doors

broad!

summer 2016

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THE FOREST'S SPEAKER: A FRAGMENT
Devon Miller-Duggan

"…in the cottage at the end of the other path, yet in the same woods—
the one with the moon-shaped door (and
on the door, the handle made of a single great pearl and the lintel all of drift…) and the windows also shaped like eggs…

Always you want to speak of things as they are made…

"But it's the making and the seeming that call us along the way…"

Whose house? What passes inside?

"That cottage? Carved from a single boulder? The Moon's, of course.
And there she comes and goes, resting and nesting,
broody with stars and wearied from turning the earth,
from tugging at the great waters."

What if the children found her instead of the Sugar Witch?

"They'd be fed on stars and lightmilk.
They'd never speak again, but only ever sing.
They'd weep in songs to leave,
but find their way home by the waterpath in the night.
They'd dream ever thereafter of cushioning dust and
a kind of flight."

What would have lead them there?

"…and in the next cottage, further into the trees,
the one at the end of the red string…"

Devon Miller-Duggan *has published poems in* Rattle*,* Shenandoah*,* Margie*,* Christianity and Literature*,* Gargoyle*. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Delaware. Her books include* Pinning the Bird to the Wall *in 2008 and a chapbook,* Neither Prayer, Nor Bird*, in 2013.* Alphabet Year *will be published by Wipf & Stock in 2016.*

A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY
Nina Bannett

I was rendered sightless,
a pillow placed
over my face,
your little brother
cushioning the first absurd blow,
a child's rage my first entrance
into alternate home
full of fun, a fuzzy family story
stretched like cotton candy through decades,
always told by us all,
a welcome laugh,
a hearty punch.

Nina Bannett*'s poetry has appeared in journals such as* Open Minds Quarterly*,* Bellevue Literary Review*,* CALYX *and online at* Topology*,* the fem*,* Snapdragon*, and Silver Birch Press's blog. Her chapbook* Lithium Witness *was published by Finishing Line Press in 2011, and her first full-length collection of poems,* These Acts of Water*, was published in 2015 by ELJ Publications. She is an associate professor of English and department chairperson at New York City College of Technology, CUNY.*

[NOVEMBER 2014]
Marie Conlan

I was the woman of the maroon hills. I filled cupped palms with the morning's sap, screaming addresses into sweet stamp spit & sending them off & off & into. I mean to tell you, we did not go home. We did not return home. We crawled, kneecaps & palms & heavy necks. Back into the same bed, but I do not know where we were that year. We grew peppers on the deck and abandoned them months later in an overgrown garden, next to the hollyhocks. I mean to say, there was a home, and we did not have it. I mean to say, we were moving and we could not tell the difference between breaking ground & grave and I cannot remember if we ever took our socks off in order steady us into the ground. It sloped so west. I do not remember what we did with the dog shit pile or if we ever told the landlord the roof was crying into the living room. Some nights, sobbing.

Marie Conlan *is a current MFA student at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. Originally from Minnesota, she currently resides in Colorado and spends her time between Boulder and the High Rockies.*

BURNING
Cynthia Vander Ven

It's summer. In the middle of the night a cool breeze parts the curtains; air blows over your bare skin, wakes you. A three-quarter moon casts green light cross the room. A girl lies next to you, propped on an elbow, looking, the long hair on either side of her face swaying like strands of sunburnt grass. The girl reaches a hand, imprints your breastbone, strafes your abdomen. Over the girl's shoulder a man's face enters the room's glow through the door's narrow crack, and watches. You turn to stone.

* * * * *

It was the winter of my fifteenth year. I lay sleeping at my aunt's house, dreaming things. The hard rain of December fell in sheets outside my wall of windows, the moonless dark covering me, masking the nakedness I dared to wear in her spare bed. I tumbled out of slumber to a warm tongue and moist breath, invisible for the down comforter. Aroused and disturbed, I spread out on the bed like a snow angel. What I can't see, I can't control.

* * * * *

In the fall of 1995, Troy asks you to model nude with one of her lovers for a project she wants to do the following spring. She says, "It's a conceptual thing, really. It's about bonding. About women flouting traditional ideas of women in the home. I'll call it *Eroticae Domesticae*."

"You just can't push me, Troy."

Troy Musselmann is a photographer. A butch dyke photographer. She has been out since her teens, though she never confides any accompanying angst. She talks as if neither she nor her family ever doubted for a moment whether she might be meant for a man.

Dark brown cropped hair with a natural white streak off the crown. Troy uses Latin freely in her work, obscenely when possible. You figure it's her slap at a disapproving church. She abandoned religion early on, not wanting anything to do with God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit because God and Jesus were Father and Son and therefore men, and the Holy Spirit certainly had that potential. She sees spirituality now as an internal source of energy, a tapping of the power exuded when another's aura flows into her own. For this reason, she keeps plenty of auras listed in her address book.

Troy looks at you, one of those harsh, defining moments that she re-runs each time you talk. She slides her tongue back and forth over her bottom lip, stops to chew on a loose piece of skin.

"Meggie, Meggie, me girl. I'm talking a set of three shots here, viewed

only at finer lesbian art fairs and shops nationwide. No big deal. You don't have to kiss. You don't have to fondle each other. You just have to look like you're having a good time."

"I know, but—"

"Look, no guy you're dating, have dated, or ever will date at some future moment will ever view these shots. Guaranteed."

You sleep with many men, of course. A fact that Troy never seems to forget.

"How do you know? Guys go to art galleries, too."

"Not the guys you date. And not these galleries. And even if they did, guys get off on seeing two women together, mixed up chumps that they are."

You pull your knees up to your chin, wrap your arms around your legs and tuck your toes under like a child. You rock as you stare out the open windows of your loft apartment. Leaves dangle like marionettes, ride down the moist, September heat, rise rapidly up for a few moments, then float past your window once again.

You don't have to kiss.

* * * * *

The Kitchen

The reflection of my light exposes each dark corner, every hidden space. 5Shadowless as wraiths, Meggie and Patrice stand at the sink. They are bare except for sheer white voile aprons, a la fifties, and black, steel-toed work boots. Their backs are to me. Their cheeks, round and soft like large, ripe peaches, fill the center of my lens.

It's warm for May; Meg's air conditioner is on the fritz and everyone wears a sheen of sweat. To ease her jitters, I'm using her apartment instead of the studio, but everything seems wrong for Meggie.

I bring in a temporary, free-standing oak cabinet with a built-in stainless sink so we can re-position the kitchen. I want a left-rear shot of Meggie and Patrice doing dishes at the kitchen sink, and can't get the light and shadows I want with a window behind them. So we move a small dinette table and chairs, and the new sink cabinet is placed against the white wall, now falling parallel with the refrigerator instead of perpendicular.

Then we move her white fridge into the living room and replace it temporarily with a commercial stainless one on loan from a client of mine, better for the black and white shot. We take the pictures from the walls and lean them against the displaced table. Stark naked, the room sounds with echoes.

Meggie's equilibrium is off. She is to stand stock-still, pensive, forearm-deep in dishwater while Patrice playfully draws a line of suds down her spine, looking at her sideways and smiling devilishly. We have to reshoot several times. The last is primo.

Through the lens I catch a wisp of Meggie's dark hair falling over her

left ear, the dusky shadow underneath her cheekbone and jawline, and the tip of her nose. Though I can't see her eyes directly, her downturned gaze and the silhouette of her pouty mouth provides perfect opposition to the grin and cocked eyebrow Patrice shoots over Meggie's right shoulder. The suds dripping down Meggie's back are a delicious extra.

* * * * *

In the spring of 1994, Meggie St. John and I are new friends. We spend a rainy Saturday afternoon in April at a classic movie theatre watching *Children's Hour* and eating stale popcorn. I remember first seeing it as a television rerun when I was about thirteen. Even then, I knew what was at stake, knew Martha Dobie's dilemma. For five straight days afterwards, I sat in my room at night with a bedsheet tied from my overhead light, wondering.

I'm annoyed at first with Meggie's insistence at conversation during the film, but she has this innocence, this childlike quality that ultimately bowls me over, makes me laugh. She doesn't admit it, but she loves being shocked. That's why I took her to this movie—if she would just listen to the subtle texture, read between the lines.

Sometimes I make up things just to see her reaction. Sometimes the truth I tell her is stranger than what I create. The beauty of it is that she can never separate fact from fiction.

"Tell me about your first time. It was with another girl, wasn't it," she whispers at one point, eyes earnest. Her tone is like a child asking for a favorite story to be read, the reassurance of unchangeability, the security in a voice.

"Nope." I gesture at the screen. "Who'd get it on with Shirley MacLaine, anyway?"

"Which one is she?"

"The one playing Martha Dobie. Now Audrey Hepburn, she's another—"

"But you said you've always known that you were gay." She leans in and whispers the word *gay* directly into my ear.

"I have been," I laugh. "By the way, everyone in here is gay, Meggie," and I'm sure I see her shrink imperceptibly into her seat. "This is where Dr. Joe finally loses faith in his woman. Moron."

I can sense her staring at me. I take a deep breath. "I was staying at my oldest aunt's house for the weekend while my folks were out of town. It was the winter of my fifteenth year. I was having these crazy, sexy dreams and I woke up to the best tongue I've ever had, caressing the insides of my thighs and—"

"Who was it?"

A loud *Shhh* from someone behind us. "My aunt's Peke-a-poo," I mouth to her.

"The Peke-a-poo kind of dog?"

"No, the Peke-a-poo kind of cow."

"Gross!" she says out loud.

"What I can't see, I can't control," I tell her with a shrug. Two femmes behind us get up, grumbling, and move to the other side of the theatre. "Besides! I had these ear-splitting orgasms, one after the other. Buzzles, bless her dear departed doggie soul, never got tired."

"Orgasms aren't ear-splitting."

"Then you've never slept with a Peke-a-poo," I tell her, smiling as Martha Dobie hangs herself in her upstairs bedroom.

* * * * *

Troy takes the pictures using black and white film. You admire the way she sets up the shots. Very professional—her lights, her umbrella shades, the props—all just so professional. Except for an occasional puff of cold air, you forget that you're nude.

The woman Troy pairs you with is very much like you—Patrice is her name—her height, her build, muscular arms and thighs, small waist. Longish dark hair. Patrice is pretty in a sort of anime look. She hardly speaks, only when asked a direct question. She does exactly as she's told. She keeps a sharp eye on Troy, too. That's obvious.

* * * * *

I'll never forget. It's October, 1994. Meggie and I are running in Central Park in the early evening, before cleaning up and going to dinner. The trees are pungent, the air is crisp, the sky that rare fall blue. At two and a half miles we stop and sit on the grass, stretching leg muscles and twisting necks. Then we lie on our backs, the damp earth creeping through our sweats. We are speechless for several minutes, having spent our talk in breathless spurts along the trail. I take her hand. She has those papery, veiny kinds of hands. Very small fingers.

"I love you." There, I said it. I played my odds.

Meggie smiles. "I love you, too, Sweet Thing."

I feel like a first-class idiot. "I mean, I'm in love with you. I have been for a long time." Meggie sits up and looks at me, starts uprooting handfuls of grass; soon the tiny stacks surround her in a circle like a rite. She looks down, meets my gaze—I'll never forget that look—and turns away. This is not good, I know.

"You've got great hair."

"You hate my butch hair, and don't change the subject. Please."

"What am I supposed to say?" There's a long silence, quiet except for the sound ofher tearing at the grass. "You know I love you, I love you like no other friend I've ever had. Just not that way."

"That way? What way, Meg? Just how many ways can you love another woman?" I sit up, cross-legged, admiring the square jaw that she says is just like her grandfather's. "How many boundary lines get crossed everyday?" Her grass pulling becomes almost manic. "We kiss hello and goodbye. We hug." I

squeeze the hand I hold tightly, lower my voice. "When we sit around and talk, my head is in your lap and you stroke my hair. Or vice versa. We laugh together, cry together, eat shit together. How about those ways?"

"That's not in love, in love. That's, what do they call it . . . filial love. And why would you tell me you love me and then have expectations of what my response will be?"

Meggie always cries at unusual times. This is not one of them. "I've known for a long time that I've been in love with you. And I know that you love me, too. I've lived long enough, been around enough, seen enough to know." I catch her chin, make her look at me. "I watch you."

A whir of bicycles in fifth gear wheel by. One man has clipped a playing card to his rear spokes. Aces or spades. Black, anyway.

Meggie stands up and looks down at me, opens her mouth twice to say something, then jogs toward the west. I bend over at the waist, bury my face in the dying grass, cry that kind of muffled, embarrassed cry.

"I've never been in love before," I speak into absence.

You don't have to fondle each other.

* * * * *

The Bathroom

I bend them like Barbies, shape them to my ideas. Meggie and Patrice wear industrial black rubber gloves and kneel at the edge of the tub, the starched bows of their aprons erect and stark against the newly-painted charcoal gray wall facing them. I direct Patrice to reach over Meggie's back for the can of cleanser, while Meggie is to raise her torso as high as she can under Patrice, then wrap her right arm up and around the right side and back of her neck, letting her sea sponge drip water down Patrice's right shoulder. I catch the sides of their faces, their mannequin gazes. The entangled sculpture of their bodies. Each woman's hair is pulled atop her head and caught with an ivory chopstick.

* * * * *

In the summer of 1994, at her prodding, you confess to Troy—now your best friend—your first sexual experience. You've known right along that Troy is a committed lesbian. She told you the first day you met, said she knew immediately that you were straight but that she was going to go against her better judgment and choose you to widen her circle of friends.

You feel the need to assimilate when you enter Troy's world, to feel not strange.

"When you're thirteen, sex rides bareback on a distant ridge, silhouetted against a western sun—something romanticized and unattainable in your present state of body, right?"

"You got it."

You are sitting in one of Troy's hangouts—a cappuccino bar with hand-painted murals of nude Greeks, of Olympus and Hades. All the employees have body parts pierced, their heads shaven in odd places. Troy is no different. Your waitress runs a hand over Troy's neck, her voice smeared as she takes your order from the lance piercing her tongue.

You say to Troy, holding your grande cup of frothy Zimbabwe blend, "I was spending the night with my childhood buddy. Carmen was a tomboy, like me, but a year older. We grew up playing baseball with the local toughs on our street. We played Vietnam War and shot Viet Cong from the backseat of an abandoned '46 Olds on a neighbor's back lot. We scoffed at dolls and dress-up."

"Then Carmen went to junior high school. She got her period. She wrote notes to boys. She didn't ask you to come over and play anymore." Troy snatches a lit cigarette from a blonde at the next table, takes several deep drags, then returns it, blowing Blondie a kiss.

"No, she didn't. Except the summer I was entering high school. She called and asked me to spend the night with her. We walked to the corner store and bought cigarettes from a vending machine and smoked the entire pack, right then. We did cartwheels down a busy sidewalk. We fixed two grocery bags of popcorn and sat up late watching an old horror movie. *House on Haunted Hill*. We went to sleep around two in the morning."

"You touched her."

"No. I woke up sometime in the night and saw her staring down at me. The moonlight made those odd, multiple shadows on the walls, caused her every move to shimmer like water."

"She touched you."

"Yes. She stroked my neck first. Then ran her hand down between my breasts, if you could've called them that."

"You didn't stop her." Troy's eyes are heavy, her lips part.

"I couldn't."

"You were thrashing around in ecstasy."

"No. I was locked up like a bad transmission: I couldn't go forward or backward. She ran her hand down my stomach, she touched me everywhere and nowhere. She leaned in and kissed me."

"It was dry."

"No. Wet, but not too. It was soft. Everything was just so incredibly soft. Her kisses. Her touch. Her body where I touched her, my body where I touched myself. All flesh. We held each other the rest of the night, kissing, hugging, taking turns climbing on top of one another and pretending to be the man, lying between the other's thighs like in the movies, grinding like we knew what for."

"You came."

"No. At some point, I opened my eyes and looked over her shoulder. In her vanity mirror I could see her father reflected, standing there in the doorway, leaning against the jamb, watching. Just watching. He always unnerved me, looked just like Robert Redford. Smoke from his cigarette curled back into the dark hall behind him. I turned away, frozen, mortified at my

sexuality. I never knew when he left."

"But you didn't make her stop."

"No. Eventually we fell asleep."

"You woke in each other's arms."

"No. Just after daybreak, before anyone else was awake, I sneaked from the bed and went home. Locked in my bedroom, I stood as close as I could get to my full-length mirror, nipples touching the cold hard of my reflection, whispering to myself, I am not a lesbian. I am not a lesbian. Then I got into bed and slept the sleep of the dead."

"And you've never awakened."

You are in love with Carmen's father, with Robert Redford, with all men. You are irreversibly frigid. Come on, now, be a cryptic whore.

You just have to look like you're having a good time.

* * * * *

The Living Room

I direct my boys to remove all of the furniture and place it in the kitchen, hallway, and bedroom. Here my light is different: it reflects and bounces off the stark white walls. Meggie stands alone in the empty room, a juxtaposition of large and small shadows, her right hand on the Hoover upright's handle, the other holding a length of cord. In this shot I want her naked except for the boots. She pulls the sweeper close to her abdomen while gazing at the shadow she casts to her right. In my lens, her shadow breasts swell on the white wall. I get ideas.

