


2013

et cetera

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Et Cetera

Since 1953, celebrating the *artistic* and *creative* talent at Marshall



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

Et Cetera

Editor-in-Chief	Whitney Naylor-Smith
Managing Editor	Michelle Hogmire
Visual Editor	Tanya Bomsta
Drama Editor	Sarah Abbott
Fiction Editor	David Robinson
Nonfiction Editor	Max Layne
Poetry Editor	Daniel Lassell

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*"An intellectual says something simple in a hard way.
An artist says something hard in a simple way."*

Charles Bukowski

Before Words

BRENDA SKEENS

Beat down
on a little
wooden upright.
Knee-high. Keys,
an old man's yellow
teeth that click
in a smiley mouth.

Bring the cool jazz
angels to slap
the backboard.
Know that tune?
One note.
Three.

I play in the empty room.
Nobody hears the tin-
pan-TIN-PLUNK. Speak
for me. Shout out
those red hot
blues to chase them down
a hallway.

A little girl's voice tickles
her momma's headache. Thump
and hum. Thump and hum.
Ain't gonna go away.
I will be heard.

You may have left and closed
the door. My fingers still
know which buttons
to push.

Archaeology

CODEY BILLS

In the bathroom mirror she removes her right contact
and dips it in Opti-Free,
synthetic tears that will not burn
when they touch the menisci of her eyes;
I who sing in starless dark or closets that have no doors,
only a rusting bar jammed between
drooling walls where a burst pipe is buried.
Please, follow that chlorine
sting and fluoride bite
down, to a foaming bubblegum core
where rows of bantam soldiers break
rank to disintegrate,
reintegrated with dust disturbed by
blue blood archaeologists in Indiana
swaddled in cinema screens and
camera contact lenses.

I was six when the camera stole
my soul, so I found Jesus in a dentist's office
on the sixteenth of March.
Salvation in a toothpick and
a green surgical mask, when as the television garbles
the discovery of a Mandarin crypt, of terracotta
terrible, the dentist drones.
I am not to pick my gums. They are not perennials. They
do not push up from the thawed earth every year:
salvation in a toothpick and Pizza Hut mints for dinner.
This is not a lie, but it might be fiction;
and I know it'll press the
whisper of a fern's frond or my
velociraptor teeth into shale, fall asleep next to the
anthracite, black under Blair Mountain.

Excavate the puffy
eyes of a boy who loves dinosaurs,
watch his
father videotape his bathroom search
for his toothbrush, his brontosaurus stool—
and I wonder what my camouflaged father would say with
his bibles and his wife,
if he dug until his antipode and found me
ossified in my living room. But this excavation has been
halted, I am told, due to lack of funds. We have not yet
begun to dig.



Life as THEY Know It
ADAM LEVY



Standards Lows/Low Standards

ADAM LEVY

Subtle Calamity

ELIZABETH DAVIDSON

I had fallen in love but pretended I wasn't. *Don't drag other people into your shit.* So I didn't tell Benjamin that I loved him. And he did tell me that he loved me. (Two blankets, one knitted by my mother's hands – a blue and white monstrosity that I loved because it made her proud – and the other a store bought chenille beauty.) He got married and left West Virginia behind. *People don't wait around for someone else's life to level out.* I said goodbye to him in a smoke filled bar after four shots of vodka. (Clothes, everything from my closet and dresser, crammed haphazardly into faded, vintage suitcases.) The vodka is what did it; it was the catalyst I needed to form a plan to leave home. (Empty boxes thrown around, some stacked, all of them waiting to be filled and taped.)

The plan came easily, but shedding my responsibilities was more difficult. *Alzheimer's is the kind of disease that rips apart the soul but leaves the body intact.* It was my mother that I didn't want to leave, couldn't leave. And she didn't want to leave her ailing mother. (One bag of shoes – I couldn't decide between the blue Adidas' and the black Puma's and the ballet flats were a necessity.) Then came the monster that had once been a sweet, white haired man with a glint in his eyes and my mother gave up the way I had after the vodka. (Two hundred dollars in a battered billfold and a cup holder full of quarters.) Everything got meticulously placed into my ancient Toyota and I headed south. *Like a bird.*

Three years passed quickly.

July 21st

The lake has dried up; eighteen square miles of red clay. The Atlanta that I know – dry, fevered, sweltering. A stranger's house. Always a stranger, I can never remember the name. A brick box with an attached porch, a white trellis curtaining the far end; a gravel drive; a cracking cement foundation. The night air is a warm blanket, thick, smothering. I light a cigarette with an engraved lighter, stolen from someone who passed out too early. Three hands holding beer bottles – clink, clink, clink. Thomas walks out the door followed by a girl who isn't wearing makeup. She whispers at me. I can feel her balmy breath against my face. She's hiding from something. *Ask her what she's hiding from!* I just stare at her, appraising. I drink from my glass and she's gone. Thomas takes her spot. Boring, predictable. We make an odd couple in appearance at least; he's fourteen inches taller than I am but we both have dark hair and hazel eyes. He's staring at me expectant. He said something and I wasn't paying attention. His sweet smile falters. He walks back inside. In between the swinging door I hear someone playing the spoons.

I flick the remainder of my cigarette across the porch; it hits the trellis in a mini explosion of fire. Dry pine needles spark silently on the floor. I coat them with my dark drink and the life goes out, smoke rising revealing blackened filaments. My ears are instantly assaulted by a banjo as I cross the threshold. Everything is bathed in a faint glow of pinprick light, a ceiling turned art installation with a thousand Christmas lights dangling, intertwining. The room screams of fragility in the soft hum; nothing quite reachable, all of the graininess of the world erased. I pass people playing video games, an abandoned piano, people snorting cocaine off the glass top table, and end in the doorway of the kitchen next to Thomas. Two scrawny guys are responsible for the music. Dirty punk kids playing bluegrass; I'm reminded of home.

Street kids, stranded in West Virginia. Sleeping on sofas, under bridges, in houses built with sheets strung between trees and decorated with stolen roses. Boys and girls in hand stitched vests, facial piercings – silver hoops, a brilliance on burgundy lips in the right light; chains, Mohawks, jailhouse tattoos done in a kitchen that smelt of piss; thick smoke, that distinct sweet yet skunky smell permeating the scene...any scene, always present; dreadlocks, stretched ears, bandanas, boots – boxes of cheap wine at their feet. Everyone the same, everyone individual. Murals on walls, sidewalks, bodies – gold, white, blue, teal, red...always red; manifestos written in foggy states, x'ed out, rewritten, notes in the margins, titled, x'ed out, retitled; music – always music – punk rock covers, classical on acoustic guitars, bluegrass . . . that Appalachian noise coursing through foreign veins.

Thomas says: "You hate the banjo."

I say: "I hate the ukulele, it's not the same."

I stare at the guy in the black rimmed glasses, smacking the silver spoons on his knee, on the palm of his hand, down his outstretched fingers. He seems serious about his craft. Scowling, pensive. Beside him is a girl. Stoned, unfocused, pretty. She's turning her violin into a fiddle; flattening the bridge, after a swig of Tennessee whisky; closing her eyes and dragging the bow across the strings; smiling at the sound, an abrasive twang ripping the air in two.

July 24th

The sun bakes my skin. The wind lifts my hair. I hear a Warbler's song before I see a yellow feather. *Sweet sweet sweet, very very sweet.* My grandmother had taught me the tune. I barely catch a glimpse before it makes for the top of a tree. *Sweet sweet sweet, very very sweet.* There is a tractor – an ostentatious thing of yellow and green – that sets unforgivably still because the last time it moved someone's pet went missing. The wind picks up. A porch swing is beating against yellow siding. A newspaper is skidding across

the pavement. Pollen remains attached to every surface in sight. I put a key into the front door, lock away everything inside. *I'll take down these wind chimes if they don't stop this melodramatic plea for attention.* I walk toward the green Saturn with the rusty hood.

My grandfather. A black and white photograph – a gray suit, a black piano, a small Huntington home – a white border, OCT 1958. His hands on the ivory keys. They said he was playing something he had written. They put the piano in a storage building, covered it with a white sheet. A corpse. I snuck in before they hauled it away. Twelve years of hearing *don't touch the sheet* clamped around my ankles slowing each movement. I removed the sheet, disregarded it on the floor. There was no rot, no decay. I lifted the fall board, ran my hands over the keys, not touching. Soundless. I wanted to absorb something of the man I had never met. I imagined that if he lingered anywhere it would be in those keys and I wanted something of him – the grandfather that would always hold the lead, because he'd never have a chance to fuck things up. In those keys was the song he played. Something delicate, a Nocturne in C minor. Something that weeps into the skin. A rise and fall of an ocean wave, a boisterous crash on the shore followed by a lull of stagnant water seeping into satiny sand.

I won't do the cocaine. There is a weakness in that powder.

Uptight. Prude. Momma's Girl. Does peer pressure ever work on twenty-something's? I can drink anyone here under the table, but I won't do that either. I have a nasty habit of attaching to the wrong people. A habit of picking the ones with a habit. Thomas sits next to me on the piano bench, cuts out two white lines on the lid of the piano, offers me a rolled up bill. *Unacceptable.* I give him a blank stare and he rolls his eyes before shoving my line up his nose. I walk into another room.

The music is blaring from a radio but Saturday's musicians are still ever present – adjusting strings, drinking from bottles. Sofas line every wall, a 1970's sofa graveyard. The guy with the spoons seems ill humored so I approach the one with the banjo. His name is Chris, an ordinary name for an ordinary face. His hair is a deliberate disaster and he wears cheap glasses. His girlfriend is at his side – nearly toothless, sagging skin. She is twenty-seven. I ignore the knowledge that fights its way to the front of my mind; always ignoring. Her intelligence is unprecedented in this setting. There is an instant camaraderie between the three of us.

Chris says: "We are moving to West Virginia."

I say: "I moved from West Virginia."

I want to go with them. I want to run away from my self-imposed hell and go with these people I don't know. I am sitting on a stranger's filthy couch discussing mountains

and seasons and street kids. For the first time in my life I am homesick. I ask him how he learned to play the banjo. He points to his girlfriend and I beg her to teach me. *Please don't leave this place yet.* She grabs the instrument and sits next to me on the green sofa.

Hemlock Falls in North Georgia. Thomas was a stranger, Julie was a mutual friend. She thought we'd be a perfect match, Thomas and I. (She had one of those shrill voices when she thought she was right.) I had said no twice so Julie stopped asking. I hadn't expected him to be with her when she picked me up at my Dunwoody apartment. A two hour drive on a chill October morning. He was taller than I had expected and he had soft freckles across the bridge of his nose. He and I sat next to each other in the back seat while Julie made small talk from behind the wheel. When she parked the car Thomas opened the door for me.

The leaves had already begun to change; brilliant scarlet, golden yellow, burnt orange, mixed with a sea of green. He was quiet and I liked that about him. We had a lot in common, he and I, and when Julie and her date decided to take a different trail I let her go with a smile. (She looked a little smug; her knowing blue eyes were saying *I told you so.*) Moss clung to everything –gnarled tree trunks, jutting boulders, wooden bridges. My cheap hiking boots slowed me down; his steps, already one matching two of mine, calmed automatically. He was into Morrissey and he liked reading books. When I recited Plath his sweet smile reached his eyes. A wooden footbridge crossed Moccasin Creek. I took photographs of trees as he identified species; shutter clicks mixed with bird songs. The rushing water of the creek introduced the roar of the falls –water cascaded down rock walls, autumn leaves plunged into calmer beds. His subtle touch was warm against my cool skin.

After an hour of trying, it is painfully apparent I have no aptitude for this particular set of strings. I have uncooperative fingers; I will them to work together and to do as they're told, but they are free agents that want nothing containing a bluegrass something. Chris hands me a set of spoons. He shows off the basics – on the knee, against the hand, cascading down outstretched fingers. I follow his lead, metallic tapping echoing against my skull. His girlfriend strums at the banjo as he explains quarter notes and eighth notes. Within ten minutes it is obvious that I am a natural. Thomas leaves; two years of getting to know him told me he would. Within thirty minutes I am as skilled as the two scrawny guys that have been playing for years. It is ridiculous and enthralling. By the time we wind down there are bruises forming on my dented fingers.

Chris takes a piece of tinfoil from his pocket. The girlfriend supplies the small glass pipe. Someone asks me for a lighter but I'm already walking away. *They'll fit in well in West Virginia.* My nostalgia of place has been lifted by tainted smoke and a smell of slow death. By the time I reach the mouth of the cul-de-sac I'm wishing it was Halloween, raining, autumn leaves all around; I'm craving the soft bell of a passing train. A song

from another moment, another voice. I spot a storm drain and toss the spoons towards it. The quiet night amplifies the racket the silver pieces make as they skid across the metal grate and smack their way to the bottom.

