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santa clara review

vol. 99 no. 2

santa clara review

since 1869

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Faculty Advisor

Kirk Glaser

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features cover art by Sara Lebeck.**

Clock Eyed, 2011
Ink on matte paper

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santa clara review
Santa Clara University
500 El Camino Real, Box 3212
Santa Clara, CA, 95053-3212
(408) 554-4484

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Letter From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Uncertainty. This word stimulates me in more ways than I am sure I am aware of. It is directly related to my insomnia, untimely carelessness, isolation from myself, disconnect with the present, ever-tapping foot, and uncalculated tears. This word, to me, means more than doubtfulness or perplexity. This “word” is not a simple conclusive term or concept. Uncertainty is an unyielding everything.

Socrates said one must know thyself in order to be wise—and he always insisted he knew nothing. Blaise Pascal held that a man’s doubting is as natural as a horse’s running. David Hume felt when people are most sure, they are more commonly mistaken. He also rejected that innately solid notion we have of ourselves. Even Bertrand Russell discussed the real “Self” as something rather unreal and intangible.

I am led to conclude that we know nothing and the footing we have in our own skin is questionable. So, what *is* there? What *is* there, as we float in and out of semi-permanent environments and painfully fleeting situations? What *is* there, as we grow and change and perhaps one day determine that we are our own best friends? I cannot answer these questions. I can only attempt to explore them for myself, as you do for yourself, as the contributors of this publication do for themselves.

I am personally inclined to believe our world is a shared one, filled with the people we love, people we don’t, and everything that’s scary, ugly, or forgettable. Although I am uncertain of it, I think the world is ruled by love. There are beings inhabiting it who struggle, yet hope, to discover those rules.

Writing and art, I think, reflect our inner conflicts with uncertainty, and as well as our struggle to discover love throughout our existence. Writing and art are the mediums through which we negotiate with ourselves, our ideas, and our experiences—with all of what it is that becomes us. That’s why I write. I write to teach myself, and to understand myself. And that’s why I read. I want to learn about others, I want to see into them. Because, like Socrates, while we may know nothing, it is absolutely human to continue feeling our way through the uncertain.

The pieces contained within this issue of the *santa clara review* are the products of their creators feeling their way through their uncertainties. One piece is an exploration of a childhood fascination with death and one is a testament to the beauty and tenuous nature of awareness. Another is an unconventional presentation of love and loss, and another, an ode to holding on to the only warmth around.

Included in this issue as well, is a piece I chose to reprint in celebration of the historic value of this publication. The fiction short is a piece originally featured in issue number seven of the 1874 series of *the Owl*. Separated by chapters, the complete piece, *The Adventures of a Strong-minded Kitten: A Story of California Life* was originally published in installments. Featured in this issue, is the second installment of a delightful tale.

I hope that as you read the following accounts of love, doubt, and finding one's place in the ubiquitous unknown, you begin to feel a sense of comfort and perhaps even the slightest bit of internal peace.

Enjoy,

Taara Khalilnaji
and the *santa clara review* editors

Elephant Documentary

Animal of memory & the herd.
Of trunk holding tail in a safe line
onward. Onward slow, sad strength & skin
of sea water under February clouds.
Your body says you will take it,
whatever it is. The plucking
of your tusks or filming of your death
by lions in the African night.

After the night shift
my father would nudge through
the front door & a little rugged
moonlight would spill
off his shoulders like the salt
he mined. He was mountainous
to me. He knew histories before
the beginning of my earth.
I could hold his knee with one arm
& know wherever we were going was good.

Mama Always Said That Michael John Was a Good Boy

Mama always said that Michael John was a good boy. “He’s real good pickin’,” she’d say to me as she put the nice blue ribbon in my hair for Sunday morning worship. “But he won’t be free for long. Whoo boy. No sir. That boy’s real good pickin’ and one of them Sweet girls is gonna snatch him right up from under ya if you don’t get ‘em first. He’s real fine pickin’.”

Mama had three girls and no boys, so she knew she had to get me married to someone wealthy because I was the prettiest. But I was also the youngest, so she had to marry off Susan and Bethy before she could even entertain any of the mothers of suitable husbands for me. So both Susan and Bethy married into the same family, not to the same boy, but to brothers, in a kinda combined wedding when Susie was nineteen and Bethy was sixteen. I was fourteen at the time and Susie’s fiancée, Grady Stone, was already too old for her at the ripe age of twenty-six and yet he had the nerve to chase my skirt around a bit before he “settled for the fecund sister,” as he put it, which I hoped meant that he liked her the best. And Bethy got matched up with Grady’s younger brother, Tucker Dean, who walked a little funny on account of his three months in the army and whatever happened over there in Europe. No one would ever tell me what happened to him, not even Bethy, and Bethy usually told me everything. I suspect she didn’t actually know why he walked like that because she really did tell me everything and would’ve told me if she knew.

So while the Stones were a good match for Susan and Bethy, Mama thought she could get herself into “high society,” as she called it, by hitching me up with Michael John Watson. At nineteen, Michael John wasn’t really old enough to be getting married, but Lady Watson, as she liked to be called and my mama gleefully obliged, liked my rosy cheeks, periwinkle eyes and strawberry blonde curls, and she so desperately wanted little granbabies, so she had Michael John court me. Now at fifteen, I was growing into my height and was

starting to look like a real lady, my mama would tell me. She put the blue satin ribbon into my hair because it brought out my eyes and made my curls look all shiny. She made me up like a doll because she knew that Michael John, Lady Watson and even Dr. Watson would be at church this morning on account of him being back from his business trip. Mama made me up because she wanted Michael John to see something in me that she never quite could get Grady to see in Susie or Tucker Dean to see in Bethy. She wanted him to see me as a prize, like we were stepping down a bit in the courtship, not the other way around. But boy was she wrong. He had already seen me in a way no one but me and him would know or should know.

"Fannie Ray. Well you get over here right now, why don't ya? Do you see where you are? These here are dangerous parts. Shouldn't be here unaccompanied." Michael John had said this to me with a grin on his face so wide, I had to trust him. He held out his hand and I grabbed it and he pulled me back onto the right side of Bennett Creek. I had been wandering around the banks of the creek, trying to muster up the courage to go into the Whispering Forest on my own when he passed by with his friend Tommie Mack. Bethy had dared me to go into the forest on my own, something she couldn't do now that she was a married woman. When I wouldn't come back to him right away, Michael John had Tommie run ahead to get my mama, but he really was just trying to scare me into going to him. And to make Tommie go away. He held my hand real tight and wouldn't let go even when I was safe on the right side of the creek.

"My mama told me that your mama wants us two to get ourselves married." Michael John pulled me right up against him when he said this, still not letting go of my hand. "But you're just a little girl still. Your mama seems to like to get rid of you Price girls young. What's she afraid of? Are you gonna lose that pretty face if you wait til the proper age?"

Michael John ran his free hand along the side of my face. "I was thinking that we should test out to make sure you're ready to be getting married. Make sure you're ready to be pleasing your husband when he wants it." Michael John took the hand that he still had grasped in his and moved it slowly down. I closed my eyes tight as I felt him put my hand down the front of his trousers. He pushed my hand onto his body and made me do things to him with it that put a contented smile across his young face. But I wouldn't know

that because I kept my eyes shut tight the whole time.

Now I look at my mama in the mirror as she puts that ribbon in my hair to make Michael John see me as marrying material. I don't know if it was the ribbon or that afternoon at the creek, but somehow someone decided I was marrying material, because as I walked down the aisle of that church in my mama's old wedding dress, I heard her whisper to Bethy, sitting beside her in the pew, swelling up like a watermelon with her first baby, "I always said that Michael John was a good boy."

Tarantella

You can no longer convince me
about the severity of your disease.
I have watched you sleeping,
watched death crawl
across your face and perch
on the side of your mouth like a spider,
waiting for you to swallow, to inhale
too deeply. Like puppets
strangled by their own strings,
the fragments of your body I used to love
grow limp; there is hardly someone
there at the end of the line
and still I am calling,
calling.

Let my touch be the tune
that the medicine women played
as they danced around the sick boy,
chanting, their wizened fingers
stroking his damp skin.
Let my voice saying your name
be the lilt of a flute, the handclap
that sends you springing from your bed,
turning cartwheels in the sun.

Laundry

We hung our curious perceptions in the ragged wind
after we had squeezed the freezing water out,
reducing our hands to numbness. The lady said,
“These will never dry.” We took the cold as a given,
went inside, made ourselves hot chocolate.
What to do when love is new and turns the fingers
to ice with each touch? How to say the words
that become snow on the tongue, snow like melted water,
the salty sweat from your backside, the slow river slide.
There are people who love like an avalanche,
who are only destruction. In their wake, the ground
grows naked. We are not yet like that, but someday,
maybe. The only thing not soaked here
is this lemon yellow blanket. The lady said,
“This cannot keep you warm.” Inside, the fire
made your skin more orange than it was.
I thought about what it could mean to know you,
outside of these coats, scarves, boots. How I
could mold these feelings, pack them tightly
in one hand, curl the arm back, release.
Let the declaration of how badly I want you
explode on your chest for all the world to see.
The lady said, “What a nice pair
of friends you make.” I tucked the blanket
around us both. I kept you close beside me.
As close as I could bear to be.

Requiem for Pangaea

And here we stand at the end of the earth. A once-Pangaea, ruptured and fragmented and moving apart. The tectonics of a dying love, the gulf between us filling with a thousand salty ocean tears. The bridge of land that merged us, the earth that knit us together, the vulnerable sprouts beginning to reach the surface of our once-fertile ground—all washed away and drowned. An Atlantis sinking fast, one day to be only myth, not even memory. The movement of the continents is surely too immense to halt. And who would want to?

No man can stop dying. Dying spreads up like a weed, creeping, wrapping, suffocating, annihilating. The moribund is irreversible; don't we all know? And yet—we try. We fight and we claw and we go down howling, refusing to look death in the face until it has sucked us under the surface and we see nothing at all.

And what of love? When love is decaying and we have no sweet release of death to dash us blind? And we stand on the peninsula and stare across the rising tides, the widening channel at the land we once knew. The land that felt like home beneath our feet. The soft grass where we laid our sleepy heads. The sweet rain that washed away our tears. The cracks of thunder and lightning that sent us laughing, running, hearts pounding with exhilaration. The sun that warmed our faces, the moon that lit our way. The little imperfections in the landscape that reminded us we were party to a beauty we were unworthy to possess. The timid swelling of fullness within us, as we embraced our new world. The way our lands met so we were no longer immigrants to one another, we were only together, with no breaks or ends.

Stars on the Wall

Mowing, he recalls his daughter's friend Muriel before she left for St. Jude's in Memphis, remembers the bright pink writing on the postcards, "Feeling Fine" in looping, sparkling letters, the way she misspelled Adriana, with two n's and the last name missing. The cut grass bleeds a green smell, the whirl of the motor like gauze packing his ears, keeping all other sounds out. Back and forth for the last time, a pattern so familiar, the lawn divided into sections—first the front yard to the north of the Bradford pear tree, then south of it, the sun slicing through thin clouds and stroking out his shadow as it moves over the uneven ground. Back and forth, leaving straight, pleasant lines behind. He remembers Muriel's mother's voice—the memory oozing through the motor's gauze—her sobbing, the sound of a chair being scraped along the floor in the phone distance, as if he were in the room watching her as she sat, knees together, white crush of tissue in her hand. *Muriel died today*, Muriel's mother said, *and went peacefully*. To him Muriel had long been a shadow, was a shadow before she ever left for St. Jude, maybe even before he had heard the term *occult carcinoma* and the plan to fight it. Even her mother's voice seemed braided in shade over the phone, a sound under a parasol as she talked about Muriel's last days, the peace of it all. Back and forth, the spinning blade cuts the grass and sends it out in a verdant spray.

Mowing, the motor straining, he thinks of Adriana packing inside, organizing books and pictures, pausing to cry. *Why can't you tell her?* his wife said, *I'm no good at this*, but he insisted, said the lawn needed mowing before they moved, and wasn't she the more compassionate parent anyway? He wouldn't know what to say or how to say it. He could clean up afterwards, bag Adriana's pain like so much dried grass and leave it by the curb, stacked neatly as they drove away from this house forever and to a new house, a new city and a new job. The mower strains, coughs, dies.

He tilts the lawn mower on its side. The grass, long and wet, sticks to the blades, a soft, green mess. He finds a stick and scrapes it from the blades, the underside of the deck. Without the mower, he can

hear the wind brushing branches together and noises that could be Adriana crying inside. You've got to pack, he said. You've got to take everything off of the walls: your pictures, these stars. They did not want to come off; when he ripped them from the wall, they released with a tearing sound. He vaguely remembered putting them up when Adriana was three, lying under them with her and telling stories like his dad had told, of boys who swam in icy caves, finding light just in time to save them, of warm Chinook winds blowing in and melting all the snow in time to rescue a trapped family from the cold. The wall, with glow-in-the-dark stars, became their night sky.

One day, when Adriana was about ten, she said I'm too old for stories, Dad, but the stars had stayed and Muriel began to replace him in Adriana's life and room. And when he drank he heard them talking, giggling. His hands are green from cleaning the mower, and the pull of the cord rips sound into the yard again. His pattern moves him next to the house, along the south end, back and forth below her window. The curtains are drawn; the room is in the shadow of a tree this time of day.