* * * * *

It's still ninety degrees the evening you arrive late for the opening of Troy's exhibit in July, 1996. You're to be one of the guests of honor, along with Patrice and, of course, Troy. Before you even get out of the cab, you see men and women dressed interchangeably: fishnet stockings, microskirts, lots of black leather with holes, rings of varied sizes and shapes piercing varied body parts, purple shoes, pink hair, all lined up at the windows of the gallery, peering at enlargements of photos that Troy's shown you before: an obviously gay woman standing behind a presumably straight woman as she reads the newspaper, the gay woman's tongue almost touching the other's hair; the *pietá* of a man lying on the street, bloody and beaten, his lover cradling his body; the bust of a nude Asian girl eating a soft-serve ice cream cone. Troy refuses to reveal *Eroticae Domesticae* to you before the exhibit.

Slippery and shiny from the heat, you work your way through the door, acknowledged by some patrons and ignored by others, until you find Troy talking with a small following of women. You can hear her voice over the drone of the crowd; she is talking about deconstructing the male gaze.

You smile, knowing Troy is in her element, then notice the *Eroticae*

Domesticae exhibit at her right. The photos are enlarged to twenty-four by thirty, and in each photo she has hand-tinted your boots valentine red. 'The Kitchen' and 'The Bathroom' have such perfect clarity, you think you can reach out and actually feel your own ass. But what really draws your attention is 'The Living Room.'

Troy played with the ISO or used some kind of special film so that there's a graininess to the photo. You never thought yourself capable of the sadness with which you're looking at your own shadow. But what really draws you in is a lens, a sort of spyglass, that Troy has placed maybe five feet away from the photo, through which people can, you suppose, see the print even larger. While Troy goes on about *Eroticae Domesticae*, you queue up to get a view. Gazing into the lens, the woman in front of you repeats several times, "Look at those!" When you finally place your eye to the lens, you see not the whole image enlarged, but only your breasts with their even larger shadow in the background. An eyeful of breasts.

You stand back and stare first at the lens, then at Troy who is looking back at you. She waves, smiling through her words. Then she stops. She makes her way over to where you stand, still blocking the queue, and never taking her eyes from yours, takes your hands and pulls you to her. She knows. You can see it in her frown.

She kisses you full on the mouth: the long, hard kiss of defeat. "Meg," she says.

Unlike any other kiss.

* * * * *

Entering your apartment is like entering the ninth ring. You taste the heat, feel its weight. You disrobe before the door even latches, before you throw the first bolt. Naked, you move to the window where sounds from the Hudson are pulled through the window fan, curling into corners, lying low against the bare wood floor. You open the heavy curtain framing the ugly fan and it falls in folds on either side of it like an elegant gown. Deep evening light slits your breasts and belly, lines of light and shadow that arc and plane when you breathe or turn.

Moving to the futon, you sit cross-legged and light a Peruvian candle, small pictures of Jesus cradled in wax, reach for the remote. You turn on the TV, soundless, and fall onto your stomach, bathed in flickering blue light. Beads of sweat rise along your spine, your skin goosefleshes in the movement of air. Closing your eyes you feel each contour of the couch mold itself into your body, move your limbs to find a cool spot, then again. Fantasies sweep your mind; you don't resist. The curve of a hip here, the swell of stomach there. Floating breasts lay heavy in your hands, malleable. Everywhere: contours of secrets.

The TV screen comes and goes behind your lids, and you open your eyes to fire burning on black water, one shot, then another, and yet another. Some disaster. And through the night, as you rotate yourself like meat on a spit, the fire burns, never quenched as far as you know, burning into the next day.

Cynthia Vander Ven *has an MFA in fiction from the University of Notre Dame and has taught writing in high schools and at the University of Georgia. She will soon be writing as an expat in Italy, doing further research for a novel that includes ancient religious relics and a Romanian prostitute. She is also is a graphic designer who has done cover work for Indiana University South Bend's Wolfson Press. Dislikes include shoes, fingernail polish, any shade of pink including mauve, slow drivers, and mean people.*

"Burning" is a story from a collection entitled Flight. *The stories are centered around the Flight 800 crash off Long Island in 1996, each story getting further and further away from the initial news, much as the news today fades with time and is replaced with other breaking news stories.*

THEY SAY YOU'LL MARRY A MAN LIKE YOUR FATHER

Demi Wetzel

I married not one
not two
but three different men
to run from your name.
Your DNA entwined with mine
and I too am sick.
Your lips once pressed
on my fresh newborn skin.
The photo said it all.
I want to undo this lineage.
I want to tighten my nails
around your skull.
Three times I ran away.
Yet you returned,
a bird of prey.
Please leave us this day
along with our bread.
I'd rather starve
than sit at your table.

Demi Wetzel *is a writer living in Seattle.*

THE UNBORN THING
Carrie Mullins

I was out with Lauren this summer at Pearl Oyster Bar and she said something like, "So I was talking to my friend Becca and she told me that women are doing this thing where they eat the placenta. Can you believe that?" By the way this was out of nowhere. We had been talking about our favorite shape of French fry, which is obviously shoestring.

So I say, "The thing that's made of corn?" Lauren laughed because she thought I was making a profound joke about how in the US we are all made of corn: big agriculture bio engineering GMO mess! But I wasn't making a joke and after a few seconds she said, "Wait not polenta—" And I said, "Oh right pla*cen*ta—" And we looked at each other across our $28 sandwiches and the look on both our faces said oh fuck.

But she seems to have forgotten this.

On Thursday I came home late from work and we'd agreed that she would go ahead and cook herself her part of dinner and not wait for me. I come through the door and it smells like burnt, like burnt-ness, and I walk into the kitchen and I see a whole portion of salmon, pink and black and charred, lying on top of the trash.

She'd burnt the fish. Her portion of the fish. Before I can say anything she says you're cooking your fish, I can't deal. And I say, what happened? And she says what do you think happened? I burnt my salmon so I say here, have some of mine and she says no. So I cook my piece of fish and cut it in two and put half on a plate and try to give it to her; here, here, eat the fish, have half the salmon, and she says no, it's your fish, it's enough for one, and I say don't worry I'll have extra ice cream, you should have some fish, you bought it. And she says no and I say c'mon, have some salmon and she says, I don't want your salmon. Like that: I. Don't. Want. Your. Salmon. And I say, what do you want? And she says, a baby.

I was just trying to. I mean she'd burnt the salmon so I was just trying to make sure she ate something.

Anyway, that's what it's like. It's always there, even when I think we're past it.

Carrie Mullins *writes fiction and food journalism in New York City. Her work has appeared in* Two Serious Ladies*,* Electric Literature*,* Tin House*,* Food & Wine*, and elsewhere. She received her MFA from Columbia University.*

THE BLEEDING
Devon Miller-Duggan

Somewhere, a mountain with an altar on it:
Someone lay himself down.
Someone cut the cancer from beneath his clavicle
and sent the misbegetting flesh
to another altar, and someone there
bent over the gobbet, counting cells.

The wound was sewn, an S of twelve stitches,
gathering together opened skin.
It bled between the stitches.
It bled. Red like a sailor's morning
when the sky promises to swallow him
and he goes still out on the water which
tastes like blood—salt, minerals,
a thousand fragments of life.

Blood poured onto the altar,
soaked bindings and the hands of those who bind,
soaked the eyes of those who watched.

Somewhere, a mountain with an altar
and a red god, a sky that bleeds in the morning
and in the evening. My love's blood calls to the knives,
runs like springs uncovered by the falling tide.
In the end hooked needles in the hands of the priests
stitch the skin closed secondly.

Ten years ago, he nearly left, his blood bearing his death.
Nine years ago, he nearly left, his blood bearing his death.
Last week his blood seeped and seeped from incised skin,
now thread-marked, sealed.
Let the altar have had its fill.

Devon Miller-Duggan *has published poems in* Rattle*,* Shenandoah*,* Margie*,* Christianity and Literature*,* Gargoyle*. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Delaware. Her books include* Pinning the Bird to the Wall *in 2008 and a chapbook,* Neither Prayer, Nor Bird*, in 2013.* Alphabet Year *will be published by Wipf & Stock in 2016.*

BAGGAGE
Eloísa Pérez-Lozano

After years of being told over and over to sit
like a lady, spreading my legs feels unnatural.

"Don't sit like a boy, cross your legs at the ankle."

On the metro, my knees hold stacked luggage
in place, hands blocking where my pants meet.

And yet, my breath is hesitant and short
nervous as my insides turn in turmoil

Against the societal sea of expectations unfulfilled
invisible waves pushing my legs together.

"Keep your legs closed, keep everything out."

One woman looks at her phone, oblivious
another sits facing away from me

And another looks outside, at the metro map
anywhere but me and my clothed vagina on display.

So why doesn't their indifference help me relax?
Why doesn't it sooth my tense mind and muscles?

"Good girls sit with their legs together."

The collective judgmental voice worms its way
into my ears, threatening to drown me in shame.

I consider asking my husband to relieve me
and take on the stain of slutty stigma

But I choose instead to swim against the tide, holding
onto my baggage, my legs kicking towards air.

Eloísa Pérez-Lozano *grew up bilingual and bicultural in Houston, Texas. She graduated from Iowa State University with her M.S. in journalism and mass communication and her B.S. in psychology. She is a long-distance member of the Latino Writers Collective in Kansas City, and a member of the Gulf Coast Poets. Her poetry has been featured in* The Texas Observer*,* aaduna*,* Diverse Voices Quarterly*, and* The Acentos Review.

ELBOWS
Jennifer Russ

Madeleine, who brushed their lips against your soft

earlobe and whispered: “Your body

is a sin?” Were you sitting on the church steps one oppressive morning,

the backs of your bare legs imprinted with the ghosts

of nail heads and splintered edges

when a boy with a stack of mail slid his fingers under your shirt strap

with his eyes? Did you squeeze your sticky knees together

and run home fast to put on pants?

Beneath your corduroy jacket

does sweat slide down your belly

as you sit in a cool café with flushed face

chatting with your girlfriends over coffee?

Are you afraid of seeing Jesus sipping

sauvignon blanc at the bar,

and you wide-eyed with your

elbows showing?

Someday, when you marry, will you sink into the mattress

and moan a dirge for a world in which

we must sin to make life?

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OUR ANTARCTICA
Karissa Knox Sorrell

Our Antarctica feels like never going away and always coming back. Our Antarctica cracks and breaks apart and then freezes together into one again, so strong you can skate on it. Our Antarctic sky refuses to rain, but it drowns us with beautiful lights. Beneath the layers of cold, we are desert, but the ice gives us a cool drink. Our Antarctica is riddled with bumps and potholes, yet when seen from above, it's breathtaking. We are continent, content, contingent, coagulant: we piece our land together and hope the stitches last. Read our map until the final light fades, its shadows forming an x over the last buried treasure in the world.

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SIX SHIPS
Kelle Groom

Cork, Ireland 1894

No one knows when my great-grandmother, Ellen Gertrude Lyons (Nellie) immigrated to the U.S. from Ireland. Born July 19, 1894 in the city of Cork, in County Cork, she had five siblings. Her father, Thomas, was a fowl merchant, and 17 years older than her mother, Mary. Her sisters and brothers all older than Nellie, except Mary the youngest. They lived in a section of Cork City called Blackpool: 12 Wherlands Lane.

She married in the U.S. on November 11, 1915, 21 years old. Wouldn't she have been at least fifteen or sixteen to make the trip by herself to America? I look for ships departing Ireland around 1909 or 1910, the last wave of post-famine emigration. Maybe she left later, but earlier seems unlikely. By 1910, you could travel by steam rather than sail, and arrive in New York in two weeks instead of five or six or twelve. And the Irish didn't have to go travel to Glasgow or Liverpool. Nellie took the boat from Queenstown in Cork harbor, about 30 miles from home. The trip cost about $10.

Maybe she was coming to meet one of her older brothers—Patrick, who was eight years older, or Jeremiah, six years older. But I don't know if they immigrated. Just something my father mentioned as a possibility. Maybe she came to the U.S. through Canada, maybe she met her brother in the U.S.

Nellie died on March 7, 1919 in childbirth in Rockland, Massachusetts, with her third daughter, Esther. Three and a half years of marriage, and she died. I don't have her death certificate. A friend from the Soviet Union, Oksana, said maybe Nellie wasn't a citizen. It made me think of Nellie's husband's draft card.

On June 25, 1917, Michael James Bowen was listed as Alien on his draft card. With a wife and one child. Living at 201 Spring Street in Rockland. Oksana said it would be very unusual for the woman to become a citizen before the man. So with her husband (and Nellie) both Aliens as of June 25, 1917, what are the chances that less than two years later, she is a citizen? Did she die an Alien? Her husband's occupation is Laborer. He was 22 years old on his draft card. Born December 6, 1894 in Castle Park, Cork, Ireland. So Nellie is six months older than Michael. I'm looking mostly for ships departing no earlier than 1909 (she's 15) and no later than the date of her marriage (1915).

Some of her possible and impossible ships:

#1 The Cedric brought an eighteen-year-old Ellen Lyons to New York on November 15, 1913. This Ellen was born about 1895 in Kuockesghery and departed from Queenstown. I went to Queenstown once and closed my eyes. No Kuockesghery, but there's a Knockcroghery in County Roscommon, near the

River Shannon. The *Cedric* sailed from 1903-1932. The shipping line was White Star. It was built in Belfast by Harland & Wolff, Ltd. Tonnage: 21,227. Dimensions: 680' x 75', twin-screw, 17 knots. Quadruple expansion engines. Four masts and two funnels. The masts are like city smokestacks filling the sky with smoke. The ship launched August 21, 1902. Passengers: 365 first, 160 second, 2,350 third. Maiden voyage: Liverpool-New York, February 11, 1903. A troopship in World War I. Scrapped at Inverkeithing in 1982. Sister ship: *Celtic*. Similar to: *Adriatic* and *Baltic*. Note: Known as "The Big Four." If the smudges on the deck are people, it's hard to tell. If they are, the smudges could be sailors. A smudge could be Nellie looking out onto the black and white ocean, the bright spaces on the water like sun.

One of her ships is sinking, but I'm not sure which one.

#2 The Franconia brought a 21-year-old Ellen Lyons to Boston on May 7, 1914. She was born about 1893 in Galleygleene, a pretty sounding place which doesn't seem to exist. She traveled with a friend, Kate Lyons (odd a friend would have the same last name). She departed from Queenstown, and is on the Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States.

At 625' x 71' and 18,000 tons, the *Franconia* had a speed of 17 knots, and a capacity of 2,850 people. It launched from Newcastle, England in July 1910. In a color postcard, the two funnels are scarlet, billowing smoke. The first-class passengers could exercise in the ship's gymnasium. In troop service, it was torpedoed by a German U-boat in 1916. Sunk.

#3 A 20-year-old Ellen Lyons departed on the S.S. **Carmania** from Queenstown for New York on April 19, 1911. She was born about 1891 in Ballghannis, another misspelling. Probably Ballyhaunis in the west, County Mayo. She seems a little too old, but who knows how ages are determined for the Manifest. It's the wrong county. But who knows what other errors are made? The *Carmania* began service in 1905, build in Clydebank, Glasgow, Scotland by John Brown & Co. Tonnage: 19,566. Dimensions: 650' x 72', triple-screw, 18 ½ knots. Steam turbines. Two masts and two funnels. Passengers: 300 first, 350 second, 1,100 third. First Cunarder with steam engines. Speed of 20.4 knots. Sold to British shipbreakers in November 1932. Shipbreakers. Sister ship: *Caronia*.

#4 The Campania—another sunken ship. Ellen Lyons born about 1891 in Ballingove, another nonexistent place. Maybe from Ballingowen in Limerick. She's 21 years old, leaves from Queenstown. They sail on August 25, 1912. Arrive in New York on September 1, 1912. The ship is at least half sunk in the sea—the back half—bow lifting up out of the water. As if it's hollow floating there.

Years in service: 1893-1918. Funnels: two; masts: two. A funnel at the sunken end of the ship. Built by Fairfield Shipbuilding & Engineering Co., Govan, Glasgow, Scotland. Tonnage: 12,950. Dimensions: 598' x 65', twin

screw, 22 knots. Triple expansion engines. Launched September 8, 1892. 13 boilers, 100 furnaces. Consumed 20 ½ tons of coal per hour. Displacement: 21,000 tons. From keel to top of funnels is 130 feet; diameter of funnels 19 feet. First twin-screw Cunarder. Passengers: 600 first, 400 second, 1,000 third. Maiden voyage: Liverpool-New York, April 22, 1893. Set a transatlantic speed record of 5 days, 17 hours, 27 minutes, on her return trip. Sold to shipbreakers in 1914. Resold to the British Admiralty and converted into aircraft carrier. In collision with battleship *Revenge*, November 5, 1918, in Firth of Forth. Sunk. Sister ship: *Lucania.*

#5 The Ivernia: A 19-year-old Ellen Lyons whose estimated birth year is about 1892 in Dunmore, Ireland, arrived in Boston on May 11, 1911. Her friend's name is Delia E. Kearney. The document attached to her passenger and crew list record is an Affidavit of Surgeon for an immigrant named Ashley Hopper, and "List of Races or Peoples." "'Race or people' is to be determined by the stock from which aliens sprang and the language they speak. The original stock or blood shall be the basis of the classification independent of language. The mother tongue is to be used only to assist in determining the original stock." It must have been the *Ivernia I*, which sailed from 1900-1917, launched by the Countess of Ravensworth.

The *Ivernia* accommodated 164 people in 1st class, 200 in 2nd class, 1,600 in 3rd class. 14,058 tons, 582' x 69.9', 1 funnel, 4 masts. Steel construction, twin-screw propulsion, eight-cylindered quadruple-expansion engines, 15 knots. Builder: Swan & Hunter, Wallsend-on-Tyne.

