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SANTA CLARA  
REVIEW

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volume 103 / issue 01

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COVER ART BY MICHAEL MIRA

FRONT COVER / *YOUR TELEVISION IS EXPERIENCING A SLIGHT TIMELINE CONVERGENCE*

BACK COVER / *YOUR TELEVISION IS EXPERIENCING A SLIGHT TIMELINE CONVERGENCE*

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CONTACT US BY MAIL AT:

**SANTA CLARA REVIEW**

500 EL CAMINO REAL, BOX 3212

SANTA CLARA, CA, 95053-3212

(408) 554-4484

OR EMAIL AT:

[SANTACLARAREVIEW@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SANTACLARAREVIEW@GMAIL.COM)

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# SANTA CLARA REVIEW

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VOLUME 103 / ISSUE 01

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

JAKE LANS

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volume 103 / issue 01

## TO THE READER,

Thank you for picking up this copy of the Santa Clara Review. Our editors have worked tirelessly to find the perfect stories, poems and art for the pages of this issue, and we are altogether eager and proud to present it to you.

With a lineage of over 100 volumes, distinction from issue to issue is a lot like walking on a tightrope; a balance must be made between tradition and progression. Our humble 103rd volume is not delivered without its fair share of uniqueness. We've continued the minimalist design changes that were made in the last volume, both because they were well received and because we liked them. Undoubtedly greater, we have two new featured poets of national acclaim who have generously offered their work to our pages. It is wonderful to have such artists on our stage.

But perhaps most distinguishing this issue is the lack of nonfiction. Half because we could not find the right fit, and half because so many other pieces were compellingly appropriate, we've made the tough decision to omit a staple genre of the contemporary literary review. But what kind of editors would we be without making hard decisions?

Nonetheless, we remain steadfast to our roots. Always in pursuit of truth, honesty, and compassion, the featured poetry, fiction, and art are as diverse as ever. From dystopian micro sci-fi to mysterious vampire poems, there is something offered for every reader. It is our hope that you use what you like best as a source of inspiration for your own creations.

Along with this continued diversity of material, it has been an exciting year for us. We are in our first operating year after a tediously serious rechartering effort. While frustrating amidst the trenches, the efforts proved to be incredibly beneficial and have helped remind us why we do what we do. Thank you to all who took part in reinstating the Santa Clara Review as the creative voice of our campus and California's oldest literary magazine; we wear the name with pride.

I would also like to thank our contributors and readers who year after year support our review. Without you we are nothing but a book of empty pages.

Lastly, I would like to thank the wonderful staff, our editorial board and assistants, and our beloved advisor for the long hours put into this book. Often times with unhealthy amounts of coffee and dire needs for creative honesty, this team spent many long nights in the office debating merits of artistic and literary works, and the result is a fine assemblage of work. The things you do are truly beautiful.

Here's to happy reading, folks. May you enjoy what we have to offer.

JAKE LANS  
editor in chief



# ALEXANDRA TEAGUE

SANTA CLARA REVIEW

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*featured poet*

AUDREY MUNSON, THE AMERICAN VENUS,  
COMMITTED TO THE SAINT LAWRENCE  
STATE ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE, 1931  
ALEXANDRA TEAGUE

---

poetry

You're back from Hollywood,  
you tell the tabloids—  
on a dais in *Headless Moths*.  
a scarf on your head  
like prophecy.

At the Cecil Hotel,  
you've swallowed mercury:  
the neighbors' barns are  
tambourines, the world rattling—  
It's not your fault you're not  
where you posed all one summer:

facing opposite directions  
from rescue,

only a child of stone. *But*  
*in your mouth*  
like a security camera.  
A girl pushes elevator buttons,  
(anyone can see), signaling  
water. On a locked-up roof,

elsewhere:  
You are trained in allegory.  
You are heedless

spilling

a spy now. Or that's what  
you're hunting  
You pose with a tambourine,  
as if to climb from a plane,  
*As a child, a psychic told me,*

people keep jumping  
*to die because I wanted to be*  
burning. You are  
so many windows and  
Kentucky Marble,  
yourself as Sacrifice,

a lover laid in your lap  
except he's dead.

*the dead sea fruits of*  
that psychic spies  
It's not her fault  
waving her hands  
at nothing in the hall.  
her body in that tank.  
It's not your fault

*they watched me like the spies*  
You are hunting  
Sacrifice. Which is Duty?  
they say. Now drink this.  
through all the open taps.



Germans. Naked

propellers circling  
*I shall be famous and beloved*

from just-built windows—  
*dead*. It's not your fault  
hunting Germans with  
not enough people at home.  
like in the Firemen's Memorial  
and the figure of Duty—

like the Pieta. He'd rescue you.  
To take his place:

*happiness shall turn to ashes*  
from your past:  
they haven't been invented yet.

Guests complain for weeks: foul  
accidents keep happening

*I was supposed to shadow.*  
moths.  
That girl is safe in the future  
No one is

# MOTHER'S RED DRESS ENTERS A PIE IN THE COUNTY FAIR

ALEXANDRA TEAGUE

poetry

*After Mother died, her red dress continued baking pies.*

--C.A. Conrad

The living think they know everything  
about heartbeats—hutches of rabbits

with their prize-winning ears twitching  
at rumors of themselves; bottle-fed pigs

suckling now at the bright night air—  
all life's straw-stink and cage made safer

with ruffled ribbons and turned-over fear  
as the Moonraker's one long arm hovers

in high copper sky before plunging. The living  
scream as if the heart is a basket, though no one

falls out. They tuck the cherries into fluting  
lattice nests; seal the jelly's glow: even, crystalline

as cathedral glass. They don't see a woman's  
dress is just her heart beating crisscrossing

gingham and stitch: the hem fraying past skin,  
more unravel than red, more Red Beauty

than fabric. They don't see the trees growing  
up from glass pans—crumbling buttery crusts

with their branches. The sweetest glowing  
peaches seep the oven floor. The living put

mystics into Bell jars: add pectin to set god  
into flesh. Santa Rosa scouring her lovely face

with pepper and lye to end attraction—to shut  
desire down like an electric ride. As if anyplace

can't become a fair—light spilling over fields  
as the judges close their eyes to taste:

noting *lemon* for *infinite*. *Nutmeg* for *unreal*,  
*unknowable*. They eat my pie as if it were

more delicious than their own hunger.

# BABA YAGA RIDES IT'S A SMALL WORLD

ALEXANDRA TEAGUE

---

poetry

Dear dolls: do not believe Freud it's your almost  
aliveness that frightens: that you are yet are not.  
No one believes Dutch girls wear folded paper hats  
and carry tulips. Except Donald Trump. Except anger  
and men who make islands. Tell them  
about islands. Tell them about glue: how the sweet parade  
wave you have perfected is gesture as lacquer:  
elbow-elbow, wrist-wrist. It's not a talent to throw tulips  
that never leave your hands. You know the windmill  
like it is your dirty-fingered brother; like it is the red pagoda  
plus arms, one singing room away. It's all the same sea:  
dyed with copper sulfate until the blue is uncanny.  
Like womb water. Like the sea of repression.  
That doesn't mean these people fear castration  
at your tiny hands; that you might pluck their eyes  
from their heads. They'd give those freely  
for Mouse Ears. For a wood-fingered double  
who knows how to scrub dishes—how,  
in some fairytales, to trick witches. Dear dolls:  
have you noticed no one steps onto your shores?  
That's because it's illegal. No one knows  
your stiff-legged patriotic dance. Tell us what you've  
done with all the guns. It's a small world for airplanes  
and Ebola, for a girl facedown on classroom tiles  
pretending dead when the shooter says  
"raise your head." Dear people: are you frightened yet?  
Freud was right about compulsion. You have sex dolls  
to prove it. You have maquiladoras where women paint  
smiles. You have primitive urges. You've heard it  
deep inside your psyche: Climb out of the boat  
of reason. What can you do about this world  
but wave and wave and wave and wave and wave?





# PETER JAY SHIPPY

SANTA CLARA REVIEW

---

*featured poet*

# AUTUMN STILL

PETER JAY SHIPPY

---

poetry

Plastic fangs soak  
in a shot-glass.

Someone's carved  
my rye loaf

into a boat. Popsicle  
sticks make fine oars.

A coffee mug spills  
with fishhooks.

I tongue the scars  
on the cutting board.

Garlic, cloves, oyster  
mushrooms, milk

cartons sagging off  
baby Oak, filled

with peanuts and sun-  
flower seeds, hanging

over dirt bike frames  
and a Camaro's

toasted engine, parked  
under a blue tarp.

Near the bean stakes  
is a burlap sack



of tulip bulbs. See?  
I'm full of hope,  
I'm fare-thee-  
well, girls, and boys, so

let's spade. Let's lade  
the solar barge with souls.

I down Scope, insert  
my teeth and exit,

left, looking for  
someone to infect.

# HIVEHEAD

PETER JAY SHIPPY

---

poetry

It's humbling when you see  
what a bumblebee can do

with just a million neurons.  
Where I live, many operate

heavy machinery under  
the influence. Who can blame them?

It's hard to resist amber  
liquids and backhoes. Our mayor

is a bee. As is the principal  
of the junior high school.

The Governor awarded her  
a laurel wreath for teaching

kids what's what. For a while  
I believed that Mr. Lackey,

my manager at Friar Tux,  
was a bee, but it turns out

that he's a yellow jacket.  
That explains a lot.

Some people in my town feel  
guilty, or even jealous

and angry. Why are those insects  
showing us up! Not me.

Thursdays I take a class  
at the library. Meditation.

My guide gave me my own mantra:  
Bzzz. Try it. Say that

a few hundred times and tell me  
you don't want to just pull

the covers over your eyes  
and fly away to dreamland.

# ODYSSEUS

PETER JAY SHIPPY

---

poetry

After spending half the day  
eating lotus, I resolved

to do something with mangos  
and rum. On the way to Hi-Lo

I saw that my neighbor  
had slapped strips of white tape

to her car's bumper and used  
a Sharpie to write: Walter Sucks.

I didn't know Linda. Belinda?  
Cinda? Is that a real name?

We waved now and then. Once,  
while she was watering her yard

I asked her to hose me off. She  
declined. But, I knew she was right

about this Walter. Walter  
must truly suck for her

to take so little effort  
to bona fide this bona fide.







VOLCANO  
PARKER ALLEN  

---

digital photography



# RIVER BOATS

EDY MADSEN

oil on canvas  
16" x 20"

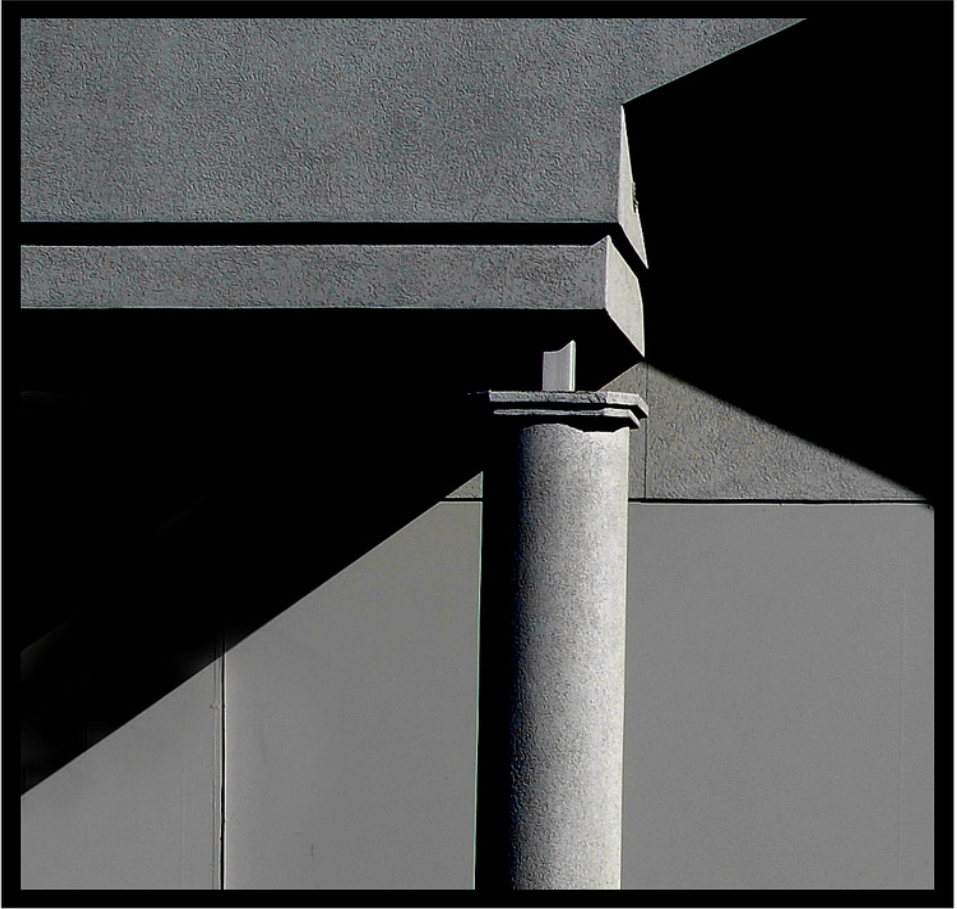




# CONFLICT

SUSANNA RAJ

acrylic on canvas  
24" x 36"



# VILLA

THOMAS GILLASPY

digital photography



# ALL THIS TIME

HANNAH WITHERS

---

fiction

To be honest, I never really liked younger men. That hasn't stopped them from loving me excessively, like a gypsy curse. Which is exactly why I had to spend two and a half hours of my twenty-seventh year breaking up with twenty-one-year-old Gavin Sorensen in the Kent State University Radio Station.

I'd come to Kent to work on one of my collages—Ohio State had given me a grant to get me through the winter, collect some archives, put something together about the shootings there. The truth was I'd fibbed my way through the proposal process, used enough five-dollar phrases to seem like I had half an idea of what I wanted to do. They'd given me the money, essentially, on good faith. The first day I arrived with just a notebook, empty but for the words “Kent State, violence, b & w v. students today, police criminality/beautiful young bodies.” The words *wing and a prayer* came to mind, but when do they not?

I met Gavin at the University audio archives. I'd ended up there with the intention of looking busy, casually directed, sincerely on the scent of progress. Gavin ushered me through the digital stacks and miles of tape. He was the Executive Director of the radio station and viewed his job with mawkish seriousness.

