and Balanga  
Where the outpost burrowed like moles,  
Where the sky-trained flying soldiers  
Died in the Infantry holes.

And then ask of the silent jungles  
Where the unburied remnants lie,  
Asleep by their rusting rifles—  
The men who learned how to die.

Who squeezed their Garand's trigger?  
Who met the tanks on a mare?  
Who flew the Primary Trainers  
While Zeros were in the air?

Who watched the Bomb-bays open,  
Day after endless day,  
And stayed with their Anti-Aircraft  
With tons of H.E. on the way?

Who led the scouts at Quinan?  
Who stopped the break at Moron?  
Who, but your immature youngsters—  
The desperate Men of Bataan.

So now we have learned our lesson  
And how to apply it too,  
And this is the application:  
The things they said were true—

We were soft, we were weaklings and aimless,  
We believed in ourselves alone.  
But now we're tempered with fire,  
We are ready, U.S. to come home.

## Paleolithic Person Explains Her Footprints

I needed something to burn,  
something to light this hollow of the cave,  
something to warm me against the wind,  
I was sucking marrow from a bone.

Exhale and suck. Exhale and suck.  
Exhale and the sound of gloom from the bone.  
Exhale and the sound of a bison  
before it mounts its mate.

The moan pulsed in my ear  
like the drowsiness of wind at night.  
I exhaled and blew over and over.  
My hands were trembling.

Exhale and suck. Exhale and suck.  
The empty bone. Tones deeper  
than the sound of settling ash.  
I wished for a higher sound. A sound of joy.

I thought to give the bone ears to hear.  
I thought to give the bone a mouth to breathe.  
I carved into its side a hole  
and then another and another.

I had invented the hole.  
I covered the holes with my fingers  
and invented graves for my breaths.  
I had invented burial.

I lifted a finger to release one breath  
like an ember rising in the wind.  
I invented the high sound.  
I invented the long breath and the short.

My eyes widened as I heard what I played,  
my ears focused on breathing and pattern,  
my fingers bounced up and down,  
my fingers invented dancing.

My legs followed my fingers in the dance.  
My feet charted this joy of rhythm in the dirt.  
I forgot the holes and the graves. I breathed with ease.  
I invented a distraction from dying.

## Shifting

I was initially skeptical about the Philoctetes Project until I saw it in action. How strange and wonderful it turned out to be.

The Philoctetes Project was conceived as a way to help soldiers re-integrate back into day-to-day life outside the warzone. Actors read scenes from the Greek plays *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* without leaving their seats. I wondered, would the audience truly experience Ajax? Would they follow the drama without the aid of visual stimulation? My questions were answered when I heard the actor's fierce reading, which was charged with heavy emotion. The actor's voice was haunting as he vocalized Ajax's descent into madness. The audience of soldiers was amazed that they related so much to the ancient characters.

I realized that modern military personnel experience the same turmoil as the characters Ajax and Philoctetes. They forge a bond with each other that normal civilians cannot hope to infringe upon.

I worry that like Ajax, perhaps help will be of no avail once someone has been exposed to the hideousness of war for far too long. Am I witnessing a decay of mind? Will everything be okay once my soldier-friend comes home?

One of my dearest friends graduated from the Air Force Academy with the intent of becoming a war pilot. However, his goal was unachieved as he was instead assigned to an Intelligence desk job. Was all his training and skill for naught? He was bored, impatient, restless, and unfulfilled. After a year of grinding doldrums, he joined the U.S. Army and completed ranger school. When he called home, he spoke frantically as he sought to describe his experience. He came alive in the army, and he was eager to enter the battlefield.

"I'm going to be deployed to Afghanistan," he said, proudly heralding his "great" news. Are loved ones insensitive for not partaking in his joy? I was honest and told him I did not want him to go. "I know," he replied, shrugging off the words I had been afraid to say. He was ecstatic to leave.

We have been in fairly regular contact since he left. His emails



started off very long, descriptive, and reflective. His positive words suggested he was living a normal life in a mundane suburb instead of living packed into a tent in the middle of a desert.

Gradually, his tone changed. Simple things like “I miss peanut butter,” and “How is that one person I never talk to?” revealed something worrisome. It was normal for him to become introspective since he was alone for hours on end. It wasn’t isolation that ate away at him — only boredom. However, I knew better. I knew the toils of war were causing the shift in his character.

His emails grew more and more vague, but I did not pry or ask questions. He wrote what he saw. A whirlwind of medics. Men on stretchers. Bullet wounds. Exposed bones. A screaming soldier abruptly silenced by sedation. Bundles of tricep attached to bone by mere threads of flesh. The stench of raw meat.

Tone, voice, personality. It was all different now. He no longer discussed what he saw, what he did, what he felt. His emails shifted to “What’s going on with you?” and “Tell me about studying for that one class you hate.” How on earth would my mundane student life compare to the adrenaline-pumping fervor he experienced every day?

But the night is long and he sits alone, staring at an empty horizon. It’s slowly taking over him, grasping hold, and not letting go. He is Philoctetes, stranded on an island, starved for human contact. He no longer wants to talk about himself.

“How are you? What are you doing?” I ask.

“You wouldn’t understand,” he says. He does not explain. Would he echo the sentiments of The Philoctetes Project? The damage is not always visible to the human eye. The project knows this much. Would he be insulted? Is it overstepping boundaries? Would he not understand? Sometimes I can picture Ajax’s thousand-yard stare while reading his emails. Am I witness to a descent? Trudging through sand, dodging gunfire, and watching his comrades fall. Can the healing only begin once he comes home? *If he comes home?*

Ajax is dismayed by his slaughter of animals. They were just animals, but they were innocent. Does my friend rationalize the killings in war? The conflict to justify killing might just drive one insane. My curiosity is prying and pulling, but I would never ask it. *Have you killed anyone?*

What began as a few days between letters became weeks, now months. He no longer addresses the things I say in my letters. He

simply asks me to tell him more. I am a lifeline to mundane normalcy.

I wonder what he has seen, what has he heard. There is twisting and writhing and screaming. And then, silence. The world comes back into view and the blaring of machines thunders as a young soldier lays sedated, flesh dangling from his bones. My friend is tucking meat back into skin. He was not trained for this.