July 25th

My purse is in Thomas' car so I have no choice but to walk there first. Three miles, then seven – I won't be home by dawn, but I will be coated in pollen. I can feel, or I think I can feel, an attack on my arms, my legs, the tops of my feet; every inch of exposed flesh will be touched by the yellow film. There is a guy with a newspaper lying on a bus stop bench. He lifts the right side of the paper as I pass and asks for a cigarette, calls me honey. I'm fucking sick of southern hospitality – honey, sweetheart, darlin'. I ignore him, let nothingness swallow him whole.

I walk up three flights of stairs, knock on Thomas' door. It takes a solid minute before he answers. He stands in the crack he makes, taps the doorframe three times with his index finger. Always the same. I imagine the girl not wearing makeup sitting on his sofa.

I say: "My purse is in your car."

He says: "Of course it is."

He grabs the keys from their spot on the wall and tosses them at me. They hit the floor – a vulgar, metallic heap – and he shuts the door. He's mad. Mad at what I'm not really sure. He's probably as bored with me as I am him. That's okay, I understand that well. I walk to the end of the parking lot by the fenced in dumpster, put the key in the door of the green Saturn, grab my purse, toss the keys in the driver's seat, lock the door before shutting it.

I decide to backtrack the half a mile and wait the thirty minutes for the train. I buy hot tea from a store on Ponce De Leon, buy a paper from a kind Vietnamese man with a cart on the corner of Peachtree and Peachtree, walk into the Midtown station with its abstract art popping off the walls. I don't read the paper, just hold it to distract from my leftover appearance. I take a seat in the back of the northbound train; watch the sun rise, glass buildings reflecting the soft hues of the morning sky; watch traffic fill the Perimeter, gridlock in a soft haze; watch Georgia pines bend and sway in the echo of the passing train.

August 28th

I hate that feeling of being watched in an empty apartment at midnight. I check the closets behind the black and white shower curtain, under the bed. I get out the tape measure and take the dimensions of the living room window. The curtains are thick, velvety and lined, but I'll feel better with blinds. I check the locks on both doors. Unlocking and locking just to hear that pop that means security. *Stop being ridiculous.*

The Internet is at fault really. Stupid tracker keeping tabs on every visit one person makes to a single page. I grab my phone and call Thomas.

“Hello,” he says.

I really don't want to bring him in this. “Your girlfriend is stalking me. Online at least, but I swear I saw her in the parking lot when I came in.”

“Is this some attempt at breaking me and Carrie up?”

I knew he would think that. “Not even close. She's online stalking me, over two hundred page visits from her in the past week. I tracked the ISP, or whatever, to her office building. And if that wasn't her in the parking lot she's got a doppelganger.”

“How do you even know where she works?” I can almost see him rolling his eyes, a half smile, un-amused, distorting his features.

“Because when I found out the office building it was coming from I called and they have a company directory option. Thomas, she's stalking me.”

There's a long pause, then he says the one thing I had hoped he wouldn't. “I wouldn't have expected this from you.”

I hang up the phone. *This is going nowhere.* I lie down on the sofa and pull the afghan over my head; every light in the small apartment stays on.

September 4th

I unlock the front door with a sturdy, silver key. I worked a double and my feet and back are screaming. I put my purse on the coffee table and knock over a glass of something dark in the process. My ears start ringing; warning bells I think. I don't leave full glasses setting around – I have a cat and learned that lesson the hard way. I'm not sure what I should do, so for a solid minute I do nothing. I don't move, barely breath. I'm trying to hear something, someone, but the damn ringing just gets louder. *Do something.* I walk toward the bedroom, quietly, carefully not giving up my position.

I stand in the bedroom doorway, there's no need to go in further. The room is dark but my eyes adjust quickly. Carrie is lying in my bed, sound asleep, the rise and fall of her chest accented by a soft snore. She's tall, with blond hair and a thin mouth; if Thomas was looking for my opposite he did well. She's covered by the blue and white blanket my mother had knitted, a corner intertwined in her left hand. I have the urge to shout at this stranger but suppress it – walking out of the apartment, purse flung over my shoulder.

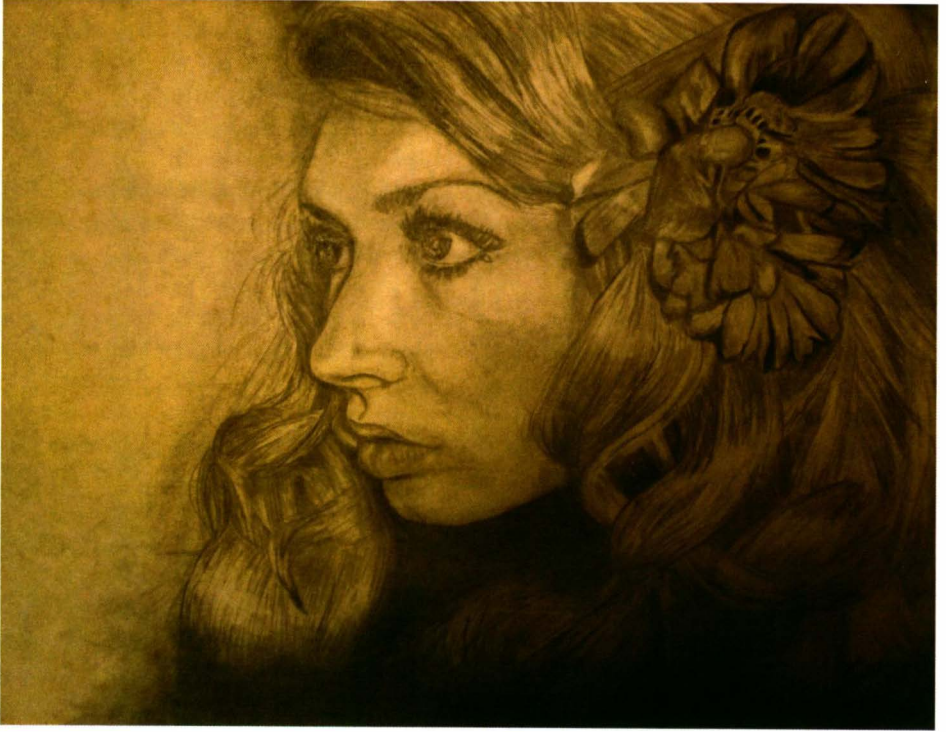
I call the police first to make my intentions clear. Next, I call Thomas.

I start talking before he has a chance to say hello. “Your girlfriend is asleep in my apartment. I’m not sure why, as I wasn’t here when she let herself in.”

“You’re lying,” he doesn’t seem so sure.

“No I’m not. I called the cops. They can deal with her. Just wanted to let you know what happened.”

I end the call. I don’t want to talk about it anymore. I’ll pack everything I can and move back to West Virginia. I’ve been tired of this place for far too long. It’s too dry. Pollen casts an unearthly glow on everything. I miss the Ohio, the sound of passing barges; the seasons, crisp autumn air, snow coating the sidewalks, cold, green mornings; the people, that familiar accent playing at the edges of conversations. I need the familiarity of it, the feeling of home.



Visions of Real Flowers
AMANDA FOOCE

i feel like

BENNET SIFFRIN

the Mediterranean sky above me
misplaced on Appalachia ridges
which glows like Vesuvius on
a coal-burnt horizon

every one of the gargoyle leaves
perched on their respective steeples
ready to crash into rubble or
closed-minded perceptions

all of the marionettes in pea coats
who bustle and tangle their strings
the very same that snap from
tension and collapse to a tumble

this damn door in front of me
the one that's stuck and I
can't tear it open like all
the others that buried me

myself –like how I used to be
when I didn't know why
or how or even what
Maybe it is just nostalgia

Tuesday

CODEY BILLS

At 1:31 PM that Tuesday, Adam sat sobbing, shaking, melted into the floor between a miniature arm and a miniature ocean. The wall behind him bled paint, the vibrant colors turning a vomit yellow-brown as they oozed toward the floor. A cigarette slowly burnt a black hole into the carpet. The pediatrician, when Adam was three, had said to his mother, Ma'am, I'm unsure why Adam won't speak. He responds well to external stimuli; he seems intelligent and he's certainly not autistic. I just don't know. Adam had closed his eyes.

At 9:16 AM that Tuesday, with his red-bearded chin scratching against the table, he could count the ridges and whorls on his thumbs. He scooted his chin across the table, between his hands, and closer to the flesh colored clay characters he had painstakingly painted throughout the Last week. Acrid acrylic fumes burnt his nostrils; open cans of paint hunched in a line against the wall. Between four and five AM, he had finished the diorama these figurines were frozen in: a scaled down boat, its sail cut from an old blue pillowcase, struggling in a roiling black paint sea.

"Hmmm," Adam hummed. He blinked once, twice, and his hand quivered toward the ship-captain and its pipe-cleaner diameter arms. A cautious forefinger and thumb pinched the captain's hand, moving it up just millimeters.

"But is it too much," Adam said. He stood, staring down at the scene. Seconds passed. An ambulance raced past, siren wailing. Wind whined through an open window, rattling the blinds and making sheer purple ghosts of curtains. A door slammed in the apartment down stairs and someone yelled "Fuck!"

"It's fine," Adam said, "Captain William F. Wood, ahoy." Kneeling again, he put his eye to a camera on a tripod and snapped a picture. He smiled. "Nine thousand nine hundred ninety nine frames left." His first grade teacher had told him, Adam, honey, you can't learn cursive underneath the desk. He had closed his eyes.

At 10:31 AM that Tuesday, after eighteen frames in an hour and fifteen minutes (.24frames per minute), Adam took a break. He unfolded his body and stretched. He looked at his watch. "A minute behind," he said, a frustrated twitch echoing across his face. "I need to eat."

He walked down his hallway into the kitchen. The window above the sink was open; a small, deep bowl—made by his mother in a college pottery class—waited

on the windowsill next to a pack of Parliaments and a white lighter. Sunlight filtered through the orange curtains, warming the hospital clean kitchen surfaces. At the sink, Adam pumped three squirts of vanilla bean scented hand soap into his left palm. With his other hand he turned the hot water on, then off. He mouthed one, two, three, and turned the cold water on, then off, then on again. To wash his hands, he rubbed his palms together six times, the top of his left hand with his right palm twice, and the top of his right hand with his left palm once. He paused, mouthed one, two, three again and turned the cold water off before turning the hot water on and off again. He dried his hands on the sunflower printed dish towel hanging from the white oven door behind him. A phone rang in a different room. Adam sighed and walked to answer it.

He grabbed the phone off the computer desk in his room. It had been charging.

“Hello?”

“Hey, hun.”

“Oh, hi, Mom.”

“How’s your day going? Did you go to class?”

“Yeah, of course,” Adam lied. He hadn’t gone to class that day, or yesterday, or last week, or that entire semester. He hadn’t left his apartment in four months. “I’m on campus right now.”

“Oh, I don’t want to keep you then,” she said. “I just wanted to—“

“It’s fine. I’m about to head home anyway.”

“Well, good. How are your classes, then? Are you turning in all your work?”

“Um, yeah, they’re fine, I guess. Same as last week,” he said. He shuffled through the syllabi he’d printed out and stacked neatly in the upper right hand corner of his desk. He peered down at them over his glasses. “Midterms are this week.”

“Have you been studying?”

“Well, I don’t really have any tests, but I’ve been writing the papers I have to do.”

“That’s good, that’s good,” his mother said. “Are you going to come home anytime soon?”

Adam bit his lower lip. “Well, I don’t really know, Mom. I’ve just been so busy, you know?”

“Oh, I know how busy you are hun. I just miss you and want to see you,” she said.

“I could always come over there.”

“Um, that, uh, you wouldn’t be able to stand the mess,” Adam lied. “Plus, it smells like paint real bad.”

“Really? What’ve you been painting?”

“The, the walls.”

“What color?”

“Uh, purple.”

“Well, that’s a nice color,” she said. “Anyway, I just wanted to tell you that I’m going to send Josh over with some food and money. What time can he drop it off?”

“Around 1 PM I’ll be home.”

“OK, well, I guess I’m gonna get off here then.”

“OK.”

“Don’t let this semester be like the last one, hun, OK?” He had failed all of his classes in the last semester.

“I won’t.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

“OK. Love you, Adam.”

“Love you too, Mom.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” Adam hung up, rubbed his forehead, and stuck the phone into his pocket. He threw himself into his desk chair and turned on his laptop. Next to the computer lurked a shiny black ashtray shaped like a skull paired with a pack of Marlboro Lights and a KISS lighter. He snatched a cigarette out of the pack and lit it.

“That was awful,” he said. His late father, when five year old Adam had crawled behind his mother while she sat knitting on the couch, had yelled, Adam, you can’t hide behind your mother for the rest of your life. He had closed his eyes.

At 12:31 PM that Tuesday, after he woke up from his customary 11 AM nap, Adam went back into the living room. He sat at a desk across from the captain's table. On the desk, a phonebook, a crenellated purple ashtray next to a pack of Camels and a NASCAR lighter, a yellow pencil, and a one subject, college ruled notebook had been meticulously aligned. He opened the phonebook and lit a cigarette. On the first drag he paused and closed his eyes. The smoke crawled up the wall and pooled at the ceiling. In approximately eight seconds, the room smelled like an emphysemic corpse. Adam tapped the cigarette on the edge of the ashtray and flipped through the phonebook.