The first thing that struck me about Gavin was his eyes, amplified behind his coke bottles, always vaguely tearful as though ill-equipped for the light and motion they were subjected to daily. He had serious eyes even when he was happy and I liked that. But not so much as he liked me (just like they all do, because I'm small and approachable, remind them faintly of their mothers if their mothers had nice breasts and listened to The Smiths). I asked what his tattoo was—an ellipsis on his inner forearm—and he told me it was Morse code for “S,” the first-ever transatlantic radio transmission sent by Marconi. He said he wanted to be a part of that history, to own a little piece of it. I told him I knew what he meant.

By the time that our headphones had canceled out the noise I could



tell that he was looking at me in that familiar way: entertaining notions, making plans. And you'd think I would have learned my lesson at that point, but he had nice eyes and interesting ideas and we were sleeping together two days later.

Two months later I had no intention of being his twenty-seven-year-old girlfriend, but that, it seemed, I was. I waded my way through the crunch of February snow to let him know that No, I could not be his valentine and No, I would not meet his parents during family visit weekend.

It was ten degrees out by four p.m. and anyone who tells you there's such a thing as *too cold to snow* is lying or lives on the West Coast. Ten degrees, and it shat snow all over my freshly blow-dried hair on the half block sprint from my car to Gavin's front door. He lived in the Radio Station, an old, white, Victorian-looking job just on the edge of campus, wainscoting and all, doubling as housing for the students who scheduled programming, managed production, maintained the equipment, et al.

He was excited to see me, though his eyes would never show it. "Hey June," he said, going in for a kiss; I pulled back, so he got my neck, pecking it quickly up the ridge of a tendon as though eating corn on the cob. This was one of several habits I'd found charming at first but had grown to make my skin crawl. The list also included: trying to hold hands inside my coat pocket when we were outside, not only bringing a water bottle with him wherever he went but also bringing one for me, spooning me in his sleep *the entire night*, saying "word" in confirmation of things, wearing shirts that were by and large too tight, putting childlike amounts of sugar in his coffee, blogging, and talking in his sleep.

He took my hand and led me into the house, brushing past the various mismatched couches and string-light-lit reading corners that marked the house as a place where college people lived. Powell, the station's Sound Tech, waved to me from the kitchen as we passed. I didn't know Powell too well. He had borrowed an expensive shotgun mic from Gavin and subsequently blown it out by plugging it into an overloaded fuse at a party. Gavin had been stonewalling him ever since.

We got to Gavin's bedroom: a postage stamp-sized room on the second floor where everything was either flannel or quilted or "upcycled," a word he taught me meaning it used to be a bike tire. He sat on his bed and ran his fingers through his wispy red-blond hair, a gesture that in other people implied stress, and in him meant he wanted to have sex. I sat down at his desk chair, once a grain barrel. I took a deep breath. I spent roughly one hundred and fifty minutes explaining that it wasn't him, it was me and my inability to be satisfied by him.

Damage done, I retreated downstairs to the living room. I was putting my boots on by the front door when Nell, the station's Director of Music Programming, called from the couch. "You going somewhere?"

I looked up from my laces, exasperated with the entitlement college students feel to ask even the dumbest questions. “Yeah. Gotta run home. Work to do on the piece.” The truth was I hadn’t done any real work on the Kent State Shooting “piece” in weeks, and had no intention of doing any that night.

The trick of collage is that it takes very little actual work. It’s a medium that feeds off of the pre-fabricated, and the only trick is collecting the pieces other people are too lazy to put together. Even the ones that made me real money, the big ones plastered around public libraries and city halls—they’re just little histories I found and attached my name to, like gluing your own image into a photo of your great-grandparents. That’s what made it so scary that I hadn’t done any work on the Kent State piece. I had too much inertia. It was like having no name to attach.

Nell just stared at me, clearly formulating what she wanted to say. She held my gaze and tore lightly at the frayed holes in the thighs of her jeans. The flannel she wore on top was almost the exact same shade of green as the plaid pillows on the couch, making her look not altogether unlike an accessory to the loveseat. She finally mumbled unceremoniously, “Umm we’re snowed in.”

I returned her stare. “What.”

She turned toward the front window, as though looking to the out-of-doors to answer for itself, or else displaying to me the shaved side of her head, stripes of scalp raked haphazard into her shaggy brown hair. I took a few steps to look out the window. Winters in Ohio, night starts to fall around three thirty and plummets by six thirty, so it took a few seconds of staring to recognize that the darkness halfway up the window was not a trick of the light, but the snowline.

“But how?” I said.

She looked back at me with the same disgust I’d shrugged at her question. “It snowed a lot.”

Hours later, it was still snowing. I loitered over the kettle in the kitchen. Gavin was holed up in the converted parlor that now served as the broadcast room for the station. He had started by burning his way through his entire Sleater Kinney catalogue, shouting the lyrics at me over the bottle of Evan Williams he was using as his microphone each time I passed the doorway. By eight thirty he’d started editing on the fly some supercuts of the saddest Leonard Cohen/Jeff Buckley/Morrissey songs he had on hand. *I suppose that he froze when the wind tore off your clothes/ And I guess he just never got warm* drifted down the hallway, followed by *I’m driving your girlfriend home/ And she’s saying how she never chose you.*

I tried to remind myself that at least the sex had been good. While it’s always a crapshoot with the younger ones, sometimes they really do surprise you. They always have excitement going for them, but of course

excitement can backfire. With Gavin, he just always seemed so delighted to have a real and actual naked woman in front of him that he wanted to show off all his moves while he had the chance, like a puppy impressing an exciting visitor with the tricks it's learned. They always say that older men are the ones who know what they're doing, and mostly it's true, but give me a young guy with the will to learn and something to prove and I can get along just fine, for a while.

There are times I wish I could make it work with these juniors; let them dote on me and play me their Japanese bootlegs and hand-draw me birthday cards. I think that it wouldn't be so bad, teaching them how to go grocery shopping or do their taxes. But there's this nagging pit where my lungs connect, a tiny black hole that sucks in reasonable feelings and certainty. All I'm left with is this stupid question, always this question—*what am I missing while I'm helping someone else mature? And then: what if I'm not missing anything?*

Nell wandered into the kitchen and looked around placidly. Then, suddenly, realization flashed across her face and she yelled “*Shit,*” startling me in the exact moment I was pouring hot water over my lemon zinger tea bag. The water flipped over the rim of the chipped white mug that read “World’s Greatest Grandpa” and splashed along the Formica countertop, soaking a package of Keebler cookies and plate of Indian food left uncovered from the weekend.

“What happened?” I asked, expecting to find her bloody, missing a finger north of the knuckle.

“I forgot to bring Caroline up her dinner,” she muttered as she threw open the refrigerator door and started tossing out sandwich ingredients.

Caroline, the fourth housemate and the station’s Director of Talk Programming, had wiped out on her bike a month before, skidding over a patch of black ice and hurtling onto the sidewalk with no helmet. I’d been in the house that night, watched her wander into the kitchen all bumped and bruised but claiming to feel no worse for the wear. I watched her stare up at the open cabinet for over a minute, her soft long limbs completely still, her face a pale ellipsis of inactivity.

“What are you looking for?” I asked her, feeling even more than usual that I was speaking to a child.

“The glasses...” she muttered without looking at me. “I need a glass.”

The cupboard she was staring at was full of glasses. Powell took her to the hospital that night, and by the morning she was diagnosed with a severe concussion, the effects of which she still apparently had. She couldn't be outside because the light and noise made her dizzy, she couldn't read because it made her sleepy, she couldn't follow a conversation because she forgot the beginning of a sentence by the time you got to its end. The

kids in the house made her meals in shifts and helped her with laundry and errands in the meantime, joking about having a pet or being parents. Caroline mostly slept or listened to music softly, wandered through the rooms of the house, forgot people's names.

"Sucks that you're stuck here, I guess," Nell intoned drowsily as she slapped a slice of turkey onto some lettuce.

"Yeah, sure does."

"You almost would've been better off calling him, huh?" she said. "My friend Naomi—well, she goes by Noah now—"

"*He goes by Noah,*" Powell interjected, grabbing a beer out of the fridge and disappearing back into the living room.

"*They go by Noah!*" shouted Gavin from down the hall, slurring his words.

"Well anyway, they broke up with their girlfriend last spring and as they were leaving the apartment building together the elevator freaked out and they were stranded there together for like, eight hours. They couldn't even pee. So," she said. "At least you can pee. Until the pipes freeze."

"That's a really good point," I said.

"I'm serious. Something worse has always happened to someone else already, right? Our problems are pretty much always artificial compared to what's already happened."

"You're probably right."

"Pretty sure I'm right. Better go take this to Princess Peach," and she thumped up the stairs, sandwich in hand.

I couldn't have just called Gavin, because half the reason I'd gone to his place was to deliver back the tapes he'd loaned me from the archives. Thinking of this, I grabbed my bag from the living room and rifled through it for the plastic Safeway bag laden with a dozen or so old cassette cartridges, each one bearing the dusty magnetic imprints of news reports and firsthand interviews, accounts of the shootings from witnesses, National Guards, professors.

Gavin had convinced me that I ought to incorporate audio into the piece as a way of keeping it alive and immediately engaging, implicating the audience or something like that. I don't remember entirely what the point was, only that he'd been very passionate and I'd found it very compelling. My big contribution had been to add audio footage of current Kent students; kids talking at the dining hall, errant tape of skateboards grinding down the library steps, even a few minutes of Gavin and I having sex a week or so prior, thinking I could dub it in at a low level and fuck with the viewer's sense of violence and arousal. That part may have been Gavin's idea. Who's to say.

I'd already digitized all the tapes and had the M4A's on my laptop. I went to the broadcast studio to try and make nice, give Gavin the bag, but



when I got there I found him on the floor, cradling the half drained Evan Williams like a doll and singing along under his breath to “Comfortably Numb.”

I peeked my head in. “Hey, I’ve got—”

“What do you want?” he spat before I could finish the sentence. I gestured with the bag. “I brought these back, figured you should have them.”

“Just leave it. It doesn’t matter. Just leave them.” I set the bag down and turned to leave.

“Why did you even come here?” he asked. “Do you know how happy I was before you? How okay my life looked?”

I turned in exasperation, sick of the idea that people have the right to talk about themselves exactly as much as they want to all of the time. I hate talking to drunks and lingering goodbyes almost as much as, that winter, I hated the old man at the desk of the library who asked how I was enjoying freshman year, and the woman who lived in the sublet next to mine, one year older than me, updating me on her wedding plans with a thirty-six-year-old restaurateur.

“I came here to give you the tapes,” I said. “They’re yours.”

“No. I mean why’d you come here at all? It wasn’t for some fucking mural you don’t even want to work on ever. You don’t care about it, you don’t care about me, you just came here to dick around and fuck me up and waste time.”

“Collage,” I said. “I make collages.”

“You don’t make fucking anything,” he said, and then heaved himself up to the board to switch from Pink Floyd to Radiohead. *A heart that’s full up like a landfill...*

I retreated to the living room, livid and full of a bile that was eating through my liver, my lungs, my ribcage. My skin ached with it, the hair on my arms stood on end like a cartoon cat.

Here was this kid, this actual *child*, telling me that I didn’t do enough, that I wasn’t creating anything of value. This kid who doesn’t even pay his own utilities, telling me, an award winner, an earner, an artist. For a twenty-one-year-old to think he has any concept of what wasting time means, and to think he has any right to look at me, to try to understand me, to attempt a name for my flaws.

Nell and Powell were in the living room taking hits from a pipe.

“Hey dawg,” Nell croaked, sucking the words back in to her chin so as not to lose any smoke. She passed the piece to Powell and tried to give him the lighter, but he’d already produced one from his pocket, was already dipping its flame in the bowl.

“Guess you’re here for the night,” she said, looking up at the Hello Kitty wall clock that read ten twenty-four.

“There must be someone plowing, right?” I asked. “School maintenance or something. Someone.”

“Better get comfortable,” Powell offered, extending the pipe to me. I looked once more out the window, one half-buried street lamp visible at the end of the block.

“Whatever,” I groaned and took his pipe and lighter, muscle memory holding the flame away from the crook of my thumb and index knuckle for the first time in five years. I sank into the futon and took a few hits, remembering my old tendency to race the drug’s course to my brain, always overloading my lungs, addling my system with it, getting too high, but not caring. Why change, I wondered. In a moment like this, why try to fix a problem without a name?

“Was she awake?” Powell asked Nell, pointing to the ceiling.

“Yeah, but drowsy. She thought it was the middle of the night and didn’t want to eat. I left the food up there though. She’ll get to it.”

“She didn’t eat much yesterday either,” he said, taking his light back from me before I noticed he was reaching for it.

“I think she’s okay. As long as she eats *something* everyday. She had some PB&J earlier.”

“I ran into Matz today. He said she’s going to have to do an extra semester, at least.”

“Jesus.”

“Yeah, real fucked up. Just sitting up there letting the sun go up and down. Half the time I don’t know if she remembers what she’s supposed to be doing. Fucking heartbreaking.”

“I don’t know,” I said, staring up at the ceiling, feeling the thickness start to soak through my forehead, deaden my nerves. The familiar lost capacity to hold my tongue, aggravated by the desire to be more right than them. “It doesn’t seem so bad to me.”

“It’s awful!” Nell exclaimed as she flopped back into the cushions of the couch, reclining like an emperor. “She hardly knows what day it is! It’s all just a blur.”

“She just got sucked out of her life. Imagine being totally absent.” Powell had started stroking my socked ankle with his foot. I only noticed peripherally, but enough to recognize it and choose to ignore it. “For no reason.”

“I don’t know,” I repeated. “It’s like erasure.”

“Exactly!” spouted Nell. “Being erased! It’s awful!”

“No, I mean like books.” They both stared at me. I could tell I was losing the train, couldn’t get back on it, couldn’t want to. “Like when you take a book and erase some of the words. Then it’s new, and it’s yours.”

“It just sounds like half a book,” Nell drawled. “Sounds like Caroline.”

“No, it’s new,” I said, leaning back into the chair. Powell’s foot slipped between my calves into the hem of one pant leg. “It’s just getting down to brass tacks. It’s losing all the heavy stuff. Imagine having no ownership over yesterday.” I closed my eyes and listened to the two of them not talking.

After a while we heard a crash from down the hall, and then Gavin growling, “Well... shit.”

