

The artwork is a complex mixed-media piece. A large, pale, almost featureless face with dark, expressive eyes and a dark, jagged mouth is the central focus. The face is surrounded by dark, swirling, branch-like structures. To the right, a small bird with a red head and back and a white belly is perched on a branch. At the bottom, there are dark, abstract shapes and a large, dark, circular form with a wheel-like structure. The background is a light, textured blue-green with yellow and red accents.

broad!

winter 2016/17

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intimacy *queered*

October 14th - November 27th



**WHEN I WAS A CHILD I REFUSED TO BELIEVE
HUMANS HAD BONES**
Selena Loomis

My bones are made of sheep's wool, I'm sure of it.

When they're not felting themselves inside me to keep safe my heart under shortened breath, they're flipping over and pretending not to be there at all—slowly working on accepting the redness in this giant dye-pot of my blood.

They're simmering on the burner of July while I pick green beans for dinner; trying and trying and trying to soak up some warmth in February under blankets of their kin on my skin, dyed to seem softer than they remember being on their own animals.

My woolen ribs smile at the baskets of yarn in my apartment corners, asking if they want to become thick sweaters; winding and winding the strands over my woolen fingertips until my woolen wrists can't twist again.

My bones wobble inside me, unsure which way is up most of the time. I can't tell if this is because they are trying to felt themselves together tighter, to keep me vertical, or trying to loosen their fibrous binds, and make me more flexible. I think it is always the former since I struggle with schedule changes, messy sleeping patterns, and daylight savings.

My woolen bones, they're tripping over each other, disconnecting from their joint sockets, allowing too much space between my shoulders and my heart. I tried to get them diagnosed but the doctors couldn't run diagnostics on spun wool and tufts of batting. Until they can figure it out, I rest in bed. It seems that is where most of the silent and forgotten work of the woman occurs, anyhow.

As a child I ate butter by the stick and refused to truly believe that humans had bones. I tried to counter it all by giving my own woolen skeleton a hefty overcoat of meat. Now I have bars of soap with lanolin in them to soften the flesh that sits on top. I try to forgive my sheep's wool bones by washing softly, and dressing warmly. I don't want them to forget to hold me up.

Selena Loomis is a genderqueer fiber artist and sometimes gardener originally from St. Louis, MO. When not writing, she can be found knitting, baking, planning for spring, or singing to her two hairless pet rats. She currently lives in southwest Ohio where she studies performance art at Antioch College. She has had a few things published in college-affiliated journals and zines.

SLEDGEHAMMER
Heather Wheat

Long before I was born, my
mother's mother grew tired
of asking her husband to

tear down a wall.

He wouldn't, and so she took
up a sledgehammer, knocked
enough of the wall over

so my grandfather had no
choice but to

do as she'd said.

After my grandfathers
died, quite close together,

my grandmothers wiped their
hands of marriage, said,

I'm done,

said, No more for me,
I'm good,

There are no strings on me.

But here I am, caught,
wriggling, bound, strung,

looking, for all the world,
like a girl who needs a

sledgehammer.

***Heather Wheat** is a mother, wife, daughter, writer, teacher, book-lover, reader. Her poetry has appeared in Poetry Quarterly, Long Exposure Magazine, on GFT Press's "Ground Fresh Thursday" web series, and in GFT Press: One in Four; her other work and essays are on Bookwitty, BUST.com, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, in Richmond Magazine, and on The Washington Post's education blog. She has loved poetry since her AP Literature teacher introduced her to "35/10" by Sharon Olds, and she understood the power poems had to encapsulate emotions and life in a solid form, yet make both transcend size.*

MATHEMATICS
Jacinta Clay

$$\sum_{\text{nothing}}^{\text{everything}} F(t) = \frac{dP}{dt} = m \frac{dv}{dt} + v \frac{dm}{dt}$$

It cannot be concluded that mass has changed;
Perhaps our mass is immeasurable.

$$B_{efore} = A_{fter}^*$$

$$(m_1 + m_2)v_0 = m_1v_1 + m_2v_2$$

$$us_{then}happy? = me_{now}how/are/you_I'mquitewellthankyou + you_{now}how/are/you_{fine}$$

Isolated, we compete for momentum.
Our energy will never be conserved.

Even after his fingers forgot how to hold mine, they remembered the softness of my lower thigh.

Jacinta Clay is a student studying mathematical geophysics and literary arts at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Her favorite emoticon is the winky face and her favorite pastime is Netflix. When she's not watching Buffy kill vampires or Chandler crack jokes, she's probably out dancing, writing or catching up on homework.

ARTIFACTS
Anna De Vaul

At seven a.m. I sit to smoke and weave my way through a labyrinth of pictures: the river, the cooling ponds, the reactor that Jack built. Here are the nozzles capping process tubes that made plutonium destined for Nagasaki on a cool August day. Here are the tank farms storing the waste, their sun-warmed sides once grills for fried eggs, back in the seventies before they were filled, before they were leaking. Here are the empty acres of sagebrush crisscrossed by wires, closed railway tracks and Potable Water trucks, giving way to guarded fences and the first waves of commercial corn rolling off into the blurred distance beyond. And here is Jack, kind and funny Uncle Jack, skin sallow around his oxygen-tubed smile, still cheerful even after they took the leg, slowly making his way across the room to show me the work of his youth.

Anna De Vaul was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in a variety of journals under her own name and her pen name, including Wasafiri, The Interpreter's House, The Missing Slate, and The Istanbul Review. She is also an editor for the award-winning journal Lighthouse. One of her more recent projects is a pamphlet of poetry (Cosmonaut) about experiences living in a small industrial city in China, her love life, and her uterus, of which most of these poems are a part.



A Young Woman's Brief Narrative History of the United States

III. A Short Preface to the Second Revolution

...Furthermore, after lengthy debate and discussion, the Fourth Colonial Congress decided to send the declaration of their independence in September of 1762 before the cold set in and travel across the Atlantic became impossible.¹ According to the seers, the declaration would be received with no small amount of astonishment; those in England had long assumed that the colonists were mostly content and peaceful, barring some internal conflicts in the early 1740s.² Trade had been uninterrupted, and there had been no clashes with the Native tribes, with the French, or, in the case of the southern colonies, with the Spanish. Thus, it was believed that the declaration would not initially be seen as a serious statement of the colonists' intent. However, once the Crown ascertained that the declaration was indeed in earnest, it would not be long before King George would declare the colonies in open rebellion and send troops to defend his empire.

¹ The declaration was surprisingly brief, containing only two assertions. First, after careful consideration and discussion, the colonists had determined the need to dissolve the current bonds between themselves and the British Crown. Second, given that the situation in the colonies had changed drastically (no specifics were provided regarding precisely which changes had occurred), it was both necessary and right for the colonies to govern themselves to ensure their own safety and happiness.

² These conflicts, which the Crown had elected to allow the colonists to settle among themselves, marked the impetus and eventual termination of the first revolution, occurring nearly 70 years after Skills first appeared in the Americas.

No adequate explanations exist for the sudden emergence of Skills, but by the 1670s, there were fantastical reports of strange occurrences not just in the British colonies but among the Native tribes, in New France, and throughout the Spanish colonies. The reports were so fantastic, in fact, that those in the mother countries had no reason not to ignore them. In the colonies, however, these reports were taken quite seriously. The few letters that remain related instances of people who could move objects without touching them, those who knew, and could manipulate, people's sentiments without asking, and people who could glimpse, with surprising accuracy, into the future. In the early days, many colonists viewed these Skills as a curse rather than a gift (the same could not be said for the Native tribes) and prayed that one would not come to their children since, by the early 1700s, it had become clear that the Skills were not hereditary. Even more perplexing, those who were Skilled had nothing in common excepting low rank. Given this one distinguishing feature, it was assumed by the ruling classes that the Skilled only existed to assist those of a higher status.

This assumption held true until the late 1730s when rebellions and riots erupted across the British colonies. These rebellions were eventually quelled, and the leaders, including Thomas Washburn's father, were shot or hanged. But because the Skilled were valuable to their masters, rather than killing them all—as some

In anticipation of the imminent war, there were two immediate difficulties that had to be resolved. First, the recently amassed colonial army was ill-prepared for combat and in need of significant training, and, second, no one had thought very deeply about the tactical use of Skills on the battlefield. It was decided that learning the essentials of military discipline should commence immediately—with the much needed assistance of the colonial allies in the French military and the Native tribes³—and, in the intervening time, those who had extensively studied the application of Skills would sort out the other difficulty. Following brief discussion, it was determined that a census, in which each Skilled volunteer would provide a short demonstration of his capabilities, should be taken to determine what tools the colonial army had at its disposal.

The census was completed with little difficulty, and by November, the generals were able to arrange units based on which Skills were likely to work best together—and with little thought as to which men would work best together. Each Skilled man had his own peculiarities, and so compelling them to collaborate bewildered some and irritated others. The worst of these conflicts were mitigated by the empathths, and there were no empathths who were used more frequently than José David Murray.⁴

proposed as the best way to maintain order—laws were passed to prohibit their movements and actions. These laws reestablished peace for a short time, but they were unable to prevent the uprisings that occurred in the spring and summer of 1740.

The colonial elites had underestimated the number of Skilled in the colonies and their ability to build alliances with other disenfranchised and dispossessed peoples—namely the poor, indentured servants, slaves (many of whom the Skilled counted as kin), and some of the Native tribes who hoped that this alliance would prove more advantageous than their current treaties. Consequently, the elites were highly unprepared when the Skilled and their allies rose up to overthrow the legislatures in Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia. (The Skilled in the other colonies soon followed suit.) Force was again called upon to put down the uprisings, though the revolutionary forces proved too numerous to be overcome. By the spring of 1741, the fighting was over, and a new ruling order was ready to be established. The First Colonial Congress was a confusion of disparate needs and demands, but eventually they were able to come to a consensus regarding land distribution for the newly emancipated, representation in the legislatures, and other matters of importance. The former elites who were able to adapt were included in the new order; those who were not, who numbered fewer than expected, abandoned the colonies, returning to England where they learned to stay silent on their displacement.

³ There were some tribes who believed their interests would be best served in fighting with the colonists; others, however, elected to stay out of the conflict entirely.

⁴ José David Murray was the son and only living child of Joseph Murray. As a young man, Joseph journeyed to the West Indies to improve his fortunes. His professional endeavors were not as successful as he had hoped. His personal endeavors, however, proved much more lucrative; he met Inez Avila and, following a brief courtship, married her in 1737. In the fall of 1738, José David was born. A daughter was born three years later, but neither the child nor the mother survived. Joseph Murray, unable to bear remaining in the Caribbean and hopeful of the opportunities that could be found in the colonies following the revolution, returned with his son to New York. His own health failed him three years later, leaving young José David an orphan. Joseph's brother, James Murray, took in the boy and, once his Skill of empathy manifested, saw to his education and his later apprenticeship.

He had such success pacifying Noah Beckett's troops that Thomas Washburn sent for him.⁵ Seeing Murray's unequalled Skill in practice, Washburn immediately took him on as one of his aides, and, despite being somewhat short-tempered, Murray quickly proved himself invaluable.⁶

These conflicts among the Skilled troops were soon eclipsed in light of a more significant problem. Following the census and the distribution of Skilled men, it had become apparent that because there were not enough of the right sort of Skills among the men, there would be significant limitations in the colonial army. The Native tribes had made up for the deficiencies in their ranks by allowing their Skilled women to serve, a decision deemed odd but understandable given the positions of influence women already held in their societies. But although the Skilled women of the colonies had proven themselves as able assistants to their fathers and husbands in business, law, and medicine, it was difficult for many of the colonial army officers to accept that women could—or should—go willingly into battle.⁷

In early December, the Colonial Congress convened to settle issues of funding and strategy for the war, but the meeting quickly devolved into a dispute over personnel. Despite assurances from the seers regarding the likely

⁵ Thomas Washburn was the first son and second child born to Anne of the Smith plantation and Jonathan of the Ashley plantation. By the time Thomas was seven, his Skill of prophecy had already manifested. This, over time, made him invaluable to his master, who relied more and more heavily on Thomas as he grew older. It is, therefore, rather ironic that it was also this Skill that made Thomas of great use during the first revolution. He was integral to the overthrow of the legislature, having some knowledge of its inner workings, and in the subsequent battles, as his visions helped him plan effective strategies and ensure timely and much needed victories for the revolutionary forces. It is often forgotten, however, that his family connections proved as important as his Skill; in the early 1730s, his sister had escaped from the Smith plantation and joined the Shawnee tribe. Her ties to both societies proved critical in helping build an alliance between the Skilled of the colony of Virginia and the tribe both during and following the revolution. Meanwhile, his mother, Anne, escaped in the early days of the revolution and helped smuggle out the young and vulnerable from the plantations, keeping them safe and away from the fighting.

⁶ There was a joke in the camp that it was Murray's temper rather than his Skill that kept the men in line.

