


2012

et cetera

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Et Cetera

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MARSHALL UNIVERSITY'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

Et Cetera

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*"The unread story is not a story; it is little black marks on wood pulp.
The reader, reading it, makes it live: a live thing, a story."*

Ursula K. Le Guin

Moon Walkers

ERIKA THARP

Little one,
the Moon is where people go
when they die. It's a pitted
dartboard drawing us in, and
when the Earth lets you loose,
you streak the horizon
like a pale comet.

On the Moon, the dead
bounce on bare soles, pearlescent
as split mussels.
They sing as often as speak,
and the music is continuous
and without commercial interruption.

Hush now,
lean in, let me tell you:
The surface is dull as dust.
Beams the living see are an illusion, you know.
It's the souls that glow the Moon—
strolling the cobbled streets,
which have no signs, as passersby
slip through each other
and there is nowhere
to get to in any hurry.
Nappers fill each nook, snoozing
under thick-paged open books.

Spring on the Moon begins
on the inside. Grasses fur the heart;
saplings shoot from fingertips; the lungs
fill with bursts of morning glories.
Petal breath stirs the Moon
Bees, who swing out from star to star,
tracing a path to pollinate the night.

A Perspective from Mary Hatch in It's a Wonderful Life

CYNTHIA MCCOMAS

Blooming in the midnight sky,
the moon averts its gaze from tired pastures and sleeping silos
to the soft brick streets of my hometown.
Slow-motion stoplights reflect the damp sidewalk
where Buffalo gals might dance around the hydrangeas
or deconstruct their youth building bridges.

When you threw that rock through the single-pane on the mansard roof,
you wished a hatful of wishes.
I wished for the glass to piece back together,
the skeleton keys to be presented by a policeman in
a home where we might arrive to leaky ceilings
after the wedding. You button up your nightshirt while the AM radio
hums.

And I wondered if you had heard my secret
spilled at the emporium counter when I was twelve years old,
would you have run into National Geographic covers
where the Tahitian Islands echo that silence you seek in attics?
Or could we name our children after historians
and philosophers to make up for our high school educations?

On my doorstep, I slipped a rose petal into your coat pocket
so that twenty years from now you might remember
the night we danced in a swimming pool, jumped from broken banisters,
and when you promised to lasso the moon.
Then you told me that day at the drugstore you felt
the warmth of my breath on your ear.

We Are Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

ROB ENGLE

The second you let go of my wrists is the second that I'll nail your hips to the wall. Don't ask me to prove it. Like you did that time I said Joan Didion was the most badass smoker ever. I looked over my shoulder at you sitting on my bed and your lips looked amused with themselves.

What I want is for you not to recoil when I lurch after a few drinks because Lent is fast approaching and I'm positive I cannot handle the withdrawal. We were at your cousin's apartment when I wanted to try Adderall but it was the Sabbath so instead you supinated my wrists and traced my sallow veins and it was better than any high in my subjective experience. The look in your eyes when I asked if I could take a drag of your cousin's cigarette said that you knew chivalry still existed somewhere, but not on this porch. You grappled your fingers through my collarbone and plucked the cigarette from my Cheshire mouth when I said you'd had enough to drink.

I'm learning that it's okay not to know where to put my nervous hands or how to react to the drunk dials that start at 11pm. I remind myself to breathe when I'm holding my phone between my teeth as I wait with our friends in bottle-strewn dorm rooms. When they act like I'm the one who needs to speak first I'll continue to stare down at my inverted Keds and twist my unwashed hair and count the minutes it takes for them to realize that this is no longer awkward for me.

Maslow estimates that only 2% of people ever reach a state of self-actualization. That is why I'll sit at my desk at ungodly hours of the night and faze you through my laptop screen, trying not to knock these anthologies all over the floor when I begin to crumble like paper kites. That is why I'm cutting my fingernails irresponsibly close just to feel the skin pulling back the other way. That is why.

I dreamt that we were at a club. The lights reflected off of your wet wrists and you were wearing that blue dress that I wish you would have bought. You led me by the hand to the middle of a precarious beat and pressed into me hard, unashamed that your parents were there.

You said that you admire the way the draught forces itself into unwanted spaces. You said you felt small in my arms the way snow makes the landscape feel.

Last night I touched myself to make sure I was still there.

Last night I came so hard against my dorm room heater that the room went dark.

Last night I drank a lot and made poor choices and called it nonfiction.

Last Thursday we played a game at that party to see who could go the longest without touching the other. *Party foul*, whatever, everyone's eyes said they knew why you spilled that beer down my thigh. You said it was an accident, you say a lot of things. The news says cigarettes and Four Lokos kill people but I'm still waiting for the proof. I'm still waiting for a lot of things.

Uncle Davis in Ligonier, Indiana

LEILA SANDERS

Can I tell him, *I love you too*,
on the phone and mean it?

Uncle Davis's Heineken breath stutters,
Come on man,
to Rick when they fight.
Uncle Davis stands in
the snowy railroad tracks,
holds his hands in the air
and howls,
Yeah!

Uncle Davis sees his dead Uncle Joey
on the porch smoking
Juicy Fruit wrappers.

Uncle Davis steals
quarters from my brother's
collection and takes five dollar tips at
Don Pablos.
Bullshit!
he says, if he's caught.

Runs his fingers over his
waxed chest, showing off his
six pack that he thinks is there.
I walk away from
his sunken cheeks and
cut off eyelashes
when he tries to hug me.

Bluebird
in the bathroom
tells him Rick is going to take him to a
psychologist.

Budweiser smeared on
Van Halen t-shirt
mixes with his
bitter body odor.
Davis rapes his brother's
drunk daughter.

No.

Watching Us Rewind

ERIKA THARP

Across a distance, we sent
how have you beens and occasional
snapshots: your cutting
board after cooking with beets,
the cat, burrowing into a pile of clean laundry,
until the day you moved in, box
by box filling the vacant space.
Once each piece found its faint
silhouette in dust, I asked you
to stay.

At first, every unrinsed dish, every
first of the month, spurred
a night in separate beds. But
come morning,
we came together,
working our bodies to earn
the jolt given freely
the moment we were jointed.

We synchronized;
cooked together—the carrot disks sealing up,
like a magician's lovely assistant, until
the crooked orange finger sat seamlessly,
ready to be planted. Tears slid up my cheeks
as the layers of onion coalesced.
With blind thumbs I pressed
the flaky peel around the bulb in strips
like paper mache.

In our small garden, the long noses
of the banana peppers shrank into
their small white bells, each fragrant
basil sank into dirt. The eggshells,
with their aching hinges, shuffled
closer together in the loose soil.
The earth hardened as we compacted
it with our makeshift tools.

We came unwound.
One word between our two mouths

never split the air. Neither of us wanted
to be the last to say it.
We felt naked together.
Until the day we parted ways
at the party of the person no one
remembers—you turned to me (after
we returned each other's names,
borrowed books we had forgotten
weren't ours to keep,
at the moment just before
we became strangers)
and said:
Are your glasses real?
Let me see them.

NEIGHBORS

ANYSSA MURPHY

Screams one room over pulled her back to her empty upstairs apartment. Two heartbeats later she recognized the wails of a hungry infant. *Eliza*. Amy's eyes flicked open with the force it took to push her husband out of the door two and a half hours before she fell asleep. From her bed she watched as the sponged detail of her ceiling performed a geometric dance for her tired eyes. Her thoughts leaked from her ears as it spun and circled with a purpose that she could detect but not define.

Stiff fingers of the house's carpet investigated the spaces between her toes as she shuffled from room to room. In the musky light of midnight the faint yellow stains that clung to the walls peered at her. *What did he do with the damn bottles?* Two days ago she couldn't swing a dead cat without knocking over three bottles or five, and now she couldn't find a single one.

Thoughts of the dishwasher splintered in her mind. She recalled the look of triumph in his eyes when he told her about the apartment he'd found. Tommy had been so excited that he agreed to move in before speaking to her. *Hot damn, baby! I got you a place with a dishwasher! A fuckin' dishwasher, can you believe it? Bet you never thought you'd have it so good.* They moved in the next day.

That night Tommy could have conceived ten babies but she could only give him one.

Her fingers wound around the small hook to unhinge the dishwasher and she felt as though she was pulling a trigger. The door swung open like a body falling off of a horse. The smell of watered down soup pervaded the kitchen so quickly she felt her stomach flop sideways. *His crowning achievement and he can't be bothered enough to flip a damn button.* She wasn't surprised that Tommy hadn't turned on the dishwasher. He never did. She tucked that in her brain like a note in a pocket. Another thing to argue about if he ever came home. *Jesus Christ, Ames,* he'd say, parading a Pall Mall Blue through the air, *you don't let nothin' go. Run the damn thing yourself, you like running your mouth so much.*

Tommy was the only one she let call her Ames. When she was younger, her father had called her Ames and she'd squinched up her nose at him. *That's not a name. I'm an actual person, I want an actual name. That's why you call me Amy, Dad.* She felt different when Tommy said it. It was the kind of thing Tommy would do; he loved breaking her rules and she begrudged him for it because somewhere she loved it too. At first she hated it—she'd twist her neck around every time he said it, pretending not to know who Ames was—but eventually it became a part of her. If he called her Amy, it bothered her, and that bothered him too. Tommy was always changing her rules, confusing the lines she'd drawn. But he did that with everyone.

From her sink Amy could see the driveway she and Tommy shared with their landlord and her husband. She was an elderly woman crusted with the kind of life Amy once swore she would never have.

She could not guess how long Eliza had been crying before she'd woken up, but as she shook the grainy formula a solid thud interrupted the disquiet and she knew it had been thirty minutes. The thump knocked her into consciousness and she wondered if Clark had eaten yet today or at all since his wife left. She promised herself she would visit him in the morning.

Formula ran down the baby's neck like melting snow down a hillside and pooled in the soft rolls of her flesh. In the chill dark Amy couldn't see it but four months of this routine told her it was there. It was happening as surely as it was that Tommy was drunk somewhere. Eliza sucked hungrily at the bottle; the squished noises interrupting the silence like a lullaby. Amy fell asleep with the baby propped against her elbow.

The sun bit her eyes, pulling her violently from a dream. Her hand jumped without her permission, and before she could stop it Eliza was awake on her lap, screaming. Amy peered at her daughter, roused by how alien her child looked with her mouth open so wide. *Jesus Christ, Tommy.* Until now she had forgotten about the curtains she had asked him to hang in their daughter's nursery.

...

He had not moved from the couch except to use the bathroom and bang on the ceiling in four days. He stewed in the quiet, thumbing the pock marks that his cigarettes had etched into the cushions. When he and Jenny's tenants fought, he listened. He sat in the dark, lapping up their words, tenderizing and marinating them in his mind. The fighting threw him backwards; his heart sped up and slowed unevenly in tune with their shouts. His neighbors went round every few days, but it wasn't why they fought that made him listen; it was that they fought at all. Before the couch's upholstery had faded, Jenny scolded him for burning a hole in its rosed fabric and they fought for three days about it. It was more like four, really, but Clark had spent a day of it at the house of a man that worked at the auto plant. Tommy and Amy's fights felt like the ones he and Jenny had when they were younger, but now placid acceptance of one another had settled in their bones. She had not raised her voice at him since his stroke.