There is an even worse question to ask than if he has killed. I will never ask it. He is different, but still there. Tecmessa mourns her shell of a husband, but there are those who would give anything to just have that shell. *Do you regret it?*

## Paddlewheel

In the daily rotation the buckets scoop names  
Up from the river of evolution. Whether forward

Or backward, the thrust has left translations  
To twist or lie ahull in the generations lifted

Into the rudder of remembering and forgetting,  
Meanings stained in the channels of time,

Voices fated to breed in Christendom  
With weedy variants like my ancestral name

Over 1400 years old, the Cullum breed—  
A migration leading to Devonshire

Where the river Culme flows, and the name voyages  
On to Ireland, Scotland, the USA.

Grandmother's destiny to journey  
Down the Mississippi; her steamer trunk packed

With crinolines, a china doll, a photo album—Delta music  
Feeding on youthful fantasies like words inside her mouth

Dueling for strength, for fortunes and hungers.  
Inside her head sounds stressed in the Baptist church,

Hellfire and damnation. A surefire way to amuse  
The art of behaviors not only on the alluvial plains

But along city streets and steaming down river  
Where card sharks deal off the bottom—

Their daily dose of awful routines propelled  
With breathless consonants and long vowels

While the whole waterfall of the named  
And the nameless flowed between the tides.

## Sluggers

When your coach throws you the pink jersey, put it on, even though you don't want to. Avoid looking your teammates in the eyes; it'll entice them to heckle you twice as hard. When the coach sends you to centerfield, pay attention, despite how boring it gets out there. Stop watching the flies. There's no discernable pattern to their trajectories.

Don't let your mind wander. If you think about Kim, you'll get an erection, and it'll press against the plastic cup. The cup's air holes have rough edges, and the skin on your penis is soft and weak.

Stop closing your eyes when you swing the bat. It's a terrible habit, and it affects everyone.

Put the pink jersey on, silently. Don't protest.

When your teammates call you fag in school, giggle along with them. Understand that you're on the team to build up the winners. You're their comparative basis. Trust the coach's judgment.

In art class, when a teammate rubs his leg against Kim, try not to stare him down. Don't close your eyes either. Just do your art. Use only pink paints. Show your pink rendition of a fruit basket to everyone and join in on their laughter. Listen to the art teacher suggest ways for creating shadow while remaining loyal to a single color. "Not all shadows must be black," he'll say. "You're the creator of this universe; you make the rules. But the rules have to be logical and consistent, bottom to top, OK? Maybe use a darker shade of pink to create shadow."

He will show you something about dimension. About illusion. You will learn to see the intricacies of space. You will see how lines imply motion. You will see where logic and anticipation intersect. You will see how a single brushstroke can make a horizon vulnerable to distance, obstruction, destruction. You will make ambiguous reference points and arbitrary nodes. You will trivialize the foreground. You will stretch time and space by shifting and shuffling your observer's eyes.

You will destroy a fastball. It will trace an invisible line through

the air and over the fence. You will expose the horizon. Your teammates will hang their heads in shame, even though they're winners. They'll shiver at the sight of the pink jersey hanging on a hook in the dugout because now it belongs to someone else.

One day, bottom of the ninth, down by one, runner on second and third, it'll be your turn to bat. You will ask for the pink jersey. The coach will think that you're horsing around. He'll remind you that homerun hitters don't wear pink.

"This one does," you'll say.

"It's meant to be worn in the dugout, not on the field. Come on, it was a joke, a team spirit kind of thing. Just wear your team jersey, OK?"

You'll insist on wearing the pink jersey.

"Why are you taking this to heart? It was meant to discipline you. It worked, didn't it? There's no reason to be sour."

You will refuse to do anything but wear the pink jersey.

He'll throw his clipboard down. "You need thicker skin, son. I can't let you go out there like that."

He'll send in a pinch hitter. Your teammates will grumble. Although you've spoiled the game, although you're the loser again, the pink jersey will remain on the hook, neither taken nor given. But next season, after you've quit sports for art, someone else will wear it. He'll realize that the coach keeps him on the team in order to build up everyone else's spirits. They'll never speak of you, but maybe, when he slips that jersey over his head the first time and everyone—so quiet, so reluctant to laugh—turn their heads optimistically toward the scoreboard, he'll see intersections he's never dreamed of, a horizon so close and vulnerable that he'll want nothing more than to shatter it.

## Starstruck

Look at the stars, he says  
Each constellation tells a story

Orpheus:        he who lost love to death  
                      tried in vain to set her free  
                      only to lose her once again

Andromeda:    vain, beautiful daughter  
                      sacrificed to still gods' wrath  
                      rescued by a man in love

*All this talk of love — would you  
save me from the underworld  
or the belly of a beast?*

They are pictures painted by gods, he says  
The silken legacy of mankind

I paint a picture of us sitting under stars  
His mortal hand gesturing up  
My mortal eyes following his reach

Who am I to mimic gods  
But one who knows the age old story

*Pyramus, Pyramus, save me from myself*

My palette bare and uninspired  
Unless I steal the light of stars  
Turn them into fireflies on my canvas  
One by one until they fly away on

Pegasus:      gallant winged horse  
                     sprung from Medusa's neck  
                     bid by gods to bring the dawn

As daylight breaks, I too can fly:

Do not ascend heroes' thrones, I say  
I am no damsel and need not be saved



## Taylor Hyundai Lied to Me

Three. That's how many scratch tickets the Taylor Hyundai dealership on Poe Road said they were going to give me. I got their announcement in the mail, a giant glossy sheet of paper folded twice in a twelve-by-nine golden-brown envelope. Prizes framed in glittery white and yellow stars as though they were their own constellations. A little corny I know, but I had a good feeling. I read each word carefully and the guarantee was clear: I'd already won a new car, ten thousand dollars, or three Doubling Dollar Ohio state scratch tickets. All I had to do was visit the dealership.

Three's always been my lucky number. It's the number of proposals it took for Karen to say yes, the number of A's I got in high school—all in gym—and the number of years I'd been driving Rocky, my ninety-three Pontiac Grand Prix with the CD player and sunroof. All the signs were there.