He began to take Adriana and Muriel out to watch the night skies. They drove until the city lights faded and the darkness let the stars through. They found Mars and Jupiter and watched one night as the moon occulted Venus, waiting in the cold darkness until the bright planet emerged from behind the moon's dark half. He taught them the stars he knew: Polaris, Rigel, Sirius. They traced the constellations he could recall, made up others, and Adriana asked for a telescope for Christmas. But when Muriel got sick, Adriana lost interest and the girls spent more time together in her room. Their conversation leaked through, and he heard them, Adriana asking, *Are you afraid of dying?* and Muriel's muffled answer. He drank more in the evenings, worked more on the weekends.

He makes it to the last section of the yard, the back, odd shaped so that he moves in loops instead of lines; each trip around closes, brings him nearer to being finished. He thinks about stars as strings of light from the heavens to the eye, strings of light that cannot be cut, but only interrupted. He remembers how, in his drunkenness the last night Muriel was over, he barged in on the two of them in her room. He didn't hear their words through the wall, but he knew they were talking about dying and he knew he wanted to stop them. He regretted yelling, but it was too late, his voice was a cone of rage in the dark

room. He saw the feebly glowing stars hanging in a pattern on the wall. The two girls were one shape in the darkness, a blank space on the bed that he pointed to with a trembling finger.

Halfway through, the trips around the yard becoming shorter and shorter, he's closing in on himself in a kidney-shaped pattern. The girls are still giggling through the gauze, or it could be Adriana's crying, or Muriel's mother wailing. That night he burst into his daughter's room he couldn't tell one night sound from another; he couldn't tell the shadow of something harmless and inert from a shadow with menace at its core, but he resolved to guard the door against any shape. The girls made no sound, and he stood, unsteady and swaying, blocking the lamplight from down the hall. *Since you can't be quiet*, he said, *I'll just sleep in the doorway*. And he got his pillow and a blanket and lay on the floor, the stars shaking, the girls quiet, huddled, dark.

Cutting the grass, gauzing their ears, keeping their mouths shut as he wedged himself in her doorway until they fell asleep. There are only a few more trips to make now; the patch of unmown grass shrinks. His hands are numb from the vibrations of the motor and he remembers tossing the stars from the wall, but seeing their outline, and in the outline's center, the greasy stain of the adhesive that had held them in place for nearly a decade. And he remembers that during the night he slept in the doorway some black shadow, an occlusion, moved between him and the wall's night sky. In his dizziness he never knew if it was his daughter or the dead girl.

The lawn is cut, but there's so much more to do. He remembers a night long ago, when Adriana was a baby. He awoke from nightmares. He stood just outside her room and listened for her breath, but couldn't hear it over an even, spring rain falling outside. He walked in, moving slowly, his hand outstretched to her. He touched her small warm body and there was a long, still moment before he felt her chest rise, a moment in which the world could have ended and begun and ended again.

He shuts the mower down now and leaves it in the middle of the yard. Inside he will find Adriana sobbing into her pillow. He cannot stall any longer. He knows that the long, still moment is hers now, that there is nothing left to do but hold her as she cries. He will put his hand on her back and feel the heaving inside and her breath, hot with life, on his neck.

Spring & All That

time, you have been tucked in my bag for weeks, a small blue version of you, I carry all spring on my shoulder—farmers’

market, bookstore, doctor’s office, where I am kept waiting an inordinately long while, only I hardly notice

that I am perched on the thinnest of tissues because for the first three hours, I have closed

my eyes to fluorescent buzz, acoustic ceiling tiles dotted with pinholes, let my consciousness enlarge

on the examining table—not so much imaginative act as practical surrender of a woman who has waited

weeks for this appointment & now finds herself open gown to the front, almost attended & why not

give up the illusion anything else matters? Nothing so much as stainless steel, glass containers, Sharps

collector of needles, instruments to examine eyes, ears, & scale. Oh, lifetime certified jewel movement,

measure my blood in calibrated increments as it circulates through the chambers of my heart, in which the EKG detects

slight variations, & my doctor, when she finally appears, says *Enter a new world, and have there freedom*

of movement. Days later, I run past a woman wearing a t-shirt that says *breaking hearts, fixing bones* & I kid you not,

past a red wheelbarrow

my neighbor has wheeled to the corner,
not glazed because it has not rained in weeks but lettered white

on the side: *True Temper USA*, & I can feel my heart too much
inside my chest wanting the glaze of your pulse, wanting

poetry not prose, wanting some good doctor to press the beauty
of my irregular heartbeat to his mouth, never let me go.

Finding the Middle

1 — Turtles

Today a man gave me two dollars.
An elderly man wearing gray slacks,
a black coat. His right hand
holding the fist of a young boy.
In his left he held the bills, his thumb
covering Washington's face.
His knees refused to flex, he just
dropped them. Two faded green
pieces of pressed moist fibers.
As he walked away I heard him,
They live like turtles, he told the
young boy. Wrapped in soiled robes,
afraid of sundown. I envy turtles.

2 — Born May 6th

This makes me a Taurus.
The bull, the emerald stone,
one with the earth, ruled by Venus.
All bullshit. Should have been a Gemini.
Two distinct people. One cries soft tears,
one growls through gritting teeth. One
white knuckled fist cocked back, one open
hand reaching out.

3 — Looking Up

Burns my eyes. Cold concrete
everywhere. Most days I see no
value in vision. I sit, back

to the brick, and dream,
of safely dreaming.

4 — *Damaged Goods*

That's what they called me
at thirteen. *Never normal.*
The title that put the story
in motion. I became the ocean.
Rising high over all humanity,
crashing down over the heads
of all beneath me, slowly
pulling back into non-existence.
Never staying steadily afloat.

5 — *Dirty*

Whiskey washed teeth,
scum-caked skin. This
is not dirty. Earth's oils,
elements. It's not dirty.
Survival is dirty. What
it takes, forces. Things
soap and water just
can't touch.

6 — *No Man's Land*

The sky my roof, street my floor.
It is my city, and it desires
to rid itself of me. All that are like me.
Turtle, Gemini, man, woman, child.
They chant, *Hide the damaged goods!*
With no voice to yell back, no strength
to raise a tight balled up fist. We do not
fall. Cannot fall. Realizing there is no
deeper bottom. We know the city as they
never will. Disappearing into sidewalk and
resurface on the marble staircase of a church.

Broken spirits lying beside dropped bottles.
We are the city you wish to clean. Clean.

When the Mayfly Waits

One day, you will see a mayfly. Just a small white moth, cousin of the dragonfly but smaller, slighter, fleeting. And on that day, you can be sure it is not the same mayfly that you failed to see the day before. That one has died and tomorrow there will be a whole new generation. With such short lives, what wisdom can the mayfly leave you? What lessons does the mayfly teach its daughter? None. Do not expect to recognize her again; she will appear an entirely new moth, a new beast. And when you meet me, remember me well. I too will never wake up the same way twice.

* * *

Today, Alexa and I are waiting at the crest of our neighborhood hill. We can go no further, or my mom won't be able to see us from the house. The grass tickles my leg hair and I scratch at my ankle with a too-long toenail. I hate the grass touching me, but the tar is too hot for bare feet, so we stand on the edge. Committed to neither.

We are waiting for boys to come around the curve of the road. Our bathing suits are already dry, warm and soft from the sun. The suits are hand-me-downs from an older cousin or neighbor, so they don't fit just right: the seat sags down between our bony legs, the fabric pinches at our armpits. My brother told me I can't ever be a dancer because my butt is too big. I choose the suit that sags the most.

The ends of my hair are still wet. Each pigtail scrapes like needles on my sun-baked shoulders. Alexa is chewing on a purple clover petal, sucking it for the honey. We listen for the soft click of bike gears around the bend.

"They better get their butts down here fast, or they'll really get it." She sighs and arches her back. Her breasts jiggle, heaping from the top of her tiger-striped suit. They are perfect globes, rounding up toward her chin in beautiful buoyant arcs. Her shoulders roll forward with the strain of carrying these perfect breasts. The fabric at her nipples is sheer and worn from too many other wearers or

from constant sunlight.

When I look at my own boobs, they are not as supple as Alexa's. They are oblong and a little weepy. She is a year older, but that year grants her a timeless wisdom and mystique. My left nipple sags lower in my suit than my right. I frown at my chest, trying to measure the difference between each bud. I turn away from the road to cover myself. Then I wriggle my hand into the suit to carefully cup and readjust my wilting booby. But my nails are too long. I scrape the areola and just like that, the boob bursts. Instant shock, the water is cold and my front is quickly soaked. The green latex of the water balloon sticks to my ribs. I clutch at my remaining water balloon implant and shudder as the water trickles down my legs and knees, pulling the dry grass blades to my feet.

We had argued, me and Alexa. Should we use the balloons as bombs, or boobs? I didn't want my mom to see me. "Why?" said Alexa. Her mom was never home; she didn't care. I scratched my ankle. "She won't see," she said. So we rotated the knots outwards and slid them into our bathing suits, like boobies. We snuck to the front of the house, walking next to the building, below the windows, so no one inside could see. Alexa's rested higher, held out longer, filled out fuller than mine did.

"Here they come," says Alexa. But I am running down the hill, away from the road, up the porch steps, to hide inside a towel inside the house. When I walk inside with the remaining blue balloon in my hand, my mother says, "Don't you come in here with that."

* * *

Here are the times it is okay to be topless: When you are a baby. When you are in the shower. When you are changing in a dressing room at Filenes's. When the doctor gives you a physical. When you are three and at the beach and someone is telling you: "no sand in your mouth, no shovel in your mouth, no bugs in your mouth, no towels in your mouth, no biting." Behind your house in elementary school when you want to play in the sprinkler. When there is a big lake and a full moon. When you are drunk in Mallorca. When you are older than seventy-five at the Y. On the third date. At freshman orientation, in front of the library, when you are a senior. If it was a good date. When he knows your coffee order. When no one is looking. When no one cares what they see. Any time after that.

* * *

This is the life of the mayfly. She hatches and unfolds on the edges of a summer day. She tests the white membrane of her wings, then feels the morning breeze, and comes of age. She'll fall in love and mate, maybe several times mid-afternoon. By dusk she has laid her eggs back in the lake; she is tired. While we sip evening drinks and scrape clean the grill, she will wilt away, will be dead by the time the sun sets into the lake.

There is a tree by this lake with a rope swing. The rope creaks when we climb up the bank and swing into the water, but the tree does not. Swinging children, like rough winters, do not bother this old oak. One hundred years, says the tree, all new people. Everyday, all new mayflies. Every year the tree is the same, and the mayfly lives only for hours. What does the tree feel? What does the mayfly feel? Nothing. No one ever hurts them. No one ever touches them. No one loves the mayfly. Only the rope loves the tree.

* * *

There is a picture in a box in my basement of my brother and me. We are frozen at the edge of our sandbox, innocent six- and four-year olds. He is wearing a red t-shirt with a spaceship on it and I am wearing nothing. His arm is around my shoulder. My eyes are closed and we are grinning, foolishly, as if we are giggling. Our teeth are scattered pebbles in our gums. We are devilishly proud of something, but it's hard to say what; the lens is focused only on our two slender bodies. My brother is wearing sunglasses shaped like stars and there is a bow in my hair. It is big.

If you were looking down, standing over us in the picture, you would see my brother, his dark bowl cut of coarse curls, but you might not see me so clearly. Instead, I would appear as the red and yellow loops of my bow. A bow so big puts weight on such a small head. A girl can't wear a bow and run around and climb trees and jump off swings. But in most pictures I wear the large frills anyway.

* * *

In middle school, my cousin and I would go on long walks, down to the lake, to talk about our blossoming futures. One such morning, when we reached the mouth of the path, the water appeared changed, all soft and white. We couldn't tell what it was;

foam maybe? Or gathered tufts off the pussy willows that grew in the marsh just west? We were barefoot and stepped gingerly down the stony beach to the water's edge. The rounded rocks were soft and the lake was all flickering shadows and morning light.

When we touched the water it was not water. From a distance, it must have looked serene. A thousand small white bubbles rising up around us, feathers caressing us from ankle to eyelash. Like sinking through a cloud or being lifted up on snowflakes, only warm, rose petals, only fast, angels, only fierce. They were mayflies.

It did not feel so peaceful. A thousand loaded pistols, white hot, searing. My eyes rolled back from the pain, the panic. They were everywhere, under my shirt, against my skin. It was a big shirt, baggy with airbrushed daffodils on the front. The oversized cotton let me float inside my clothes. If I was careful, I never touched my skin to the soft gray fabric. Still, I never felt comfortable no matter what I was in.

At twelve, the slightest brush could be enough to make me crumble. A tight sweater would make me whimper. I remember bending to cradle a bag of groceries once. The paper bag brushed, just slightly, against my chest, and had me sweating, shaking. I dropped the bag and knelt, crying over the burst carton of milk and a dozen lost eggs. I wanted nothing to touch me.

And there, rising from the water, mayflies. Touching me everywhere, mayflies. They were in my shorts and under my shirt; they beat at my chest; their little bodies were everywhere, in my mouth, at my eyes and ears. Their wings against my nipples felt like needles. The pain radiated from the quiet white caps of my chest and rippled back into the base of my spine, my heels, my throat. There was no escape, I could not strip, or run, or crush them; I stood paralyzed in their assault. They dove at me for seconds, which felt like hours and years and still sometimes I feel them. How can something so small, a nipple or a mayfly, cause so much pain? Both are barely the size of a silver dollar. Neither one is made for such attacks.