"John Cleaver, Samuel Guernsey, Amanda Gunn," he said. He bit the inside of his left cheek and his forehead wrinkled. His glasses slipped down slightly on his nose uncovering red indentations. He took another drag.

"Heather Huggins, Victoria La Grande. There," he said. Transferring the cigarette to his left hand, he picked up the pencil and put the notebook on top of the phonebook.

He wrote, adding to the hundreds of other paragraphs about strangers from the phonebook, "Victoria La Grande is a widowed woman of sixty two. Her husband died two months ago in a horrific car accident after which he descended into a vegetative coma. Unfortunately, Mr. La Grande's (Henry?) condition was such that his body would only live for approximately four point six two months. The doctors gave Victoria a choice: would she pull the plug on his life support technology now, or would she prefer to have this last four point six two months with his living body? Victoria deliberated for three days. On the first day, she looked at old photographs of herself and Henry; she wouldn't do it, she thought. On the second day, Victoria"

Knock, knock, KNOCK. Adam looked toward the front door, dropped the pencil onto his careful capitals. He stood and crept to the front door, its left side gilded in chunky locks, chains, and slim metal bars. He peered through the peephole. The distended forehead and eyes of a short guy in a blue t-shirt squinted into the peephole's other side.

"Adam, you home?" the guy said.

"Um, yeah, wait a just a, a second," Adam said. He slid bars and chains and turned locks with trembling hands. He paused, took a breath. He opened the door.

"Took you long enough, asshole," said the guy. Adam stood in the doorway blinking rapidly and biting the inside of his lower lip.

"Yeah, sorry, hi Josh," Adam said. "I, um, wasn't expecting you until 1 PM and it's," he looked at his watch, "oh." Josh laughed. He had a grey plastic bag in his left hand and an iPhone in his right. Its giant numerals blinked 1:01.

"I know to be right on time. You just lost track of it. That's a first."

“I’ve been a minute behind all day.”

Adam looked down at the silver band where the off-white carpet and the wood of the landing tried to meet. He looked up again, past Josh, into the fluorescent hallway of the fifth floor. Someone had scrawled “Janie is a slut!” on a flyer for the local YMCA.

“You gonna let me in?” Josh said. Adam’s attention snapped back to Josh with wide eyes and a slightly gaping mouth.

“Yeah! Yeah. Sorry. I was, uh, still startled,” Adam said. He shuffled three feet back. Josh came in, sniffed, wiggled his nose, and shook his head.

“It smells like shit in here man.”

“Actual shit or are you using ‘smells like shit’ to mean ‘generic bad smell?’”

“Jesus, I don’t know, Adam.” Josh rolled his eyes and pushed past Adam into the living room. Adam followed, stopping in its entrance.

“Well, I have, um, been painting all morning so it may just be that.”

“Maybe. It also smells like cigs. You been smoking in here?” As Josh eyed the still burning cigarette in Adam’s hand, its centimeter long ash fell off and drifted toward the floor. It nested between a wine stain and Adam’s bare left foot. Josh smirked. Adam looked down at his hand, up at Josh, then down again, and thrust his hand behind his back. Josh laughed.

“Dude, I saw it. Mom would be so pissed if she knew you smoked in here,” Josh said. “It’s a non-smoking place. It’s on the lease.” Josh plopped onto the couch and flung his arm across the back of it. He dropped the bag; it made the crinkling noise peculiar to plastic grocery bags as its handles wilted toward the faded orange cushions.

“As long as you don’t tell her, it’ll be OK.”

“She is paying for it, you know. If the landlord found out, it’d be Mom in trouble, not you.” Adam pursed his lips sarcastically.

“Oh, no, eviction and having to move home are certainly not horrifying prospects.”

“Don’t be a dick.”

“Don’t think you know shit,” Adam said. Josh sucked in his upper lip and sprang up. He blinked, looked down and up, and stuffed his hands in his pockets. Adam sat at the desk chair and watched. Josh paced, leonine, toward the table with the painted figurines. The six feet between the brothers widened and somehow seemed glaciated, crevassed.

“What’s this?” Josh pointed to the table. He squatted and his shirt rode up, displaying his lower back and its dark fuzz. He stretched out his curious right hand.

“Stop-motion stuff. Don’t touch it, Josh.”

“Why?”

“Just don’t. Seriously.” Adam breathed in deeply, ran his hand through the hair on the back of his head. His foot tapped an erratic rhythm against the floor. When he was 11, his piano teacher had said, Adam, try to keep your hands from shaking. He had closed his eyes.

At 1:16 PM that Tuesday, Adam watched his life collapse. Josh’s fingers inched toward the captain. When they touched the captain’s arm, an invisible hand grabbed Adam’s diaphragm. His heart pulled him out of the chair. As his vision’s focus became clearer, the edges of the room darkened. His brother’s outline sharpened until it cut.

“Josh,” Adam gasped. “Don’t touch it.” Josh laughed. He jerked the captain’s arm up. The snap of the shoulder’s dislocation collapsed the distance between the brothers. Adam clapped a hand onto Josh’s shoulder and spun him around. Josh lost his balance, ended up on his ass, dark eyes wide and lips parted. Adam’s cigarette fell. Orange blossoms sparked where it hit the floor.

“Dude, Adam, I’m so s—“

“Shut up, Josh. Shut the fuck up.” Adam took a step forward; Josh scooted away from him. Adam kicked at Josh, but Josh caught it with his free hand

“I’ll fix it. Yeah,” Josh said, scrambling to his feet.

“It’s already ruined. You ruined it,” Adam said, turning around, in one motion rubbing his cheekbones, eyes, cheekbones, yanking at his beard. “God.”

“No, look. There’s this little joint here,” Josh said, stepping toward Adam and waving the arm around. He looked at Adam, then at the set. He walked toward the set again. Adam whipped his head toward him and extended his arm. Flopping his hand around, he said, “Fucking stop!” Josh picked up the captain and tried jabbing the arm back into its socket. Adam yelled, bolted forward, and pushed Josh out of the way. Josh dropped the captain and its arm.

“Oh god oh god oh god,” said Adam. Tears leaked from his eyes. “Get out. Leave.”

“Wait. It’ll be OK, Adam. You can—“

“No, I can’t,” Adam moaned, pushing Josh toward the door. “I can’t.” He pushed Josh again. Josh stepped backward, throwing his arms up.

“But—”

“Get out!” Adam pushed Josh again and Josh’s bounced off the door. Josh scrambled out of the apartment. His footsteps made a martial beat in the empty hallway. Adam slammed the door shut behind him. The doctor had said, Adam, maybe if you try to focus these obsessive impulses into something that *requires* such obsessiveness—like, say, stop-motion films or something of that nature—the general intensity of your disorder will decrease. Adam had closed his eyes.

“Fuck fuck fuck fuck,” Adam said. He rushed to his broken captain and knelt beside him. His hand crept slowly toward the captain, trembling. He tried to pick it up, but his shaking hands fumbled it. He tried again, again, again, but each time his hand would not close. Adam sobbed, slapped the floor. He dug his fingernails into his scalp and screamed. For a moment, after, he whimpered, rocking back and forth. He stood shakily and straightened his shirt.

“Fuck this,” he said. He bolted toward the captain’s table and grabbed the set, heaving it toward the wall. It burst against the wall and bits of boat and tiny body parts rained down; the black paint ocean flooded the floor next to the captain’s detached arm. Adam grabbed cans of paint, blue, red, yellow, black, white and flung it against the wall where it splatted. The paint drooled toward the floor, in the mirrored rainbow of an oil spill. He grasped the edge of the table and flipped it over; it smashed against a bookshelf, rocking it, scattering copies of books he’d never read.

He knelt then, shaking, sobbing, and thudded to the ground between the miniature arm and the miniature ocean. The room revolved around him. His mother had said, when he was eighteen, make some friends in college, hun. It’ll do you good. You can’t hide in your bedroom forever. He had closed his eyes.

At 1:41 PM that Tuesday, Adam made a phone call. Without standing, he dug into his pocket. He held down the two button and mashed the phone against his ear. *Ring, ring, ring*. “Please answer please answer please answer,” he whispered. He tasted cruel salt as tears wet his lips. *Ring ri—*

“Hello? Adam?”

“Mom?”

“Are you crying? What’s wrong? Are you OK?” His mother sounded frantic.

“Can you come get me? Please?”

“What? Oh, yes of course. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes, OK?”

“Please hurry,” Adam said.

“I will. Will you be OK until I get there?”

“I, I think so. Yes. Maybe.”

“OK, I love you. See you in fifteen minutes.” *Click.*

“I love you too, mom,” Adam said to the silence. He threw his phone across the room and curled into a ball. With his face so near the carpet, he could count individual fibers. Aimlessly, he rubbed miniscule circles into them. He sighed, coughed. He closed his eyes.

Officer 440

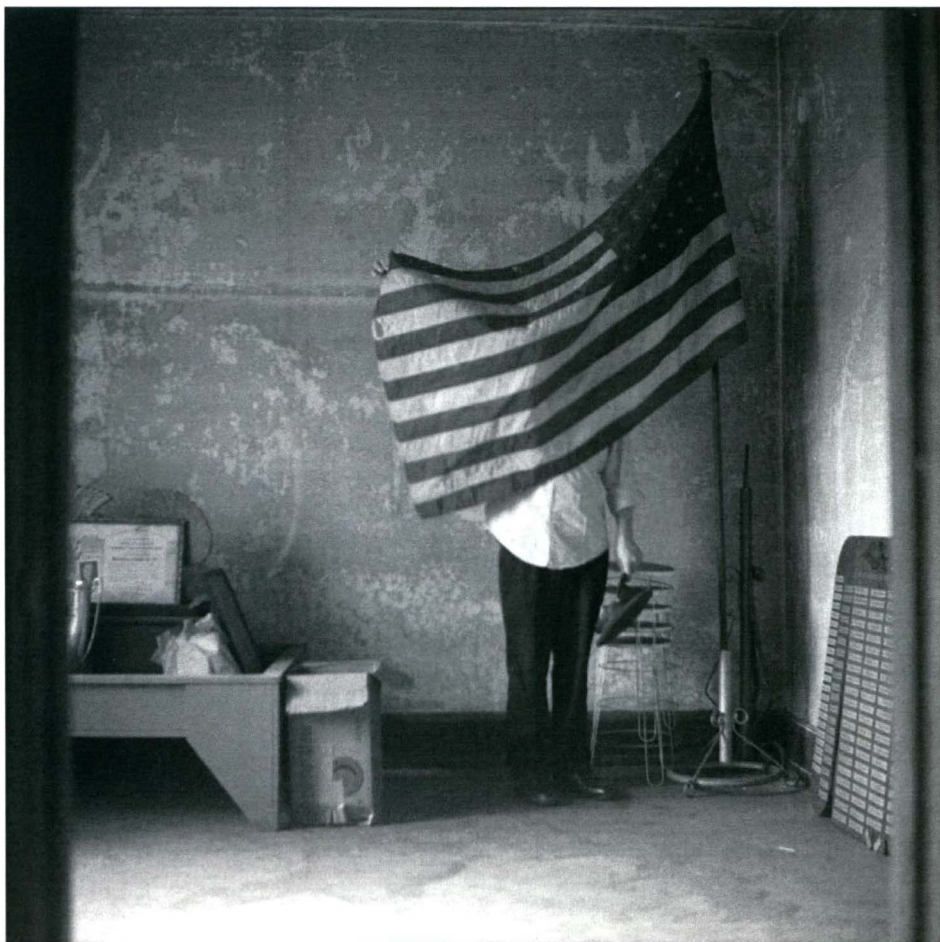
LEEANNA WILES

Daniel had spindly arms that shot
me with paintball guns
and rosy cheeks my tiny fists punched.
I tried to match his long strides
walking home from school,
occasionally sinking
knuckles into his scrawny sides or
stomping on his feet,
waiting for him to chuckle
and put me in a headlock.

But years passing
meant my brother growing
up and away
from me.
Saturday night wrestling
Evolved into cool high
school parties and cologne
I could taste from my bedroom.
I pressed my face to the door frame
and
watched him straighten his
navy and gray graduation tie
without a smile.

College exams
utility bills double shifts ended
engagements weighed him down.
They chiseled away pieces of
my brother
and sculpted him into
a grownup.

Today, Officer 440
stands sturdy in his bullet-
proof vest. In the winter
cold, his cheeks are rosy
again, and I half-
heartedly wait for him
to tickle or
tackle or tease me, but
he doesn't. He just looks
past me and
shivers in the cold.



