

2015

# Commonthought (2015)

Commonthought Staff

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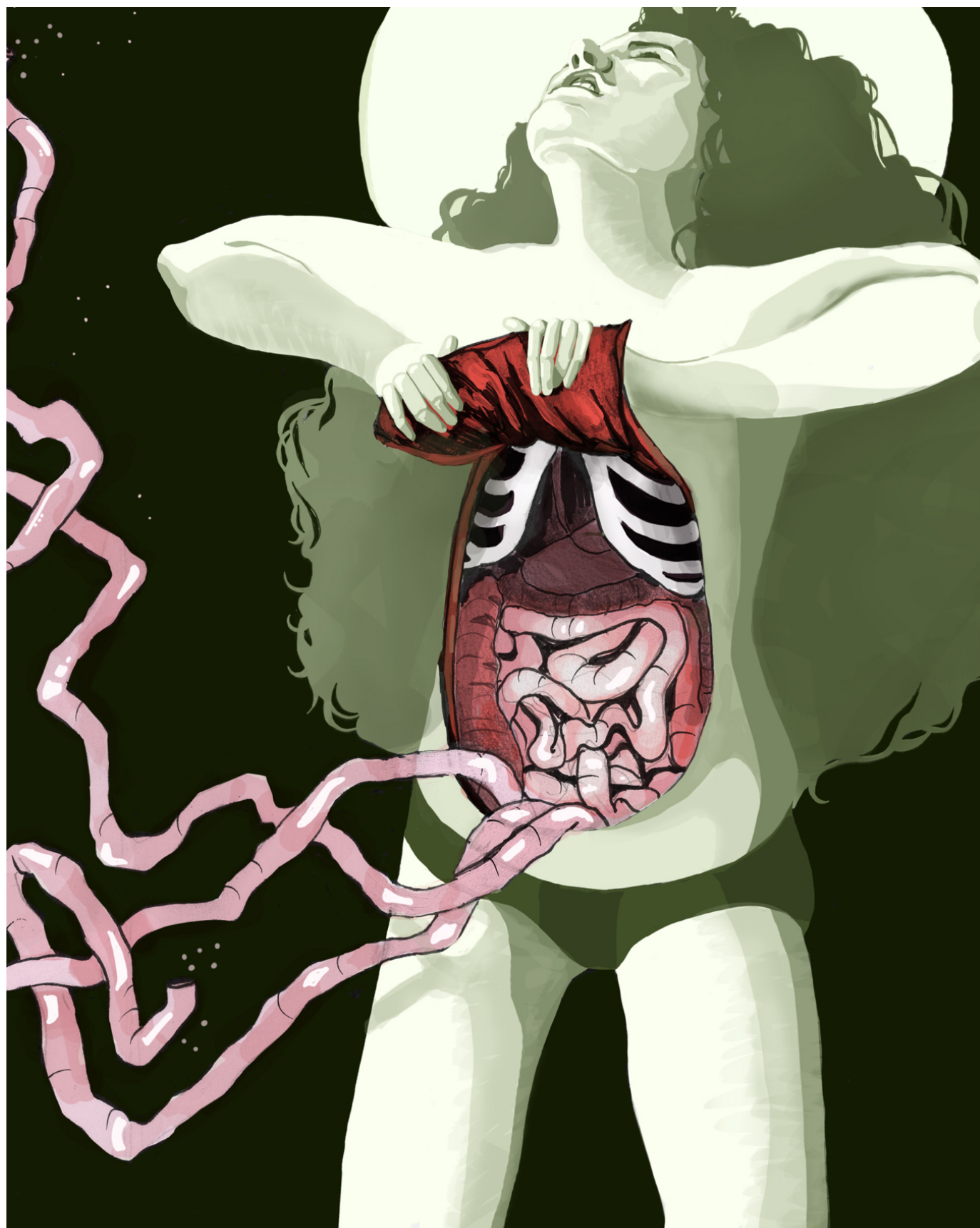
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# Commonthought

2015

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*2015*



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*Commonthought* is a celebration of the creative endeavors of Lesley University.

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**Cover Art:** *"Escape" by Elizabeth Bauman*

# Foreword

Before I was co-editor of my undergraduate literary magazine, I was production editor. The design and layout of the magazine made sense to me, even if I did threaten the computer with violence every once in a while. But writing the foreword, that was always a chore. And, like all work that feels like work, I pushed it off. Then, at the last minute, I'd try to come up with something. Just as often as not, my co-editor and I would make a joke of it, wearing our slacker tendencies on our sleeves. It was the 90s, after all. We had plenty of sleeves to wear things on. Plenty of wonderful, ratty flannel sleeves.

The task of writing a foreword is no easier now, and the idea of making a joke of it — however tempting to my grungy inner child — is preposterous. I'm faculty now. I'm a *mentor*, an *advisor*. I have an example to set.

Of course, our mentor back in the day was a hippy art professor who regularly wore mismatched fluorescent socks and only irregularly attended our staff meetings, so there's that.

The task at hand is seemingly simple — introduce the work that follows and get out of the way — but it's hard to sum up everything that went into these pages. It always is. The contributing editors, my students, took their jobs as seriously as ever and have pulled together an eclectic mix of work by Lesley students, faculty, and alumni alike.

I hope you will enjoy this issue of *Commonthought*, and that you will consider adding your voice to our pages next year.

—E. Christopher Clark

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**Inside Voice**  
*Graehound*

## Beach Boys

*Tony Gloeggler*

Before you found yourself  
sitting with your eyes shut,  
lifting closer to heaven  
as your headphones poured  
*Pet Sounds* into your ears,  
you sat in the back seat  
while your dad drove slowly  
through town, his left arm  
dangling out the rolled down  
window holding a cigarette.  
You hoped he would turn  
on the radio, quickly tire  
of the all news station  
and switch to the good guys  
on WMCA, the top ten counting  
down to 'Help Me Rhonda.'

Your fingers drum lightly  
against your thighs,  
you mouth along the words  
to the chorus. Stopping  
at the next corner, girls  
from your fifth grade class  
cross the street, wave thanks.  
As the guitar fades away,  
your father glances  
in the rear view mirror,  
watches your head move,  
follow Claire and her cutoffs  
turn the corner. He catches  
your eye and nods  
as if he knows something  
you still hadn't figured out.

## Lucubrations

*Brandon Marlon*

Nightfall dispels the shrill trill of day  
along with its niggling concerns; now the stars  
glisten and throb overhead, startling the distracted  
sopped in uncertainty from unworthy preoccupations  
till even hardened recusants turn querists,  
second-guessing beloved tenets,  
wandering the wings in the gallery of memory,  
contemplating the cosmos as bricolage.  
Dazzled by the bedizened firmament's fallal,  
we sorely lament abortive endeavors  
and regret miscellanea, suddenly in dread  
of nothing but time, universal adversary,  
nourishing tombs with mortal remains.

## **Bonsai, Small**

*Cole DiSorbo*

You break another potted plant. It's the third one this week. You're not quite sure how it's happening, just that it *is* happening, and you should probably be more concerned about it than you actually are. Instead, you vault into your armchair and throw yourself sideways, vowing to vacuum the dirt up before you storm through it and sully your whole apartment. Again.

Your phone is blowing up in your bag, and as usual, you elect to ignore it. You pretend your TV is turned on, tuned into that one channel that's just constantly static, because grabbing the remote — two feet away on the coffee table — is more effort than it's worth. You're not so great at this meditation shit; you can feel yourself frowning as you try to block out your annoying 8-bit ringtone. Who even uses a fucking ringtone anymore?

You give in, arching your back so you're hanging, head two feet from the floor, and fish around your bag for your phone. You look at who's pestering you without really seeing. Hitting the lock button shuts it up long enough for you to slither back into an optimal lazy position.

Ten minutes later, you're in your kitchen, lights off, popping aspirin. Your phone has a new crack in the screen and won't turn on.

This is the third pot. Not of the week, but of the month. You're slightly concerned that only now are you starting to feel like a bad plant owner. But the weird tree Walmart mysteriously labeled as 'Bonsai — small' seems to be doing just fine, unnatural amount of transplants aside.