I told Karen about it as we lounged around the house—the one my mom left to me when she died—both of us with the Wednesday morning off. As the closing manager at Arby's, I had to go in later that night. Karen only worked weekend shifts at Dairy Queen for a couple hours, said any more than that hurt her back. I couldn't blame her. My feet and back got pretty sore after a shift. It's the type of pain you live with, I guess, until you're able to lie in bed, drift off, slowly forgetting about it until the next eight-hour stint. It's the type of life that makes offers from car dealerships feel pretty special.

If you do the math, I said to her, it costs less than three dollars in gas to get there and back. That's how much the lowest prize is worth.

Did you use a calculator? Karen asked, not looking up from her new Elle. She was couched in our living room, Cheez-Its box between her thighs.

No, but I can estimate.

How long will you be gone?

She asked that a lot. Sometimes when I came home, my friend Preston would be there waiting for me. We played Madden in my basement, mashed together in my saggy loveseat, and he was really

good, always burning me with Hail Marys. Karen introduced us a few months earlier, said they met at Wal-Mart or something, and at least once a week I'd come home to him waiting in the kitchen, his skinny tan legs chameleons to our table legs. He really liked to play, I guess, always wanting to give me another chance to beat him. I never did.

I'd rather have the ten thousand dollars, I told her. Otherwise, I'd be tempted to sell Rocky, and I couldn't do that. Rocky's taken me all the way to Denver and back.

Where?

Denver.

Eric, when did you go to Denver?

I laughed, kissed her on the forehead. Karen had the worst memory. I'd told her about my senior trip to Denver at least fifty times, the impulsive decision Greg, Josh and I had made, cutting class during finals week to hike the Rocky Mountains with just backpacks. That had been three years ago and I wanted to go again, but Greg and Josh didn't live in Ohio anymore and Karen never seemed too keen on the idea.

You're sure you don't want to go to the dealership? I asked. What if we win the car? You won't get to pick the color.

The color of what?

The car.

What car, Eric?

I didn't laugh this time. She was doing it on purpose, I realized. She thought it was funny to ask stupid questions to frustrate me. I'd told her before that I didn't like it, but all she said was, How do you think I feel? which didn't make sense, so I dropped it. Still, she knew it hurt.

What will you do while I'm gone? I asked.

She sat there slouched in her pink sweatpants with the letters on the butt—though I couldn't see them at the moment—smirking as she placed crackers on her tongue. She broke them one-by-one, each making the sound of a bug getting shoe-squashed.

I should shower, she said. How long will you be, again?

I shrugged, had never done this sort of thing before. I always thought the fliers in the mail were scams, never bothered to make the trek. But when the dealership is just up the road, a mile away, and they promise a minimum of three scratch tickets, are bound to it in writing, it's just too good to pass up. I even felt a little obligated, I think. I couldn't win if I didn't go—the flier said so. And then who

would I be to complain about my job or the weather or bills piling up? I could be a winner and not even know it, just continuing through life whining about how nothing ever worked out for me, when really, it had.

You know, if you walk, you'll save even more money, Karen said, this time looking up at me. I loved the way her eyes looked, beautiful light brown, almost tan, like one of those fancy coffee drinks. They were the first thing I saw when she rang up my Oreo Blizzard two years ago, were what I fixated on as we stood in front of the St. Mary's rose garden and said our vows, time so distorted I could hardly remember what we'd said when it was over. When you meet eyes like that, you marry them, no matter what your family thinks.

Regardless of her beautiful eyes, she was right about walking to the dealership. When you're pushing two-hundred K like Rocky, you save the miles any way you can, so I laced up my shoes. I tucked the flier carefully in my back pocket, needed my prize-deciding personal security code: KQ43Z21. Karen left her couch and started changing for a shower, the water rumbling, warming up for her. I was almost out when she yelled something about the drain.

What is it? I yelled back.

It's backing up.

I didn't know what she wanted me to do about it, didn't know the first thing about unclogging pipes.

I'll call Preston. I think his dad's a plumber, she said. He's good with his hands.

Is he? I asked. I couldn't remember, didn't have the time to stop and think about it. I told her that was fine, I had to go.

You don't mind? She sounded disappointed for some reason, like she wanted me to say something different. She did that a lot, questioning my response, waiting for my answer like I was on some marriage quiz show. Usually it was about whether or not something upset me, like her leaving her dirty clothes around or the time the neighbor's dog crapped all over our yard. Most things didn't bother me, and I think that bothered her.

No? I said, knowing it was the wrong answer. I had to be honest. Why would I mind if Preston came and fixed our shower?

I didn't hear a response, so I walked outside. Patches of weeds marbled the yard, the grass shaggy like an old dog since I hadn't mowed in about three weeks. I liked my house fine, grew up in it,

felt comfortable here. Still, it was hard to get motivated to work on it, give it the care and attention it deserved. I was a fortunate guy to have a house at my age and I guess that's what happens when your parents die young—dad just a year after I was born, mom last summer. I didn't fully appreciate it, though. Didn't feel like the house was really mine. And mowing the lawn, trimming the hedges, and cleaning the gutters made me feel like I was a teenager again, like my mom was still in the house drinking diet Coke, thinking up more chores for me to do. Funny thing is I didn't mind it then, did anything the house needed, and really, felt pretty good about it. That wasn't the case anymore. I suppose you avoid what makes you feel bad. There's nothing wrong with that.

\* \* \*

I walked up to the dealership and man was it crowded. Just herds of retired couples filling the parking lot like they were storming a bunker. I almost turned my back on those scratch tickets, to be quite honest. But I'm not a quitter. I've never left a job or a relationship no matter how bad they've gotten. Like when my eighth-grade girlfriend stopped talking to me, spread rumors that I was Osama Bin Laden's nephew just because I have black curly hair—am not even middle-eastern, but half Italian—I still tried to make it work, made her break up with me. My thinking is that whenever you read about someone great like Christopher Columbus or Alexander Fleming, you find that they always pushed through adversity. Great things don't come to quitters. So I walked right up to that dealership. Besides, I had the afternoon off.