* * *

Here are the times it is not okay to be topless: In baby pictures that you bring in for show and tell. Communal showers in gym class. When Filene's has video cameras. If kids at school work at Filene's. When the doctor has been to your house for dinner. When there's a

hole in the ozone. When you're eating. When your older brother's cute friend Peter is over and wants to jump in the sprinkler and trips you and it hurts. When he laughs. When you don't know the language. If you have neighbors. If it requires running. When he says, "It's the third date," and it wasn't a good date and it's past midnight, and he's ordering coffee. Any time after that.

* * *

When a mayfly leaves the water, it has already done so much growing. Before that lone day of flight, it floats beneath the water for a year, feeding on plant growth, breathing through gills. What does it learn of life in the air from below the water's surface? How can the water prepare it? When does it know what it wants? What it will become? Floating and waiting, it doesn't seem like the same winged creature at all. But when the mayfly emerges from the water, it matures quickly, in minutes even. It becomes an adult; it is wise.

Once in flight, the mayfly does not eat, does not sleep, does not have time for these things. Their stomachs are full of air. Their wings beat swiftly as they search each other out. The male has long front legs, to find and hold the female while they mate, mid-flight. Yes, the female, too, has legs. But these legs are useless.

* * *

By third grade, I fit into my mother's graduation dress, but just barely. It is white, with yellow daisies, a starched collar. She graduated at sixteen. She is the fourth of seven sisters. She says you can't count on the men. The sisters worked at the inn up the river from their house. They walked there in shoes wrapped in white plastic shopping bags. They wiped tables and served drinks. They cleaned bedrooms after men came through to hunt and ride their snow machines. They picked up the discarded pieces, crushed beer cans from the bathroom waste bin, ashed cigarettes from the windowsill. They worked for six days, and on Sunday they went to confess. When they didn't have anything to confess, she says they made sins up.

Her sisters wrack up ex-husbands. One won't eat except for Ensure shakes. The others smoke Virginia Slims. My mom says she never smoked. Said that it's disgusting. She feeds us advice for a working girl.

When the boss says, stay after, say no. When the boss says, you

need to wash that uniform now if you mean to get paid, say no. When the boss says, the boys in the back room don't need two girls, so the rest of you can go, say no. When the boss says it's just a joke, you better quit, but first, laugh.

I try to picture her in the daisy dress, filling saltshakers and delivering clean towels. The boss called her a tall glass of water, because she was so long and skinny. No chest. Now, after children, her hips have widened, her curves are full and round, like mine. I have no children, but neither of us fit into the dress. I ask her how come I don't look like that? She says, "I was very young then."

If I ask my mom about love, she says she didn't have boyfriends like her sisters. A girl shouldn't be interested in all that. If you press her, then she'll tell you, you can't count on the men. She says you gotta be stronger than that. She doesn't say why.

Only, there's a photo in a box in my basement. It shows my mom on the beach in gym shorts and a striped t-shirt. She is laughing, arm-in-arm with a sister. They are wearing large glasses that eclipse their eyes and cheeks. Her legs are long and her curves are soft and slight. Delicately in her hand, there is a still-burning cigarette. She says I'll never have to take that kind of job, but every girl's gotta work.

* * *

Mayflies don't really sting or bite. It only felt that way that day. The mayflies in my shirt were not attacking me. They have no memory, no fear, no pleasure. They wanted nothing from me. People are not so lucky, or unlucky. People want and feel and remember. Like I remember the mayfly. People have something to tell you about who you should become. Then you must work, consistently, to become it.

* * *

It is not a special party, just another college party. Some frat house or an old apartment that is loose and rotting from the years and years of college students who have taken their turn with it. Christy and I hover in a corner near the keg. I am uncomfortable in what I have worn. It is too casual and everyone is dressed fancy. Or it is too conservative and everyone is dressed in string bikinis. Or it is too revealing, which is common, because I feel uncomfortable with exposed skin above the knee, below the collarbone, between the hip

and rib cage, or anywhere on my back. Christy is wearing a teddy, which she is calling a tunic, which she has paired with knee-high boots. I am here because she needed me, a wing woman.

The music is loud, so you can feel it in the floorboards, but it's a song we really like. We are scoping out everybody and everybody is scoping out us. Christy is looking for some guy she met last weekend. They'd hung out a couple times. Watched an HBO movie and giggled with their hands under the blankets and fallen asleep talking and such. I spot him in the fluorescent white light of the kitchen, he is leaning on the cabinet, eye-level with some other girl. Her back is arched, shoulders back, hands perched on her hips. If he sputters a little when he talks, the phlegm would land on her glitter-dusted chest. I decide not to point him out to Christy, but she sees him anyway.

My red solo cup is mostly foam. Christy takes it from me and pulls me out onto the sparsely peopled dance floor. She begins to move, hypnotically, grinding into my hip, as if devoted to me. The beat is deafening. I sway stiffly with her. She lets her head roll forward pressing her nose to my throat, breathing into my neck. All I can think is, we are not that drunk. "Dance with meee." She twists us and we are bathed in the glow of the kitchen light. She closes her eyes and spirals against my legs, my hips, my navel, my chest. I cannot see him, but I know that he's not looking.

We leave the dance floor, and soon after I leave the party altogether, wrapped and hiding in my jacket, and then alone in my cot-sized bed. She wouldn't tell me 'til much later, but she did end up back at his place that night. He brushed Dorito crumbs off his sheets and they tussled like teenagers in the sheets. When she was just about asleep, he became frustrated. Seriously? This was the third time he'd hung out with her, and just another make out? Was she for real?

In the beginning, we kept a tally of our conquests in dry erase marker, on the mini fridge under her desk. Did we think we were liberated? Or hip? I don't know. It was sometime around that party that we stopped keeping track of the little bounding check marks. It was too painful to count, to not count. To earn them, to not earn any at all. When she finally tells me, she says she never said "no." But she has a hard time sleeping after that.

* * *

When I wake up in the morning, I am an entirely new person. Everyday. As if, overnight, I forget all about me. I rub my eyes and look at me, hard. I try to recall but, inevitably, I need to be reintroduced everyday. I am a sleepy-eyed Brigadoon. What century is this? I have to relearn, practice; find me over and over again. In the mirror I am hair long, hair up, skin freckled, or pimpled, or plain. I squint. Who's there? Some days I am all pink and ruffles. On others, I want to ooze all over and not let anyone wipe their mouths. Some days I walk with my shoulders first, sometimes with the corners of my hips or my feet. I try and act like I am not surprised by me, but I am.

Yet somehow, when I leave for work or school or to visit friends or when I call my mom on the phone, they all know who I am. It's a phenomenon I don't understand. On the days I rush out and haven't had time to clean the face I have, or sip the coffee someone (me?) has already bought and ground and left ready to brew, I wait to hear them say my name first before I speak. Do I usually hug or shake hands? I can't ever remember. They have to help me, or my new morning self decides. I watch for clues. They tell me, you look good, or tired, or they say "that's so you!" I am intrigued. What is it that they recognize? How do they know who I am everyday? When I return for bed each night, I am certain. Exhausted from the work of remapping my borders and negotiating fair treaties with the rest of the freeborn world. Yet somewhere, submerged in my own slumber, I once again forget.

* * *

Imagine that, at any given moment, there are ten thousand mayflies. Assuming that every five seconds, five hundred mayflies are going through puberty, and every three seconds, six hundred mayflies are climaxing, together, and every eight seconds, one hundred and fifty of them are being bested, rejected, and must go woo another. Given that a thousand (1,000) mayflies and you (1) are in your shirt, how many are enjoying themselves? How many are getting hurt? What is the arc of the curve at age five, age twelve, age seventeen, age thirty-eight, age sixty?

Imagine the probability of pleasure. Imagine the certainty of pain, who would you choose to become? To emerge as? Choose only one.

* * *

When I open my eyes, there's a boy in my bed with an arm around my shoulder. He curls in to me. He wants to know what time it is. Some days I pretend not to hear him. Like I'm sleeping, or need to go to the bathroom too badly to chat. Sometimes I tell him and then I curl too. He does not seem shaken either way. Occasionally I watch to see when he opens his eyes. What will he see in me? I look for appraisal, shock, or suspicion. He opens them and then he says, "Are you hungry?" and I have to think, "Me?"

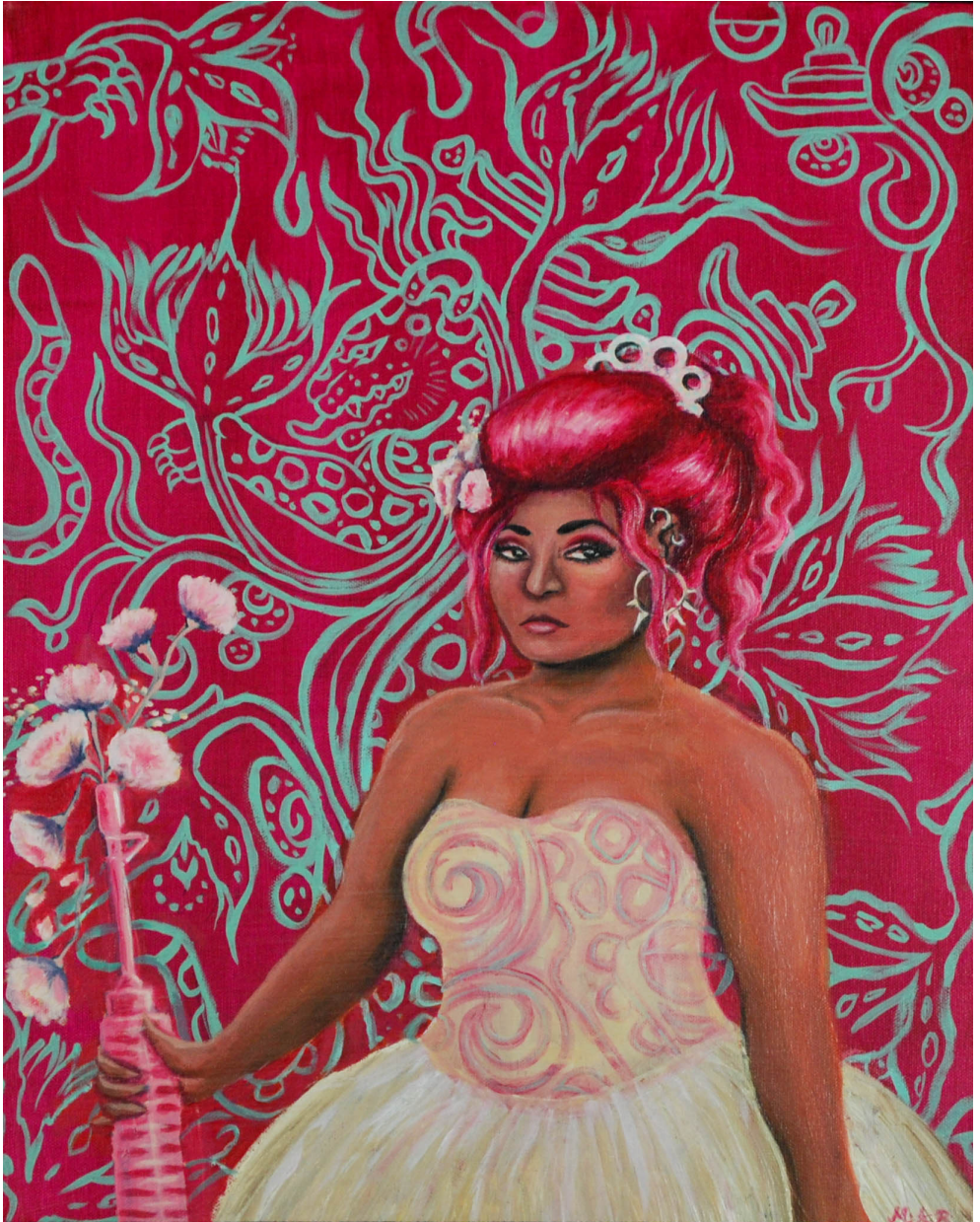
Yes. I am.

Every time this boy touches me he asks, "Is this okay?" Usually with words and out loud. Even in the movies, where people tell him, "Shh." Even after years and hundreds of times of telling him "Yes." Now, sometimes, it is just with eyes or the way his hand presses on my shoulder, soft-like, and questioning. No matter if it has been three months or three minutes since I answered; still it's there, a doorway, a threshold, an obstacle we have to overcome. "Is this okay?" Doesn't he remember? I go crazy. Desire rattles around inside of me, a pinball in my torso, my knees, my lips, my brain. After a while, I make a list: "Times when it is okay to touch me." He reads it, several pages. "Do you get it?" I ask. "Can't you just tell me when?" He doesn't ever stop.

After a long day of creating me, I get back to my bed at night, and he is still there. I ask him if he knows why he's there. "Yes," he says. But then he doesn't tell me why. Some days I have been all lace and syrup. On others, all spit and bark. Either way, he is there.

Some nights I take off my breasts. Not just the cotton and wire, but all of the flesh and fantasy of carrying me, the woman. I hang the breasts over the back of a chair, or on my closet doorknob, or else I just leave them on top of my backpack. "Why do you do that?" He asks me. I tell him something like, "My feet are sore," or, "travel makes me hungry," or, "too much reading." Then I am suspicious, because he doesn't seem suspicious of these answers. He looks at the hanging flesh across the room. Dripping like tears toward the bedroom floor, or heaped like poured pancakes on my book bag. Then he forgets them altogether. He folds himself around the me that's left, pulls the sheet up over us. "Is this okay?" he asks, and I say, "It's getting late," and we fold ourselves up, and we sleep.