After arriving in Boston in May 11, 1911, the *Ivernia* set sail again. Five days later, enveloped in fog, it crashed on the rocks in Queenstown harbor. Five days had been a speed record for the *Campania*. The *Ivernia* traveling fast. Repaired, it was hired for troop transport, and torpedoed by a German submarine in 1917.

#6 Saxonia: A 15-year-old Ellen Lyons born about 1894 is listed in Boston passenger lists, 1899-1940. She arrived on July 9, 1909. The *Saxonia* built in Scotland, black-hulled. 14,281 tons, 600' x 64.2'. Just one funnel, 106 feet tall. Four masts. A speed of 15 knots and a capacity of 1,964 passengers (164 first class, 200 second class, 1,600 third class). There were many young people on Ellen Lyons' page of the Passenger List: fourteen-, fifteen-, sixteen-year-olds.

#7 Franconia: Again. This time, a 21-year-old Ellen Lyons, born about 1893, arrived in Boston on March 7, 1914. Under "Remarks" is written "Providence." All the Remarks are cities. On the facing page, a 19-year-old Catherine Lyons is going to Lakewood. Ellen and Catherine both have check marks in the box "Groups." But some have capital letters: U, Y, X, A, B, C, G, H, I, J, L, M, N , O, P, P, Q, S, S (another Lyons appears here, 20-year-old with no first name, just a check mark, this "S") and headed for Cohasset,

Massachusetts), T, U, Y , W, X, Y, Y, Y, Z. A strange alphabet, with check marks interspersed for some passengers instead of letters. The repeated letters not a family name repeated, so why the same?

#8 Saxonia: Again. But with an eighteen-year-old Ellen Lyons born about 1889, arriving in Boston on April 12, 1907. There are no records for the year 1901. What happened that year?There is also a 19-year-old Ellen Lyons listed in the 1910 U.S. Federal Census. Estimated birth year, 1891 in Ireland. Her mother and father's birth places: Ireland. A boarder in the home of Martin and Mary Reynolds with their children Thomas (4) and Martin (2). Her year of immigration: 1906. The home is Boston Ward 19, Suffolk, Massachusetts.

I don't think I can find Nellie here.

Three years and four months before Nellie died, she got married. On November 11, 1915, she was 19 years old. Nellie Gertrude Lyons was married to Michael James Bowen (Bohane) in Rockland, Massachusetts by J.P. Ryan, a Catholic priest. Who was at the wedding? Their parents still in Ireland. Nellie's parents: Mary McCarthy and Thomas Lyons; Michael's parents: Daniel Bowen and Hannah Hagerty. She is "Bride." He is 2 years older, 21 years old. Occupation: Laborer. Three girls were born: Gertrude, Florence, Esther. Gertrude and Florence given away to neighbors. Who took Esther? Did Michael keep her? All the girls gone now.

On March 7, 1919, Nellie Bowen nee Lyons died at the age of 23 of puerperal septicaemia. A childbirth death, her daughter Esther living. Before germ theory had been accepted, doctors didn't wash their hands. One doctor in Vienna discovered this link and was fired, ostracized, died in an asylum. Doctors believed they were gentlemen and gentleman had clean hands. In some periods, 25% of women in childbirth died, sometimes 40%. There were times of 100%. Doctors went from autopsies to deliveries, hands full of death. Better to deliver at home or with midwives only, non-autopsy performers. Did Nellie die because someone didn't wash his hands?

I visited her husband, my great-grandfather, Michael Bohane's old house in Ireland. In Kinsale, on the water, a hill of green up to the house. Made of earth and thatch, now stone. Ruined. No roof, the house is open to sky. All the roofs taken off, so they didn't have to pay the roof tax. Two bedrooms slept nine people. There's a Bohane stone for Michael's father here. And Mary Bohane, a six-year-old whose dress caught in the open fireplace. She ran out of the house, into this field, clothes on fire. She lived a week. Something very clear is out of reach.

Once, my father went to Blackpool, where Nellie was born. House gone. But a relative found his baby picture in an attic. His mother, Gertrude sent it back to her mother's family. My dad became an Irish citizen through Nellie,

dual citizenship with the U.S. In Ireland, when the rain comes, it's the mist I'd expected. By then, I was inside another ruin where people had lived.

I can't find Nellie. I can't even find her ship. In Blackpool, I met two sisters, holy girls who descend through Nellie too. One sister with blond cloudy hair like Nellie's took my hand. She brought me into the living room, and asked if I wanted to be blessed. I said, Yes. How could I say no? She held a locket with a first-class relic of Mother Teresa's blue hem. Knelt, bowed her head. She prayed, asked that I be healed. From what? I never see her again.

I have one photo of Nellie. Beautiful. Not smiling. Her daughter Florence on her lap, Gertrude on Michael's. Someone reminded me that people often didn't smile for photos then. Even the babies aren't smiling. Maybe no one said smile, no one entertained. Nellie young, but womanly, a softness to her hair, her face. Big bow in Florence's hair, at the top. Gertrude's eyes round and blue, a mesmerizing light, as in her father's eyes. It's not a color photo.

Her home in Cork is now a medical center. Her home is Rockland is a two-bedroom, one bath, 1,224 square feet. Except it's not her house. This one built in 1935, sixteen years after Nellie died. It has a pool, and none of the previous owners are relatives. The name Ellen, originally Helen, means bright, shining light. A teenager crossing the ocean alone, transatlantic. Then, married, baby after baby.

On the ship, she seems free. But it was crowded. Frightening? A thousand people in third class, 1,600 people. A steep staircase down. Bunk bed near the ship's engine. Enough room to sit up. Did she leave Ireland before or after the Titanic left Queenstown on April 11, 1912 and sunk three days later? Was she frightened? She would have had a few hours a day on deck, if the weather was good—salt air, wide ocean. Did she know anyone? Improvements in steamships, from steerage to third class, meant she might have had a cabin, shared with three strangers. A wash basin. Two bathtubs for a thousand bodies to wash. What did she bring in her one trunk? Did she know Michael Bowen in Ireland? They'd only lived four miles apart—Castle Park to Cork City. Did she know she was headed toward him?

Those days at sea between countries, between birth and marriage, motherhood, death. In the photo, her eyes are tired—she has a household, husband, two babies, another on the way. Even her daughter, Gertrude, barely knew her mother two years before she died. Nellie still a girl at 23, unknowable and in my blood, DNA. The closest I can get to her is me, looking for the ghost ship that brought her here.

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Nan has not spoken to her father for nearly nine months. Their most recent telephone conversation at Christmas lasted less than ten minutes. (He asked her if she had received her present, a pair of cashmere socks Nan knew his wife Greta must have picked out. Every time Nan opens her bureau drawer, she feels freshly irritated that her father got her socks for Christmas).

So Nan knows something is up as soon as she hears her father's voice, flat and atonal. She knows before he says, "Listen, Cakes, I have bad news." Her mother is sick, he tells her. She fainted in her tai chi class.

"They have tai chi in Oklahoma?" Nan says, stalling. Her mother told her about the class weeks ago. Nan teased her, making up names for poses: the Ferocious Crane, the Eager Watermelon.

He ignores the question. When her mother came to, he tells Nan, she was lying on the floor with her feet elevated. A woman in the class was holding her wrist, taking her pulse. Maureen did not want to go to the hospital, but the paramedics insisted. At first, it seemed like no big deal. Fainting happens to older people, the attending nurse said. "You're probably just dehydrated." Maureen drank water and chatted with the nice male nurse about the novel he was reading. But after the blood test results, everyone became somber. Maureen's white blood cell count was high. So there were more tests, and a sonogram, and, finally, the diagnosis.

"It started in her colon, but it has metastasized into her bones. And for some damn reason, I'm her emergency contact. God knows why. I mean, we've been divorced ten years. That contact should be you." Her father bites off the words, though Nan isn't sure at whom the accusation is levelled: her mother, for never bothering to change her information, or Nan, for being 6,000 miles away.

Nan pictures her brain as a clear cage of stuffed toys in an arcade; she pictures a drop claw, stretching and descending to select a question. "Is Mom okay?"

"Of course she isn't okay, Nan! She has stage four cancer. She's dying." Her father sighs. "Listen, Cakes: you need to come home."

Holding the phone to her cheek, Nan considers home. The word seems as alien as metastasized. "Home" certainly doesn't describe Muskogee, Oklahoma, where her father, now in Denver, no longer lives himself; where Nan grew up, where she fled sixteen years ago for college. Now she barely visits. Nan last saw her mother a year ago when Maureen came to Tokyo. The only Japanese thing her mother liked to eat was pickled ginger, which she ate by the forkful, and the packages of dried seaweed with which Nan stocks her cabinets. Haru doesn't like her apartment to smell like cooking.

Nor does "home" describe Tokyo, though Nan has lived in this studio

apartment for nearly three years.

In fact, Nan has spent the last five days, prior to this phone call, trying to develop an exit plan, while lying on her king-sized bed that disproportionately fills the room. (There's also a bureau and a wicker rocking chair, a bathroom with glass tiles the color of celery, and the tiny kitchen Nan hardly ever uses).

"This place looks like a hotel room," her mother said when she saw her apartment, puzzled. "Not a place where someone lives."

When her father hangs up, Nan feels, under the concrete slab of misery, a weed-shoot of relief. Now she has a reason to leave that Haru will not object to, conscientious Japanese son that he is. Of course Nan has never met Haru's parents, but she knows he visits them every Sunday. Haru refuses to talk about his wife. He speaks of Matsumi only in pronouns, as when he mentioned a film that "someone" he knew had seen. When Nan, antennae alert, asked if it was good, Haru said, carefully, "They liked it." To find out anything at all about Matsumi, Nan must resort to subterfuge. But Haru freely shares information about his parents. Nan knows Haru brings his mother a box of sesame candy every Sunday. When Haru described these candies, his elegant fingers shaped cylinders out of air.

Nan calls Haru at work, something she is supposed to do only in the case of emergency. For a long time she is on hold. His voice is terse when he gets on the phone. "What is it?"

As soon as Nan says "My mother has cancer," tears flood; her nose runs. She is taken aback by how many fluids she exudes.

Haru's voice becomes soft and buttery. "Of course, of course. Take as long as you need." He gives her his travel agent's number. "Atsuko has my credit card information. Leave your return open. Tell her you want to go business class."

"Thank you," Nan says. When she travels with Haru, they fly first class. She has gone on three trips with Haru, to Rome, to New Zealand, to Bali, but the only memories the drop-claw in her brain can snatch from those trips is the voyage there: the white cloth napkins, the glass flutes of champagne.

"Take my room," her mother tells her, but Nan refuses. There is no way she could fall asleep in the queen bed that belonged to her parents, facing the bureau that still, inexplicably, has a framed picture of the three of them, Nan, her mother, her father, at Nan's high school graduation. The picture certainly wasn't there five years ago, the last time Nan visited. Her mother must have tucked it into some drawer before picking up Nan at the airport. Now, stuck in the hospital, Maureen has not been able to spend days baking blondies and seven-layer-bars, sticky with condensed milk. She has had no opportunity to hide anything incriminating, anything that will stoke Nan's concern or pity.

What is most depressing? The fact that her mother still displays this

pretend-family shot? Or that she conceals it from Nan? Or that Nan's face in the picture is unlined, her eyes as wide as a fawn in a Disney movie?

Instead, Nan sleeps in her old room, crowded with her mother's sewing machine and dozens of bolts of fabric: fabric that will never be made into the skirts and blouses and summer dresses her mother planned.

These unmade clothes float like ghosts.

Nan has to pick her way through a forest of fabric bolts, lemonade yellow, red- and white-checked, or the most disturbing of all: a mint green background with bunches of balloons. That one must have been chosen for non-existent grandchildren. Once, when she still lived in San Francisco, Nan took her mother to a fabric shop in the Sunset district. According to Yelp reviews, it was famous for retro prints. Her mother ran her finger over fabric obviously intended for children: sturdy cottons depicting gingerbread men, rocket ships, robots. When Maureen looked up and saw Nan watching her, she blushed.

"How long will you be there?" Haru emails her.

Nan can only get an Internet connection in the basement of the house. She sits cross-legged on the shag carpet, her laptop propped on the coffee table where, in high school, she and her friends Danielle, Sunny, Roy, and Patrick used to set Patrick's skull head bong. Nan remembers crawling on the rug, looking for marijuana buds that someone had spilled.

"The doctors say three months, maybe less."

Nan can type these words without crying, though if speaking them, she would be the same water-logged mess she was in Tokyo. She told her father this timeline the same way, in an email including links to the Mayo Clinic. Her father wrote back, "Sorry, Cakes." She imagined him dry-eyed, reading his email while Greta poached chicken for dinner.

"Let me know if there is anything I can do," Haru replies.

Nan is tempted to make outrageous requests: "Come to Oklahoma! Meet my mother! Keep me sane while my mother dies!"

While her mother shrinks away, might be more accurate. Maureen is becoming visibly smaller, harder. She's like a strip of meat hung to cure. When Nan holds her hand, it feels less warm and pliable than flesh. Her mother's body is already in process of transforming into something other than a body: a piece of petrified wood, a polished tusk.

Time stretches like the dachshund toy Nan had as a kid: its head and front legs were joined to its hindquarters and tail by a Slinky. As a child, Nan believed that the toy was in pain every time his front half was separated from his back half. She could only play with it when tightly compressing the two halves.

Nan scrolls through Facebook, searching for anyone still in Muskogee. Not Sunny, who lives in Kentucky now and has seven-year-old twins. She constantly posts pictures of their jack-o-lantern faces. Not Patrick, finishing his radiology residency in Los Angeles. Nan remembers making out with Patrick in this basement. They never really dated: he was too goofy. But it's clear from his profile picture that he has aged well. He used to wind Nan's watch for her, a watch with a red alligator strap. Danielle is not on Facebook. Roy is still in town, though, and after Nan sends him a message, he invites her over for dinner.

He hugs Nan when she rings the doorbell. "Look at you! You look exactly the same."

Roy looks as if he's been inflated. Nan says, "You," meaning to say "You, too," but her awareness of this—that even Roy's head seems fatter—makes her sentence grind awkwardly to a halt. "You have such a nice house," Nan finishes, stupidly.

Roy nods. "Denise, come say hello."

"So pleased to meet you," says Nan, to a freckled woman with rabbity teeth.

Roy and Denise shake their heads. "We've met," says Denise.

It turns out they were in high school together, though it's five minutes later, after Denise has enumerated context after context (Mr. Dashwood's history class; yearbook; some school play), that Nan's memory finally clicks: she pictures Denise with silver face paint, a fairy to Nan's queen, offering in cupped hands an imaginary honeycomb.

"You were in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*."

"Right, I was Peaseblossom," says Denise. "And you were Titania. Do you still act?"

"A little."

"And model too, right?" says Denise.

"That's right." Denise is a sunlamp warming Nan. Under the beam of Denise's questions, Nan feels glamorous and interesting: San Francisco, Japan, mostly film these days, not stage.

Of course, when Denise asks, "You mean movies?" Nan has to admit, no, commercials.

In one ad, she was a girl in a bar. "Which is funny, because I don't even drink."

"You don't drink?" Roy says, raising his eyebrows.

"Not really." Nan remembers, suddenly, being wasted, and Roy holding her hair back while she vomited on the grass. Was it his lawn? Patrick's?

"And I was a sorority girl, in another one," Nan continues, to dissolve this image of Roy gripping her hair.

"You should see if they're casting at the community theater," Denise says.

Dinner is chicken and rice filled with weird, sweet things, raisins and

lentils, which Nan locates, avoids eating, and then buries under more rice. Roy pours her wine and then says, "Oh, sorry, I forgot." He adds her wine to his own glass.

The gratification produced by Denise's attention evaporates as they talk. Patrick is chief resident of his hospital in L.A., Roy tells her; his pretty, blond wife is an obstetrician. Nan tells him she went to grad school. For what? An MFA in poetry. Once more, Roy looks baffled.

Denise says, "Oh yes, I remember your poems! You had poems in *The Starlight*!" (Nan would never have been able to reproduce, never mind so swiftly, the name of their high school literary magazine.) "Are you published?"

And the glow once again disperses as Nan says, "No." This unspools into a long string of No's. No, Nan doesn't have kids. No, she is not married. No, she doesn't have a boyfriend.

Nan is so habituated to Haru being a secret that this last "No" pops out before she can stop herself. Afterwards she longs to retract it, just like the disclosure about not drinking. She watches Roy refill his glass. She wants to sip wine and tell them stories about Haru, her handsome, cultured boyfriend, who takes her on trips all over the world.

"I saw Roy last night. Remember Roy Petersen?"

"Of course!" her mother says. "I have cancer, not Alzheimer's."

Her mother picks an ice chip from her cup, puts it on her tongue, and grimaces. For some reason—Nan doesn't know if it's the disease, or the medication—everything tastes bitter to her mother, even water. Ice is better ("the cold is distracting, anyway"), but not much.

"So how is Roy? Still fat?"

This makes Nan laugh, then stop. These sharp edges are not like her mother. Maureen was the sweet, courteous yin to her father's brusque yang, though she never scolded her husband for being rude or critical, other than sighing, "Oh, John." It was Nan whom she tried to polish and soften, Nan whom she told, "Be polite," "There's no harm in kindness," "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

Has cancer made her mother bitter, like the ice chips? Or is this harshness the product of something else?