⁷ The women, however, showed themselves to be more than willing to serve. When the calls went out for volunteers, scores of women offered up themselves and their Skills. This seemingly rash behavior was blamed on a pamphlet regarding the rights and privileges of women that had been circulating through the colonies. The anonymous document argued that as Skills had leveled the relationship between men of all races and stations so they should also reconstitute the place women occupied in society; hence, the author argued, the professions should open to women so that they might be allowed to provide for their own livelihoods rather than being dependent upon the whims of fate and men. A number of responses were penned, refuting the assertions made in the pamphlet, claiming that the differences between men were nothing more than custom while those between men and women were of nature and, thus, not to be subverted. These responses, however, did little to stop women from attempting to volunteer. One girl from Boston cut her hair, stole clothing from her younger brother, and joined the Massachusetts army. She was finally discovered in November—though she had made herself so useful in the previous months, her captain, a man named John Freeman, endeavored to find a way to keep her in the camp.

location of the first of the battles, the delegates could not agree on the redistribution of the Skilled men, fearing that the loss of any of these men in what could be vital areas could have devastating consequences for their own families, businesses, and properties.⁸ The arguments persisted for a fortnight before the Congress elected to disband for the benefit of those celebrating the Christmas holiday.

Meanwhile, Charlotte Washburn,⁹ having heard a great deal about the difficulties the Congress was facing and knowing the strain they were creating for her husband, decided a distraction was wanted; consequently, she decided to hold a party ostensibly to celebrate the season.¹⁰ Mrs. Washburn, it was said, had a gift for composing a party, so it is unsurprising that surviving accounts describe the evening as singular. It is, however, peculiar that the most important encounter that occurred that evening was between two people who were indifferent to the party's diversions.

The first, José David Murray, had attempted to decline the invitation, being neither overly fond of the company of others nor of dancing, but Mrs. Washburn would not hear of his absence, citing the great use he had been to her husband in the past months. The second, Amelia St Clair,¹¹ the niece of Mrs. Washburn, was not normally one to avoid a crowd, being possessed of a quick tongue and a clever wit, but she had recently recovered from an illness.

⁸ The disputes were focused on the imprecise nature of the seers' visions. Due to the influence of free will, it is rare for seers to envision only one possible future, though some futures are decidedly more likely to occur than others. So, while the locations of the battles could be surmised, the element of doubt in these visions guaranteed that the disputes in Congress could not be settled swiftly.

⁹ Charlotte Johnson Washburn was the second daughter and third child born to Hannah and Adam Johnson. Andrew, a free black carpenter from New York, married Hannah in 1716. Their first born was a son, named for his father, followed two years later by Charlotte and her twin Diana. Charlotte's Skill of prophecy manifested when she was thirteen, and due to her family's limited means, she was hired out to the S---- family who used her Skill to ensure the continued growth of their wealth and influence. Charlotte's visions, however, were put to better use during the revolution; it was on her advice that the ambush of Albany was planned for the spring of 1740. Following the revolution, and during the first convening of the Colonial Congress, Charlotte's brother Adam met Thomas Washburn whom he brought home to meet his family. Thomas and Charlotte were almost immediately enamored of each other and, facing no disapproval from either his family or hers, married in the summer of 1742, after which they established a home in New York.

¹⁰ In a letter to Lucy Crane, Mrs. Washburn wrote, "The party is meant to be pure lightness and frivolity. However, it would be fortuitous if the gathering could provide a solution to our current dilemma. Perhaps a chance meeting could be arranged that would offer a key." This statement has been read as evidence that Mrs. Washburn had other motivations for holding this fête, though it is, of course, impossible to read intention into a letter written in haste to an acquaintance.

¹¹ Amelia St Clair was the first and only daughter of Diana and Gilbert St Clair. Gilbert, a Frenchman from Montreal, met Diana in New York and married her in the winter of 1736. In the spring, she followed him back to New France, but hearing rumors of unrest in the British colonies, they returned to New York in 1739. Gilbert

Mrs. Washburn, being aware of Murray's aversion to society and knowing her niece's need for a quiet companion, introduced the two. Shortly after, they disappeared together for nearly an hour.¹²

What transpired between Miss St Clair and Murray can only be guessed, though the effects of their conversation provide some hint as to how the two occupied their time. The first of the effects was comparatively limited: a flurry of letters that passed between Murray and Miss St Clair, ultimately ending in an understanding between the two. The second of the effects had a much broader impact.

The Colonial Congress resumed the first week of January, where new plans were proposed, argued, and vetoed. It is likely that nothing would have been resolved before spring were it not for Murray's contribution to a discussion that occurred over dinner at the headquarters of Thomas Washburn.

The dinner conversation had turned toward the dispute that had waylaid the Congress. Blame was assigned to the various delegations—Virginia's was viewed as particularly intractable—before the men began offering solutions of their own volition. The outcome of this conversation is perhaps best articulated in a letter written by Abel Smith to his intended, Elizabeth Carrasco:

“The mood at the table was initially somber, though there was the occasional attempt at levity—absurd propositions proffered only in jest. This is why we should be forgiven for not knowing that Murray's plan was not a lark. Without prompting or explanation, Murray asked why no one had, as of yet, suggested that the Skilled ladies make up the deficiencies in the collected armies. A couple men

joined the revolutionary forces and was wounded in the fall of 1740; shortly thereafter, he died. Diana's deep sorrow was broken only when her daughter, Amelia, was born. Diana and her daughter lived with her parents in New York until 1747, when they both fell ill. Diana did not survive her illness; Amelia barely did. Charlotte insisted on taking the child into her household, both out of devotion to her sister and because she had discovered that she and her husband were not to be blessed with children of their own. Amelia was treated very much as a favored daughter by her aunt and uncle. They provided her with the best education possible, befitting both her intelligence and her developing Skill of empathy.

¹² According to the recollection of Jane Franks, a close friend of the Washburn family, the two went in search of a calmer place in the house because Amelia had become light-headed. However, Amelia likely had other motives for abandoning the party. Like her aunt, Amelia had been closely following the progress of the Congress, and she had ideas regarding how to settle the stalemate, many of which are recorded in her journals. (See Chapter 4, footnote 11.) She was well aware of the favorable position José David held among her uncle's aides and also may very well have realized that her opinions on how to resolve the crisis facing the Congress would likely strike her uncle more favorably if they came from someone other than herself. (How complicit her aunt was in this plan is unclear. See footnote 10.) For his part, José David proved unusually receptive to hearing Amelia's ideas. He had taken an immediate liking to her, given his penchant for intellectual conversation and a good argument. Despite their initial amiability, later letters showed that they were still seemingly both surprised that their temporary alliance offered the possibility of a more permanent partnership.

laughed, but it was clear that Murray had asked this question in earnest. Before anyone else could speak, Samuel Howard offered his support to the proposition, wondering aloud why the women should not be permitted to use their Skills in aid of the war effort, considering that there were innumerable women not only willing but eager to serve. Betsey, I must confess that, thinking of you, I could not help asking if we could, in good conscience put our sisters, our wives and sweethearts, in danger. Several of the men took up my part, and there was, for a time, a lively discussion. The General, however, remained silent, until Benjamin Ford addressed him, saying that surely he would not permit his own niece to take up arms. The General considered the comment, and when he finally spoke, he said, quite unexpectedly, that he and his wife had always endeavored to give their niece her liberty, so should she wish to serve, he would not stop her. His comment abruptly ended our debate. In this manner, we had stumbled upon an answer to our troubles—though many of us, myself included, were not yet comfortable with this solution.”¹³

Once this idea was accepted, Thomas Washburn and his men began to work through the practicalities of placing women on the battlefield. Washburn and his officers and aides made conjectures regarding how and where the women would be most useful before Washburn asked Howard and Murray to write a proposal.¹⁴ In search of suggestions for improvements, and believing that there were still problems that they could not see, Washburn requested assistance from members of the Mohawk tribe who were present in the camp to discuss strategy. After conferring at length, one of the Mohawk women questioned why the men did not request guidance and assistance from their own women. This counsel was seen as good sense, and missives were sent to the women whom the aides and officers knew best. Replies were sent with alacrity, but a few of the women opted to send themselves rather than their words, maintaining that their thoughts and ideas would carry more weight if they were present to deliver them.¹⁵

Ultimately, this assemblage generated a functional strategy that they

¹³ This letter was included in the papers of Mr. and Mrs. Abel Smith and willingly shared by their daughter, Juliana. Mrs. Smith’s response, which is as notable as this letter, contains a clear rebuke of her husband’s assumption of her helplessness: “I am much obliged to you for your consideration for the safety of the ladies, though this concern, I think, might be more than we require. I believe we Skilled ladies might be trusted to ensure our own well-being, as we have in prior circumstances, and exercise authority over our own autonomous selves.”

¹⁴ They discussed and proposed the use of women in unconventional scenarios, perhaps remembering the great use Skilled women had been in ensuring the equanimity of the Royal Governors during the transitional years following the first revolution.

¹⁵ According to the available records, these women numbered six: Mrs. Washburn, Miss St Clair, Mrs. Rush (the sister of Sergeant Howard), Mrs. Ford, and her sister Miss Morgan.

presented to the Colonial Congress on a bright but cold day in the final week of January. It had been assumed that Thomas Washburn would put forward the proposal himself; instead, he elected to allow his wife to speak for him. This decision proved to be critical. The Congress afforded Mrs. Washburn every courtesy, though many of men present did not attempt to hide their surprise at hearing a woman speak sensibly and knowledgeably regarding matters of war.¹⁶ Once she was finished, a debate commenced over the reasonableness of the proposal. There were a number of reservations, some of which were easily countered while others called for more considered discussion. Eventually, however, the opposing voices were either convinced or outnumbered by those willing and able to see the merits of the plan. It took only one week more before the proposal was formally approved.

The adoption of this plan provided for the success of several of the early battles with the British. In one instance, Elizabeth Carrasco Smith, a talented Mover, caused chaos by placing a fire in a British camp, destroying a cache of supplies and ensuring the capture of most of the soldiers. Other Movers, like Susanna Morgan, performed raids, stole supplies and, with the assistance of female Seers, created blockades across vital roads, impeding the movement of the British troops. Empaths, like Amelia St Clair and Mrs. Ishmael Rush, became able spies, due to their remarkable proficiency in gathering and transporting confidential reports. These contributions, and innumerable others, were crucial in ensuring a swift and decisive end to the war. In truth, it has been claimed by some that without the service of the women, the American bid for freedom would have been an utter and complete failure.

¹⁶ José David Murray's journal contains an excellent description of the reaction of those in the room: "The silence was absolute though it was a silence born out of shock rather than admiration. Many of the men who had been plainly ready to dismiss the words of a woman—even a woman such as Mrs. Washburn—unexpectedly found themselves leaning forward in their chairs, attending to her every word. Miss St Clair, who, rather distractingly, had placed herself at my side, identified to herself, and to me, those who were inclined to take our part. As she has a better grasp of the minds and sentiments of men than I do, I was inclined to believe her."

THE BACK SIDES OF THINGS
Hannah Albee

It is as if now her feet are locked
In tracks not unlike the roller skates
she once wore, the ones with the key
that wound heavy steel grips
around her soles and heels to secure her body
in place when she wobbled off as a human wheelie,
a vaudevillian act of near calamity.
It is the backsides of things now
Sliding by.
Used to be
the trip, this commute, had been a way out and beyond,
a getaway, a Bon Voyage.
But now the steel wheels clinch her
as much as they do the straight lines of track.
No veering off course
from the morning in, the late afternoon out,
or from the clicks on the ten ride ticket,
punched holes in a row, one
Two three.

She once or twice stopped off at other stations
to grab at exploration villages
that caught her attention, but these excursions
as it turned out,
proved only to be lonely and expensive and brought to her only
more longing, more voyeurism of what she did not know:
the back sides of things,

It is the backs of things every day. The backyards, the still swimming-
pool water, the desultory swing-sets, the rusted cars and weedy
kitchen gardens, the empty lots and locked warehouses, the sleepy
construction yards, and their earthmoving machines, always
at rest, always empty, and the backs of things like whole towns and
parking garages and steamy pyramids of brown bark mulch and dirt
and fertilizer which only make more terrible the flourishes of fronts –
the sudden reveals of quaintness – the kind, relented privilege –
the charity of inclusion – a brief servant and master shared quarters
rendezvous: the tastefully renovated brick train station winking at her
with its low hanging eaves, the shiny black lamp posts, buttoned up tall
to make civilized their meeting.

Beyond that, only the wildness
of invasive vines blanketing each standing tree and fence to form
rounded, cartoonish monster shapes that hide native species,
the sticks and the spikes and the packed and rooted forest floor.

The backs of things reveal to her the flourish of organic and rounded
graffiti letter shapes, inflated loops and curlicues, iridescent colors,
both faded and bright, fluid purples and reds and silvers revealing
a life cycle of spontaneous and mysterious regeneration,
a nocturnal language on the backs
of cement block buildings and dynamited cliffs and small, emptied
Roosevelt-era utility signal boxes still too young
to be called ruins.