Though the sun shone fully outside, the house remained dim, as if dusk sat on its haunches outside. When Amy opened the door, light flooded into the house, inflating it like a balloon. Clark's head rolled on its axis. His mouth broke open ready to greet his wife. His eyes met Amy's and his face flattened. A ravine disrupted her soft features, a canyon of apprehension.

She felt awkward and unwelcome. Her mouth twisted, forming empty shapes with no sound. This house felt familiar to her, more than just the complement to her apartment. The familiarity prodded at her skin.

Understanding realigned her face. Guilt poked her ribs.

Patches of rough plywood peered from under tables and chairs. Their living room was a paused image of a renovation, a project Clark had insisted on two months before he had a stroke while driving. He'd since gotten better, but his fervor died with the sight in his left eye. Jenny, his wife, had managed to patchwork the majority of their living room using rugs she found at rummage sales. She scattered the remnants of

other homes around her floor, creating a mosaic of shifting fabrics and colors to hide Clark's failure. His remodel had only touched one room in their house, and none in the apartment they rented out above them.

Smoke-stained faces that had populated his life grew from every surface in his home. His wife, Jenny, had been collecting old photographs and records as long as he had known her. Her family, she said, had sprung from a rock somewhere and weren't worth the time anyway, but she had maintained a steady fascination with his. Clark's great-grandfather, she discovered, had married the daughter of a Cherokee Tribesman. After coming home from the Civil War, he had thirteen children. Pictures of them hung over their box television in rusted frames Jenny purchased at an estate sale. A faded photograph of Clark's parents sat in a frame next to their sofa on which he sat, gnawing at the elastic skin of a tomato.

Amy picked her way across the room and sat adjacent to him in a recliner with flaccid, brown skin. She hadn't planned what she would say to him, how she would explain infringing on his home this way. She thought it would be like talking to her father.

Unbidden, words began falling flatly from her mouth.

Since his daughter had rushed Jenny unexpectedly to the hospital he had not spoken to another person for longer than three and a half minutes. Now he sat in his home, nodding desperately along with Amy's words. He did not hear what she said, but it didn't matter. He saturated himself with the sound of her voice.

I think my girl gave up on me, Sugar Foot. His sentence smashed into hers and fell to the floor. His tongue flopped against his jaw.

Silence fogged the room.

Her response came dumbly. *Nah, Clark, it's all that radiation.*

Before his eyes could find her, she stood up and walked away from him. Amy did not look as Clark had imagined. Daydreams of a fiery young woman had danced across his mind; his brain conceived images of a girl with wild hair and eyes that saw you when they weren't looking. Every night that she and Tommy fought he dreamt that he could pull his Amy in and kiss her face. In his dreams he grew backwards to be with her. The girl in front of him, though, looked timid and confused; Clark thought she looked like a field mouse. Her hair was flat and dull. Her eyes looked as if they might roll to the floor if she moved her head suddenly. Shame congealed in the capillaries of his face.

Are you hungry?

From his indention on the couch, he could hear Amy as she moved about Jenny's kitchen. His wife tramped across the floor, slammed doors, and crooned as she sliced and chopped; Amy however, glided; voices of the cabinets as they opened were the only testaments that she stood in there, making him lunch.

Thank you, Ames. Clark's words met her in the kitchen and crawled up her vertebrae.

A blue pack of cigarettes sat on the stand beside him. She sat his plate on top of them and walked to the door without saying anything.

When she left, he did not eat the tomato sandwich she'd laid before him, but fell into a fitful sleep. Clark dreamed he stood on the roof of him and Jenny's home, talking to a street light.

...

The house met Amy in dense silence. Her living room startled her. Clouds had converged over the house outside, stifling out the sun, and in the dullness of the afternoon she felt as if she were stepping into Clark's home rather than her own. Urges snaked from her stomach and she imagined what it would feel like to pull the pictures from the walls.

She had escaped to visit Clark during Eliza's nap, a baby monitor zip-tied to the belt loop on her jeans. Now anxiety swam through her fingers, causing her to pick at its dials and ridges. The stillness she left behind made her crave the sounds that she and Eliza produced together.

Stiffly, she undressed herself. The clothes she wore to visit Clark smelled of smoke and dirt and reminded her of Tommy. It perplexed her that someone's house could smell so much like a person. As she pulled on a woolen sock, cries echoed from Eliza's nursery.

Finally. Guilt seeped across her mind; she knew it was wrong to begrudge Eliza of her sleep but she was sick of being alone. In the past Tommy's absences after they fought invigorated her, but now an urgent longing for him distracted her thoughts. She remembered how it felt waiting for a pregnancy test.

Creaks and groans came from outside as rain began to grab at the windows. Tommy, she knew, would use the weather as an excuse not to return to her. She felt like a tin roof after a blizzard.

...

After Amy left Clark's home the day before, he had spent the rest of the day and the entire night dreaming. Snatches of his life plowed across his mind, planting seeds that propagated lucid and wild dreams. When the phone rang the next morning, he awoke feeling like he had been pulled from the sea. He wanted nothing more than for his savior to dunk him back beneath the waves.

As the day progressed, the phone shouted at him from beside his pillow, waking him up, calling curses into his ear as he tried in vain to sleep.

Clark had not seen his wife in four days, but had been filtering calls for her since she left. The callers never wanted to talk with him, but asked to speak to Jenny as

soon as he said "hello." He resented them for it. When they asked for her, Clark had to explain that she was not home, why not, how to get in touch with her, and when she would return. When Clark tried to explain that he didn't know, he was met with indignation. They treated him with spite; as if he hoarded the answer they sought on purpose, too selfish to share with them.

Now he sat in boycott of the phone, his arms clinging to one another in front of him as it rang. *An old man can't get no sleep all 'cause they want their damned answers. They can burn in hell, by God.*

As the phone continued to ring his resolve faltered. He began to wonder if perhaps Jenny was calling.

Finally, without his permission, his arm snapped loose of his body, and dove at the phone like a seagull after a fish. The phone was ringing for the fourth time in the last five minutes. Clark told himself that the only person that persistent was his wife.

Jenny? A crack is his voice split the syllables of her name.

Through the curved ear piece, Clark heard someone breathe heavily. *Dad?* The voice of his only son answered him.

Yeah, who else? What do you want? Anger swelled and seeped from his gums as he chewed them. Why was he calling? Couldn't Jenny call him herself? She was the one he wanted.

Um, I just, Dad...

Where's your mom?

Dad, please, that's what I'm trying to talk to you about. Clark's anger dissolved down his throat. Both he and his son sat silently, hoping the other would say anything at all. *Dad, Mom's not coming home.*

Sour mucus climbed up his throat and threatened to spill out of his nostrils. He felt cold and confused; the way he had after his first stroke. *Of course she is. You ain't a doctor, how do you know? You better not be sayn' shit like this in front of your mother, I'll tan your god damn hide.* His crooked finger jabbed the air in front of him because his son was out of his reach.

No, Dad. She stopped breathing this morning. The doctor came, and he did everything he could, but, well, do you understand what I'm saying to you?

I ain't stupid, son.

That's not all of it, Dad. Caroline is going to pick you up tomorrow.

...

His shape blocked out the light in the doorway like a cookie cutter in a roll of dough. Blue runoff from the 3 am sky seeped in the front door like poison. It infected everything and made it harder to see. The alcohol caused him to walk as if the tattoo on his calf weighed him down; making him shift unequal amounts of weight on each foot. Tommy's head tilted back and forth as if a screw in his neck had come loose. His eyes did not move themselves but sat frozen in his skull, seeing only what sat directly in front of his head as it lolled. His ring, Amy noticed, was still on his finger clinging to his bloodied knuckle.

He did not see her but Amy stood adjacent from the door, hunched over in the kitchen. There she leaned, elbows obstructed by the fake marble counter tops. She felt moronic sitting in the dark with her mouth open, her tongue grasping at words.

Tommy's eyes found her face and she felt her lungs collapse. Blood defiled her cheeks, and thoughts of Clark smoking a cigarette, sitting alone in his living room pinched at her temples, confusing her. The sticky linoleum floor of her kitchen anchored her in place, grabbing at her ankles like a servant begging his master for food.

He stood still, under her gaze, letting his labored breaths steam in the air in front of his face. He didn't say anything, but stumbled past her into the hallway.

When the echo of his snores reached her in the kitchen she followed him into their bedroom. She unlaced his boots and took a Pall Mall from his jacket pocket.

...

Street lights splayed themselves unevenly across his head, the thin strands of his hair reflecting light awkwardly. He sat sideways, lumped against the window. Cold from outside leached through the metal skin of the bus and into the muscles of his face. His cheek itched but he ignored it. His body felt stiff and uncouth, and he thought his extremities might break off if someone tried to move him.

From his seat he examined the Greyhound's passengers, and wondered if any of them were running away. As he closed his eyes he saw a young girl cradling her baby, smoking a cigarette. The smell made him crave a cigarette and he wished Amy hadn't crushed his last Pall Mall.

August 14th

CHARLES C. CHILDERS

Under the shade
of a barren-
apple orchard,
little children play
at poverty.

They smear dirt
on their noses
and clothes, no
shoes, all innocence
in hillbilly
blackface.

They chuck rocks
at beehives, pummel
the corpse
of a copperhead
with "walk'n stiks,"
fish for leaves
in mud puddles
with bits of string
(stolen from the air-
conditioned "city"),
and make mock
depression dolls
with their lunch
left-overs.

By the time
they return
to the farmhouse,
they're covered
in burs, like coonhound
curs, new clothes
all tattered and torn.

Their aged grandma
catches them,
and with a cry
(and a world-
versed whimper),

tans their backs
with a leather belt,
the children, tear-choked,
screaming incoherently
at the injustice of it all.

I'm Really Not As Patient As People Think

ROB ENGLE

I twist my forearms around one another whenever I read Proverbs 16.

*Better a patient man than a warrior,
a man who controls his temper
than one who takes a city.*

I wish I were patient enough to spend Friday nights
pursuing noble endeavors like reading Dostoyevsky or
learning how to write my name in Arabic or
spitting bits of verse into the wind.

This November has felt like
three sets of arms wrapping around my torso or grabbing
two premium beers at a party I wasn't invited to. Yesterday
I was mad at myself until noon because I got 8.5 hours of sleep.
Today I erased two whole pages of writing because
a book once told me that's what writers do. Tonight

I admitted to my friends that after 6 or so drinks
I would be stumbling towards the nearest bridge
with every intent to jump. I waited with a wrist
curled around a half-empty glass for one of them to laugh and say,
So that's why you want to move to New York, for the bridges?
But instead my plea was eclipsed by someone toasting
to a Reds win and the prospect of pussy tonight.