A pause, and then Nell—“I should probably go check on... that.” She got up and meandered down the hall, reluctantly. Powell and I sat still, listening to the negotiations taking place down the hall, *mostly of the okay, let’s get you up to bed* variety. Then there was a hand on my knee. “C’mon, I’ve got something I want to show you.”

Most of what I knew about Powell was that he was an ex-lacrosse player who had discovered his passion for wires and sockets in his junior year, joined the radio staff, and in a few months had sufficiently charmed the extracurricular board into funding the station’s transition from copper cable to fiber optic, which he’d installed himself over the summer. He’d used his four years in school to transition from a clichéd king of pussy to a subtler, more employable one.

He stood up and when I opened my eyes his other hand was extended to help me. I couldn’t help but wonder, when was the last time a man did that for me? And then, does this person count as a man?

He pulled me past the stairs and into the basement doorway just below the banister. The steps were pitch dark, but we slid down them without incident and my body was doing it all so effortlessly, feeling so totally obliterated and graceful.

He flipped the lights at the bottom of the stairs and revealed exactly the room I could have described without ever having seen it. Jimi Hendrix and Al Pacino contemplated a threadbare loveseat from the wall, haloed by a crown of rainbow colored string lights. Cups and plates littered the room, as did yard sale furniture and stray articles of clothing, some of them clearly having belonged to females passed. It was the throne room of the undergrad Pussy King. I’d seen it before in school and regrettably had seen it since.

So ran the curse: I could not escape the unframed posters or mismatched sheet/comforter combinations. I was pulled gravitationally into the field of countless paperback copies of *Beyond Good and Evil* and Plato’s *Symposium* with yellowed USED stickers peeling off their spines. He crossed the room and I hung where I was like a buoy in open water. He dug through a pile of papers by his unmade bed and returned with a small rectangle of paper, wrinkled with age. He handed it to me.

It was a yellowing photograph of a woman running up the marbled steps of a building, the sun reflecting off her waist-length hair. Behind her

a mass of people ran in every direction from a center point in a kempt collegiate field.

“The shootings,” I whispered. “This looks original.” The woman in the photo looked startled but determined, certain of where she needed to go. She had that look of realness that all these archived pictures have, that look of a temporary human being stamped forever into the body of a history.

“You’re giving this to me?” I asked, still locking eyes with the woman in the picture.

“Yeah. I found it in a junk sale a couple weeks ago,” Powell said low as he leaned in towards my neck. “I thought of you as soon as I saw it. Thought it might be useful for your collage, if you don’t already have a hundred like it.” His breath disrupted the tiny hairs on my ear. “I was just waiting for you to dump the chump so I could get a moment alone without him pitching a fit. Don’t know how a baby like him ever locked down someone as sharp as you anyway.”

I looked up at him. “Sharp?”

“You always seem to know just what’s going on.”

Sharp.

“No, I bet I could find a place for this somewhere,” I told him. “There are still a few unfinished parts.”

And I should have known better when he started kissing my neck than to cock my head to the side to let him nearer. Staring at his dirty socks on the floor, I should have been wise enough and mature enough to pull his hands out from under my sweater. Considering that he’d never held a job, likely never been to a friend’s wedding, still let his parents pay for the gas in his car, and would become the second man in that house whom I was to fuck, I oughtn’t to have let him pull down my jeans, slip his fingers under the band of my underwear, assume the position of a true twenty-two-year-old gentleman. But as he pressed his lips between my legs and I stood waiting to feel something, I kept wondering, *But why change now? Why when I start to feel something nice? Why would I change after all this time?*

“Okay,” I said. “If you insist.”

After, I went to use the bathroom upstairs while he slipped into the basement shower. Still loopy, I turned the wrong way in the hall and stumbled on Caroline standing stock-still in the broadcast room. She looked like a statue, tall and cold in her tank top and pajama bottoms, staring at the stacks of equipment that lined the walls. It was silent in the room, but the row of green sensory lights danced up and down along the board, signaling that there was a broadcast running but it was muted in the booth. She herself looked muted, stultified at some problem beyond recognition. How nice to feel so lost and new, I thought. How nice not to

know what you did yesterday.

“Are you looking for something,” I asked, again feeling like someone’s mother.

She looked at me, then, and there was a kind of despair on her face. “I just,” she said. “I’m confused.”

I didn’t have time for this, wanted only to disappear into the bathroom, find an escape hatch from my body. But who would take care of this if not me? I found myself, again, the only adult present.

“What’s wrong?”

“You just, you were down there,” she said. “And now you’re up here. But Gavin was down there too and when I came back up he was already here. I’m too tired, I think. I feel crazy. And I can’t get this tape out of the player.”

“What do you mean,” I asked, my stomach tightening, “Gavin was down there?”

“I didn’t mean to. I just couldn’t find anyone, and I heard voices downstairs. I didn’t mean to. But I saw you and Gavin, you know. I came right back up.”

My chest sunk. There was no telling them apart, for her and maybe for anybody. “Then what?” I asked. “What did you do?”

“Gavin was here already. I tried to explain to him, but he didn’t get it. He just started swearing and pacing around. Now I can’t get the tape out.”

I looked at her feet and saw the bag of tapes there, half of them spilled out onto the floor. “Those tapes?”

She didn’t move or respond. She just stood, spinning the silver ring on her pinky finger. Finally she looked down and mumbled, “Gavin gave me the tape. He told me to put it on. Then he left.”

I dove for the board and shoved up the monitor dial, cranking the volume on the in-studio speakers.

*Aaaaaahhhhhh God... yeah...* my voice moaned from wall to wall.

*Ohh June... How do you want me?* came Gavin’s wispy voice in response, clear as crystal because he was obviously cheating out towards the tape recorder.

I yanked Caroline back away from the sound system and started punching buttons and knobs with abandon, piercing the skin on every knuckle before I found the tape player and ejected the cartridge, but not before every listener in the broadcast range heard me whimper *I want you to fuck me* in a voice that in my head had sounded like Marilyn Monroe, and over the waves sounded like a sad child.

Silent again in the booth. A light began to flash in the room, signaling that the phone had an incoming call. One by one, each line of the phone lit up eager and alive, callers wondering where the voices had gone,

who had been fucking, apparently, in the broadcast booth, and how it is that a thing so present can suddenly be so wholly absent.

Fucking a man I didn't want in the basement, fucking another one on the radio. All interchangeable, and me totally unchanged. Never changing.

Caroline sniffled and I looked down to see her crumpled on the floor, staring at her hands, red-faced and crying. "I'm sorry," she kept saying. I felt overwhelmed with hate for her, for all the choices she wasn't making. I just hated her, and felt a sudden, direct need to do her violence.

"How could you do that?" I yelled at her. "How could you fucking do that to me?" I grabbed her face with both my hands, made her look at me. "And don't act like your broken brain is any excuse, you little moron! We all know what we're doing, you can't just pretend you don't know because it's turning out bad!"

I shoved her out of the way and ran down the hall to the front room, ramming on my boots and coat and throwing open the door. The eaves had kept the snow away from the door itself, but it formed a mound slantwise across the front step, getting as tall as my neck. I could just see the landscape beyond it, sharp and underlit by the reflection of lunar light. Bare trees reaching down to the snowline, dark lines and silhouettes. I needed to be anywhere but where I was. Just, absent.

I lurched my weight forward and ploughed into the snow bank. I could almost crawl on top of it, but every inch up I sank a foot or so down. It stung on my fingers and where it snuck in between my boots and socks, but I kept crawling out, knocking snow away with my elbows and shoulders. The path I left behind me collapsed back onto my legs, leaving only a muddled, frustrated track in my wake. The further I got the more I sank into the snow bed and the harder my progress became. I knew that if I stopped and went back I'd have to look at Caroline again, look at anyone, be a person with accountability. I wanted only to erase my tracks and become a part of something else, something big and uniform and old. Ohio was there exactly when I needed it, ready to devour me up in a bed of frost. Consuming you whole, I've since learned, is the biggest and cruelest gift someone can give you.

I heard Nell behind me shout, "June? June—where do you think you're going?" and I felt ashamed of being seen, ashamed of floundering only ten feet from the house, ashamed of having been there at all. I struggled harder, sank deeper, lost feeling in my hands and cheeks.

"You can't get out that way, June. You've got to wait for someone to clear it up!"

But who would come to clear this up. And where had all my waiting got me.

# COMBING MY HAIR

DANIELLE FRANKEL

---

poetry

The clouds are mosques  
opaque in the distance  
bulbous and great

the orange haze  
the days last effort  
her last hot breath

the dock  
will cave  
it's sidesplit  
echo of a heartbeat  
shuddering bones

the rubber band knot torso  
late night lonesome and grasping and missing

there was this tall tree this afternoon  
it's foliage like a cotton poof  
against the hot tin of sky  
there were the leaves  
falling that made the whole world slow and swell  
there was the body pumping  
there was the shameful necessity to cling and pry  
myself open  
to the turquoise cliffs or the combing  
my hair so slow in the mirror

# SEMIOTICS UNDER THE BIG TOP

ROBERT ROTHMAN

poetry

Green is green until it is more and less, never evermore to be just green  
again a gain a loss.

Greenly I go forward, grained in green-think, not thinking gray or greige  
or heaven-help-me, black, those colors from to stay away.

The blues were never blue to me, the sky so clear as to defy  
such gloom, too high to be so low.

The sunrise stuns the brain                      the tongue goes numb  
what dart                                      what analgesic                      before the  
roar  
returns.

Interpreter, you are medium                      halfway between  
the sea and me                      the waves can't crest and roll to shore  
without your voice.

This tree                      the trunk                      that branches and  
leafs  
a pentimento                      to that earlier form                      haunts and lifts

See double                      like a man drunk                      weaving down  
the road.

Get used to it                      staggered and staggering.

Dig heart                      dig away                      beneath  
below  
to where                      there is nothing more than is                      is?

Double-sighted, double-jointed, dual citizen

Not god. Not beast. Welcome to the Big Top.



# HIGH SEASON

LIZ ROBBINS

---

poetry

As everyone does, they asked for an ocean view, water in abundance, as if needing to remind themselves what's essential to life. They were old already, in the Greek Isles, in their mid-twenties, on their honeymoon. The rich salt air and majestic blue sea with its shallow patches of green reflected the semi-precious stones for sale in the shops, the sea's quiet calm contrasting the desperate press of sellers. She could eat anything, honeyed baklava and thick pitas, she was so thin, as though new experience made her heart race, burned fuel. They were old in Mykynos and didn't know, speeding the narrow streets in rented motorbikes, the heights of love already imperceptibly leaking. As any drug, turning a dependency. They tilted forward and back. On the nude beach, she was first in, she turned in love again, thrilled embryonic, her perception muted, a ball suspended in salt, free of duty. She grew young again as he disrobed, his eyes downcast, wading into the sea, toward her, into them, and

she watched him swim out  
cold, quick and exposed, as though  
she needed saving.

# AN UNKNOWN ERROR HAS OCCURRED

KYLE T. SHAW

---

fiction

Jesus Christ, you can't take a shit in a Walmart without your skull vibrating, a flash blinking in your peripheral. 2020, year of the hindsight. You remember when it used to be in your pocket, when it was its own, three-by-five inch device that could be ignored for a minute, like a toddler demanding attention. 2020, now it's in your body.

*(1 of 38) Sexy singles detected in your vicinity! Blink three times to see your matches.*

*(2 of 38) NeuralSoft OS 3.1 free to existing customers following seizure settlements.*

*(3 of 38) Your credit score has changed. Tap your right temple to see your current scor...*

They made it like insurance: you had to have it, or else you couldn't mortgage a house, lease a car, go to the doctor. It came in the form of a dissolvable pill. There was resistance, of course, but nothing more lethal than artillery fired through a keyboard, from the convenience of an armchair. You can still hear them—faint whispers like ghosts, echoing editorials longer than your graduate thesis onto the forums. You remember what it was like to be a ghost.

*(12 of 39) ShadowDemon05 replied to Dankster: Your just repeating yourself lol pathet...*

You wash your hands while the big guy who may have just exorcised his own asshole waddles straight from his stall to the door. After finishing up, you get back out there and grab a cart. You forgot it's July already. Giant overhead arrows direct shoppers to the Christmas seasonal section.

*(15 of 42) Midyear Black Friday Countdown Sale! Recommended items for Tony:*

*(16 of 42) PinkTube Premium: \$19.99/month limited offer. Tony, upgrade your accoun...*

If not for your asthma, you would have been over there in the Sandbox with your brother Marty. He would joke a lot in those video chats

before the mortar raid.

This place's been this way for 7,000 years, he said. By the time I get home, everyone's gonna have more robot parts than a Purple Heart. You told him you wanted to be there, that if anything happened, you wanted to be there too.

Bro, he said, you think you got a lot of noise *there*? You ain't heard it *here*, man.

*(20 of 49) Mr. Norwood, it's time for your six month cleaning. Schedule an appointm...*

Traffic's been at a standstill for twenty minutes now. People in the cars ahead of you tilt their heads to see if there's an accident or just more roadwork. The sun is going down: that obnoxious time of day when the rays pierce your windshield. They haven't found a way to turn that off yet.

You pull down the visor as the truck behind you inches forward, closer to your bumper. Your dad said that forty-something years ago, there were only trees where this highway is—that was before the NeuralSoft site opened and everyone moved south.

*(38 of 73) DEVELOPING: Nation sets record for yearly suicides*

*(39 of 74) Xiao Chun has added you as a friend*

*(40 of 74) NRA denies link between increased gun sales and suicide spike*

You wonder how anyone could be considered naked anymore, while still being a human phone.

Maybe it wasn't an accident. Maybe a woman reached a red light and got another used car ad pinged into her brain. You imagine her hastily unbuckling her seatbelt, digging the pistol from the glove box, toppling out onto the solar-stripped street that recharges her new Toyota, and shedding her clothes. She claws and rips away her synthetic tights, kicks off her shock-absorbent shoes and thrashes out of her sweat-resistant sweater. She stares into the sun and begs for silence, making herself naked for the first time in decades by pulling the trigger.

The truck behind you honks as the line progresses a few lengths ahead.

*(50 of 100) Sunset in 30 minutes*

# AND LET IT BEGIN WITH ME

B.J. BEST

poetry

i was raised a catholic, my adulation  
all body and blood. transubstantiation  
was creepy as my first communion,  
which i mostly remember as the union  
of bb gun (a gift from my godparents)  
and that poor sparrow. my larynx  
was wrenched with *sorry*. but, here, in the hospital's  
scrim  
of stained glass, sing the words of my favorite hymn

when i was eight in the small church in stanley:  
*live each moment in peace eternally.*  
my grandmother would thump blackberries  
into an ice-cream pail; i would carry  
burrs home like blisters. then we'd fish in twilit  
calm:  
*let there be peace on earth, she'd hum,*  
and i'd sing  
along.