***Hannah Albee** is a Writers' Workshop teacher and Communications Manager at Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen in New York City. With a background in education and counseling, her work with soup kitchen guests and volunteers has informed and strengthened her own craft. When she took some coursework toward an MFA in Professional and Creative Writing at Western Connecticut State University, she was a student editor for the student-run Poor Yorick Journal. Her poem 'For Immediate Release' appeared in the Summer 2015 issue of Apeiron Review.*

SOLSTICE
Sam DeFlitch

I can feel the cracks between worlds
as though I could stretch out my fingers
and stroke the portal, make it sigh
as a final sticky night wraps up her shift,
punching the clock at dawn
that leaves the lesser shaking,
the leaves so dead and vibrant,
a golden yield before a full stop;

tonight she slips between
layers of blankets, a soft reminder
that she comes without the beckoning
of your fingers, the blessing of your
tongue, and delights in the dark.

And not draped in starlight,
some sigh of the universe—
she names herself the earth,
soil that spills through fingers,
rings in the tree spine.
Corporeal and visceral,
a body thrumming
upon cranberry bogs,
a curve of cornfields
upon the jawline of a grey horizon,
calling doves at dawn. She is nothing
so much as life, a touch of the divine.

So paint the doorpost with your blood,
for something moves with languid chill
and all the women feel the turning,

Samantha DeFlitch is an MFA candidate and TA at the University of New Hampshire. Her work has appeared in *Birch Gang Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and *The New Engagement*.

MIDDLE-AGED
Lauren Sartor

Ladies in their twenties
get me tired that my legs
ache. I think how much
they've yet to encounter.
In the next decade their
optimism will be battered
and fried. Men will fuck
them like automatons,
leaving them heavy with
self-doubt, absence or child.
They will have abortions,
go hungry on minimum wage,
take the wrong bus, see wedding
pictures of men that were
too handsome or too cruel.
They will quit drinking but
start smoking. They will buy
moisturizers in bulk and panties
in packages. They will lose
friends through death or distance,
their dreams will turn quotidian.
Their enthusiasm will flatten
under the tires of life. They will
sit on a bench near a college
campus, watching the young
ladies, while waiting on a transfer.

***Lauren Sartor** received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and is currently getting her Ph.D. from SUNY Binghamton. She has been a college instructor in Saudi Arabia, a cab driver in Arizona and a carnival worker across states. She is currently working on her first full length book of poetry and reviews chapbooks on thethepoetry.com.*

THINGS NOT TO MENTION ON THE FIRST DATE

Gray Torres

I am missing the repulsiveness, the slight taste of bile on my tongue after
a night with some ugly fucker

I am choking on shoulda coulda woulda

I am never short on enemies

I am taking notice of how others look at you

I am still hearing screams in quiet rooms

I am never shaving my twat for you

I am very afraid of aliens

I am not fond of showers

I am ignoring the ghosts of hands that shake and grab me

I am not listening

I am excited yet slowly becoming disappointed

I am going to write about you

I am sometimes a man in bed

Gray Torres has been published in *The Black Napkin*. Currently resides in Bronx, NY studying for an English degree.

CONDITIONAL LOVE
Erin Sullivan

they said the devil, not god
is a honeyed voice against the ear
the comfort of a hand
against your waist
and this is where i throw the salt
behind me while i say
“i am a good boy”

i think,
at birth the compass
was reversed
for, i was told:
the road to god is hard and long
while hell is short and sweet

Erin Sullivan is a trans woman from southern NJ. Previously published at The Fem and sea foam mag. Likes to make plans and then ignore them. Online at <http://erintoknow.tumblr.com>.

UNPACKING
Anne Garwig

It is 2012
and you are supposing
because I have a radio
I am into older men
a fine symphony plays
and no other words
are fine enough to name it
to be truthful
appear to never lie
if you have loved and cared
deeply for women
before me, since
life is a polygon
of many bisections
and rays
I am ordinary
people will fight wars
people will have abortions
I am moving slowly
but I am moving, unpacking
in this box
Ingres' naked female
with too-notched spine
maybe I ought to say something
about her right breast
but my grandmother didn't die
in world war
for me to unpack the Odalisque
mustered up my mustard-gas
bravado; her bombs are beautiful
if you're into moving fast

Anne Garwig is a recent graduate of the NEOMFA program. Her work has recently appeared in the Litterateur, Icarus Down Magazine, and "Luminous Echoes," an anthology published by Into the Void Magazine. Anne lives in Youngstown, Ohio.

I'm buying back from thieves the gifts you bought for me
The American girls I met ask if I'm chasing your ghost
or just Doing My Own Thing. What kind of woman do they take me for?
(I have been calling myself a woman for some months now)

Stepping out into the catcalling streets, it ceases to matter
what I am above or that I am finally up off my knees. With my skin so fair
skin just like theirs, nobody can tell the American girls I met apart
from the American girl I am. Hot-breathed, hungry men ask us, "Hermanas?"

(I have been calling myself a woman for some months now)
(I'm a runner from and not towards; I do not have the legs for a chase)
I hope you like the necklace and Doing Your Own Thing

***Casey O'Brien** was born in 1988 in Wisconsin to a couple of sweethearts. She lives in Milwaukee, where she spends her time tutoring public school kids in the basics of the English language, loving her friends to smithereens, dipping her toes in icy Lake Michigan, debating whether or not to get her nose pierced despite her sensitive skin, and writing. She has been told since she was in grade school that she would become a writer, and after 27+ years of uncertainty, is finally coming around to the idea.*

EPIGENE
L. Stacy Christie

Molecular scars adhere,
DNA like grandmother's vintage dress

(cotton-rose odor over cigarettes; tea-brown edged lace, polyester.
Wear or alter it—pull it on, let it hang on the body)

her genome, known blueprint of life.
Shake it hard, life's etch-a-sketch,

(the process a cascade of events: cross-grained fabric prickles skin;
one hundred tiny buttons; tissue-lint clings to pocketed fingers)

epigene — wipe clean the family curse, O-R-P-H-A-N
= C-G-A-T— rewrite the gene landscape.

(cells change: wrinkles unmark, stiffening joints supple, youth restores. Reverse
cellular memory / the direction of biological time).

L. Stacy Christie has an MFA in Poetry. Her poetry can be found in Persona Literary Journal, Cliterature, and Yew Journal. She has published book reviews for Texas Books in Review and Southwestern American Literature. Stacy teaches writing and spends her time baking and making feminist art.



WEDDING FAVORS

Margaret Wilkerson Sexton

“\$6.25 a box,” the woman explained in a huff, like she already knew Shannon was five days late on rent.

Shannon did the math in her mind then mumbled some excuse and hung up the phone. She had had the idea to buy Octavia’s wedding favors from the nicest praline shop in New Orleans. But the gesture would come out to over a thousand dollars according to this woman. For half that money Shannon could make the candy—all the recipe called for was evaporated milk, sugar and nuts—and buy tiny boxes from the dollar store, tie them up with a ribbon. Maybe she would offer to do that actually, but then again, she knew Octavia. Shannon would make them look pretty, just like the outfits she put together from Ross and TJ Maxx—people started gushing as soon as she stepped out of her house, and you couldn’t tell her she didn’t look like Saks 5th Avenue in her getup, not to mention her bronze skin, tight waist, her Remy 33 laid down her back. Still, Octavia liked things fancy, not pretend fancy, and Shannon didn’t want to start a fight. Not this time.

She wasn’t stupid. She had noticed that though they’d gotten engaged the same weekend, that though Shannon was four years older, lectured Octavia about the difference between a boy and a man and when to switch from pads to tampons, Octavia was getting married and she wasn’t. It didn’t surprise her. Everything always worked out for Octavia. She had even stopped being bitter about it.

Shannon hadn’t always been so nonchalant, but she was better now. Of course there had been that summer when Octavia was studying for the bar and maybe Shannon had sabotaged it, showing up at her place with drinks every night, starting arguments with her days before the test. She had told herself she was just rekindling their connection after years of separation. She had told herself she was just pointing out that Octavia’s boyfriend was a douchebag to be helpful. She was in such a bad place then. The love of her life had left her, she was 50 pounds overweight, she was still in college with no degree in sight, and her embarrassment was so sharp she needed to share it. What would happen if somebody else had something to be ashamed of for a change? Would witnessing another failure divide the feeling in two? She could handle half. It was the full amount that was killing her.

It hadn’t gone that way. Octavia had failed but Shannon’s guilt had nearly taken her out. That was why she was researching favors a month before the wedding. It had been five years since the test, still too fresh to mention but far enough to put behind them. She wasn’t in the bridal party and that bothered her some but she still wanted to show her support. Lord knew she couldn’t afford anything off of that registry—Bloomingdales, Nordstrom’s, Gump’s, places that wouldn’t let her in the door with her

credit—but there were those pralines...

She decided to call Octavia, run the idea by her; the worse she could say was no; at the least she'd see her intentions.

"No," Octavia said. "We have the favors covered."

"What about alcohol then?" The idea had just come to her; she worked at a bar nights, and maybe she could hustle a few bottles out. Not enough to cover 200 people, but like her mama always said, every little bit helped.

"The alcohol comes with the venue," Octavia said then. "Everything's included."

"Alright," she said. Then she let it go. Another person might have taken it personal but she knew Octavia too well for that. She knew she didn't mean to come off as condescending as she did, she was just scared to let go of that guard around her, that mask, and seeing that didn't offend Shannon, it only made her sad. The girl had reason to be afraid.

She was surprised when Octavia called her a few weeks later though.

"There is something you can do," she said.

"What is it? Anything."

"Well, you know how my mom is," Octavia went on.

Aunt Sybil. Octavia was always complaining about her and Shannon got that she had her quirks but sometimes she wondered what she thought about her own mama. If Octavia thought Aunt Sybil was bad, she must have thought Shannon grew up in an insane asylum.

"Aunt Sybil is quirky but she cool, man," Shannon said.

"Well, maybe she's a little bit too cool."

Octavia had gotten so uptight since she became a lawyer.

"What you mean?"

"The time thing. She came to the shower two hours late. Two hours, and she's supposed to be the mother of the bride. That's unacceptable. If she's late to the wedding, she's just going to have to miss it."

Shannon laughed. "Girl, you know about CP time. Then we from New Orleans too. But she's your mama. She can't miss the wedding."

"I'm not kidding, Shannon." Her voice was rising.

"Alright alright, look. I got you. I'll make sure she gets there on time."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Shannon could tell she had made her feel better. She liked having that effect on her.

"There's another thing," Octavia said. "I don't know if it's being married to Steve or what," she paused, "but the way she's been dressing lately—"

Oh that. There was no question Steve could use a few Shannon Porter fashion tips. And Shannon had to admit she had noticed that his slovenliness had rubbed off on Aunt Sybil too. It was surprising 'cause Aunt

Sybil had always been the flyest one in the family: light skin, long hair, cute shape, plus she had her own business. Every man in New Orleans had wanted to date her. In the last few years though, Shannon hadn't seen her outside baggy sweats, t-shirts, white socks and Adidas slippers. She'd thought that was her uniform, but then she showed up to the shower in an African print caftan.

"Yeah we gon' have to work on that," Shannon said. "I've been meaning to mention that my damn self."

"Bless you child," Octavia said and they laughed. "Really, though, it means a lot to me."

"Mhmm, I got you sis."

Shannon planned to meet Aunt Sybil at the airport the day before the wedding.

They were all from New Orleans, born and raised within a block of each other. Growing up, Shannon would walk to Octavia's house in the morning, eat Aunt Sybil's semi-edible breakfast, then lead Octavia across the street to school. Their relationship had become more complicated in their teenage years. More than anything, Shannon had wanted a father and Octavia's was so unbearably present, it was impossible not to take it out on her. Still she had imagined all those years that one day their kids would walk to school together just as they had. Then Aunt Sybil had moved to Delaware for Steve and Octavia had moved to San Francisco to be a lawyer. Meanwhile, Shannon still lived in New Orleans, busing tables at night, driving Ubers during the day to buy a college degree she should have earned a decade earlier.

Her flight got in a couple hours earlier than her aunt's so she rented the car while she waited. She had been to San Francisco to visit Octavia when she first moved there but that had been a different time. Octavia hadn't become all big time yet. She was still drinking and smoking weed, she stayed in a room in a broke-down apartment with four strangers. Neither of them had any money and the best they could do to be polite was treat each other to burritos and Nation's burgers. They'd sit out on Octavia's roof rolling blunts, telling old stories about Aunt Sybil's cooking, how she called Kraft macaroni and cheese Sunday dinner, how they'd feed their plates to the dog one noodle at a time. They laughed and laughed, remembering. This was gonna be different, though, a wedding out in Napa Valley; even the invitation was bourgeois. She was glad she had Aunt Sybil to mind. Otherwise, she would have felt out of place.