When Nan smoothed the covers on her mother's bed, she noticed a depression in the middle of the bed, indicating where her mother has been sleeping: no longer on the far left, making room for her space-consuming husband. In her own bed in Tokyo, Nan always sleeps on the left, even though Haru hardly ever sleeps over (only when his wife is on vacation with their two children). Perhaps having Nan's father gone—not just divorced, but in Colorado—has made her mother migrate toward the middle in other ways? To cease being the base to neutralize her husband's acid?

"Roy's wife seems nice," Nan says.

"Denise. Yes, she's pleasant." Her mother puts another ice chip in her mouth, makes a puckering face. "Though a bit silly, don't you think? A bit eager?"

"Oh, Mom," says Nan. She remembers her mother shaking her head, murmuring "Oh, John."

"Her mother's in my book club. Florence Habersham. She always wants to read the most saccharine books! I couldn't even get through the last one." She frowns. "Poor Florence. She's desperate for grandchildren. I don't know why they don't have kids. I don't know if there's a problem there, or…" Her voice trails off.

Nan waits. After a long time, she says, "Or?" But her mother doesn't respond, and when Nan looks down, Maureen has fallen asleep.

Several days after going to Roy's for dinner, Nan looks up Muskogee Players, the community theater website. They are auditioning for a play: Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*. When she sees the title of the play, Nan bites her lip. It feels like a sign. This is a play she read for Twentieth Century British Literature, one of the two lit classes she took at San Francisco State University for her MFA. Paul's class.

There are only three characters in the play: Robert, his wife Emma, his best friend Jerry. Emma and Jerry have an affair that lasts seven years. The most distinctive thing about *Betrayal* is that it goes backwards in time. It begins two years after the affair is over, and concludes right before the affair begins. It ends when Jerry grasps Emma's arm and the two characters, unaware of everything to come, of the pain the audience has seen unfold, exchange a look.

Of that ending, Paul said, "Before experience is innocence. Experience is the product time manufactures." Nan remembers writing those words in her mottled notebook.

She feels silly when she gets to the audition, in her red wrap dress and boots. Her black-and-white head shot is four years old, and when Nan gives it to the director, he frowns. She imagines that he is registering how out-of-date the photo is. But Nan likes this picture: no wrinkles around her eyes, her bangs perfectly groomed. When she was living in San Francisco, still modelling, Nan got her bangs trimmed once a week. She kept them on the verge of too long, nearly in her eyes, because a photographer once told her that's how he liked her: hidden. Cate, her one real friend in her MFA program, the one who wasn't dismissive about Nan's writing, who didn't refer to her poems as "efforts," found it hilarious whenever Nan told her she had just gotten a trim. "How much this time? One millimeter?" Cate would ask.

Another woman hands the director a Christmas card for her picture. She says, "Sorry, this is all I have."

* * *

Afterwards, Nan is sure she was given the part of Emma because she is pretty, and not because she was impressive. During the audition, Nan had hiccups, and when she held the script, she kept imagining her mother's papery skin.

Mickey, the actor who plays Jerry, her character's lover, is pot-bellied and flirtatious, despite being married. But Timothy, the actor who plays Robert, her character's husband, is beautiful, in a familiarly asexual way. He reminds Nan of male models. Even when these models were straight, they struck Nan as neutered, with their waxed chests, perfectly groomed eyebrows, and flat, hard abdomens. For Nan, such men were for looking, not touching. Their bodies seemed laminated. They were props to bend oneself around.

So Nan is surprised at how much she looks forward to kissing quiet, beautiful Timothy, the man who plays her husband.

They rarely touch—their marriage in the play is troubled, given that Emma spends most of the play involved with her husband's best friend—so Nan anticipates Scene Four, which ends with Robert/Timothy kissing her. First her character responds; then she breaks away to cry on his shoulder. In the minutes leading up to their kiss, Nan feels her skin warm and thrum. It is hard to follow the stage direction to break away. Nan wants to keep kissing him. Last rehearsal, her reaction was so delayed that Timothy opened his eyes and stared at her.

It has been nearly two months since she last had sex, two months since she saw Haru. Nan needs to remedy this situation before she grabs the sides of Timothy's face with both hands, or before she lets Mickey, who uses his tongue when he kisses her, screw her. She isn't attracted to Mickey. Nan has issues with soft bellies. Besides, he is married.

These days, Nan's physical contact, outside of the scenes with the two men who play her husband and her lover, is limited to her mother: swabbing her mother's forehead with a washcloth, putting ice chips on Maureen's pale tongue.

Nan pictures herself growing soft, brown, rotten.

Since Nan was twelve, since boys first started noticing her, she has needed to be touched, or at least to be viewed, to convince herself that she is here. Otherwise, Nan starts to disappear. In bright sunlight, she imagines one could see through her. Soon she will be a hologram.

Lying in her twin bed at night, surrounded by the bright bolts of fabric that will never get made into clothes, Nan thinks about Haru's hands, dry and cool. Somehow, Haru extracted all moisture and stickiness from sex. Nan always knew when Haru was stopping by: on Mondays and Thursdays. If Haru was making an exceptional visit, he would text her. This was to give Nan a couple of hours to get waxed, to put on the lingerie that filled her bureau drawers. Haru presented lingerie to Nan, always the colors of a fruit

cocktail: cantaloupe, pear. He liked to unlock the door and find Nan kneeling on the bed, hand on hip, a pin-up. Haru took a long time undressing her, turning her this way and that while he unsnapped, unbuttoned, and unhooked. The undressing lasted longer than the sex. Afterwards, Nan showered. Only when she was clean and dry, her hair combed, her skin dusted with baby powder (Nan felt like a sugared doughnut), would he kiss her shoulder and say, "My lovely Nan."

In the minutes when Nan waited to hear his key in the door, when she arranged herself on the bed, wiggling her foot to keep it from going to sleep, Nan would think that her relationship with Haru Tatsuo was not all that different from modelling. It involved posing, upkeep. Nan got Brazilian waxes every three weeks, kept herself moisturized and manicured, wore floppy hats to keep her face out of the sun. Haru is mildly repelled by bodies, the fluids they exude, their texture, the way they smell. He likes Nan artificial and composed, a vase of arranged flowers.

"So tell me about him."

Nan looks up from her phone, startled. Maureen's shifts from sleeping to waking have become so stealthy.

"Tell you about who?" Nan says.

Maureen waves her hand, impatiently. "The man in Japan."

"How—?"

"I have cancer, I'm not an idiot."

Nan looks at the opposite wall, painted a watery color she thinks of as "hospital blue." She pictures the way Haru's hair falls into his eyes. Though he is forty-four, his hair is still completely black. Once, when they were lying in bed, he looked at her in a piercing way, as if he were about to say something important, and then plucked a hair from her head. "Gray hair," he said, showing it to her.

"He's married, isn't he?" her mother says. When Nan nods, her mother sighs. "Kids?"

"Two." Nan pauses, then says, "A third on the way."

Haru hasn't told her this. But Nan found the sonogram image in his wallet while he was in the shower. She remembers drawing in her breath so loudly she could picture the speech bubble emerging from her mouth: *Gasp*! So much for his endless deflections when Nan talks about turning thirty-four, wanting a baby someday.

"I was involved with a married man once." When Nan looks at her, startled, her mother laughs. "You should see your face! You look like a girl in a comic book, gasping!"

Hearing her mother articulate the cartoon image she had just pictured makes Nan close her eyes. States that used to be distinct are fusing: sleeping and waking, living and dying, her body, perched in the scratchy hospital

chair, her mother's in the bed.

"It was after Dad and I split up," her mother says. "I went through a nutty time. I remember being in one of those expensive bath stores, and stealing a soap. Speckled, like a robin's egg. I put it in my pocket and walked out. I didn't seem to have an appropriate sense of what did and did not belong to me." She contemplates her bony fingers. "Do you have a picture of this fellow?"

"'Fellow'! You sound like you're in a Victorian novel," Nan says. "No, but I have this." She takes the slip of paper out of her wallet, tucked behind her credit card, and hands it to her mother. Her mother unfolds it, looks at the sonogram, and breaks into a sudden, elated smile.

"Oh, Nan!"

"Mom, it's not mine. It's his. I mean, his wife's. I took it, like you with the soap. I found out she was pregnant, just a few days before I came home."

Home: the word seems to drop and sink inside her, a marble in a chute.

Nan watches her mother's smile disappear. Three months ago, Nan stopped taking her birth control pills. She looked at the pill pinched between her fingers, and instead of putting it in her mouth, she rolled it up in Kleenex and threw it away. She pictures the Kleenex, celery colored to match the titles; she pictures the bone-colored waste basket. She cried when her period started the next month. That was two weeks before she found the sonogram image in Haru's wallet.

Her mother's fingers move. At first Nan thinks she is crumpling the sonogram, but then she sees she's folding it instead, then refolding it, precise, quick pleats. In a minute she hands it back to Nan: an origami boat.

"So your name is Nan, like the bread?"

If a man said this to her in San Francisco, Nan would have felt disdainful. But in Muskogee, the fact that a man knows Indian food charms her.

"Well, you pronounce it Nan," she says.

Ted is cute: surprisingly, cuter than his picture on the website, where half his face was in shadow. Nan used to online date all the time—it was how she met most of her boyfriends, before Haru—but after three years, she's rusty.

She likes Ted's curly hair. It reminds her of Paul's, her professor from years ago. Ted tells her that he wants to travel to Asia, so she takes out her passport and shows him her stamps for Japan and Bali. She tells him about the bar in Bali with the palm-frond roof that served drinks made with loquats, grated ginger, and gin.

"That sounds amazing."

She tells him about the play she's doing and the way it moves

backward in time.

"So the audience knows from the beginning that your character and her lover are going to cause each other all this suffering?" he says.

"The audience knows, but the characters don't. So the audience watches them fall in love, and have no sense of what harm is coming. The scenes towards the end are so hopeful." Nan takes a sip of her wine. "Before experience is innocence. Experience is the product time manufactures."

"That's lovely," he says.

Nan opens her mouth to tell him that was Paul's line, her grad school professor. But she stops herself, just as twenty minutes ago she stopped herself from correcting Ted when he referred to them both being thirty. She was about to: it was an innocent mistake. She had said something about graduating in 2004, and it was only after he said, "Oh, me too!" that she realized he meant high school, not college. Then, as now, she opened her mouth, then closed it.

Because she likes being smart, and saying elegant things; she likes being thirty, the past four years erased, Japan evaporated. Her mother fingering those bolts of fabric at the store in the Sunset neighborhood, planning clothes for grandchildren.

Besides: what the hell does that phrase mean, anyway? Paul had a way of drawing out vowels that made his declarations in class sound aphoristic, but later, when Nan thought about them, they didn't make much sense. Paul sounded good; Nan, queen of looking good, recognizes a similar contrivance about him, a self-construction.

"How long are you in town?" Ted asks, and he smiles when she says, indefinitely.

In the bathroom Nan smiles too, at her image in the mirror. She reapplies lipstick: Fetish, her favorite shade. Muskogee has things now: cosmetics stores, tai chi classes, theater. It would be possible to make a life here. She wonders if Ted has a garden. As she combs her hair, she thinks of a website that a friend once showed her where you upload your face with your boyfriend's and the images blend to forecast the children you might have. Ted has brown eyes, like hers, though his are not almond-shaped. She imagines the pixels of their faces fusing.

When she gets back to the table, though, he is frowning. Her passport is in his hands.

"Why did you lie about your age?" he says.

"Why are you looking at my passport?"

"You left it on the table." He shrugs, as if this answer is adequate. "This seems an inauspicious start, though, to begin by lying. I think I'd better go."

"Wait," Nan says. She wants to explain the misunderstanding about the graduation date, but though Ted looks at her, patiently, no other words emerge. She has a panicky thought: is she capable of coming up with lines

that are not scripted?

Ted stands up, and says quietly, "I'll pay for the drinks."

Nan wakes up the next morning with that feeling of dread that she remembers from her serious drinking days: her mind scrabbling to recall what precisely occurred. Why does she keep thinking of her brain as clawed? But no longer a mechanical drop-claw. Now it is something small and feral: a hamster, scratching at the shredded paper lining its cage.

When the image of Ted walking away returns, she closes her eyes. The whole incident with the passport feels less mortifying than the memory of studying her reflection in the bathroom mirror, thinking about that website that merged couples' faces into blurry, hypothetical children.

Mortified: Nan turns the word over in her hamster-claw mind, considering its root. What is the link between embarrassment and death? Being so embarrassed one wants to die? Or is there something fundamentally embarrassing about death, losing control over one's body? She thinks of a William Butler Yeats poem Paul used to quote, something about the soul being harnessed to a dying animal. Is that why Haru finds bodies so objectionable, why she has to be dry and powdered, perfumed and presented, as if on a tea tray (the tray her bed, with its satin cover)? Because bodies are mortal, so one has to obscure their scent of decay?

Nan has an actor's memory, trained to learn lines quickly but not to retain them. So it is not until her rehearsal that night that the line from the Yeats poem returns to her in full: "Consume my heart away; sick with desire/And fastened to a dying animal."

They are rehearsing Scene Six, the scene where Emma is reunited with Jerry after she has been travelling with her husband for several weeks. Her husband has learned about the affair, but Emma chooses not to tell Jerry that Robert knows. She does not tell Jerry for years, until after her marriage is over. Is her silence an effort to protect him, or is it less defensible? Emma's motives have always seemed obscure to Nan, though now, in her hamster-claw state, they feel intelligible. Emma is fighting to survive, and such actions are inherently selfish.

Scene Six ends with Jerry and Emma lying down in bed, embracing. Mickey sticks his tongue in Nan's mouth, as he has been doing for weeks, and this time Nan returns the kiss. The Yeats line unfurls in her brain like a scroll: sick with desire. Her left hand rests on Mickey's ass, which, unlike his belly pressed against hers, feels solid, not fat.

"Throw some water on those two," says Allen, the director.

Later, after Nan has put on her coat, someone comes up behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders. Of course it is Mickey, though he says nothing. He pushes her hair over her left shoulder, and she feels his lips, wet

and warm, on the back of her neck. He unbuttons the coat she has just buttoned. Nan raises her arms slightly to give him room. Still kissing the back of her neck, Mickey pulls her shirt out of the waist band of her skirt. His fingers slide up her ribs. He pinches her nipples. She gasps; the heating in the theater is wonky, and Mickey's hands are cold, as cold as her mother's, which, due to Maureen's cancer-wracked circulation, feel carved from stone. His right hand slides down the waistband of her skirt. Nan allows herself a beat of regret that the hand touching her does not belong to beautiful, silent Timothy, the actor who plays her husband.

An hour later, Nan waits at home. Getting ready for Mickey, Nan longs, in the abstract way she wished for his hand to be Timothy's instead, for any of the silky camisoles and teddies that fill her bureau drawers in Japan. She must make do with her black bra and panties. She hasn't brought any robes, so instead she wears her mother's terrycloth one.

More unsettling still: she is stuck with her mother's bedroom, because her own twin bed is too small.

She looks, impatiently, at the digital clock. Mickey's wife is out of town, visiting her sister, but before he can come over, Mickey has to walk their dog. Wouldn't a more ardent lover forgo the dog walk? Risk the possibility of urine to mop up when he arrives home, late and sated? It's an errant thought, dangerous to even consider when she should be psyching herself up to get laid.

To regain her bearings, Nan looks at herself in the mirror over her mother's bed. Her lips are pale: she needs to repaint them.

Suddenly she remembers being in a bar with Paul, four years ago, when she was finally able, after repeated invitations, to lure him out for a drink. "I want to talk to you about my Pinter paper," she said. Paul raised a skeptical eyebrow, but capitulated. She remembers sitting in the bar in the Richmond next to the Korean barbecue, presenting him with a drink: "I'm buying, because you're advising." She remembers Paul twisting his wedding ring, then laughing at something she said. He didn't kiss her, though she had exerted all her mind-control powers to incite him to.

But Paul stretched his hand across the table; he touched her bottom lip. He said, "You're clever." And this moment seems like the end of *Betrayal*, the hopeful point of no return: innocence before experience. That moment of being special, of being regarded. That moment before Paul's eyes turned from Nan's mouth to his fingertip; before he looked surprised to see it lipstick-stained.

Kim Magowan *lives in San Francisco and teaches in the English Department at Mills College. Her fiction is published or forthcoming in* Arroyo Literary Review, Atticus Review, Bird's Thumb, Breakwater Review, Corium Magazine, Crack the Spine, Fiction Southeast, 580 Split, The Gettysburg Review, Gravel, Hobart, Hotel Amerika, Indiana Review, JMWW, Parcel, River City, Sixfold, SNReview, Squalorly, Valparaiso Fiction Review, *and* Word Riot. *She is working on a novel and a short story collection.*

JIM
Helene Macaulay

I still see you now and again
Though your heart stopped cold one night after dinner.
In the raging desert of your new habitat
The dilapidated warehouse doors
Slap in the angry wind.
The tiramisu went wasted, love.

Wait—is this a movie set?
I see Klieg lights and a dressing room
You stand at my starboard flank
A mammoth, blown up in the haloed glass
Mirthful eyes betraying your stinging (arousing) tongue.
Sweetheart, remember my fine vision!
You never fooled me once.

Oh—here's the director
The scene will start now
(Doesn't it always end too soon?)
The makeup man smothers your genuine shine and off you go.
We've crossed paths at the murky portal, and will again one day, too.