# THE GIRL IN THE NOVEL

HOLLY BAKER

---

fiction

The girl in the novel was beautiful. Her hair fell long and wavy down her back in sweeping, dark tresses—tresses? Yes, that was the word. Girls like her had hair that fell in *tresses*—the color and sheen of a blackbird, and her eyes were the sort of blue that inspired young men to write sonnets. Her chin was the right kind of narrow, her jawline smooth but defined, and when she stood her figure was a single, curving brushstroke, a thin line that traveled effortlessly from shoulder to pointed toe. Her name was Calista. It meant *beautiful*.

Sometimes, alone in her quiet studio apartment, Margo stood before the bathroom mirror, her usually frizzy brown curls wonderfully dark and flat and shiny with water, a towel cinched tightly around her body to flatten her breasts and taper her waist, and tried to see Calista in the reflection instead. Calista, who belonged in *Vogue*. When the mirror was fogged and she saw herself as though through smoked glass, Margo could almost trick herself into believing it. But soon enough, always, the mirror began to run, and droplets slicing across the canvas of her imagination revealed the truth: short, heavy-set, wide nose, blotchy skin, and deep-set brown eyes. Nothing sparkled. With a scowl and a roll of her eyes, she turned away from the reflection.

In empty elevators, or at bus stops on bare streets on dark mornings, she stood as tall as her spine and calves could stretch her. She attempted to channel the spirit of Calista, to shift her weight with the same casual disinterest, to toss her hair across one shoulder and cock her head to listen for birds. She practiced a coy smile and slow blink. And when she walked, she strolled, and she wondered if her someday-lover happened to be watching, undisclosed, with quiet admiration and a hopeful heart. Like Calista's lover.

*He admired her long before he ever spoke to her. It was the way the sunlight sank into her hair and glowed through her skin. It was the way her eyes shone in the dim light of the concert hall, like lights reflected*

*in dark, still water at night. Her laughter floated like a piccolo solo across a crowded room, and the way she held the stem of a champagne flute as she raised the rim to her rose-colored lips reminded him of the way she held the neck of her violin: with an understanding of its fragility, a respect for its beauty, and a responsibility for its protection. An artist's hands.*

The city bus trundled to a stop before her, and Margo saw herself reflected in the winter grime of the folding glass doors: a dumpy girl in an oversized winter coat and men's boots. Calista had disappeared. A moment later, the doors folded with a hiss. She dug into her handbag with fingers stiff from cold, fished out her wallet, and extracted the prepaid city transport pass as she stepped onto the 301. The man behind the wheel ignored her until she passed her card through the reader and it returned with a jarring buzz.

"Out of charge," he said.

Her face grew warm, as if she stood beneath a hot spotlight. Not knowing what else to do, she put her card in the reader again.

Impatient, the man repeated himself. "You need cash," he said. "Two twenty-five."

She fumbled again inside her bag, knowing she had spent her last bills on cigarettes, knowing she would find only stray pennies and crushed saltines along the bottom seam. She imagined herself retreating from the bus in shame, the other passengers looking down at her through the dirty windows before the bus sped away, wheels kicking up slush and snow into her face. Then what? She didn't have the time to wander the streets in search of a Touch-N-Go to reload the card. In any case, she didn't have the cash. She would have to find a Dominick's and buy a transit card—did she have any money left in her account?— and miss the next bus. Miguel would throw down his mop when she walked into work and start screaming at her in Spanish; it was a scare tactic. Only this time, it might work. This time, he might make good on his promise to kick her and her sorry boots to the curb.

"Lady, I need to get this bus rolling."

"I don't—" Her voice stuck and deepened her humiliation.

"No problem, I've got this one."

Margo stepped aside to let one of the other passengers, a middle-aged man in a nice business coat and leather gloves, feed his own card back into the machine. A happy *ding* followed. The bus rumbled and began to move.

The man smiled and gave her a wink, but Margo turned her head aside and scooted past him toward the rear of the bus. 7:10 in the morning, and already nearly every seat was occupied. Bag clutched tight to her chest, she jostled her way through large overcoats, trying not to touch them, trying not to be a nuisance. No eye contact, find a seat, stop moving. But

she had already marked herself: the girl who held up the bus, the girl who couldn't pay her own fare and had to rely on strangers who just wanted to keep moving. She clutched a silver railing and watched the snow puddle around her boots.

That man!

To her relief, the bus hit three green lights and reached its next stop quickly. In the shuffle for the back exit she claimed a vacated seat, tucking her feet under the seat so she wouldn't be a bother to those in the aisle.

How he must have been congratulating himself! He had seen her plight, had swooped in like a superhero, Chicago Card *Plus* at the ready, and the poor, chubby girl was saved. *Thank you, kind stranger*, he must have been expecting, *whatever would I have done without you? I am ever so grateful*. But really, it was *he* who owed *her* the gratitude. She had served as his feel-good moment for the day, his Good Samaritan deed for the month. He could now find clever, self-effacing ways to slide his gallant act into water cooler chats and family dinners. *What more could I do?* he would say. *I couldn't just leave the poor girl stranded in the snow. Poor thing. I hope she's all right*. Then he would shake his head with pity and they would all admire his modest charity. Everyday hero, they would say.

She wouldn't risk glancing to the front of the bus where he sat, probably watching her, sporting a sympathetic grin, so she pulled a book from her bag. Its gray-and-black was cover simple, unassuming.

*"Have we met?" she asked.*

*The chill air transformed their breath into crystalline clouds, which dissolved between them. Calista shivered and pulled her coat closed with one hand; her other held her instrument.*

*He shook his head with an air of remorse. "We should have by now, I think. I'm the man who made your violin."*

*She looked skeptical, teasing. "Antonio Doreli?"*

*"Richard, actually. Richard Palatino. I'm... something of Antonio's apprentice. But I worked personally on yours."*

*She smiled and her eyes sparkled. "It's the finest instrument I've ever owned—"*

The bus began to slow again, and Margo's eyes flicked away from the page to see if the man was leaving. He wasn't, and her stop was still fifteen minutes away. But before her attention could return to the sentence, she noticed a young man a couple of seats away lean into the woman beside him and put his face so close to hers that their noses nearly touched. The woman's head rested against the window and her eyes were closed, and the boy's inspection seemed to confirm she was asleep.

His hands were hidden in the pocket of his hoodie, and his hood was pulled tight around his face, obscuring his eyes. But Margo sensed

his agitation. His heel bounced up and down on the floor and his butt shifted on the seat as if his briefs were too tight. Every few seconds, he sniffed sharply and rubbed his nose, and his head kept twitching toward the woman, and toward the canvas tote resting in her lap. It was only half-zipped; the boy had noticed.

The woman, an old thirty-five or a young forty, wore a nice wool coat and good shoes. Nothing too pricey, nothing flashy, but she clearly shopped in department stores, not the Goodwill. She was a woman who could afford to fall asleep on city buses.

Margo watched the kid and saw the casual way he leaned back and marked the exit and the passengers that stood between him and the doors. His foot, however, continued its rhythmic bouncing.

She turned back to the book.

*"It's the finest instrument I've ever owned. You can tell Mr. Doreli that he's doing a splendid job teaching you."*

*"A violin is just wood and strings until touched by a musician. You know that, I'm sure?"*

*"So you think I would do just as well with a Pirot?"*

*"Certainly not, miss."*

*She laughed—the trill of a piccolo.*

The bus whined as it slowed for the next stop, and just before the doors clattered opened the boy made his move. He stood, took hold of the silver bar on the other side of the sleeping woman, and allowed the sporadic lurching of the bus to unbalance him as it came to a stop. His body bent over the woman, and when he righted himself again, Margo saw the dark pink wallet in his hand disappear into his pocket. He turned, before the woman's eyelashes could begin to flutter. For an instant, his eyes met Margo's. She looked away. Then he was off the bus, and through the window she watched him striding back the way they had come, his head low and his back hunched. Then he was gone.

The sleeping woman hadn't stirred.

Margo wondered how long it would be before she noticed the missing wallet. No more than a few hours, at most. She would fish for a quarter to drop into a bum's outstretched palm, and then she'd know. Oh, it would be upsetting, but not devastating. After the moment of panic had passed, she would call her bank to cancel her cards, bemoan the lost twenty and spare ones and the Subway punch card, but by the end of the day she would have applied for a new driver's license and replaced old photos of the kids with more current ones. She would make plans to get a wallet with more card holders and a bigger change purse and a zipper that wouldn't stick, and screw the punk who had made off with twenty-two dollars in cash and canceled cards and two punches away from a free six-inch sub.

It wasn't Margo's fault, anyhow.



She had done no more or less than anyone else on that bus, and this was just the way things went sometimes. Bad things happened; life happened. A stolen wallet wasn't the end of the world, or even that woman's world. The kid hadn't pulled a knife or fired a shot, and hell, maybe the theft would teach the complacent woman not to fall asleep on the 301, her unzipped bag an open invitation.

No, Margo cared little for petty injustice. She cared even less for idiots who trusted that the world was, essentially, a safe place.

*"You've been watching me, haven't you?" Calista cocked her head to the side, and though she tried to look disapproving, her eyes teased.*

*Richard laughed, embarrassed, and rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm that obvious, am I?"*

*"I know when people are watching. I can feel their eyes."*

*"Forgive me. I can't help it."*

*"Oh?"*

*"When I look at you," he said, "it's like all the ugliness of the world disappears. For a moment, I get to pretend it doesn't exist."*

*It was Calista's turn to blush.*

The 301 rolled to a stop on the corner of Jefferson and Ninth. The woman slept on, but Margo pulled herself to her feet and shoved her way toward the door. A few steps outside the bus, she had forgotten all about the businessman, the young thief, and the stupid woman. She was replaying in her mind a conversation between Calista and Richard—their first. Under her breath, she practiced a light, musical laugh.





# TRANSAMERICA

CINDY LYNCH

digital photograph  
14" x 20"



# ENCHANTED

SUSANNA RAJ

acrylic on canvas  
24" x 36"



# CITY\_LIFE\_TIME\_OUT

ALLEN FORREST

ink





## BLESSED ST. JUNIPERO SERRA

JEN NORTON

acrylic on wood  
16" x 20"



# HER DREAM OF WINTER

BETHANY REID

---

poetry

In her dream of winter  
she unravels a yellow sun  
heavy as damask, books passage  
as if imagined wind were a sleigh,  
loneliness a bearskin  
to wrap over her knees.  
She takes winter by the throat,  
shakes loose hail like fine, white teeth,  
unfurls a carpet of snow.  
She dreams white mountains,  
where trees crook like candy canes  
under a burden of ice,  
dreams wool skirts,  
knit stockings, long walks  
under frozen skies. In her dream  
she comes home  
to a simmering stew,  
to dark bread fresh from the oven,  
so hot it melts the snow  
from the windowsills.  
Hers is a dream without frozen armies,  
without children shivering  
under thin blankets.  
In her dream of winter  
even the howling of wolves  
rises tender as blue notes  
into a sky strung with stars.  
If the stars are hard,  
they are hard like diamonds.  
She unfurls her hair,  
lifts up like a jewelry box dancer,  
skates over winter ice  
unruffled as a mirror.



# FERAL

STEVE ABBOTT

---

poetry

at the boundary of what is  
sharp edge of rust or yellow  
a scatter of sawteeth the arch  
and scratch what you  
are some enemy fatal threat  
to survival's instinctive  
recoil and food is not  
enough your pity a chain  
a box a cage sprung open  
is to survive and nothing  
you offer is more than some  
bristle a morsel its defined  
borders a loss of this  
street-jungle blood  
where everything animal  
flows its splintered  
seconds even moments of  
rest no break in why this  
is this way makes  
no difference there is  
instantaneous hiss  
and beneath warm fur  
no clear line circles beyond  
reach to leap past where  
you turn away to look  
how swift it is the synaptic  
crackle arcs to limb-brain  
swipe and claw retreat attack  
retreat and lunge without  
reflection in my dark eyes  
seeing deep in you what you  
can't even imagine in me

# WHERE SHE LIES DOWN

BETHANY REID

---

poetry

She builds a house of cardamom and ginger,  
of the licorice-child bite

of anise. She builds cabinets of old sleds,  
beds of baskets and elbow pipes.

Who would lie here? Her house, not sweet  
-n-low, not candied over. She builds

a house of sage and rue, a house so bitter  
the windows break like teeth in wartime.

Her daughters gather baskets of salt,  
wear hearts red as radishes on their sleeves.

What house is this where her feet  
turn to basalt, where her forehead vaults,

where her neck arches and her shoulders  
stretch so wide they put out the eye of the sky?

# MISSED CALLS

NATE PILLMAN

---

fiction

The toilet flushed. Eric walked from the bathroom and clicked off the light. Not enough time had passed between the flush and his appearance. He hadn't washed his hands. He was reverting without her. Deteriorating. Devolving. He would devolve all the way to a jawless fish or a single prokaryotic cell once he moved to Boston—if he moved at all. Eric didn't know what Michelle knew yet.

"I guess I better go pack," Eric said. He sat down on the futon next to Michelle and grabbed the remote.

"Did you wash your hands?" Michelle asked.

"I don't have to answer that question anymore." He pushed his glasses up on his nose and flipped through the channels slowly. Several shows interested Michelle: *Monks in New York*; *Hot Cops, Cold Cases*; *Three Meals for Three Hundred Rubles*. Eric flipped past all of them.

Michelle lit her phone with the side button. It was seven. Duane would be waiting for her at Fat Burt's in a half hour. He was always a half hour early.

"You know," Michelle said, "there are more germs on a single toilet handle than—"

"Why does the bathroom smell like perfume?"

"I don't know."

"Are you wearing perfume?"

"I sprayed air freshener earlier."

"How are your stomach issues?" Eric said. "Are you regular?"

"I don't have to answer that question anymore."

Eric stopped on the show *Sexy Science*. A wiry-bearded scientist was describing Earth before plate tectonics ripped one continent into seven. The camera cut to the scientist walking on the beach with his shirt off. He had a nice chest and was flexing and unflexing his pectorals as he walked. The scientist was still talking about plate tectonics in a voiceover when the real him stopped walking, turned to the camera, and licked his

lips.