I passed a careful-stepping elderly couple and made my way inside. The showroom was worse than the parking lot, people everywhere. I watched them, had never seen so many retired couples in one place. For some reason, all the old people were scared of everything. Scared of the salesmen, the show cars, the door they struggled to push open as they came in and out. Why? They'd seen these things a million times, but the old people looked at them as if they might kill them. Maybe that's what it means to be old. You're closer to death, closer to God than you've ever been, and maybe the closer you are to God the more you realize you're not God. And that's pretty scary, makes everything else seem scarier, even things

you've seen your whole life. I started thinking maybe it was good Mom and Dad didn't live to be that old, that they still saw the world as a warm safe place when they died. I wondered if I would live long enough to realize how scary everything was.

I waited to see a salesman for about twenty years. Finally, one emerged from his office, singled me out with a nod and a smile like he'd been looking for me all day. He was fairly young, maybe early thirties. His tie was a yellow, green, and red mess, like someone ran over a Keebler elf and smeared it on silk. His short black hair looked wet, but I think it was just gel. It'd be pretty unprofessional to walk around work with wet hair, and this man was definitely a pro.

He led me past the Elantras and the Veracruz, back to an empty table. It sat between other tables where other salesmen helped other hopeful couples, and though the showroom was hectic and loud, our table was quiet with just the two of us. I could hear the rustling of the papers he carried, the click of the pen as he popped the ballpoint in and out.

He introduced himself, Matt Middleton, and took some of my information—in case they needed to mail me the ten thousand dollar check, or the Toledo Blade wanted to contact me for a short spotlight in the local news section, I assumed.

Was it Beach street with an 'a'? he asked.

Two e's.

Very good, he said, scribbling. What car do you currently drive, Eric?

I told him about Rocky: his age, his sunroof, his rust spots on the hood that reminded me of freckles. I almost started telling him about my senior trip to Denver, but that would've been too much. Luckily Matt Middleton stopped me.

Ninety-three? he said. He said it a few times, actually, and sounded more shocked with each repetition. How many miles does the car have?

I said about one-eighty, though Rocky's odometer read 191,873 last time I checked. I don't know. I thought if I rounded down, Matt Middleton wouldn't think Rocky was such a bad car. He kept shaking his head like he'd never heard of something so old, like it was ridiculous for me to have it.

Eric, it sounds to me you might be ready for an upgrade. Have you had a chance to sit in one of our new Accents?

No thanks, I said.

He grunted and adjusted in his seat.

With GM and Chrysler declaring bankruptcy, taking all your hard-earned money in bailouts, you need a car manufacturer you can trust, he said.

Wasn't it the government who bailed them out?

Well, sure! You pay taxes, don't you?

Yes, I do, I said.

The government took a good sixty dollars from each check and I always forgot to account for it when multiplying eight-fifty by the number of hours I worked. Made it hard to budget. But what did that have to do with the prizes? I pulled out my flier as a subtle reminder. Maybe he'd get the hint.

Matt Middleton glanced at the sheet, promptly bounced his eyes to the showroom models, the glossy paint jobs that looked as though they'd never rust. He pointed at a black convertible beside us.

How'd you like to test drive a Sonata? It's much better than a sunroof, believe me.

I'm really just here to collect my prize, I said.

You know, they've discontinued Pontiacs, he went on, pretending he hadn't heard me. You're going to have a tough time finding parts for that old Grand Prix.

But there are thousands of Pontiacs on the road. Why would they stop making parts?

Because they've stopped making the cars.

I didn't respond, just looked at his combative eyes. Matt Middleton sighed. Who said anything about finding parts? He was trying to wear me down. Make me doubt my car so I'd buy a new one. It was obvious he just wanted to sell me a new car, but wasn't it just as obvious that I didn't want one? That I didn't want to listen to anything else he had to say, just wanted to check my personal security code for the ten thousand, take my scratch tickets and go?

Look, he said, leaning forward on the desk, hands quivering on the table. I'm not saying you have to buy a new car today. But if you don't, you're going to regret it. Later this week you'll be back in your old crappy Pontiac just dreaming about what it'd be like in new leather seats, browsing eighty different stations on XM radio. This is your chance to drive a real car.

A real car? My chance? I remembered patting Rocky's trunk as I

walked by this afternoon, his muffler kissing the driveway. It was an old car, but it was reliable, and who was Matt Middleton to tell me otherwise? I didn't know as much as he did, didn't understand what made some cars last longer than others or how any of those parts worked under the hood. I could still appreciate it, though. Knew a good car when I drove it. And I suppose that's a lot like marriage, like me and Karen. Even though I didn't understand her all the time, it didn't mean I loved her any less, that I was any less grateful to have her. It certainly didn't mean I should trade her in for a newer model.

The air was thick between us, fluorescent lights painting fire in our eyes.

I'm not interested, I said.

Why did you come down here? he asked, like I was wasting his time and not the other way around, like they hadn't mailed me a flier that begged with glittery stars for me to see their crappy dealership, their crappy cars made who-knows-where.

I just want to see what I've won, I said. I pointed at my security code.

Matt Middleton sighed again. He wouldn't look at me. It was like I was in trouble, like I'd offended him, shot his sister or something. Finally, he stood up, pointed to a dim hallway by the offices. He marched me to the secret winning codes, single pieces of paper stapled haphazardly to a six-foot wall sitting in the back like a rejected cubicle, unfolded.

Here, he said.

The wall was covered in gray carpet, winning codes listed for each prize. It was plain white paper, plain black font, and I compared it to my flier, glittered and gaudy. Before I even read them, I knew my codes wouldn't match.

Well, I said. Looks like it's the scratch tickets.

Right, he answered, like I was stupid for not saying it sooner. Look. Do you have any friends or family who might be interested in a new car? Any addresses or phone numbers?

I could only think of Preston, his Mazda with the bad breaks, but I wasn't about to sell him out to a guy like Matt Middleton. Friends don't do that to each other.

No, I said. I don't have any friends or family.

He smirked.

Alright. Alright, fine.

He left to get the tickets and I stood there for another twenty years just waiting. I watched the old couples take their turns at the wall so they could see they had the wrong codes, too. Two-by-two they came, like animals turned away at the ark, and they smiled at their rejection, like they were just happy the wall hadn't killed them. No one had the right answer, no one able to achieve that magic. I suppose the old people knew that already, and that made me feel better. They came even though they knew they'd already lost, perhaps because there's value in the reminder. Still, I wanted to see someone win. Someone to beat the system, make the world seem easier than it is.