Helene Macaulay *is an actor, filmmaker, photographer and poet residing in New York City and Madison, Wisconsin. Her films have been broadcast on PBS affiliates throughout the northeastern US, and her photography has been exhibited internationally, including the National Portrait Gallery, London, UK. Her work is available for viewing at helenemacaulay.com.*

FALLING ASLEEP SECOND
Erica Charis

She drifts to sleep before me (she always does)
and dreams of drinking coffee
or rocking children gently.
I lie awake and counting breaths like sheep
and hold her warmth in close (twisted, sweating,
memorializing everything:
the smell of sheets, the iridescence of skin in clock light)

I imagine, somewhere in the desert's early dark,
(her incandescent skin flashing blue and red and white,
the rocking of the ambulance bed, counting seconds
like heartbeats, palms sweating) everything twisting
to drown the doctor's droning apologies
on the wrong side of the emergency door.

Erica Charis *holds a B.F.A. from York University. Her poetry has been published in* Borderline *and* FUSION *and her cross-disciplinary collaborative work has been performed at Lesley University, the Lydia Fair, and the Dance Complex, among other community venues. She's an alum of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and opened for Henry Rollins at the Association of College and Research Libraries annual conference in 2013. She works professionally as a librarian at the Berklee College of Music and posts excerpts of and links to her work at lettheceleryrot.wordpress.com/poetry.*

IOWA
Marie Conlan

Iowa, your grains look like the charred hairs of my electrified Uncle,
falling all over themselves and sticking up from the ground, flat
albeit for the elbow of a hill nudged under the Dying Red Barn.

Your land looks like the hands that farm it, calloused and beige,
the plains like rolling knuckles, contorted and sprawled, sucking life
from its bellycore. Growing from a deep heat, dying from a deep frost.

The trucks are only using you. They erode the paint lines on your
black tar roads
and crumble the pot holes like soil and do not even cradle
your prostitutes at the gas station,
they just plaster your blue sky air with their sideburns of
advertisements
until Nebraska, where the night is purple dark and the head is
cheaper.

Still you tell them, in your rusted, redwhiteandblue metal sign
language
"AMERICA NEEDS FARMERS"
and we passerbys pass by and think Oh Iowa, you're so nostalgic
and Coffee Table Book. Poor Iowa,
cute little farm baby so American and domestic.
We ride 35 like the backwash of our dreams,
we chase West we chase East we think we leave
the habitual living in Iowa, and Iowa laughs
right in the eyes of our headlights as it whispers truths
that bounce like hearty, black echoes against the slow plains,
strangled into silence by the Diesel fumes and the stale car heat.

Marie Conlan *is a current MFA student at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. Originally from Minnesota, she currently resides in Colorado and spends her time between Boulder and the High Rockies.*

THOUGHTS ON THE CITY
Lauren Conte

Sometimes in Idaho at night,
she contemplates the dullness
of her heart in contrast
to the brightness of the sky. She wonders
how so little of herself can be seen
in its reflection. The vastness
of barren land is a magnifier,
enhancing the light. Yet, when
she stands in its glory, she fades away.
Why can't you see her?
The brightest she has felt
was when she reflected the stars
in a place littered with plastic cups
and chattering strobe lights.
When she was among a crowd
throbbing, jolting with the beat
of one frantic heart.

Lauren Conte *is a twenty-something who currently resides in Kennesaw, GA. She is working towards a Bachelor of Apparel and Textiles degree along with a Minor in Professional Writing at Kennesaw State University. When Lauren isn't petting dogs, she is writing poems about her life and the lives of those she pets.*

SING, MY TONGUE
t pomar

between grain elevators and barns
in the mile after mile of vacuum
we attempt to map the multiverse

out here in the triangular prairies
mechanical waves find no medium
bells don't ring for their privilege
i don't have to coax you down an alley

you sure taught me something
when you took me by the hand
showed me down to the lake
my state of grace washed away
between my thighs

as we navigate through grasslands
i'm deafened by the telepathic cablegrams
of your murmuring skin
i slow cook us stews from the
redeemed dreams we'd pawned
to afford their consecrated prescriptions

you clean out the attic within your eyes
as i triumph in the works of
your oily hands

make of this what you will
to us this is the sacrament
of the displaced

t pomar *is a queer and intersectional feminist writer and artist, currently based in the town of Brighton, in southeast England. She earned her MA in Queer Studies from the University of Sussex (United Kingdom). Highly political in intent, her work spans genres and mediums—including academic essays, articles, poetry, and illustration—and, much like her identity, is influenced by the literal and figurative boundaries she has moved and continues to move across. She is currently putting the finishing touches to her latest poetry chapbook*—Love is so Passé—*and developing her first comic book*—Project A. *Her work has appeared in various publications—most recently in* Quaint *and* Heather.

CAIPORA
Holly Day

You can't count on nature spirits to find
babies wrapped in old sheets, by the side
of the road and under the trees, gasping for their first breaths
not quite alive, simply abandoned. You can't count

on fox-headed women, sylphs with cow tails
to be there to find babies left behind
in rest station bathrooms on lonely country roads
to come just in time to stop those tiny cries

to save those tiny fingers twitching in lines of ash
left by cigarettes burning out on wet tile.

Holly Day *has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include* Music Theory for Dummies*,* Music Composition for Dummies*,* Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*,* Piano All-in-One for Dummies*,* Walking Twin Cities*,* Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*,* Nordeast Minneapolis: A History*, and* The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in* New Ohio Review*,* SLAB*, and* Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book,* Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press.*

"TEAR," SAID THE HORIZON
Frankie Drayus

Then a lantern fell out of the sky and into my
light space.
And all above was darkened as I grew.

The lantern said, “Like a bright pool be still.”
It was more dust mote than *word*.

Word is my guiding my body safe from dirt
my exhibitionist Mistress Me—
the piece that broke off and became more
beautiful.

Mare maria—
Gratia plena

There is no wane that does not spill
into me.
Why it does not bend the sky with all
it’s newly lost is that it bends

Every body—
Who’s under Earth
Who’s under duress
Who’s a molten island thickening
in a light sea.

Definition, then, is a lock
and a key:

Until a sayer says, there is no limit:

“We are *here*.”

It is the orbit that is inconvenient.

Such a sticky fracture—
each piece from the mother-body
spun into subluxed escape:
the chain not quite severed
the pull from deep
beneath the sweat.

What is “order”
in a light sea of breach?

What is “inviolate”
when the ocean’s a dry rip?

When flame is caught by oxygen
is any schism innocent?

I miss the wholsesale swell—
the simplicity of no fingers.
The fissures of little gills

Frankie Drayus *has work forthcoming in* Poet Lore. *She lives in Los Angeles, where she is a repeat survivor of the 3:15 Experiment.*

TINA'S HERCULEAN LABOR
Michelle Ross

Tina waited for Shay while Mr. Fischer's four dogs hobbled about the lawn and deposited one last set of turds for her to pick up along with the rest of the week's shit. Shay, who lived on the street too, but on the opposite end, where the houses weren't brick but vinyl siding, was Tina's business partner in this venture. But when Tina spotted Shay pedaling down the street on her brothers' dirt bike, the wringing in her stomach sharpened.

Shay threw the bike down alongside Mr. Fischer's ditch just as he called the dogs back into the house. "Oats! Fig! Angie! Screwball! Get in here!" The dogs' tongues hung from their mouths like fetched objects.

On Mr. Fischer's sidewalk, a wheelbarrow waited, a stack of clear produce bags within, secured by a rock from Mr. Fischer's cactus garden. Mr. Fischer paid them a dollar a sack.

When the dogs were back in the house, Mr. Fischer called out from inside the screen door, "The yard's all yours." He would sit there in his wheelchair and watch them until they were done.

"I don't feel so well," Tina said to Shay. She'd considering staying in bed, faking a fever, but even if that had gotten her out of picking up shit this Sunday, what about the next Sunday and the Sunday after that?

Anyhow, picking up Mr. Fischer's dogs' shit wasn't even the half of it.

"You got a temperature?" Shay said.

"I'm achy and weak," Tina said, the word weak ringing more true than she'd anticipated. Tina's dad had climbed treacherous cliffs with his bare hands, no ropes; and he'd hiked through the Alaskan wilderness alone, with nothing but what he carried on his back. What would he think of her being afraid of something so silly as ending her friendship with Shay?

Shay scoffed and pulled back her hair, which shone as though she rubbed Crisco into it. She secured it with a rubber band she pulled from her pocket, then rolled the sleeves of her oversized "Don't Mess with Texas" T-shirt up over her shoulders. She wore the same pair of cut-off denim shorts she always wore. She'd cut them right at the knees, while every other girl Tina knew was cutting her shorts off mid-thigh or higher. Tina's own shorts were cut at about three inches below the crotch.

As she deposited dried dog turds into one of the bags, Tina peeked at The Flying Saucer, the name she and Shay had given the house that had been built across the street from Tina's house that past winter and spring. Before December, Tina's house had long stood alone at the west

end of the street, marking the end of the neighborhood. Now that position had been usurped by the queerest house ever built. It was circular and and covered in some kind of metal sheeting, like cisterns were made of, only The Flying Saucer was big enough to store water for the entire neighborhood, maybe the town, Tina thought. And the house was surrounded by two rows of small, identical windows, evenly spaced—122 in all. The house was set far from the street, so without her binoculars, the windows were impossible to see into from where Tina was. She felt as if she was being watched, though. All those windows were dozens of eyes fixed on her.

After Tina's dad left them a little over a year earlier, Tina heard her mom say to a friend on the phone, "That man thinks he's Hercules or something, talking about how he's got this urge for adventure he just can't squash. He said to me that sitting put like this isn't in his DNA. I kid you not. Well, all I have to say is 'Good luck slaying the Hydra, asshole.'"

Tina had read about Hercules' twelve labors in school. They were a means to win forgiveness from the gods for his having slaughtered his family in a fit of madness. Not all of them involved fighting monsters like the Hydra, which Tina's mom seemed to wish would devour Tina's dad. Hercules also had to complete tasks such as stealing golden apples and driving away a huge flock of birds.

Getting rid of Shay was Tina's Herculean labor. The task felt to Tina as impossible as slaying the Hydra with its mutant regenerating heads.

She was running out of time, though.

At the end of August, Tina and Shay would be attending the same school for the first time. Although Shay lived less than a mile down the street, the dividing line for the two elementary schools in town karate-chopped their neighborhood in two. Then, in seventh grade, all the kids got thrown together.

Tina had been worrying about this pretty much since she'd met Shay a few summers earlier. All this time, Shay had been a secret Tina kept from her school friends, even Kelly Coop.

Tina probably never would have hung out with Shay in the first place if it weren't for the fact that the summers were long, and Tina's family lived in the boondocks, miles away from any of her other friends. When Shay had mused that the people moving into The Flying Saucer might really be aliens from another planet, Tina had said that she didn't believe beings intelligent enough to overcome all the hurdles of traversing outer space to visit Earth would choose their street as a final destination.

Now, to make matters worse, the day before, the new neighbors had arrived. The men from the moving truck had transported furniture and boxes for nearly four hours. Tina had watched them haul in a shiny black piano, a treadmill, and two marble statues that the men seemed to struggle with as much as the piano, although they were a fraction of its size. After

the truck left, two cars drove into the garage, which, unlike the house, was box-shaped. The garage doors descended before any people got out. The house connected to the garage via an enclosed walkway, like a pseudopod reaching out to ingest the homeowners. Tina didn't catch one glimpse of her new neighbors.

Then, that evening, just as Tina and her mom and her litte sisters, Stacy and Lacy, twins, were sitting down to dinner, along with Joe, her mother's boyfriend, the doorbell rang. According to Tina's mom, a girl about Tina's age introduced herself as Corvus and handed her the invitation:

Casey, Avalon, and Corvus cordially invite you
to share refreshments and conversation
on Saturday, the 13th of June, at six p.m.

Tina had run to the window. What she'd seen was a flash of the girl's long, tan legs as she disappeared beyond the scraggly trees at the edge of Mr. Fischer's yard.

"What kind of people give their kids names like that?" Joe had said.

"The kind of people who live in a house like that," Tina's mom had said. She'd brought the chicken fried steak and mashed potatoes to the table and gone on about how she couldn't imagine how the new neighbors were going to get unpacked and settled in one week's time, the date of the party. "It's a Herculean task," she'd said. Presumably she'd been referring to the size of the house, but Tina's mom had been known to liken a sink full of dishes to one of the labors of Hercules.

Tina didn't expect that a girl like Corvus, a girl who lived in a gigantic house that made Tina's house look like a child's playhouse in comparison, would become her friend. She understood, however, that if Corvus saw her with Shay that summer, the slim odds of becoming friends would dissolve into nothing like an antacid tablet fizzing in a glass of water. And more importantly, there could be further repercussions once school resumed.

When Tina and Shay had counted the windows around The Flying Saucer earlier that spring as it was being built, Shay had said, "Why the hell do they want everyone seeing their business?"

Tina had pointed out that the windows were small, better for seeing out than in.

Now, as she collected dog turds, all Tina could think about was how this girl, Corvus, could very well be lurking behind one of those windows this morning. If she was, her first impression of Tina wouldn't be a flattering one.

With any luck, Corvus was a late sleeper.

Collecting the old turds wasn't such bad work, though, really. They

were like chunks of graphite, lightweight without their water content. But the new shit was a different story. Always, Tina and Shay saved it for last, to allow as much time as possible for it to cool. The new shit glistened, as if taunting the old shit, which had shriveled from the heat. The foolishness of youth, Tina's mom said sometimes: to think you're not going to wither sooner or later too.

"Your family get an invitation to the housewarming party at The Flying Saucer?" Tina asked Shay.

She thought about Corvus delivering an invitation to Mr. Fischer, how he would have looked to her wheeling up to the door, his legs as wide as sacks of chicken feed. She pictured her mom answering the door in that dumb T-shirt with the watermelons all over it and her big, eager smile.

Would Corvus have delivered invitations as far as Shay's house? Or would she have gotten only as far as the Herman house, seen the flatbed truck parked in their front yard, the dandelions as tall as people, and turned around and walked back home?

Shay said, "What the hell? Why would they invite your family and not mine?"

Tina motioned toward Mr. Fischer behind the screen door. He didn't approve of them using "foul language" on his property.

"Fuck him," Shay whispered.

Shay's question seemed ridiculous to Tina. There were a thousand reasons not to invite anyone from Shay's family to your party. What she said was, "You live like a mile away. And the street goes on another mile after that. Where do they draw the line?"

"It's not like they don't have room for all of us."

Shay meant everyone who lived on the street, but what Tina pictured was Shay's family crowding into The Flying Saucer. Shay was the youngest of five kids, and even the oldest, Rod, who was twenty-three, still lived with his parents. Plus, her granddad lived with them. Whenever Tina ate dinner at Shay's house, which she did only when she stupidly lost track of time and felt snagged, unable to wriggle out, Tina had to squeeze herself between Shay and Shay's fourteen-year-old brother, Holt, at the table. He inevitably made some joke about Tina's body, like she was so bony that if humans went cannibal, she'd be just about the only person on the planet who could roam freely without fear of being eaten. Shay's dad, who always sat down to dinner without a shirt, his curly chest hairs on full display, would inevitably laugh. He'd say, "Toughen up, girl. Dish it out. Don't just take it."

Shay's family treated Tina like she was a meek kitten.

But at that very moment, her dad was in Arizona, leading hikers across the Grand Canyon. In the postcard he'd sent her, dusty trails zigzagged down the canyon walls like shoelaces. Tina imagined that if she had a powerful enough microscope, she might locate him in the photograph, like a mite on an eyelash.

While Tina hadn't done anything so daring just yet, she thought she

had to have some of his bravery and strength in her. She imagined these qualities as spongy figurines that expand to ten times their size when you soak them in water.

Or: in sweat. It was so hot out that Tina wouldn't be any more wet if she'd run through a sprinkler. Shay too. If it weren't for the huge Texas stamped across her chest, her boobs would be showing by now.

"Shit," Shay said. She laughed. "Shit, this shit is as big as a cow patty."

Hercules had cleaned shit too, but cow rather than dog. The story was that this King Augeus owned hundreds of cattle, and their stables hadn't been cleaned in years. Hercules had one day to complete the seemingly impossible task. He solved the problem by diverting a nearby river so that it washed the stables clean, sending all that cow shit elsewhere, making it someone else's problem.

Kind of like how The Flying Saucer was set above the street, the land falling away from it like a grass skirt, which Shay said would cause floodwaters, should a hurricane hit, to roll downhill over to Tina's house.

It wouldn't be the first time her house flooded. Every house on Tina's street had flooded when she was a toddler. Her dad had told stories about boarding up windows and, later, having to tear out carpet and place water-stained furniture at the curb for the city to haul away. The story Tina's mom told was how Tina's dad refused to leave despite the city urging everyone to evacuate; how she had reluctantly stayed with him because navigating the terrible traffic of the mass exodus alone with a two-year-old seemed the worse of two nightmares; how while she worried about clean water to drink and whether the roof would remain over their heads, Tina's dad had stood alone in the empty street and flown a bright red kite as big as a door.

Tina's twin sisters bobbed above the fence and then disappeared below it, again and again, as they jumped on the trampoline. Tina thought about how if she could freeze an image of their bodies hovering in the air, smiles on their faces, no sign of the trampoline or the earth below, the picture wouldn't make any sense at all. Who smiles when they're falling from the sky, no parachute to soften their fall?