This time you shattered the pot trying to have drunken wall sex. A perky lesbian picked you up at the bar, and you'd been alone so long you didn't bother trying to explain the difference between 'she' and 'them' when referring to yourself. All you'd bothered with was convincing her that your place was the better idea, because not only are you a paranoid fuck, but your roommate is also gone for the week. Wall sex turned into couch sex, which is just as good in your book, and honestly, your favorite part was touching her hair. Long hair is

mystifying, especially when it's not dyed candy colors or tied up high and out of the way.

You woke up with a crick in your neck and a face on your chest, leaving remnants of lipstick stain you were sure was more obvious in other areas. You showered together, laughing about nothing, and she programmed her number into your phone before she left. It's was good enough that you didn't regret the hangover.

The next transplant isn't due to more broken ceramic, but rather because your tree has outgrown its pot. You think when this happens you're supposed to snip the leaves and the roots, then shove it back in, but it's just not in your heart to do it. You get a bigger pot — try not to think that bigger equals easier to break — and place it back in the window, turning it so the leaves have to stretch in the other direction to get at the sun.

You had another fight with your roommate, about something so stupid you don't even remember. You'd both said nasty words, words that only friends of too many years know how to throw at each other, and it ended with you hauling your teary ass down to Walmart's plant department. The ones you know you won't kill are out of your budget, and while you love the cacti that look like pincushions, you know they'll wither up in a couple of months under your care. You can't justifying buying them to yourself, especially when your bonsai is still hanging in.

You go home with a tiny ice cream cake, and you and your roommate have a heart to heart, because neither of you really have your shit sorted out.

You cry, and so does he, and if your life was a poem, it would make your ice cream taste better.

It does not.

Somewhere along the line, you forget to water your plant. You get so focused on the cadence of daily life that things get washed away. It's kind of what you're aiming for, but you regret that your little tree got caught up in the tidal wave of insignificant details.

Your roommate tries to talk to you, but you're having none of it. It doesn't fit into a checkbox on your premade list, so therefore, it's not a necessity. He has his own list of boxes you should be filling, ones that

involve you getting back out there and drinking less alcohol, but you fail to see why you should be trying to tick those off.

You are drunk during most of these conversations.

Your roommate has taken up care of your tree. You are officially no longer a reliable plant owner. You're seeing a therapist about it. She seems to think there's a bigger issue than browning leaves to talk about, and you guess maybe there is.

You tell her you should probably pick up a book about pruning, and start doing some artistic shit with it. You're a little bit nervous of what the outcome of that'll be, but, at this point you think maybe it's worth a shot.

That isn't quite in the vein of things she wanted you to talk about, but she's a champ, and tries to turn the plant into a metaphor about your life. You're only half listening though, because this has got to all be psycho mumbo jumbo bullshit anyway.

You've already established your life isn't a poem, after all.

In a drunken stupor you moved your tree from its home in the window to the dark confines of your room. You've decided to name it Adrian Jr. because it has its life together, and you like to pretend that's your legacy. Your roommate is pounding on your door again — he's convinced you've had too much to drink, and he's probably right.

You negotiate. He's only allowed in if he helps you out of your make up *and* your binder. He agrees.

You tell him about your night out while you tug your shirt off, pausing only to wiggle your hips uselessly while he pulls you out of nylon hell. You cough hard, and he looks worried. You wave him off. He asks how long you've been wearing it, and you tell him only since you left. Binders are only for extra androgynous days. He should know that.

Later, he makes jokes about holding back your hair while you puke. You'll make the same ones in a week when his boyfriend breaks up with him.

You storm into your apartment at promptly 6:27, already kneading your stress ball. The second you're through the threshold, you scream and hurl the ball at the nearest wall.

It knocks over your bonsai, surprise surprise.

You're fucking 8 bit ringtone goes off, trying to play haunting final boss music through tinny speakers. You punch a wall and storm off to the kitchen, shaking out your reddening knuckles.

Using chopsticks turns into a problem. All you wanted was a beer and some cold lo mein, but it looks like your hand is going to be a whiney bitch for the next couple of hours. You give in and use the one clean fork, left handed.

Your ringtone plays again, mid bite. You are inappropriately furious, and you know it. Your roommate comes home to you pulling out the battery.

He rolls his eyes and explains he was the one calling. You look away and sip your beer.

You're at Walmart again, buying another pot. Your roommate likes to joke that the staff there knows you, and has you on some ridiculous pot buster black list. You really hope that isn't the case. Your face heats up just thinking about it.

You pick plastic over ceramic this time. That doesn't stop it from being pot number nine.



## **Dream**

*Elizabeth Bauman*



*Thomas Gillaspy*

## **The Politician**

*A.G. Abrams*

### **Birth**

The Politician is born a month early, having filibustered his way out of his mother's uterus.

### **Early Life**

The Politician starts out small time, but increases in size at an excellent rate due to his constant suckling. His mother has to supplement his diet with Greek formula.

### **First Executive Decision**

The Politician doesn't sleep in the same room as his parents, because that would be a violation of his right to personal space.

### **First Friend**

Another boy brings in candy, which The Politician takes in exchange for friendship. The next day, the boy doesn't need to be asked before donating his candy.

### **Social Standing**

The Politician gets perfect grades in everything except music. He prefers to sit and listen, if he is not the chorus leader.

### **First Election**

The Politician is elected class president, and as promised, everyone who voted for him is invited to a victory dinner at his house. He is sure to provide sushi for the Asians, and fried chicken for the African Americans. This is an equal opportunity party.

### **First Negotiation**

The Politician is accepted into a prestigious private high school, completely of his own merit, independently of his father's being on the board of trustees.

#### First Campaign

The Politician makes a list of the most influential upperclassmen before running for student council. He invites them home to dinner. Along with the boy whose family owns a liquor store.

#### Second Election

The Politician is made treasurer, unprecedented for a freshman. He brings in cupcakes for all the people who voted for him. He puts the cupcakes that weren't eaten in the trash, being sure to squish all of them.

#### First Date

He smooth talks her father into letting them stay out late. He takes her to see *Invictus*, a story about a white rugby player who, through his influence on the black president, becomes a superstar.

#### First Sexual Encounter

The movie ends surprisingly early, so they do it in the backseat on the highway. At first she is reluctant, but he reminds her of his popularity, his father's influence, and her own dangling scholarship.

#### First Visit to the Mechanic

His first girlfriend's furious humping resulted in damage to the ten-year-old rear suspension. He haggles the mechanic down to half the price, which his father is more willing to pay.

#### First Volunteer Job

He is the peanut butter man at the soup kitchen. Each bum receives a single knife-full of peanut butter on their toast. He uses a larger knife for those who thanked him by name last time.

#### Second Campaign

The Politician and his third girlfriend arrive at school early to put up posters for his candidacy for student council president.

#### First Conspiracy

His father is at a conference the weekend of the election. The Politician

spreads the word that if he's elected, the party of a lifetime will be held at his house.

#### First Cover Up

The Planned Parenthood receptionist leaves her desk and tells him to hold out his hands. She drops seven or eight condoms into his hands. His fourth girlfriend walks a little weirdly on her way to his new car.

#### Graduation

As valedictorian, The Politician urges his fellow americans to keep up with their studies, and he gets a summer internship in the congressional office of his fifth girlfriend's father.

#### College Years

Double majoring in American history and political science is easy. The way to balance social life and studies is to cut out sleep and take multiple doses of cocaine per day.

#### Marriage

The Politician's seventeenth Girlfriend is the only one to ever truly satisfy him. Her participation in his campaign for mayor was key. After all, women are half the vote.

#### First Legislation

As his district's youngest governor ever, The Politician is uniquely qualified to push the agenda of the young folk. The wearing of hats in school was forbidden until now. Four years later, grateful young adults enjoy helping him achieve national significance.

#### Scandal

Prostitutes? What prostitutes? Proof? What proof? Blame? Blame my wife! Wife? What wife? Media blackout? That guy's gay!

#### National Significance

It's not enough. It's never enough. You can always have more power. You can always bend stronger men to your will.