An hour later you handed me
your near-full cup of Captain and cranberry
and told me to keep our spot in the pong line-up
while I stood against the wall paranoid
that you were trying to drug me. I wonder if
anyone ever notices how I twist my hair between
my index and middle finger when I'm nervous or
the way my hands find their way beneath my navel
whenever I don't know what to do with them.
So I'm sorry that I left unannounced but my grandfather
had started to stare back at me in the bathroom mirror.

A poster of James Dean looking over his
shoulder hangs next to the head of my bed.
The only greatness for a man is immortality.
Peggy Lee sings of nicotine-laced loneliness
and black coffee. Whitman sings the body electric.
I roll over and face the wall.

Pandemonium's Order

HOLLI PERKINS

"Mom, I need to go to the hospital," you say on the phone to your worried mother as you stand frantic in your dorm room during your freshman year of college.

"No. You don't. You'll be fine," she replies, out of shock.

"Okay, Mom." You hang up the Nokia old-school cell phone and head to your Math 099 class in distress. You have anxiously checked your phone for text messages in class when you finally receive,

"Get ready. I'm taking you to the hospital."

The mental hospital. The mental institution. The psychiatric ward.

Fear overtakes your mind as you realize that the time has come that you must face the demons that have taunted you for four years.

You pack your clothes and wait for your mother to arrive at the university to pick you up. You drive down the street holding your mother's hand while she drives. She tells you to give her your cell phone.

You arrive at River Park Hospital and walk in to find a receptionist at the front window. She says, "Can I help you?"

You say plainly and quickly, "I am admitting myself."

You know at the young age of nineteen that you feel alone entering a hospital while most people your age are enjoying life.

She leads you down a quiet hallway with framed flowers on the wall as you feel the evening darkness outside.

You and your mother enter a medium-sized assessment room where you sit down on a couch that looks comfortable but is stiff because of your tense muscles.

The nurse walks in and asks you why you are here. You tell her everything you can think of about your symptoms as your mother holds your hand tightly but nervously. You must tell her about your fear of guns, knives, cleaning products, and imaginary poisons.

"Wait here," she calmly says, "I am going to call the doctor and see if he wants to admit you."

Sitting in the room, waiting with your mother and drinking 7-UP in a Styrofoam cup, you tap your foot and wonder how much time has passed since the nurse left to call the psychiatrist. She finally returns with a plastic hospital bracelet that has your name hand-written with Sharpie and the name "Dr. Spangler" written under it and ties it to your wrist. It is now that you realize you are booked to stay in the hospital.

You say goodbye to your mother. "You'll be fine, honey," she says as she hugs you. "I love you," she reminds you, although you already know.

Dare to think about how you are staying in the psychiatric hospital for seven to ten days.

You're thinking about how it feels to be strip-searched. *I don't want them to see me naked! No one but my mother has seen me naked!* Your naked body, under a hospital gown, is being stared at to make sure you don't have any weapons on your person, things that you could use to harm yourself or someone else. Another nurse opens the front of the hospital gown she asked you to put on and stares at your bare flesh. You do not have anything on your body that would cause an uproar, such as a razor blade. You put your clothes back on, closing the door of the bathroom behind you, and the nurses ask, "Is your bra wired?" "Yes," you say, and then after you have to give them your bra as you stand with a shirt on with no bra under it, you watch in horror as the nurses gnaw and slice your expensive nude-colored Victoria's Secret bra.

You meet Dr. Spangler after you wake up on the second day of your stay. He says, "Bless your heart," when you tell him your fears and symptoms. You realize then that he is an empathetic doctor and that he is going to take care of you.

Jillian, the new psychologist at the hospital, with her long and wavy brown hair, flowing skirt, and employee ID necklace on, walks into group session where you and the other patients are learning coping skills together. You are immediately drawn to her because she seems to genuinely care about mentally ill people.

"If any of you need to talk, I'll be in my office," she says kindly.

You walk into her office and sit down before her desk, and you're handed a pamphlet describing OCD and treatment options.

You talk to her about why you're there and how badly you want to be normal.

Is the hospital really equipping you to deal with your OCD in everyday life?

You don't believe so, unfortunately, because they don't do anything but put you on medication and talk about your prognosis. They don't provide you with the therapy you needed. The only two people who genuinely help you are Jillian and Dr. Spangler.

Don't forget the manic-depressive Tom, who is extremely attractive since he shaved his beard. He is trying to kiss you while getting cookies and milk in the kitchen during free time. He says afterward, "I'll give you a kiss later when the nurses aren't watching."

"Major Payne" plays from the VCR as you cuddle with Tom under the blanket you brought from your bedroom. Don't forget how the nurse tells you that if you and Tom continue to mingle, you'll be sent to the geriatrics unit with the old and senile people. Therefore, you must steer clear of him until your discharge even though you like canoodling with him. You imagine leaving the hospital and keeping in touch with him because you wrote your phone number on a scrap piece of paper from a coloring book in the common room and gave it to him. *He's not going to call me.*

Don't forget how you are going in and out of the psychiatrist's office and up and down the hallway to the nurse's station to get your morning and evening medications, knowing the routine you have to follow. In your fuzzy socks and long johns at 6 AM you wait for your Ativan and wonder what the day ahead will bring. *Will I get to do something else besides sit around and watch TV, filling out crossword puzzles and reading books?*

Don't forget OWP's.

Off Ward Privileges...The time of day in which you are allowed to exit the locked unit of the psych ward and go downstairs to the run-down cafeteria to eat mushy spaghetti and drink Tru-Moo chocolate milk. Remember how this was an upgrade from having your meals sent to you on a covered tray, where the mush was even mushier?

Heaven forbid you remember passing the people in their separate room in the cafeteria who were branded mentally insane, walking back to the elevator in your leggings with the nurse who is just ignoring the "crazies" and their nurse. They are people who did "insane" things, like murder and rape. Don't even think about them and how seeing them is scaring the ants that are already in your pants.

•••

Check to make sure the silver-knobbed door is locked; walk from down the hallway back to your dorm room to wiggle the knob, realizing it was locked the entire time. Repeatedly check to see if your alarm on your iPhone is set; get out of bed right before you fall asleep, and in the dark, search for your phone, click the screen on, and search for the alarm, only to find that it is in fact set for 9:30 AM. Stay far away from weapons and cleaning supplies. Move your foot away from these items so none of them come in even the littlest bit of contact with your body. Confess every single little thing you do or think to someone who can reassure you; call your therapist to confess to her that you cut someone off in traffic and your franticness that the police are after you.

•••

You remember when you were diagnosed at fifteen. You remember the scary symptoms. Death in general scares you to no end. You used to be afraid of killing yourself. You were afraid when you hung your towel on your shoulders that you would wrap it around your neck and suffocate yourself.

Your daddy's mindset is, "I'm not sure what's going on, but I found someone who can help." You are sitting with your parents on either side of you with your hands in theirs. They are worried about you and uncomfortable because they truly have no idea why you are so intensely suffering.

You talk to the psychologist your dad found for you through his business. He fixes her boats so she can take her old dog out on the lake. You walk up the stairs of the house her office is in and sit down on her cozy couch with her chair right next to the arm of the couch.

You remember describing your intrusive thoughts and fears, and you had better remember how she said with certainty in her voice, "It's OCD."

At this moment, you realize you aren't crazy, and that there is a reason for your obsessions, anxiety, and irrational compulsive behaviors. *I have a mental illness.* If people watched your every move, they would wonder why you twitch when you see a gun, knife, or a bottle of Clorox bleach. Crazy to you means being thought of as insane.

There is a chemical imbalance in your brain that causes your irrational thoughts. You're just afraid that people will see you as a crazy person *whose ducks aren't in any kind of row.*

Try not to think about how you are kicked out of college until you can provide a note from your psychiatrist saying you are safe to be at school and that you are not a threat to yourself or anyone else. Try not to think about the several times the counselor at the university, sitting in her windowed office with you on the couch in front of her, tells you to seek hospitalization for your absurd thoughts and fears.

You are at St. Mary's emergency room only to show how you don't want to be there. You are crying and you almost scream. You are in an uproar, saying "I don't wanna be here!" because you are afraid of being locked up and having a mental hospital record, like "crazy people" have. You fuss and carry on, only to be sent home with instructions on how to get better in an outpatient setting. They tell you to stop taking the Lithium you have been taking and come back if things get worse.

None of those attempts work.

...

Dr. Spangler pulls you into the small, beige-walled assessment room in the main ward of the locked unit where you ask about your schedule for the rest of the week. "And Monday," he proclaims, "discharge!" You are excited at this moment because it is here that you realize you can leave the hospital because no one thinks you are crazy enough to stay any longer.

...

Back home, do not pick up the phone and call your boss again. She was probably napping when you called her and that's why she sounded so impatient and annoyed. Put down the phone and do your homework and stop worrying that you're going to get fired for calling your boss on her day off just to see if you're on the schedule for next week when you said to your other boss that you'd just call Monday and ask.

Make sure you lock your door the first time so you don't have to come back and check to see if it's locked and risk being late. Your precious valuables will be fine in there, you have to tell yourself. *But what if someone gets in my room and steals my iPad and bank statements?* Turn around once you're already outside the building. Walk back inside. Go all the way up the elevator. Turn the knob that's already been locked once.

Set your alarm and check it only one time as opposed to the four times you check it before falling asleep to make sure you won't oversleep, therefore humiliating yourself the next day. Make sure it's set to the correct ringtone so it will be loud enough. Make sure it's set early enough so you can hit the snooze three times so you don't have to get up and endure the day as early as you should. Sleep as long as you possibly can before you're forced to get out of bed. *My bed is just too comfortable to even get out of!*

Make sure you don't move in the direction of cheating on your boyfriend. After all, you are naked and the shower is running while a boy sneaks into the bathroom with his girlfriend when he isn't supposed to. Be certain that you don't have any impulses to get out of the shower, run over to this boy, kiss him, and drag him into the shower with you. You wouldn't want to act on the horrible thought you had of having sex in the shower with someone you didn't know, would you?

Stay away from Clorox bleach, Windex, and the imaginary rat poison on your foot that you are afraid to come across even though there is nothing like it anywhere around you. It is easy to come across cleaning supplies because they are in your mother's kitchen and you use them to clean up after dinner, but you must make sure they don't get into anyone's food or drinks. Keep your mind focused on the task at hand and make sure you don't invite any thoughts of poison on your foot that isn't ever going to be there into your head. You worry that the rat poison has been put on your foot without your knowledge and you are concerned that you carry it around putting it on people's food. You obsess and worry about contamination by items that are not present in the room, and if they are present, you freak out that they are touching you. You don't want anything to do with any of these chemicals because you're terrified of them. You think they're bad and you shouldn't think they're bad if used properly. Use these objects properly, like you know you are going to.

While you're trying to live, don't think of all the ways you could die.

Don't go near a gun or a knife. You're afraid of them, so afraid that you want to cry every time you see one in person. They're bad, you think, and they're only used to do harm to others. No, they're not. They're used to cut chicken for your chicken pot pie. They're used to make sure the cow you're eating doesn't suffer when being put down, so you can have it for dinner. They're used by your daddy to bring home venison. Don't be afraid of these objects that are harmless if used correctly. Crazy people use them unwisely. You're not crazy, remember? They're not going to hurt you or anyone else.