Quinceñera



Melina Alexa Ramirez
acrylic paint
16.5" by 24"

George Harrison



Natalie Yacob
graphite pencil
9" by 12"

Never Forgotten



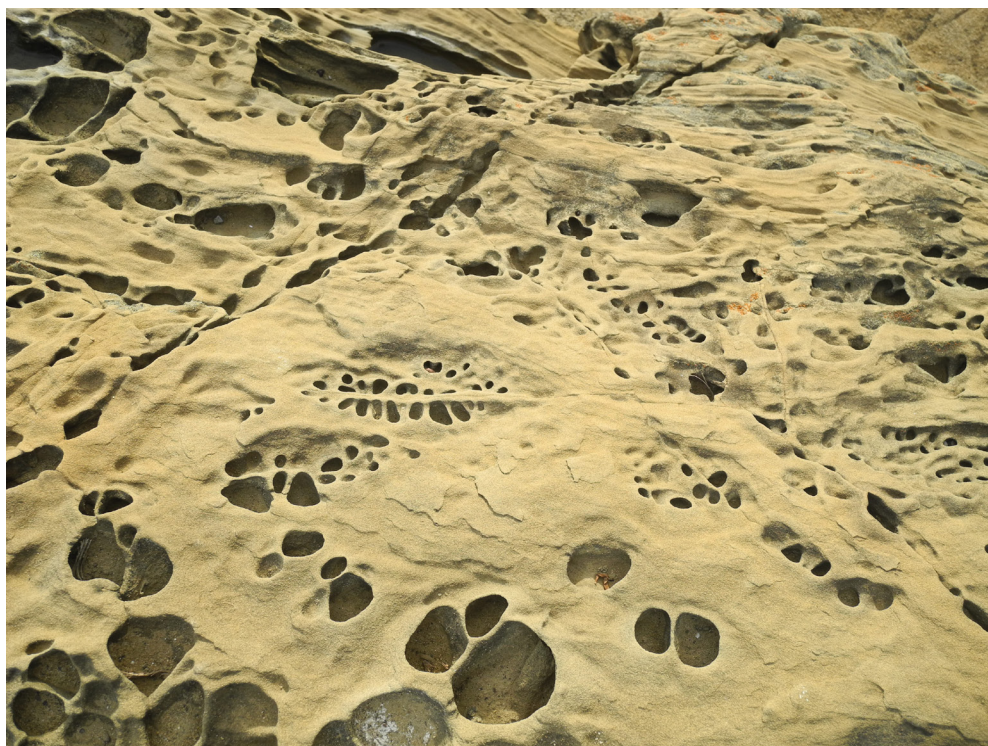
Kyra Sjarif
graphite pencil
16" by 20"

Rainboots



Tyler Knapp
ceramic
12" by 24"

Water: Creator, Destroyer



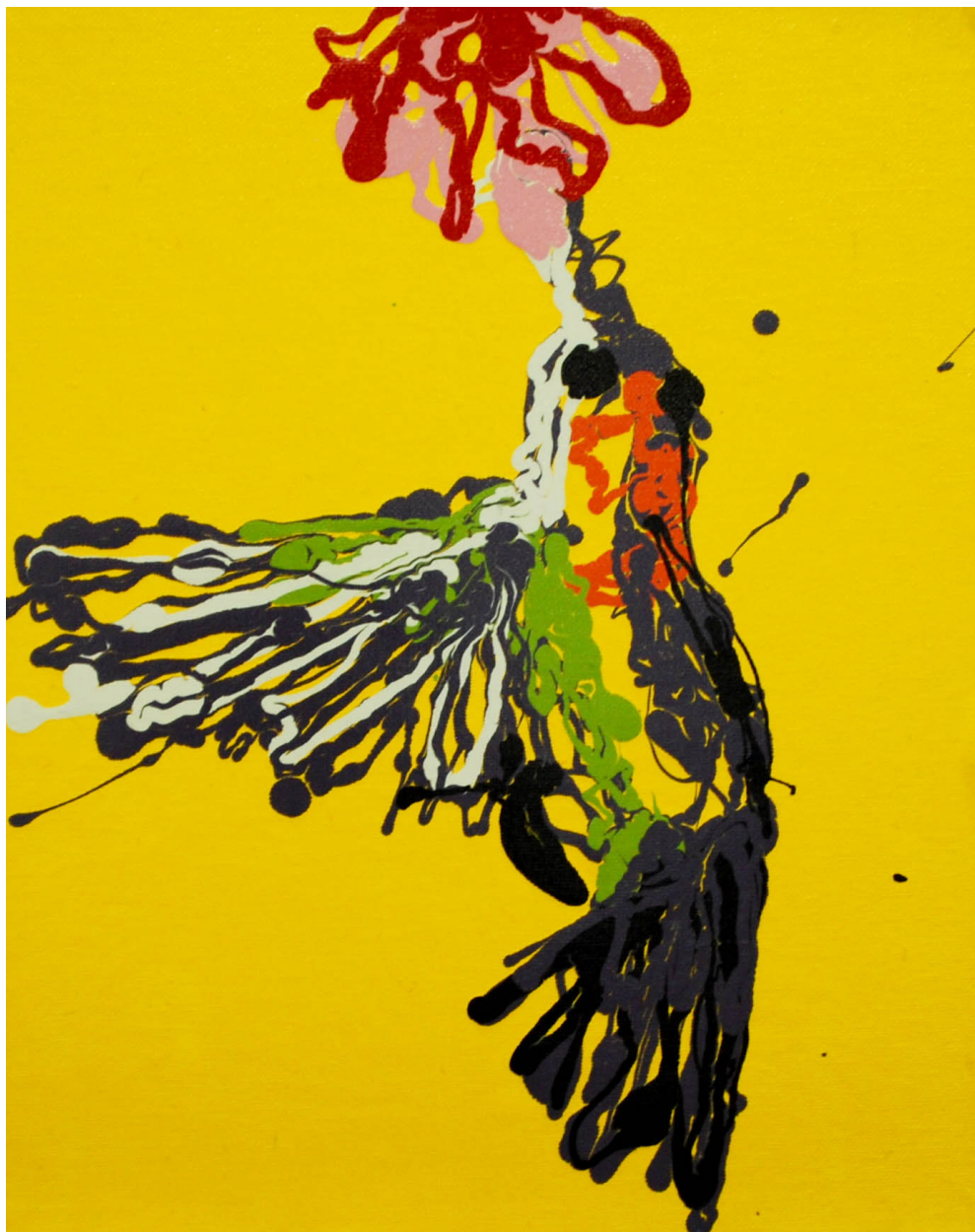
Kathryn E. McAuliffe
digital photography
12" by 9"

Crows on Wire



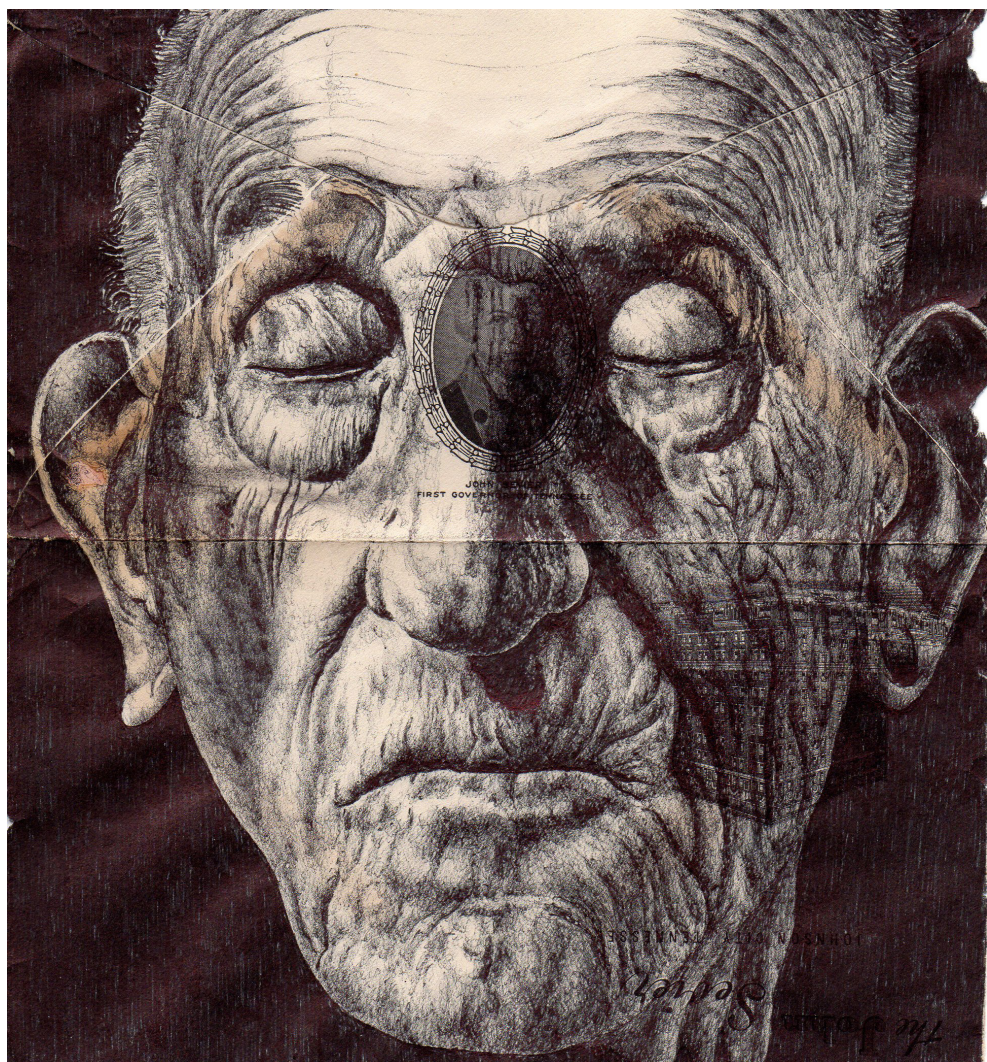
Kim Munson
monotype with chine colle
11" by 9"

In Flight



Veronica Machuca
acrylic paint
9" by 13"

Bic Biro on Vintage Envelope



Mark Powell
biro ballpoint pen
6" by 8"

Granddad

From the chill sea breeze across the threshold stepping
into the warm house wondering
how skinny cousins and aunts could hide
such a large man with a heavy gut like
a sack of syrup, seeing him where
I was not looking, expecting him when
I turned and turned and turned
with soft crushing hands brown
and creased like walnuts; I felt
his absence in my stomach like the point
when the chair tips back too far.

St. Emiliana of Clifton

Many people only know of Clifton by passing its exit on the highway to some bigger, brighter city, like New York. But others—thousands of others—flock to this town of brick apartments and convenience stores and tagged underpasses in order to pray at the shrine that decorates the trunk of the oak tree where the Virgin appeared to a child not long ago.

That child was named Emiliana. She was seven years old and lived with her grandmother in a one-bedroom walk-up next to a Mexican restaurant, which sent the smell of fried onions and tortillas up through her broken-screened window at night, during those summer dusks when her grandmother would put her to bed early, saying no good could come of being awake after dark. But Emiliana never fell asleep right away; the scent of dinner down below, the laughter that reached up like a smoky hand, the raucous music of bottles and dishes—none of it would let her rest. And so she read. She read her grandmother's religious pamphlets, her devotionals, her prayer books. But mostly she liked the pictures, the glossy pictures plucked in the middle of black-and-white pages, of Mary, her blueblue eyes, sky eyes, candlelight eyes, and that burning heart, and the thorns around that heart...

Emiliana's mother flitted in and out of her life like a moth. Sometimes there, in a flurry of perfume, but mostly not. Sometimes there, plaiting Emiliana's hair, telling her about her father, who was dark-skinned and tall, not like these short *mejicanos* always trying to paw her at the bar. *In five more years he'll be out*, she told Emiliana. *Then you can meet him. And I'll do your hair just like this.* Sometimes she was there, drinking grape soda or Corona and smoking at the kitchen table, laughing loudly at the Maury Povich show, her bare feet blackened on the bottoms and propped on the table across from Emiliana. Sometimes she was there, but mostly not.

When her mother was there, she would walk Emiliana to school in the morning, wearing tight pants and absorbing the cat-calls of men in the pores of her skin. But still, she held Emiliana's hand tight,

and told her to stay away from the men, no matter if their skin was white or tan or brown or black, no matter what kind of hat or hoodie or bandana they had on their head. Best to blend in, she said. Best to become invisible.

When Emiliana's mother wasn't there, her grandmother walked her to school, but one day in the fall of her second-grade year, her grandmother's knees gave out. The old wooden cane she'd been using for years, carved by her great-great grandfather from the branch of a tree struck by lightning in their Mexican village, was not enough to carry the weight of the heavy seventy-year-old woman five blocks back and forth to Emiliana's school. And so Emiliana began walking alone.

She enjoyed it. It gave her time to think. *Whatchyou need to think for, honey?* her grandmother always said. *You too young to be thinking.* But she liked to imagine the lives of the flower vendors who smiled at her, she liked to look at the fruit at the bodega and imagine where it came from, the tree or vine it fell from, how the air smelled there, in California, in Pennsylvania. She liked to look at the clouds that hovered above tall buildings, and wonder which one God would live on, if he had to choose.