#### Later Years

All the stress of introducing redundant legislation has put a strain on The Politician's heart. His wife, two children, dog, cat, sixty-acres of property, and sixty inch 5K screen fear for his health.

#### Retirement

The Politician loses a bid for re-election.

#### Semi-Retirement

Ivy league schools need ivy league commencement speakers. Memoirs need authors.

#### Death

The Politician's picture appears on the newspaper all over the state. His obituary, written by his chief of staff, gets its own section. The people whose obituaries would have appeared weren't of national significance.

#### Legacy

The Politician will always be in our hearts, our legislature, and between omissions in our textbooks.

## 9x5

*Shem Tane*

We are all working with depression  
its not a company secret.  
I guess the roster keeps expanding,  
It can be seen all the way from HR  
and you know they have their hands full.

Albert tried to jam the copier with his own fingers.  
Thought flesh would be better than stationery.  
If the ink dried faster it would have been,  
but capillaries and temporary tattoos get the works all gummed up.

Each cubicle trying its darndest to mimic a terrarium.  
The asbestos filtered all attempts and only laid them neatly  
on the in-voice.

I wish the water cooler would just melt so  
I wouldn't have to hear Johnson explain  
how Johnson is stealing all of his purple thumbtacks.  
Did I also miss the fucking memo about the generation of Johnsons?

Having a kid is like hearing that someone has a benign tumor,  
you act shocked at first and then happy with a splash of relief.  
Cover up the remark under the fresh monoxide from your lips.

## **[I Am My Mother's Immigration Record]**

*Michelle Kubilis*

I breathe our island —  
almond blossoms  
    (virgin buds)  
tinged with salt air;

crying ashes from Mount Etna,  
sweating the Mediterranean sea,  
droplets onto black grit —

My great-grandparents' sand.  
My mother's sand.

My sand.



**Falling**  
*Elizabeth Bauman*



## **Murder of Crows**

*Kevin Fang*

## Jill

*George Leetch*

The map lay on the table, blank but for a few featureless continents. The table floated in dark space, any heavenly bodies far enough away that the area around the table was dim. Standing next to the table was a being in a suit. He had crustacean claws for hands, and his head was comprised of a single cyclopean eye, slits for breathing, and a maw covered by a myriad of tentacles. He tapped the edge of one of his claws on the table and four doors appeared a cosmically short distance away from it. The being stood with perfect posture: waiting for the doors to open.

After some time, one of them did, and a flaming elephant walked through to take its place at the table. The elephant extended its trunk.

“Fray,” he said, “Heard about the opening.”

The crustacean took the proffered trunk in one of his claws. “I’m The Doorman, charmed.” He released the trunk after a firm shake and bowed low. “What role are you looking to fill?” he said as he motioned toward the map.

A throne of gold materialized behind Fray within reach of the table. He surveyed the map for a moment, tracing the borders of the continents with his ever-burning trunk before sitting down. He looked at The Doorman. “Commerce and trade.” He said.

The Doorman tilted his head, keeping his one eye focused on Fray. “You don’t look like an icon of those domains, trying something new?”

Fray made a trumpeting noise through his trunk as he shook with laughter. He pointed at his tusks. “Ivory,” he said, “that’s qualification enough right?” The Doorman let out a single “ha” before two more beings came through the doors.

The first of them was a glowing orb whose dimensions shifted slightly as it moved. Its voice lilted through peaks and valleys of sound, resting only to say its own name. “I am Aoife,” it said, “I’m here to represent Beauty in this new world.” The orb stretched into a humanoid shape, creating a golem of gold. The gold reflected the starlight around the table, and Aoife’s newly chiseled features were accentuated by the shadows cast from Fray’s fire. Aoife was androgynous aesthetic perfection.

The other was a tall man with a face on the front and back of his head. The front face had a sharp countenance, with multiple scars and a pronounced jawline and nose. The back face was rounder, softer and bore a sad, sympathetic smile. He had five total arms; three came from his sides, two on his left and one on his right. The remaining two were smaller and jutted out from the front and back of his collarbone. He was dressed in bronze armor and held different objects in his main three arms. In one he held a scale, in another, a curved blade, and in the final one a battle standard with the mark of a sun on it. "If there is to be beauty," he bellowed, his voice echoing among the stars, "Then there must also be Balance, Honor, Discipline, and War!" He sat back into a wooden throne that appeared behind him. "And Adaryn will be the one to give it to this realm."

During his exclamations, a serpentine creature with blue scales, a white mane around its head, and a set of clawed hands slithered through the final door, curling up on an icy chair near the table. The already assembled beings looked over to it. "Kry'lethzyk," it said, raising its head to survey the northern part of the map, "Darkness, Winter, and The Deep." The beings eyed each other while The Doorman conjured a clipboard. He narrowed his eye as he scanned down the page.

"Let's see then," he mumbled, "Commerce, Trade, Beauty, Justice, Honor, Discipline, War, Darkness, Winter, The Deep, Memory and Doorways..." He let the clipboard go, and it disappeared into the dark of the cosmos. He continued, "Sounds like we're ready to get started."

Aoife's perfect face contorted in horror. "This place sounds awful, are you really planning on doing this with only us?"

"Don't you think this is enough?" The Doorman said.

"Absolutely not." Aoife morphed into The Doorman, though it had sharper features, more long and elegant tentacles, and smoother claws. It rapped on the table. "Now chop chop, find us another one."

"Are you saying that we can't fill this," he scraped his claw across the map, "by ourselves?" Adaryn gripped his sword tighter, Fray traced a meandering line through one of the continents, and Kry'lethzyk chuckled through its teeth.

The serpent glided through the star-space, bringing its face up to The Doorman's. His posture stayed perfect, though he made an audible gulping noise that only Kry'lethzyk could hear. The serpent smiled, and an inner darkness seeped through its teeth that mingled with the

blackness of their surroundings. Kry'lethzyk turned, still grinning, to face the rest of the assembled.

"He's a rookie," it said, "doesn't even know what it takes to make a world." The Doorman smoothed out his still unwrinkled suit as Aoife smiled and sat back in its chair.

"That would explain things," Aoife said, "We'll need a minimum of one more if this is going to be a place worth making at all." The Doorman sighed and rapped his claw on the edge of the table, creating another door. After a second of delay, a twenty year old girl wearing glasses and carrying a coffee tray, walked through the door. Her eyes were closed.

"Steph," she said as the other beings moved to surround her. "You wouldn't believe the shit I had to deal with when I was getting the cof —" She opened her eyes, looked behind her, then at the assembled, then back behind her. She let out a scream that started softly and amped up in volume as she soaked in the details around her. The Doorman smiled and tapped his claw twice on the table, causing the doors to disappear in puffs of purple flames.

"Well, there we go," he said, "as soon as she stops screaming and tells us what she's going to cover we can start." After the girl ran out of breath, the beings used the quick silence to introduce themselves and their corresponding domains. Fray went last, extending his burning trunk to her as he spoke.

"Fray, Commerce and trade." He said. "I was thinking that maybe you could do life and nature? It'd really help business if this place ended up natural resource rich." He let go of her hand with his trunk. "I don't believe we've gotten your name yet? Unless it's AAAAAAAH OH MAN OH MAN AAAAAAAHHHHH." Fray trumpeted at his own joke.

The girl fell backwards, a cushioned wheely chair materializing to break her fall. "I'm Jill," she said, taking her glasses off and cleaning them against her shirt. "and you're an elephant who is constantly on fire." She put her glasses back on. Her situation remained unchanged.

"Mostly," Fray said, "but you should know we take different forms..." He scratched his head.

Adaryn broke his silence. "Unless her screams tell us we're seeing something extremely rare." His small arms reached up and took his faces off. Sunlight streamed out of the opened sides of his head, turning the void they sat in bright with solid sunbeams. His hands exchanged

the faces they were holding and then reattached them to his head. His softer face was now looking forward. "How old are you child?" His voice had lost some of its harshness.

Jill sat wide eyed, staring directly at where the sunlight had come out of his head. "I'm 20 years old," she said, "turning 21 in a month."