“Can I smell you?” Eric said.

“What?”

“I think you’re wearing perfume.”

“No, you can’t smell me.”

“Why are you so dressed up?”

“I’m going out later.”

“With who?”

“Friends.”

“What shoes are you wearing?”

“What?”

“Are you going to wear heels?”

“Jesus,” Michelle said.

The bearded scientist was in Canada now. The oldest rocks on earth were in Canada. Somehow, the scientist could tell they were formed by extreme heat. He was on his knees, still shirtless, looking at a pile of gravel with a magnifying glass. The camera panned to the scientist’s firm ass.

“Are you going to miss me?” Eric asked.

“Yes.”

“Why are we like this?”

“Like what?”

“Why can’t we be together?”

Michelle didn’t know how to answer. She thought of their relationship like a Russian nesting doll. Eric cheated while on his campus visit to Boston. He did this because Michelle was not yet over her previous love during her and Eric’s first month of dating, and she had cheated on him then. Eric found out about the cheating because one night two years later, Michelle confessed after several bottles of Squiggly Pig wine. Michelle often drank too much because Eric was not verbally affectionate anymore. Eric was not verbally affectionate anymore because he had eased into that cushioned part of a relationship where building up is no longer needed long before Michelle had. Building up was no longer needed for Eric because he was a man. Eric was a man because he had testosterone running through his veins in inconsistent bursts and a piece of flesh that dangled between his legs and sometimes hardened opportunistically.

Michelle thought she could see it hardening now, but it might have been the play of the TV light off his jeans. She sat up higher and confirmed. It was only a shadow, an illusion.

“Do you think we’ll get back together?” Eric asked.

“How?”

“After I find myself.”

“After Boston?”

“Yeah.”

“After five years?”

Eric shrugged.

A commercial for Tide came on. A wife with a too-big smile and a husband with a too-big jaw played tug-of-war with their twenty children. The children were winning. The children won. The wife washed everyone’s clothes with Tide.

“I love you, Michelle.”

Michelle stared at him while he stared at her. The TV played off his glasses, which were nonprescription.

She grabbed the remote and turned off the TV and threw it across the room. It landed on the carpet without a sound. She wished she hadn’t touched the remote. The germs.

Eric kept staring.

“What?” Michelle said.

Eric leaned toward Michelle. Michelle looked at the crotch of his jeans. She was interested but leaned back. She didn’t want to smell like Eric before her date with Duane. Duane was sensitive and appreciated her and Eric had a certain smell to him. It reminded Michelle of the city in the winter.

“Please?” Eric said.

“Okay.”

She pulled Eric toward her by the collar of his shirt and closed her eyes and opened her mouth.

Eric sniffed her neck and sat back up. His glasses were crooked. “I knew it.”

Michelle stood up. “It’s not perfume.”

“I’m glad I’m leaving.”

Michelle put her hands on her hips and imagined herself a superhero. She took a deep, satisfying breath and said, “Maybe you’re not.”

“What do you mean?”

“I did something I shouldn’t have.”

“God. What?”

Michelle smiled. “When you were in the bathroom I checked your phone.”

Eric grabbed his phone. He pushed the message icon with his thumb. His thumb was shaking. “It’s illegal to look at someone else’s phone, you know.”

Michelle didn’t expect this reaction. She felt a cold burn in her stomach. “So you’re seeing someone.”

“It’s not serious,” Eric said. “And it’s none of your business. You could go to jail for looking at someone’s phone. You could go to state prison.”

“You created this culture.”

“What?”

“This paranoia.”

“You started it,” he said.

“Revenge is like a Russian nesting doll.”

Eric scrolled faster with his thumb but didn’t respond.

Michelle walked across the room to the remote. A board creaked underneath the carpet. She loved that board. She loved her apartment. She was glad she wasn’t moving. She was glad Eric had moved out long ago.

“Where is it?” Eric said. “What did you read? Did you delete it?”

“It wasn’t a text.”

Eric scrolled through his phone some more. Michelle returned with the remote, making sure she stepped on the squeaky board.

“Check your voicemail.”

Eric did. Michelle stood above him, waiting.

“Oh, Jesus,” Eric said. He removed his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

The university was cutting Eric’s funding before he even got there. Due to an “inexcusable filing error,” the voicemail put it. It was the only school Eric had applied to. It was the only school with a doctoral program in Post-Humanist Culinary Arts and Sciences.

Michelle sat down and turned on the TV. The bearded scientist was doing pull ups from a pine tree. Faint hip-hop music played in the background. His back muscles were like rocks and his voice, disembodied, talked of the early stages of evolution.

Michelle twirled the remote in her hands while Eric cried. One at a time his sobs perked her awake. They were like whiffs of smelling salt.

“You’ll be fine,” she finally said.

“I’ll be fine?” He looked up from his phone. The light of his screen painted his face green. “This is my future. This is my life.”

“You need to leave, Eric.”

Michelle turned off the TV and walked to the bedroom. She decided on a pair of zebra pumps and returned. Eric was still sitting there.

“This is my life,” he said. He scrolled his phone and looked up. “My life.”

Michelle sat down and slid on her shoes. “You still look alive to me.”

Eric sat there for a while, staring above the TV. He held his glasses to his mouth and breathed on them. He rubbed them clean with his shirt and put them on.

“What time is it?” he asked.

When Michelle lifted her phone to check Eric grabbed it and threw it across the room. It hit the wall with a crack and broke into three neat pieces.

Michelle wasn’t answering her phone and Vince wasn’t answering

his door. Duane phoned his date again while he tried picking the lock of his brother's apartment with an expired health insurance card. He slid the card up and down the space between the doorframe and the door while jiggling the handle. It was an old trick meant for old locks. It wasn't working.

Michelle's automated voicemail answered and Duane left a similar message to the one he had two minutes earlier. He checked the clock on his phone. 8:02. He hated being late. He started on the lock again.

"Dad," Jessa whispered.

The insurance card snapped in the doorframe. Duane picked up the two halves and got out his Discover. "Not now," he said.

"Someone's dying."

Duane didn't turn around. Turning was a reward. It would lead to more startling claims. He paused for a moment and listened for the sound of dying. He heard nothing.

"Play your sushi game," Duane said. He slid the Discover into the space and jiggled the handle.

"My phone's dead."

Duane wondered if Michelle and Vince's phones were both dead. He had called them each three times. It shouldn't have mattered. Vince was supposed to be home tonight, watching Jessa. Duane was supposed to be with Michelle tonight, making love.

Duane felt the doorknob pop. The door opened and glided into darkness.

"You did it," Jessa said.

A feeling of liquidy pride filled Duane's chest. He imagined his chest a water balloon.

He took a step inside and felt the wall for a light switch. "Vince?" he said. He smelled baby powder and dishwater and cologne.

"I'm not going in until we help the woman."

"What woman?"

"The dying woman."

"Stop it, Jessa."

"But someone's dying in this room."

Duane turned. Jessa had her ear pressed to Apartment 303. Her crinkled hair was fanned across the door like the flaming spools of a cartoon sun.

"Stop being creepy."

"We need to help her," Jessa said. "What if she's having a heart attack or a seizure or a diabetic coma or is choking on slimy beef stroganoff?"

Duane dropped his Discover.

Two years ago Jessa had vomited up Dianne's beef stroganoff directly after warning she would if forced to try it. Jessa had not spoken any memories of her mother since the funeral. The doctor said this was as

normal as it could be given the situation. Duane thought of the situation often. Now he thought of the stroganoff night. He wondered if Jessa remembered all of it like he did. He wondered if detail counted as memory as he stared at his daughter's yellow hair.

"If you don't come over here I'll scream." She said it loudly and Duane pressed his finger to his lips and walked toward the door of Apartment 303.

Duane had expected the sounds of sex on the other side and he was right. The sex was rough and foul-mouthed and clashed with the blinding sterility of Vince's building. It saddened Duane. He had never made Dianne say those things. He knew he could never make Michelle say those things either. He would definitely not make her say those things tonight if Jessa had to join them on their date to Fat Burt's. Vince was up. It was his night to play babysitter and he was failing. Duane couldn't imagine how Vince would feel if he heard this woman. His brother had moved here to get away from those thoughts.

"You see?" Jessa said.

"It's the TV," Duane said. He grabbed Jessa's wrist and pulled her away.

Duane and Jessa crossed the hallway and entered Vince's place. Duane found the light switch and kept Jessa behind him as he scanned. The front room was empty except for a TV and a beanbag chair and various movie posters. In the kitchen dishes rose from both basins of the sink like bleached coral. Duane closed the door behind them.

"Uncie V needs to get it together," Jessa said.

"Stay by the door," Duane said. "Don't follow me."

"I'm bored."

Duane took a few steps in. "Vince?"

No one answered.

"Do you think Uncie V killed himself?"

The water balloon in Duane's chest popped. It was hot water. It ran into his stomach.

"Why would you say that, J.J.?" Duane said.

"He's not happy," Jessa said. "Like mom wasn't."

Duane stepped toward the kitchen counter and grabbed it before he fell. He stared down at the dishes. There were only bowls and spoons. They stank of mold.

"Jessa, do you remember?"

But she was already away from her thought and away from the door. She stared up at one of Vince's posters: Godzilla and a giant shih tzu glaring at each other across Tokyo. The shih tzu had red eyes. It was the only color in the poster.

Duane plunged his hand into the dishwater and removed one drain



stopper, then the other. He walked into the bedroom calling Vince's name while the water moaned and shrank away.

From the inside of his idling car Vince stared at his old house from halfway down the block. He drove by often, especially on nights when it was his turn with Kenna and his wife would be free. Tonight there was a black truck parked in Vince's old driveway so he was waiting.

His phone buzzed. It was Duane again. Vince wanted to answer but Kenna had finally fallen asleep. He turned the radio up to hide the buzz. Kenna could handle the radio. It put her to sleep, unlike Vince's voice, which always woke her. In the rearview mirror her head looked smaller than normal. It rested against the side of the safety seat like a piece of soft fruit. Even closed, her eyes were sideways commas, the outsides the tails. Vince had round eyes and so did Rachel. They also had attached earlobes while Kenna had detached. Once Vince ordered a paternity test off Amazon but threw it away when it arrived. He walked it all the way down to the dumpster.

In his driveway the truck was tall and broad and charcoaled with dust. It stood out in this neighborhood. Vince had loved this neighborhood when they first moved in. He still loved it. What he didn't love were the things his wife chose to do whilst living in it.

On the radio the song by the nasally teenage girl about the different kinds of alcohol for the different days of the week came on and Vince turned the dial. Lebanon was attacking Syria. Vince turned the dial. It was amateur night at Star-Butts. Vince turned the dial. He decided on his go-to station for when he was feeling down.

"... and Mrs. Canwell made it across the street without concern. This is Cynthia Whipplehorse reporting, 93.9, *Normal News*."

A commercial for step-by-step tree pruning came on. It wasn't trying to sell anything.

Vince had discovered *Normal News* when another radio station was making fun of it during their morning show. Vince was considering killing himself that morning. Two nights before he had pressed a steak knife to his throat hard enough to leave a line of small holes there. When Duane asked about the marks Vince said a crazed squirrel had attacked him. Vince knew that morning that he was one step away from something more. When he got home from work he might have dragged the teeth back and forth until he stopped thinking. But then the cold-voiced female DJ and the hopped-up male one went from talking about peeing in the shower to talking about the lameness of *Normal News*, and Vince got curious and tuned them in. He never looked back. Listening to normal people doing normal things was the only thing that got Vince through his abnormal life.

A block of light appeared. The front door of his house was open.

Rachel was there. A man was there. They shared a kiss and pawed at each other's shoulders.

Vince waited until the man left the doorway for his truck so the man couldn't retreat into the house. Once there, Vince put his car in drive and pulled into the driveway so he was bumper to bumper with the truck. A pair of metal testicles hung just below the license plate.

Vince grabbed a pamphlet from the pocket of his door and stepped out. The man was frozen. He still had his key in his door but hadn't yet opened it. Vince closed his door softly. He didn't want to wake Kenna.

"Can I help you?" said the man; only Vince realized it wasn't a man, but a boy. His voice didn't sound like the voice of someone who would drive a large truck. He had a patchy beard that disappeared before it got to his sideburns and wore a Carhartt cap.

"This is my house," Vince said.

"Huh?" said the boy.

"Rachel is my wife. She's married." Vince held up his ring finger.

"Whatever," the boy said, but he didn't get into the truck.

Vince handed the boy the pamphlet.

"What's this?"

"My wife is ill. She has a problem."

"She isn't married."

"Read it."

The boy squinted at the pamphlet cover. "Historic—"

"Histrionic Personality Disorder."

"Man, you're nuts," said the boy. He opened the truck door.

"You must have just met her," Vince said. "I bet you just met her tonight."

The boy kept standing there. "Why do you say that?"

"I haven't seen you before."

"You're wrong," the boy said. "I've been here before. I've never seen your car here."

"I live in an apartment."

"You said you were married."

"We're separated."

A block of light again appeared. It brought out the boy's acne. Rachel stood in the doorway, her head against the frame.

"Baby," she said. Her voice was hazy, barely there. The meds had calmed her verbally but the poor choices were still there.

"Pretty young, Rachel," Vince called. It was the first time he'd raised his voice in days.

The boy looked at Rachel and shielded his eyes with the pamphlet. "Is this guy stalking you?"

"I told you," Vince said. "That's my wife." He was getting angry. His

phone seized in his pocket. Duane.

“Holly, I’m worried,” the boy said. “Will you call the cops?”

“Her name is Rachel,” Vince said. He was yelling now. “Her name is Rachel Holland McDonald and she is ill. She has a problem that she’s trying to get help for. You are now part of the problem.”

“Baby,” Rachel said again.

“Shut up,” Vince screamed.

A noise like a miter saw started over Vince’s shoulder. Kenna was crying.

“Jesus Christ,” said the boy.

Vince took several steps forward. The acne on the boy’s forehead looked like a sideways South America. “This is my home,” Vince said.

The boy said nothing. He looked uneasy.

“Baby,” Rachel said.

“This is my home and that is my wife, and this—” Vince said, walking to his car, unbuckling a wailing Kenna, and holding her in front of the boy, “This is our daughter.” He was trying not to yell but he was angry. And he had to yell to be heard over the screaming. “Her name is Kenna Rachel McDonald. Look at her. You tell me she doesn’t have my ears and my wife’s eyes.”