Or: maybe they would appear to be engaged in a strange kind of flight, rising up toward the sky rather than falling from it. Like the people in pictures depicting the Rapture.

A picture could suggest so many different meanings, depending on how you looked at it, and depending who was looking. Like the way Tina's parents told different versions of what happened during the hurricane. Or: take the stories of Hercules. People enjoyed those stories enough that they'd been around for thousands of years, yet when Shay had discovered that Tina checked out library books about Hercules, she'd rolled her eyes and said, "Really? Who cares about some guy who was never even real?"

Tina's mom hollered out the back door now to the twins. "Don't get too close to the edge, girls! You'll fall off and break your necks!"

Tina tossed the last of her bags into the wheelbarrow. Shay had barely picked up about half of the dry turds on her side.

Shay said, "I thought you didn't feel well."

"I don't. I want to get out of this heat."

Behind Tina's sisters, the rooster stood on top of the hen house. He seemed to be eyeing Tina.

On the other side of the screen door, Mr. Fischer looked back and forth between Tina and Shay and whatever was on the television.

Across the street, The Flying Saucer was silent, no sign of children or animals.

Tina realized she'd not only been trying to limit the duration of her humiliation if Corvus was watching, she'd also been racing Shay. How ridiculous it was to care about being better than Shay even in this: cleaning up shit.

Shay looked skeptical, but she said, "If you want to go inside, go inside. I'll finish up and bring the money over after."

"I'll do my share," Tina said.

Tina's dad was supposed to have flown her out to spend two weeks with him that summer. He'd said they would hike the Grand Canyon rim to rim, stopping to make camp along the way, just the two of them. Then he'd called the first day of summer break to say that he had to work those two weeks; he needed the money. They'd have to do it another time. He'd said he owed her.

Tina was used to being disappointed by her dad. She didn't assume the trip would be rescheduled as promised. Still, she hoped it would be. Also, she understood that if she didn't collect, that debt wouldn't just fade away. She'd hold onto it.

Tina didn't want to owe Shay anything—certainly not the wet turds. In fact, it would be even better if she helped Shay with her half. Then, later, when Shay thought back on this day, she would have to admit that Tina did her right at least by the dog shit, if nothing else.

So Tina took in a deep breath and she picked up every wet turd on the lawn, even the ones that were Shay's responsibility.

When they were done, Mr. Fischer wheeled himself down the ramp leading outside and inspected the eleven bags they'd piled inside the rusted wheelbarrow.

"Some of these are hardly halfway full," he said.

"It's too hard to tie them closed if they're any fuller," Shay said. She popped the knuckles on both her hands.

"I'll give you eight dollars."

"Ten," Shay said.

"Nine," he said. He loosened the knot on the crusty old tube sock that he kept his money in and counted out nine one-dollar bills.

Tina sucked in a deep breath. She said, "Can you make change for one of them?"

Shay stared at her. Always one of them held the money as they biked to the convenience store at the end of the street to spend their earnings immediately. They bought fistfuls of candy. Sometimes Shay poked a finger through the black plastic concealing one of the porn magazines, while the clerk, an older boy with fat red cheeks and a metal ring through his eyebrow, pretended not to notice. Shay would comment on the cover: "Look at how huge her tits are!"

Mr. Fischer looked put out, but he gave Tina four quarters in exchange for one of the bills. They were moist from Mr. Fischer's sweaty palm.

Tina held out Shay's portion, and Shay stared at her hand.

"You can have all of it if you want," Tina said. "I don't care."

"What are you doing?" Shay asked.

Tina used to complain to her dad when she was little about him not playing with her. Saturday and Sunday mornings, he was always out exercising. One morning it was running, the other mountain biking. He'd be gone for hours. Sometimes she would beg him to stay. He'd say things like, "Do you want me to live to an old age, so I can be around to see you grow up, maybe have kids of your own? Well, I've got to take care of myself then. I need to exercise." He would also say things like, "Being selfish isn't bad, baby doll. Another name for it is self-care. Sometimes in this life you have to disappoint people, even the people you love, in order to take care of yourself. It's an act of bravery really, choosing obligations to yourself over obligations to other people."

Tina called out to Mr. Fischer as he started to wheel back toward the house. "I'm not going to be able to pick up after your dogs next week, Mr. Fischer. Maybe not the week after that either. I've got a lot going on these days."

Mr. Fischer stopped, wheeled himself around. "Oh, do you now?" He looked at Shay. "What about you? You got a lot going on?"

Shay looked at Tina the way she had when she'd spotted that photograph on Tina's nightstand of Tina blowing out twelve candles, Kelly and her other school friends crammed with her into one of the skating rink's orange booths, a pile of presents in shiny paper on the table.

Shay snatched the four dollars and fifty cents from Tina's hand. She said to Mr. Fischer, "Yeah, I'll be here next week."

"Good," Mr. Fischer said. He wheeled back around and disappeared into the house, leaving Tina and Shay alone out there. No other humans in sight.

The squeezing in Tina's belly was back, and she wondered if Shay might be feeling something similar now. If, like Hercules when he cleaned the Aegean stables or like her dad, Tina had just passed her problems onto

someone else.

Being brave and strong wasn't supposed to be easy, of course. Probably it wasn't for her dad either. Probably there were moments when he felt a terrible ache in his chest for having left them. Probably he wouldn't have done it if he'd felt he had any other choice. Like Hercules killing his wife and children: Hera cursed him, made him do it.

Tina overheard her mom one night tell Joe the story about her dad flying that kite in the hurricane. Her mom had then said, "That man used to say to me, I kid you not, that he liked running westward because it meant he was running in the opposite direction of Earth's rotation. He said he liked to imagine that if he pushed himself hard enough, he could outrun the spin of the planet."

Tina understood why her mom hated her dad. She didn't blame her mom one bit for that. Still, it had surprised her to hear her mom talk like her dad was an idiot for imagining he might outrun the spin of the planet. That was precisely the sort of thing Tina admired most about her dad, how nothing seemed too big a feat to him.

So much depended on one's perspective.

Now, for instance: she felt as though she and Shay were standing on opposite rims of the Grand Canyon. But from the moon, which was about how far away the mysterious Corvus seemed in her alien house, the Grand Canyon would appear to be a speck of dust.

Or, take Mr. Fischer's lawn: from Tina's vantage point, the grass looked clean, but it wasn't really. Even if she could run a river through it, Tina couldn't lie down on that grass without coming away with particles of dog shit. She might not be able to see them, but she'd know they were there. On her skin, sticking to her hair.

***Michelle Ross**'s fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in* The Common*,* Cream City Review*,* Gulf Coast*,* Paper Darts*, and other venues. She lives in Tucson, Arizona, and serves as fiction editor for* Atticus Review.

DIVINATION
Nina Bannett

No chairs or furniture.
A child's book, your gift.
Receive the stone. Kindness.

I can stand as your empty house.
I stood in laundry. Used my envious palms.

You hobble around like a chicken,
new feet. I come over to stand next to you.

Accept this state of affairs.
Diminishing.
Windowless.
Your making.
I see the break.

Empty altar. No adornments. Nothing to adore.

Nina Bannett*'s poetry has appeared in* Open Minds Quarterly*,* Bellevue Literary Review *and* CALYX. *Her chapbook* Lithium Witness *was published by Finishing Line Press in 2011. Her first full-length collection of poems,* These Acts of Water*, was published in 2015 by ELJ Publications. She is an associate professor of English and department chairperson at New York City College of Technology, CUNY.*

ON MY FATHER'S ANGER
Tatiana M.R. Johnson

it wells real swollen and one day it pops
years later you will wonder if it happened
if your skin was once stripped

it falters in—like he did sometimes
crooked figure in a door frame
panting like mad—
you left him?
how could you be some clumsy?
how could you have gotten so lost in that supermarket?
why didn't you scream for him?

when your feet carried you home
to your mother's glass arms—you hoped he would not return
he did that time—gasping because you were lost *you know?*

a child in a store, who walked away from their father
a child who made their own way home
weren't you then? *that type of kid*
it doesn't matter

the wire hanger crashed through your skin
dancing to the rhythm of your father's voice:

don't ever do that again

your mother a statue—does no rescuing
your brothers remember the feeling
the time he put a cigarette out on their brown bodies

your father is a metal bottle cap scraping the table
all carving and wrecking, you are wooden masterpiece
a mass full of splinters

it is hard to remember just how it happens
each time it has ever happened
if the montage is correct, it plays again...

how long does it take for fear to leave the body?
will it ever stop feeling so loud?

Tatiana M.R. Johnson *is a writer and artist living in Boston. Her mission as an artist is to foster healing and wholeness through creative expression. She hopes that people feel heard and seen with the work she produces.*

CHIBAISKWEDA
Holly Day

I talk more to my father now that he's gone, perhaps
because now I can get a complete thought out, aloud, without fear
of interruption or condemnation. In those last days, he was a shadow
of what he had been in my childhood, but still
his dry, brittle husk still held
so much power over me the words I should have said
stopped stillborn inside me.

These days, we talk about everything—the weather, my job
politics, religion. I ask him about my family, if they look at me
the same way I used to look at him, hulking angry in his favorite chair
a trap to be avoided, to run past on tiptoes, and only when necessary
if there was anything
he wished he had done different
if I am turning into him.

Holly Day *has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include* Music Theory for Dummies*,* Music Composition for Dummies*,* Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*,* Piano All-in-One for Dummies*,* Walking Twin Cities*,* Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*,* Nordeast Minneapolis: A History*, and* The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in* New Ohio Review*,* SLAB*, and* Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book,* Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press.*

THE TRANSPLANTS
Chachi Hauser

Noah makes food in bulk, freezes it, and eats a portion of it every meal for the following week or two. Tonight, the house smells deeply of beets. Noah is making borscht and the old sponge will be dyed pink permanently.

Arthur has trouble sleeping. He only sleeps sitting up, usually with his lamp on. He dislikes daytime and is often late for work. He is occasionally fired from the film sets he works on as a insignificant member of the camera department, and it's a mystery to everyone how he keeps getting jobs in the first place. Emily plays bass in an all-female punk band. She works as a barista in a coffee shop frequented by gutter punks and people who want to look like gutter punks and people who ride tall bikes. Danny is a talented realist painter, though recently he's been going to his studio only to smoke weed with the bearded carpenter he shares the space with and with whom he is hopelessly in love. Lara longs to be a screenwriter and on her days off from pedi-cabbing in the French Quarter she works on a feature-length screenplay about a bunch of young people who don't know what to do with their lives. Danny and Noah work at the same vegan café in the Bywater, Danny working tirelessly in the back kitchen, while Noah takes customers' orders in the front and pours coffees. Sometimes Noah has to make a juice with the juicer and he hates this. They all live together, five of them in their twenties and a mangy cat, in a shotgun house on "the other side of St. Claude."

On weekends, Arthur comes home coked out in the early morning and climbs into bed with Lara. Sometimes they have sex, but other times Arthur falls asleep in a strange position that looks altogether uncomfortable and Lara gets up and makes herself a cup of coffee with the French press. Occasionally, Arthur doesn't come home at all and this means he's sleeping with a girl whose name he won't remember and whom he might tell Lara about when he gets drunk the following night and has lost his sense of propriety. Emily is highly aware of what kind of night it has been since she has the room adjacent to Lara's, closer to the front of the house and Arthur has to walk through her room in order to interrupt Lara's slumber with his clumsy hard-on. Emily is a light sleeper. Sometimes she listens to Arthur and Lara fuck and touches herself. Whenever she comes or they do, Emily feels terribly ashamed and listens to a podcast on her iPhone to drown out the post-coital voices beyond the door.

No one ever takes out the trash and since they produce a substantial amount each week, it usually piles over, attracting flies and stinking up the house when it's hot out. Emily wonders where these flies come from, if they are sneaking through a breach within the structure of the house or if

they're somehow born out of the trash itself. This disgusts her but she usually does not bring the trash outside.

The cat is an outdoor cat, a fact that Lara finds amusing as he was born in New York City and spent the first three years of his life in a relatively small, eighteenth-floor apartment in Midtown with Lara's parents. He now enjoys the dirty outdoors and chases the neighbors' chickens when he can.

Only Danny is originally from New Orleans. Lara, Noah, and Emily are all from New York. Lara also grants Arthur a certain level of authenticity because he was born below the Mason-Dixon line, in Memphis. The five of them went to the same liberal arts school in Connecticut and moved to New Orleans after graduating. They did not move down together but ended up in the same house out of the convenience of familiarity. None of them can explain why they are in New Orleans but they enjoy it. They work far less than their Brooklyn counterparts and still make enough to support themselves, their habits, and hobbies. They've lived in the city long enough to become accustomed to the repetitions of each passing year; they've each accrued a substantial selection of Mardi Gras costumes and are used to how quiet the city becomes during the hot, humid summer, yet are still always surprised by how crowded everything seems come winter.

The friendship between the group has intensified over the past year and, because all of their bedrooms touch each other, some rooms lacking a door altogether, they've forfeited any suggestion of privacy. They're often in their underwear around each other and recently Emily has taken to putting in her Diva cup with the bathroom door open. Emily has not had such close friends since college and sometimes she feels sad about the possibility of impermanence. She thinks of how her younger brother used to cry whenever he was given a balloon because he was so devastated by the idea of it popping or flying away. She tells Lara this story because she enjoys the allegory.

Emily and Lara are quite close, being the female contingent of what feels like a thoroughly male house, though neither of them is particularly feminine. They'd been mere acquaintances in college but bonded over their decision to move to New Orleans instead of Bushwick like the rest of their friends. On Sundays they bike to a dive bar and pretend to watch a football game, eating free food provided by the bar and then usually escaping the dark, smoky space to read in a park. They make mimosas with cheap champagne and talk about books they're reading and movies they want to make together.

Emily is black and Lara is white, a fact that Lara is hyperaware of since she's never had any black friends. Arthur is also black and Lara wonders if the people on their block who've lived in the neighborhood for

many years are more forgiving of them as a group of gentrifiers. She's never voiced this philosophy to her other housemates because she feels uncomfortable acknowledging difference. The day they were moving their boxes out of the U-Haul into the house, a black man drove speedily by in a convertible and upon seeing them, stuck up his arm up in the air, his hand drawn together in a fist. Only Noah saw this and he did not mention it to the others because he was not sure if he'd misinterpreted the symbol; additionally, he doesn't want to frighten Danny, who he'd had a difficult time convincing that the neighborhood was safe. Recently, they'd thrown a barbeque in their backyard and were pleased to see a lot of their neighbors in attendance, mingling with so many young, white kids with tattoos, passing around blunts and helping each other tend to the grill. At this party, a black guy from across the street had told Emily that she ought to "stay in her lane," that it is unnatural for a black girl such as herself to be spending so much time with all of these white people. Later, Emily had recounted the interaction to Lara and for some reason Lara felt like apologizing. Someone stole Noah's phone but it ended up being one of Danny's artist friends who no one likes very much.

Tonight, Noah makes borscht. It's pouring outside and the sound of rain hitting the tin overhang above Lara's window is so loud that she has to turn up the volume on her laptop to listen to the old horror movie she's watching on Netflix. Still, she can hear the train calling out into the empty night and she feels cozy inside. All of her housemates are home save for Arthur, who is either working or is out drinking with his coworkers after wrap. Bored and not tired at all, Lara pauses the movie and steps from her room into Emily's. She climbs into bed with her friend, who's reading a Kathy Acker book she doesn't fully understand.

Lara slides under the sheet towards Emily. "How's the book going?"

"It's really good." Emily looks over at Lara, wondering if she knows that she's bluffing. "I'm not sure if there's a plot—not that a narrative is always required. Listen to this though." Emily reads aloud from the page she's on, "'Writers create what they do out of their own frightful agony and blood and mushed-up guts and horrible mixed-up insides. The more they are in touch with their insides the better they create.'"

"I like that," Lara says, but she is restless, she wants to say something unrelated. Emily can sense that Lara is not interested in hearing more of Acker's raving. "What's up," Emily says, shifting onto her side in order to face Lara, still questioning if she will ever completely grasp Kathy Acker and what it means of her own intelligence if she doesn't.

"Okay, so I've been thinking about that moment right after a guy comes," Lara begins. "How he slumps into you, laying there with his head

on your chest or whatever, breathing heavily and sweating against you, and you put your hands in his hair, petting him, almost comforting him." She pauses. Sometimes Lara herself wonders if she's simply practicing dialogue for her screenplay. "There's that collapsing, as if the act of coming has somehow reduced him to a person much gentler than the one who was just thumping against you." She knows exactly which character would say this. "Even if the sex is awful, there's something satisfying in that moment right after, something motherly about it. I think I'd have sex just for that part. Don't you think?"

"You're a freak," Emily answers, knowing Lara is not looking for a legitimate response. "That's a good monologue though."

Lara laughs and watches a mosquito flit across the room and disappear. They're quiet for a moment. "Do you think we should've stayed in New York?" Lara asks, quietly. "I mean, do you think we're a bunch of assholes living here in a neighborhood—in a city—that doesn't belong to us?" She's surprised to find herself saying this to Emily, with whom she discusses many things but never this.

"I don't know." Emily thinks about what the guy said to her at the barbeque. She suddenly feels very tired. "I don't want to live in New York though."

"Me neither." Lara can hear the hum of the mosquito. Her eyes search desperately for its small body.

"If we lived in New York, we would just be assholes living in New York." Emily coughs, listening to the steady rain, wondering if it'll stop before she has to bike to work at five a.m. the next morning. "I'm gonna go brush my teeth." Emily begins to rise from the bed, climbing over her friend, her feet landing flat on the dirty hardwood.