America the Abstract
ADAM LEVY

Teeth Like Lloyd

SYDNEY RANSON

I feed my appetite with your voice. Your fricatives pirouette on my tongue. Each sibilant hangs on my teeth, then slides off and leaves its wax to pile up in my throat. I cough it up and collect it in a jar. It sits on the shelf in my basement and becomes familiar with the musty cloak of yesterday's wet laundry. On the shelf, there are jars of swollen strawberries and gritty half-skulls of pears, blackberries like bundles of balloons. But in your jar, suspended in their own sugary liquid, are ripened vowels that arabesque when I give the jar a shake. I wipe the damp film off the metal lid with my thumb. Now I'm sitting in bed at 2:00a.m., scooping your words from their glass house with a sticky index finger, speckled with seeds, semicolons, ellipses. Each dig gets me closer to your older, sweeter language—closer to what I've been craving. The last drops cling to the jar's lip until I tilt it to mine, and I'm full-bellied, staring at an empty jar. In the bathroom, I slide a finger in my mouth until it reaches my throat and the words come up and fill the toilet and overflow onto the floor, puddle around my crooked toes and stain the linoleum.



Mona
KELLI HARRAH

The Emission of Beauty

EMMA N. RODGERS

Imagined eye beams snatch ghostly particles for the beholder in only fractions of sparks and delight.

From an age when all emotions entered from the outside in, instead of permanently existing in one's locus of being, this theory made perfect sense to all of those learned and well-versed men and women, poets and plebs, gods, philosophers, leaders, and senators alike: incapable of viewing the nature and power of sight as nothing less than an unstoppable assault.

Thus susceptible to whatever their eyes absorbed of life's diverse aesthetics and grotesqueries, they made beauty its ultimate goal, as only beauty could purify the soul upon reception; able to coil emotion around a thumping heart and squeeze honey from a stone or give a woman pause.

Perspective is all a matter of inches or perhaps feet but an intriguing mystery nonetheless, so it remains as one theory of many. To believe that what one sees can mold the essence of a soul—for either good or bad. How much more value is there to be had out of one who is a creator? Pouring forth inner beauty.

As a modern artifex discipulaque I wonder would Aristotle's eyes fall in love at first sight?

Poems Like Wind: An Interview with Neil Carpathios

TANYA BOMSTA

Recently, I read a poem by Neil Carpathios to my seven-year old daughter. Some of the language was beyond her second-grade vocabulary, so I told her to just pay attention to the sound. She listened quietly while I read some lines and then said: “It sounds like wind—like a breeze.” She is, you see, a poet herself, and her response was more profound than she knew. For good poems are like wind—they can move us, refresh us, and they often disrupt the inertia of everyday life.

Neil Carpathios’ poetry does just that. It takes up the subject of the quotidian and infuses it with unexpected observations and surprising epiphanies. In one poem, he sees an ant on a kitchen floor and turns it into a witty commentary about how even the smallest things can change our life course. In another, he begins with watching his son play a computer game and ends with questioning the motives of an omnipotent god. In short, his poems compel us to reconsider the everyday, temporal world as a place that narrates our deepest concerns and reveals our profoundest desires. Jane Miller has observed that Neil Carpathios “exposes daily life unflinchingly. These are frank, razor-sharp, and tender excursions into reality.”

Part of what makes these “excursions” so powerful is the poetry’s accessibility and intimacy. Carpathios’ poems speak not only to poets, but to readers of every kind, even to seven-year-olds who can hear in his words a force as powerful as wind. His observations often read as though he has *read* us, as though he has shared our experiences. I have found myself responding to a friend’s concern about a personal relationship by referring to one of Carpathios’ poems, titled “She Says I Should Be More Like My Cat.” I have returned to his poem titled “At This Moment,” to re-read lines about the fleeting nature of human relationships, and to ask the question along with the poet: “In whose mind as a memory do I dance?” His poems themselves will certainly dance in our memory, for he articulates the shared experience of being human with grace and insight. His surprising imagery, from a baby “wallpapering his mothers’ womb” to kamikaze angels dressing in bird suits and smashing into windows, makes us see the world a little differently, but always reminds us of the humor, the sadness, the beauty, and even the unfamiliarity of everyday life.

Just as his poems deal with the experience of the everyday, Carpathios also wants poetry to be a part of everyday experience. In his weekly newspaper column “Let’s Talk Poetry,” published in *The Portsmouth Daily Times*, he discusses poetry with the community and showcases poems by local readers. A tireless advocate of the arts, he is also currently editing an anthology that celebrates writing about southern Ohio. He earned an M.F.A. from the Iowa Writer’s Workshop and is the recipient of several fellowships and grants from the Ohio Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. Currently he teaches English and serves as the Coordinator of Creative Writing at Shawnee State University. His poems have been published in both literary journals and

as award-winning chapbooks. He is the author of three collections of poetry, including *At the Axis of Imponderables*, which won the Quercus Review Book Award. He has twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Here, he joins *Et Cetera* staff member Tanya Bomsta to talk about his poetry.

TB: One of my favorite things about your poetry is its accessibility. The lines and the words are simple, yet profound. Would you say that's a conscious choice as you write?

NC: I think it is. I would say that a poet tends to write the kind of poetry he likes to read. I don't like poetry to be a puzzle or detective work. It is a conscious choice, and it happens more naturally now. I like poetry that's accessible. I think the hardest thing in the world is to be simple and complicated at the same time. Sometimes we drift into abstraction, hoping to get it right. Billy Collins has a great metaphor that I really like and agree with. He says a poem is like a card trick: you have to have just the right number of cards face down. If you have too many up, it's too easy, there's no mystery to it. If there are too many cards face down, then it's too abstract and complicated. I like clarity, but clarity is hard to achieve in any type of writing. I value that a lot.

TB: What is some advice you would give to students or other readers who don't feel as though they understand poetry?

NC: When I read a poem, I read it intuitively. I think a lot of times the first instinct is to read a poem and put pressure on yourself: "Can I understand what it means? It's got to have a secret or a puzzle or a hidden meaning." We immediately put on that analysis cap. I tend to encourage them to read it the way I do; instinctually. I don't have to understand it. A lot of meaning from the poem comes from something beyond logic and you have to almost be open to experiencing the poem and not let your mind get in the way. Sometimes I encourage students to *not* understand. When you eat something delicious or drink something you love, are you really thinking about why it tastes so good? Maybe at some point you start to, but you experience it first, you take it in. You have to be willing to feel uncomfortable from moment to moment in a poem, not knowing exactly where it's taking you. A lot of times we're taught early on to problem solve. And the instinct is to say, "I have to contain what this poem is, I have to understand it, then I'll get it and I will have digested it." But I think good poetry maybe can't be contained.

TB: Throughout your poetry, you frequently examine themes of God and religion. To what extent do your descriptions of God act as metaphors and to what extent do they reflect your own religious beliefs?

NC: That's a good question. My wife and I always talk about how in conversation I tend to be pessimistic and sarcastic about faith and religion. And then she'll say, "Well how come so many of your poems are about God—God this, God that?" I think to some extent they are a vehicle or a metaphor to convey certain ideas. I hope they come across as being speculative, but still respectful of the notion of God. Walt Whitman wrote, "I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least."

That's how I feel about it. So I think I do write a lot about the *possibility* of God. I really believe that there's magic in the world, things that are beyond understanding and logic, and I hope that comes through in the poems. But I was raised in a pretty traditional church-going home, and I rebelled against it. I think that rebellion planted some seeds in me as a child, and I started questioning what religion was all about. But sometimes I do use God as a character or as a metaphor, and sometimes as a tool.

TB: How do you decide what to write about? In other words, what makes something poem-worthy for you?

NC: Well I think it's rare for me that I have a subject preconceived, or think, Oh, I have to write a poem about that. Once in a while that happens, but usually I don't know what I'm going to write about. I really don't. When I sit down, I write down my observations, but they're very fragmented. But I usually sit down early in the morning, and I'll look through my journals and I'll come across an entry. It could be a quote from something, or something I heard, or it could be an observation, a fragmented image that I thought up. For some reason on a given day one thing will jump out at me, catch fire. It might lead to a poem, or an idea for a poem. But I really don't have a preconceived idea of what to write about. I think that may also be a difference between poetry and other genres. For me the process of writing in prose is much more conscious and disciplined. In poetry you need to be a little more open to discovery, to the unknown. Poetry is a little scarier for me. I don't know what I'm going to write about, if anything, at a given moment. I just hope something will come out of it.

TB: How often do you begin a poem only to abandon it later?

NC: What happens a lot of times is that I'll abandon a poem and return to it later, but not use it in the same way. For instance, I might use what I've written previously as a future poem that I hadn't planned on. I keep everything. There might be one image that's salvageable that I'll use in another poem, but I'll trash the rest of the poem. It happens pretty often. I rarely work on a poem for a long period of time consistently. Usually I have to get the first draft down pretty quickly, and then I'll go back and tinker a little. But I have had experience where I've written a poem, and years later, after a long period of not even looking at it, I'll come back to it and change it. The longest period of time I've left a poem alone is probably a couple years. But it's an illusion, because it's not like I'm toiling away for two years.

TB: Now let's talk about how you bring writing into the community. You currently write a weekly newspaper column in *The Portsmouth Daily Times* about poetry. What prompted you to begin that?

NC: Well I came to Portsmouth and I noticed there wasn't anything like that in the newspaper and I thought it would be a great way to bring writing into the community. Mainly the reason I did it was to publish the work of local poets. I get a pretty good stream of submissions. I really want to display their work, and when I don't get submissions I'll write a column having to do with something about craft. I thought it

would be something nice for the community and also a little variety for the newspaper. That's another reason I started the open mic event that we do in Portsmouth. I like to provide a forum, a place where poets can meet and share their work. A lot of people don't know where to share their poetry.

TB: Along with your column, you're very active in promoting writing in the community. Will you describe some of the events you've taken part in?

NC: I think that there are a lot of opportunities to bring people who like to write out of the woodwork. Writing is such a solitary thing. It's not easy for people who aren't in school, so if you can provide a column or an open mic event, those are easy ways to bring people to the surface. Other things I've done involve people who aren't really even interested in writing. There's a yearly event called "Poems for Bread" which is a benefit poetry reading open mic event on campus. We collect money for a pantry or a halfway house. It's a fun way to support a good cause, and writing can work in that way.

Years ago I did some poetry therapy, similar to art therapy. I would go to a halfway house in Columbus—this was before I came to southern Ohio—and did writing exercises with recently-released mental patients who were reintegrating into society. I also had an experience in Portsmouth where I took three of my best creative writing students, three young women, and we went to a local halfway house for troubled adolescent girls. We would go once every two weeks to write with the girls. I think writing is a great way to release, to share. They wrote without any concerns for quality, because that wasn't the point. We just went in there and had them write. That was a great experience. A lot of people don't think about writing and how it can be used in different ways. I try to mix it up: things on campus that are more academic for those who are really serious about writing, and things in the community for those who would like to write but aren't sure where to start.

TB: Do you have any advice for aspiring poets?

NC: Know who you are. Be alert and pay attention. And fall in love with the world, over and over again.

The Bell Psalm

BRENDA SKEENS

Wait.
At the corner
I stand in stop motion,
and let Sunday walk
a mourner's path.

Anticipate the bells
Coming to clean the air
of all its demons.

I heard the call
And discovered the earth
had shifted my father's body
beneath my feet.

Once,
I held
my father's hand
as we listened to the bells.
We laughed and were
lifted
by the spring winds.

I learned to wait
for the peal of each chime.
Every
pitch was a word
from God.

The tolls cleared the air
and swept everything away
except the two of us.



East and West Was One

ADAM LEVY

Antigone Airport

EMMA N. RODGERS

“*Chod*, we’re going to be late!” Amrita suddenly seized my arm and jerked me from the café counter—her bright orange, manicured nails and my many bangles dug painfully into my flesh—as she waved for Ganesh to follow, “Ganesh—Indira! *Jaldi chalo!* Hurry up!”

Somehow I had managed to save my expensive chai latte from spilling all over the floor or my crisp grey pant suit, but at the cost of scalding my lips. The flimsy paper sleeve, soaked in dribbling foam, slipped through my seared fingertips as Amrita’s heels broke into an oblivious staccato onward.

“**Passengers of Flight 099 please report to Gate 22, Terminal 2 East in order to begin boarding,**” boomed an overhead announcement, “**Gate 41, Terminal 2 West will now begin secondary security screening in five minutes.**”

Ganesh appeared at my side and handed me several napkins from the counter dispenser before Amrita whirled back around to us. “Look—we need to go past Gate 22—then go right—our Gate is at the end of Terminal 2 West. *Chod*, where’s those stupid carts when you need them, this is America da--!”

“Amrita Didi, **relax!** Stop being *bindaas*. We have plenty of time; besides, you and Indira can always go on ahead. I’ll be fine.”

Amrita’s amber eyes narrowed as she fixed Ganesh with a grave look, while he merely shrugged his shoulders, rearranging his duffle strap, unmoved. He was still getting used to his body since the incident that earned him the Purple Heart, a Bronze Star, and an honorable discharge, and he was no stranger to the gawks of strangers or the concerned-but-disapproving looks of Amrita, who was convinced that our brother would irreparably strain himself one of these times.