She texted Aunt Sybil to tell her to just come outside; she was already in the car waiting. She thought her aunt would appreciate it but she seemed pissed as she opened the trunk.

"I told you I was gonna take care of my ride," she said. "You know I like to do my own thing." She had deviated some from the uniform but not

enough, joggers that were too big in the legs but too small in the waist, and when she bent over to lift her bag into the car, Shannon could see her crack.

“That’s fine, Aunt Sybil.” Shannon averted her eyes when she hugged her. “But not for this weekend. Octavia wants us all to be on the same schedule.”

“Octavia, huh? Since when is she calling the shots?” she muttered under her breath.

“Um, Aunt Sybil, it’s her wedding,” she said. But that didn’t shake her mood. Just like Octavia had always been close with Shannon’s mama, Shannon had always been close with Aunt Sybil. They joked that the sisters had had each other’s babies. It had been a few years though since Shannon had seen her aunt, and she was looking more like her own mama than she ever had, or maybe it was just the way she was acting, scattered and off her game.

Once the bag was in the car, Shannon had to circle for another hour because Aunt Sybil ran back into the airport to use the bathroom and grab a bite to eat. She came back with a McDonalds bag reeking of Filet o’ Fish and started eating before she shut the door. “You said you didn’t want nothing, right?” she asked, ramming the French fries into her mouth in handfuls.

Shannon shook her head, then drove for a little while. After she pulled on 101, she turned to her aunt.

“Are you alright?” she asked finally. She hadn’t been so up close in a wedding before but she could have sworn mothers of the brides were usually excited. Aunt Sybil seemed terrified.

“Yeah I’m fine. My nerves are just bad,” she said.

“Your daughter’s wedding,” Shannon sang. She didn’t feel as threatened by Octavia’s success in life when she was with Aunt Sybil. Aunt Sybil didn’t seem impressed by any of it. No, she raved about other things, like Shannon working double shifts at the bar. Shannon had called her when it was time to tell her no good ex to hit the road, and her aunt couldn’t say enough about her independence. Not like her own mama.

“I get being nervous, but you got to be excited too, Aunt Sybil,” she said.

Her aunt smiled just a crack. “Something like that,” she said. But once she finished her sandwiches, she just chomped on the gum in her mouth like an overstimulated horse.

When they’d been driving for an hour, she called Steve. Shannon couldn’t hear his end of the line but she could hear Aunt Sybil.

“Nothing’s wrong. I’m in the car with Shannon.

“Nothing. No, it was alright. I just wish you had come with me is all.

“I know you’re going to be here tomorrow but tomorrow is not today is it?

“No, I haven’t seen anybody yet.

“Yeah I’ll let you know.

“Yeah I’ll tell her hi.

“Well, you can tell her all that yourself.

“Alright, love you too.”

Meanwhile Shannon could feel Eric blowing her up from the phone in her pocket. The story of her life. Now that she was through, he couldn’t get enough of her, even though he’d run off with a 20-year-old the month before. The wedding was going to be a good distraction.

They barely had time to shower and change before the rehearsal dinner. Shannon had a friend who worked the MAC counter and she’d hooked her up with the new eye shadows and lip colors. For as long as Shannon had known Aunt Sybil she’d gone to the salon every week, but now her hair was natural, aka a hot ass mess. That look wasn’t for everybody, but good thing she had brought her flat iron, not to mention some extra dresses. Aunt Sybil had wanted to wear a suit, and it was cute, but it was too much, more appropriate for the ceremony itself if you asked her. Her own mama came by the room to say hi, but Shannon gave her the cold shoulder. She was still mad about how she’d handled her when she told her Eric wasn’t happening.

People came up to Aunt Sybil the whole rehearsal dinner to compliment her style. That made Shannon feel almost as good as if she was getting the compliments herself. Almost as good, but she hadn’t anticipated how nice the scene would be. The food was just so so, white people shit, chicken without a carb and a dry salad with something called quinoa. She was going to have to stop at Jack in the Box on the way home but the venue couldn’t have been more beautiful. Gold-rimmed chairs, flowers on every table, you couldn’t take a sip of wine without a waiter refilling your glass, and if she looked up from her plate, she could see the mountains through the window beside her.

After cocktail hour, Octavia’s father-in-law asked people to toast the bride and groom. Shannon hadn’t planned anything but nobody from their side of the family stood up so she volunteered. She didn’t know what to say but she had never had an ounce of stage fright, 150 people, most of whom she didn’t know, staring back at her or not. Then it came to her. When she was younger, she and Octavia had been part of a singing group, Cousin Cuisine. It was just the two of them and they never recorded anything but they turned classics into jokes of themselves. She remembered one of their “hits,” and she stood up and belted it out—Whitney Houston’s “He Filled Me Up” replaced with lyrics about a beautician who burned her client’s edges.

The room erupted into laughter. Sometimes Shannon thought she had missed her mark in life. Times like these when she was the center of attention in a room of people, she felt like she didn’t need a man or a steady

income. She walked back to her seat, listened to more people drone on about how great Octavia was, and she held onto the story she'd just told and the people who laughed for her.

After the toasts she hurried to the bar. Aunt Sybil seemed to be doing alright. She had become even more jittery as they were getting ready. She mentioned Uncle Paul a few times. Did Shannon know if he was bringing his wife?

No she didn't.

Had she seen her lately?

And she'd shaken her head again, no.

But now Aunt Sybil was across the room from her talking with him, and it didn't seem like a fight was about to break out. His wife had come but Shannon had assured Aunt Sybil that she looked better than her and with the work Shannon had done, she did. She did.

Shannon looked up to place an order and saw the bartender for the first time. There weren't any black men at the wedding that weren't family, but here was one, and chocolate at that. Tall too, and built, that was her type but she was starting to think her type might not be a good thing. Nobody fitting that description had led anywhere.

Anyway, she sure would appreciate some company tonight so she made sure to catch his eye real fast then look away. She blinked twice, looked back again, crossed her legs, then gave a lil glance down like something between them might be his business. She didn't even have to smile for him to take the bait, all *What can I get you?*

"I don't know yet," Shannon said. "I still don't know."

She put Aunt Sybil to bed before she invited him back to her room. It was mediocre sex, not the best she'd had but certainly not the worst. Lately she'd been over that part anyway. Nobody could make her cum better than she could. It wasn't about that, it was about that feeling she got right when it was beginning when there was still so much hope, when they were both so committed to what they were doing, nobody else in the world existed for them. That was when all the pain she carried felt canceled out, wiped clean. She didn't know what it was that did it. It couldn't have been love, she didn't know half the people she fucked but maybe it was stepping out of herself, maybe it was joining something greater. Regardless, it was everything at a time like this. She didn't know why she had thought she could make it through this weekend without it.

The next day, now that was different. He had let her cuddle him all night and she appreciated that, even though it only made it harder when it was time for him to go. When she heard the door close, she sat on the edge

of her bed and cried. That had started when she turned 21. It wasn't about a specific person—she would never see this man again and didn't know him from Adam—but something about a man's back and the click of the door made her weep each time.

She would have to see about Aunt Sybil, but she was so tired. She climbed back in the bed and rolled over on her side. Her head was pounding, she knew she should get up and pop an Advil but she didn't have the legs for it. The wedding didn't start 'til six. It would be okay if she rested for a minute.

She woke up with a headache worse than the morning's and a feeling in her gut like she had missed something. It was noon. She searched through her purse for her schedule. There had been a breakfast that morning but she guessed it wasn't a big deal. Aunt Sybil should have been in Octavia's hotel suite two hours ago getting her hair done. She prayed she had made it. She reached for her phone. The guy from last night hadn't texted. She tried to push through the way that made her feel.

"Aunt Sybil?" she got her on the first ring.

"Yeah." She could hear blow dryers in the background.

"So you're with Octavia in hair and makeup?"

"Of course I'm with her. What, do you think you have to chaperone me somewhere to get me to go?" Shannon could hear her crack a joke with Octavia about that.

"When are you going to be done?" Shannon asked.

"In a couple of hours."

"Then you're going to go and put your dress on?"

"Of course I'm going to go and put my dress on. What, you think I'm going to go in a robe and towel?" Shannon could hear Octavia laughing with her.

Maybe Shannon was taking her whole assignment too far.

"Okay," she said. "Well, I'll come and get you before the ceremony then?"

"Well, no, 'cause I'm walking down the aisle, remember? Plus I'm going to meet up with Octavia early to see her put on her dress."

"Oh," she said. "Alright then. I'll catch you at the reception." She hung up. She didn't want to see Octavia put the dress on. It probably would have triggered her. She was four years older. It should have been her first. And even if it had been her, there wasn't any money for it to be like this.

She found one of her cousins and walked out to the vineyard for a smoke before the ceremony. She had been trying to give up weed. Her new job requested piss tests without notice but this was an exception.

"OG Kush," her cousin said. Had she had it before?

"No," but it was obvious how it got the name. After they finished the joint, the wedding coordinator directed them to their seats in the courtyard. They were late so they headed for the back. There was an orchestra in front

playing one of those sappy wedding songs. She could glimpse a line of family standing just beyond the vineyard to their right, shrouded in olive trees and vines. Aunt Sybil and Uncle Steve walked out first, past the fountain in the center of the courtyard, to the front row. Uncle Paul's new wife was next, and Shannon could have sworn she was wearing Aunt Sybil's dress, but no, it must have been the OG.

The bridal party was next: skinny little bridesmaids, either white or high yellow, and what would Shannon have looked like walking in behind them? Then the flower girls giggled in, sprinkling hydrangeas as they crashed into chairs. It was Octavia's turn now. Shannon hadn't seen her yet but she could imagine how she'd slay. Professional makeup, hair, her dress alone must have cost thousands. Not only that, the girl had always been beautiful. Shannon could see her dress swaying between gaps in the vineyard. Everyone stood and Shannon joined them, peering forward for a glimpse. Finally she was there, holding Uncle Paul's hand, draped in white except for her shoulders, which were bare, her hair a sea of crinkles, her red fingernails clutching a blue bouquet, her pink cheeks—she might as well have been an angel. Tears sprang to Shannon's eyes, she didn't know why. Seeing so much beauty shook her up, it made her nod along with the sorority sister reading 1st Corinthians 13; it made her smile with genuine glee when the vows were announced. She was happy for Octavia, her cousin deserved it, regardless of what that said about her.

Shannon's power wore off during cocktails. She hadn't seen Aunt Sybil come back from photos and she sulked through the swarm of guests looking for her. She passed her mother who tried to get her attention, but she pretended she didn't notice. Finally in the bathroom, she recognized Aunt Sybil's shoes under the stall.

"Aunt Sybil?" she whispered just in case it wasn't her.

She didn't respond so Shannon called out again.

"Yeah?" She could hear her trying to clear her throat. She might have been crying. "Just give me some privacy for a minute," she sniffed.

"Okay," Shannon opened and closed the bathroom door but stayed where she was.

Aunt Sybil walked out a few minutes later in a huff. "Goddamn you," she said.

"What's the matter?" Shannon rushed over to her, eager for fresh pain to attend to.

"You know what's the goddamn matter. That heifer is wearing my dress. And better than me."

"Now you know that's not true, Aunt Sybil."

"Whatever it's not just that. Your cousin let that bitch see her put her wedding dress on."

"Were you there too?" It seemed like Octavia had let the mailman see her put her wedding dress on—everybody else but her had been there—but she told herself this wasn't about her.

"Yeah but it should have just been me. And her girlfriends of

course.”

“What does it matter as long as you were there? It’s her day.”

“When you have a daughter call me and ask me that.”

Shannon didn’t say anything. They walked to the tent and found their table. It was time for dinner. Shannon sat in her seat, glanced down at the favors below her: bottle openers. Didn’t Octavia know everybody used the edge of a table? Maybe in her world they didn’t. She picked one up and slipped it into her purse.

A few minutes after they sat, Uncle Paul stood up in the middle of it all, another speech. She didn’t feel she could take much more. Aunt Sybil must have agreed because she rolled her eyes.

“This mothafucka,” she muttered.

Shannon passed her a glass of wine. She had downed the one in front of her already.

But it didn’t seem to help—Aunt Sybil got louder as the speech went on, clearing her throat or scooting her chair back. Uncle Paul was a natural speaker; it seemed like he stood up to talk in front of a group that size every day. In one sentence he had the audience laughing and crying. He told stories about Octavia from when she was a girl, some Shannon remembered, some she didn’t.

Aunt Sybil stood up.

“That’s not true,” she called out across the room. Uncle Paul fell silent. 200 heads swung back at Aunt Sybil.

“You know that’s not true, Paul,” she repeated. Shannon knew she should do something but she didn’t know what. Pulling her back down in her seat would create a scene. Maybe they could play it off like this was planned. She looked at Octavia. She could see the girl was mortified.