Kry'lethzyk spat globs of darkness to dim the lingering sunbeams. At Jill's declaration of age it stopped and looked directly at her. "You're never turning 21, the unit you're talking about doesn't mean much anymore."

The Doorman slammed one of his claws on the table. "We can explain the rest as we go," he said, staring at a stretch of open ocean on the map. "But for now we should get started." The other assembled beings, besides Jill, agreed and focused on the map. Jill looked around the area, made dark by Kry'lethzyk, and eventually rested her eyes on the map like the rest of them. She squinted to see it in the darkness, and just as she thought about how much better this whole situation would be with a bit of light, a glowing green sphere appeared above the map.

Adaryn looked over to her. "You're a natural," he said, switching faces afterward, "but I cannot allow that to be the only light of the realm." He waved one of his free hands, and a larger orb of yellow light came into view some distance away from the green one.

Kry'lethzyk spat a tight ball of darkness. "Relax with that," Kry'lethzyk said, wiping the black ooze off the ball to reveal a glistening moon the white of first stage frostbite. "Leave some room for darkness."

The Doorman rematerialized the clipboard and scanned its contents. "Are we quite done with heavenly bodies?" he said, "I'd like to get to the more interesting parts please." He dropped the clipboard back into oblivion.

Jill stared at the sun that she had made, soaking in its soft green glow. "Heavenly bodies?" She looked at the other beings sitting near her, realization just outside of her grasp.

Aoife shook its head. "We're Gods, child." It transformed into Jill, though her features conformed closer to typical standards of beauty. "You wouldn't know it looking at you though."

Jill put her head in her hands. "I'm not a God, I'm an Environmental Science major." She let the words sneak around her fingers.

“Enough with that,” Aoife scoffed, “Just do your part and don’t get in the way. Also, let’s stop with the drab map.” Aoife waved a hand and the map and table was replaced with a floating planet with the same continents that were on the map. The suns reoriented to be at fixed points away from the planet. The planet began to rotate. “It’s such a better view this way.” Aoife, still using the form of a prettier Jill, smiled at Jill.

Fray got motioned with his trunk and the planet floated within reach of his trunk. “I agree, anyway, I’ll kick us off with a river here.” Fray ran his trunk along a section of the main continent and created a river that cut through its center. Jill blinked and saw the river form over millions of years. She saw the entire length of it cut into the soft clay earth of the planet, and form together between different tributaries until it became the drifting current that Fray had drawn on the planet. She shot open her eyelids, gasping. She looked over to The Doorman, who was sweating and smiling.

Kry’lethzyk yawned. “You get used to it.” It said. Fray tossed pushed the planet over to Kry’lethzyk who shrunk it and caught it in a claw. The serpent exhaled through its nose, coating the northern pole of the planet in ice and snow. Jill shivered in her chair from the years of cold. “That’s enough for me, your move Doorman.” Kry’lethzyk said while passing the planet to The Doorman.

He held the thing in his claws and focused. He released the planet and it increased in size. He flicked his head to the side, causing the planet to turn quickly until he laid a claw on it to stop its rotation. The Doorman brought his face to the spot of open ocean he was eying earlier. He traced a jagged shape in the sea, and then reached his tentacles to the bottom of the ocean. They strained for a moment against the weight of their task. With a grunt he pulled a volcano out of a fault line and closed his eye. He took a deep breath and reopened his eye, which was now glowing bright red. The volcano erupted for millions of years, creating the island shape he had outlined in the ocean. He exhaled volcanic ash and wiped his tentacles against his suit.

“Quite the show.” Adaryn said. He brought the surface of the planet to his sword, and scraped away a section of rocky terrain into a vast, coarse desert. “Not everything needs to be so flashy, remember to have some dignity.” He passed the planet to Aoife.

“You’re one to talk,” it said, adopting its androgynous gold form again. “You’re all too direct about this.” Aoife waved its hand, producing no change on the surface, but Jill saw vast gold and silver deposits beneath the ground in a section of the continent not far from Fray’s river. “You’re up Jill.” Aoife held the planet in its hand.

“Toss it then.” Jill said, holding up her hands.

“No,” Aoife said, dropping the planet and letting it float in the space between them. Jill looked from Aoife to the planet and back, her eyes pleading. When Aoife responded with a smug grin, Jill turned her attention entirely to the planet. She raised one of her hands, turning it to wave the planet over. Thinking better of it, she decided to just extend her hand, fingers outstretched, and think of the planet flying into it. The planet twitched, then flew into her hand at top speed, forcing her chair to wheel back a little.

She turned the planet around until she reached a vast open plain bisected by Fray’s river. She thought back to the first time she heard Mrs. Carme talk about the primeval forests. She remembered how she wished she could have seen the canopy that blocked out the sun, and the trees that didn’t grow branches until thirty feet up. She thought of how she mourned the biodiversity that was lost before her spark had been lit on earth, and how she would’ve given anything just to walk in the shade of an ancient forest once in her life. She thought of the one gift she wanted to give every creature that would eventually walk this strange world. Her consciousness dug into the soil, planting seeds that took thousands of years to achieve their full potential. She closed her eyes and saw the forest expand across the land mass, taking up the former plains with the planet’s cradle of life. When she opened her eyes she noted that her hair had come undone from her ponytail, and that it was now a mass of vines draping down from her scalp.

“This is wild,” she said, feeling the buds growing on her hair, “I can’t wait to tell Steph...” Her voice trailed off: time was dawning on her.

Adaryn caught her sad look, switched faces and spoke. “I’m afraid so. You ‘turned 21’ a long time ago.”

“What softie here is trying to tell you,” Kry’lethzyk said, “Is that everyone you’ve ever known and loved is long dead already.” The serpent reached between its teeth, pulled a bit of darkness out and stretched some of it idly between its claws.

Jill sat in her chair, cradling the planet in her hands. She looked straight ahead. "They're all gone." She whispered. "Finals week doesn't matter, and my mom doesn't matter and Steph doesn't matter."

"Yeah, it's a bummer." Fray said, drawing the planet towards him. "Aaaaaanny way, I'm gonna need to freshen up what's left of the plains for later. He touched a tongue of flame to the plains, filling them with golden wheat fields.

The planet took shape as it was passed amongst the Gods. Aoife slowly had the deposits of precious metals expand and rise to the surface, Adaryn built plateaus along the coast of his desert and sectioned off the area with a hostile mountain range, Kry'lethzyk created pockets of geothermal heat within its frozen north, along with vast undersea caverns amongst the northern islands, and Jill, after a few more cycles, threw herself into making the world lush and bountiful. She created tiers of ecosystems within her forest and created smaller areas of thick vegetation across the entire planet. The Doorman fiddled with his island on each pass, first making it rocky and then surrounding it in impenetrable mists. After the Gods had decided that the physical world was done forming, The Doorman drew the planet toward him.

"I just have one last touch," he said, "Just a doorway." The Doorman conjured an immense door at the summit of the volcano. It was built of solid obsidian and its insides were completely dark, letting no light escape.

Kry'lethzyk nodded its approval. "Break time." It said.

The Gods dispersed through the doors they had come through to check on their other domains, leaving The Doorman and Jill alone. Jill looked over the planet and admired her handiwork. The Doorman straightened his tie and walked over to Jill.

"Jill, do you mind if I ask you something?"

"Go ahead... can I call you Manny?"

"If it pleases you, sure."

"Do you think this world needs conflict?" The Doorman said.

"I, I don't know Manny." She said, "If we make people, isn't it inevitable?"

"That's what everyone thinks," The Doorman responded, "but I want to try utopia from the start, or at least close to it." He went back to his chair, sat down, and looked at her. "Maybe you'd like to help?"

Jill sat in thought until the other Gods returned; examining the perfectly lush world she'd helped to create.

Fray started the process again. He put the planet in the center of their circle of chairs, enlarging it so all its features were shown in sharp relief. "Time to get to the good part," He said, "There needs to be a race capable of upholding the ideals of free trade and frequent commerce." He closed his eyes, and an image of a large humanoid with upward facing tusks, green skin, and large ears appeared in front of him. "I'm thinking orcs." He completed.

Aoife recoiled. "Orcs? Those are your paragons of trade?" It looked on with horror as he brought the first orcs into existence in the fertile riverbed.