...

Don't forget how your daddy came to pick you up the Monday after your ninth day at the hospital.

You are saying goodbye to the nurses who took care of you and are even saying goodbye to the other patients in there with you. Michael, the violent chain-gang thug who got sprinkled with tap water to get baptized when a pastor came to visit, clung to you and said, "I love you." You say, "I love you too," knowing you'll never see him again even though he also has your phone number. *Will he call me?*

They wish you well and you should remember giving some of them hugs because they all struggle and you could relate, even if in different ways. Think about how desperate each of their situations are and how desperate yours is. Your situation has placed you in a place you need to be in right now. Remember that.

...

A year and a half after being discharged from the hospital, you see the psychologist you'll never forget, Jillian, at Wendy's restaurant. At first, you don't speak to her because you're afraid of being embarrassed. However, she finally walks up to you and says, "You did it," after introducing herself to you once more and asking about how your life is going now. You felt an immense amount of pride at that moment that she remembered you and sees your progress just by looking at you.

...

Worship God at Baptist Campus Ministry with the loud band singing, "Oh praise the One who paid my debt and raised this life up from the dead!" Raise your hands in praise as you stand in the midst of one hundred and fifty other college students who have different issues than you, but they still have issues and they still struggle. Remember all that God has brought you from.

...

Pass River Park Hospital every time you drive down 6th Avenue. Remember it with your analytical brain that imagines what it would be like to go back.

Reverse Homicide

SHOSHANNAH DIEHL

After Matt Rasmussen

The forensics team fuses your hair into your scalp
and your teeth into your gums,
Before the police heap dirt over your
Lifeless, wooden body and retreat to their homes.

Kayla and Jessie scrape the dirt clods away from your face,
Using a blood-encrusted shovel.
Your lungs burst open as they suck the water out of your
Mouth and nose, flooding them instead with oxygen.

Kayla pulls you to your feet while Jessie wipes the
Shovel clean on your hair.
Your head begins to take shape, as if a sculptor is
Rolling it between his hands like clay.

The dandelion beneath your shoulder
Repairs itself, stretching its spine
And snapping its neck back into place,
Drinking in the water that drips from above.

You are led to your car, which you use to
Drive back to Ohio, where your grandma is waiting up.
Once inside the door the phone rings.
“You should come see me, I want to talk.”

Out the window, raindrops group together
For the long jump, launching into the sky
To bury themselves into distended clouds.



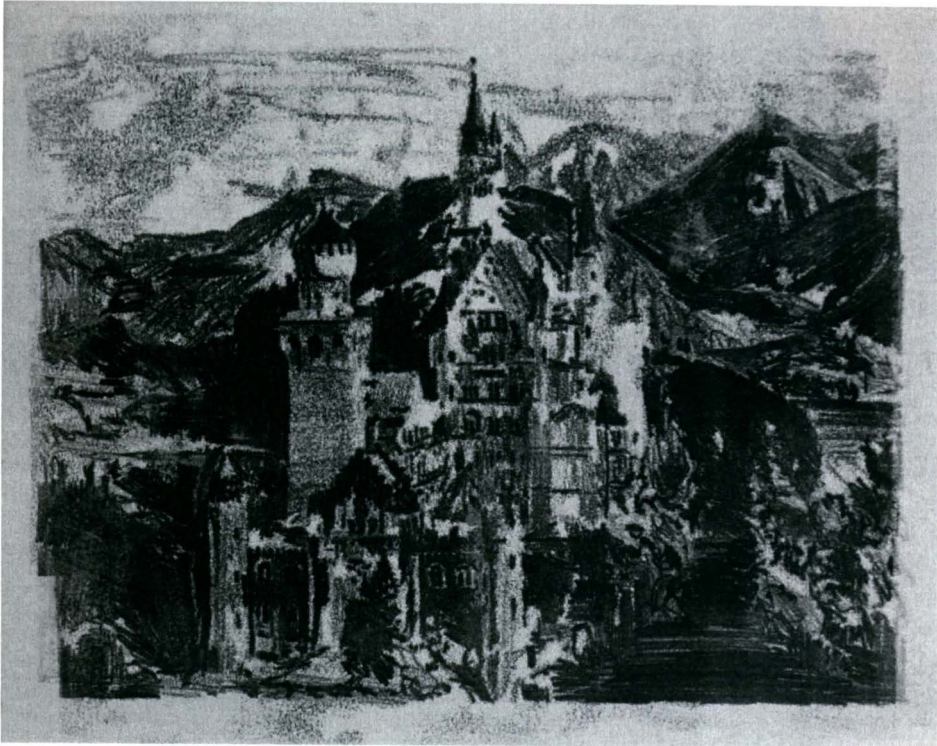
Watercolor Study: Nude One
ALLEN ARMEL



Love Doesn't Live Here
BRETT TUCKER



Appalachian Terror Unit
SYDNI BIBB



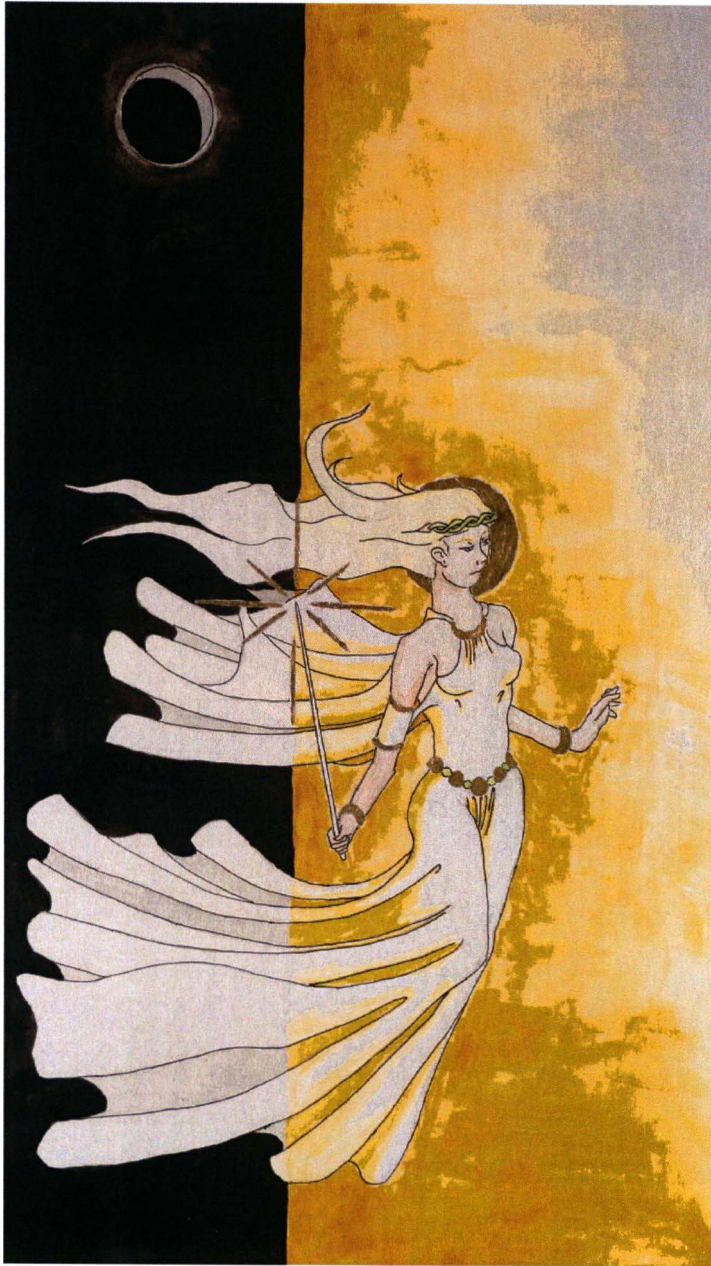
Castle 2
ROBERT GREER



Adolescence
ALEX SIMMS



**Time to Assemble,
or the Right Place at the Same Time**
BRETT TUCKER



The Maiden
ALLEN ARMEL



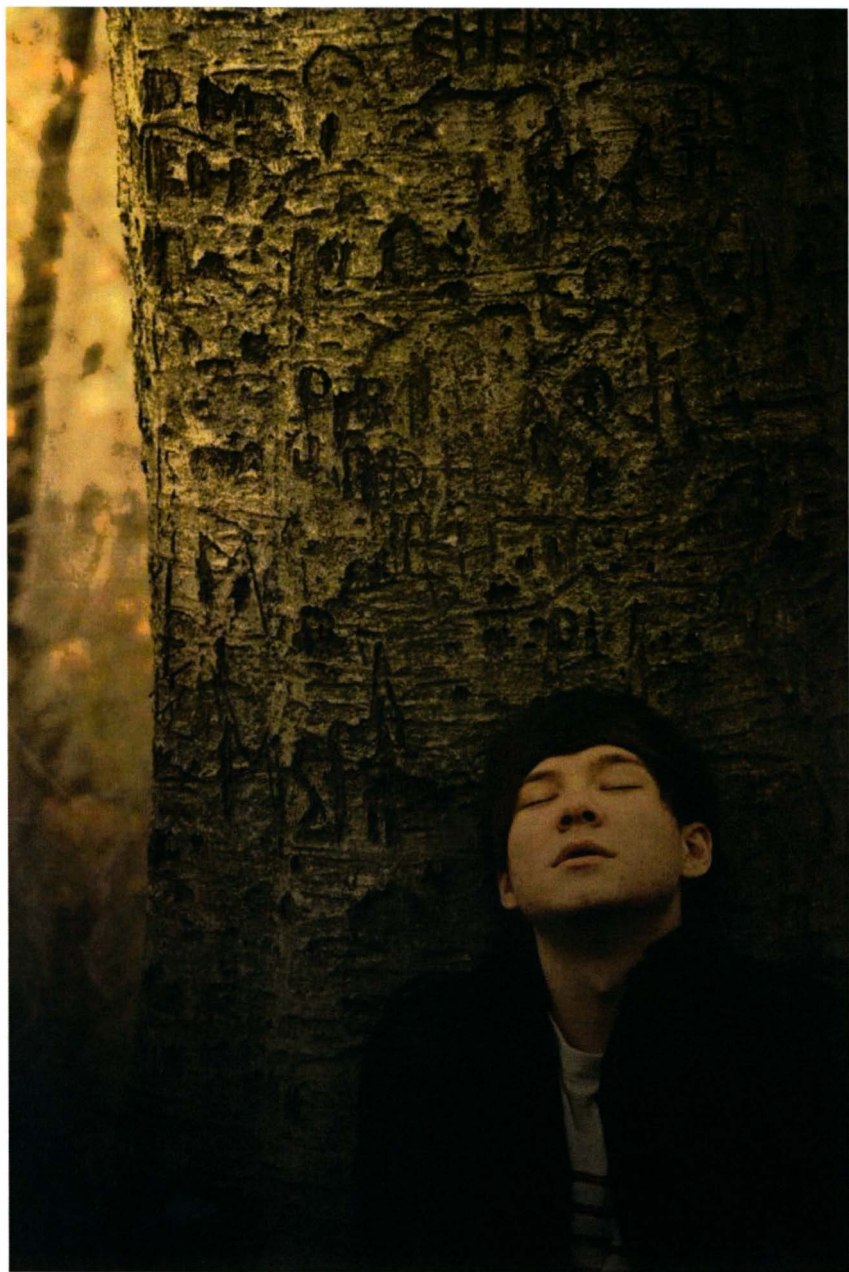
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“Reality with Teeth”: An Interview with Eula Biss and John Bresland

MICHELLE HOGMIRE

On a snowy Thursday in February, I talked with award-winning nonfiction essayist Eula Biss and celebrated video essayist John Bresland at Fat Patty’s, over the remains of a bratwurst patty, a vampire killer burger, and a strawberry spinach salad. We discussed everything from aspects of the essay and the MFA college experience to confronting labels and difficult subjects in video and on the page. Biss and Bresland are married, and they both hold MFAs in Nonfiction from the University of Iowa and teach writing at Northwestern University.