Aunt Sybil left the table and walked the 20 feet up to the microphone. It was so silent in the room Shannon could hear her heels clacking against the wood floor. Aunt Sybil reached the stage and yanked the microphone from Uncle Paul’s hand.

“Good evening, everybody,” she said. Octavia had put all their side of the family in the same area, and the three tables they made up responded, “Good evening.”

“Now, Paul is a great speaker, and he’s a good father, but there’s one thing I want to clear up. He said he drove Octavia to school every day but I want to say that’s not true.”

“It’s just a speech,” Uncle Paul said, barely audible.

“I know it’s just a speech but I’m going to get this right. See, I drove Octavia to school every day for four years. I drove her one hour there, and one hour back. She wanted to board at that school but I wouldn’t let her, because you lose a child already once they go to college and I didn’t want to go through that twice. Anyway, everything else he said is right but I had to clarify that.”

Silence again. Then Shannon’s mother stood up and cheered, and

Shannon burst out laughing. She couldn't help it.

Shannon found Octavia downstairs in a tasting room later. Her best friend was hugging her while she cried.

"It's okay," the friend kept saying but it wasn't helping anything. Shannon decided to try.

"It wasn't that bad, girl," she said, sitting down next to her cousin. Octavia looked up. All the colors that had made up her perfect face were smeared together. Shannon felt angry all of a sudden. Everything had been so perfect, and Octavia was going to let this little thing ruin it.

She repeated herself with more edge in her voice. "It really wasn't that bad, Octavia." The girl started crying more.

"Girl, you know the other guests didn't even blink an eye," she softened her tone. "They probably thought it was staged." That wasn't all the way true but people lied to other people on their wedding day.

"I don't care about the guests," Octavia said.

"Why you crying then?"

"It's my mama. She can't even be happy for me. She can't even think about me enough to stop herself from making such a scene. I don't care about what she said, it's the fact that she said it."

"Oh," Shannon said. She didn't know what to say. She understood. When she had found out Eric had left her, she had wanted her mother to hold her, to say something more than, "He's just a man, I guess," and laugh that maniacal laugh. But she hadn't.

She took the girl's hand. "I'm sorry," she said. "I know I was supposed to be watching her, and I tried, but—"

Octavia shrugged. "She was on time at least," she said. "And she looked good doing it," she added.

"She made a fool of herself but that eye shadow did her proud," Shannon said smiling.

"Them shoes too," Octavia sighed.

"I should have had you in the wedding, I know that. You probably don't care but I just want you to know that I regret it. It would have added to the day to have you up there with me."

Before Shannon could respond, the makeup artist walked in. "Touch up?" she asked, and Octavia nodded. Shannon felt her phone vibrate in her purse. It was a text from the bartender.

"Off tonight. Can I swing by? We could just talk."

She felt a queasiness rise from her stomach to her chest.

The makeup artist turned to her. "I could fix you up too?" she asked. "Y'all are the same skin tone. That golden brown."

Shannon nodded. Octavia said she would head back to the reception. "I'll catch up with you later," she called over her shoulder like it was a question.

“Of course, have fun,” Shannon wasn’t sure if Octavia heard her. The powder brush swept over her face, and her nose tingled. There was a fresh bottle of beer next to her and she reached for it. She tried not to listen to the voice that said *what was the use*. She had a way with words, like that speech she’d given at the rehearsal dinner, everybody had always said so. With men that gift seemed to elude her, but maybe tonight would be different. Surely she could find something to say to make him throw his head back and laugh, that gesture that seemed to equal staying.

She fingered the opener she’d pocketed, clamped it to the top of the bottle, and popped the lid off.

Margaret Wilkerson Sexton received her BA in Creative Writing from Dartmouth College and her JD from UC Berkeley School of Law. Her first novel, *A Kind of Freedom*, will be published by Counterpoint Press in August 2017. Her stories have been published or are forthcoming in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, and *Limestone Journal*, and her work has been nominated for a *Pushcart Prize*.

WHEN FLYING
Anna De Vul

I think of the radiation collected
stored in cells and hanging heavy
in thyroids so the singing throat hurts
Perhaps this is the story
the result of the sin
not of flying too high
or of seeking heaven but of hoping
to cross the borders of Babel
to speak to people born far away
and to be heard

Anna De Vul was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in a variety of journals under her own name and her pen name, including Wasafiri, The Interpreter's House, The Missing Slate, and The Istanbul Review. She is also an editor for the award-winning journal Lighthouse. One of her more recent projects is a pamphlet of poetry (Cosmonaut) about experiences living in a small industrial city in China, her love life, and her uterus, of which most of these poems are a part.

***WOMEN 1950s VINTAGE RETRO CAPSTONE
SHOULDER PARTY DRESS
Erin Sullivan***

amazon safari:
(yeah, i'm sure that one's never been done)
machine garbled images, word tagged titles
i think of my friend, that wrote product descriptions
(they could have used him here)
a single image, a promise, a size listing,
a price, a sale discount
a color, reviews, copy-print, and a threat
(only five left in stock!)

what does it mean to buy a dream,
(Women 1950s Vintage Retro!)
a ghost's dress, harkening back to the good old days
when men were men and women were women
(and people like you: underground)
suppose i buy it anyway, domesticity's dream
call it reclamation, make it political
what good is rebellion, privately kept

Erin Sullivan is a trans woman from southern NJ. Previously published at The Fem and sea foam mag. Likes to make plans and then ignore them. Online at <http://erintoknow.tumblr.com>.

A CLEAN VOID PAINTS A SILHOUETTE WHERE YOUR DRESSER WAS
Charlene Ashley Taylor

Sinking into the sand carpet, I think of the paint on your jeans and markers without caps. I think of when you would pirouette down the hall, your arms up to hug the ghost that led you – heel toe spin again and again until you spilled your high, stumbling with a smile. The moment I saw the boxes I became the candle wax on the television, the cat piss snuggled on your pillow, the mold in our coffee pot. I became the starved python that stunk for a week – until you noticed the trash and scattered ashes, loose threads etched in the floor. A clean void paints a silhouette where your dresser was and I can taste the antique grime that caked its mirror.

Charlene Ashley Taylor has a BA in English and is currently a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Louisville. Her work has appeared in Limestone Journal, Coe Review, Transcendent Zero Press, The Bitter Oleander, The Chaffey Review, Yellow Chair Review, Spry Literary Journal, and elsewhere. She is also a Graduate Editor with Miracle Monocle and the founder of Louisville's newest reading series River City Revue.

I. LETTER FROM MY LABIA TO MY HAND

Erica Charis

after Rachel McKibbens

Some days skin will be a breastplate.
Some days skin will be mermaids scales.
It's okay to love both.
Some days your blood will beat heavy.
Some days your tiny hairs will dance windblown.
It's okay to crave both.

Some days your love will be a stumbling 2AM skinny dipper.
Some days your love will be lake water over cool stones.
It's okay to open your yes to any touch that feels like home.
It's okay to explode into sweat and thin-veined constellations
and it's okay if your cells return unrecognizable—
It's okay to be new.

Some days your touch bellow jagged and purple.
Some days your touch will be full of fireflies.
Hold all that is yours like a votive.
Guard each flame until it is dark enough
for their magic to be incandescent.

Some days you will write I don't know what I want.
Some days you will write I want someone to hit me.
It's okay for your words to be parachute or scalpel,
and it's okay for your fingers to become ghosts
against the pen and for each sound to haunt your knuckles
and it's okay to let them all go.

Erica Charis is a Creative Writing Instructor for Berklee Online. Her writing has been published in *Borderline*, *Crab Fat*, *Broad!*, *The Yellow Chair*, *Rain*, *Party*, & *Disaster Society*, and *Anchor*, and is forthcoming in *Mezzo Cammin*. Her cross-disciplinary collaborative work has been performed at *Lesley University*, *the Lydia Fair*, *the Dance Complex* and other community venues. She's also an alum of the *Bread Loaf Writers' Conference*. She posts excerpts of and links to her work on her blog: lettheceleryrot.wordpress.com.

My clearest memory of eighteen is being
pinned to a white, wrought iron day bed
while a voracious teenager pried himself
inside of me over my salt-water screams,
Fugazi mumbling in the background.

When I hear their 1988 EP, I still wipe phantom
tears from my trembling mouth and consider
the tidiest trajectory in which I can careen
my car into the center divider. I wonder
which fatal angle would be most convenient
for the clean-up crew.

In my head, I've written him postcards,
sent him gas-station gifts and novelty t-shirts,
You raped me eight years ago and all I got
was this crippling case of post-traumatic stress.
Anxiety has a not-so-funny way of army-crawling
its way into the hollow of your throat and sucking
the life out of your lungs as if they were foil
balloons suffused with cheap helium. I don't know
if I'll ever get used to this high-pitched panic
and the convent of compulsions it brings.

Most of my waking hours are spent trying to resist
the unconscious need to press my fingernails into a
steering wheel until my hands go numb, yanking
fistfuls of my own hair, or pulling my bed sheets
around me so tight that it gives the illusion of being held.

Even now, the quick, uneven intake of my breath
signals my boyfriend to ask what is wrong. I am
struggling to find a way to tell him that I think
about taking a framing hammer to my hip, feeling
the bones like crushed hail beneath my skin.

I wish I remembered prom instead.

Kelsey Gutierrez is a decent writer and an ugly crier. She, like you, is trying her best. She studies creative writing at California State University, Long Beach and was the recipient of the 2016 William T. Shadden scholarship in poetry.



GOD ACTION/MYTH
L. Stacy Christie

For women authority of the man extends into intimacy and privacy
inside the body in sex reproduction in worshipping a male (god)
in conforming to social codes of dress and demeanor (knees crossed
mouths closed) demean even in using language (woman learn in silence
with all submission)

(Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell.)

Myths (exist as words) about rape persist
damaging survivors, dangerous in a civil society (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God.) **MYTH:**
Rape is a crime of passion and lust. **MYTH:**
You cannot be raped against your will. **MYTH:**
It is impossible for a husband to rape his wife. **MYTH:**
A woman who has really been raped will be hysterical. **MYTH:**
Rape is an impulsive act. **MYTH:**
Rapists are usually psychopaths who do not know their victims. **MYTH:**
Gang rape is rare. **MYTH:**
Many women claim they have been raped because they want revenge. **MYTH:**
Women who dress or act sexy ask to be raped. **MYTH:**
Women who go out alone or walk in scary areas want to be raped. **MYTH:**
If a woman consents to one sex act then any other sex act can't be rape. **MYTH:**
In most cases, black men rape white women. **MYTH:**
Prostitutes and sex workers can't be raped. **MYTH:**
Only young, pretty women are raped. **MYTH:**
It is impossible to rape a woman wearing jeans. **MYTH:**
If no woman speaks about rape then rape must not exist. **MYTH:**

(Let your women keep silent, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience). Of the word.

(For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man).

God action.

Did He come in the image of man ?

Did something in her silence resemble yes?

Did she shudder under the weight of His birthright?

Was she alone near a river?

To whom does she pray?

Did He shine?

Will she bear it?

[Who does He think He is?]

(For a man is the image and glory of God)

Sorrow Sorrow (in woman's marrow) silence permeates violates

(Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.)

Male authority over women permeates (ownership) every social institution
every orifice most intimate exchanges and practices
(fluids and medicine and law)

The state is one agent of male authority
the rapist the husband the god the pimp the priest and
so on and so on and so on

L. Stacy Christie has an MFA in Poetry. Her poetry can be found in Persona Literary Journal, Cliterature, and Yew Journal. She has published book reviews for Texas Books in Review and Southwestern American Literature. Stacy teaches writing and spends her time baking and making feminist art.

A LOVE POEM IN 5 ENCOUNTERS

Selena Loomis

1. in the claw-foot bathtub on the second floor of my house in the second grade my mom tells me i have to brush my hair or i'm cutting it off. i forget what it means to pick up the brush and my school pictures have a bob flirting with my chubby cheeks. i don't care about being prettier but my head feels like butterflies.
2. my mom sees my smooth legs in 5th grade and says she didn't realize i wanted to shave them in the first place. i tell her my friend lily does it and she's pretty so don't i have to now?
3. senior year, summer's over and yr in my bed telling me you won't love me proper until i'm. . .clean. the next morning i spend forty minutes in the shower and i can't tell the difference. you tell me i'm prettier now.
4. i move closer to the ocean to move closer to myself and i forget about you sort of by accident. you call me on the phone and i tell you i don't miss you. you write me a love letter with the I love yous crossed out in red pen and i shave my head to remind me that i'm prettier now.
5. "your hair is the color of god picking flowers" reads the turquoise tile right above my head in my favorite library bathroom stall, urinals sit next to me through the metal wall and my newly-shaven head reminds me that my armpits are warmer than my ears this time of year.

Selena Loomis is a genderqueer fiber artist and sometimes gardener originally from St. Louis, MO. When not writing, she can be found knitting, baking, planning for spring, or singing to her two hairless pet rats. She currently lives in southwest Ohio where she studies performance art at Antioch College. She has had a few things published in college-affiliated journals and zines.