Mostly, these thoughts blocked out the sounds of the men who stalked the street in groups and the ones who leaned up against buildings watching passing cars and nodding, each propping one sneakered foot on the bricks behind them. They were usually quiet in the mornings, but sometimes in the afternoons she'd hear shouting down an alleyway or watch as someone rode slowly down the street, a gun nosing its way out the window. The gun never went off, until one day it did.

She didn't register the sound at first. It was overcast, so she thought, *A crack of thunder.* And then she thought, *Firecracker, fireworks?* And she pulled the straps of her Dora backpack tighter around her shoulders, wondering which way to go, when some men—or boys, really, no more than double her age—rushed out a door behind her screaming, chasing after the car, pulling out their own guns and shooting them right in front of her so that there could be no mistaking the origin of the noise, the smoke. The gunfire didn't stop until the car had driven away and Emiliana had been shot.

There was no pain, nothing to tell her she'd been shot except for the sudden darkness and the warm wet finger of blood tickling her

temple. She did not call out, did not ask for help, but lay where she was, on the sidewalk surrounded by brown glass and dandelions weakly breaking through the cracks, and she waited there until she heard sirens and they came to take her to the hospital.

The next sound she heard was her grandmother's wailing, a sound she grew used to over the next months. She'd sob deeply when putting Emiliana to bed, she'd bawl over Emiliana's bowl of cereal, and she'd weep when reading Emiliana the books given to them by the school so she wouldn't fall too far behind. Her grandmother would cry when the How-To-Read-Braille book came through the mail, she'd whimper when drawing a bath and running the sponge over Emiliana's healing head, and she'd howl on the phone with Emiliana's mother, who had not come home, had not wanted to see her daughter blind. It was as if, suddenly, because Emiliana could no longer see, she could hear the nuances of her grandmother's sorrow, hear every slight variation of her tears, and know the true meaning of every synonym for cry. She imagined making up even more synonyms, the way Eskimos have thirty words for snow because there is so much of it.

But then, on Christmas Eve, her mother came through the door. Emiliana could tell it was her by the perfume she wore, something spicy and smoky with a name like *Baby* or *Desire*. It was strange, the silence her mother made when she walked in the door. It was strange, the absence of wailing. It was then she learned that her mother cried silently, because when she came over to Emiliana, put her smoke-smelling hands on either side of Emiliana's face and drew in close to kiss her, Emiliana could feel the tears fall warm over her lips, and they tasted just like her grandmother's tears.

Her mother wanted to take her to see the Christmas tree at the city park, and got into an argument with Emiliana's grandmother about it. *You want her to see the tree? You crazy. Estupida!* Finally, Emiliana's mother grabbed her hand and dragged her to the car, Emiliana bumping into walls and railings on the way. And they drove, down the street and through an underpass, even darker in there. When they were out, and nearing the park, Emiliana could tell because she felt it under her eyelids: the rainbow glow of colored bulbs, the diamond-brilliance of white lights, the sparkling flash that pulsed in time with the music: "Jingle Bells," "Silent Night," "O Holy Night"...

Their feet crunched on the ground; Emiliana didn't know if it

was dead leaves or a thin layer of snow, but she hoped it was snow. They walked for a while, then stopped. *Where are we?* she asked. *At the Christmas tree.* And her mother let go of her hand. Emiliana reached out her arms in front of her, turned, stepped a bit to the side until she felt a tree trunk. *Is this it?* she asked, but she never heard her mother's answer.

Instead, she saw the face of the Virgin emerging from the trunk in front of her, glowing, radiant, burning almost, flaming from the wood and looking directly at her with such blue eyes Emiliana believed there had to be a new word for *blue*, looking at her with such love she thought there must be a new word for that, too. Mary smiled at her, and then lifted a hand to Emiliana's brow. The hand, though on fire, was cool and made Emiliana think of rivers in places she'd never been. And then, without a word, Mary told her to open her eyes.

When she did she saw the trunk of a white oak tree, one of many standing in the park. To her right, her mother was gazing at another tree, the city's Christmas tree, strung with lights and garland. Emiliana looked down to see the snow under her feet, and when she turned back to the tree from which Mary emerged, the vision was gone. When she told her mother what she'd seen, and that she was no longer blind, she didn't believe at first. No one did. They thought she was imagining it, re-imagining the world around her as she once knew it. But she wasn't; she was healed by the Virgin and the sacred heart of Jesus, as her grandmother would later tell all her friends, laughing so many different shades of laughter over tea or coffee.

With the New Year, two things happened: the tree where Emiliana saw Mary appear was made into a shrine by a local group of Catholics, a portion of its trunk encased in glass, and flowers were draped all around it, photos of lost children and prayers scrawled scrap paper scattered at its roots. Women went to it, praying for their children, and men—the men from the street, who leaned against buildings—went too, praying for something of their own. As for Emiliana, she made the decision, at eight years old, to join a convent. She was turned away by many—*too young, too young!*—until one accepted her. And she grew up within their walls and got lost among their trees, another anonymous saint.

Midwest Love Song

Someone's dog is in the hen-house again,
the chickens' shrill squabble pierces the dark.

You turn, not for your gun
but to me, breath heavy as cinder.

Pastor tells me love bears all things—
that it keeps no record of wrongs.

Loving you is to heap fried eggs on your plate,
massage balm into your split knuckles each winter.

Tonight you are sopped in earth,
your fingers, roots pressed to me.

Deer

Each fall
I scatter cracked corn
outside our bedroom window
so you can watch
the deer feed.

In spring, you loved
the young ones
with legs like golden rod,
their coats fresh as sumac.
You traced your belly —
little buck, our fawn.

Now I think of you as I drive
in the darkness—
you, in the spare room
painting it white again,
folding and unfolding
bibs and quilts.

The car soars up hills,
my gut plunges
when deer leap
from the embankment.
They halt, gaze at me,
ears cupped,
illuminated like lanterns,
their breath, like halos,
testing my scent.

Where is Thy Sting

I'm certain it didn't happen more than twice in my childhood, men hanging themselves in garages. But it seems my mother would enter the kitchen and inform me at least bimonthly, "Mr. _____ hanged himself yesterday." I grew up thinking that suicidal hangings were a common community occurrence, like shopping for groceries or paying the paperboy once a week. I could imagine men down our street thinking, "Well, I reckon it's about time now to go hang myself," as they would jauntily amble out to the garage, grab a sturdy rope while yanking on it a couple of times to test its hang-worthiness, find something to stand on (I pictured a chair), toss the steadfast rope over a beam, wrap the rope around their necks then tie off a durable knot, and step off the chair. This scene was not difficult for me to picture at all. Maybe someday I would do the same. I needed to visualize this, just like imagining driving a car one day or having a steady girlfriend. One needed to prepare, set the scene, or as they say in psychology, conceptualize. Dream a little.

"Who found Mr. _____?" I asked my mother.

"His wife, poor thing."

I guessed that might be one of the things wives did in our town—walk to garages and cut down their husbands.

Would my father do such a thing? Oddly, I didn't consider that. First, I always envisioned those men wearing soiled work clothes and having dirty fingernails, but my father wore slacks, pressed shirts, and ties to work, and I would see him cleaning his fingernails from time to time. He also shaved every day, wore pleasant after-shave, and Vitalis hair oil—sometimes I'd put on one of his hats just for the heck of it and catch the agreeable smell. Didn't seem likely my father would hang himself.

"Now, don't be going over that direction today," my mother said.

I knew where Mr. _____ lived and knew he had a strange, young son with a speech impediment, three or four years younger than me, named Donnie.

"Okay," I said.

Within five minutes I was riding my bicycle back and forth in front of Donnie's house. Several cars kept pulling up and parking in front. The mere sight of so many cars held my interest, and I recognized many of the people, some carrying food into the house. Just as I expected, Donnie soon came out the front door. He didn't own a bike; I'd never seen him ride one. He sat on a grassy berm between the sidewalk and the cars and watched me as I passed each time. Finally, he stepped into the street and held up his hand, like a traffic cop. I stopped, but he didn't say anything, and I didn't know what to do. I'd never been this close to death and was immediately sorry I hadn't stayed away. The kid didn't talk, just stared. Not grieving, not sorry, not much of anything. I wanted to be somewhere else.

Finally he said, "Did you know my daddy die?"

I wanted to act ignorant of this thing that I'd willingly sought and was facing squarely, the thing that was close to choking me. I wanted to admit I didn't know his "daddy die." I shook my head.

"He die," Donnie said.

I wondered if Donnie knew how he died. I was in the wrong place and needed to leave, which I did. Pronto.

I told my mother I saw Donnie, but didn't admit I rode to his house. "Why wasn't he crying?" I asked.

"He's too young. He doesn't understand."

This made me feel old and mature.

"And Donnie's simple," she said.

"Simple?"

"Not right. He's not right."

I could have told her that. But I discovered a truth: hangings were events to be discussed in the kitchen, but death up close was to be avoided.

The hangings seemed to continue apace, but that was a trick my childhood memory has played on me all these years. There was only one other garage hanging. Still, I imagined many, thinking they were always men I didn't know so well who hardly spoke to their wives or children, if they had any, because I thought most wouldn't have had children—Donnie being the exception. The bankers, barbers, insurance agents, merchants wouldn't hang themselves. And I was pretty sure farmers wouldn't either, because they were always too busy. Only really sad people would hang themselves. It would be a quiet thing, and maybe no one would cry, no big fuss.

The other hanging was the husband of the woman who helped my mother clean house after Mom had one of her “spells.” Dad hired the woman because when Mom had a “spell” she stayed in bed a lot and when not in the dark bedroom, she cried and told Dad and me things she thought we had done, but that we hadn’t. It always seemed to please both my mother and Mrs. _____ to be in the house together all day. I liked to hear them talk because my mother usually only spoke to people on the phone or at church. I knew Mrs. _____ was poor and that we weren’t, so I worried she would feel bad about not being as well off as we were and that she might think us snooty or bossy. So the woman cleaned while my mother pretended to be working. Mrs. _____ would admire certain things in our house and compliment my mother about them, which always saddened me. I wished the woman would stop talking about our stuff so admiringly.

My father always came home for lunch, but on the days Mrs. _____ was there, he didn’t, and my mother would fix us a lunch, always taking an inordinate amount of time to do it. I recall tuna salad sandwiches, cottage cheese, fresh fruit, a new product called Fritos, and Coke or Seven-Up. The sight of Fritos made Mrs. _____ catch her breath.

“Those are so expensive,” she said.

“You’re welcome to them,” my mother said. “Coke or Seven-Up?”

“Oh my goodness. For lunch?”

“We have plenty.”

I knew that was the wrong thing for my mother to say, and I wanted to tell Mrs. _____ that we really weren’t rich at all—yet, we always had Coke and Seven-Up—and that she didn’t have to eat the Fritos or drink the soda if she thought she shouldn’t. I liked Fritos and Seven-Up but didn’t feel so much like partaking with her there.

My biggest fear was whether the topic of her dead husband would come up. And I don’t believe it ever did, thus confirming my supposition that hangings might be somewhat like car wrecks or heart attacks. Dying was dying. And funerals were funerals, too, regardless of what landed the corpse in the casket. Still, I wasn’t too keen on the whole idea of death, even though it was a logical part of our town’s ethos, similar to children going to school and babies being born.

In fact, death was a social lubricant in our town, garnering much more traction than birth. An expired citizen was not spoken of rever-

ently, but with all the anticipated majesty that only a good funeral could provide. I often heard the standard lament, "Oh, his death was so sad." Translation: "Who you reckon'll show up?"

The weekly newspaper printed death notices, handily placed beside cash registers or thumb-tacked to bulletin boards cluttered with auctions or real estate offerings. As a child, I sensed people's hidden glee and did my best to match the mood. A funeral was one thing, but the build-up could last for weeks or months, a slow progression of updates on worsening conditions.

There were two funeral homes, Taggart's and Clark's. My parents favored Taggart's. I was taught by precept and example to choose sides in all things, such as churches, ball teams, car makes. Maybe Taggart's produced a snazzier corpse—I wasn't sure. My mother kept me apprised of the corpse census. "Clark's has a body," she'd say. And just like when Donnie's father died, she would say, "Don't be playing around Clark's." I wondered what awful thing might happen if I did, so I cut wide swaths around funeral homes. Finally, Taggart's went out of business—not enough bodies I guess—which caused Clark's to corner the market on death. Prices probably rose.

My mother, a church organist, often played at funerals and was paid handsomely, I gathered, because her mood elevated considerably before and after a funeral—a surefire way to avoid a "spell." Vocal soloists were in demand, many profiting for years. And, of course, money crossed ministers' palms, too.

I wondered if Mrs. ____'s husband's death amassed the usual hype or if hangings were different, although at the time, I couldn't imagine they were. Did my mother play the organ at his funeral? Could Mrs. ____ afford to pay her?

After I excused myself from the lunch table and had gone outside to play and wandered back in to beg for a Seven-Up, they were still at the kitchen table, even though a good part of the afternoon had passed. Their mood was light.

"Shouldn't we get back to work?" Mrs. ____ said.

"Let's have a Coke," my mother said.

"Another?" Mrs. ____ asked.

"A pick-me-up."

"I really shouldn't, but all right."