Matt Middleton was barely out of his office when I saw his bleak expression. Finger-pinched, a distinct single scratch ticket juttred from his hand. Not three, as was promised. But one. I was already planning what to say, how I would quick draw the flier from my pocket and fire Taylor Hyundai's own words back in his face, demanding the three tickets. One ticket wasn't worth my walk down here in July heat, the sweat gluing my shirt to my back. It certainly wasn't worth being insulted for driving Rocky.

This is all we've got, he said. They're sending someone out to buy more. It'll be at least another hour.

I couldn't help but notice his words, blaming a mysterious 'they.' He held out the single Doubling Dollar Ohio state scratch ticket, a red and yellow cardboard slip with silver windows. He was already eyeing the lines of new old couples pouring in, like he didn't care if I took it or not.

I saw his reflection in the glossy silver paintjob of a nearby Elantra. He looked better there, in the paint. If I didn't know him already, I would've thought he'd be a good man, maybe a friend, someone I could trust. That's what the new paint does. You ever see your reflection in a store window and think 'I'd buy that,' then realize it doesn't make sense? Like that.

\* \* \*

When I got home, I found betrayal. It's bad enough when a stranger lies to you, takes advantage of your momentary trust, much worse when it's your friend damaging one of the most important things in your life.

And maybe I shouldn't have gotten so mad. I usually didn't. But I was already fuming from the dealership, kept thinking how



unfair the world was, how I'd wasted my day and had to go to work in a few hours. So when I saw the front of Preston's crappy Mazda crammed against Rocky's crumpled trunk, I freaked.

I don't really know what I was thinking. I was angry that either one of them let this happen while I was away, neither my friend nor my own wife bothering to call. Somehow, they were both to blame in my subconscious. I stormed through the front door, yelled their names. The house was quiet, my voice echoing back to me in a tone I wasn't used to hearing. Preston sat in the kitchen with his shirt off, skinny and tan, a few black tattoos on his chest and back. I grabbed him by the back of his neck and threw him across the floor. He hit our cabinets with a thud.

Karen came out to me kicking Preston on the ground. She begged for me stop while all Preston could say was, 'I'm sorry,' over and over, curled up like a fetus.

I told him to get out.

And what do you do with a seventeen-year old car needing more repairs than the car is worth? You fix it. Because it's been there for you, will help you get through each day as long as you take care of it. Not many people will agree with me on that, but I don't care. I'd rather fix what I have, keep it as long as I can, because nothing in the future is promised.

Karen and I curled up together that night. We touched more than we talked, a sort of silent restoration taking place. I could've said more, told her how angry I was about Rocky, but I didn't. She was apologetic enough about it all, and I didn't blame her for what happened. She seemed happy, more so than the last few months, so I left it.

Preston hasn't been over since the accident and I'm glad. I keep getting more Taylor Hyundai fliers, though, sometimes two or three a week. Can't get them to stop. Each time I see one, I think of that day, how angry I was about being lied to and having my car's trunk smashed in. Whenever I get upset about it, I open the drawer of the nightstand, pull out the Doubling Dollar Ohio state scratch ticket Matt Middleton discarded to me, the silver windows still intact. And what's inside those windows? More rejection? More loss? I'd rather keep the silver, the muddled reflection of light, though I won't pretend I've won, am not that naïve. I just want to keep that paint, keep it new. I know what's behind the silver. But I don't need to see it.

# Respects to Love

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Veronica Garcia  
digital photography  
10" by 10"

# Illuminate

---



Konina Biswas  
screenprint and photomanipulation  
22" by 28"

That's... Interesting

---



Alejandra Germann  
acrylic on canvas  
16" by 20"

## Mennonite Farmers

---



Brady Dillsworth  
digital photography  
12" by 18"

All that Comes from Ores

---



Eleanor Leonne Bennett  
digital photography  
10" by 8"

# La Flor de los Muertos

---



Ariana Rodriguez  
digital photography  
7" by 5"

# Tales of Melancholy

---



Alexis Mire  
digital photography  
7" by 5"



# Geisha

---



Cindy Hayashi Lin  
clay  
16"

## Raymond Jacob, a.k.a. “Atlas”



### **Santa Clara Review: Can you tell us a little about your background?**

**Raymond Jacob:** I’m from San Antonio, Texas, born and raised. Although Texas is my home, I’ve always wanted to go school at Santa Clara University and move to California to be part of the West Coast music scene. Growing up, music has always been a part of my life. I learned drums and piano in middle school and played in a band throughout high school. However, before college I never took a formal lesson for an instrument but rather taught myself music through trial and error. The same goes for producing music; I would search YouTube for piano and production tutorials and would experiment with them until I made them my own. Being at Santa Clara has been amazing because I can finally have a formal basis in music by having it as my main study in school. I’ve learned by ear, which has enabled me to find my own style. Now I can ground this style by knowing the theory behind it.

**SCR: How would you describe the music that you make?**

**RJ:** My music is a hybrid genre that takes elements of hip-hop, dub-step, and house sampled with everything from 60's orchestral soul to Gregorian Chants. I take traditional modes of sound and mix them together and focus them through an electronic lens, creating an experience I like to call electronic triphop soul. Every song I produce is made to evoke emotion and feeling in the listener so they can have their own interpretation and musical experience.

**SCR: What kind of equipment do you use?**

**RJ:** Probably most important piece of equipment is my Monome 128, of which there are very few in the world. It acts as an open canvas for live performance where I can program and sequence sounds to my liking. It also acts as an indispensable production tool and allows me to sample, collage, and mix it all together on the spot.

The Monome is a very rare instrument that doesn't come with a manual. You have to go online and become a part of the Monome Community and learn from other Monomers how to program and use the device. It's a very unique and sometimes difficult instrument to learn; I'll just say it took me 6 hours to learn how to turn it on. Once you learn how to use it, it's an amazing tool.

**SCR: Who are your musical influences?**

**RJ:** I love all types of Music, from classical to Argentinean Cumbia. I use my environment to create original music that is one hundred percent me. That being said my biggest inspiration is Dereck Vincent Smith of Pretty Lights. He inspired me to get the Monome and led me in the direction of electronic hip-hop.