LUNCH HOUR LOVE SONNET
Anne Garwig

Heaving praises, due to
library carrel thrill:
her body equals temple,
his body equals mill.
He strives, turns 'em loose
on three meals a day: coffee,
beer, woman juice.
The mill wheel stops,
the water stills.
Sanctuary latchkeys,
undone doors: *I to my work,*
you to yours.

Anne Garwig is a recent graduate of the NEOMFA program. Her work has recently appeared in the *Literateur*, *Icarus Down Magazine*, and "*Luminous Echoes*," an anthology published by Into the Void Magazine. Anne lives in Youngstown, Ohio.

LEAKING
Anna De Vul

I cry and I cry and
maybe that's why I'm not bleeding maybe
all the diet coke and fizzy water and
whisky too much whisky
and the tamari I pour on my rice and tofu
are just enough to keep me
in tears but not enough
to keep my blood flowing
as if losing you makes me less
of a woman like my body
is saying now I'll always be lacking

Anna De Vul was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in a variety of journals under her own name and her pen name, including Wasafiri, The Interpreter's House, The Missing Slate, and The Istanbul Review. She is also an editor for the award-winning journal Lighthouse. One of her more recent projects is a pamphlet of poetry (Cosmonaut) about experiences living in a small industrial city in China, her love life, and her uterus, of which most of these poems are a part.

Did you see the pickaxes I packed in my bag to excavate with?
Did you see the paring knives I'd been using at home?
If I sit here long enough up against the sea, all of these sharps will dull
Instead of prying, I will wander these shape-shifting beaches
and fall for cities way out of my league
I'll take salt and salt and lime juice and lime juice and lime juice in my beer
and ride on motorbike taxis to heights I have no business reaching
What I am asking of life is to be distracted to death
Would you with your eyes, beach glass green, beach glass smooth
notify the doctor that I'll take salt and lime juice and, best I can, care?

***Casey O'Brien** was born in 1988 in Wisconsin to a couple of sweethearts. She lives in Milwaukee, where she spends her time tutoring public school kids in the basics of the English language, loving her friends to smithereens, dipping her toes in icy Lake Michigan, debating whether or not to get her nose pierced despite her sensitive skin, and writing. She has been told since she was in grade school that she would become a writer, and after 27+ years of uncertainty, is finally coming around to the idea.*

GOOD DINNER COMPANY

Hannah Albee

Your voice, a turmeric ribbon,
A flourish of spice and smooth cambric.
I wrap it close and watch your words
Catapult across old buckets of slop:
That turgid moralist speech, that stiff
Shadow who makes life so difficult
On the rest of us. I like the sense
You make
When the sun sets
Through our window pane,
Onto your napkin which you shake,
(gently) placing it underneath, and
Looking at me again, yes, with a pause,
Like prayer,
Before your mouth that kissed me
Sets upon our Eucharist.

Hannah Albee is a Writers' Workshop teacher and Communications Manager at Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen in New York City. With a background in education and counseling, her work with soup kitchen guests and volunteers has informed and strengthened her own craft. When she took some coursework toward an MFA in Professional and Creative Writing at Western Connecticut State University, she was a student editor for the student-run Poor Yorick Journal. Her poem 'For Immediate Release' appeared in the Summer 2015 issue of Apeiron Review.



HEN&CHICKS
Sam DeFlitch

on her deathbed my half-blind grandmother read the eye chart in her hallway and remembered every word of catechismic prayers *hail mary hail mary hail mary*.

succulent no. 5 on my windowsill shot skyward at sunrise and by the time i return home tonight will be nearly a foot high - i know, i know, i've seen it before. she is old and tired and this is her grand finale and she is remembering all the things she did not see. let her burst then let her rest.

her chicks live on with the memory of glancing up and watching death. but confined to the pot on my kitchen window will live no differently and will leave with the same magnificence.

Samantha DeFlitch is an MFA candidate and TA at the University of New Hampshire. Her work has appeared in *Birch Gang Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and *The New Engagement*.

GREASE LIGHTNING

Hannah Kludy

I'm the girl who takes her top off to signal the beginning of a race. I usually just wear a bikini top, or a front clip bra. Those aren't normally very comfortable, but in terms of easy removal, they work the best. I was appointed this position because I was one of the few girls who hung out with Roy, Mikey, Toenails, and Cooper. Mikey and Cooper both have girlfriends, but as Toenails put it "If they had any less titties, they'd be boys with fat nipples," so I guess I got the job by default.

Here's how it all goes: Roy finds someone he wants to duo with. I think he meant to say duel at first, but now we all call it a duo. Then, he arranges the date. It's always on a Friday or Saturday, but the time switches depending on who has to babysit younger siblings and who is grounded and needs to wait for their folks to go to bed. Next, he arranges the place, and it's never the same, not ever because then we'll get a local reputation and the cops will be after us like nobody's business. Last, he lines up whose turn it is to race. They divvy it up even, but I'm never allowed. I'd be the best, though, if they let me.

"Lisa, come set the damn table! Your brothers are hungry!"

"Coming!"

I took the warped stairs two at a time, and my shoes made little dust puffs each step. I could hear the TV in the living room and the radio in the kitchen. Mom liked the noise. I figured it made her less lonely after Dad left. She always says how happy she is that loud-mouth-son-of-a-bitch-whore-loving-dipshit is out of her house. I'm not so sure, but I do think that she would be happier if *some* man was living here. But she doesn't date. She goes to work in the morning at the police station as a secretary and comes home straight after to smoke Marlboros and drink Natural Light in the kitchen, and talk on the phone to Aunt Marge.

"You're just asking for a man to grab you up, going out in a skirt like that. Do they make them that short? And what in the name of the lord is that on your chest? You even call it a shirt? Just some threadbare flannel to me. Your hair is a nest. Wash up before you sit at this table. You've got such pretty hair, I don't know why you don't take care of it," she said.

Both Denny and Martin, my little brothers, were sitting at the table looking like they rolled in something that came out of a dog's ass, but that didn't mean they had to wash up. I stomped my way out of the kitchen and into the bathroom. I brushed out my hair and splashed some water on my face, but I didn't change my outfit. Tonight was Friday and I was going out with Roy.

I came back into the kitchen. Mom made meatloaf and mashed potatoes with green beans. It was the kind of thing she made all the time. Once I asked for pizza for dinner and she told me that she wasn't some

gourmet chef. She pronounced the “t” in gourmet. I told her that I was tired of the same damn food for dinner every day. She told me she was tired of the same damn attitude from me every day.

“Lisa, Denny said that you look like a clown with all that paint on. You’re scaring him,” Martin said. He was seven and a great pain in my ass. Denny was nine, and I knew for a fact nothing short of a belt whipping from Mom that scared him.

“Tell Denny that the bloody clown I saw under his bed ought to scare him more.”

Denny looked up dumbly from Mama’s phone, probably playing Angry Birds again. He frowned.

“Lisa, be nice to your brothers.”

“Yeah, Lisa, aren’t clowns supposed to be fun?” Martin asked.

“Yeah, aren’t they funny?” Denny said. He was always sort of slow, but nobody picked on him. At seven Martin was the size of most ten-year-olds, twice as mean and with one hell of a mouth on him. Nobody in their right minds, not even those twelve-year-olds who always hung out at the park gave Denny any shit. Martin did not allow it.

“Mom, I’m heading out after this.”

“Where to?”

“To the movies with Sally. The new *Fast and Furious* is out.”

“If I call Sally’s mother, is that what she’s going to say to me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Sally’s mother was a riot, and she didn’t give a shit what Sally and I did. Sometimes we’d go over there when her mom wasn’t working and drink vodka and orange juice, and she’d make us crepes.

“I’ll be sure to do that, then.” Mom was lying. All bark, no bite.

I shoveled the meatloaf at top speed. I had the mashed potatoes next, and I was about to start on the beans when my phone rang. It was Roy.

I shouted “Bye Mom, see you tomorrow!” and I could hear her cursing at me as I ran out the door and down the dirt drive to Roy’s old beat-up blue Mustang. It didn’t look like much, but God, it was fast, and he handled it real well, tight on corners and no jackrabbit starts, just smooth acceleration. The gears shifted like they were lubed with butter. I liked driving it sometimes, when Roy was feeling generous. My car wasn’t as sexy. I had a Mercury, one of those old lady cars with the plush interior and fancy cigarette lighter that never works.

“Hey, baby!” Roy called to me, laying on the horn a little. I could hear the boys running around inside the house screaming, Mom yelling.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“I know that ain’t Sally’s car!” I could still hear her from the house.

“Your mom’s all riled up. Whatcha do, fry one of the boys?”

“I thought I told you I’d meet you two blocks away in fifteen minutes.”

“I knew you’d be looking so damn beautiful that I couldn’t wait.” He looked away from the road and brushed some of my hair away from my face,

rubbing tough knuckles against my cheek, and I could feel goosebumps growing on my arms. He was so damn gorgeous, with his black hair gelled back and his leather jacket on. He had on a grey tee shirt with a tiny hole on the left shoulder, and I was sure he'd be wearing the same beat-up Converse he always wore.

"Where?" I asked again.

"I found this place, stars for days."

"Where at?"

"Just keep steady for a bit. You'll see."

I am not a patient person, and I didn't really give a shit about the stars. I knew Roy didn't either, but I also knew that wherever he was taking me, we would be alone. I was so, so glad I wore my miniskirt. I could feel my mouth getting hot, my hands tingling. Couldn't we just pull over right there on the street? We could duck down in the backseat, crawl over each other, and I could mess up his hair, run my fingers through it and have him say over and over again "Lis, Lis, Lis." Nobody but him ever called me Lis.

My phone rang again. This time it was Mom. I turned it on silent.

"You ready for the duo tomorrow?" he asked.

"I guess."

"What's that mean?"

"You know what it means." I didn't want to fight over it, not tonight, but he knew that I was never excited for a duo anymore, not when I didn't get to have any of the real fun.

"Lis, you can't drive. You'll get caught."

"You know I wouldn't. I'm better than that. I could kick Cooper's ass every day, and you can't even deny it. Remember that time we did a practice run and you let me drive? I killed him, left him in the dust."

"I'm not debating this. I make the damn plans, I make the damn rules. You don't drive. Look, if you get in any more trouble, you won't be able to run track this year. You know coach told you that you're on his last nerves anyway, all the missing practice and office visits. You'll get kicked off, and that's the best hope you've got for any kind of scholarship."

"That's not a guarantee."

"It's better than what any of the rest of us got."

"I just wanna stay here with you."

"Don't get like this."

"Like what?"

"Gooley. You know I don't do long term."

We pulled over at this little peak, which we drove up a thin gravel road to get to. Where it ended there was a sort of make-shift dump where people tossed their old furniture. A dozen couches, old Playstations, and more televisions than I could count. It was right next to a factory of some kind and there were fences everywhere. It was a little foggy out now, and the smoke from the stacks made it tough to see even the moon. Roy put a hand around my shoulders and rubbed the back on my head, playing with my

hair.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?”

“Roy, you know this is shit.”

He smiled and ran his other hand up my thigh, between my legs. “I know,” he said. “I know.”

We stayed out all night and woke up in his backseat the next day. My legs were a little cramped from being curled up for so long, and I could only imagine how Roy felt, being about a foot taller and all. He didn’t seem to mind. He kissed me right on the mouth, and his breath tasted terrible.

We slid into the front seat, and he drove me home. To make my mother less angry, I had him let me off a block before my house and I walked the rest of the way. When I got in, the sun was just beginning to rise. I knew that everyone would be asleep and would be asleep for hours. When I walked in I was surprised to see Mom sleeping on the couch. She had the TV on real low and her cheap old flip phone still in her hand, and I hoped she hadn’t been like that all night. She has a bad habit of waiting up for me when she knows I won’t be home.

When she woke me up about three hours later, she seemed a little tired, and that made me feel guilty. She listed off about a dozen chores for me to do, including cleaning the boys’ room, and then stormed off to scrub the floors or something. I let her go and filled up a cup of coffee from the pot. It had gone off with the automatic timer two hours before, and it was only lukewarm. My chores went quick like they do when you work top speed and you’ve been doing something for years and years and after an hour or so I was curled up outside on the hammock which hung between two old oak trees, scrolling through Facebook. I could hear Mom yelling at the boys about something or another and Denny crying. Martin was yelling right back, and I figured he had it all covered, so I tilted my head away from the noise and slept the afternoon away. When I woke up, Denny was pawing at my arm.

“Lisa, Lisa, Mom says it’s dinner time and if you don’t get down here to eat she’s gonna ground you for another week.”

“I’m grounded?” I asked. I had a sneaking suspicion that she was just waiting for me to try and go somewhere before letting me know.

“I s’pose. That’s what Mom said.”

I followed him inside. “So I’m grounded?” I asked as I settled down to leftovers.