I went to the refrigerator to fetch the sodas. When I returned, both women were smiling. And I knew my mother was a long way

from having another “spell.” I supposed death and Mrs. _____ had worked their magic.

* * *

Car accidents ran a close second to hangings. A notorious curve on a blacktop road accounted for what seemed like numerous deaths, particularly to teenagers, this before I was a teen and long before I could drive. Tow trucks brought the vehicles to the local car dealership, where we could gaze at the damage and expound on the cause of death.

“The steering wheel went right into her stomach.”

“The roof came down on his head.”

“She was thrown from the car, and, they say, landed about ten feet away. Found dead.”

So the details went.

I was once asked if I wanted to ride out to the curve and see where an accident happened. I don’t recall who took me, but I remember the scene vividly.

“And this is where he landed,” someone said, pointing to a red patch of gravel on the edge of the road.

I was taken to another part, where the blood was nearly black against the road’s surface.

“And this is where they laid him,” someone else said of another passenger, “after they finally got him out of the car.” Blood-soaked grass.

I was fascinated and did not consider the scene grisly or even morbid. The entire incident—crashed car, blood—represented an important event that was designed to titillate me in some way, not bring on revulsion. I was taking my cues from those around me as though this were nothing more than high drama, the kind I saw at the movies each week and that I should appreciate, even be proud that something so important took place right before my eyes, in our own town. And I was lucky enough to see it, before the rain washed it all away!

I viewed my first corpse—Mrs. Campbell up the street—when I was three or four years old. Since my mother was playing the organ at the church funeral, she had Mrs. Bateman—our aged neighbor who also wanted to attend the funeral—sit with me during the service. I remember nothing about the funeral itself, except for the tra-

ditional promenade past the coffin. When we came to the bier, I was too short to get a gander, whereupon Mrs. Bateman lifted me up to gape, stare fixedly upon, study, scrutinize, contemplate, and forever remember the expired Mrs. Campbell. My mother from the organ saw Mrs. Bateman hoist me high into the air, and she forever decried what Mrs. Bateman did, the manner in which at such a young age I was first allowed to gaze upon dead flesh. Today, I can still see Mrs. Campbell in her casket but recall nothing about her alive. As far as I was concerned, she might have been born exactly the way I saw her and immediately brought to her own funeral.

My second death viewing happened when I was eight or nine. A car wreck killed a young boy and his parents. I saw the bodies laid out side by side in Clark's funeral home, not in coffins but on three twin-sized mattresses, with gauzy, see-through drapes over each. I half-expected them, one by one, to wake up, stretch, and greet us. But, like Mrs. Campbell, they remained still.

At age nine, my mother drove me to St. Joseph for the funeral of her uncle George, a man I'd never met and who, according to her semi-hushed ramblings, might not have been the most upstanding of her relatives. The day before, she took me to a downtown department store in St. Joe and outfitted me in a scratchy tweed suit and starched white shirt. And for the cherry on top, she bought a wool overcoat large enough to fit over my new suit. The day of the funeral, she cinched a tie around my neck—tight like a hanging—and we were off. The funeral parlor was stifling hot on that winter day as I sat broiling in the suit that chafed my crotch and the tie that nearly sealed off my air passage. The thought of death still makes me sweat and itch, a choking feeling.

My sophomore year of high school a classmate died of cancer, and I was one of six pallbearers at her funeral. At that age I was securely immured in false adolescent toughness, so death or its attendant demons had no hold on me whatsoever. I performed my duties as though the funeral might have been another event like a baseball game or an all-school assembly. No chafing or choking there.

My father died after a couple of debilitating strokes, in which his sharp wit, sound mind, and kind regard for others' feelings morphed into false visions of strangers living in the basement, his refusal to see long-held friends, surprisingly cruel talk, and occasional unannounced wanderings into neighbors' houses. Unlike other funerals,

his was a social event where town people could speak of his humor and witticisms. I was married and regarded his funeral as, among other things, a means for my children to hear of the real Lee Pulley, not the one they'd seen post-stroke. "Listen to the people speak of him," I wanted to tell my children as the stories poured from friends and relatives. But my children didn't have the early funeral baseline I'd experienced—no Mrs. Campbell, car wrecks, death of classmates. They could only be unnerved by the sight of death.

My mother died years later at age 96 after both my children were married with children of their own—their sensibilities to death fully formed, I assumed. I was divorced and recently remarried, and unbeknownst to me, my wife—who had lived in New York City, San Francisco, and Southern California—had never attended a small town funeral. I should have prepped her, but forgot. She'd never seen an open casket; her people had always been cremated. When we walked into the funeral home, there was my mother laid out in a pretty blue dress with town people milling around, smiling, greeting me, speaking of old times. Happy talk. My wife, ashen, asked, "Why is she wearing glasses?" I had no answer. All the while, merry times abounded with my mother's trifocals pointed at the ceiling, performing no apparent function.

I was long accustomed to death bringing joyous nostalgia, but not my wife. She needed to be schooled, and on the way home I tried my best.

"It's just the way things are in small towns," I said.

"With a corpse right there and people acting like nothing happened?"

"Pretty much."

She finally asked, mildly exasperated, "You want to be buried in your glasses?"

"Maybe with new frames," I offered, hoping for a lighter touch.

"You people," she said, and sighed, looking out the window.

I Am a Jam Machine

Strawberry kiwi fills another jar,
strawberry kiwi in a sticky jar.
Fridge is getting crowded, but I've come this far!
No bitter can touch this sweet.

Little green figs full of seeds like teeth,
pink pulp and seeds always stuck in my teeth.
Will it be enough to feed the craving beneath?
No empty can touch this sweet.

Peaches in the sink and plums on the scale,
peaches in the pot and sugar on the scale.
Never can they rot now, never go stale.
No sour can touch this sweet.

Raspberry blackberry leaves another stain,
dark, heavy nectar can't help but leave a stain.
Purple turns to gray when it washes down the drain.
Oh sorrow, don't touch this sweet.

Sweep Me Up

Kierkegaard's last words

I'm finished dreaming,
choosing words, discarding lies.
Done with yearning,
expecting hands from clouds and alleluias.
Through with tenderness.
I'm closing doors left and right.
Damping the fire.
Concluding obligations,
real and imagined.
Releasing the frantic bird that's been
trapped in my chest.
Returning sentences to books.
Shedding teeth and tongue,
bone and limb, I am
no more true or false,
nobody's conjured soul,
only ash delivered to air.

Clock Eyed



Sara Lebeck
ink on matte paper
8" by 9.5"

Into the Night



John Mark Kreikebaum
digital photography
16.5" by 11.7"

Jesse, Faceless



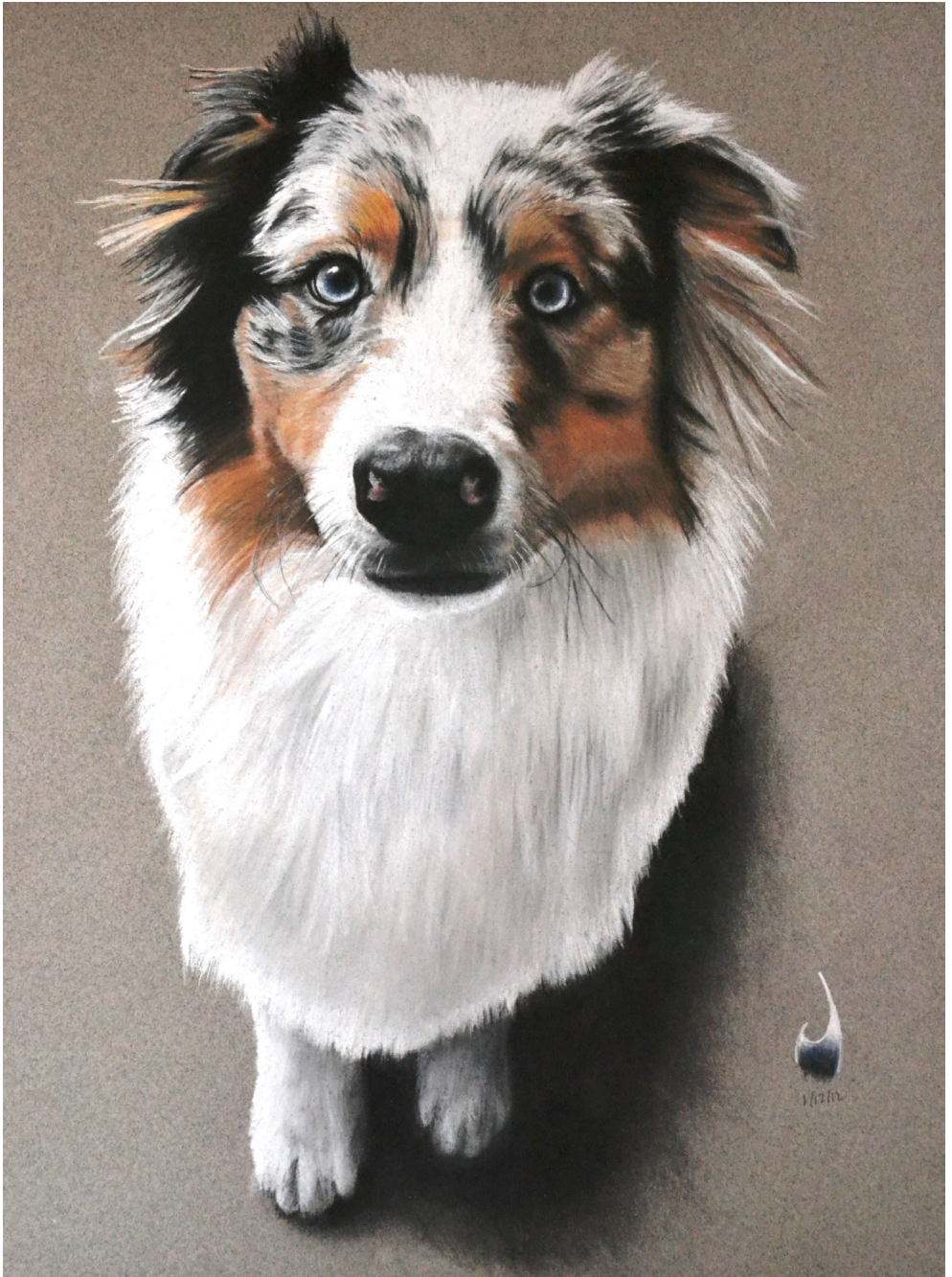
Danielle Martin
digital photography
15" by 10"

The King of Haight Street



Eliza Lamson
digital photography
10" by 13.3"

Dash



John O'Malley
pastel pencil
11" by 14"

High



Eleanor Leonne Bennett
digital photography
14" by 11"

Boy Jumps



Ramin Bajoghli
digital photography
11" by 8"

Untitled



Michelle Cumbaa
oil on canvas
24" by 36"

Dream Job

Someone was scrubbing the sky with a washcloth
when we looked up from polishing our shoes.
We were a museum of Impressionists or Hopper's
nude smoking woman in her narrow rectangle of light,
facing an open window revealing the invisible
world beyond reach. When my paycheck
arrived I was waiting in an assembly line of luggage,
all of it perched beside my father at the railway
station the last time he belonged in our lives.
Up the street from the house where I was born
is a street where someone else was born,
and above that street is a cloud out of work,
morosely drifting above us. Once I was
a coroner for ants and swept them from the basement
floor and buried them in the trash bin with lint
from the dryer. As a child I wanted to be a preacher
for street musicians, this music that rises
from the subway where for a time I worked closing
my eyes while we were shuttled underground.
My last job required that I put my hands
in my pockets and shrug from time to time,
that I piled my desk with papers that enjoyed
the camaraderie of other papers, the lot
of them floating like houseboats before me.
We need a little joy in our labor, and so I arranged
my pencils into constellations of stars,
stacked the hours against other hours, watching
them create another wondrous Tower of Babel
where I was hired to translate each word
into every other word, each tongue into breath.

My House of Cards

When I shook Jay's hand for the first time I eyed him, as if a quick survey up and down might provide insight into a stranger's character. "Good to meet you, man," I said.

"Yeah, nice to meet you."

It was Kara who was interested in subletting the room, but something told me that her boyfriend would be along for the ride. I turned back to Kara, "I've got another few walk throughs over the weekend, but I like you guys. Make sure to email me as soon as you know what you're doing."

Jay and Kara were heading back down to LA. They'd driven up to Santa Cruz to check out apartments, and they'd viewed two rooms other than the one I was advertising. It was therefore unsurprising when I received Kara's email. "We really loved the place, is it still available?"

* * *

Subleasing the small room in my apartment to Jay and Kara was a mistake made out of urgency, necessitated by a need to fill the room as quickly as possible, to the first applicant willing to put up with me. Sometimes mistakes pile up upon one another. One unfortunate and ill-conceived decision leads to another choice—an opportunity to either address wrongs or to shrink from their acknowledgment. And then it leads to another choice, resulting again from making the wrong decision, and making another until the situation has become almost unrecognizable because the quagmire was established incrementally, and you find yourself balancing upon a house of cards, too precautions to step down from, and too unstable to add just one more card.