MH: Both of you are considered “essayists,” so I was wondering: what drew you to that form? Or what made you choose the essay, as opposed to other forms of writing?

EB: I would say I kind of found my way there. I started off writing poetry, and for a number of years, I thought of myself as a poet. And I was calling my work poetry, even when it was resisting the confines of that genre. So I think that I wrote poetry that got increasingly more essayistic. And what it means for something to be essayistic is kind of complicated. My intro to nonfiction class was just discussing this the other day and it was a long, complicated discussion about what we mean when we call something essayistic. I’m still not sure if I can boil that down, but I think that my work was engaging with the movement of my mind across some problem. And that’s why I call it essay writing.

JB: When I was in my mid-twenties, I was really lucky. I figured out a way to live for about a year without working, so I could just write. That was the dream for me, and it had been throughout my youth. And when I got that year to start writing, I of course wanted to write fiction because that’s what I came up loving. You know, postwar fiction writers like DeLillo and Pynchon. They wrote these big, epic novels that I just really took to. David Foster Wallace had just written *Infinite Jest*, so these were the kinds of books that I wanted to be able to write. But when I took that year to really work on them, all the characters that I had dreamed up seemed flat and silly to me. It just never worked. It was never good. It was never even close to good. And I didn’t care. I would write them and think, “I don’t care. They’re not real.” Then, I accidentally wrote an essay at one point about a snail mail correspondence I had with my father. I noticed that when I started writing him as a true character, as a true human with depth and dimension, I cared about him on the page. And that was a discovery for me. So I came to nonfiction by accident when I realized that the work I was doing had teeth when the people were real. I know that great fiction writers are able to make their characters real, too. I just don’t have that.

MH: Both of you also have MFAs in Nonfiction from the University of Iowa, which of course is well-renowned for being a really excellent, prestigious writing program. Could you talk a little bit about your MFA experience? Do you think academic experience is valuable for writers? I know there’s a debate going on right now about whether that experience is valuable or not.

EB: Part of the reason I went to Iowa was that I was feeling isolated as an artist. I was just kind of practicing my art. I was living in San Diego, but I just moved there. I wasn't plugged into a community of other writers. I was really hungry to be around people who were thinking about the questions I was thinking about. That's a huge part of what was valuable to me at Iowa, which I think could be found in a lot of other ways.

MH: Like community?

EB: Yeah, it was plugging into this community. Which for us, we were in the nonfiction program. That's separate from the workshop, which is the famous part. We were in the less famous part of the school, and it was a very small program when we were part of it. Our cohort was like eight people. For me, it was a great space to engage in conversation. John and I met each other almost immediately, and we ended up getting married. There were rich relationships that came out of that space and some important friendships. The peer relationships were really core, but I don't think that is the only way a writer can get that. There are great writers out there who have never done MFAs. As an academic program, the other thing that happened is that's where I really learned how to teach at the college level. We were teaching as our support, our fellowship. And teaching quite a bit. I also was there knowing that I wanted to teach. I think I got the two things I was looking for.

MH: You both tackle difficult, complex topics in your work, especially in terms of things like race in the essays from *Notes from No Man's Land* or in video essays like *The Seinfeld Analog*. What drew you both to that topic specifically, when it came to selecting a topic to talk about?

JB: Sometimes it's just small, simple interactions or lucky, lucky circumstances. Like *The Seinfeld Analog*, that work began when I was reading a draft that Eula had written. The essay was "All Apologies" from *Notes from No Man's Land*. I think in an early draft, you [Eula] were quoting Susan Power who was closely involved in what happened in Rwanda and was writing really beautiful work about it. So some of the research Susan Power had done came up in Eula's research. That for me was germinal. I saw that, and I thought, "I want to write about this, too."

EB: And John quickly knew more about that than I did.

JB: But that also nicely illustrates the beauty of a grad program where you're in a higher concentration of artists, so you're more likely to encounter other work that will influence you in a really direct and immediate way.

EB: Yeah, and with "All Apologies," I was talking to you [John] about that stuff, and you were pushing my thinking about the Rwandan genocide. There's a point in there where there was a news story about an apology that was made in Chinese, and we had a Chinese student in our program who is now a famous novelist. I sat down with her, and she translated some Chinese for me. There were lots of people around me feeding that work and moving it forward just through casual conversation. For me, every essay comes out of a problem or something that I'm uncomfortable with, so the subject matter tends to be charged because that's where I feel the need to write—a place where something seems unsettled for me. I have no need to write about things that I can already think pretty clearly about. I feel like writing has nothing to offer me in those areas.

JB: And I think, Michelle, that if most people—not just writers—if we just followed the things that bothered us to their origins, I think those origins would be universally troubling, disturbing things. That's how you find subjects of substance. You track the things that bother you to their origin, and those projects usually terminate at difficult events or circumstances or politics or cultures.

MH: Could you talk about the advantages or disadvantages of choosing to work in hybrid forms, whether that's a braided or fractured essay form or a video essay? What are the good things and the downsides of working in that type of a form?

JB: I don't use that term—hybrid form. I understand why it's used because we are writers and we operate among people who are not just writing new material, but they're in conversation with a literary tradition that's gone on for thousands of years. I get that. I get the way the tradition informs the work we're doing. So when you bring in new elements—new literary forms that haven't been in the tradition, like a braided essay—that's not seen as a traditional form, even though it is. The braided essay goes back forever. Or let's say you used video or sound or something, and it was seen as a hybrid, or a multimedia essay. Does anybody doubt that if this technology existed in the time of Plutarch or the time of the Romans or the Greeks, that they would be using this shit, too? So it's not really a hybrid form. Because of the circumstance of technology and human evolution, we just have arrived at a point where these things are new. They are going to inform the work. Yes, it's hybrid. But is there anything about recording sound or using images that is at odds with language or inhibits language? I don't see it that way, and I don't think so. I think all of these things—cameras and sounds and language—those things belong together because we are all equipped biologically with those things, too. That's how we operate. We hear things and we see things and we think about things. We're just now at a lucky time in our lives where technology is changing our engagement with literature, but it should. And it was inevitable. It just wasn't possible until we all suddenly had these editing machines in our pockets.

EB: I guess I would similarly reject the premise. I think that most forms are hybrids in some ways, so to separate out the hybrids seems futile to me. We had John Jeremiah Sullivan come to Northwestern, and he gave this great talk about the origins of magazine writing. He was talking about early, seventeenth century print culture in London and how all these small magazines and newspapers were emerging because suddenly the technology was cheap enough. I'm not quite clear on why it was happening, but it was happening, and how this was changing what literature looked like at the time. And he talked about Defoe's important character in that moment. Defoe is also someone who we think of as innovating the novel. One of the first novels in the English language is *Robinson Crusoe*, but Defoe was also doing interesting magazine writing, too. He was doing stuff that people hadn't done yet, like putting out ads in these little newspapers. He wrote this book that I love called *A Journal of the Plague Year* where he put out ads for people who were alive during the plague and remembered it. So it's a work of fiction that reads very much like a work of nonfiction because it's heavily researched with firsthand accounts. It's written in the first person, but he never actually witnessed that plague. John Jeremiah Sullivan was tracing his lineage as a magazine writer back to that time and saying that there is this hybridity at the very heart of magazine writing. I think almost any literary tradition, if you look back far enough, is folding in a lot of different kinds of influences. That's

how art moves forward. Everything the artist is in conversation with gets folded in. So forms change and they have complicated textures. Even looking two thousand years back at this essay by Seneca that I teach sometimes—his letter on slavery—he was using a private form of communication, the letter, but he was using it to make a public document. That's the kind of hybridity that's behind personal essays.

MH: I get frustrated with a lot of that labeling, too. Even when you apply to journals now if you're trying to get work published, some of them have specific stipulations that say, "No multi-genre pieces," or they're really against that. Or nowadays if you get labeled as an experimental writer—which that's a term that I really don't like—it's almost like you're pushed to the side. It's not seen as a good thing, and I find that odd.

EB: I think that depends on what circle you're hanging in. Because in some circles, you have to be experimental or avant-garde in some way, or it's not okay. That stuff is like fashion. I don't think it's about what's really going on in the work.

JB: I would argue, though, gently, that if somebody's talking about or assessing your work and what they have to say is that you're a hybrid artist or an experimental artist, I do think in some respects you failed. Because the thing you have to say should be the thing you're saying. It's the thing that people should walk away with. And if what you're doing is so experimental that it's just baffling...well, that can be great because Godard was doing that with the films he made in the 50s and 60s. They were baffling, and to me, they make me angry, but he was developing new ways of communicating in these films and new visual grammar that was really exciting, too. So some of these innovators that are referred to as innovators, we don't talk about what they said. We just talk about how they said it. They still have things to teach us, too. So that is important. Being marginalized or pigeonholed as an experimenter can still be really important because it can help other writers figure out how to say the things they want to say.

MH: Definitely. That makes sense. So do you have any advice for young writers, especially people who are interested in writing essays, or video essays, or nonfiction writing?

EB: Read. That's kind of a failsafe.

JB: One thing I would say, well there's a lot to say, but one version is that if I were twenty-two right now, I feel like I would have everything just lift. Because I would have my cameras, I would have my tools, and I would just start making really fluent, smart visual essays because there are right now twenty literary journals that are publishing this kind of work that ten years ago didn't exist or couldn't publish this work. Suddenly there's this new space. An authentically, genuinely new form. Not a subtly new form, but a dramatic new form of literature, and that doesn't happen in our lifetimes. It's happened once in my lifetime. It's happening right now. Throughout the twentieth century it was always poetry, fiction, and now we've got this other new space. This visual element that's being added to language. There's a lot of demand on behalf of editors and journals to feature this kind of work, and I think right now is the ideal opportunity for young writers to embrace this area of high demand and seize the opportunity.

Fathers

ROB ENGLE

I will be 20 tomorrow and I am not trying to make this ceremonious. It is the eve of Thanksgiving and I am sitting in my father's new recliner, the lone piece of furniture left in my living room in the midst of being remodeled. I am drinking bourbon that I smuggled home from school and settling into the awareness that my adolescence is numerically over. I will be 20 tomorrow and I am laughing at the cliché I am.