"Yeah, I figure they get a bum rap." Was his only response

Kry'lethzyk floated up to look at the northern oceans. It ripped out a few of its teeth and threw them into the water. The teeth broke apart into hundreds of maned serpents that soon filled the northern seas. The darkness in Kry'lethzyk's mouth formed to replace the missing teeth. "That's my favorite part; I always make sure there's something in the Deep to be afraid of." It said to no one in particular.

Adaryn threw his scale into his desert, causing a rock formation mimicking its shape to appear. "Creatures of split aspect, as I am." Sphinxes could be seen basking in the sun on top of the rocks.

"I was hoping to save them for later," Aoife said, rolling its eyes, "but none of you have made anything beautiful enough to justify my presence here." The gold and silver deposits broke through the ground, forming into a geometrically perfect city whose buildings extended high into the sky. From the same deposits rose gold and silver men and women, each of them exactly identical, and each of them incomprehensibly beautiful. "Behold, the Adonites. Arbiters of beauty, and ultimate beings."

"I abstain." The Doorman said, looking at Jill.

Jill looked through her pristine and primordial forest. She looked at every undisturbed leaf and hollow, remembering the cancerous nature of humanity on Earth. She opened her mouth to speak, but her attention was caught by the orcs building rafts to travel the river. Fray looked at them, gently stroking his burning trunk across the barren areas of the plains, creating a breadbasket they could build off of. Her mind reached into the desert, and she saw the Sphinxes careening

through complicated rock formations and roaring riddles at each other; catching the responses carried to them by updrafts. Her perception took her to a small clearing in her vast cradle of life within her forest.

“If I’m wrong, I’m sorry.” She whispered. The faint breath of her words called a human form out of the dirt and with it many others. Generations went by before she had time to catch her breath, and she knew each of their lives in its entirety. She was privy to each gaping emptiness and rising triumph. She had all of the whispered secrets, damning thoughts and wonderful desires of the people. After a few more moments she heard their prayers, speaking to the spirit of life, asking Jill for the blessing of a good harvest or a fertile marriage. Tears streamed down her face, and when she went to dry them with her vines, the buds on her hair burst into red flowers. She laughed until the tears stopped. The Doorman tapped the side of his chair in agitation.

The Gods watched their children grow. Aoife’s Adonites expanded their metropolis outward, encroaching on the lands of the orcs. The orcs created an order of elite tradesmen that protected the water route of the river and ensured fair deals for all, though haggling was allowed. The Sphinxes took to philosophy and war tactics, and Kry’lethzyk’s serpents periodically invaded the ports and nightmares of the land dwellers.

Jill’s humans remained in their forest, learning to speak with the web of life and work with its energies. She gave them the gift of magic, granting them the ability to manipulate the trees to suit their needs, though they carried her love of nature, exceeding her expectations. From time to time The Doorman would expand his obsidian doorway on top of the Volcano, though this escaped the notice of the other Gods.

Their mutual silence was broken when the Adonites outstepped their bounds.

“Aoife, call your golems off,” Fray said, gesturing to a group of orcs who had been taken as slaves by Adonites.

Aoife shrugged. “They do as they please,” it said, “and they have deemed your creatures too ugly to be treated as equals.” In the desert, the Sphinxes prepared for war. “And what are your glorified chickens doing over there?”

Adaryn set his scale on the arm of his throne. "Preparing to dispense justice." He declared. He switched faces and smiled at Fray. "Don't worry, your children will be free in a few generations."

Kry'lethzyk motioned to the coast near the desert where a pod of serpents had gathered. "And what makes you think you're freed up to go help goody goody?"

Adaryn stood from his throne, switching faces again. "Do you forget that I am a God of War as well?" He yelled, "My children will fight on both fronts, it'll be simple when the enemy can only fight in the water."

The Doorman leaned close to Jill and whispered. "We have to stop them."

"I can't," she responded, "The humans can't leave the forest; they might learn something they shouldn't."

"Fine," The Doorman mumbled, "If you won't help I'll take care of it myself."

"Manny?"

The Doorman's eye glowed the same red as when he raised the volcano out of the ocean.

The war raged for years, with the Adonites fighting a losing war of attrition within their metropolis against rebel orcs who were supported by Sphinxes, and the Sphinxes running out of reinforcements because of serpent raids in their homeland. When both sides were sufficiently weakened The Doorman stood straight up out of his chair.

"Enough." His voice was calm and steady, but his eye's glow had been transferred to his volcano. "Fighting on this world will cease." The volcano erupted skyward, its lava forming into molten meteorites which were brought down on all fighting forces, scattering their remains and causing the few survivors to be displaced, away from their areas of influence. The volcano was destroyed from the force of the eruption, and its lava coated the entire island in obsidian glass. The Gods turned to look at The Doorman. "Do you know why I am The Doorman?" He laughed at their dumbstruck faces. "I am The Doorman because, despite being a God, I'm just here to open the door for my master." The planet rumbled, and the obsidian door buckled outward. "He is at the heart of this world, and the changing planet and conflicts raging on its surface have rocked him asleep." He walked away from the planet, enlarging it and turning to face the Obsidian door. "but now there is harmony, he is awake and ready for me to open the door! It is time for

him to rise, and for all existence to see itself out.” The Doorman’s neat countenance was destroyed. His tie was loose around his neck, and his suit had become frayed with burns from the volcanic explosion.

Jill turned to look at the other Gods. “There has to be something we can do.” She pleaded, “We just have to cause trouble right?”

Aoife returned to its golden orb form. “We can only use what we already created, and that infernal war took most of my wonderful Adonite’s away from me.”

Kry’lethzyk leaned on its icy throne, gazing out into the void around them. “and I’ve only got a few serpents left, and they’re heading up north for a few hundred years.”

Adaryn looked at his balanced scale. “The Sphinxes gave justice to the orcs, so they have no enemies to fight.”

Jill looked into Fray’s eyes. She saw the pain of generations of orcs scarred into his retinas. “All they wanted was a good deal.”

Another tremor shook the planet, causing the Obsidian Door to buckle again. The Doorman leaned in, his tentacles reaching to open the door. Jill heard the voices of her oblivious and loving humans praising her for her benevolence. She felt their love for her forest, and the deep respect they held for every living thing they encountered. She also felt their petty desires and power schemes, squashed by their environment. Her skin hardened into bark as she rested her hand on the top of the forest’s canopy. “We can only use what we have.” She was crying, and morning glories sprouted through her skin in the tears’ path. “They’ll never forgive me.”

She clenched her fist, raising the trees from their ancient roots. The vegetation developed a hunger and the ability to feed. Their destructive force threatened to wipe out the humans, and Jill heard them cursing her name. All of them. The trees cursed their newfound madness and hunger; the humans cursed her fickle nature and asked why she had forsaken them. The conflict raged across the continent, causing humans to cut their ties with the magic of the life web. She watched them invent familiar technologies and burn and destroy the forest. The other races recovered while the humans were occupied, and soon had conflicts of their own with the young warlike people. Some humans found their friendship with nature once more, and some trees managed to fight their hunger, but the ancient trust that had cradled the humans since their creation could never be repaired. All the while, the banging on the

Obsidian Door became quieter, and the raging discord of the world rocked The Doorman's master back to sleep.

The Doorman fell back into his chair. He attempted to regain his composed look and shrink away from the other Gods' gazes simultaneously.

"This is a bit of a mess." Fray offered his assessment of the situation to break the silence.

"I'd hoped to have been getting on to the next creation by now," Adaryn paused after saying this. He switched faces to his softer side, filling the void with much needed light. "but I'd hate to leave Jill alone like this, so I can stay behind."

"Not me, I'm sick of this ugly world." Aoife drifted into the void.

"And I'm bored." Kry'lethzyk slithered away.

Jill shut out the voices of her children and looked at The Doorman. "And where are you going Manny?" Her voice cut like a sawblade on bark. "now that your master has gone back to sleeping?"

The Doorman hit his claw against his chair, conjuring a door behind him.

"My master is in all worlds," He chuckled, "I'm going to try again." He rose from his chair and opened the door.