Lara wishes Emily would say something more profound but she's moving towards the door. "I forgot you have work early," Lara gets up from Emily's bed and begins to walk reluctantly into her own room. "I love you." Lara is still anticipating something reassuring to come from her friend's mouth.

"Goodnight." Emily thinks she can hear a strange desperation in Lara's voice but she doesn't know what she wants to hear. Emily shuts the door behind her and steps towards the bathroom. Lara gets into her bed, one of her knees beginning to itch and, as her fingernails tear into skin, she can feel a bite forming.

Chachi Hauser *is a writer, filmmaker, and barista who lives in New Orleans. She completed her undergrad at Wesleyan University in 2013 and is currently editing a short film that she co-wrote and directed about two young female friends living in New Orleans.*

CHANGING HANDS
Amanda Bradley

The woman who lived here before me left a garden behind:
carrots and garlic and raspberry bushes in back,
day lilies, daisies, hydrangea in front. She was a nurse and
had four boys. This year, I am letting the gardens go.
I have no time to prune and weed and can and bake berry pies.
This move to my first house in the country after twenty-three
years of city living has my mind teeming with ideas for poems,
but there's unpacking to do, planned vacations to go on with family,
a semester ahead to prepare for. When I wrote poems at twenty,
I had all the time I could desire. I wrote a poem about how I went
to New Orleans with a friend, who stayed behind. In truth,
I had only been to New Orleans with family as a child. I felt I must
make up stories to write poetry because I had not lived much.

I wrote the true moments, though—the litter of kittens in a box
in the alley, the two men who came flying out of a corner bar
in a brawl as we drove down Bourbon Street at noon. All I could
write about authentically at twenty was moving around so much --
the deep need for loyalty and intimacy due to always losing
people along the way in cities I left behind. There goes Pittsburgh,
there goes Atlanta, there goes Dallas, there goes Omaha. There go
my best friend and first love picking someone new to replace me.
These moves made me wild and desperate inside, self sufficient
and tough outside. I was dangerous, a rebel destined to flail
through years and years of life. This may be the first move I've made
that feels deliberate, careful, my choice. What I leave behind now
is not what I hope to get away from, but what I hope to change.
It is now my decision what to plant in the garden for spring.

Amanda J. Bradley *has published two poetry collections with NYQ Books:* Oz at Night *in 2011 and* Hints and Allegations *in 2009. She has published poetry in many journals including* The Paterson Literary Review*,* Ragazine*,* The The Poetry*,* The New York Quarterly*, and* Gargoyle*. Amanda is a graduate of the MFA program at The New School in Manhattan, and she holds a PhD in English and American Literature from Washington University in St. Louis. She teaches at Keystone College in northeast Pennsylvania.*

O-OPEN
Frankie Drayus

for Isabelle Eberhardt

No, no, no.
        Then you   in a red dress—

My fat retina
        judging gut & rut-glands—
we all say:
        Come/
            don't come
based on the likelihood of breakfast

We all see
        your arterial motives
swell   swell you are   *swell*

We all sigh
not responsible
swathed in exhaled vowels

Ohhhh----- weeee------- saaaay-------

We had a stable environment
        until you
in(tro)duced
        free   radical   red

Now our calm is want and want is
        multi multi multiplying—

        Oh.   Open—

Blame unknots like a scarf
Thought   unzips and falls to the carpet

Each red breath   a horizon   curved
so want   is a round   *o.*

Oh, we say

What loves like blood—

A dress slipping beneath
sounds like flooded branches

The horizon spilling over

its own O

Frankie Drayus *has work forthcoming in* Poet Lore. *She lives in Los Angeles, where she is a repeat survivor of the 3:15 Experiment.*

NORMAL WOMEN
Sandy SooHoo

"Imagine a white sea, very white, whiter still."
Antoine de Saint Exupery,
Wind, Sand and Stars

I.

Here is what I remember of my father, what will remind me of him endlessly—we say forever when we really mean a personal forever, we really mean until we die, this forever is mine:

Standing in the kitchen, watching him expertly chop up plates and plates of meat and vegetables before tossing them into a wok to be cooked. Asking him how, always, and having him tell me to just watch. "Watch! And learn," always. Still, to this day, I try slicing up onions and nearly slice off bits of my fingers.

Also: Sunday mornings. My father would make coffee and bacon and we would eat BLTs at the kitchen table, with fat slices of tomatoes from his garden, on white bread with mayo and the juice dripping down to our elbows, grinning.

His temper: my father running up the stairs after I'd fought with my brother, after he'd pushed me and I'd screamed. The two of them arched against each other like roosters about to spar, staring, their faces red, rage simmering off their skin in the summer heat. My brother had grown. They looked like two tall, angry mirrors propped against each other.

And still: my father standing in the kitchen. Sleeping at the kitchen table, a newspaper in his lap. Staying up at night, drinking beer through a straw from a mug with ice in it. My father, up late, always, sitting on the side of his bed with his elbows on his knees. My father with his tired eyes and easy smile. My father with his industrious hands and tireless disposition. Work harder, always. You just keep on, keeping on, baby. My father: the hero. My father: the ghost.

II.

I'm fairly certain there is a dead mouse under our radiator. I'm certain because there is a little block of poison there, and a specific kind of too-lumpy-to-be-a-dustball shape behind it. Also, because we found another dead mouse there the other day. This one just had the sense to hide.

I cannot face the mouse. I've considered bringing up the issue to my roommates, but this only means confronting the fact that, if I suspected as much, why haven't I dealt with it in any way whatsoever for the past, oh, two to three weeks? Well, the answer is obvious: I'm chickenshit.

I call my brother. He is my twin. I live in Brooklyn, he lives with our mother in our childhood home. He yells at me: “What are you going to do, just leave it there?” He can't imagine my fear: we are not actually privy to each other's secret, innermost thoughts. “Maybe it will spawn a colony of other creatures that will quietly carry it away!” I offer.

“Ugh, Sandy,” he says, disgusted.

“Maybe it will attract me some cats! Kittens!”

“Seriously. Get some goddamn plastic gloves and take care of it.”

“Maybe the boys in the taqueria downstairs will get rid of it for me.”

“Is it a snap trap or a glue trap?”

“It's not a trap, exactly, it's some brown cube that the exterminator told me was poison.”

“Is it a big mouse?”

“I don't know.”

“What do you mean you don't know?”

“I can't look at it.”

“You mean you don't even know if there's a body there?”

“Well there's a shadow and—“

“What do your roommates think it is?”

“I haven't asked them yet.”

“What?”

“I'm scared!”

He makes some kind of brutish noise and hangs up on me. I am half-worried that he is driving to Brooklyn just to slap me in the face, but the actual odds of that are pretty slim. The problem is I don't have plastic gloves. The problem is that death scares me. Dead bodies, dead animals, their fur falling off, tiny eyeballs like giant X's in their stiff little skulls.

I spend a lot of time trying to outrun this anxiety: the feeling that death is always imminent, somehow. The feeling that I'm always about to be crushed between two tons of metal and a wall of concrete. I've grown used to it; it's just a white noise that colors my life. But from time to time I experience a kind of unyielding depression that feels something like a fat black cat sitting squarely on my chest as I am trying to sleep. I have named her Doom, and wrestle with her from time to time. Sometimes she brings a friend, named Sadness, and, when she does, it's harder to get rid of them.

III.

I can’t bear the thought of Jason’s ex-girlfriend. She was an actress and they had been together for three years before it ended. He had gone to therapy to try to salvage their relationship and failed. He talks about her like she still exists, late at night, when we are supposed to be sleeping. I stalk her on Facebook: discover her to be a plain girl with dirty blonde hair and a face in a constant scowl. She must be one of those actresses who doesn’t like having her picture taken.

I try to forget her. I want him healed. Here I am again, taking in the wounded; the patron saint of lost causes. We met one night at a bar in Gowanus; it was 90's night, and I was dancing to the Spice Girls with my friend Jenny. Once Jason introduced himself, I took his hand and ran outside, where we smoked cigarettes and talked about how he went to Sarah Lawrence, used to work in a law office and how now he was trying to be a writer. I was shivering with cold and he made me take his jacket. Sometimes I fear I am too easily won over.

We've spent almost every day together since the day we met, he tells me of his break up and his sick brother, how after the break up he was laid off from his job. I imagined he puttered around his apartment for seven months. He told me he wrote a screenplay. Same thing.

It is morning and blue light leaks through the giant windows in my bedroom, the sheer white curtains dancing; it's some kind of dream, not real, not waking. Jason's broad, solid body hovers above me; he pushes the hair out of my face.

We are kissing and I roll on top of him, feeling small against his chest. I pull away to look at his face. I examine his face, his fine face, his good face and little, perfect ears.

"You have a freckle on your ear," I say, my first discovery.

"I know," he smiles.

"How do you know? You can't see it!"

"I can feel it," he says. I pause. Blink.

"You can?"

"No! You can't feel freckles."

I roll off him in a fit of giggles and wonder why in the world he likes me.

"No, wait." He is laughing too, reaching for me as I shield my face from his eyes. "You're so pretty," he says, pulling my hands down. "You're so, so pretty."

I think I'm in love with him, so I don't tell him that I need more than that, that it means nothing to me; my body is a vehicle, the vessel that carries me around and we go on together, shaping each other constantly.

I don't want to scare him, so I don't say anything. I just hold his face and kiss his mouth and for those short sweet moments feel warm; feel content and whole and comfortable. Feel safe.

"I could kiss you forever," he says.

I'm not sure if it's a compliment to tell someone that they make you think of dying a whole lot less. So again, I don't say anything. Instead I go on kissing him, convinced we could make this happen, as if forever really meant something. But really when people ask me about the future I look at them blankly:

What future? I say.

* * *

V.

I am sitting in a blue paper gown at the doctor's office. It wraps around my middle in a way that makes me feel like I am all arms and gangly legs. I have extra bones in my ankles that make them look like gnarled tree roots in miniature, my long skinny feet like little boats. Rabbit feet, my dad used to call them, picking me up and mercilessly marveling at how big they were. Stop, I'd whine, and beg him to release me.

I am at the doctor for a number of reasons, but mostly because of the phantom pains I feel in my hip sockets when I stand up. I don't know how to explain this to a health professional: the pain is sharp, as if my bones are rubbing against one another, I can hardly walk until I kick a leg backwards into the air and snap everything back into place. A grotesque popping sound accompanies this graceful little step, and I've nearly kicked many a stranger in many a public place, just trying to align my bones. Also, I've found it helpful to be able to see someone every once in a while who can positively assure me that I'm not, in fact, dying.

The doctor walks in. She is a little woman, with a gentle demeanor, and I immediately want to tell her everything. I also want to apologize for all the boys I've had sex with and all the drugs I've consumed, but I know better than that, so I just say I'm active, and that I've tried weed, and that I don't smoke cigarettes. Occasionally I will drink. Done. These are all perfectly acceptable answers.

"Let's talk about your history," she says. "Any diseases I should know about?"

"I had leukemia when I was eleven," I say. It's almost a nursery rhyme by now, I've said it so often. Her face softens.

"Leukemia," she says, "what kind?"

"ALL? Acute lymphoblastic." I say this, and am mildly embarrassed that I'm never quite sure of the words to describe what I went through. And it all sounds alien to me, like a trip I took to a foreign country some fifteen years ago, I'm only now trying to reconstruct the memory of it. I'm fine, I say this often, all better. But I'm not entirely sure of what that means. I constantly think of Antoine de Saint Exupery in *Wind, Sand and Stars*, explaining his difficulty in describing an experience in which he navigated a plane through a brutal storm, he says: “I had no grip on what I had been through. *Imagine a white sea, very white, whiter still*. You cannot explain things to people by piling up adjectives, by stammering.”

The doctor senses my discomfort, which I appreciate, and in her silence I end up blurting out some anxious protests:

"Sometimes, my hips stick when I stand up. And I know it's probably nothing, it's more annoying than anything, but I know that some survivors—well the few other survivors I know—experience hip troubles too. I just have to snap them back into place. I don't know. I don't know what's causing it."

She nods, understanding, and types it into the database. She tells

me about a survivorship clinic uptown that will have much more information for me.

"Is there a history of cancer in your family?" she asks.

"Well, my dad, he passed away from esophagus cancer two—two and a half years ago."

My voice wobbles, because I know that it was exactly two years and nine months, but saying anything sad with that kind of exactitude means you are still not quite over it. My life has been a long struggle with recovery: are you better? Is it gone? Do you feel quite right yet? And after my father died, it was kind of like falling all the way down to the bottom of a mountain I had just finished climbing. I could almost just see the bright crest of my life: an education, a career, a home. And then suddenly I was drowning, and the path in front of me had entirely disappeared. The life I had imagined for myself was gone, a light replaced with harrowing darkness and the acute sense of being deserted. "I also—" I feel like I am piping up in a classroom full of strangers. "I also sometimes feel anxious. And sad."

The doctor is no longer typing and looks at me, and I wonder what kind of radical energy emanates off me when I am telling intimate things to a stranger. I wasn't about to start telling her that I'd personified my anxieties, turned them into animals and clouds, and started naming them. But I felt like if she pushed me a little, all that would come pouring out of me too.

"Do you have a history of depression?" she asks.

"Well, after my dad died, I saw a therapist for a year. And then I moved, and it was kind of like, see ya, and I stopped."

She nods: "Do you want to start seeing a therapist here?"

I am befuddled and answer vaguely: "No, nah, I don't think that's necessary. I mean, maybe. I mean, I'll think about it and get back to you."

She is understanding, but I know that I sound confused and crazy.

"The survivorship clinic has a lot of wellness programs that I think you could benefit from and many survivors have a tendency towards anxiety, showing some symptoms of PTSD and the like." She pauses. "And, how long has it been since you've seen an adult doctor? Your doctor?"

"Well." I am stammering because I know I am going to get this question wrong. "I haven't really. I mean, I saw an internist, once, two years ago. But, only once. So."

I'm not in trouble. I don't know why I think I would be. She finishes typing again and then turns to me.

"Okay, let's do some basic tests and then I'll have the nurses do an EKG for you, okay? And I'm going to be your doctor from now on."

I feel like I won her favor, though I know she would be my doctor anyway. I am used to doctors tapping on my bones and looking in my orifices, so the exam is easy. I pass with flying colors. She tells me to hold

her fingers and squeeze them.

I hold her hands, and squeeze.

"Okay. Okay," she says, "you can let go."

Right. I'd forgotten. She smiles.

"Well, Sandra, everything looks good. A nurse will be in here to take some blood and do an EKG, and I'll take a look at it before you leave so you know what's going on. Also, I'm going to have you get an echocardiogram so we can get a better look at your heart."

She leaves and I feel strange and cold in the sterile examination room. I look at all the doctor's instruments and how the color of the walls and the floor and the table I am sitting on are always exactly the same. The same fluorescent lights. I feel like my body could take root here and become a part of it, as if I'd grown up in these exam rooms. I am at home here, in the strangest way.

I think of Jason. How can anyone fall in love with someone who has such a toxic, sticky past? Cancer follows me around like a hungry dog, waiting to be fed. When enough things go wrong, it's hard to feel as though they are not, somehow, cosmically deserved.

As I'm almost ready to leave the doctor knocks on the door. She hands me a photocopy of my EKG and shakes my hand, and holds it:

"Please remember to get that echocardiogram. But, from what I see here, you have a completely normal heart."

V.

It's been a month. I feel that the all-too-quickly and haphazardly-tied threads of our relationship are coming undone. I don't know why I am surprised. I cannot wriggle out of this girl's shadow. I'm trying to rationalize his pain, I'm trying to tame it into something I can contain, smooth over. As if there were room for all of us together in my bed. If I just make myself small enough, I can disappear.

"It's like, I'm just programmed to be a boyfriend," he says. We are trying to talk and may have been drinking copious amounts of alcohol. "For three years, I never did anything for myself. It's like, I don't know myself."

He says these things after taking off my clothes, after mashing his face against my face for almost an hour. There is something about my body that leads here, always, to this discussion: I'm just not in the place to be a boyfriend. Usually it's the other way around, it's me trying to squirm out of some boy's skinny, cloying arms. We are in my bedroom, upside down in my bed, the covers on the floor, the floor littered with articles of clothing.

"I just… I can't be an *us*, right now," he says, he is on his elbows, above me. I feel like I am staring up at him from the bottom of a deep pool.

"I'm never an *us*." I say this solemnly, too solemnly, and it makes him laugh.

"Yes you are! You've told me about your us's."

I have, I guess. I don't know how to explain that I never felt like it was real before. I lived a long time away from my feelings, I guess. It was a matter of survival.

"Can I call you my non-boyfriend?" I ask him. I'm lying. I don't want this. It may be the first time I don't want this. I feel the smarting echo in my heart of telling someone you care about something you don't entirely mean. My words are hollow, insincere.

"You can call me whatever you want." He kisses my face. I think I can live with this. I will take something over nothing. We fall asleep drunk, wrapped around each other. With my eyes closed, it's like I'm clinging to a piece of driftwood.

I wake up in the morning and feel strange, feel alien again and out of water. I look at his face next to me and think I am comforted by it. Think: well we can't all just be happy all the time, where's the point in that? Think: this is going to end soon. He grinds his teeth in his sleep. The sun is rising. I shimmy out of his arms, positive he doesn't want me anywhere near him. He makes his groaning, sleeping noises and rolls over, away from me. I fall asleep again an hour later, restless and unsure, with the sinking certainty that I only ever feel more alone in relationships than out of them.