Although Ganesh had made remarkable progress, he still struggled with properly balancing his weight and movements when wearing his prosthetic legs, having lost both legs below the knee and part of his left arm past the elbow to that fateful IED. He had spared his unit but it would forever make even simple tasks—like handing his little sister a napkin—a painfully slow ordeal. That certainly didn’t mean my Iraqi war veteran brother wasn’t able to take care of himself, despite what Amrita and others might think. Even as a civilian now, Ganesh could certainly handle an overseas flight on his own if he had to.

Amrita impatiently brushed an errant strand of auburn hair away from her face and snapped her attention back onto me, “Fine, *Bhai*. Indira Bahan, what are you doing? Just throw that disgusting thing away—you’re making yourself into a mess! Ugh!”

“Flight 217, San Diego to New Delhi: is on time and will begin preparing for early queue-boarding in one hour. All passengers must go through secondary security screening prior to boarding. Please have your tickets, clearance pass, and carry-on ready to present before entering the queue at Gate 41.”

The chai latte made a hollow sound as it disappeared into the trash and the three of us raced down the Terminal 2 East corridor: a blur of restaurants, gift shops, newsstand signs, and the American masses.

With Amrita, it was always this way, or I should say, *her* way—especially whenever she felt overly responsible for things. I was almost twenty-three years old and just because she was ten years older than me, six years older than Ganesh, Amrita still treated us both as if we were little more than toddlers needing constant minding. She was Daddy’s little *rajkumari* through and through. Of course, she naturally inherited his beautiful, rich amber-brown eyes, long lashes, and his headstrong, ambitious personality, and fairer Indian complexion. She could have been born in Punjab rather than Poway if not for her slight South Dakotan accent and her gorgeous wavy cinnamon-auburn locks, which seemed to be the only two traits of our Mother’s she had inherited. While Ganesh and I inherited only Father’s hair, the color of black cumin, and his sharply curving hawk-nose, and although darker skinned, we took after our Mother in every other regard, from her striking cerulean-eyes to her comely, resolute personality.

Regardless, Amrita was still my Didi, and always would be, just as Ganesh would always be my Bhaia. We were family, no matter how much we could utterly exasperate one other. Secretly though, I was glad that Amrita had taken charge of getting us through the massive and confusing international airport and was more than happy to surrender control of all of the itinerary details of getting from San Diego to New Delhi. The most I had had to fret about the trip was over which new authors I would chose to load onto my e-reader and making sure that my hair wasn’t too drab that morning.

Hopefully, once we got ourselves settled on the blasted plane and Amrita could finally chill-out, I could ask one of the flight attendants if they could let me have a cup of ice for my scalded hand. My clunky suitcase’s wheels kept a frantic, metronomic beat over the tile as I blindly tried to keep pace with my dear Didi, as she weaved *bindaas* through the milling crowds ahead of us, like a great freighter surging down the sacred Ganges.

I huffed along, stammering out gaspy apologies to the alarmed pools of strangers we barged through I would glance back at Ganesh every now and then out of protective habit. Ever vigilant and hyper-aware, I knew that his half-lidded gaze behind his square black frames belied the tension that constantly screamed from just beneath his skin. Still, the countless sea of probing wide-eyes pierced through his stoic armor like shrapnel with their silent, cruel fascination, blasting through his façade of calm with every accidental shoulder brush and each metallic, unnatural footfall he took. I winced with every apologetic head-bobble he made to excuse the bump, knowing that the one empty, fluttering sleeve was surging with phantom lightning.

We nearly would have collided full-tilt into the back of Gate 41's security queue if it had not been for an elderly couple darting in front of us so suddenly that the three of us were forced to come to a stumbling halt.

“—Gate 41 security queue will now begin in thirty seconds, thank you for remembering to comply with US before you fly with us today.”

Although the queue guard gave us all a look of reproach, he waited to secure the retractable belt stanchion until after Ganesh had already shuffled past. *We made it!* I breathed out a heavy sigh of relief and, ignoring the queue guard's grumbling, began to rub my aching temple with my uninjured hand as we stepped forward towards the end of the line. What I would have given for some caffeine at that moment. Instead, I tried to console myself with the fact that in another some fifteen hours or so, I could have all the real, fresh chai tea lattes I could want for the next three months. Besides, there was no coffee chain in the world that could brew a cup of chai like my Aunt Neela.

“Here, I'll get behind Ganesh, Indira,” Amrita ordered as she jostled past me so that I was standing behind the disgruntled-looking elderly man and his wife who had so rudely cut in ahead of us seconds ago. The balding man eyed us suspiciously before his wife jabbed his protruding belly and made him face forward, hissing audibly, *“Just hurry up and take off your belt, Harold, the faster we get through this, the less time we have to be near ‘those people.’”*

“Christ! *Hurry up?* Why would I hurry this up, woman? *I can't bloody believe they're forcing us—us of all people, Vanessa!—to have a layover in that bloody Cow-Kisser, Paki-filled*
...”

Ganesh furrowed his brows, but he held back his tongue, even when I thought I heard the man mutter more racial slurs under his breath, but I didn't want to hear if he did. It was easier for me to pretend that we Americans were better than that.

“Ugh, this is going to take *forever!*” Amrita scrunched up her face into an ugly pout as she smoothed the hem of her pencil skirt before straightening up. “Just *wait* till I tell Chanda about all of this. Gods, I hope I'm not too jet-lagged when we land—the Ravi Bajaj is having an exclusive collection opening at his fashion house this weekend! It's going to be absolutely fittoos!” Our eldest Cousin Chanda was always closer to Amrita than me, and the two could talk for hours on end over the latest gossip and other such nonsense as they thrived off of New Delhi's vibrant city-scene. I, too, squinted ahead at the long line of passengers that seemed to stretch on infinitely and was filled with the longing to be seated in my Aunt Neela's tiny kitchen that very instant—eager to be through with the whole ordeal of flying for very different reasons than Amrita.

Seeking to occupy myself, I thought on what made me so eager to be “home” and called to mind the familiar feel of Aunt Neela's teak-wood tabletop, worn smooth by use, which served as workspace, social hub, and dining table at the heart of my Father's

brother's urban home. How my close Cousins Raj and Lakshmi and I would sit around that table, chatting over the delighted squeals of Aunt Neela's youngest (until she successfully shooed them back out the clothcovered doorway again) while we slowly sipped our sweating glasses of mango lassi during the heat of the day—and later in the cooler evenings, hot chai lattes—content to simply be. And how it was pleasantly strange that the heavenly aroma of fresh-baked naan permanently permeated the whole house, no matter what dish Aunt Neela cooked up, not even dal makhani. Vishnu only knows what Ganesh was seeking during our annual three-month India “migration,” but I hoped it might involve some healing for him since his early discharge.

It was then that Ganesh's soft laugh jarred me from my reveries, “Indira Bahan, you always have too much on your mind, you know that? *You're worse than Amrita*. YOLO, you only live once, so live in the moment a little—and move up a bit,” he teased before gently nudging me forward. When I started, sheepishly realizing that the line had lurched forward by several feet, I noted how far his hard gaze bore past me, focused on something else. Distracted, but not wanting to cause further trouble, I made to sprint in an effort catch up to the rest, but our troubles were just beginning once I came within an arms breadth of the elderly man again. The couple reacted to my presence as if I were about to charge at them—the woman threw up an arm defensively while the man flashed an obscene gesture at *me*, before they both, ironically, ran smack into the man ahead of them in their haste. The line had stalled again.

Shocked, I recoiled until I felt Ganesh's strong hand firmly squeeze my shoulder. I tried to brush away my contempt with a firm head-bobble, remembering that I had not yet replied to Ganesh's comment. Grateful for his protective presence, I turned back to him; catching his fraternal gaze as his focus returned to me. I smirked back, “I could think better if I had some nice hot chai in me.”

Strained enough at that point, I was ready to just collapse into my assigned rear window seat, farthest away from Amritia and Ganesh, who were seated in the middle of the plane together, the moment we boarded. Wanting nothing more than to immediately burrow myself into one of my e-books, seeking comfort in the text's orderly lines of purposeful prose, where all was right with the world, everything had its place, and all made sense.

“Flight 217: Final Queue Call. All passengers must be in the process of or finishing mandatory secondary security clearance in order to board. Flight is on schedule for departure in thirty minutes.”

“Next.”

I had just set my flats in my last security bin, about to calmly step through the full body X-ray scanner and move on, when I became aware of a commotion behind me.

“Sir, I'm going to need you to step aside here.”

“What’s wrong, Officer?” I heard Ganesh respond as two more uniformed TSA officers rushed past me. “I’m afraid we cannot allow you to go through the X-ray body scanner and we are going to need you to go through a pat down. If you would li—”

“Wait a minute! What do you mean he *can’t* go through the X-ray scanner?” Amrita interrupted. I turned and saw that she had put one hand on Ganesh’s shoulder, preventing him from setting down his duffle.

Chod! “Ma’am, I’m going to need you to *step back*.” The identifications officer barked at the same time that I was tapped by the female security bin officer, who ordered, “Ma’am, you need to step through the scanner now.”

A chill crept from my stocking toes to my bristling hairline in the split second it took for Amrita to turn a shade of bright crimson, but I was unable to respond to either my sister or the female security officer.

“The other TSA officers at the *first* security clearance had you *walk* right on through their X-ray scanners without an issue. Isn’t that right, Ganesh? Indira? They cleared him, it has *their* stamp right *there* or can’t you r—!” I noted, stupidly, that she matched the color of her blouse.

“Amritia—wait!” I *had* to do something before Amrita got us into serious trouble! Why couldn’t she just follow and work with the rules? *Oh what would Mother and Father think when they heard about this?*

I made to step between the officer and Amrita, impulsively yanking on the man’s sleeve in order to divert attention, “Officer?”

Taking my placating gesture for a threat, the man reacted with academy-honed reflexes: planting an elbow into my sternum like the strike of a Cobra without a bat of an eye.

I didn’t understand what had happened? One moment I was touching the Officer’s arm, the next I was laying on the hard floor, my vision a dazzling fireworks show, my mind swimming in chatter, and my lungs struggling to remember how to breathe.

“Sir, I need you to *step aside* and allow us to perform a pat-down search. You will need to remove any devices before we may do so and all personal items and carry-on *must* be placed in a separate security bin. If you would like, the officers can search you in privacy.” The towering man calmly placed his fists akimbo again, continuing to issue his commands, while the other wide-eyed female officer hurriedly helped me to my feet. Had I really just been *elbowed* to the *ground*?

“Indira!” Amrita and Ganesh both shouted. I saw Ganesh push forward against the man’s rigid arm-bar as he made for me, but the officer callously shoved him back. “*Mr. ... Singh*, we cannot allow you to go through the X-ray scanner with your metal

prosthetics—they might ... *um* ... damage our equipment when on your person. The *must* be removed in order for you to go through this security check.”

Yet another, stronger officer joined the woman clasping my sleeve as I wobble to my feet, feeling a little steadier once my ears stopped ringing. If I could just hold the incessant pair for a few more minutes until everything got sorted out. Surely this was all just a simple misunderstanding ... Ganesh’s blue eyes flashed dangerously and his mouth pressed into a thin, taut line.

“Please, just a moment, my head ... I promise I’ll step through once I’ve got my bearings ... *Please.*” I moaned as my hand and head throbbed more acutely now. *How could all this be happening to us? We had followed the regulations, we had all been cleared through the first security clearance, and we had been on countless trips from America to India and back before this ... rules were rules, but?* I let the officers coax me a little closer to the scanner as the woman spoke soothingly then, “Ma’am, if you just step through the scanner really quickly, there’s a bench you can take a se—”

Too late. Horrified, I and everyone else at Gate 41 could only gape as the scene escalated. Amrita had wrenched our brother’s duffle out of the one hapless officer’s hands, who had been sincerely attempting to assist Ganesh, as my sister turned on the interrogator.

“You want *permission* to touch a triple-amputee, Iraqi war veteran’s junk after he removes his metal prosthetic legs—that he needs in order to *walk*—with his *only* arms even though he *just* went through the first full body X-ray scanner *without* incident—because he *might* damage—I mean, he is darker skinned than your pasty white ass and you think he might be a terrorist—the equipment and therefore must go through ‘extra thorough—but *totally* nondiscriminatory—invasive screening procedures?! I’ll have you all arrested and brought to court; I’m a lawyer!”

“A wheelchair can be provided—” The duffle-assisting officer meekly began until Ganesh cut him off coldly, “No.”

I could no longer see my siblings through the wall of TSA agents. “Sir, if you refuse to cooperate with the security procedure then you will have to be escorted out of the screening area and to the nearest ticket counter, where your ticket may be refunded.”