Jill ran after him, leaving the voices of her cursing humans behind. She pushed him through the door, closing it behind her. "You're not going to ruin any other people like my humans." She was already surveying the map in front of her and The Doorman. "Wherever you go, no matter how many worlds you make." Her bark skin twisted to create uneven areas filled with fungal spores and pus. "You'll never get the precious harmony your master needs to awaken." Her vine hair grew until it ran down her back. Her proportions and colors changed wildly as she spoke, creating a kaleidoscope of sound and mass. "because now wherever you go." The morning glories on her face turned into crustacean claws clutching clipboards. "There will be Jill, Goddess of Discord."

## **The Nature of the Tip**

*Meg Richter*

Glacial Tetris in a rocks glass  
starts to water down my drink;  
sweating, untouched in the grass,  
begging me to take a sip.

Solar saturation,  
bathe us both in sapphires.  
I grasp with outstretched fingertips  
and put its body to my lips.

I will swallow glaciers whole,  
and keep the sun inside my soul.

Yesterday the universe was slanted,  
a heavy gust of wind caught hold.  
I gulped gold and felt disenchanted  
by the blasé nature of the tip.

Fire rekindles old friendships,  
tonguing their wooden necks.  
Trembling tree limbs are eclipsed,  
forever engulfed in the flame's grip.

## **We Stride**

*Shane Hibbert*

Caked in sweat and dirt  
We stride  
Hearts pounding with passion  
Sword and shield at side  
We stride together

Allies fall  
We crawl  
To their side  
That we might hide  
The pain from their dying faces  
And we remember the faces  
That spit in our mother's faces

Some of the best men  
Find themselves face down  
Belly in dirt  
Diamonds in the mud  
Blood  
Bombs that break backs  
And shred shoulders with black flak  
What's broken will never last  
So for that we wear the mask

Yet taken up a new  
We stride together  
When that is through and through  
And dawn has done its dew  
A time will come to say adieu  
When the sky turns white from its hue of blue  
Let remain what's true is true  
I fight for you my Brother  
I fight for You



## Contemplating the Sublime

*Michael Talbot*

## Okawa

*Kimberly Stanizzi*

"I'm gonna be me, I'm gonna be free, I'm walking on moon beams and staring out to sea." Our voices quivered as our tears interrupted the melody. It was the first time we sang our anthem without sounding powerful, unstoppable, and united. But we were. The past three months brought us together, just as the waves brought the colored pebbles together along the sand. We stared out into the monstrous entity that was the Pacific Ocean, one last time. Sobbing into each other's shoulders with fingers intertwined, thirty-five friends were now bonded like family. The powerful words of that eight year old boy I had met several weeks prior reverberated in my mind. "Your performance reminded me of nature. I often wonder how something so beautiful can cause so much destruction?" *I don't know*, I wanted to tell him. *I truly do not know*.

There were many things I questioned over those three months in Tohoku, Japan. I will never understand the horror of what was experienced on March 11, 2011. I did not need to speak the same language to see the hearts of the people of Japan. Despite knowing their hearts were larger than most, Mother Nature remained relentless, and swept away 16,000 of her creations.

As we said our final goodbyes to nature and its destruction, I could not believe I had the power to escape. I was able to leave the torn up land for my home, while many were still trying to rebuild their own. They had too much pride to abandon their land. Women would still sweep the isolated foundation of what used to have surrounding walls, ceilings, and humans to warm the emptiness. Before leaving the beach to head to the airport, my friends and I continued, still, in our final moments in Japan. I took one final glance at the impetus that brought me six thousand miles from home. And just like the tsunami that flooded the coast two years earlier, memories of my time there overflowed my mind. One after another, I was back in each moment.

I remembered a day on the beach, tugging on the corner of a green, buried piece of metal and watching as the dirt rolled off the broken glass revealing the time: 2:46 pm. I remembered feeling desperate, craving the eye contact of a child too broken to look up. I remembered

being enamored by the innocence of the children too young to comprehend. And then, I remembered Okawa.

It was about two weeks into our three month music outreach tour in northern Japan, when we made a detour while driving to our next location. The previous weeks had been exhausting, as each one of us gave everything we had to try and give the children one happy day. We just wanted them to have one day where they did not have to be disturbed by the memories of March 11. One day where they did not have to think about their dead parents, missing sisters, or cramped shelters which they return to at the end of each day. The performance we put on wasn't our priority. I just wanted to see the children smile and for the displaced light to finally reabsorb the space within their empty shells that were once full of the life and innocence all children possess. I wanted them to feel like kids again. But it wasn't until Okawa that we discovered just one of the many true tragedies Japanese children endured on this day.

Our tour bus bounced along through dirt roads sandwiched between the ocean and the mountains, while sleepy heads searched for comfortable resting spots against the cold, glass windows. We moved inland between the hills and our bus slowed as we passed over a rusted bridge laying over serene and settled water. I imagined how different the water must have looked on March 11. The bus pulled to the side of the road after completing its journey across the bridge. The thirty-five of us were unsure of where we were, but remained unquestioning and trusting. We were told to take an hour to ourselves and look around the area. With compliancy and uncertainty, we exited the bus and were accompanied by nothing but an ominous feeling, that suffocated us with its heaviness. I stepped onto the dirt and the smell of the warm sea exhaled against my face. I lifted my gaze and stared down the hill that connected to the edge of the bridge. The land below me was blanketed by green grass, and lofty hills hugged the edges of the flattened earth. The hills were embedded with soaring trees, damaged to their tips by the acidity of the risen and salty tsunami water. The nature was bountiful but mankind had dwindled. What once used to be a bustling village was now empty, shattered by an element and unwillingly abandoned by its people.

My knees buckled in reaction to my unsteady and growing emotions as I made my way down the hill and moved closer to the crumbled,

isolated structure. The sight of a mangled cement mural of brightly colored faces left me certain of my location. I was at an elementary school, or what once was. I clutched my stomach, as I could feel the discomfort of my emotions bubble up inside me without containment. I imagined the building only two years before as a place of great bliss, where children were free to learn and explore, and parents were eased by their children's ensured safety. I needed to know that these children were fine; that they escaped the horrors of that lamentable day. But the heaviness of the atmosphere suggested otherwise.

Disoriented in my tantalizing thoughts and horrendous visions, it took me several moments to gather myself in the present and join my group that had gathered in front of the memorial. I joined too late to understand who the man was that was standing beside our translator, but I knew his words would be powerful. And so he began to tell the story of Okawa Elementary School, while the translator struggled to deliver his every word and emotion:

“The earthquake struck at 2:46 pm off of the coast of Tohoku. There was the threat of a tsunami, but no one knew how bad it would be. Children were in school and parents had to make the decision to either pick their children up, or leave them in school. If a child's home was closer to the ocean than the school, the parent's left them at school and trusted the teacher's to make the right decisions in order to keep the students safe. Here at Okawa, only one student had their parents take them home.”

The translator tried, and with choppy English, delivered to us the tale of this nightmare.

“The teachers had fifty minutes between the earthquake and tsunami to decide where to take the children to safety. Japanese children always listen to their teachers and never question their authority. But there was a major problem. Many of the teachers agreed to take the children to the bridge. They believed that it was elevated enough to keep them safe from the tsunami. But one teacher disagreed. He knew that the safest option was to help the children up the mountain. He believed in this so strongly and argued with the rest of the teachers. The others were worried that having the students climb the mountain would be too risky. Time continued passing before any decisions were made and the children nervously awaited instructions. Finally, the teacher gathered

their students and took them to the bridge. The one teacher who disagreed held strong to his beliefs and was able to get one student to follow him up the mountain. Once they made it to the top, they could see the water rush in and take over the land, the village, and their school. The teacher and student at the top of the mountain looked below to their colleagues and friends as the water struck the bridge, taking them with it. They held each other, sobbing in horror at the gruesome sight below.”

I was shocked by the man's poise and precision as he told the story. He stood tall, gazing past his audience. His brow hardly furrowed, though the tragedy placed unneeded fault lines through the landscape of his face, just as the earthquake had done to the land. But the numbness of his pain was still present, two years later.