Carolyn mixed her son another whisky sour. She hadn’t asked about the brochure yet. Luke was the same as his father. He hoarded his demons inside until they were adequately suffocated. Then he talked.

“How’s the truck running?” Carolyn said. “Did you change the oil?”

“It’s crowded tonight,” Luke said. He didn’t look up from the pamphlet.

“About max,” Carolyn said.

Carolyn poured Luke’s drink and he took a small sip. He had delicate table manners, unlike his father, who, over Luke’s shoulder, stuffed his face with rigatoni to the applause of several patrons. Carolyn could see sweat droplets on her husband’s expansive forehead. It was Bob’s third plateful in a half hour.

It hadn’t started out this way. The place used to be called Bob’s Barbecue and boasted a hundred-ounce steak challenge. Then Bob finished the challenge one night over a bet with a patron. Then he finished the challenge again the next week over another bet. Then he finished a sixty-pound bucket of baked beans the next week, cold. Then twenty baked potatoes, including the skins. Now they served drinks and had a spotlighted table for Bob and let the patrons buy him whatever they wanted him to eat and called the place Fat Burt’s because Fat Bob’s was already copyrighted and Bob thought B names popped best.

Luke set his glass down hard. It made no sound. There was too

much applause. Bob had just finished his third plate.

“Two-to-three percent of the population.”

“Huh?”

Luke pushed the bill of his hat back. “That means that five or six people in here right now are nuts.”

“According to what?” Carolyn asked.

Luke tapped the cover of the brochure.

“What is that? Did you get that at school?”

“Holly is nuts.”

“Did you and Holly break up?”

“She’s married.”

“A junior in high school is married?”

Luke took another small sip and lowered his hat. “I guess.”

“How old is she, Luke? Is that why we never met her?”

“You think that’s the reason?” Luke jerked his head backwards, toward his father.

“How much older is she than you?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Well I do.”

“You’re pouring me drinks.”

“What does that matter?”

“Age doesn’t matter,” Luke said. He took a sip. “And she’s nuts.”

At the other side of the bar a man wearing obnoxious glasses had been holding up and shaking his credit card like a rattle. Carolyn went to him and poured him a pint of dark beer. When she returned, Luke had turned around on his stool. He was drinking and watching his father.

“The doctor said we need to cut down on red meat,” Carolyn said.

“He looks like a giant white wall,” Luke said.

Carolyn grabbed the brochure from the bar. The headings were boldfaced.

*What is Histrionic Personality Disorder?*

*Is Suicide a Risk?*

*Why is My Loved One Loving Others?*

*Miscellaneous*

Carolyn was concerned. Her son belonged to a generation of terrible youths. The other day Carolyn had watched a news video on self-mutilation. Teens were cutting their femoral arteries and sealing the wound with a chemical agent before they bled to death. It got them high. Femming, they were calling it.

“So, Holly cheated on you.”

“She cheated with me.”

“How long were you two dating?”

“I don’t know.”

The crowd cheered as the waitress brought Bob his fourth plate of rigatoni. “What about Robert and Penny Stoves’ daughter, Noelle?” Carolyn said. “She’s pretty.”

Luke said nothing. A man in an argyle sweater leaned over the bar to get Carolyn’s attention. He was gray with pallor and had a little girl by his side.

“I was supposed to meet someone here,” the man said. “Her name is Michelle.”

Carolyn frowned a fake frown. “I haven’t heard anything.” She glanced around. “But feel free to look for her. All seating is general admission.”

“I’ve been here before,” said the man.

Carolyn watched him and the little girl walk away. The girl had yellow hair that spread out in thick strands like the legs of a starfish. The legs wiggled when she walked.

“That is the cutest little girl,” Carolyn said.

“I bet she’s a femmer,” Luke said.

“Very funny. We should get you your own stage.”

“Fuck you.”

Carolyn felt as if she were slapped. She walked away and pretended to clean a stain off the bar while she watched the patrons. The man and girl found their Michelle. She was sitting at a corner table. Her legs were crossed and her top leg bounced with the kicking of her foot. She wore zebra shoes that sparkled. The man and girl sat down across from her. The little girl smiled at Bob while he ate.

When Carolyn returned to Luke, he was leaned over on his knees. The crowd was whistling and clapping. Bob held his empty plate above his head. His chest heaved in and out like a wave.

“This place is nuts.”

“I’m worried about you.”

“About me?” Luke jerked his head at his father again. “About me?”

Carolyn walked away. She went to the man with the argyle sweater. He and the little girl were at the bar again.

“Hi,” said the man. “I know it’s late, but I was wondering—”

“We want to order the fat man a dessert,” the girl said.

Carolyn looked at Bob. He removed his apron and rolled his neck. He was sad and alone, soulless and mindless. He was a rock that moved.

“Of course,” Carolyn said. She patted the girl’s hair. It was soft and she didn’t want to stop.

“We think he’d like a banana split,” the girl said.

“You got it,” Carolyn said.

She put in the order and whistled loudly the way her mother had taught her. Bob looked up. Carolyn pointed at the patrons and held up a

finger. Bob nodded and retied his apron.

“Where have you been?” the sweater man said.

Carolyn realized the man wasn’t talking to her. He was talking to another man with one of those baby shields strapped to his chest. The baby buckled to the shield was not cute like the little girl. Carolyn thought it took humans many years to gain cuteness and very few to lose it.

“I’m sorry,” the baby man said. “It’s Rachel.”

“You need to divorce her,” sweater man said.

“I know.”

“You scared the hell out of me tonight.”

“I can take Jessa now,” the baby man said. He grabbed the little girl’s wrist.

“I don’t want to leave yet, Uncie V.”

“We just ordered Burt a banana split,” sweater man said.

Carolyn walked back to Luke. He had removed his hat and was facing the window. He already had his father’s receding hairline.

“That man with the baby?” Luke said. He paused and drank his whisky sour in three large gulps. He set the glass on the bar and swiveled toward her. “That’s Holly’s husband.”

Carolyn scanned the restaurant. The man with the baby was sitting at the table with sweater man and blonde girl and zebra shoes. No one was talking.

“How do you know?”

Luke opened the pamphlet and said nothing. His eyes were pine green, even in the bar light. Like his hairline, his eyes were also his father’s.

“Excuse me,” someone said.

It was the man with the obnoxious glasses. He leaned onto the bar. His pint glass sat empty in front of him. Carolyn grabbed it.

“Another?”

“No,” the man said.

“The check?”

“No.”

The man removed his glasses and cleaned them. He looked younger and meaner without them shadowing his face. “That scrawny guy in the sweater and the little girl. What did they order?”

“A banana split,” Carolyn said.

“For themselves?”

“For Bob,” Carolyn said.

“You mean Burt,” the man said. He put on his glasses.

“For Burt,” Carolyn said.

The man with the glasses turned around and looked at Bob.

“So is that how this place works?” the man said. “You order anything and he eats it?”

“Yes, but actually—”

“And people like that. They like this place.”

“We are a four-and-a-half star restaurant,” Carolyn said.

She looked at Luke. He had his face down on the bar. He looked like a fifty-year-old with a failing liver. She wanted to take him home.

“I’d like to place an order,” the man said.

“Sure,” Carolyn said. She pulled out her pad and pen. “What’ll it be?”

“Ten banana splits.”

Carolyn stopped writing before she finished the *b* in banana. “For you?”

“For the big guy,” the man said. He took off his glasses and cleaned them again.

“We like to vary what foods we order Bob,” Carolyn said.

“You mean Burt,” the man said.

“I’m not even sure if we have enough bananas,” Carolyn said.

The man shrugged. “Add another scoop of ice cream then. I want all these happy people to get their money’s worth.”

“No,” Luke said. He had overheard. He was sitting up on his stool, his back painfully straight.

“What?” the man said.

“Get out of here,” Luke said.

“Luke,” Carolyn said.

The man slid his glasses on top of his head. “Do you work here?”

“He’s not having any more food tonight.”

“I’m a paying customer.” The man turned to Carolyn. “Could you place my order, please?”

Luke stood up and put his hat on. He was taller than the man but the man had more bulk. “He’s done after that banana split.”

“And the ten I ordered.”

Luke stepped forward. His chin touched the man’s nose. “Time for you to go.”

The man took a step back. “Your breath is terrible. How old are you? Can I see some identification?”

“Can I see your badge?”

“Look, kid, I don’t want fatty to die any more than you do. You see that woman over there in the sparkly shoes?” He pointed at the table where she sat. Luke looked but didn’t nod. “That’s my woman. She’s fucking that guy in the sweater. I just want them to realize how bad this place is. You know it’s bad. I know it’s bad. She knows it’s bad.” He pointed at Carolyn.

“My woman is fucking the guy with the baby on his chest,” Luke said.

The man smiled. He looked at the table and back at Luke. His smile

disappeared. “So what are you going to do about it?”

Luke sat down and swiveled his stool toward Carolyn.

“Pussy,” the man said. He lowered his glasses onto his face and left.

Carolyn called the kitchen and told them to shut down for the night. Luke ran his finger along the creases of the pamphlet for a while. He laughed to himself and then looked up. He surveyed the drink wall behind Carolyn. His eyes were untouched forests.

“Can I get a Crown on the rocks.”

Carolyn didn’t move. “You did the right thing, Lucas.”

“That means so much to me.”

“Don’t patronize your mother.”

“Crown on the rocks,” Luke said again.

“No more tonight, dear.”

Luke removed his hat again and ran his hands through his sparse hair. He sighed like an old furnace. “I wanted to kill that guy.”

“He’s not worth it,” Carolyn said. “He has a banana fetish. That’s all.”

“I meant the guy with the baby on his chest. I wanted to kill him in his driveway earlier tonight. And when I saw him here I wanted to kill him even more.”

“I wanted to kill the man in the glasses,” Carolyn said.

“For his banana fetish.”

Carolyn smiled. “Yes.”

The crowd began to cheer. The waitress was bringing Bob’s banana split. The little yellow-haired girl jumped up and down in her seat. Another waitress followed her, another banana split in hand. A waiter followed that waitress, also carrying a banana split. And another. And another. Carolyn counted all eleven. Luke watched the procession with dispassionate eyes. Then he crumpled the pamphlet into a shiny ball and stood up.

Carolyn spotted the man with the glasses near the door. He was leaning against the wall with his arms folded, smiling. She could see the reflection in his lenses of all the tiny hands clapping in unison. They looked like salmon leaping.

Luke walked to the man in the glasses. Carolyn ran to the line of servers.

She grabbed the arm of the last in line. Her name was Trudy and Carolyn disliked the way she applied eyeliner.

“What the hell is going on?”

“What?” Trudy said.

“We’re done serving.”

“Oh.”

“Who placed this order?”

Trudy shrugged.



“Stop this,” Carolyn said to the other servers. They didn’t hear her. The crowd was cheering too loudly. She looked for Luke and the man in the glasses. They were gone, which she knew wasn’t good. Already a small crowd was running out the front door to watch.

Carolyn let go of Trudy’s arm and watched Bob’s face turn crayon-white. The servers placed the ice cream in front of him. For a minute she ignored the commotion at the front door and watched the rest of the patrons. They were unaware in their ruckus. The yellow-haired girl was certainly happy about the multiplication of her banana split order. Her banana hair shook as she bounced in her seat. With the rest of the crowd she chanted “Burt, Burt, Burt,” and clapped along with her chant.

# NIGHT MUSIC

CONNOR SIMONS

---

poetry

Oh my heart!  
My fingers and toes and  
Each sensuous point where flesh  
Vibrates, comes to an end, and  
Tingles with the living electricity that  
Shouts within all things.  
The hair on my chest, thick and coarse  
Has become holy!  
Each blemish is a sacred mount that sings a  
Thousands Hosannas to the the sanctity of sweat!  
The curve of my calves  
Joyously flex for the sake  
Of their own innate power.  
Even the smell of my late-night breath,  
A mixture of wine and chicken and coffee  
Is alive!

Unburdened from age  
My shoulders are broad enough,  
Strong enough to gleefully  
Carry desire upon their length.  
In rapture I awaken  
At four in the morning  
To the dark  
And the swirling of water from  
Some toilet  
Rushing down a rusting pipe

# TRAINS

SARAH DESTIN

---

poetry

I imagine you'd come to love trains  
if your first breath came into peanut lungs with soot  
& dirt & the chugga-lugga-chugga-lugga engine.  
That they'd take the place of the father,  
the same one who delivered you with dull scissors  
on the train's burgundy rug of blood & snow,  
when he left you & your mamushka  
three years later to farm chicken in Martinez  
& take a Chinaman lover.

Your mamushka made do & took a job cutting hair  
near the port where the sailors come for fun.  
In Russia, she had been a countess &  
lived in a lilac room with silver brushes and servants,  
but no one asked about that anymore.

I know why you tell me about trains, when I ask about childhood.  
The trans-siberian railroad ending in Vladivostok.  
The tracks that splinter off to Harbin.  
The White Pass & Yukon Route Railway. The Pikes Peak Cog Railway.  
Express trains in Italy.  
The train that went over the Santa Cruz mountains in the 30s. Skinny  
pale legs  
& mamushka's Russian friends rolling fat cigarettes, drinking right out of  
the flask.  
You turn your head one direction and the world is whizzing by the  
windows,  
but look the other way, and it's just one track after another.

# (SUBTERRANEAN ILLNESS)

CHRIS MURAVEZ

poetry

she she she he he i i vomit half-life i fuck her ocean of pain to nowhere  
where pulsing thoughts confuse ethical orgasm w/ synapse desire  
or do you not think i i tried to come once on battlefield weapons time  
my self my loathing my damp colonies stank the room  
when i asked for forgiven for to for forgive for forgiveness  
she commands i wait until i remove my mask, i should shudder at  
such a promise such fleshless expectation but i ... i viral machine can't  
believe this exists this little death above hovering ghostly chains  
around i neck constricted my choke hold holy in-between thinks  
it's time to marry time time to reconcile time to reconcile i

# ENGLISH: MUSCLES SINEW AND LUNGS

ROBERT ROTHMAN

poetry

Mongrel dog, inviting any with  
Hot mouth and strong legs to your den, taking  
His love moans and sharp barks, domesticating

The outlaw tongue, curling beside while he  
Raves in nightmare visions, moving to another  
Whose feral passion and dominating ways

Ignite your lust. Is there any cur you wouldn't  
Bed? Any sleek-bodied swift-running  
Or thick-boned massive hound who hasn't shared

Your pleasures? When you arise inside me, my tongue  
And teeth wrapped around your generations of  
Offspring, the furnace air of lungs spitting out

Invectives or spooning sugar cubes of endearment,  
Standing stock-still at sunset, casting words at colors  
like a fisherman, I know what to call you: mother.