I settled further back into my rear window seat, watching the wisps of clouds and the dark churning sea below rushing past, chewing my bottom lip. *How could I possibly explain this to my Father’s family? Everything had happened so fast ...*

The e-reader propped on the tray faded to its black and white idling screen: some bleached marble bust of a bearded Greek tragedian with piercing white eyes. I could

longer feel my scalded hand, numb where it rested on the melting cup of ice, but something else seared me painfully deep inside ... was it I who the taken the wrong step or had I taken the right one?

A bit of turbulence jolted me from my ruminations, rattling the cubes like glacial chimes, as I turned to the empty aisle seat.

It was too late now anyway, I suppose, I was on a fifteen hour flight to New Delhi. Alone.

Antigone Airport Glossary

N.B.: All of the pronunciations given here are not in IPA nor is the author of this short fiction a native-speaker of Hindi; therefore, readers should note that the pronunciations and slang usage therein are the closest attempts to reproduce the language by a non-native speaker.

Amrita—Feminine form of Amrit, meaning “immortal” from the Sanskrit (a) “not” and (mrīta) “dead” (uh-m-r-ih-t-ah).

Ganesh—Modern transcription of Ganesha, the Hindu god of wisdom and good luck, the son of Shiva and Parvati. He is often depicted as a stout man with the head of an elephant. The deity Ganesha is widely revered as the “Remover of Obstacles” and more generally as “Lord of Beginnings and Lord of Obstacles” (g-uh—n-ai-sh).

Indira—Means “beauty” in Sanskrit. This is another name of Lakshmi, the wife of the Hindu god Vishnu (ih-n-d-ee-r-ah).

Chod—Hindi slang swear word essentially for the word “Fuck” used as both a verb and a noun (H-ohd).

Jaldi chalo—Hindi expression meaning, “Hurry up!” (y-ahl-dee ch-ahl-oh).

Didi—Hindi address for an elder sister (d-EE-d-EE).

Bindaas—A Hindi colloquial term for someone who is being reckless, acting without restraint, carefree, or rule-breaking (b-IN-dh-ah-s).

Bhai—Hindi address for a younger brother (buh-hai).

Bahan—Hindi address for a younger sister (bah-han).

Rajkumari—Hindi term for “princess.” (raaj-kum-aar-ee).

Punjab—A state located in the northwest of the Republic of India bordering Pakistan (Puh-n-j-ah-b).

Poway, CA—A city of less than 50,000 located in San Diego County, California, roughly 25 miles north of San Diego.

Black cumin—*Bunium persicum*, commonly known as “black cumin” is a tape of culinary spice found in northern India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iran.

Bhaia—Hindi address for an elder brother (buh-hai-yaa).

The Ganges—(g-AH-n-j-ee-z) A river in Northern India that is held sacred by followers of Hinduism; flowing southeast from the Uttar Pradesh region into the Bay of Bengal delta.

The “**head-bobble**” or “**Indian headshake**” is a common Indian gesture used as a non-verbal means of acknowledgement, encouragement, or to indicate a confirmative “yes,” “maybe,” or “no” answer, similar to nodding in Western cultures. While it is often taken to mean “yes,” it can be used to say “no” (particularly when the person may be reluctant to actually say “no”). It consists of a side-to-side tilting of the head in (roughly 45-degree) arcs.

Ravi Bajaj—Recognizably one of India’s top men and women fashion designers who launched his eponymous label back in 1987 at the “The House of Ravi Bajaj” located in New Delhi and revolutionized the fashion business in India.

Fittoos—A Hindi slang term meaning “sweet” or “perfect” (Fih-tt-oo-s).

Mango lassi—A yogurt-based drink made with water and mango pulp common throughout India.

Naan—A leavened, oven-baked flatbread.

Dal Makhani—An aromatic staple food of Punjab, India. It is a vegetarian dish, consisting primarily of whole black lentils and red kidney beans, slowly simmered in a buttery, creamy tomato sauce.

Vishnu—The Hindu deity believed to embody the aspects of divine preservation and protection (v-ih-shn-uu).

The Greek author, **Sophocles**, who wrote the tragedies known commonly as the Theban plays: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*.



Nature Reflections
AMANDA FOOCE

Beach Trip

HANNAH SMITH

Nags Head was a hundred new sights, sounds, and smells. It played a concerto. The ocean was the swelling body of an orchestra, with its mighty crescendo of cresting waves that struck the sand at the fortissimo of booming percussion then sank again into a sudden diminuendo of receding foam. The wind sang against the sea like a smooth violin, the squawks of seagulls a choppy trumpet's call. "The most beautiful song I've ever heard," I recall my grandmother saying with eyes closed and head tilted back, listening. I agreed. Her favorite thing about the beach was its sound. Every time she came, it played her the same song.

In June of 2001, the summer after I left Mrs. Sander's second grade class and the summer before my baby sister was born, my family took a trip to the beach. I remember not sleeping the night before we left. The ticking hands of the round clock on the wall mocked my pleas to move faster. With the arrival of dawn, my parents, sister, brother, and me, uncles, aunts, cousins, and grandparents all loaded into our separate vehicles and began our ten hour drive to the beach. We stayed in one house just several yards from the ocean. All twenty four of us, squished into eight little bedrooms.

We'd wake early to spend mornings roaming along the deserted shoreline collecting pieces of speckled or striped seashells that ornamented the vast stretch of sand like pale stars. My mother told us stories of how as a girl she would search for long hours, knees cushioned deep in wet sand, shifting through the many jagged and broken shells to discover just a single, complete conch – one whose coiled body hadn't yet been shattered by the ocean's cruel abuse. She'd gingerly wash her precious find in the water and stow it in a bucket to take home to Parkersburg. My sister and I looked for ones of our own to contribute to our mother's collection, while our aunt showed us slick stones smoothed and polished by the sea's constant stroking.

When my mother was a child, my grandparents would pack her, her three older sisters, and one brother into their old, mustard station wagon, tight like boxed crayons between suitcases, cola filled coolers, and lumpy pillows, and head south to spend a week in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. They made this trek from their home in Parkersburg, West Virginia nearly every summer. My mother and her siblings waited for the annual beach trip like some kids wait sleeplessly for Santa Clause or Easter morning.

Over Nags Head the sun is relentless. In its strong afternoon rays, my cousins and I stormed the billowing water to bathe our sticky skin in its cool relief. Our tiny bodies seesawed in swollen waves, tossed to and fro like upset wind chimes. We'd squeal as

the ocean ballooned above our heads and lifted us from our feet with ease, our weightlessness exciting us. My grandfather sat at the water's edge watching our frenzied play as he had watched his own children, our parents, years ago. Our shouts surfaced memories that made him smile.

Matching freckled faces with noses painted rosy by sunlight reflected off his moist eyes. Images of a dark haired babe in a cherry swimsuit, abandoned plastic shovels, and a boy letting out his kite's long string, allowing the ascending diamond to sail further and further away, swam into focus. Girls turned cartwheels, pelicans dove like determined missiles, and a woman's cheek pressed against his bare shoulder.

My grandparents liked to take the ferry to Ocracoke Island. They'd drive their station wagon right onto the boat. People left their vehicles to walk freely about the deck. Seagulls hovered near the sides, enveloping the boat like winged guards. We devoted a whole day to exploring the island. Ocracoke was small. The town there felt old and run down and wonderful. Chipped paint clung to the many weather-beaten coffee houses, restaurants, and souvenir shops that lined the narrow streets. Everywhere proud signs reminded us that Blackbeard had been there once.

From the top of the Cape Hatteras lighthouse a person can see miles of lonely beach. My sister was too afraid to climb the 240 iron steps of its spiraled staircase, so she waited for us from the ground. My cousins and I squinted to spot her shrunken figure below, daring to dangle our heads over the railing before panicked parents tugged at our arms. The lighthouse had been destroyed, rebuilt, and moved until it had come to rest 1,500 feet from the seashore – its original distance from the ocean.

The wind was heavy. It stroked my sunburnt face and caught the curls at rest on my shoulders, making them dance behind me like wild flames. My grandmother had told us not to drop anything from the lighthouse, to keep what we had tucked inside our pockets, safe. This was a speech she'd given to our parents the first time she had brought them to Cape Hatteras. I remember when I reached the top though that I wanted more than anything to take the coins hidden in my jean shorts and let them slip from my grasp, to watch them tumble and tumble and shrink until they disappeared.

At night we dashed across the sand in pursuit of little fiddler crabs that sideways scurried from the bright beams of our flashlights. My uncle hastily crouched down when he spotted one. Scooping it up in his naked palms and letting the creature race along his fingertips, he relived summer evenings of his boyhood. We eventually tired from our running and settled down in sandy beds to watch the ocean's steady inhale and exhale. None of us talked. We just breathed in the poignant scent of salt mixed with damp wood and hoped we wouldn't forget it.

Change happens when we're too busy to notice. Years passed without any beach trips. My little sister learned to tie her shoes, and my brother started karate. My older sister graduated high school. My cousins were married, and babies were born. I did ballet. My father took a new job, and my mother kept busy with teaching and volunteering

and caregiving when her parents got sick.

My grandparents had always said that after they died they wanted their ashes buried in North Carolina. In 2011, my mother, aunts, and uncle used their inheritance to rent a big house a few yards from the beach for all thirty four of us to live for one week. We left early and drove ten hours to the Outer Banks, my uncle with a metal box seated in the front of his car. It was the summer before I started college and the summer after both my grandparents passed away.

The morning we buried their ashes was pale blue – a perfect day for it, someone had remarked. The sun itself had just barely begun to wake. The symphonic sea played its familiar music, and I was reminded of my grandmother. She would never be without its sound. The carefree chatter and laughs of babies accompanied the singsong ocean. My cousins' children stomped through the shallow tide, chasing one another with outstretched arms wrapped in grainy sleeves of sand while aunts watched their fun through wet eyes.

My uncle passed around photographs he'd brought of our previous trip, pictures of my cousins and me in ponytails and pink polka dotted swimsuits. My toddler brother built a sandcastle in one. In others, my aunts and uncles sunbathed or read books on the shore, and my father talked to my mother's round pregnant stomach while she laughed. My grandparents looked at me with happy expressions.

Five pairs of hands emptied the ashes into the earth. My mother and her siblings cupped the fine powder in their palms and mixed what remained of their parents together before gently pouring the ashes into the hole my brother had dug himself. The moment struck me hard like a dart. It hurt. But still, in some way the laying of dust and bone seemed to me just like the planting of seed.

The younger children searched the shoreline for shells and driftwood to mark the spot where my grandparent's ashes were placed. As I watched them adorn the white sand with glossy pebbles and bits of shell, I could see myself in their tiny hands that had gathered and rinsed the treasures clean, and I could see my mother in me. I saw my grandfather mirrored in the face of my aunt who watched her daughter's babies toddle through shallow tide pools. In this one place, this sacred place of living memory, life was somehow sustained. And none of us could ever really die, made immortal there as the sea itself.



Blooms
BRENDA SKEENS

Rebel

After Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"

CHARLES CHILDERS

Hey man, you should start listening to this band called Black Flag, they like started hardcore punk music; *well what's hardcore punk?*; oh shit, you've never listened to punk music before, here dude, let me make you a mix-tape; you haven't heard of Glenn Danzing, you need to start listening to The Misfits; what's going on bro, I think you should learn to play an instrument, any instrument, that would make you cool; you should listen to Rancid, their early stuff, not this new-age crap they just put out; we're all going to go hang out at the skate park man, you should come with us; you should get your own skateboard dude, start hanging out with our crew; hey, you better start listening to Bad Brains, they were the D.C. originals; you need to stop worrying about whether or not you're going to be socially accepted, it's not cool to worry about whether or not you're cool; you need to listen to the Dead Kennedys; you need to wear studded bracelets and vests; you need to plaster patches and buttons on every stitch of clothing, it's what the Crusties do; why are you still wearing hemp necklaces, what are you, some kind of peace-and-love faggot?; you need to listen to Limp Wrist; you need to start wearing nothing but band tees, good band tees; *well what makes a band good?*; a good band is a band that doesn't care if they're good are not, they don't care about anything; you need to start listening to Crass; you need a tattoo; you need more tattoos; you need a full sleeve; you need to start listening to Leftover Crack; screw America man, we need to take these capitalistic pigs out; come on, let's go dumpster diving at Sam's Club; come on, let's steal some forties from Wal-Mart; come on, let's break into the police evidence locker; *well I don't want to get arrested . . . again*; dude seriously, man up and stop being such a little bitch; you need to hate those tough guy hardcore bigots; you need to hate anyone who isn't politically correct; you need to hate those who hate others; you need to stop listening to all that hedonistic, sexist, racist bullshit, who still listens to Skrewdriver anymore anyways?; you need to be vegan; *well I like to eat meat*; alright then asshole, support animal cruelty, I hope you like the salty taste of tears in your food . . . fascist; you need to smoke cigarettes; you need to stop smoking cigarettes, they're not vegan; only smoke American Spirits, they're organic; you need to drink Pabst's Blue Ribbon; why the hell are you drinking that hipster shit, that's not cool, here's a bottle of Yeungling; don't drink, straight-edge is the only way to go; start smoking weed, it's organic; you should lay off the pot, you're turning into a stoner; *well what's this?*; it's cocaine, want a bump?; hey dickhead, let's all go get messed up by the graveyard; let's all go get messed up at the abandoned memorial home; let's all go get messed up at my mom's house; dude, why did you sell all of your rare, limited edition vinyls, you had some real classics in there; *well I couldn't afford drugs, I couldn't afford rent, I don't even have a job anymore*; man . . . that's so punk rock!