“Seventy-five teachers and students died that day and several are still missing. Some parents still search the area every day for their children's bodies. Parents are devastated and confused as to why that had to happen to their children. They trusted the teachers to keep them safe and they were betrayed.” The ending tone of his voice continued to ring in my ear for the next several, silent moments. Sniffing noses discontinued the reticence. We offered thanks and bowed to the man for taking time to tell us the story. And yet, this is just one story; a tragedy only one community was faced with on that day. Some have been shared and others kept quiet to avoid the connecting emotions.

The rhythm of the ocean breeze helped me to reenter the present moment. I untwined ten fingers from the hands that held mine on either side, but remained still, mesmerized by the beauty of the waves as they rushed in with a haunting power. I watched as they receded to reveal the jewel-like stones nestled in the wet sand. As surely as the waves pulled the sand away, there is one thing that can never be taken away. It is the crushing scars that the events of March 11th, 2011 left on my innocence and on the people of Japan. We held each other closer and finished our song together, once more. The bus was waiting and our weeping voices casted out and lingered over the misty ocean air. “...And if a door be closed, then a row of homes start building. And tear your curtains down, for sunlight is like...gold.”



**Wood Cut**

*Elizabeth Bauman*

## **(RIVER) SONG**

*Andrew Gordon Rogers*

Swallow: the pressure of warmth in the throat —  
the past, future — pushing against the teeth, against

the tongue, forced to action, forward and onward:  
apprehensions, complications, things unknown, forced

forward and onward: the movement of the fish, starts and fits,  
between the stones and the ripples, the riverweed, the pulse,

the heartbeat — the hairs raised on your skin, shivering —  
downstream, upstream: the trout in intermission, considering.

Here is the swirl; here the white water through the stone;  
here is the thrown stone in the undertow, curled beneath

the foam, the shadows of the elders being thrown above, blowing,  
the arbors holding, gripping at the moving air, water, earth; here is

the push through the corridors carved by motions, before the motions,  
after the run of the thousand ripples: the ups, downs, movement;

the loosestrife blowing in the shadow and out, heavily rooted,  
overlooking the ripples — bent, irregular — jealous of the nomadic.

Release: nature, spill forth, symbolism here and there;  
the water runs above the largest stones, surrounds them —

bathes them and carves them — enters their cavities, their divots;  
the rush removes bits of algae, tufts of hair pulled away, pushed

downstream, wrinkling in the current, dropping below for the bottom-  
feeders,  
oblivious, strong against the push, gobbling up what's left behind.



## **Invisible Woman**

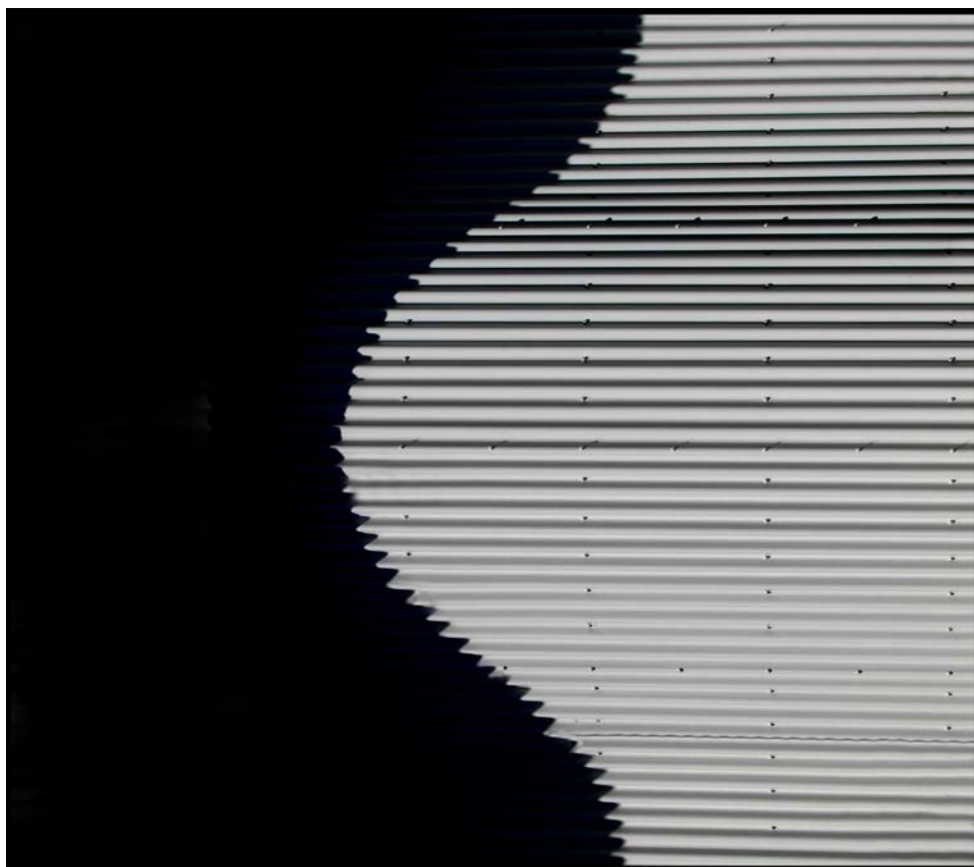
*Maryam Zahirimehr*

**[a baked affair / fucking gluten]**

*Michelle Kubilis*

crumpling tissue paper organs  
    pumping pumping pumping  
gas pedal to the belly,  
twisting insides to balloon animals &  
shaking  
my snow globe brain.

but those sex eyes  
suave, velvet  
    RED velvet —  
they squeezed me good  
filled me up  
then left the morning after.



*Thomas Gillaspay*

## The Train Through Amish Country

*Jake Hammel*

The soft *whoosh* of the wheels marks time as the train speeds through the bright countryside, its passengers like cloth dolls abandoned on a dusty shelf. Outside, it is June, and the late corn is being planted, the older stalks waving with resignation from behind their gleeful younger brothers. In the seat beside me a businessman is returning from another sweltering day in the city. He is restless, refusing to release his soul to the rhythm of the train. He resists the humble surrender of the other passengers, preferring the furious clacking of his laptop keys to the soft but constant hum of the train or the rustling song of the corn. But then, he cannot hear what I hear.

We speak the same language, the corn and I, the language of the speeding train and of the businessman's hunched back. It is the language of the moon and the sun, the dry earth and the rushing river, the city and the country, and everything in between. It is spoken with the soft voice of the faceless dolls of Amish children, humble almost to the point of silence. Only those who truly listen can hear its whispers.

Fields pass by in a soft blur. In one, an amish farmer is plowing, his rugged draft horse snorting at the effort of pulling the plow. He encourages the horse in a voice I cannot hear, his sleeves rolled above the elbows as he pushes the plow from behind. Beneath his feet and the horse's heavy hooves, the ground is breaking with a sigh as it prepares to receive the seeds of this year's bounty.

The train speeds on, and the sea of green corn fades, the sound of its thousands of waves remaining only in the rhythm of the train hurtling along toward its destination. In its place, another city springs up, as if born from the ground itself. A fence, like delicate lace, shakes as the train passes by. Pillars stand tall and strong along the platform as we pull into the station. They speak in elongated syllables, feeling the omnipresent vibrations of their own words. The train stops, as if hovering on the track; it waits as its passengers disembark.

The businessman, his suit wrinkled, steps slowly from the train. The bright sunshine startles him, and he reanimates like a brusquely-yanked marionette with his first breath of city air. To him, the city is the only thing that speaks, and he is glad to be within its embrace once again.

The train groans in anxiety as it begins to pull away, glad to be moving again. The businessman's face smudges outside my window as the train moves on.

The train picks up speed, rushing past the city with its squat, disapproving buildings. *Why do you move so fast?* they say to the train, their monosyllabic voices demanding an answer that the train has no intention of giving. The train is young, and the buildings are old. *He will learn*, the tired brick men say to each other as the young fool rushes by, *He will learn*. Staring out my window, I watch the city rush past. Its buildings speak in the same clear, deliberate tones they have spoken with since before my father or grandfather was born, since before my family came to this country. They tell all who will listen the ways of life. They speak of *ordnung*, commanding that everything has its place, every creature its duty. Their pragmatism offends the speeding train and he ignores them; he is enjoying his *rumspringa*.