## MYSELF IN SEGMENTS

ELIZABETH DELGADILLO

watercolor, ink, acrylic, newspaper  
28" x 18"



## SELF PORTRAIT IN TIGER PELT

MICHAEL MCGREGOR

acrylic on canvas  
14" x 11"





# SAVE A SEAT IN YOUR MEMORY FOR ME

MELINA RAMIREZ

acrylic, gold leaf, text, on canvas



# YOUR TELEVISION IS EXPERIENCING A SLIGHT TIMELINE CONVERGENCE

MICHAEL MIRA

digital photograph



# HOW TO FIGURE THE RETURNS

ASHLEY COWGER

---

fiction

Everything in life has a cost. It's basic Econ 101 stuff. Take me, for example. Take me and Keith. Moving in with him had its drawbacks, the most obvious being that I had to move all the way to Los Angeles, hundreds and hundreds of miles away from my family and friends and the internship—a *paid* one—that I'm pretty sure I would have been offered had I gone ahead and went in for the interview. If I were to create a table to analyze that decision, it would include the move under the "Costs" column, and there would be lots of other things too, like the way Keith's nose whistled while he slept or the way he always stacked his pomade up in the medicine cabinet in such a way that it blocked my side of the cabinet from opening. And, of course, there was Klepto. I hate dogs.

But there would be lots to put in the "Benefits" column, too. Things like the way he looked when he got home from work, all greasy and disheveled and sexy as hell, or the fact that he made enough money, I didn't technically need to work at all. I just did. I don't know why.

It's by weighing the costs against the benefits that you can determine something's true worth. You also have to consider how much value to give each item. The internship, say, should probably count more than how attractive I found Keith in his mechanic's coveralls. If I had gone to that interview, who knows where I'd be now? Not a waitress at Lollie's, you can bet on that. I'd probably work longer, harder days, but I'd be working as an economist. I'd *be* somebody, you know?

It's hard not to think about stuff like that when you're home sick on the couch, sitting in front of the TV and feeling insignificant. I was sitting in the living room trying to distract myself from my thoughts by watching a yoga show on TV. Sipping chicken broth from a mug and tilting my head this way and that as I watched the limber, skinny woman twist her body in impossible ways didn't really keep me from wondering for about the millionth time whether I was just being paranoid or whether a four-days-late period was something to be concerned about. I had never been more

than a day late in my life, and since I'd started on birth control ten years before, when I was eighteen, my periods had been as predictable as the dawn. So I was on the pill, and Keith smoked a bowl of weed every night to calm his nerves, which should have affected his sperm count. It seemed impossible that I was pregnant, but it seemed equally impossible that I wasn't.

That's what I was thinking about—costs and benefits, impossibilities, and whether or not I should suck it up and just take a test—when Klepto came over and plopped himself down on the floor between the couch and the TV, right in front of me so I couldn't help but notice, and started doing his scratching thing. He'd been scratching impulsively—at his ears, behind his neck—and he'd rub his front legs down his face and let out a long, low whine that sounded like absolute agony. His dense, chocolate fur, which looked like ragged pieces of yarn to me, would whirl about his shaking body, and the ID tags on his collar would jingle like invisible bells. Alarm bells.

I walked over to the bathroom and leaned against the doorjamb. “Do you think Klepto might have fleas or something?” I asked Keith. My voice came out pinched and nervous, not at all how I had intended it. I cleared my throat and added, “I mean, just because he's been scratching so much lately.”

Keith glanced at Klepto over his shoulder. “Nah. He's just itchy.” He was standing in front of the mirror combing pomade into his dark brown hair. It's like he *wanted* to fit the stereotype of the oily mechanic, the way he dressed and did his hair and everything. Most days I liked it, but that day—I don't know. Something about the way his hair looked wet even though it wasn't, it kind of made my stomach churn. “Dogs get itchy, Rache. Just like people do,” he said, double-checking his slicked back hair in the mirror.

I would have believed the scratching didn't mean anything if Klepto had always been an itchy sort of dog. He was a standard poodle, which is like a toy poodle blown up to the size of a Labrador, and his fur grew like brown tangles of human hair—thick and curly. If I had hair like that all over my body, I'm sure I'd be itchy, but Klepto *didn't* scratch all the time. I'd been living with Keith for six years, and I'd never seen Klepto go at it the way he was now. Still, I knew better than to press it right then, so I just said, “Huh,” and took another sip of my broth. “Maybe you're right.”

After Keith headed to the shop that morning, Klepto tried to jump up on the couch and push his big, dumb head into my lap, but I pushed him off with my stockinged feet. “Get away from me, you disgusting thing,” I said. He did his little whimper thing and gave me that same look he always did when I rejected his affections, but he left me alone and lay down on his doggy bed.



I spent the rest of the morning scouring the internet for information about fleas. How to know if your dog has them and how dogs get them, that sort of thing. Pretty soon I had filled a full page with notes. I didn't want to test Klepto for fleas myself—I didn't much like touching Klepto under normal circumstances, let alone if the smelly beast had fleas—but I figured I could at least tell Keith what he needed to do.

It didn't do any good, I would tell Keith, to pretend the problem away. I practiced saying it aloud to myself nine different ways. No matter how I worded it, though, I couldn't get the tone quite right. Keith knew I didn't really like Klepto. He would surely think I was just making more excuses for why we shouldn't own a dog.

I gave up on finding the right words and went upstairs to take a nap instead, but I couldn't really sleep. I kept hearing Klepto scratching on the floor beside the bed. I put my headphones in and pulled the blanket over my head, but it didn't help. I could still hear it: the jingling bells, the panting, the whines. I just lay there for hours, trying not to think, until I heard Keith opening the front door downstairs. By the time I'd pulled myself out of bed and went down, he'd already found the jotted notes about how to check for fleas. He was sitting at the table eating a sandwich and reading the notes when I walked in. He looked up.

"You're home early." I sat down on the floor, then thought about the flea larvae that might be slithering around in our high pile carpet. I stood up again and took a seat at the table, opposite Keith.

"Yeah," Keith said. "Nothing but oil changes today. They didn't need me." Keith shoved the last bite of his sandwich into his mouth and stood up. He picked his plate up and carried it into the kitchen, placed it in the sink. "How're you feeling?"

I shrugged. "The same."

He nodded, then walked back into the dining room and picked up my notes. "So you really think Klepto's got fleas, huh?"

I shrugged. "Couldn't hurt to check, right?"

He skimmed through the page. Then he called Klepto.

Klepto bounded over and put his forepaws on Keith's legs, knocking Keith back a step.

"That dog has no idea how big he is," I said.

"He's just being playful." Keith handed me the paper and bent down to rub Klepto behind the ears. "Aren't you, boy?"

I looked down at my notes. "You have to part his fur to get a look at the skin. If you see little black specks, like pieces of dirt, that means he's got them."

"Fleas look like pieces of dirt?"

"No. Their feces do."

He parted Klepto's fur and inspected the skin, then parted another

patch and looked again. He let the fur go and rubbed it in tight circles. “But how do we know it’s flea feces? It might just be dirt.”

A cold heaviness formed in my stomach. “So that means you found some?”

He petted Klepto, looking down at him and not me. “I don’t even know what I’m looking for, Rache.” His voice had an edge to it.

I’m sure mine did too when I said, “I told you. Little black specks.”

He sighed. “You can check if you’re that concerned about it.” He stood up and walked into the living room, Klepto trotting along behind him.

I hesitated, then followed. “He’s *your* dog,” I said, which sounded childish, I knew, but I didn’t know what else to say. As nauseated as I’d already been feeling all day, the thought of touching Klepto’s flea riddled fur just seemed like a bad idea.

“And *you’re* the one who thinks he has fleas,” Keith said.

“Fine.” I reached down and roughly separated a patch of Klepto’s fur and leaned down to get a better look. The tiny strip of white skin was speckled with black dirt. It looked exactly like the pictures I’d seen online. My stomach felt like it was giving out on me, and I ran down the hall and into the bathroom. I just barely made it to the toilet before I threw up.

\*\*\*

The cost versus benefits of having a dog is a topic I’d given up broaching with Keith years before. I actually typed it all up in a spreadsheet for him once, and I let Keith decide the value for each item. Time spent walking the dog: -5, he said, because it was a hassle, true, but it was also kind of nice sometimes, didn’t I think? Got us outside, forced us to exercise. Picking up your dog’s warm shit: -20. Yeah, he agreed, that was the worst. The way the dog greets you with such enthusiasm when you get home: +10 (it had its drawbacks, I pointed out, when the dog weighs almost as much as you and can knock you over without meaning to). Snuggling with the dog in bed on a sluggish Sunday morning: +25.

It took us days to think of all the items that needed to go in one column or the other. We’d be sitting at dinner and I’d throw out, “What about giving your dog a bath?” And he’d follow it up with, “Don’t forget sweet, sloppy doggy kisses,” which I thought should be a cost but he said was a benefit. The ultimate score, after we’d run out of items, was -1. We’d both insisted that we had won (not that it had been a competition or anything).

“The costs outweigh the benefits,” I told Keith.

“By one,” he said. “That’s not statistically significant.”

And so we were at a stalemate. And so nothing changed.

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It took most of the day for Keith to finally accept that Klepto did

have fleas, but he still didn't seem to think it was that big of a deal. "They're sucking his blood," I told Keith, and, "I don't want them sucking my blood too."

He thought I was making it seem worse than it was, but agreed to read through some articles about how to get rid of fleas. "Just as soon as you calm down," he said. "And stop scratching your legs. You're not covered in fleas."

The thing was, the flea thing really did bother me. I knew it shouldn't. Fleas are common enough, and it probably made me seem petty and kind of prissy. But I didn't like the idea of something sucking my blood, feeding off of my flesh so it could grow big and strong. I had never liked the idea of a pet depending on me to begin with. But Keith had owned Klepto for something like ten years, and we'd been together, Keith and I, for just seven. Klepto had seniority.

When I'd found out that Keith had a dog, I didn't really mind the idea, thought it was kind of charming, even, but when we started talking about moving in together—me giving up my life back home to move to Los Angeles and start over with Keith—I was hesitant. But I loved Keith, and I loved that he wanted me to be right there. Loved that he'd never had another girlfriend living there with him. He wanted me to be the first.

Much as I loved him, I just couldn't bring myself to love that stupid dog. He was big and clumsy and tracked mud into the house. He barked at nothing half the time and smelled like mildewing hair clogging up a drain. Sometimes, when I'd get frustrated, I'd say something I didn't really mean to Keith, like, "If I had known you had a dog when we first met, I never would have given you my number," and Keith would cut back with something like, "If I had known you didn't like dogs, I never would have *asked* for your number," but I knew he didn't really mean it, either.

The online articles all agreed that getting rid of fleas was a serious undertaking. You had to treat the animal, for starters, but also, you had to cleanse every possible spot in your house where flea eggs or flea larvae might be hiding. There was nothing we could really do about it that night, but suddenly the idea of lying down and wrapping myself in the blankets, resting my head on the pillow, seemed like a death wish. I don't know how I had managed it earlier. I didn't know what fleas looked like in real life—we hadn't actually seen any fleas on Klepto, just the signs of them, and the pictures of fleas online were all magnified—but I imagined the monsters themselves were too small to be noticed crawling around on black sheets.

When we climbed into bed, Klepto jumped onto our feet, like he always did, and I gasped and shooed him off. "Down!"

Klepto barked, then jumped back onto the bed, this time folding himself up solely on Keith's side.

Keith reached down and patted Klepto on the head. "It's okay, boy.



Mama thinks you've got the plague."

"Don't call me mama," I said. "I wouldn't be that mutt's mom if you paid me."

Keith and Klepto locked eyes, and Keith shook his head. Klepto broke the eye contact to shift his weight to one side, tilt his head up, and scratch his neck. "Poor Klepto." Keith gave the dog another pat. "I bet those little buggies itch like hell, don't they?" Keith settled back into bed and rolled over, presenting his back to me.

I glared at Klepto, then leaned my back against the headboard. Keith looked over his shoulder at me as I switched off the light. He lay his head back down, pretending not to notice that I wasn't lying down. I leaned against the headboard, sitting up, all night long. I barely slept at all, and when I did, I dreamed about parasites eating me alive from the inside out.

\*\*\*

The next morning, my period still hadn't come. I could tell before I even went into the bathroom, but I went in anyway and inspected my underwear. Then I gathered up everything in the house that was machine washable—curtains, pillow cases, rugs, all our clothes—and piled them inside the car to take to the laundromat. "Half that stuff isn't even dirty," Keith said when he woke up and saw that I had foraged through his side of the closet, but I just ignored him, and he shut up about it.

"I need you to pick up some flea treatment after work," I said.

"Okay," he said.

"And some flea bombs, for the apartment."

"Those things are toxic."

I grabbed my car keys off the counter. "Take Klepto with you to the shop tomorrow. By the time we all get home, it'll be fine."

"Okay," he said. He looked at the keys in my hands. They were shaking. Then he stepped over to me and placed his palms on my shoulders. "Is everything okay?"

I nodded, stepping close to let his arms envelop me. I closed my eyes, but I had to pull back because I thought I might start to cry. "I'm just stressed."

"It's just fleas. Dogs get fleas," he said. "It's nothing we can't handle."

"I know, it's just..." But I didn't know how to go on.

\*\*\*

I took up twelve washers at the laundromat, and the lady behind the desk gave me a disapproving look. No one else was even there that early, though, and so I didn't really feel that bad. After I had switched all the loads into the dryers, my friend Celine called my cell.

"Where are you?" she asked.

"Doing laundry."

She paused, then asked, "But why?"

I sighed. “There are flea eggs all over everything.”

The lady behind the desk lifted an eyebrow at me. I turned my back to her.

“Okay. But do you have to do that now? Aren’t you going to come with us?”

Celine and I had made plans with some other friends almost a month before to attend the career festival at the local community college. Employers from every imaginable field were sitting at booths in the convocation hall as we spoke, just waiting to lure eager young go-getters into their businesses. “I forgot.”

“Forgot,” she said, half under her breath.

“I don’t have anything to wear.” I watched the wet clothes whirl around and around in the dryer. One of the towels made a consistent thumping sound every time it hit the bottom. “And I haven’t been feeling well the past few days.”