Beholding Eye
AMANDA FOOCE

The Monster Under Your Bed

DELANEY MCLEMORE

Number 197.

This is my number, on a piece of paper that can
only be described as shaped like a pod racer,
one of those things Anakin Skywalker built from scraps,
but this is just a reminder that there are
hundreds of women like me, here waiting
for the doctor to return with a swab's results,
the piss test's proof,

(the way I feel like I could never be a mother
the way I imagined breaking them,
ruining a kid and making them a
terrible person.

My kids
are sealed away inside my life's pink wealth,
they aren't ready to come out yet)

but somehow it didn't comfort me.

Number 197.

They are calling my number, and I
am taken to a room with mint green walls
and I wonder what made mint green such
an antiseptic color that doctor's offices everywhere
held a monopoly on the purchase of said paint?

The nurse is stone-faced.

Results are in.



Untitled
REBECCA KEITH

Back into Ashes

Laura Adkins

Kate didn't believe in bad vju. She didn't believe in the good kind, either. "It'll be good therapy," Jess had said. "And anyway," she had added with a furtive glance away, "it's a tiny bit psychological too. Just think positive. That's what they teach in Wicca."

Kate had rolled her eyes at her friend Jess's words but had accepted the dream catcher anyway. Now, as she stepped up on the stoop and into her grandparent's house, she imagined carrying one of those Wiccan good luck charms to ward off the bad vju. She smirked to herself as her eyes swept over the other thing in her hands, the dream catcher.

For something created by Native American legend to "catch" and trap nightmares and bad thoughts, the thing seemed pretty powerless to her. Tan yarn had been skillfully woven into a spider web and fixed to some flexible, green twig. Three feathers—one dyed red, one blue and one yellow—drooped down from the twig rim. And dangling from the bottom side of the rim were several thin leather strips, also decorated with feathers and beads. Finally, a few bright beads were threaded just outside the small hole that was the center of the webbing. That was where the good dreams were allowed to pass through.

A pretty thing, maybe too pretty to have ever been a *real* dream catcher. Obviously one of those commercialized pieces of so-called "genuine" Native American artifacts sold at tourist attractions around the country. How ridiculous, Kate thought, that her friend Jessica thought this would do any good. Jess was taking some sort of spiritual class at college and was "really into it," evidently. When Kate had told of her plans to visit her grandparent's house to dig out anything she might want to keep, she hadn't been able to hide her reluctance. That's when her strange friend had recommended the dream catcher.

Kate rolled her eyes at Jess's words but had accepted the dream catcher anyway. Her Grandmother Dora had passed away but her Grandfather James was alive and well. He and his new girlfriend (an idea Kate still couldn't quite come to terms with, at his age) had moved to Saint Albans together. He was planning on selling the house. Kate hadn't thought there would be too much she would want to keep, if anything, in the house she grew up in but had decided to check it out anyway. Jessica had a hard time understanding how someone could not want anything out of the house they grew up in, but by now Kate was used to most people not understanding *what* she had grown up with.

Now, as she stepped inside, she saw that the living room was almost exactly the same as it had been the day she had moved out at fifteen years old, just shy of twelve years ago. Kate got the feeling that an invisible dark rain cloud was hanging over the

dim and musty room; a pall of bad memories and conflicted emotions that could never be ushered away with any amount of sunshine. She laid the dream catcher down on the rocking chair by the door (now that was a *real* rocking chair at least, as tall as she was), deciding to start in the back of the house first. She took a deep breath and plunged on ahead; a swimmer taking on the ice-cold waters of an intimidating sea of memories.

At the end of the single, dingy hallway there was the wooden music stand her grandfather had made when she was in middle school. It was a gaudy thing, painted a solid bright pink and made too thick. Memories of sheet music and the merry sound of the flute briefly fluttered against Kate's mind. She had enjoyed playing for a couple of years, but she had always struggled with reading the music and had labeled every note of every song with its corresponding letter. After a while she got bored of it and decided to quit after 8th grade, much to the chagrin of her family. Everyone gave her hell about it except for her Grandmother Dora, who had hit her head on the edge of the music stand one evening after emerging from the bedroom in a drunken stupor. Kate had been about ten.

She hadn't witnessed the event itself, only its immediate aftermath. Now, as she touched the pink monster-of-a-music stand, she remembered turning the corner all those years ago to find Dora on her trunk next to a true pool of blood. Kate cringed inwardly. That was more blood than she had ever seen in her ten years on this earth, and it still was to this day. Terrified, she had turned and fled the way a small child would have: Out the door, across the driveway, and straight to the human resource building on the other side of the street. She had sat down on the smooth cement beside the glass double doors and pulled her knees up to chest, crying. So much blood. How could anyone bleed like that from just a small cut?

Kate shuddered again and removed her fingers from the music stand. Her Grandfather James had searched for her, calling out her name. She couldn't recall if she'd answered him or he had found her first, but instead of comforting her he had mostly scolded her on disappearing. Kate did remember not feeling bad about it. It had been too terrifying to see all the blood that had come from her grandmother's head, covering the wooden floor like a coat of paint. Too terrifying.

Now she moved into her grandparent's old bedroom and stood beside the queen-sized bed. It seemed much smaller now than she remembered it as a kid. So many nights of climbing into bed with them after suffering night terrors. Too many horror movies. She gave a crooked grin at that thought. Nowadays she loved a good horror movie, though as a child they had kept her from getting a good night's sleep more times than she could count. The bed had been comforting, perhaps the only comforting thing in the whole house, now that she thought about it.

In the corner of the room beside the closet was her grandmother's vanity mirror and antique dresser. Though the top of the dresser was empty now, Kate still pictured it as it had been, with professional photos of her grandmother as a young, healthy woman on its top. She was beautiful all those years ago, with a soft face and bright green eyes.

She still had worn makeup then, too. There had also been very old pictures of her grandmother with her own parents. Kate even recalled a church picture or two. The dresser was what Dora had been before the disease had struck her.

Kate turned towards the tiny bathroom that was connected to the bedroom. It was just big enough for a stand-up shower, a sink with a small cupboard below, a mirror above, and the toilet. Just looking at it made Kate think she could smell wet cigarette-ash mixed with Aquanet hairspray. Her grandmother would always smoke while she was in there, and when the main bathroom was occupied and Kate had to use this one, there was usually the long stump of ash in the toilet.

It was to the small cupboard that Kate's attention was drawn. Also painted in that same tasteless pink. God, what had her grandfather been thinking? To a ten year old girl it was just a fine color, but the fact that her grandparents accepted it as proper décor suggested yet another layer of general disturbia. The cupboard had been used to store two things almost exclusively. It was where their calico cat, Susi, had chosen to birth her litter of seven or eight kittens one summer, and it was where Dora had kept her stash of Vladimir Vodka.

Kate pushed back the cheap metal spring-lock and opened the cupboard. It creaked more than it used to. There, lying down towards the back and enveloped in a thin layer of dust, was an empty bottle of the stuff. Kate reached back and grabbed it. Her hand brushed up against some cobwebs. She distastefully shook them off and shook the bottle. Not even the tiniest drop was left, which stood an equal chance of being due to evaporation as it had to Dora's greed. She stared long and hard at the faded gray and red label, its edges peeling away from the glass. *You killed yourself with this*, she thought.

What made her more furious than anything else was that Kate felt that it had been *allowed* to happen. She wasn't sure whom to blame, although her grandfather usually came to mind. This had not been a sudden illness, it was not a mental illness (not in the legal sense anyway); her grandmother had not pierced or punctured a vital organ. Those things happened to someone. Instead, Kate's grandmother had *chosen*, over a period stretching back decades before Kate had even been born, to slowly commit suicide...

Kate shook her head, feeling her throat clench up. She took the vodka bottle with her into the kitchen and tossed it into the plastic urine-yellow trashcan. A quick flash charged through her mind—the game of Tug of War:

Fingers clasped in-between the brown wires of the rabbit cage, feet trying to charge out the back door, while other frail fingers, given strength with liquor, pulled the other way. On and on and on, with clenched teeth and red face and exploding chest and words stuck just behind lips that wanted to scream give it to me you stupid bitch louder than anything. Then snap! Plastic bottom broke away from top; a cascade of dirty cedar chips all over the floor. And then her grandmother had laughed.

The rabbit had been a gift from Kate's mother Tamara. Explaining to people why she lived with her grandparents was always difficult. Not because it bothered her so much to talk about her mother's mental illness, paranoid schizophrenia, but because it seemed to make others feel more awkward than she.

Kate stared at the kitchen floor as though the ghostly cedar chips might spontaneously reappear. She had been so angry, so full of hatred for Dora's behavior as it was, but it was her laughter that had really gotten under Kate's skin. And her grandmother had always laughed when she saw the misery she caused other people during her drinking campaigns. Now, Kate thought that perhaps she had done it to ward off her own feelings, to become numb. Which, Kate thought sourly, she had excelled at.

Kate left the kitchen with its ugly yellow trashcan and phantom wood chips for the living room. Her eyes immediately set upon her grandfather's antique writing desk that stood against the pale blue wall. Her grandfather hadn't taken it yet; it would have to be moved delicately. She had no idea just how old it was, only that it had also belonged to her great-grandfather as well. The ornately-carved, dark-grain wood hutch was still smooth to the touch as she gently gripped its sides and pushed up, then out. She had never been able to open it as a child, much to her chagrin, though her grandfather was quite pleased with that fact. Still, her memories here weren't as bad.

"Here, look at this."

An old cigar box from the top of the desk. Her eyes widened as he opened it.

"This belonged to your granddaddy Lucas."

Small gasp of wonder as her eyes lit upon the rattlesnake tail, the buffalo nickels and 50-cent piece. Other things in there, too. Well-preserved. She sensed their age, had a sense of true age for the first time. He grinned and chuckled...

In most respects, Kate's grandfather had been a good one; more like a father, really, since Kate's own father had left her mother not long after Kate's birth. The image of her grandfather's laughter caused her to recall at least one shining moment with Dora as well:

It was time to go. She was bent down on the carpet, analyzing the shoelaces with great attention to detail. Her grandmother's voice spoke softly but urgently to hurry along. yet she must make the bunny ears right. She could do it. Slowly but surely, Kate looped the laces together and then, to her amazement, she had done it. "Grandma, grandma, look! I did it!"

Dora came in a hurry, clapping her hands together, a grin flashing across her face when Kate pointed down proudly at her shoes. "Aw, look at that! Now you're a big girl," she had quipped.

Kate cut off the memory as fresh tears stung her eyes. That memory, at least, was complete and whole, like a film being played in her mind. She was forever thankful for it too, because it reminded her that she had loved the woman despite everything. It was the alcohol that had been the monster, not Dora. Kate let out a breath and returned to the desk.

Now, the wood of the writing desk creaked-groaned-squeaked before doing as it was supposed to do and let her in. There, underneath some old newspapers and manila envelopes, was the unmistakable red-rimmed pages of James' Holy Bible. Kate slowly pulled it out. The rough, black leather cover was cracking around the edges, its seam beginning to come unstitched. Kate inhaled its scent. It was a leather and old ink and Lava soap smell that belonged solely to her grandfather and made it his. Kate both loved and hated the thing.

"Why don't you just divorce her?" she had asked. Long, heavy sigh. Slow, meditated answer, like every answer he gave.

"Because, even after everything, I guess I still love her."

Kate had not known how to respond to that, except to say something like, *"But she's so miserable all the time!"* Another sigh.

"I have faith that the Good Lord will see us through."

Now, Kate thumbed through the "Good Lord's" book and frowned. Faith was a concept she had never understood. Her grandparents had placed her in things like vacation bible school and a church program for youth for a few summers when she was still in grade school.

"But if God made the world in six days then wouldn't there be dinosaurs living with people?"

Kate remembered asking the question, and the response she had gotten. Her bible school instructor had smiled kindly, patted Kate on the head, and had—quite abruptly—become enamored in conversation with another adult. She had loved dinosaurs, loved playing with them and reading about them and watching their re-creations on television. She had even slept with a purple stuffed T-Rex for years. In fact, Kate had loved everything about nature. The Discovery Channel was a better place to pretend to live in than the ominous, sometimes dangerous, goings-on of her real home.