I am 3 and my grandfather is sleeping among flowers and talismans of war. My mother is staring at the carpet, its Celtic pattern writhing across the floor to where she is standing with her two brothers. She is in her mid-30s and parentless. She is as beautiful and composed as when he was escorting her down the aisle, but today her dress is a different color. A line of bodies brushes by, each one idling for a minimum of 45 seconds to reiterate how her son has the face of her father. She is trying to make that matter.

I am 13 and with Amanda behind the Pancake Skate 'n' Whirl and her mouth tastes like sour hard candy. Over her shoulder I see the funeral home where my grandfather lay a decade ago. The wind is blowing cigarette ash into the creases in the pavement. My mother told me that every evening after the 5 o'clock mass at Immaculate Conception my grandfather would sit on his porch and smoke two or three packs of Chesterfield Kings. She told me that he was the kind of man who would collect favors but never call them in. She also told me that almost no one attended his funeral. Amanda pulls away when she realizes my eyes are open.

I am 10 and standing in a jaundiced gymnasium watching my basketball coach throttle his son against a wrestling mat. *Be a fucking man and quit your crying!* My burgeoning Adam's apple is lodged in my mouth and I don't hear my dad when he asks how practice was.

I am 19 and we've never met but I clench her between my teeth like a cigarette. I already know that when I stumble in at 2am I will slump against my dorm room door and write her story as a whiskey-wrought mad lib. *Her eyes were _____ and _____ and said that she couldn't help but _____ him the way she never _____ you.*

I am a clump of undiscovered cells in my mother's womb. I am concentrated and sinless and solely dependent on larger powers. In ten weeks my parents will discover that I am a boy and in another twenty I will discover what that means.

I am 8 and my mom is sitting on the edge of my bed giving me a fair warning about what would happen if I ever were to be gay and my hands are shaking and don't even know what that word means.

I am 16 and my dad is golfing with his friends when he sees a man collapse on the course. He presses his mouth to the man's without hesitation and tries to make his heart start beating again. The man dies. We go out to dinner that night.

I am 14 and my sister's stifled cries permeate my bedroom wall. It is Friday and she is lying on her bed in a brand new dress, her unfinished make-up smeared into the furrows of her sheets. My mother informs me that she was uninvited to the party tonight and this news makes me feel small and stupid and separate from the adult world. My joints just click into a fist when I raise my hand to knock on her door.

I am 18 and he is looking back at me from the bottom of an empty glass. He is staring back through barroom mirrors and bloodshot eyes. He is my hairline, jaw line, eyes, and especially, my nose. He is the crucifix that sits on my dresser filled with Jerusalem dirt. He is the splinters of a hand-crafted mallard I broke when I was 5. He is the Coast Guard Cross and Purple Heart sitting atop a carefully folded American flag in the back of my closet.

I am 5 and it's not my burden and it's not my responsibility and when I stand on my father's feet he'll do all the walking. We waltz from wall to wall in my basement and when I stumble I know with 100% certainty that he will catch me.

I am 19 and nervous a majority of the time. Last week I sat on this same couch in this same house with a girl whose name was not far from the one whose mouth keeps getting closer to mine pretending to tell me secrets. I act impressed by her knowledge of *The Great Gatsby* when she finds out that I am an English major. She grabs my wrist when my fingers reach for the threads on my shirt. I lurch and we are taking even steps down 5th Avenue. We are sitting on the edge of my bed and she is pushing me underneath her clothes and my hands are still shaking.

It is November 28, 2013, 1:35am. I came into this world two decades ago to this minute. I am 20 and trying to be as honest as I can.

My Mother at the Wheel

ERIKA THARP

Along the shelf my father fixed
to the far wall, brittle as bone, as white,
my mother's pottery rests in rows.
The grooved imprints of her fingertips
ring each piece. Bowls set in bowls in teetering stacks
are hatchlings nested in halved shells—
all mouth. So unlike my father's paintings.

Surrounded by her mud spun pots
she bows her head at the wheel, cups
one hand around the wet mound,
clasps the other around both, and taps her foot
to set the wheel spinning. Begins to mold
a new vessel from earth with the ten bent
ribs of her fingers. The way her pulse throbs
in each palm, one inside the other,
must remind her of the way our two hearts
once beat in her body.

Silt gloves slip up to her stippled wrists.
When she pauses to swipe her forearm
along her glazed brow, she seems a half-statued
woman, ossifying under the gaze
of the Medusa, at the point
of equipoise just before
passing into stone.

Steven

JACKSON ARMSTRONG

It's a quiet place, down in the nicer parts of town—the streets are narrow and the houses are decidedly not. Just in sight, to the west, is a graveyard; in front, there's a door knocker, decorated, certainly, with the seasons, year after year, without fail (who puts up Valentine's decorations?) and framed by hanging lamps above and tenderly kept plants below; the parents keep this place tidy. A walk forward, a knock and "hello" bring me to a room trying very hard to be different from the rest—though no amount of nostalgic or ironic knick-knackery and wall hangings could hide such wonderful shades of white and elegant molding. In a way, in the age where "selfie" has replaced "self-reflection," it's perfect, in that idiosyncratic, hipster fashion. Attention draws immediately to the artfully framed *Logan's Run* poster and, oh yeah, the man in the chair (you know the kind—foldable wood and canvas; the chair, not the man) with whom I have formed an unlikely relationship. This is his home, in the most metaphysical sense of the word, and Steven is a friend, irritation and mild fascination.

To his credit, Steven is an amateur film-maker (don't tell him that term was qualified). Unlike most of his kind, the cellphone generation, myself included, to whom boredom (viz: real boredom—the kind that drives you to discover mountains or do math) is unknown, Steven has actually produced a body of work. But this isn't about his films nor how he makes them. This is simply about Steven (something that is in no way, to him, a novel idea) who is, quite possibly, the strangest concoction of pretension and personal-synthesis that the Earth has ever seen. It's an act—every film and every breath; don't think for a second that it isn't. And it's a damned good one, too. But I aim for what's inside.

"And it was, did you say, 2001 when you finished your first movie?"

"Well . . ." Steven cocks his head for correction before rocking it side-to-side in a manner suggesting, perhaps, that the feeling of a self-aggrandizing thought bouncing between your ears is one you should savor. ". . . you could say I finished in 2001. You're never really *finished* with art—something that you've made that's always part of you, though—are you?"

Touché, Steven. The movie, *Single Cigarette*, is not necessarily objectively awful. In fact, it is, in many ways, the magnum opus of the *artiste* at thirteen-or-so—halfway through a career he insists really began at age three.

"I don't think I talked to anyone at that age. I was very shy," he admits with a brief laugh.

"Most three-year-olds ar—"

"But the camera took care of that. . . . Through it I could see everything—"

"That's how they work, Stev—"

"—and I found that I could see things no one else could."

“... Three years old, you said?”

A sidelong glance at a lonely tree stump, austere love on “those winter Sundays,” a bird, I suppose, covered in jam and unable to fly with its little bird friends—rough facsimiles of poignant, real-world scenes that go unnoticed by “average” people: the evidence, he’ll assert, of an eye for film-making.

Oftentimes the mask (and pre-distressed clothing) that he has chosen to show the world will strike one as borderline obnoxious. Still, what’s inside is a tantalizing mystery—to know Steven is to be simultaneously frustrated and fascinated. He is, pure and simple, the temple he’s built for himself (he would prefer a more artsy, rustic analogy, I’m sure). The easiest way to peer inside this monumentally stupid structure is to give him an opportunity to engage in his most treasured pastime—talking about himself. This is the fundamental nature of our friendship, and we both get what we want. He talks; I listen.

...

James Lipton, of *Inside the Actor’s Studio* fame, could be considered by many to be quite adequate an interviewer. His famous rubric, fielded to a nearly incalculable number of actors, strives to truly grasp their essence in as concise and comprehensive a manner as possible. The man seated on the canvas chair, willing for query, smoking in his parent’s house next to a cracked window on whose sill rests a plastic stegosaurus is, undoubtedly (and very much only technically), an actor—he stars in all his own “films”—as well as a writer/director, and his essence is, if nothing, palpable—you could grab it out of the air and juice it. The fact that Steven is neither a real artist, or even a genuine person, is neither here nor there. Also, this was, of course, his idea.

The conversation catapults from “what’s your favorite word” (Answer: “word”), soars past “least favorite” (Ans: “*moist*—it’s not wet, but it’s not dry—too many negative connotations; I hate it”) and lands firmly at “what turns you on creatively, spiritually or emotionally?”

“Hmm,” again, every subtle moment of concentration has a tinge of awareness about it, “I’d have to say my work.”

“Any particular?”

“They’re all my fav—”

“Oh, come on.”

“*Dogs In Heat*. My latest. I was twenty-one. There’re no dogs in it really. It’s about addiction—drugs, spirituality . . .”

“I see.” I don’t. Aside from himself, Steven is inspired by great sculptures, *Leaves of Grass*, actual leaves of grass, Arabic culture, Björk, ducks (his favorite animal), and an endless list of random other objects.

“What turns you off?”

“Scorsese. And babies.”

“Babies?”

“They freak me out.”

“Fair enough.”

When asked his favorite noise, what followed could best be transcribed thus:
“frrrrrrrrr.”

“You’re joking. What is that?” That is, according to his copy of the *Oxford English Meta-Dictionary*, “the sound of him making that sound.”

“I love it. It was the ‘death-sound’ of my main character in my sixth short.” That term doesn’t, and rightfully, shouldn’t mean anything to you—but Steven is a visionary. And he also does all his own Foley work, in case you were wondering: celery for breaking bones, punching slabs of meat—it’s downright professional. When it comes to his dream, Steven is incredibly driven and quite prolific. His oeuvre consists of four films and ten short-films. He stays busy between projects by writing, and in his spare time, he does things, anything really (the quirkier the better—playing accordion, memorizing bad limericks, etc.), that he can drop later in conversation.

“I hate the sound of pigs oinking,” he says, jumping the gun. It’s that and the rustling of plastic bags that set him off most. There’s a story behind that, it turns out. When Steven was five, he nearly suffocated after becoming obsessed with the things—in both their form and function.

Capable of holding heavy cans or floating gracefully in the wind, he explains, in a much more wistful fashion—capable, too, someone should have informed him, of keeping carbon dioxide close to your face where it shouldn’t be. The event left him both terrified and forever fascinated.

“You used a plastic bag in your first film. You said it was very symbolic.”

The terror has lessened to mild irritation, but the innocent fascination stayed, Steven assures—perhaps, even, growing. It’s something “a lot of people can’t understand.” This is, you should know, crap.

“What profession, other than your own, would you like to attempt? I mean, you work at a sandwich shop, but you’re a filmmaker; *that’s* your profession, to clarify.”