**SCR: Where do you record?**

**RJ:** My bedroom has become a laboratory of computers, synthesizers and drum machines. It is my recording studio that happens to have a bed in there too. I have a nice big desk that never sees the light of schoolwork because it's filled with instruments.

**SCR: Do you know what kind of track you want to write before you sit down to make it, or do you create music more from a process of experimentation, trial and error?**

**RJ:** It varies. Often, I have specifically what I want inside my head and I produce the whole song before I lay down a track. Other times, it just flows and comes out of nowhere. When the creativity comes out to play, I try and hold on to it as long as I can. It isn't out of the ordinary for me to be locked in my studio for 12 hours at a time on producing tear.

**SCR: What is your favorite aspect of performing live?**

**RJ:** There's nothing better than feeling the energy of the crowd. When I play live I play for the people, so it's extremely satisfying to see them get down. I also enjoy the pressure to perform and the anticipation before a show. Under that pressure, I perform the best. It forces my alter ego "Atlas" to come out and perform, and after a show if I can look back and say, "damn I killed it," then I succeeded.

**SCR: Can you explain the significance of your song "To My Soul"?**

**RJ:** Creating "To My Soul" was a great journey. I wrote it for a special lady at the time and if you listen to the words they're pretty amorous, for example, "I see painted pictures within your eyes / Spoken psalms within in your voice." At the time I had a lot of passion and emotion running through me so acting as my creative vent. That's what I try and do with my music though, take the emotions I'm feeling and channel them through art. I know the song had a lot of potential when I wrote it but it was Leah Nascimento's beautiful voice that brought it to life. It was great to work with such a talented artist because not only could we bounce ideas off of each other but she has something special and made the song what it is.

**SCR: Can you give us some insight into performing in a different country?**

**RJ:** Playing in Buenos Aires was an amazing experience. It was so awesome to see a crowd full of curious Argentines and Brazilians

jamming to West Coast electro. I know it was very different for them though because it would be as if someone came to California and solely played Cumbia and Reggaeton. So it pushed me to experiment more and incorporate South American rhythms into my live performance. We learned from each other and it was a great exchange of music and culture.

**SCR: What is your most embarrassing experience in your life?**

**RJ:** I think you have to buy me a drink first.

**SCR: Tell us about your upcoming gigs and releases.**

**RJ:** I have gigs lined up at the Claran, C&J's and a other shows in affiliation with Level Events. Level has been a great supporter for not only my music, but also the whole music scene at Santa Clara. I also have plans to play a live set on KSCU and play at various parties around school. As of now I have a whole new catalog of fresh tracks that I plan to finish within the next 4 months in anticipation of a full-length album.

## Austin Pidgeon, of “Austin and the Pigeons”



### **Santa Clara Review: Can you tell us a little about your background?**

**Austin Pidgeon:** I was born and raised in Phoenix, Arizona. I started playing guitar at a young age, but never took it too seriously until high school. At that point, I began writing songs, recording low quality demos, and sharing them with my long-time music mentor and current producer, Jason Root. He took notice of “The River’s Run Dry,” a song I wrote in 2008, and decided he wanted to make an album out of it with me under his label, Inspired Recordings, LLC. I guess that’s how it all officially began.

We recorded that EP—*The Early Sessions EP*—the summer before I got to Santa Clara. At that point, I was playing and recording as a singer/songwriter, but knew I wanted more out of my music. I threw up flyers around campus and got Owen Watson to play bass and Ian Brown to play drums. We later added Quinn Peck on lead guitar and have been writing and playing together as Austin & The

Pigeons ever since.

**SCR: How would you describe the music that you make?**

**AP:** My music is rooted in reggae, with strong influences from blues, jam bands, hip-hop, and, more recently, bluegrass. I've moved from a strictly acoustic singer/songwriter style to a more electric, upbeat sound, trying to pick the energy up for our live shows.

When people ask, I usually say we are a "reggae jam band." Artists like Bob Marley, Toots & The Maytals, and Steel Pulse will always be influences of mine, but I try to steer clear of falling into that pop-reggae genre that is so popular today. And I can't overlook the strong influences in my music of bands like Project Blue Book, with their epic 12-minute jams, and Still Time, with their ability to speak to audiences of all ages.

**SCR: Where do you record?**

**AP:** For the first record, we recorded in three parts: I recorded guitar and vocals in my dad's office in Phoenix, Jason Root recorded drums at Sonance Studio in Nashville, and his ex-bandmate, George Gekas, recorded bass at Vital Sounds Studio in New Orleans. It was pretty strange recording in three different states, with one guy I'd never met before, and doing everything over the Internet. There was less room for collaboration, less room to sit down, tweak the tracks, and experiment with the instrumentation. For this record, we've had a little more freedom.

**SCR: Do you play any instruments other than guitar?**

**AP:** I play a few instruments, and am always looking to pick up more. The first instrument I learned to play was the electric guitar. I remember in high school there was a group of musicians who used to gather at break and lunch to play. What was a fun, collaborative jam session quickly turned into a competition of sorts, where each guitarist tried to out-solo the next, playing faster, heavier, more complicated leads. I couldn't stand this. Playing guitar was never about outdoing another. It was about creating and sharing music! I locked up my electric, brought out my acoustic, and started writing

songs for myself. Soon after, I learned to play bass and drums so that I could record on my own, and took up the harmonica, as well. Recently, though, I've been playing a lot of mandolin, experimenting with bluegrass. It's a wonderful instrument with a very unique sound, and I hope to implement more of it into my music in the future. You'll hear some great mando playing on the new record by Jonah Chilton, a friend of mine who I studied in Cape Town with.

**SCR: What is your favorite aspect of performing live?**

**AP:** Everything. Performing live is my favorite part about playing music. It is the culmination of songwriting, mastering your instrument, collaborating as a band, connecting with the fans, and, most importantly, improvising. The main reason I made the transition from playing as an acoustic singer/songwriter to fronting a band was to improve the live performance.