“Yes, you are! I know for a fact that you were out all night with that Roy,” she spat his name, “and you gotta few things to learn about me if you think that I am just gonna let my daughter run around all night with a boy like she’s some tramp. He won’t even date you! No respect. I told you, get yourself a good boy but—”

“Save it. How long am I grounded for?”

"Two weeks, maybe three if you keep up this attitude. You want it to be three?"

"No ma'am," I said. "Dinner tastes fantastic."

She gave me a long dirty look, but she didn't seem to find anything in my tone to complain over, so my grounding was not extended. It didn't matter anyway. I snuck out for duos no matter what. Best if nobody knows where you're headed to. So I ate my dinner and laid on the sofa and watched TV for a while, but I was too keyed up, so I decided to go for a quick run. I laced up my trainers and put on a tee shirt and sweatpants. Mom looked up when I left, and she gave me a little nod. She liked seeing me go run. She never did come up to the school for football games or science fairs or the honor roll assembly, but she'd drive an hour away to some awful tiny town just to see me run. I liked that about her.

She was alright, really, I thought while I ran. The rhythm pumped away the anger. My breathing was steady. I ran three miles, my usual circuit, and felt better when I stepped back into the kitchen.

"Twenty minutes and five seconds," Mom said. She had a little egg timer next to the radio, and she kept good track.

"Average night."

"You were at twenty-three a month ago."

"I'm gonna hit the showers, Coach."

Mom smiled at that, she did every time.

After my shower, I curled up in bed and waited for the house to settle down. It didn't take long. The boys weren't allowed up past nine, and Mom never stayed up past ten. At ten thirty, the house had gone silent, and I lifted my window. It let right on to the roof, and below the roof was a little metal pillar that held up a part of the porch. I stuck my toes in between the iron vines and jumped down. I ran a block, lightning speed, and met Roy. His headlights were off.

"Who and where?"

"Damien brothers and their stupid little buggy. Swiney Park. Cooper is on tonight. We gave him the easy one."

"He'll still lose. And the Damien brothers will be all mad when they see they're racing him. You know what he did to the youngest one."

Roy shrugged.

"And they always play dirty. I don't know why we duo with them."

"Are you gonna bitch about it all night or are you going to shut up about it and have a little fun?"

I decided that I would have fun but give Roy the silent treatment until he apologized for his language. I picked at my nails, trying to look like I didn't give a rat's ass about what he had to say until we got to Swiney Park. It was the closest park to the edge of town, and one side was straight cornfields. The other side was an old country road that was mostly used for tractors, and we didn't drive on it, but it did have a little church stuck on the side like it had been dropped there by a tornado and nobody ever knew

about it. The other road was the river bed and had a steep drop on the one side, like a cliff. Two cars would have to be really ballsy to run a double on it, side by side. It was one of my favorite places to race because it was all turns, control, not a lot of speed. That tricked people into losing. And the view was amazing up above the river, like you were flying out over it.

The track was simple: the road out of town, make a turn on the roundabout before you hit the highway, take the river road, and return to the starting point. If I were driving, I'd be able to blow the Damien brothers right out of the water. Or push them into it.

The crew was already waiting for us when we arrived. Mikey had his arm wrapped around Daisy, who was wearing a plaid cotton dress. She looked like a baby-doll, and I wondered every time I saw her what she was doing with Mikey, the guy who fought anyone who half-looked at him wrong and stabbed a kid in the eighth grade. She came right up and hugged me.

"Hey, Daisy Doll," I said.

"You look super!"

"Aye, Lisa! What the hell took you guys so long? Lord knows you weren't doing your hair," Mikey hollered. He put out his cigarette on a flashy new Ford flatbed.

"You stealing cars again?" I asked.

"Nope, won it in the lottery."

"Daisy, what are you doing with a boy like that?"

Daisy just smiled at me, and I thought there might have been something to it, but then Toenails rolled up and started telling everyone about how the Damien brothers had been talking shit all day long over at the pool. Believe it or not, Toenails was a lifeguard over there. I knew that the Damien brothers, both fat, short guys with bad tempers, could hear him, but I don't think he really cared. He called them son-of-a-bitch-whore-kissers, and I could see the younger brother's hands turning to fists. Duos could get nasty if you got people good and riled right before. I hoped that Cooper and Kitty would get here so we could just the damn thing.

Just before I was about to tell Roy that he ought to race instead, since things did seem to be getting a little hot, Cooper barreled into the park with Kitty riding shotgun and screaming out the side of the window. Her bubblegum pink hair was braided, but some of it had come loose and slapped her face in the breeze. Kitty hopped out when they pulled up, and she was stupid drunk. I leaned closer to take a look at Cooper, and he seemed pretty far gone too. That was sheer stupidity. Duos were tough enough sober, and we really wanted to win. I looked at Roy who had narrowed his eyes to slits.

"Coop, get out of the damn car."

"Is it time?"

"Not for you. Get out of the car!"

Cooper lumbered towards us. "What did you say?"

"Man, you know you don't come to this wasted. I can't let you race."

“Roy, you don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m fine.” He drawled the last word.

“No, you’re not. I’m taking this duo, and you won’t be getting one for a while. Shit, Cooper, you can’t even really drive sober, how the fuck did you think you’ll drive drunk?”

Cooper seemed to be considering this for a moment, and then before we knew it, he raised his fist and punched Roy straight in the face. Roy stumbled and caught himself before he fell flat. I could see dirt on the pads of his fingertips. Cooper ran back to his car, revved the engine and hollered to the Damien brothers “You fuckers ready to lose?” and I watched, unable to move, as they jumped in and stood at the starting line. Kitty pushed me out of the way and stood between them. She dropped her tied tee shirt onto the ground and then undid her bra, a back clasp. It fell off her thin, bony shoulders, and her pale breasts looked blue in the moonlight. I turned to Roy to see if he would stop this, but his jaw was clenched, his arms were folded, and he just watched.

The cars were off, and soon they were out of sight. I could hear their engines long after, though, and I thought I could picture where they were: finishing off on the road out of town, braking hard on the roundabout, and trying to tuck the tail end in while squealing up to the river road. We stood in silence while we waited. Daisy had taken Kitty into the bed of the truck and got her shirt back on. Kitty was sleeping it off now, and I figured she would feel like a real shit tomorrow morning. I was itching for the race to be over so that I could talk to Roy, see what he thought.

I was about to ask if he wanted to go sit in the car when we all heard it, like a shudder. The air seemed to turn sour, and I could feel it in my bones. There was smoke rising over on the horizon, and I could hardly breathe. I thought it was in my lungs already, not like nicotine, but like burnt exhaust.

“Lisa, get in the car,” Roy shouted.

“Are we checking it out?” I asked as we ran.

“Stupid fucker better not have gone and killed himself. He’d better not have.”

I looked back and saw that Daisy had gone white. Toenails was already behind the wheel.

Just as we climbed into the car, the Damien brothers came squealing down the road. Their car had a new dent, sizable, right on the driver’s side of the front bumper. They didn’t stop and shout about victory or look out over us or anything. They just drove as fast as their piece of shit would go. That’s when I knew it had to have been real, real bad. I thought about Cooper. He wasn’t a bad guy. He took good care of his kid brother. He treated his mom well. He gave Kitty his world. How could we let him race?

The car was hot from sitting with the windows up, and I wanted to roll them down. I started to crank them, but Roy slapped my arm.

“Don’t, don’t. You don’t want the smoke in here. Fuck, the cops are

gonna come here now. But we'll all keep quiet. And we told him not to; it's not our faults. The Damien brothers won't tell. I know they won't."

His face was slightly swollen, and I wanted to kiss it and hold him close.

We made the track in less time than the Damien brothers had, less time than Cooper had, and less time than I probably could have done it in. Roy drove like a demon with cool precision. A real professional. I thought he looked like a movie star from some action flick, and I might've put my hand down his pants any other night.

When we got there, I saw Cooper's car twisted up against the cliff-side. It was crunched, really bad. I screamed and Roy clamped his hand over my mouth.

"Christ," he said. "Fucking Christ."

The car was mostly caved in on the driver's side, and not a single window was intact. It was smoking, and I was worried that we'd have a car fire soon if we didn't quit the place. Cooper was lying on the hood of the car, all bent up. His spine was coming out of his back, right before the base of his neck. Most of his head was gone, dashed into the rocks. Splatters of gore two feet up.

I was hyperventilating. "Roy, Roy. Is he dead? Did he die? No, no. Roy?" But Roy didn't respond. He just looked at Cooper, mouth hanging halfway open, and I could tell that something in him was cracking in two, like a fissure in the rock. If Cooper's corpse wasn't enough to make me pass out, that sure as hell was.

I woke up later in Roy's bed. It smelled good, like his hair and warm body. I snuggled closer to him and put my lips to the inside of his arm. He was wrapped all around me, and I felt safe enough to pretend that last night hadn't happened. Oh, God. Cooper.

"Roy, wake up."

"What? What happened?"

"Did everyone make it home okay?"

"Yeah, I texted everyone. I bet the cops will have found him by now. Shit, his mom's gonna be fucked up."

"What are we gonna do?"

"Lay low for a while, that's what."

"Think that the Damien brothers did it on purpose?"

"Wrecked him?"

"Yeah, I saw a dent on their bumper. And Cooper and Toenails were giving them shit. Plus you remember when Coop posted that photo of him kissing that one girl? She didn't talk to him again after that. Not to mention that time in gym, with the other boys, they—"

"Don't you dare mention that. And what are we supposed to do, even if it was on purpose. We can't rat."

"I know. It's just unfair."

"Yeah."

“I love you.”

“Time to leave, Lis.”

Cooper's wake was two days later at the church by the park where our race began. When Mom, the boys, and I drove up, I could see the cliff and the road from where we sat. I thought I could even see some of Cooper's brains still on the wall, but I was wrong. I rubbed my eyes to get rid of that thought. The church was white and boring, with chipping paint and an old sign out front about God's love. I wanted to feel God's love, but I just didn't right then and there. Instead, what I felt was the need to egg the shit out of the place.

Toenails wore a suit. Roy hugged Cooper's mom, and I knew it must have been hard for him because he and Coop had been friends since they were in kindergarten, and he spent a lot of time staying with them when his parents were out of town. I noticed that Cooper's little brother, I couldn't remember his name, was curled up like a cat on a chair. People walked past and squatted to try to talk to him and console him, but he didn't move. If you looked really hard, you still could barely even tell he was breathing.

I walked to the casket and looked down. Mom put her hand on my shoulder and squeezed, and I leaned my head to hers. I wouldn't cry, I wouldn't cry, I wouldn't cry. Martin held my hand. Caskets are strange, I thought. You couldn't even tell that Coop was in there. Was he? For a moment, I wasn't sure, and I wanted to throw it open. I wanted to climb inside it a little, too, because that could have been Roy out there driving. It could have been me that night.

The whole place smelled like sickeningly sweet wilting flowers.

We were just about to leave when the Damien brothers came through the door. All of us stopped and stared. We were dumbfounded. I wanted to kill them. We couldn't say anything though, or else we were busted. They bowed over Cooper, shook his mother's hand, and walked right past us. That stayed with me, fusing into my brain like the image of Cooper on the hood of his car. I stood with blood rushing to my head, making a white whooshing noise. And then I ran. My mother hollered my name.

There were tears running down my cheeks, and I was trying to control my breathing like I do when I sprint, but it was coming in choked sobs. Roy chased after me. I could hear his feet slapping the pavement, then the dirt road as the terrain switched.

“Run, Lisa, run!” Denny and Martin shouted from behind. I pushed faster, feeling my heart rate increase, the oxygen flowed smoother. It tasted like adrenaline, the salt and the tang of it.

I gained on the brothers quickly, and I could see the older one fumbling with his keys. I jumped on him, tackling him to the ground and ripping my black dress, skinning my knee. Roy was somewhere far behind, left in the dust. I grabbed the keys out of the oldest brother's limp hand and

wrenched open his junker's door. I wanted to see into their soul and learn what was most precious to them and rip it in front of them. In a split second, I decided I was going to wreck their goddamn car right on the same part of the goddamn road.

I threw myself in and stuck the key into the ignition. It roared to life, and I gunned it. I closed the door as it shot into motion. There was a lump in my throat, and my hands were sweaty. I could barely see with the tears. And behind me I could feel warm breath on my neck.

"Faster, faster," I thought I heard Cooper whisper. "Let's show these fuckers."

The tires squealed, and I went faster than even Roy had, cutting corners so quick that I almost spun out. On the road away from town, the engine began to whine and the steering wheel shook. On the highway, it seemed to level out into a shriek, and I was worried that I would blow the engine or something before I even got to the cliff. There was smoke coming up from the hood, and it made the road in front of me seem a little misty. I thought I might have to settle for crashing right there, but just as I wrenched myself onto the cliff road, it was like the car knew it was on the last lap and determined to push forward. The breathing on my neck stopped, and I felt this weight lift, like when your ears need to pop and you put a piece of gum in your mouth.