I dream of my father. He is eating a bowl of noodles with chopsticks in a Chinese restaurant and looking at me sideways, says, What's the problem, Sa-Sa?

Please don't call me Sa-Sa, I snap, it's a baby name.

But you're my baby!

When we wake up again, it's almost noon. We both have aching hangovers and walk down the street to get food. My heart is a stone dropping into the pit of my stomach. I don't reach for his hand.

"Where are we going?" he asks. I study his face. His fine face, his good face.

"Right over there," I say, pointing across the street to a café. He grabs my hand as I lower it, our fingers weave together and I feel both connected and separate from him. The previous night's drunken conversation has lingered, sits between us like an unwanted houseguest, and I am plagued with the vague guilt of having, sort of, lied to him. We sit down for breakfast. It's disgusting.

"My eggs are cold," he says. I feel responsible.

"I'm sorry, this place is usually good." I feel terrible. He shrugs, saying it's fine, really. It's not fine, not really, but the man next to us gives us his newspaper. We have little to talk about. I move my food around my plate, nauseated.

"What are you doing today?" he asks.

"I promised Jenny I would help her roommate make a video to apply to be on *Survivor*."

"Oh." Jason is quiet now. Where did the glue go? How have we spent so many hours with so much to talk about, such a respect and understanding between us and sit here now, with nothing to say? We finish our cold, icky meals in discontented silence.

I walk him to the subway and kiss him goodbye.

"I'll call you later," he says. I know that he won't. I study his face.

"I'll talk to you later," he says again, kissing me, smiling, and I can't look away from him. I'm trying to see to the bottom of his eyes, to his organs, his stomach, his soul. I know for a fact, with no reasonable explanation, that this is the last time we will ever see each other. He kisses me again. I think, for one second: this is it, we could just stand here forever on this street corner, bidding farewell to each other.

But we can't. Time is an arrow pointing forward.

VI.

I see normal women every day. Women with husbands and wedding bands, women with babies strapped to their chests, with strollers, with diaper bags and nannies and dogs. Women who live in cozy little homes filled with fine art and literature, with cats and dogs and gerbils, women who eat organic food and wipe their babies' asses with biodegradable recycled non-toxic alcohol free baby wipes.

Women who smell like lavender.

My brain is quiet. I sit in a park near my childhood home, obsessed with the mating rituals of pigeons. If the girl pigeon doesn't want to be courted, she can just fly away, can't she? Can't she just fly away? The male pigeon puffs out his chest and follows her, cooing and jerking his head back and forth. The female pitters about, nervously almost, looking back at him sideways with beady eyes before she takes off. He follows. They always follow.

I'm trying to let go of the world I imagine is safe and calm and normal. A world that I see as separate from myself, a world I've been orbiting around for years and years and years. I have to stop. It's not my reality. It's boring and sad and dull and comes from this idea that safe things will keep you happy. People spend their whole lives looking for solid ground where there is none, not really, not in a job or a home or even another person. All I can tell you is that I can't promise you anything. All I can tell you is that you can have everything you want, and you don't have to be all tortured about it.

I don't want to hear from you. I don't want to know that you're a coward and a fool. I'd rather tilt my face to the sun; wonder where you are.

* * *

At night I watch TV with my mother; my head is in her lap on a pillow and she strokes my arms absent-mindedly. I am always sad for her. She asks me about Jason. I tell her: “I don’t know. I tried to give him space.”

“You can’t change people, honey,” she says.

“I know,” I say. I close my eyes. Hot tears fill them to the brim.

“Oh, babe,” she says, wiping my face.

I don’t know what I am crying about: Jason’s disappearance, or my inability to convey my feelings, or the unshakable belief that I am a monster. Feeling spun out, separate from the world, like I’m constantly reaching for something I cannot ever seem to touch.

I try to go to sleep, but all I can do is roll around in my tiny twin-sized bed, fluffing and re-fluffing the pillows. All I feel is the distinct sensation of someone promising to come back for you and then never returning.

After I've been in bed for a half hour I hear a quiet knock on the door. I know it's my brother.

He comes in and sits on my bed.

“Did you ever take care of that mouse?” he asks. My brother is just like my dad, sometimes, all business.

“There was no mouse.”

“For real, Sandy?”

“Really, no dead mouse, I finally got up the courage to look under there and there was just the poison block and a pile of dust.”

“You’re ridiculous,” he says. “But, that’s good I guess.”

He adds the last part, I suspect, to make me feel better. He tells me about his day and the new girl he's seeing. She goes to Wellesley and works in an antique shop. This afternoon he took her and her friends to Chinatown. Then they watched the fireworks.

“That's nice,” I say. My brother is becoming well adjusted. He is so much less angry than he used to be. We sit in the dark. The light from the hallway spills on the floor in a gold, familiar puddle.

“How about you?” he asks. “How's your boy situation?”

“Well, he never called and I found out on Facebook that he got back together with his ex-girlfriend.” I sigh, involuntarily, my lungs always struggling for breath.

My brother shakes his head, makes a sound of disappointment. His hands are on his knees.

He is the stringy silhouette reincarnation of my father. He doesn't say anything.

“I have to go to sleep,” I say, “Lauren has us getting up at seven to go to the beach tomorrow.”

Lauren is our older sister. She is hen-like and stern, treating us

like helpless chicks."Of course she does," he says. I half expect him to try to impart some wisdom on me, or to tuck me in, but he just says goodnight and leaves, his broad shadow filling the doorway for one brief moment before he closes it behind him and is gone.

Sandy SooHoo *is a freelancer working in photography and film and writing in her spare time.*

DESERT OFFERING
Marie Conlan

Here: a sugar factory and a green flesh wound
of a baby cacti. Americana blowjobs,
medium rare steaks, ripe throats.
Loose poppy/loose opium.
Beast grief
wailing & so wet.
A ghost pepper meeting you
at the edge. The lavender
field toppling
into
no small thing. A cold
fissure. A big eyed baby and a small,
small womb. Here: she couldn't even finish—
Into such succession. Into such.

Marie Conlan *is a current MFA student at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. Originally from Minnesota, she currently resides in Colorado and spends her time between Boulder and the High Rockies.*

LOOKING FOR CUBA
Celine Aenlle-Rocha

It is not the same as a rejected passport or a canceled flight, but when I hover over Cuba, thinking now I will go, but I do not, there is the familiar hot pain rushing up my knuckles saying ha! you are not Cuban. You never will be.

I am not Cuban yet my father says he is, although he cannot remember the house where he lived or that his mother brought him to a prison in Havana to visit his father, dismissed for treason. He does not recall being wrapped in a blanket and taken onto a ship, his only belongings a pack of diapers, his mother in tears, her husband saying if they call my name I will go, but you will stay on this boat.

The boat was white and they were not fed at all until they landed, and then they were given American peanuts while they were interrogated:

> did you work in the government? what is their plan? how many cubans are coming over? it's just terrible over there, isn't it? well you can be american, you can stay here and we will give you a job, but you must get new clothes and a new language, howdoesthatsound?

I am not Cuban, but my grandmother can list the birthday of every relative born in Havana and Miami and Spain. She hands me old, flowery paper with faces and numbers so old they shock me.

But, after all, my grandfather was not first, nor was his revolution.

My grandparents ran up north and stayed until the winter iced their linen shirts and my father's small, still growing heart.

Because:

> *what can we bring?*
> one coat.
> *one jacket and one coat?*
> pick one.
> *I will bring the coat.*
>
> (and so they froze)

Thus we cannot be cold and we cannot be in Cuba so instead we sink into limestone walls deep within Miami, where the coral is pink and one can be happy, peaceful, with not one single revolution around.

Yet still I am not Cuban, although I stick my fingers into hot, cool vanilla flan and I dream in Spanish, and I hear my grandfather speak of water so clear you could see the whole island reflected back in the waves.

I am not Cuban and neither is my mother and she isn't anything else either, according to you. She went to college and the sororities told her you are too black for us, and the black association told her you look too white.

> (but if I am not Cuban and I am not black and I am not white may I still be American even if sometimes I want to be more than that?)

I am not Cuban, but I will say I am anyway. I will breathe in the Castilian poetry of my childhood, I will push back my hair to hang over a boat in Key West and jump 90 miles across.

No, I am not Cuban, as you have told me:
You live here, you have always lived here, you say.

Yes, I hear you.
(but I can hear that old nostalgia too)

Celine Aenlle-Rocha *was born in Miami Beach, grew up in Los Angeles and attended Kenyon College, where she studied creative writing and contributed to student-run literary magazines* HIKA *and* Luna de la cosecha. *She currently resides in New York City, where she is working in book publishing and writing her first novel.*

HOW PEOPLE LEAVE, PART II
Melissa Moorer

This time it will be different. This time, I'll wrap the old up carefully so nothing leaks out. I will store it in a cool dry place where it won't get moldy. Someplace where the cats can't get to it or even your nosy mother. Eventually, when I have the courage, I will dispose of it someplace safe. I will bury it by the side of the road. Or burn it. Then when I have forgotten enough, when I don't even drive by it on the way to work anymore, I'll be able to. But something always gets left out: the picture that fell behind, the book I thought was mine (but has your name inside), the unreadable note you left in the margin of page one hundred and thirty-four.

When you started over you did everything right. There was no warning and nothing left. One minute I was riding in the passenger's seat, your hand warm and possessive on my knee. Next thing I know, I'm on the side of the road staring up through burger wrappers and old soda cans, the yellow needles of weeds growing out of the cracks in the asphalt. Your car was already out of sight and the mile marker was twenty-seven. Maybe that's where I should start this time: a number. But there are a lot of numbers and no limit to them, not even the speed of light.

I tried exorcism, but you're not a ghost and now I miss the ghosts that are gone.

I could start like you did with a car and a road and nothing else, not even green. I could use that car to drive a line between then and now, a line so thick no one would see past it to that other girl who tried too hard. The girl who said 'sorry' all the time and usually meant it. There would be no breadcrumbs fast enough to catch up and the birds would take care of them anyway. No one (not counting me) could follow that dotted line back to the house, to the bedroom still covered in our clothes, to the way I looked at you with helpless love and longing right up until. The dishes would still be in the sink, the TV in the next room murmuring incessantly of violence and hope, its language of disappointment always just about (but never quite ready) to explode into ecstasy.

I could press delete over and over and over until we are nothing but blank white and blinking. But nothing is ever really gone in ones and zeroes. We would still be there lurking in a hard drive or cloud, somewhere I could never reach with hands and fingers like these. You'd need special hands, special words. Machine words.

I think I'll start before numbers, someplace scrubbed clean with bleach or maybe acid and buckets of scalding hot, soapy water. I will have to get rubber gloves and brushes small enough to get into every crack and fraction (your toothbrush is perfect). I will scrub it all down and start from the smooth, shiny clean of nothing and nowhere. There are no numbers or

even words you can find for the place where I will begin (you'd say a zero is nothing, but I say zero is a place that is held so it's something). Look behind zero for the place I won't be, already some place else, without you or even me. Some non-place infinite and empty all at once, ready.

Melissa Moorer *was struck by lightning when she was eight. Her work has been short-listed for a few awards (Glimmer Train Very Short Fiction Prize, Pushcart, storySouth Million Writers) and published in luminous journals (*The Butter/The Toast*,* The Offing Mag *(forthcoming),* LCRW*,* Hot Metal Bridge*,* FLAPPERHOUSE*,* Vestal Review*). She was Assistant Editor at* The Butter*, where she wrote 'This Writer's On Fire' series for Roxane Gay.*

PELVIS I AND PELVIS II (IMAGINARY DIPTYCH)
Frankie Drayus

This one says I

look with a vacancy

I hold nothing in this
my cipher—it's a lesser
evil—? The hole in hold—
(it's what is done—)
to bring the greater hell in held—
so I am brought. Eye
of blue. I without blinking.
Distant ocean which
sees and thinks nothing.
No I without blinking:

What was a cradle now is a frame
Catch is to keep as death is to *blaze*—

What there is to know I

will not tell you. Neither
will I. We are two and yet

we are none. You are the
one and yet you pierce

nothing. You—piercing
the nothing—

you are the eyelid opening
up to this—

the picture
picturing emptiness—

Frankie Drayus *has work forthcoming in* Poet Lore. *She lives in Los Angeles, where she is a repeat survivor of the 3:15 Experiment.*

OUR LAST FIGHT
Nina Bannett

Sorry that I hurt you

you felt unsupported

glad you were able
to get your feelings out
in the open

broken love
low with crumble

suppressing neglect and loss
about each other
we can talk more

hollow shade
thin with dawn

strengthen ourselves
plan for a cathedral meeting

instead you will tear
the structure down.

Nina Bannett*'s poetry has appeared in journals such as* Open Minds Quarterly*,* Bellevue Literary Review*,* CALYX *and online at* Topology*,* the fem*,* Snapdragon*, and Silver Birch Press's blog. Her chapbook* Lithium Witness *was published by Finishing Line Press in 2011, and her first full-length collection of poems,* These Acts of Water*, was published in 2015 by ELJ Publications. She is an associate professor of English and department chairperson at New York City College of Technology, CUNY.*

LOVE LIKE STONE
Rae Liberto

Leave the door open
so I can enter
like I live here
been here
never left

Nod to me nonchalant
like you aren't
giddy inside
like together doesn't
electrify your skin

Many layered woman
mistress of the casual
my unaffected romantic

A grin cracks
your well crafted
neutral

A sustained stare
and your guards
stand down

Leave the door open
so I can enter
like I live here
been here
never left

Rae Liberto *is a queer feminist poet based in Brooklyn. She is currently working on her first collection of poetry. Rae's work will be featured in the forthcoming winter issue of* Lavender Review.

CYHYRAETH
Holly Day

The next time I see my mother, it will be because I'm dying
close to death, she will stand at the side of my bed
put her cool hands on my burning forehead
bring me soup.

She will look just like she did
when I drew that last picture of her when I was a child
how I tried to draw her with my imperfect hands:
too beautiful and too young to be so sick.

Holly Day *has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include* Music Theory for Dummies*,* Music Composition for Dummies*,* Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*,* Piano All-in-One for Dummies*,* Walking Twin Cities*,* Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*,* Nordeast Minneapolis: A History*, and* The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in* New Ohio Review*,* SLAB*, and* Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book,* Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press.*

3 TALES WITHOUT WITCHES
Devon Miller-Duggan

Ladybugs in thousands inside
an old farmhouse set on strong land among
bright trees. They cover everything, even
the dragons held down in ever room by
ceilings. Lured by sugar
the aging king can no longer swallow.

* * *

The bones of one creature extracted
to bind up the body of another.
The bones of many creatures reamed clean
and pierced to make the musics of another being.
The bones of one creature grafted
onto the bones of another so that it may walk.

* * *

King wounded unhealably and throbbed awake,
soothed ever only by a small boat
on living body of water, casting
line after baited line, or
taking a long knife to spiny limbs
of dry growth of his dying land,
clearing any branch that might feed a fire.

Devon Miller-Duggan *has published poems in* Rattle*,* Shenandoah*,* Margie*,* Christianity and Literature*,* Gargoyle*. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Delaware. Her books include* Pinning the Bird to the Wall *in 2008 and a chapbook,* Neither Prayer, Nor Bird*, in 2013.* Alphabet Year *will be published by Wipf & Stock in 2016.*

THE EMPTY NEST
Kerri Casey

A cardinal slams his body against a window. His scarlet reflection leaps forward. The mirror bird matches him wing beat for wing beat, anticipating every lunge and peck at the exact moment he makes them. The bird in the glass cannot be beaten. Something deep in the cardinal's breast compels him all the same, driving him hard against himself.

In the trees, the female cardinals watch and wait for the battle to end. Their quivering, brown bodies cry out for the conjuring of eggs. The call of the reflection comes again, and again, and the magic of spring eludes them.

Kerri Conrad *recently completed a novella of literary fiction. In* Surviving Mississippi*, the mysterious story of a woman's death unfolds just as Hurricane Katrina tears into the pages of the book. A novel-in-stories is in progress, as is a modern interpretation of* Romeo and Juliet. *Kerri writes from the Blue Ridge mountains of Asheville, NC, and can be reached at kerriconradwrites@gmail.com. She is currently seeking representation.*

FEATURED ARTIST

Liv Hoffman *is a young photographer who grew up on the Bowery and started photography when she was 12 years old, using a flip phone before buying her first digital camera in high school. Her work is deeply rooted in her neighborhood and documents a variety of themes such as graffiti, youth, friendship, homelessness, and urban decay. Her photos have been featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Outlaw Arts, Con Artist Collective, and MoMA PS1. In 2015, Liv Hoffman received a National Gold Key in the Scholastic Awards and was a merit winner in Youngarts. In September, she will attend the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago for her BFA in photography.*

Celine Aenlle-Rocha
Nina Bannett
Amanda Bradley
Kerri Casey
Erica Charis
Marie Conlan
Lauren Conte
Holly Day
Frankie Drayus

Kelle Groom
Chachi Hauser
Liv Hoffman
Tatiana M.R. Johnson
Rae Liberto
Helene Macaulay
Kim Magowan
Devon Miller-Duggan
Melissa Moorer

Carrie Mullins
Eloisa Pérez-Lozano
t pomar
Michelle Ross
Jennifer Russ
Sandy SooHoo
Karissa Knox Sorrell
Cynthia Vander Ven
Demi Wetzel