Steven nods, and reveals that if he hadn’t been born with that certain *je ne sais quoi* for filmmaking, or if he were to lose it, presumably in *un accident tragique*, he’s confident he could be happy doing other things—rehabilitating neglected animals or architecture, he offers. You know, real jobs. Ever modest, he confesses to having an aptitude for mathematics and photography. His devotion to film, however, hasn’t stopped him from branching out. He’s decided to step carefully into more musical territory. He admits, coyly, that he’s a little unsure, but very excited—and uncomfortable at how easy the transition has been for him.

"I've composed the music myself."

"Of course you have. What's it about?"

"The Trail of Tears. It was so sad. But there had to be some source of hope or joy; otherwise I don't think those brave people would have made it."

"But a musical?"

"Why not? It could be very moving." The notion is criminal.

"What's it called?" Steven says he's had the idea for a long time—three or four years, he isn't sure—and he's toyed around with several titles.

"None of them seem to do it justice. It's not something I can take lightly, as connected as I feel to them. I'm one-sixty-fourth Sioux. Did you know that?"

"I wouldn't've guessed, no. How about *Trail of Tears: The Musical*?" He doesn't take this suggestion seriously, and gets lost in thought for a moment. He asks, quite abruptly, if there can't be a relocation for lunch.

...

The conversation continues downtown, and Steven is at his best—talking away with the server, making sure to tell her just a few of the quirkiest, most summary things he can think to say about himself in the time she is professionally obliged to be present. This is Steven flirting, and it's hysterical. When she's gone, the "in-depth personal analysis" continues with the traditional Lipton closer:

"What would you like God to say to you when you get to Heaven? And you can't say 'thank you.'"

"I wasn't going to say that," he laughs. There's a pause—his fingers interlock in front of his face—and, for a moment, Steven looks truly real. "I don't care what anyone says, I loved *Fruit Shop*."

We Came to a Crux

ROB ENGLE

you gave yourself a baptism
on every day in February.
each was humid in your throat
like those Louisiana nights
when you let her tie you
to the kitchen chair
because you had nothing better to do
and her knuckles, white with reverence,
broke open like a storm
you could see coming for miles.

28 times the Ohio River
regurgitated your lukewarm body
faster than the mouth of God.

you used to look to the sky
for Orion to point you towards
the next bar but
it never failed that
a pang of prayer
would swell to the surface
when you showed up drunk
and unsure if you would hear
her deadbolt surrender.

you've long since burned a hole
through your bed and
have begun to sleep by the door
clutching a High Sierra filled with
a few soft packs of Marlboros and
a tattered pack of tarots
but you ended up burning those too
because the bag hugged your body
in a way she never did.

you think about hopping on the next coal freight
but your knees buckle and your hands
begin to tie themselves to the bed.

you remember driving to Kentucky
for a bottle for Jack Daniels Winter,
taking a detour through Ohio going 95
just so you could piss off the police.
you sped past the electric bodies
of roadkill smiling towards heaven as
Tom Waits' bourbon-soaked voice
told you where to put your hands.

but you came to a crux
and her unfinished cigarettes
are still burning holes in the backseat
of your car.

the broken heater is a far cry
from your mother's waning arms
as you sit in glossy-eyed waiting
at a stoplight you know
will never turn green.

and when the pages of your tongue
fold over themselves
no one will question why you haven't
spoken in three days.

Schist

TEFFANY HUNLEY

There is no radical departure for the awakening of consciousness. Nobody begins afresh.

“Philosophizing Starts With Our Situation”

Karl Jaspers

I will tell you something about stories,

.....
They aren't just entertainment
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

Ceremony

Leslie Marmon Silko

...

Day 1- 4:30pm

Another day, another fight—but this one is different—between an aging mother and grown daughter joined by biology, not love. This fight is the fight that has been under all the others. The women stand apart, pitted against the other, in the middle of a barren un-living room.

“You really wanna know why I'm tired of your boyfriends, Mother?” Hesitation. “Fine.” The vicious surrender. Fine. Finally. “Remember Frank?”

“Of course, the waste of three years of my life.” The cavalier remark spat out.

“No. He's more than that.” The lump in her throat appears on its own. “He... he...” She has always told herself this time would not come—she willed it to never come. She has kept it in, let it eat her from the inside, alone, because if it ever got out it would destroy the whole world. But today she is thirty, and she came to her mother's, just because, but her mother had forgotten, rather, had never even remembered it once in order to later forget, that today was her only child's birthday—had left her daughter to grow old, alone. And this last alone is too much.

“Frank... hurt me.” The spoken words make the memories real. “Frank... molested me.” Molested. The word collapses the room, and now she sends the walls that have contained her into final oblivion, releasing the details of destruction inside of her. “The pink nightgown. That fucking pink nightgown. Remember that?” Quivering voice. Quivering thoughts. “Do you remember the nightgown?!” She screams at the stoic face of her mother, frozen since the words ‘he hurt me’ entered the air and sucked out its oxygen.

“That’s what he made me wear when you would leave. I hated it, hated how it felt on me, hated the buttons in the front that he would unbutton with his fat fucking fingers. And I would never scream because I couldn’t. He’d want me to talk to him but I couldn’t. I couldn’t even cry. I would just stand there, frozen, until he’d make me get in bed with him—god ... oh god...” She leans into the disappearing wall and wilts to the floor, the monster overpowering her body-home once again. Her flesh, bones and breath become small and weak. She unknowingly rocks back and forth, whispering the alphabet under her breath like she did as a child, protecting her mind from that which it never could contain, though she forced it to. Her mother stares at the ball of disheveled sweat and tears on the floor, the thought never occurring to her to comfort her daughter. “Comfort” is a foreign word and action in this space, in this mother. The space is hollow and catatonic. A place of fracture. Of departure.

Day 1- 8:30pm

She hears James smack his lips on the chicken and rice she’s just made, unaware of how she arrived back to her own cheap and dirty apartment. A single unopened gift sits on the table. “I’ll get another job. Fuck ‘em. They don’t appreciate genius,” he says, coyly smiling as a single piece of rice dangles from his lower lip. These are always his words after being fired. Three jobs in one year. Now he’s eating the last meat in the apartment and all he can do is feed her bullshit... promises, promises. “Happy Birthday, sunshine. Gonna open that or what?”

Day 2- 9:15am

She’s gone before James wakes up, with her checking account cleared out. *He’ll never leave, and nobody else would put up with him this long. He knows it. He’s said it, at night, in the other room, when he thought I couldn’t hear him. Or maybe I just felt him saying it.*

Day 2- 6:00pm

She’s heading west. Slowly along the winding back-roads. Nowhere in particular, just west. Into a sunset like cowboys ride into after the action has passed, the gunslinging’s over, and the enemies are dead. *Bam—one. Bam—two. Bam—three.* Frank. Mother. James. She doesn’t know which was the hardest trigger to pull.

Day 2- 8:30pm

The mountains are becoming nothing more than foothills amidst barren, open land that offers no protection from predators, leaving victims vulnerable in their inadequacies. Flat land is a dangerous place to be when you’re alone, but she doesn’t care or think about it.

Day 3- 2:00am

She pulls into an empty parking lot in Indiana and sleeps in the car. She regrets leaving the cat—Percy. She cries herself to sleep and hopes James thinks to feed him. She was the only one who ever did.

Day 3- 10:00am

Just keep driving. Maybe I'll head to Texas. Cowboys like Texas.

Day 3- 12:00pm

High noon. Beat you to the draw. Why did you make me do it? Rest in peace, poor souls. I'm sure you'll have nice caskets.

Day 4- 4:00pm

The air in Texas is as dry as the land is, and she stares at dilapidated shacks along the highway, aged and weathered, abandoned. In a broken window of one of the structures, she thinks she sees a small girl looking out at her, waving slowly. She loses control of the car for a moment, barely keeping it on the road.

Fuck Texas. There are ghosts here. Keep going.

Day 5- 6:30pm

New Mexico and a white wooden cross on top of a mountain. She gets off the highway and pulls into a fast-food joint because her tears are making it impossible to see the road. They keep coming, even as she screams for them to stop.

Just breathe.

Day 6- 11:00am

Still in New Mexico. She spots a reservation in the distance and drives to it. She's never been on a reservation. She sees a woman selling pottery along the side of the road and gets out of the car. Just to look. To see something different. The woman sees her out-of-state tags and traces of old mascara smudges around her eyes and invites her to come have a meal at her home.

Why not? Here's as good as anywhere.

...

Strays. Strays have no home. No name. Strays are not naturally occurring; they are creatures of civilized order gone awry. They have a forgotten beginning and no

intention of remembering. Every day is new, endless. If left to their own devices, strays soon turn wild. Their fur grows long and dirty. They eat whatever they find and are not picky. They sometimes join a pack, sometimes roam alone. They are at the mercy of the elements. They find shelter when they need it and sleep when it comes.

...

Day 7- 7:00am

The Laguna people. Well, at least four of them. Bruce works for the uranium mine on the reservation, and Iris, his wife, works at the Laguna school. They have two children, Charlotte, 17, and John, or Big John, as his father calls him, 3. Iris started making the traditional Laguna pottery as a way to help Charlotte embrace her heritage; Charlotte is the only blonde on the reservation and can't wait to leave. When John was born, Iris had complications from the pregnancy and medical bills their insurance wouldn't cover, so Bruce decided to turn a profit on the sacred art to ensure Iris could keep seeing the specialist in Albuquerque. Iris thinks she would have recovered fine without the specialist; a cook at the school had been bringing her a home-made remedy. But Bruce asked her to see a doctor in the city, so she obliged. Iris thinks Bruce listens to the out-of-towner foremen at the mines too often. "They don't know our ways," she says. The mine paid for the school Iris works at.

Day 10- 6:00pm

The family has chicken and rice for supper. Their guest begins crying when it is placed on the dinner table, and she runs to Charlotte's room, where she's been sleeping. Big John asks his mother what's wrong with his new friend, and Iris replies, "She has been given a memory by Thought-Woman. We'll eat supper in silence for her." The family obliges.

Day 14- 5:30pm

There's something about relying on the hospitality of others. She feels like a bum. She's leaving. "Sister," Iris says, upon finding her packing, "stay. Go for a walk up the hill, and don't come down until Mother has taken your tears and thrown them in the lake."

Day 14- 8:30pm

Nothing to lose. And... I trust Iris.

Day 15- Sunrise

She has survived her first night spent outside, alone in the Laguna hills. She heard coyotes in the distance, but they didn't scare her. She was too busy thinking about where she was. Naked woman between sky and earth.

Day 17- Evening

The food bag is growing sparse and her water is low.

How long am I supposed to stay up here?

She stares out at the flat tops of the mesas in the distance and they become breasts whose tips have been massacred and chopped off by a vicious god.

Day 18- Afternoon

I can't make it much longer.

Day 18- Night

She is sinking into the lake as a coyote tugs at her hand leading her deeper into the unknown. She sees old Laguna men and women gathered in a circle on a large rock near the lake bottom watching her pass with stern, silent gazes. Percy is sitting in the oldest woman's lap. The water is tinted with golden flecks that drift upward around her. Between her wisps of dirt-brown hair floating around her face, she sees a drop-off in the lake floor that looks to be the source of the golden dust. The coyote has left her, but she continues to sink into the abyss below. The deep water is becoming brighter as if somewhere, down here at the bottom of everything, old light has found a home. Focusing her vision, she sees the source of the light. She is watching a hundred dancers stomp the lake floor around a looming fire that seems to billow stronger with every breath she exhales. They're chanting something... almost close enough to hear... almost... her name. They're chanting her name as if they've been waiting for her, having started the fire to show her the way. And there, in the center of the fire, Iris is sitting, serenely smiling, beckoning her to come.