This year has been particularly special. It's taken a couple of years to develop and polish our sound, but we are now reaping the benefits. Playing bigger venues, drawing bigger crowds, having real fans who enjoy our music—and who occasionally sing along to the songs—it's amazing. Every time I get on stage I realize how fortunate I am to be playing music, and I hope that feeling never fades. I want to thank everyone who has come out to any show of ours, especially the regulars—Barry Matic, Jimmy Sexton, Bennett DeLozier, Brendan Montgomery, Scott Morton—I can't start or I won't be able to stop. The fans make the shows, and make the music worth playing, so thank you all.

**SCR: Can you explain the significance of your song “What I Find”?**

**AP:** “What I Find” was written at my place in Santa Clara last spring. Waking up on a sunny Saturday, I couldn't help but feel the blessings of the people and community that is Santa Clara. My beautiful girlfriend, Courtney, my friends here, and my faith were the inspirations of that song.

“This morning light—it comes and goes, and comes and goes, but this feeling never fades.” This refers to my relationship with Court-



ney. It's too easy to write about love and girls so I try not to, but I couldn't help it in this case.

"I don't know where I'll go. I'm not looking, I'll just find what I find." This line is pretty important to me. I've found in my life that when you look too hard for something, you often don't find it, or you find something completely different and altogether better. And if you plan your days too strictly, you'll miss out on some amazing experiences. I remember my brother had a painting in his room growing up that read: "Without doubt, the universe is unfolding exactly as it should be." I used to hate it. I never believed it. How can you believe that with the apparent atrocities that occur in our world—genocide, racism, fatal tsunamis, institutionalized poverty... I've learned, though, that nothing is inherently bad, and there are positives to all situations. If we can look at those positives, trust that wherever we are, in every moment, is exactly where we are supposed to be, we can free up a lot of stress and sorrow and start enjoying our short time here.

**SCR: Tell us about your upcoming gigs and releases.**

**AP:** The new record, *The Santa Clara Sessions*, is set to release in February. It is a collection of songs written over the past year and a half, and has a good variety, which I'm most excited about. There are some rootsy reggae tracks, some bluesy tracks, and some nice acoustic jams to round the album off. We'll be promoting the album throughout Northern California, looking to play gigs in San Francisco and down through the Central Coast, but we love playing here in Santa Clara. Look for us teaming up with Leve1 Events for TGIFW's at C&J's and check the website for all other gigs.

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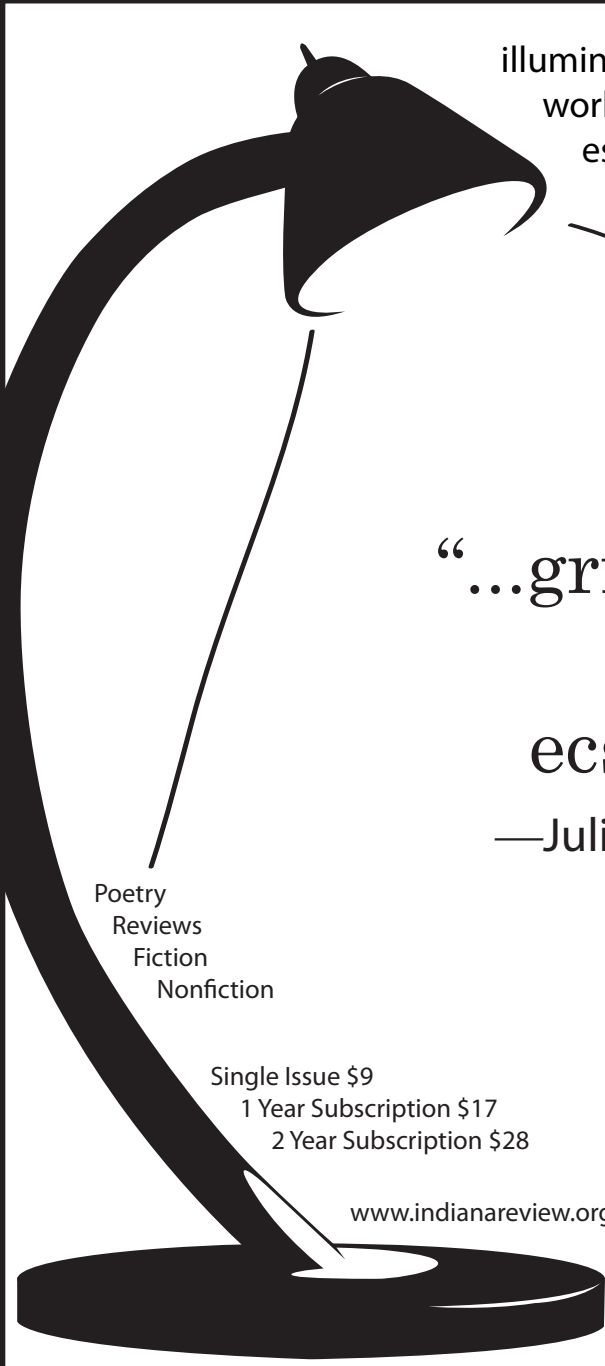
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## Contributors' Notes

**Alejandra Germann**, senior studio art major at SCU, has been painting with acrylics since age 15. This piece is part of a larger collection of portraits of imaginary people, inspired by people she has encountered throughout her life.

**Alexis Mire** is a nineteen-year-old photographer, creative writer and student studying in Jacksonville, Florida. She creates using both film and digital mediums. She is highly driven and coming up strong.

**Alison Morse**, a senior at Humboldt State University, is studying art history and studio art, with a focus in small metals. Her artwork is largely driven by her interest in self-sufficiency, in particular through food production.

**Andrea Scarpino** is the author of the chapbook *The Grove Behind* (Finishing Line Press). She received an MFA in Creative Writing from The Ohio State University, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and teaches with Union Institute and University's Cohort Ph.D. program in Interdisciplinary Studies. She is a weekly contributor for the blog *Planet of the Blind*.

**Angela Rydell's** poetry has been published in *The Sun*, *Poet Lore*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Cortland Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and other journals. Her work has nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and she is a recipient of Poets & Writers' Maureen Egen Writers Exchange Award. She holds an MFA from Warren Wilson College.

**Ariana Rodriguez** is currently a senior at Santa Clara University majoring in Studio Art. She is constantly inspired by her surroundings and dreams. Her main focus right now is being able to create artwork based on her observations on society and culture. Commissions are gratefully accepted.