In front of me, I could see a person standing on the edge of the rail, looking down.

"Kitty!" I screamed. The brakes squealed. I almost smashed my face into the windshield but I reached my left hand out and braced myself on the dash. I heard a little pop.

"Fuck!" I looked down to see a bump on my hand shaped like a straw. Something had snapped. "Oh, fuck! Kitty, get in here!"

I put the car in park and ran out to her. She was leaning forward, carrying something. With my good arm I pulled her back and we rolled on the ground, wrestling for the top. I was in agony, but I couldn't quit.

"It's my fault!" She was screaming. "Mine!"

"Kitty, stop!" I reeled back and punched her straight in the face, and that must have done something because she rolled onto her side and sobbed, broken wracked little gasps. She let what she'd been holding in her hand drop and I picked it up. It was a rock smattered with brown, dried blood. Cooper's. I held it for a moment, and then laid it on the ground.

"Get up, Kitty. I'm taking you home." I slapped her a little. "Get up, did you hear me?"

Kitty stood, eyes blank, and walked slowly to the car. She threw herself into the seat, a rag doll. I watched her for a moment before climbing into the driver's side. Just as I was about to pull away, I could feel it again, that warm breath on my neck. I turned to the rock on the ground and Kitty

pointed at it.

“I’ve got it,” I said. I walked to the rock, picked it up, and got back into the car. I buckled Kitty and smoothed her hair. We drove back to the church in silence. I expected a fight or something to be going on, but everyone was just sitting around on the hoods of cars, Damien brothers included, smoking cigarettes. When we barreled up, Roy came walking toward me and my eyes swiped over him.

I parked the car and left the keys in the ignition. I stepped out and felt a million years older. Then, just like lightning had struck me, I went rigid. I looked down at that rock, and over at the youngest Damien brother who was glaring at me, and then back to the car. Daisy dragged Kitty away like she knew a storm was coming, and as soon as she was out of the way, I took the rock down hard on the Damien brothers’ windshield, and the glass shattered like it was made of thin ice. It was effortless.

Then, like a breeze, Cooper’s voice floated through. “Eat shit,” he said. And everyone heard it the same as me.

***Hannah Kludy** earned her BA in Creative Writing and Publishing at Northwest Missouri State University. She lives in Maryville, Missouri with her husband and drinks way too much Starbucks. Her work has been published in the Northwest Missourian and Medium Weight Forks, Surcarnochee Review, Red Mud Review, and The Bitchin’ Kitsch. She has also been published, and won the fiction prize in, Cardinal Sins.*

A PLEA FOR MY COUSIN'S LIFE
Sam DeFlitch

Girl-child crouches on the carpet
cowboy Woody in hand, broken,
with an unending loop:
somebody's poisoned the water hole!
somebody's poisoned the water hole!
Sunoco Logistics, for one.
They scorched the earth & burned the water
and we're all stinking of gas,
somebody's poisoned the water hole!
dusted with ash.
Down the Susquehanna 55000 gallons
and a settlement. Which bones
are headed for the mill?
somebody's poisoned the water hole!
And once we've
burned&boiled&dumped&sold it all away,
where will she live?
there's a snake in my boot.

Samantha DeFlitch is an MFA candidate and TA at the University of New Hampshire. Her work has appeared in Birch Gang Review, Appalachian Heritage, and The New Engagement.



RESPITE
Anna De Vul

That first week was delicious
torture, six long days and nights
of waiting for the blood to stop
flowing, the kisses to move south

In the mornings I pulled on polos
in the summer heat to hide the dark
bruises spread like butterfly wings
across my collarbones

In the long afternoons we learned
to map moles and the pulse
of arteries across stomachs,
the places where sounds lay in wait

At night we curled close, didn't speak
of wives or endings or anything
other than desire and the love
we'd unearthed in each other

Under patient hands and tongue
we stretched and unfurled
like flowers at the first touch
of sun, shared our dreams

a rarity for two people closed
tight as seedpods, transplanted
into parched soil in a city
brimming with silent strangers

We spent the seventh night panting
limbs dead weight, heads heavy
on shoulders like shipwrecked sailors
who finally find a place to pause and rest

Anna De Vul was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in a variety of journals under her own name and her pen name, including Wasafiri, The Interpreter's House, The Missing Slate, and The Istanbul Review. She is also an editor for the award-winning journal Lighthouse. One of her more recent projects is a pamphlet of poetry (Cosmonaut) about experiences living in a small industrial city in China, her love life, and her uterus, of which most of these poems are a part.

PERMIT
Heather Wheat

This momentous event
I was there for:
You getting your learner's permit.
You signing your name like an adult,
you touching your
right index finger to the
fingerprint scanner,
the whorls and ridges and lines of
your skin exposed now for
everyone to see. Now,
people can know you in this
specific, intimate way, can
identify you based on evidence,
and there are moments
of your early years—
moments of our life—
I cannot remember.
But I was here.
I signed my name,
taking responsibility
for you, for your life, for the
lives of others you pass
as you learn to drive.
You will turn the wheel soon,
you will control so much in a way
you never have. And with
every turn of the wheel, you move
farther and farther away from me,
just as we are working on
becoming close.

Heather Wheat is a mother, wife, daughter, writer, teacher, book-lover, reader. Her poetry has appeared in Poetry Quarterly, Long Exposure Magazine, on GFT Press's "Ground Fresh Thursday" web series, and in GFT Press: One in Four; her other work and essays are on Bookwitty, BUST.com, McSweeney's Internet Tendency, in Richmond Magazine, and on The Washington Post's education blog. She has loved poetry since her AP Literature teacher introduced her to "35/10" by Sharon Olds, and she understood the power poems had to encapsulate emotions and life in a solid form, yet make both transcend size.

RAMADAN
Lauren Sartor

In the classroom my students and I cut our tongues
into small pieces: rectangles, octagons, half-moons.
We test each shape in the other's ears.

During the ascetic weeks I place gum – mastic, lime with mint –
into their stubborn mouths. Anfal faints while changing tense.

The sun watched as grown women in security greens
covered her chin high with a black abaya.

Allah is specific about clothes, the inner thighs and pictures.
He is watch smith of prayers set in motion hundreds of years.
After so far lived, five times a day, groups become superstitious
when flying, determined about driving, encouraged to split
a man's heart in fours.

My students ask if I'm married, if I have children.
I answer that I have been to Paris twice.

My bedroom drawers are full of dates.
In this barren landscape of sand and moths
I wring my heart and blow skin flakes from my arms.

My boyfriend and I tell ourselves twelve months is not
so long. When Skype has static, we search for the other
through Calibri and emoticons.

His eyes are the color of a Long Island sky,
a reminder of a beach I lay naked on.

Lauren Sartor received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and is currently getting her Ph.D. in poetry from SUNY Binghamton. She has been a college instructor in Saudi Arabia, a cab driver in Arizona and a carnival worker across states. Her work has been published in a handful of literary magazines.

I told him we were to make out for just one minute, and so we did. After that minute was up, I took his half-sucked Tootsie Pop, bit it in half, gave it back, and walked down the painted porch stairs. "I am woman," I thought.

Unfortunately, I was not woman. I was power. Woman needs not push man or break his things. Woman needs not do anything she doesn't mean. I was woman the next morning when I woke up feeling badly. I was woman because I felt exactly like myself.

Casey O'Brien was born in 1988 in Wisconsin to a couple of sweethearts. She lives in Milwaukee, where she spends her time tutoring public school kids in the basics of the English language, loving her friends to smithereens, dipping her toes in icy Lake Michigan, debating whether or not to get her nose pierced despite her sensitive skin, and writing. She has been told since she was in grade school that she would become a writer, and after 27+ years of uncertainty, is finally coming around to the idea.

***IT IS IMPOSSIBLE (OR AT LEAST VERY HARD) TO
HAVE AN ORGASM WHEN YOUR FEET ARE COLD
Selena Loomis***

a tiny baby goat rubbed its shit on my new watering-can-and-tulip-
print dress
and i overcooked my banana bread
and i felt like a woman when i had to make dinner again
and i felt like a woman when i washed the tiny baby goat shit off my
freshly shaven calves and out
of my freshly thrifted skirt
in my new partner's parent's bathroom

my new partner has a tape deck in their car
and there is a tape they have that you push into the car
and plug in to yr ipod
but sometimes
after the songs end
when i'm real distracted being in love
i can hear the tape inside the tapedeck whirring
spinning its feet under itself and
trying to keep them warm

Selena Loomis is a genderqueer fiber artist and sometimes gardener originally from St. Louis, MO. When not writing, she can be found knitting, baking, planning for spring, or singing to her two hairless pet rats. She currently lives in southwest Ohio where she studies performance art at Antioch College. She has had a few things published in college-affiliated journals and zines.



HAUNTED GIRL
L. Stacy Christie

Starts as hidden,
folds/unfolds mystery
reveals X (pink smoke)
sums her up. Everything nice.

Grows, coil-bundles replicate, make her—
a trillion errors thread cavities, scaffold
every body-wrong—mucous, adipose, odor, fluids—
her body burdened by tiny ghosts of DNA.

Surely the haunting stays,
grows cell-wise over girl-bones—
without asking builds itself—
fleshy, unknown, owned.

Call it bloom, bloody brown webs
a seep-stain—dirty pure girl wanted
by all, herself somewhere
in transcription—womanproof.

Girl haunting, cycle of lay downs—
full flowering multicellularity—hierarchy
of want: life, self, visbile/invisibility. Another way
of saying. (Diffusion: the process of). Spread

out/in. Wet space holds haunt, that anchorage—
mediates what eye or idea makes,
electrical impulses, her—imagine being light—
focused, bent—she can't detect.

L. Stacy Christie has an MFA in Poetry. Her poetry can be found in Persona Literary Journal, Cliterature, and Yew Journal. She has published book reviews for Texas Books in Review and Southwestern American Literature. Stacy teaches writing and spends her time baking and making feminist art.

UNDER THE SKIN
Anna De Vul

It's months later when I start to think
of the memories, him teaching me
to make a roux, to stuff a chicken
with rosemary and garlic squeezed
under the skin, to chop a line
of meth and to hold my breath
for 30 seconds to get the most
from a hit, to hide a tin
or box or baggie, to talk and laugh
to the police when pulled over
or when my mother called them
to make a joke of his drunk form
lying on the floor, unresponsive
to my baby sister's cries, to lie
to say he just had too much crab
as we painted his toenails
and bald spot with sparkly polish
because I was also high and I
had to make it fun, to give her
a different set of memories

Anna De Vul was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in a variety of journals under her own name and her pen name, including Wasafiri, The Interpreter's House, The Missing Slate, and The Istanbul Review. She is also an editor for the award-winning journal Lighthouse. One of her more recent projects is a pamphlet of poetry (Cosmonaut) about experiences living in a small industrial city in China, her love life, and her uterus, of which most of these poems are a part.

Jessie Janeshek

until you seek white like lavish Vegas
 where it began.

there was a pocket
of sharp gold and safe thought

a City of Rocks
 every brown boulder
 named for a planet
every stone crèche a rattler's tableau.

You called me actress
tongue down my throat
damned the crow's wings
jacked the dead rabbit.

I stretched a long rope
between hunger and drama
as you watched me undress.

Black prairie skirts
bitter panties and marrow
I'll imitate trauma the still-blue-eyed dolls' mildewed bodies
and then won't you dance?

No, you'll cry *precipice*
until it's too late
to light up my corpse like a candle.

Jessie Janeshek's second full-length book of poems, *The Shaky Phase*, is forthcoming from *Stalking Horse Press*. Her chapbooks are *Spanish Donkey/Pear of Anguish* (Grey Book Press, 2016), *Rah-Rah Nostalgia* (dancing girl press, 2016), and *Hardscape* (Reality Beach, forthcoming, 2017). *Invisible Mink* (Iris Press, 2010) is her first full-length collection. An Assistant Professor of English and the Director of Writing at Bethany College, she holds a Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and an M.F.A. from Emerson College. She co-edited the literary anthology *Outscape: Writings on Fences and Frontiers* (KWG Press, 2008). You can read more of her poetry at jessiejaneshesk.net.

[FEATURED ARTISTS]

Giada Cattaneo moved to Miami after completing her Bachelor's degree in History of Contemporary Art at the University of Bologna. She has collaborated with many editors and publishers in Italy. In the United States, her illustrations have been published in Fourteen Hills Magazine (San Francisco State University), Black Scat Review, Meat for Tea Magazine, The writing disorder, Puerto del Sol (New Mexico State University), The B'K bitchin' kitsch, Sincerely Magazine, The Fem Magazine, and 13th Floor Magazine (University of Nebraska). She is passionate, positive and colorful. Her website is www.honeyjade.com.

Angel Rey is a photographer and creative director out of Providence, RI.

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Thank you for writing, submitting, and reading.

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