With merely the thought, she finds herself beside Iris in the fire and looks on as flames and water occupy the same space. The chanting has become a lulling, foreign hum that reverberates from within her. The dancers are now sitting and staring into the fire as if they are looking past her, past the flames, and are somehow seeing themselves on the other side staring back.

She looks at Iris and is drawn into her eyes, as if they are pools into which she can further sink. And she does, with utter abandon. She is floating to places she has needed to go for years.

Day 19- ??

She rocks back and forth.

Maahhh-thur. Maahhh-thur. Maahhh-thur.

Day 20- Morning

Bruce finds Sister stumbling down the side of the hill, famished. He carries her back to the house and into the arms of Iris. She is nourished and replenished, and given a coyote's tooth to keep around her neck.

Day 27- Morning

Gesturing with her chin to a small stream at the bottom of a hill where the softest gray clay comes from, Iris hands Sister a linen-lined basket. She will gather the clay and learn the sacred tradition with the Laguna women.

Day 32- Evening

One night, before they fall asleep, Charlotte says her hair is blonde because she wants to be an actress and nobody would accept her Pueblo hair in Hollywood. Plus, the boys in town always say they wanna do an Indian. This way, they leave her alone. Sister tells Charlotte how she got her name. She says her mother wanted people to think that the child who was with her was her sister, not her daughter; her mother fought age and accidental motherhood from the beginning. This way, her mother could say things like, "Sister, stop." Or, "My Sister and I did so-and-so the other day" and the world would never know the difference.

Day 40- Morning

She's with the women. Wrapping the clay coil that will become a vessel. Round and Round. Round and Round. Bruce dances and sings the story of Spider-Woman's creation around the sacred potter's circle. Big John bounces in rhythm following his father, laughing as the dust rises up beneath his feet.

Day 50- Afternoon

The slip on the clay pots has dried. The yucca leaves are stripped and become brushes. Iris shows Sister how to paint the traditional symbols after asking Great Spirit to guide their hands. Black lines across pure white vessels.

Day 52- Evening

Big John's fourth birthday. The Laguna celebrate. Bruce has bought him a red wagon and spends the evening laughing and pulling his son back and forth across the dry land, the men outside watching and relaxing in the red sun. The women remain indoors and share stories. Stories of ancestors, stories of each other, stories that make the world. And Sister takes them all in.

Day 83- Morning

Iris finds Sister at the road-side stand selling wares for the family. "The air is good for firing today—no wind. It's time." And Sister dutifully packs up the stand she has just opened. The baking of the clay vessels decides its own time, and the people oblige. Sister is one of the people.

Day 83- Afternoon

In the sweltering heat of the firing, the aroma of fresh cedar chips and dried sheep shit fills the smoke-filled air of the open land. Charlotte, forced to attend the baking by her mother, asks Iris, "Why don't you just buy a kiln?" Iris smiles and says, "Maybe someday we'll have to. But not today."

Day 83- Evening

The moment of unveiling arrives. The ashes are brushed away, and the hot pots are retrieved from the earthen pit with long sticks. All but one have survived the delicate process. Iris leads the women in a song of thanksgiving to Great Spirit. Even Charlotte dances. Sister smiles at the broken pot; it was one of hers.

Day 100- Morning

Time to go. She feels it.

Further into the sunset. Maybe California. The end of the west.

Iris has Bruce load Sister's car with enough supplies to ensure she can continue working on her potter's craft. "The clay will show you how to do more. Listen to it." Big John wraps his small arms around Sister's neck, and tells her not to be gone too long. Charlotte stays inside watching from the living room window, wishing she was leaving, too. As Sister pulls out of the driveway, Charlotte thanks Great Spirit for bringing Sister to them.

Day 100- Afternoon

Sister hums the song Iris taught her in the lake. It makes her want to move, go, run... to some new place. She spots a train traveling in the distance.

...

Trains. They mark the western plains like black paint on white pots, retracing lines that seem to have always been. Bound to their duty, they move cargo, human or otherwise, someplace other than where it was before. Faster than the horse-drawn wagons of the

Wild West, these diesel-fueled machines keep cargo safe from outlaw raids; no sheriff needs a high-noon gunfight with these transporters on the plains. Modern roads often run alongside the tracks of these mighty carriers as if once-a-good-path is always-a-good-path. There's safety in numbers out in the wide-open. The East-West railway line through New Mexico runs parallel to Interstate 40.

...

I-40 W. To California. I've never been to California—the end of the land. Maybe I'll see what's there.

The Sea-Girl

CHRISTOPHER HALL

The sea-girl peels her back
from the Atlantic's floor
to clear-coat my road in salt-water.

The tide wrinkles like a bed-sheet
across the street as she comes

decomposing into sand,
a carousel of shrimp and seahorses
nibbling at her ankles.

The sea-girl walks two fingers
down the bridge of my nose
and wedges my head between breasts,

where one ear
hears the hum of a conch shell.
I kiss the sand crumbling lips.

I finger the gritty hairline,
which smears like a baseball diamond.

The tide recedes
and I'm left to find her heart

beached like a man-of-war
in ribs of sea-foam.

The Death of the Baltimore Veteran

AARON MORRIS

after Randall Jarrell

I was a failed abortion of the State,
Abandoned under Thor's old rattling bridge
Outside the city. Twelve feet from the line
Of taxis, I lay on the sidewalk, flat,
My stomach empty as a paper cup.
When I died, some tourists nonchalantly stepped
Over my false bed, tomb of open air.

Hamra

SHOSHANNAH DIEHL

In Hamra, our skirts caress the city concrete,
Like the alley cats that rub on our legs,
Sleeves pulled to pulse points on our wrists.
“Hella, Hella” men murmur into their Hookah pipes,
A Lebanese cat-call that is not for cats.
They say American girls love attention,
And perhaps we do, as we traipse down the street
Like baby ducklings, all in a row.
A man with mahogany skin sits on the sidewalk
Selling prayer beads, while a woman lays her child
In front of her on a piece of water-warped cardboard,
A sacrifice to the money gods.
A four-year-old girl tugs on our polyester skirts,
Attempting to sell lighters or roses or shoe-shines,
and just ahead, where the city dissipates into water,
the cerulean sequins of the Mediterranean
Pull down the sun, wrap themselves in light,
and begin to dance.

Contributors' Notes

Allen Armel is a double major at Marshall University in Painting and Religious Studies.

Jackson Armstrong does things that are done by folks, you know, sometimes, or not.

Sydni Bibb is currently a senior at Marshall University and is studying Art Education.

Charles C. Childers is a junior studying English Literature at Marshall University. A member of the Honors College, he hopes to one day get a PhD in English/Linguistics and to work on creative writing in his spare time. This is his second piece to be published in *Et Cetera* and the first attempt at publishing poetry. He currently lives in Huntington and enjoys playing the drums in crust-punk bands and getting Hemingway-wasted.

Mara Colkett is currently a junior majoring in graphic design at Marshall University. She lives with her beloved husband in Huntington but after she graduates, there is no telling where they will end up. She loves to travel and art is her passion. Her work has been featured in the Birke Art Gallery and the Parkersburg Art Center. Her first publication was in *Gambit*.

Shoshannah Diehl will be graduating with a BA in English: Creative Writing in May 2014. She currently plans to receive her MA in English and try her hand at teaching English to speakers of other languages. She will one day use her English skills in mission work, traveling the world, serving others, and writing about her experiences.

Rob Engle is a sophomore originally from Washington, Pennsylvania. He is pursuing degrees in English and Broadcast Journalism and this is the first time his writing has been published. His best work tends to come in the early hours of the morning when he is highly caffeinated and highly honest.

Robert Greer is currently a sophomore at Marshall University and is studying Visual Art.

Christopher Hall studies Creative Nonfiction and Poetry at Marshall University. He lives in Ritter Park and hopes to earn a law degree in the near future.

Teffany Hunley studied Western Philosophy, Asian Religion, and English at Marshall University. She is a writer, musician, and visual artist who seeks to challenge traditional boundaries of artistic expression for the sake of truth.

Cynthia McComas is a junior at Marshall University majoring in English Education. She hopes to go on to graduate school for Creative Writing. As someone especially interested in finding new ways to write about ordinary life, she allows anything from vintage photographs to interior design to guide much of her work.

Aaron Morris is a graduate student in English at Marshall University. He earned his BA from West Virginia State University, where he won the Marshburn Poetry Prize in 2011 and won runner-up for the Giardina Fiction Prize and the Marshburn Prize in 2012. He served as a contributing editor of the *Kanawha Review*, WVSU's student magazine, where his poetry appeared. His poetry has also appeared in *ABZ* and *Turtlesell*.

Anyssa Murphy is an undergraduate student at Marshall University, majoring in English while minoring in Biology and Classics. She and her cat, Fizzig, lead a quiet life in Southern Ohio, though they will one day hike to Machu Picchu (perhaps together). "Neighbors," is her first work to be published.

Holli Perkins is a senior Creative Writing major at Marshall, graduating in December 2014, and moving on to get her Master of Arts in Teaching. This is her first publication. She loves her faith, family, friends, and cat named Blossom. She loves being involved in campus ministries & church. She dreams of going back to Disney World. She currently lives in Huntington where she enjoys reading large quantities of inspirational books in her spare time.

Leila Sanders is a senior at Marshall University, working towards a BA in English/Creative Writing. She enjoys reading anything that captures her interest, writing poetry, listening to music, and watching movies. She currently lives in Chapmanville, West Virginia.

Alex Simms is a current psychology student at Marshall University, but enjoys photography on the side. Interested in capturing the limitless quality of youth culture, Alex strives to capture the unique life of everyone he photographs, hoping to indicate that we're all ultimately just trying to "figure it out" (whatever the heck that means).

Erika Tharp will graduate this May with her bachelor's in English: Creative Writing. Her poem "Seeing My Mother Naked for the First Time" was printed in an *Et Cetera* of yesteryear, and she loves having that title on her CV. She hopes one of the MFA programs she's applied to will have mercy on her. And she is thrilled at the chance to write of herself in the third person. What a ham. Hi Mom!

Brett Tucker is currently a junior at Marshall University and is studying Visual Art.

ART

Allen Armel, Sydni Bibb, Mara Colkett,
Robert Greer, Alex Simms, Brett Tucker

FICTION

Teffany Hunley and Anyssa Murphy

GENERAL

Rob Engle

INTERVIEW

Michelle Hogmire

NONFICTION

Jackson Armstrong, Rob Engle, Holli Perkins

POETRY

Charles C. Childers, Shoshannah Diehl,
Rob Engle, Christopher Hall,
Cynthia McComas, Aaron Morris,
Leila Sanders, Erika Tharp