**Brady Dillsworth** is a commercial photographer and photojournalist from Rochester, NY. He grew up in the country felling trees, splitting firewood and working hard. He wears wool shirts and Carhartt pants, and spends most of his time outdoors.

**Charlotta Kratz** teaches in the Communication Department at Santa Clara University. Her photography has been published in Italy, Sweden, and the U.S. Her work has been part of exhibits in California, Georgia, and Milan, Italy. More info: <http://charlottakratz.com>.

**Chelsea Silva** is a sophomore at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island. She is working towards majors in English Literature and Creative Writing.

**Christine Gosnay** lives and writes high atop a peak in the Santa Cruz mountains. A novelist, literary critic and member of the National Book Critics Circle, her poetry has recently appeared in *Prick of the Spindle*, *DIAGRAM* and *Anemone Sidecar*.

**Cindy Lin** is a student from Taipei, Taiwan, who is currently studying psychology and studio art at Santa Clara University. Her main media is clay and she is interested in exploring the boundaries of clay.

**Cristian D. Rubi** was born in 1989 in Phoenix, Arizona and graduated in 2011 with a degree in Philosophy. Rubi currently lives in Scottsdale, Arizona. **Cynthia Leyva**, raised in Redwood City, CA, is a current senior and has recently discovered her artistic talent in a drawing course at Santa Clara University. She enjoys drawing picture-like images and hopes to continue to develop as an artist in the near future.

**Don Peteroy's** fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cream City Review*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Chattahoochee Review*, *Ellipsis*, *Yemassee*, *Permafrost*, and others. He is a current Pushcart Prize nominee, and volunteers on the editorial staff at the *Cincinnati Review*.

**E. D. Roberts** is a Pushcart Prize nominee. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary publications. Awards for her work include a Chester H. Jones National Poetry Prize and a New England Writers Poetry Prize. She lives in Thetford Center, Vermont.

**Eleanor Leonne Bennett** is a 15 year old photographer and artist who has won contests with *National Geographic*, *The Woodland Trust*, *The World Photography Organisation*, *Winstons Wish*, *Papworth Trust*, *Mencap*, *Big Issue*, *Wrexham science*, *Fennel and Fern* and *Nature's Best Photography*. She has had her photographs published in exhibitions and magazines across the world including the *Guardian*, *RSPB Birds*, *RSPB Bird Life*, *Dot Dot Dash*, *Alabama Coast*, *Alabama Seaport* and *NG Kids Magazine*.

**Ezequiel Olvera** comes from Los Angeles and is an undergraduate studio art major at Santa Clara University. He is a Latino painter with a personality that is bold, colorful and positive. He wants to thank his family for inspiring him from day one to pick up a brush.

**James Magorian** has been published in *Connecticut Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *New Orleans Review*, and *The North American Review*. His latest poetry collection is called *Geographia* (2008) and his most recent novel is *Hearts of Gold* (1996).

**John Azrak** was a finalist in *Glimmer Train's* and *The Sonora Review's* short-short fiction contests. His short stories appear in the anthology *Bless Me, Father* (Penguin), *The Alembic*, *Passages North*, *West Branch*, *Natural Bridge*, and elsewhere. He has been a frequent contributor to the *santa clara review*.

**Joseph Celizic** teaches at Bowling Green State University. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Redivider*, *PANK*, *Unsaid*, *Windsor Review*, *CutBank* and other journals.

**Joshua Fredkin** is a past editor of the *santa clara review* and recent graduate of Santa Clara University. He is an aspiring poet and writer, thrilled to be published in this issue. His work is motivated by the many individuals who inspire him on a daily basis.

**Kassie Mattia** is from Green Bay, Wisconsin and is a physics major at Santa Clara University.

**Katherine Boyle** is a senior English Major at the United States Air Force Academy. This is her first publication.

**Katherine White** is currently double majoring in English and Political Science at Santa Clara University. After that, who knows?

**Konina Biswas** is an Interaction Designer in San Francisco and a recent graduate from the MFA Design program at the California College of the Arts. She is interested in bringing together members of the global community using emotive as well as functional experiences.

**Melina Alexa Ramirez** calls into question Eurocentric standards of beauty and worth with symbolism, historical and contemporary references, and humor in her work. She will be displaying her work with her peers at the Triton Museum of Art May 4–13.

**Michael Rosa** is a student at Santa Clara University, majoring in English and Communication. He enjoys playing table tennis and foosball, gardening, reading, writing, people watching, being in the vicinity of trees, and nautical themes.

**Nathaniel Hunt** lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, working as a writer and editor. His poems have been featured published widely in the small presses. He is the co-founder and co-editor of the upstart literary journal *Cartographer*.

**Noah Milligan** lives in Oklahoma City with his wife, Allison, and daughter, Esmé. His work has appeared in various online and print journals and received an honorable mention in *Glimmer Train's* May 2011 Short Story Award for New Writers.

**Perry Oei** received his B.A., summa cum laude, from the University of San Francisco and his J.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. During the 1980s, he co-founded and co-edited a literary magazine in the Bay Area called *Ceilidh*.

**Sara Lebeck** is a 20 year old Digital & Fine Arts student at the University of Oregon in Eugene. She practices art in many mediums, including band & album artwork for the band "Orion". You can see more of Sara's fine arts, hand-made items & graphic designs at <http://saralebeckartwork.com>.

**Sarah McClammy** is a sophomore accounting major and creative



writing minor at Santa Clara University. She is an avid equestrian, riding competitively on her own horse in addition to leading the Santa Clara team as co-president.

**Shoshauna Shy**'s poems have been published on *Poetry Daily*, in *Poetry 180*, *The Seattle Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Poetry Northwest* and elsewhere. She is responsible for the "Poetry Jumps Off the Shelf" program, and is the author of four collections.

**Tom Holmes** is the editor of *Redactions: Poetry & Poetics* and the author of six collections of poetry. His writings about wine, poetry book reviews, and poetry can be found at his blog, *The Line Break*: <http://thelinebreak.wordpress.com/>.

**Veronica Garcia** is a senior attending Santa Clara University majoring in studio arts and communications. She is a conceptual digital photographer who gains ongoing inspiration from her dreams and life experiences using her camera lens as a portal to create new worlds.