“Do you have the flu or something?” Celine asked.

“I’m not sure,” I said. “Maybe.” I thought about adding, *There’s no point, anyway. No one’s going to hire me*, but then one of my dryers dinged, and I told Celine I had to get going.

\*\*\*

For the last couple years, I’d been toying with the idea of going back to school to get a master’s degree in economics, not because I wanted to be back in school, exactly, but because I wanted to not be doing what I was doing: waiting tables, yes, but more than that. Drifting, I guess. Floundering in the shallows. But the literal cost of going back to school (a good twenty grand, at least, and that’s not counting books or the opportunity cost of not working for two years) seemed to far outweigh the benefit. It’s not like I’d be guaranteed a job after graduation. For all I knew, I might end up deeply in student loan debt and having lost two years of my life just so I could end up begging for my old job back at Lollie’s. I put the gamble in the “Costs” category, and it tipped things over the edge.

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When I got home from the laundromat, I popped the trunk to begin lugging the loads of clean laundry inside. Then it occurred to me that since Klepto and the house were still untreated, if I brought all this stuff in, it would just get contaminated again. I slammed the trunk closed.

The second I opened the front door, Klepto came barreling over, barking and panting and jumping up to press his dirty paws against my thighs. I swiveled around him and watched him topple to the ground. I snorted. “Serves you right.”

He followed me into the kitchen, and just to get him off my back, I tossed him a couple of treats. Then I poured myself a bowl of cereal, walked to the living room, and sank into the sofa, perching the cereal bowl on my

lap. Klepto trotted into the living room and lay down on his doggie bed, folding his paws in front of him and then dropping his head onto them, his eyes peering up at me.

I shook my head at him. “This isn’t... I can’t...”

Klepto lifted his head slightly, then dropped it back down and closed his eyes. I wanted to do the same, but I was sure there were microscopic beasts crawling all over the couch. Jumping. Fleas were supposed to be able to jump. I stared down at my cereal, then placed the bowl on the coffee table and drew my knees up to my chest. “Fuck,” I said under my breath. Klepto’s ears perked up, but he didn’t open his eyes.

\*\*\*

I spent the rest of the afternoon vacuuming the entire apartment. After I’d vacuumed everywhere I could reach, I moved all the furniture to the center of each room and vacuumed some more. When Keith came home and saw the state of the apartment and that I hadn’t brought the laundry back in, he just kind of lifted one eyebrow at me but didn’t say anything. His silence felt to me like an attack. “We can’t just sit around and ignore them, Keith. They could kill Klepto.” This last part didn’t seem very likely, but I wanted Keith to feel guilty for his indifference.

“I don’t think they’re going to kill him,” Keith said. The thing about Keith was that he was so fucking reasonable. It was irritating sometimes.

“But they could,” I said, and I realized I was shaking. “They’re parasites. They’re *feeding* off of him.”

“Hey,” Keith said, stepping over to hug me. “It’s okay, Rache. It’s going to be okay. We’ll get rid of them.”

I pressed my face into his shoulder and breathed in the sweat and engine oil on his shirt. It was comforting, even though it smelled terrible. We just stood like that for a few minutes, my body quaking and his steadying it. Finally, I asked, “Did you get the flea bombs?”

“Yep,” he said. “And the treatment for Klepto. I ran over to the vet during lunch.”

I leaned in closer to him. “I can’t bring the sheets and everything in until we’ve flea bombed the place,” I said. “And I don’t want to sleep here tonight.”

Keith kissed the top of my head. “It’s going to be okay.”

I held Klepto steady as Keith administered the flea treatment—a tiny tube of goop that had to be squeezed onto the nape of Klepto’s neck—then Keith took me out to dinner. When we got to the hotel, I dropped onto the bed and fell asleep.

\*\*\*

When I woke up, it was dark outside, and Keith was gone. I felt disoriented and confused for a second until I found the note he’d left by the phone: “Went home to walk Klepto. Back in a bit.” Then I remembered

where I was and why.

I stripped off my clothes and climbed into the shower, turned the water up to just short of scalding and massaged the free hotel soap into my skin. All the articles we'd read said that getting rid of fleas could take months, that it's not uncommon for them to come right back a week or two after you think you've killed them all. The idea was exhausting, battling fleas for months to come, and all for a dog I hadn't even wanted to begin with.

But I did have a choice. I didn't have to live with fleas, or even with Klepto. With any of it. I could still get out. I could climb out of the shower, towel off and throw on my clothes, and I could check in to my own hotel room for the night. In the morning, I could head out. Move back home. The car was mine, and I already had it packed full of our laundry. What more did I need?

I rubbed my hands over my still taut belly and began to cry. I stood there like that—crying, the hot water reddening my skin—until I heard the bathroom door click and Keith's voice call, "Don't freak out. It's just me."

I ran my face under the water to wash away any signs of tears.

Keith pulled back the shower curtain. "Get some good rest?"

I nodded.

"You still look tired, though," he said, looking at my eyes.

I turned the water off. "Yeah," I said, wondering if he could tell I had been crying. Keith tossed me a towel, and I wrapped it around myself and climbed out. I wiped some of the steam off of the mirror and looked at my reflection. My eyes were puffy and red. "You know, if you want to go home and spend the night with Klepto, I'll understand."

Keith wrapped his arms around me from behind and kissed my neck. "Nah," he said. "I'll stay here with you. Unless," he added, looking into my eyes through the mirror, "you'd rather be alone."

I stood there for a long few seconds, staring into his eyes, and then I rested my head on his arm. "No. I'd rather be with you."

\*\*\*

We made love that night in the sanitary hotel sheets, with no dog watching us from the foot of the bed. The next day, Keith took Klepto with him to the shop while I flea bombed the apartment. When they came home, Keith and I unloaded the laundry from the car and put the apartment back together. That night, after we climbed under the flea free blankets, I asked Keith if he thought we'd successfully killed all the fleas.

"I don't know how a single flea could have survived," he said.

"But they often come back a week or two later," I reminded him. "Do you think they might come back?"

He sighed and kissed me on the forehead. "I guess they might," he said. "And if they do, we'll get rid of them again."

“Yeah,” I said, and nuzzled against his neck. “Hey, Keith?” I said, and for a second, I didn’t know if I could say it. My heart seemed to stop beating; my hands shook. I had to close my eyes and force the words out. “I think I might be pregnant.”

“Really?” he asked. “For real?”

“For real,” I said. “But before you get all excited, I should tell you I don’t really know whether I want to have it.”

There was a pause, and then he said, “Okay,” his voice gruff, hesitant, but somehow soothing. He pulled me close and didn’t say anything after that. He could be just perfect like that sometimes.



# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

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**Alexandra Teague** is the author of *The Wise and Foolish Builders* (Persea, 2015) and *Mortal Geography* (Persea, 2010), winner of the 2009 Lexi Rudnitsky Prize and the 2010 California Book Award for Poetry. The recipient of a Stegner Fellowship, an NEA Fellowship, and the 2014 *Missouri Review* Editors' Prize, Alexandra is Assistant Professor of Poetry at University of Idaho and an editor for Broadsided Press.

**Peter Jay Shippy** is the author of *Thieves' Latin* (University of Iowa Press, 2003), *Alphaville* (BlazeVOX BOOKS, 2006), *How to Build the Ghost in Your Attic* (Rose Metal Press, 2007) and *A Spell of Songs* (Saturnalia Books, 2013). He is a recipient of a Gertrude Stein Award, the Iowa Poetry Prize and the Diagram Prize for the Essay. He has received fellowships in drama and poetry from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2012 and 2013 his poetry was included in *The Best American Poetry*. Shippy was born in Niagara Falls and raised on his family's apple farm. He teaches at Emerson College.

**Steve Abbott** has edited the poetry anthologies *Cap City Poets* (Pudding House, 2008), a collection of work by 74 central Ohio poets, and *Everything Stops and Listens* (OPA Press, 2013), featuring work by members of Ohio Poetry Association. His work has appeared in journals including *Connecticut Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Wind*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

**Parker Allen** Parker Allen is a senior at Hillsdale High School in San Mateo. He enjoys all types of photography but loves taking action shots and manipulating the shot with long exposure. He hopes to take photography electives in college and pursue this as a hobby.

**Holly Baker** earned her PhD in creative writing from the University of South Dakota. Her work has appeared in *Crab Orchard*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Eclectica*, and others. Currently, she is living in Romania completing research for her first novel.

**B.J. Best** is the author of three books of poetry: *But Our Princess Is in Another Castle* (Rose Metal Press, 2013), *Birds of Wisconsin* (New Rivers Press, 2010), and *State Sonnets* (sunnyoutside, 2009). *I got off the train at Ash Lake*, a verse novella, is forthcoming from sunnyoutside. He lives in Wisconsin.



**Ashley Cowger** is the author of the short story collection *Peter Never Came*, which was awarded the Autumn House Press Fiction Prize. Her short fiction has appeared in several literary journals. She holds an MFA from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and she teaches English at Penn State Harrisburg. Learn more at [www.ashleycowger.com](http://www.ashleycowger.com).

**Elizabeth Delgado** I drew a pirate ship once for a middle school assignment. It was pretty bad. I remember my dad asking me innocently, “what is that?” I fervently spent the next hour determined to prove that I could draw a ship. The feeling of pride I had after finishing that second little drawing was indescribable. I’ve loved art ever since.

**Sarah Destin** is from Saratoga, California. She graduated in 2014 from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York with a degree in creative writing. She is currently pursuing a career in the publishing industry and working on her MFA portfolio. Follow her on Twitter @sarahdestin.

Graphic artist and painter **Allen Forrest** was born in Canada and bred in the U.S. He has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications and books. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University’s Reed Magazine and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation’s permanent art collection. Forrest’s expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.

**Danielle Frankel** lives and plays in her hometown of Portland, OR. After studying English Literature at Pitzer College, she’s spent her days traveling, farming, cooking, writing, and most recently working at a small (but mighty) sustainable local grocery. When she grows up she wants to deliver babies within the home.

**Thomas Gillasp**y is a northern California photographer with an interest in urban minimalism. His photography has been featured in numerous magazines including the literary journals: *Compose*, *DMQ Review*, and *Citron Review*. Further information and additional examples of his work are available at: [thomasgillasp.com](http://thomasgillasp.com)  
[flickr.com/photos/thomasmichaelart](https://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasmichaelart)  
[Thomasmichaelart@yahoo.com](mailto:Thomasmichaelart@yahoo.com)

**Cindy Lynch** is a high school art and photography teacher. She enjoys creating her own artwork, and teaching. She takes pleasure in sharing her knowledge about art history and the process of making it. This year will be her 11th year teaching in the San Mateo High School District.

**Edy Madsen** was born in Seoul, Korea. She is a graduate of Kyunghee University and is now an American citizen working at Bon Appetit at Santa Clara University. She is a lover of nature, and her many paintings are of landscapes from around the world. Several have been published in the *Santa Clara Review*. An exhibition of her art was held at Santa Clara University in 2015.

**Michael McGregor** graduated from Santa Clara University in 2010, where he studied Art and Art History. He went on to receive a Master's Degree in painting from Laguna College of Art and Design in 2014 under the mentorship of John Brosio and F. Scott Hess. He currently lives and works in Southern California with his two cats.

**Michael Mira** is a writer, photographer and designer based in Houston. He was born in Manila, and grew up in New York and Texas. His writings and photography have appeared in various online and print magazines, such as *Identity Theory*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Newfound Journal*, and *Gravel Literary Journal*, among others.

**Chris Muravez** is an MFA candidate at the University of Notre Dame. He is a ten-year veteran of the U.S. Army and the Army National Guard. His poetry focuses on exploring the damaging effects of war on both the society and the individual.

**Jen Norton** “Painfully shy as a child, visual art was Jen’s first language and she is still passionate about its ability to communicate for her. After SCU ('87), Jen worked as a graphic designer for a decade before pursuing her own art. Jen’s current work combines Catholic traditions with modern folk art, fulfilling a need for a new expression of the faith.”

**Nate Pillman's** work has appeared in *PANK*, *North American Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Mid-American Review*, and others. He is originally from rural Iowa but now resides in Tucson, Arizona.

**Susanna Raj** is a Senior, double majoring in Psychology and Studio Art. The essence of a moment, an emotion, a way of life, or a state of mind are the challenges that she likes to tackle through art. Art allows her to create a new vista to better understand the created world.

**Melina Ramirez** is a 2012 alumna from Santa Clara University who majored in Studio Art and minored in Religious Studies. The title of this piece is derived from a lyric from an Atmosphere song, “The Woman with the Tattooed Hands”. It also makes reference to the iconic painting “The Birth of Venus”, while celebrating contemporary sensuality. If interested in purchasing this piece, contact [maramirez501@gmail.com](mailto:maramirez501@gmail.com).

**Bethany Reid** is the author of *THE COYOTES AND MY MOM* and *SPARROW*, which won the 2012 Gell Prize selected by Dorianne Laux. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals, including *Blackbird*, *Calyx*, *Springtown*, *Cairn*, and *Pontoon*. She lives in Edmonds, Washington, with her husband and their three daughters.

**Liz Robbins’** third collection, *Freaked*, won the 2014 Elixir Press Annual Poetry Award, judged by Bruce Bond. Her poems are in recent or forthcoming issues of *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Fugue*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *Poetry Daily*, and *River Styx*. She’s an associate professor of creative writing at Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL.

**Robert Rothman** lives in Northern California, near extensive trails and open space, with the Pacific Ocean over the hill. His work has appeared in the *Atlanta Review*, *The Alembic*, *Existere*, *the Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry*, *Westview*, *Willow Review* and over thirty other literary journals. [www.robertrothmanpoet.com](http://www.robertrothmanpoet.com)

**Kyle T. Shaw** is a graduating senior Creative Writing major and Marketing Management minor at Salisbury University. He is a member of his university’s chapter of the Lambda Iota Tau National English Honor’s Society. His work has previously appeared in *Catfish Creek* and the *Sun & Sandstone Review*.

**Connor Simons** was born in Portland, OR in 1993 and has lived in the Pacific Northwest since then. He is currently studying English Education at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, WA and hopes to use that degree to continue writing poetry and to teach English abroad.

**Hannah Withers** is an MFA candidate at the University of Montana. She’s a Los Angeles native, now in the Rockies by way of seven years in the Midwest. Her work can be found at *McSweeney’s*, *The Believer*, *NPR*, *The Redbranch Journal*, and *The Kenyon Review*.



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