Laying alone in a room littered with liquor bottles, as if clutter, both physical and pharmacological, might hide lingering memories, traces of just what had been sacrificed, I couldn't help but notice those things—a framed picture, a particular CD, my desk, my bed, my clothes—that reminded me of just why I was looking for room-

mates in the first place. My ex had moved out. I ended the six year relationship instead of facing some difficult problems, and, in doing so, had forfeited the love of a woman devoted to me in ways that I won't come across a second time in my life, for such a genuine love as Melody held for me is scant in this world. She left in a rage after spending two wrenching months looking for an apartment, after pleading with me to reconsider, to think about what I was throwing away, and she emptied our bank account on her way out. She was right to take the money. I'd been spending recklessly, and had put us in an awkward financial situation. That being the case, the money, more, really, than we had in that account, was due her. It was a point of shame which my reveries often returned to—how I'd promised for so long to take care of this woman I loved, how unambiguously I'd let her down.

* * *

The night after they moved in, Jay and Kara made dinner. "Damn," I said, "that smells so good. What're you guys making in there?"

"Pumpkin gnocchi with homemade pesto," Jay explained, "We've also got baby greens, heirloom tomatoes, and a little chèvre for the salad, and I'm broiling just a little tenderloin with a really light wasabi marinade so that we have some protein."

Holy shit, I thought, I've struck gold. "Well let me pay you guys for some of the groceries, I mean this is a huge dinner."

"Nah man," Jay insisted, "We would've been cooking up a storm anyway. Man, I love it, if I'm not doing it at work, then I'm gonna have to be cooking at home. Besides, we needed to check out the farmer's market anyway."

"Well, okay," I said without protest, "but at least let me do the dishes."

* * *

I arrived home from work at three or four in the afternoon, a pint of whiskey in hand, ready to drown out life's degradations, ready for some merriment, only to find Jay sitting on the living room couch in silence. He'd closed all the blinds, turned out the lights, and was brooding without even attempting the distractions of music or television.

"What're you up to?" I asked him.

He stared at me for twenty seconds before answering, "Nothing."

"You get out any resumes today? I know there are restaurants in town that are hiring. It'll help," I told him, "getting out, getting moving."

"Nah, I didn't get out today. I'll make some rounds tomorrow," and, with that, Jay resumed his brood.

I locked myself in my bedroom, where I could open the blinds to afternoon's lingering daylight and drink alone.

* * *

Kara invited a friend of hers, Tim, to come down from San Francisco for a visit. A band they liked was playing at the Catalyst, and the three of them—Jay, Kara, and Tim—were going to the concert together. I anticipated that they would stay out late, close out the bars, and arrive home after two in the morning. Knowing that the house was mine for the evening, I stayed in, and was therefore sitting in my bedroom watching a movie when they stormed through the front door at around eleven, Jay and Kara screaming at the top of their lungs. *That's an early end for a show*, I thought to myself.

"Why are you doing this?" Kara asked.

"You're full of shit, you know that?" Jay yelled back, "You think I don't know what you're fucking doing here?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kara said.

Tim remained silent. I paused the movie to better hear what was going on. There was crashing in the kitchen.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about."

"Jesus Christ," Kara said, "you're never going to let me be happy, are you? We were having a good time at the show. What happened to you?"

"Why is he here, anyway?" Jay asked. They came stomping up the staircase, Jay pursuing Kara.

"He's my friend."

"You're a fucking slut, you know that?" Jay screamed as Kara slammed the door in his face.

What have I gotten myself into, I thought as I lay listening to my housemates scream for hours.

Jay was intimidating, and he terrified Kara's houseguest. In fact,

Tim fled, chose to make the hour and a half journey back to San Francisco drunk, in the middle of the night, rather than stay in the same house as Jay. I thought it a wise decision. Jay was over six feet tall, muscular though lanky, and he looked mean. I'd already discovered that he had a propensity for the drink, and, it now seemed, he possessed propensities for violence as well. There's nothing I hated more than a bully. My home life began to appear bleaker than ever. But I took it for an isolated incident.

"Man, why'd you give that kid such a hard time?" I asked Jay the next afternoon, while he sat brooding on the couch, nursing a hangover and his regret, "I don't think you had anything to worry about from that guy."

"We've had this kind of trouble before," Jay explained, "You don't know the history."

* * *

I couldn't sleep for the screaming. It was pervasive, like a haunting, and it frightened me more than I cared to admit to the friends with whom I had discussed my living situation. I lay in bed, taking long pulls from a fifth of bourbon, chain smoking joints and Lucky Strikes, not quite able to achieve the disembodiment that I so longed for. I wanted out of this house, this place, this mortal coil.

I alternated, turning up the volume up on the movie that I was attempting to watch and turning it off entirely. I couldn't focus on the movie either way, but I also couldn't decide if I wanted to hear what my housemates were screaming at each other, or if I wanted to drown them out. Jay was yelling and throwing things as usual. Kara was crying and screaming. That's how she fought—vacillating between deep sadness and fury.

I'd had to take a piss for over half an hour, and the fact that I'd polished off the better part of a fifth only intensified the urgency. I heard them stomping around their room, storming into the hallway, slamming the bedroom door, opening it to keep screaming, locking one or the other out in the hallway. Sitting at the edge of my bed, I toed the pile of empty bottles littering that portion of my floor. Having decided which one would best serve my purpose, I snatched up an empty water bottle, pulled down my sweatpants, and filled it nearly to the brim. I capped it, opened my closet door, and threw it in with the other bottles of piss.

* * *

It was late, after one in the morning, and I was on the edge of slumber when the screaming whipped me back into consciousness. Things started smashing against walls. The apartment shook. Loud and unidentifiable noises echoed, leaving me with only my imagination to gauge the severity of atrocities occurring in the bedroom next to mine. Then I heard, as clearly as if all other noise had been extinguished for that brief and violent moment, the sound of Jay striking Kara. She ceased, at that instant, to produce intelligible words, and language gave way to sobbing screams.

I jumped from my bed, steadied myself for a moment, and then stormed out of my room. I pounded on their bedroom door, ignoring the sign hanging from scotch tape, which read, “do not disturb.”

The ruckus ceased. I detected indistinct whispers from within. Then Kara’s voice rang out behind the closed door, “Can’t you read the sign.”

“Fuck the fucking sign,” I was furious, “You guys need to chill the fuck out,” I yelled, my mouth three inches from their door.

“Leave us alone, mind your own business.” Kara had clearly been appointed the ambassador, and Jay remained silent.

“I’m not going to leave you alone until I know that the fight is over and that you guys are going to sleep.” They didn’t know it, but I had my phone in my hand and was on the verge of calling the police.

Kara argued a bit more, accusing me of interrupting their privacy, of interfering in business that was not my own. I screamed back, shaking in my rage and in my fear, until she finally relented, promising that they would go to bed, that the fight was over.

* * *

I returned home early from work the following afternoon. Neither Jay nor Kara was home, but I noticed their bedroom door was cracked a bit when I went upstairs. I pushed it the rest of the way open, just to check out the condition of the space, just to see what, if any, damage had been done. It looked like a police search gone horribly wrong, like someone had come in and ravaged their possessions in pursuit of something never found. Furniture was upended, the smaller pieces having been hurled across the room. The largest piece of furniture, their dresser, had been thrown to the ground in a rage and lay face down on the floor. I’d heard the cacophony, but

hadn't imagined that they'd created such a ruin of their space.

I approached Jay when he arrived home that evening. Having spent the day sitting around, terrified, apprehensive about a confrontation that I knew needed to take place, I steeled myself for discomfort, and, in the worst case scenario, for violence. He looked horrible when he walked across the threshold of our home, sweating through his hangover. "We've got to talk," I told him.

"Yeah, got it," he sounded resigned, "do we have to do it right now?"

"Yeah, I don't want to put it off any longer. Look, I know you guys are going through some shit right now, and I'm truly sorry that you're having a hard time. I kept my mouth shut when it was just screaming, though it kept me up at night and made me uncomfortable in my own home. But last night was a new low. There can't be violence in this house." Jay endured my lecture with a series of *I-knows* and head nods.

"Look man," he said, "this was a bad idea to move in here. I never even wanted to take this place—I even told Kara that moving in with you was a bad idea—so I'm going to start looking for another room to rent. I'll be out of here by the end of the month."

"That seems like a solution," I said, "Do I have your word on that? By month's end, you'll have another place?" Jay assured me once again that he had no desire to live with me.

I had a similar conversation with Kara later on that evening. I told Kara I thought it best that she find a new place, and I gave her the sixty day notice stipulated in our rent agreement. Finally, finally, I was amending the topmost mistake.

* * *

Kara went home for the holidays, but, inexplicably, Jay remained in Santa Cruz. This was not ideal. Jay had a week without his girlfriend, and, though I was thereby assured that no more domestic disputes would be occurring beneath my roof, it also meant that Jay could imbibe with impunity—a dangerous prospect for a violent man.

Because it was the last day of my work week, I got drunk early, purchased a gram of blow, and was flying by nine o'clock when I met up with my neighbor, who I quickly coerced into going out for a drink. Adam was a family man. He lived three apartments over

with his wife and four year old son, and he didn't get to drink as much as he'd like to. His tolerance wasn't near what mine was. We took a few shots at my house and then walked over to Andreson's, a biker bar located a couple of blocks from our complex, where Adam proceeded to get impaired to the point of motor skill failure.

On our walk back to the complex, Adam could barely stay on his feet. I held him around the shoulder to keep him from stumbling off of the curb, and had plans to hand him directly over to his wife, who could put him to bed with a roll of the eyes and then reprimand him in the morning. But when we arrived home I brought Adam into my apartment instead, my need for another rail by then exceeding concern for my friend. We came across Jay, who was sitting in the living room with his brother, an unexpected house guest for the evening. The remnants of a fifth of bourbon sat on the coffee table beside an ashtray overflowing with roaches and cigarette butts. I parked Adam in the doorway and ran upstairs to do the things that couldn't wait another minute.

I spent more time up there than I'd anticipated. When I descended the staircase no one was in the living room. The front door was ajar. I heard yelling from the courtyard. I exited the apartment to find Jay screaming at Adam. He and his brother had Adam flanked, one on either side, effectively boxing him in.

I ran between Jay and Adam and I began pushing Jay, step by step, away from my friend. "What the fuck are you doing, Jay? This is your fucking neighbor, why are you starting a fight with him?" Recognizing Adam's helplessness, I also realized Jay's propensities as a victimizer. It dawned on me, even then, in that impaired state, that Jay was a coward, that he only beat on and threatened people who were unable to defend themselves, and this realization served to incite my own hatred.

"He's talking shit!" Jay responded.

"Talking shit?" I asked, "He can't even talk. How could he possibly have done anything to deserve this?"

"Being wasted is no excuse. If someone's talking trash, then they're asking for a beating," Jay informed me, though I didn't agree.

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard." I continued pushing Jay away from Adam, who barely stood on his own two feet, looking confused and clearly unsure what was taking place, but recognizing that he was in danger. When I thought Jay was a suitable distance, I

turned my attention to his brother. "Why don't you stop this, dude? He's your brother."

"Hey man, it's not my place to get involved," Jay's brother informed me. "I can't stop him."

"Stop him? You're supporting him. You're not just standing here, you *are* getting involved. You have to recognize how stupid this is, that Jay's going to regret this as soon as it's over."

Then Jay decided to make all dialogue redundant. While my attention was focused on his brother, Jay charged Adam and sucker punched him in the face. With that first punch, Jay knocked him out. Adam fell backward, unconscious, into the bushes in the center of the courtyard. Jay sprung on Adam's unmoving body, punching him several more times in the face. Without a moment's consideration, I grabbed my housemate around his neck, and, using the force of every ounce of my weight, lifted him back to his feet. Adrenaline surged and I tremored under my fury and under the frustrations of a thousand horrible mistakes. With a jab meant to do nothing more than open his eyes, snap him back to his senses, I clacked Jay's mouth shut and sent him stumbling backwards toward our doorway. "Shut the fuck up and get into the house!!!" I screamed. Neighbors were peeking out of windows, through closed blinds. Jay felt his jaw for a moment, then turned wordlessly toward the open door and walked inside.

The Adventures of a Strong-minded Kitten; A Story of Californian Life

Originally published in the Owl, March 1874, Vol. 8, No. 7

Chapter XX. — A Lawyer's Photograph.

Once more Pussy is transplanted to a new scene; and we now find her in a luxurious city home under the care of Mr. Lawyer's housekeeper.

Pussy's new master was one of the shining lights of San Francisco. He subscribed literally to the city charities, and went to sleep regularly in his church pew every Sunday morning.

He owned a great number of ranches, all over California, which he had acquired from silly Spaniards or foolish "forty-niners," for whom he had settled land-grant disputes, and whose property he had taken in payment for his services. All the ranches that he thus legally acquired he stocked with cattle, and would on no account sell any of his real estate, except at fabulous prices; and, as in all the counties where his land lay the bulk of the taxation fell upon the improved land of the small farmers, he escaped almost scot free, and consequently made a great deal of money with very little outlay of capital. Sometime he would erect a saw-mill and clear off the timber on one of his estates, and would then set up a township and sell town lots at \$1,000 an acre. In fact, having already great quantities of money, it was easy for him to make more.

Midas-like, he seemed to turn everything he touched into gold; and, so far, he might have been considered a happy man: but, judging others by himself, he thought no one was to be trusted, or loved; and so, being sadly in want of a companion, he concluded to make a pet of little broken-legged Pussy.

Had she been an ordinarily good looking cat he would never have bestowed a second thought on her; but she was so grotesquely ugly that having a natural liking for all crooked things, he took a fancy to her at once. So far, indeed, did this innate peculiarity extend, that he never looked people straight in the face, but only glanced at

them out of the corners of his eyes.