An unwelcome memory of Dora snatching the remote out of her hands during one such adventure into the animal kingdom, then rudely changing it to something else, flashed in her mind. So many times they had fought over that damn remote. In her drunken stupor, her grandmother would refuse to let any member of the household watch what they wanted to. Kate shook away the reverie, returning her attention to the bible. She skimmed over the tidbits of paper and bookmark-ribbons before losing interest and letting her eyes meander to the rest of the living room space. So much ugliness.

It made her cringe, with its awful clashing of decades and colors. Most of the furniture screamed out from the 1970s, juxtaposed bizarrely with items such as a black plastic cordless phone on a phony Victorian-era table, the ancient projected TV screen built within a wooden frame that had a four-channel knob resting over top dingy, blue carpet so worn with age it had been walked on and vacuumed into mold.

If God had ever been here, He must have forgotten to bring along the maid, she thought.

Kate walked over to the rocking chair and picked up the dream catcher. *Had* God ever been here, if He existed at all? Technically He was supposed to be everywhere, or see everything Adkins 10 at once, or some such nonsense. Had He watched passively from some massive and ethereal corner in the sky while Kate's mother, Tamara, seized by a schizophrenic delusion, had wrapped her hands around her grandmother's neck?

That memory was always a hard knock to the teeth. This time, though, Kate forced herself to think about it while she stood there, between the rocking chair and the writing desk, where it had happened. Instead of visceral images, she found herself wanting to ask—no, to *scream out*—all the appropriate questions that one would ask of such a domestic dystopia:

What was He thinking when He watched Tamara slam her grandmother up against the door and choke her? When little Kate started crying, started yelling, terrified of her own mother? Perhaps He had yawned. Or maybe (Kate thought with a spasm of optimism), He had sent Kate's visiting uncle into the room in just enough time. Enough time, right after Tamara had grabbed a hold of Kate's arm and had cruelly twisted it, after her grandmother's face was red and tearstained. Enough time. After. Kate had always wondered if her mother was one of the reasons for her grandmother's drinking; now, at that moment, Kate figured it *had* to be a reason—a pain they had both shared.

How much space did that nightmare take up within the confines of the tan yarn webbing she had placed in her hands again? A larger space, surely, than the incident with the rabbit cage. Maybe a bit more than the terrible event with the bloody music stand. Kate found herself staring through the hole in the center of the dream catcher. There was the ancient blue carpet. Her brown eyes moved past it to the far corner of the room. It was crowded with dust and cobwebs. Her eyes wondered back towards the kitchen, where even the stove hadn't been properly cleaned in who knew how long. Everywhere she turned, in fact, she could see the uncleanness, the decay. No matter how hard she tried, Kate couldn't separate the image of the house from her grandmother. When she looked at the thin and archaic lamp, its cobwebs glinting off the dim light, she saw her grandmother's ever-thinning frame. The ceiling fan and its blades were bad teeth, coated in years of abuse by alcohol and nicotine. Even the dirty white tassels of the carpet in the hallway were not safe from her mind's scrutiny; their fibers were her grandmother's salt and pepper wigs that used to rest in front of the vanity mirror.

Kate dropped the dream catcher and left the house, feeling the need for some fresh air. Even outside, she couldn't help but to feel somehow soiled by the inside. Shrugging off her irrational thoughts, she walked down the sidewalk and stopped by the garage door her grandfather had built into the side of the house. A thin wisp of a smile crossed her lips as she studied the nearly-impeccable craftsmanship of the door. Grandpa had been one hell of a handy man. As far back as she could remember, he had been building things. He could take a few lopsided and gimped-up pieces of lumber and create things like a Mickey Mouse book shelf, a wooden box for the 5-pound bag of Russet potatoes Dora bought at the Big Bear, and even a bread box with 'Bread' engraved on the side. He'd built it for her grandmother as an anniversary gift. Some box it had been too, sanded down to perfection and perfectly carved. Even Kate at her young and naive age had been able to see the time he'd put into it.

In a particularly inebriated state, her grandmother had thrown away the bread box and had ripped up her anniversary card in one fell swoop a few days later.

Kate winced at that memory, feeling the old familiar pain in her chest. She hated that memory, even more than when her mother had choked her grandmother. She'd hated her grandmother.

"She tore up the card I gave her, threw it in the fireplace," he said, voice filled a sadness Kate wasn't accustomed to. Palms open and held out in a helpless gesture towards her, silver of the wedding band trying to shine off the overhead light.

"Then she threw out the bread box, said she didn't want it."

Kate felt her heart breaking for the first time. She sobbed, looking into her grandfather's gray eyes and asking why, why would she do such a thing and why aren't you mad, very mad grandpa and how could she, oh just how could she...

Kate clenched her teeth together and forced her way back to the outside that was around her, to the fresh summer air and the birds that chirped in the maple trees. It was hard. She knew she wasn't as well intact of a person as others; she imagined people could see those crevices in her woodwork and could tell that something had happened, but Kate decided that she did a decent job at keeping those crevices well glued.

Looking back at the garage door, Kate could still see the cheap Bic lighter in Dora's hand up against it one autumn afternoon. Another surreal day, when the azure sky and multi-colored leaves hadn't seemed real.

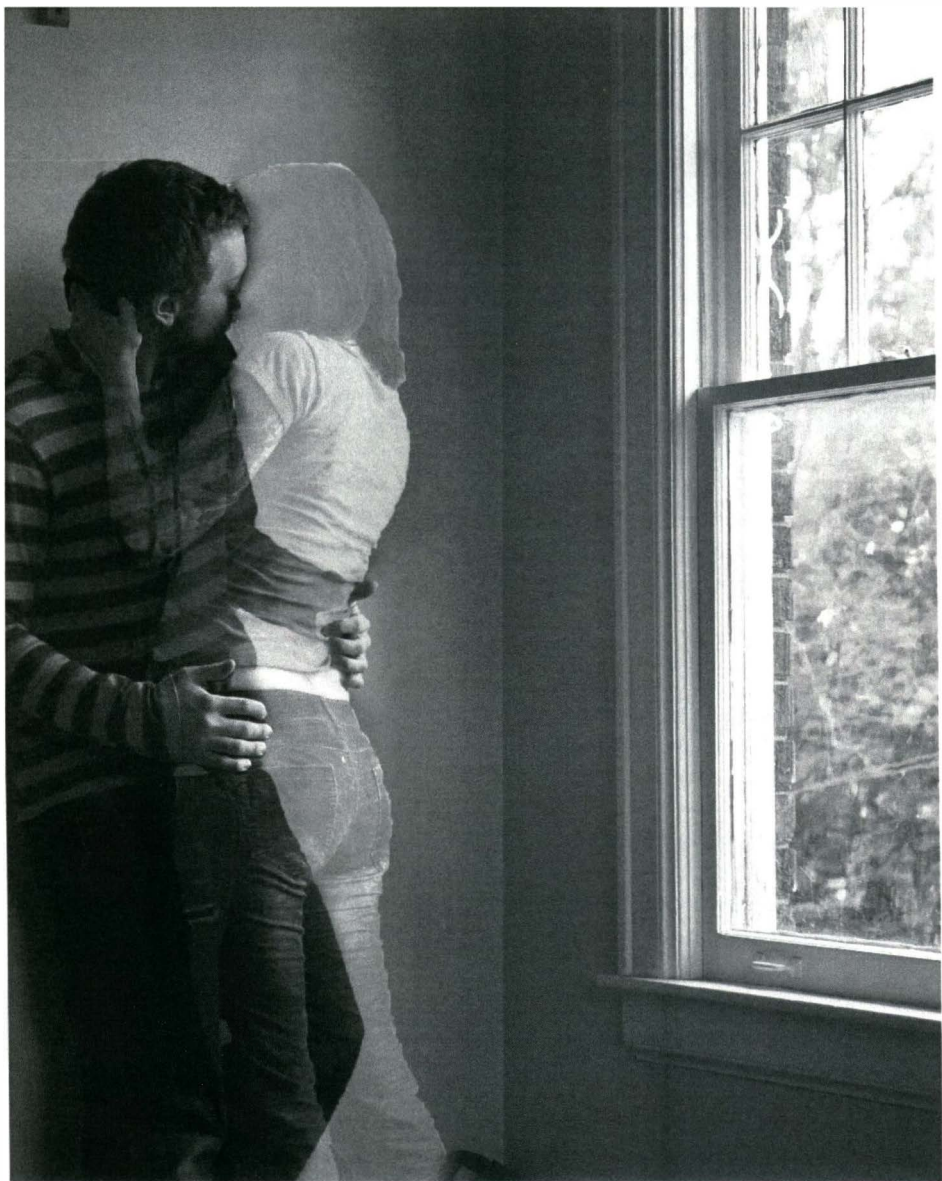
"I'm sick of this house. I'm gonna burn it down!"

Staggering, bumblebee steps out the door. Kate felt her chest tighten, followed with light, quick steps afforded to her by youth to the stoop. Laughter again, a sound like the frayed ends of sanity emitting from her grandmother.

“No, stop, are you crazy?”

The Bic lighter had indeed reached the door, but Kate had jerked it out of her unsteady hands (it seemed that a young girl’s strength could, at times, outmatch a fully intoxicated older woman’s). Kate stepped away from the door as the memory faded. The house hadn’t burnt down, yet she felt like she had stepped back into ashes just by coming back here.

Back inside the house Kate picked up the dream catcher again. It *was* a ridiculous idea, she decided. If nothing else good had come from her experience in this place, it was that she had always considered herself strong, with a strength that come from within, molded layer by layer over the harsh years. It had gotten her out of this house, it had helped her ace high school and college, and it had led her to survive her first year of marriage. She went into the kitchen, opened the trashcan lid, and threw the dream catcher in. Kate realized with a start she hadn’t collected a single thing from the house to keep. The simple truth was she never intended to. After all, what could you collect from ashes?



Miss You
ADAM LEVY

Watching a Person Breathe

SYDNEY RANSON

In sleep, the lungs balloon.
Air fills their walls and sacs where it can,
like saltwater waves cresting in inhales
and exhales.

They release and crash
as ribs slide tides of breath
shallow within the core,
where we cannot hear the volumes
of the waves that drift us about our nocturnal coma.
We drift so slowly
that we never feel how far from the shore
we have been taken, up and down.

Our chests, we have moved them
but elsewhere.
The ribs crack like driftwood
in the choppy current, and float
from the diaphragm of the Atlantic into
our chest cavities.

A twitch and a turn nearly wake us.
And then, in sleep too,
the pelagic breath returns. The lungs rise again.
Another swell sets in, pulmonary and oceanic.

Contributors' Notes

Laura Adkins has been published twice in a collection of local poetry and prose called *The Kanawha Review* as well as a local newspaper, *The Putnam Standard*. She currently lives in Scott Depot, West Virginia, with her husband and attends college at Marshall University.

Codey Bills is a student at Marshall University, where he majors in English Literature and Philosophy. A native of St. Marys, West Virginia, Codey is deeply influenced by the people, geography, and ideologies of his home state.

Charles Childers is a second-year junior studying Literature at Marshall University. A self-proclaimed punk, he plays the drums for several bands in the Huntington area as well as doing spoken-word poetry. This is his first time submitting a work for publication, and he aspires to one day become a full-time writer. This poem is dedicated to Christopher "Topher" Seelinger. *Bella ciao comrade, you will be missed.*

Elizabeth Davidson is in her senior year at Marshall, working towards a BA in English/Creative Writing. Her interests lie in writing nonfiction, reading nonsensical flash fiction, and watching bad movies. She currently resides in West Virginia with her three sardonic cats.

As a child **Amanda Foose's** mom noticed that she was unusually talented at art in almost any form. When she was a year old her mom sat her in the yard and let her finger paint for hours. She eventually took private drawing lessons and won every art contest that she entered in during her adolescent years. Art became a growing passion of hers so she decided to study it at Marshall University as a Painting major.

Kelli Harrah is currently in her third year at Marshall University as a graphic design major. Her piece, "Mona", was a response to a modular assignment. She wanted to take a well-known image, and give it a pop art feel and cultivate a material that the general public wouldn't consider a typical medium. That's what she enjoys about art. There are no restrictions and limitless possibilities.

Rebecca Keith is a student at Marshall University.

Adam Levy is a senior photography major at Marshall University. He is a Huntington native who enjoys using alternative and classic film processes to convey the relationship between man and nature. His pieces require careful planning, and lengthy setups to ensure a quality final image. His works have been exhibited at MU's student juried art shows. Adam is influenced by such artists as Alec Soth, Robert Parke Harrison, and Joseph Mougel.

ART

Amanda Fooce, Kelli Harrah, Rebecca Keith,
Adam Levy, Brenda Skeens

FICTION

Laura Adkins, Codey Bills, Emma N. Rodgers

INTERVIEW WITH NEIL CARPATHIOS

Tanya Bomsta

NONFICTION

Charles Childers, Elizabeth Davidson, Hannah Smith

POETRY

Codey Bills, Delaney McLemore, Sydney Ranson,
Emma N. Rodgers, Bennet Siffrin, Brenda Skeens,
LeeAnna Wiles