Chapter XXI. — Mrs. Jones's Misfortune.

Mr. Lawyer's housekeeper was a little wizened, hump-backed woman with a parchment face, a tremendous beak for a nose, a very small mouth, and an equally small chin, which last feature retreated as far as it could into her bony neck, just as if it were ashamed of itself.

She was not a very bright-minded person; but for all that, she had two qualities for which Mr. Lawyer prized her highly. She was very deaf, and very silent. "Here's a present for ye, marm," said the policeman, "wid Mr. Lawyer's compliments."

Now Mrs. Jones, concluding there was something nice for dinner in the basket, placed it on the clean kitchen table, and putting on her spectacles proceeded to raise one of the basket flaps.

But there was a very angry cat inside; and no sooner was the housekeeper's face within reach, than it was vigorously attacked; and behold a great scratch right across Mrs. Jones's Roman nose! "Dear me! Something alive!" cried little Mrs. Jones; and she immediately clapped a long strip of black sticking plaster across the bridge of her nose.

The street door bell rang at this moment; and as soon as she opened it, Mr. Lawyer hailed her.

"Well, Mrs. Jones: how do you like my present? Eh? Good gracious! What's the matter with your nose?" cried he, going up to her and shouting in her ear.

Then, without waiting for an answer, the lawyer burst into such a fit of laughing that he began to think he had made a good investment in this Pussy-cat which had caused such fun.

"Come, Mrs. Jones," he cried, "let me see the unfeeling wretch that has so barbarously injured you." And the little woman tripped gravely into the kitchen, followed by grinning Mr. Lawyer.

"Why haven't you taken it out of the basket yet!" cried he. So, Mr. Lawyer lifted Miss Puss out himself, and placed her on a chair by the stove.

Mrs. Jones was at first disposed to keep Pussy at arm's length; but being a person of very forgiving temper, as the sticking-plaster peeled from her nose, so did all unkind feelings from her heart; and

cat and housekeeper became ere long the greatest friends possible.

Chapter XXII. — Treasure-Trove.

One day our kitten, without meaning any harm, nearly frightened poor Mrs. Jones out of her life; for having recovered from her ailments, and feeling once more quite strong and hearty, she was so delighted that she suddenly stood on her head, right in the the corner of the kitchen, just as Mrs. Jones was carrying a hot beefsteak into the breakfast parlor.

“Oh my!” cried the housekeeper, “Oh my!! Oh my!!” each time louder than before; whereupon Mr. Lawyer, thinking there must be robbers in the house, rushed in with the most unlawyerlike promptitude, and saw kitty wheeling, head over heels, round the kitchen.

“Why, she is dancing the catalepsy, Mrs. Jones!” cried the limb of the law, looking intensely amused.

“What’s that, Sir?” inquired the trembling housekeeper, glancing in dismay at the (once hot) beefsteak and potatoes, which now lay in a chilled heap at her feet, mixed up with a quantity of broken crockery.

“The cat fandango, to be sure;” replied Mr. Lawyer.

“Oh my, yes! The cat fandango, to be sure;” repeated the old woman, still shaking all over.

“Yes,” returned the lawyer; “she’s only amusing herself like the Mexicans. Why didn’t you think of this before, Mrs. Jones, instead of going off into a tantrum, and spilling my beefsteak?”

By this time Puss had arrived in front of the worthy housekeeper, and was standing upright, with front paws straight down, by her side, like a soldier in the attitude of attention. She was begging for the beefsteak.

“Let her have it!” exclaimed the lawyer; who began to think himself a remarkably smart man, to have been able to wheedle Mr. Manager and Mr. Farmer out of such a treasure.

Chapter XXIII. — Pussy Becomes a “City Madam”

Nothing was now too good for Pussy, who became henceforward the ruling power in the house, and could consequently do whatever she liked, so long as she did not go beyond the precincts of the yard.

This yard was extremely limited in extent; but insomuch as it had high walls, and Kitty's crooked limbs were not good at climbing, she was kept within bounds.

Other cats used, however, to come and see her; and as they were all fond of music, it was agreed to establish a glee club, and make the yard the concert room; and here accordingly, Kitty sang to her heart's content, without fear of coyotes.

Fortunately for the club, Mrs. Jones was, as we have said, deaf; and Mr. Lawyer was generally absent until late at night at his office; so that Pussy's operatic airs did not disturb the household in which she lived, although the neighbors were driven nearly distracted by her. There was no redress, however; for what would it avail, in San Francisco, to go to the law against a rich lawyer?

So Kitty lived and prospered; and in due time grew quite domestic, and became the mother of a large family of kittens to whom she often told the story of her life, as a warning to them not to indulge in pranks which entailed such sufferings.

Contributors' Notes

Ramin Bajoghli is a freelance photographer and TV Producer working mainly in Washington D.C. and New York City. Currently, he is completing his Post Baccalaureate studies in Pre-Medicine at New York University. Ramin also serves as the President of the Board of Advisors of Iranian Alliances Across Borders (www.iranianallainces.org), a non-profit organization that works to develop community leaders with high school and college students.

Eleanor Leonne Bennett is a sixteen-year-old internationally award winning photographer and artist who has won first places with *National Geographic*, *The World Photography Organisation*, *Nature's Best Photography*, *The Woodland trust* and *Postal Heritage*. Her art is also globally exhibited.

Tovah Burstein, a New Hampshire native, is currently an MFA candidate at Roosevelt University in Chicago. Her work has previously appeared in *Chicago Reader*, *Bookslut*, and *The Laurentian*. She also served as Editor-in-Chief for the 2012 issue of *Oyez Review*.

Michelle Cumbaa is a senior undergraduate from Charleston, South Carolina and is a double major in biology/pre-med and studio art. Much of her artwork is focused on exploring where and how these two fields of study intersect.

Joshua Bakar Fredkin is a past editor of *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.

Marissa Henry is a senior at UC Berkeley, majoring in comparative literature with emphases in Greek, Latin, and French. When she grows up, she wants to be either a classicist-poet or a jam machine.

Abe Gaustad lives and writes in Germantown, Tennessee. His fiction

has appeared in *Camera Obscura*, *New Orleans Review*, *Third Coast*, *Gulf Stream*, *Smokelong Quarterly* and elsewhere.

John Mark Kreikebaum was born in scenic California and has travelled around the world. He uses photography to capture and share memories. He puts much thought and care into everything he does, especially his relationships, studying physics, and his hobbies which include cooking and cycling.

Mercedes Lawry has published countless poems over the past 35 years and two chapbooks, most recently *Happy Darkness*, as well as stories and poems for children, fiction and a bit of humor. She lives in Seattle.

Stephen Layton is a junior majoring in English and philosophy at Santa Clara University.

Sara Lebeck is a digital and fine arts student at the University of Oregon. She is also the manager and designer for the band Orion and helps organize and design the annual “Wonderland” events. www.saralebeckartwork.com

Ben Leib has spent the past twelve years as a waiter, a student (undergraduate and graduate), and an alcoholic intravenous drug user. Each of these stations in life has brought him an equal amount of torment. Find out about Ben’s current, seafaring adventures at benleib.com.

Veronica Machuca is from Los Angeles and is currently a junior accounting major at Santa Clara University. She tries to paint, draw and dance as much as she can during her free time.

Danielle Martin studied art for two years at UC Santa Cruz and is in the process of transferring elsewhere to earn her BFA in graphic design. She spends her days taking pictures, reading art blogs, and making things.

Kathryn McAuliffe’s interests and activities include pen caps, unimpeded views of the setting sun, Jumanji, Dick Clark, living life on and or near the edge, knobby knees, Russell Block as a Monopoly

auctioneer, mason jars, and time-travel.

Kim Munson is primarily a sculptor and printmaker. She currently is exploring themes of animal behavior and ethology, especially among crows and ravens. She is a graduate of Santa Clara University, with a BA in studio art, and a BS in marketing.

Sayuri Matsuura is a native of Columbus, Ohio. After working in the science field for five years, she completed the Masters program at Ohio State University for Foreign and Second Language Education. She currently instructs university students, immigrants, and refugees in English as a Second Language.

A.C. Nelson is a junior economics major at Santa Clara University.

Bill Neumire's work has appeared in *American Poetry Journal*, *The Laurel Review*, *Hollins Critic*, and *Clarion*. He currently serves as an assistant editor for both *Verdad* and *Fiddleback*.

John O'Malley is mechanical engineer who loves to draw. Most of his pieces involve a focus on the eyes as they portray the most emotion and make a piece that much more realistic and intense.

Mark Powell is now London-based after graduating from the University of Huddersfield. Since graduating he has had shows on the west coast of America, Barcelona, Berlin and up and down the United Kingdom.

Michael Pulley's short fiction has appeared in *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Sonora Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Review Americana*, *Furnace Review*, and *S/N Review*. "Where is Thy Sting?" is part of a memoir, *Riding in Place: A Life in Glimpses*.

Melina Alexa Ramirez grew up in San Jose, California. She is a studio art major and religious studies minor from the class of 2012. This piece is autobiographical, and is part of a larger body of work that calls into question euro-centric standards of beauty and worth.

Kyra Sjarif, hailing from smoggy Jakarta, Indonesia, is a sophomore studying French, studio art and psychology, with an emphasis in

gerontology. Her piece attempts to pay homage to the elderly, reminding us of the contributions they've made to our history.

Doug Ramspeck is the author of four poetry collections. His most recent book, *Mechanical Fireflies* (2011), was awarded the Barrow Street Press Book Prize. His first book, *Black Tupelo Country* (2009), received the John Ciardi Prize.

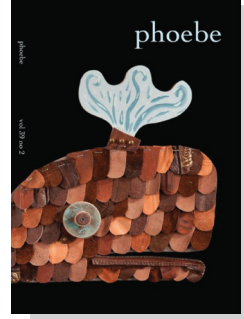
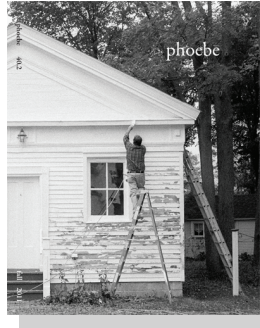
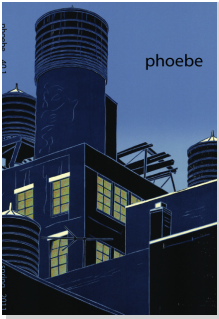
Marci Vogel, a native of Los Angeles, was recently admitted into USC's Literature and Creative Writing PhD Program as a Provost's Fellow. Her poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the AWP Intro Journals Award.

Natalie Yacob is from Burlingame, California. She has loved drawing her whole life and is currently a psychology major and art minor at Santa Clara University.

Isabel Yap was born and raised in the Philippines. She is currently majoring in marketing at Santa Clara University. Her work has appeared in *Philippine Speculative Fiction*, *Heights*, *Every Day Poets Online*, and elsewhere. These poems are dedicated to her family.

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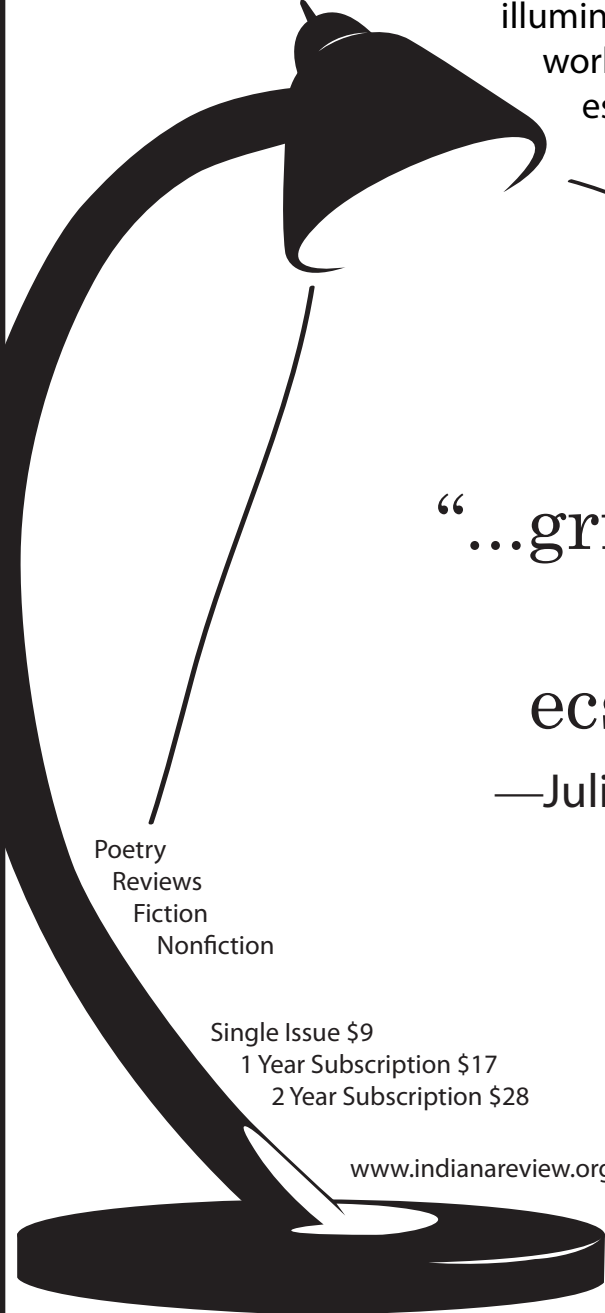
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