It is June, and I am on the train. Soon I will disembark, stepping onto a hot platform that is supposedly more real and firm than the enormous, clamorous choral production that has just played through my head, with its imperfect, clashing harmonies that sing in a language so few can hear, whose words are so tangible I can see them written in the air around me. It is June, and I am struggling to rediscover pragmatism and precision as the train slows to a halt. Those who wait for me, their mouths pulling into smiles as the train slows with a soft *screech*, cannot hear what I hear. As I step out onto the platform, I hear the last few strains of the train's song, singing of the destination it will never quite reach.



**Invisible Woman**  
*Maryam Zahirimehr*

## **Public Bodies**

*Michelle Kubilis*

— And she begins avoiding side streets, virtue soiled. Small limbs glisten with youth, eyes stroking her skin with icy tips — disrobing her of safety. So she stops looking down, eyes shifting from the earth and fate towards heaven — the silent prayers of a child, a prelude to city life. Then she stops checking for monsters, the ones that wear masks on television, but she finds the real ones — the innocence reapers — and they find her. Stares intensify (grabbing) — calls gain ferocity (groping) — uneasiness rises (pinching). It becomes natural to her, the way it goes, something she brings upon herself — And she stops struggling.

## **My Ex-Best Friend**

*Kaitlyn Kallimanis*

Your words taste like Splenda,  
And it makes me gag every time I remember,  
And if you have to keep insisting that you're not that kind of person,  
It usually means you are.

My words are a vacation to Antarctica.  
And you're shivering to death, I'm so far from you.  
You freeze me in the back and push me away.  
Then, you wonder why I'm cold and distant.

If I had a mirror  
To reflect my soul, I would see you  
Staring through the glass, but all you see is another piece of trash.  
You run away from the smell of the shit you created.

The leaves fall down and I fall too,  
All thanks to you and your two  
Hundred faces. Why do I miss you sorely  
When all you did was make me feel poorly?



**Crying**  
*Elizabeth Bauman*

## **Riley Burgess (14) File #C625F7**

*Kyle Freedman*

It was late, and I was supposed to be asleep. My room was pitch black; the only thing I could make out was the glowing red numbers of my clock, giving off a faint and eerie glow. My eyes were heavy and the sheep were all accounted for. As slumber was about to take me, there was a loud noise from downstairs. My eyes flew open and I began climbing out of bed. Quickly moving to my door, I opened it but a crack and was blasted with the stench of father's favorite drink. With the smell came noise, and lots of it. Screaming and yelling rang out through the house; the all too familiar sounds echoing in my mind, bringing forth a sense of dread.

There was a breaking noise and a scream of fear that came from my mother. It was followed by a harsh angry voice struggling to create simple words. It was back and it was in the house. I retreated into my room and searched around until I finally found my baseball bat. It felt heavy in my hands and for a moment I considered just going back to bed. I knew what I was going to do was incredibly dangerous, but I didn't want to suffer any longer.

Tiptoeing out of my room and down the stairs, I steeled what remained of my frayed nerves. I moved silently through several of the rooms, any missteps covered by the sounds of yelling from the kitchen. It took what felt like an eternity but eventually I had made my way to the second entrance to the kitchen. I looked into the room and was struck with feelings of horror, dread and despair. My mother had her back against the wall, her face and part of her dress splattered with blood. The monster loomed over her, a jagged brown club of glass was gripped tightly in its hand.

I quickly moved into the room, gripping the bat firmly in hand. I gave no time for the creature to react and I swung the bat with all my might, catching it in the back of its leg. It let out a small pained noise as it clutched its knee with both hands where I had struck it, the creature's club falling and shattering onto the tiled floor. It whipped its head around and glared at me with two eyes full of rage, its lips pulled back to bare its fangs in hate. I had the bat in hand. I could have swung- I should have swung again. But I didn't. I was scared. As his

eyes stared directly at me my hands and feet became heavy. I couldn't attack, I couldn't even run away. I was unable to do anything as he turned around and kicked me with one of its massive feet. It struck me in my stomach and I flew back, slamming hard into the kitchen fridge.

I couldn't breathe, it hurt too much. The back of my head felt warm and wet; everything looked blurry. The creature limped towards me, dragging its injured leg somewhat behind it. There was something in its hand. It took a moment for me to realize that the creature was holding my bat. I didn't remember dropping it or seeing the creature pick the bat up, but it was in its hands, and it was walking closer.

I looked to mother, who had remained against the wall since I came in. She seemed to be frozen the same way I had. Mother blinked and the next thing I knew she was standing and grabbed the creature from behind, her arms restraining his. She was yelling at the creature as she tried to drag it away from me. I watched them fight for a while; it was all I could do. I tried to cheer her on though I don't know if I ever actually spoke. Mother put up a good fight, but the creature eventually gained the upper hand and pushed her away. She stumbled and fell to the ground.

When she hit the floor I tried to stand up, only managing to do so by leaning against the refrigerator I had been thrown into. Everything was still blurry, it hurt to look at the lights. My vision was all screwy, the room was spinning and it looked like there were now three of the creature. The creatures lifted my bat over their heads and I knew that if it hit me there'd be no waking up. I had to do something and before I knew it I was running at the creature. I made a choice, more of a guess, and shoved the one in the middle with all my might. I heard an "oomph" as I made impact and the creature fell over. There was a crack and a clang as it fell, the bat dropped to the ground and rolled away as the creature fell to the ground, catching the corner of the table with its head, blood spilling from the wound like an overflowing sink.

The creature was gone; it was gone forever. I felt my legs give way as I fell to the ground, all feeling fading from me. I felt arms wrap around me and pull me close. I remember mother's voice, she spoke reassuring words and was saying everything was going to be alright. I glanced one last time at the creature that had caused my family so much pain. I saw its bright red face and frozen expression of anger. I looked it in its black

beady eyes and watched as its face contorted back into the face of father one last time.

I don't remember much after that. There were lights and colors, accompanied by many different voices. Eventually I was told a few days had passed since I had slain the creature. I was also told things that I couldn't really follow, I remember the doctors saying things like "broken ribs" and "internal cranial bleeding." The point was they were going to be keeping an eye on me.

The first few weeks were a never-ending nightmare. I wasn't allowed to leave my bed, all those tubes were itchy and the food tasted awful. After a while I was moved to a different room where I was allowed more freedoms. The doctor I'm seeing now isn't like the previous guys, he doesn't wear white and he isn't trying to stick things in me. He just asks a lot of questions, wanting to know how I feel, and wants me to write out what happened. That's why I am writing right now. But I don't really care about that. It's been so long since I've seen my mother, I really hope she's alright. I just want to see her again. How much longer will you keep me away?

## **We Ask for Water**

*Whitney G. Schultz*

*Baltimore, after the riots*

Standing at the site we saw burning only months ago,  
our Mayor smiles — large white teeth, an obscene grin,  
and she promises that we will rebuild. Her voice rises  
above the crowd — smoky in its sweetness,  
but all we see is the ash rising, the news reports,  
the flaming buildings behind her. The sun shines,  
we sweat in the humidity, feel the clammy limbs  
of strangers pressing against us. We are swallowed,  
consumed like we absorbed the news: *our city*  
*is on fire — watch!* And now, under a relentless sun,  
we listen to your words: our city is on fire — we are alive!  
Those flames left scars, Mayor, those flames left scars,  
and some of us are still burning, that ember still smolders,  
and who is there to put it out? From the center, a pulse,  
a hand reaches above us, throws what we've been looking for  
since April, since last summer, since so long ago, we forgot  
why we are still fighting, still burning. From the center, that hand  
raises the water we begged for when the riots took over  
the streets, raises the water to anoint, to condemn,  
and then you, Mayor, you are the one to receive it. You are  
extinguished — your words wilting under the spectacle.



**Arrested**  
*Rocky Cotard*



**“If you’re not ready to die for it, put the word  
‘freedom’ out of your vocabulary.”**

*Mosheh Tucker*

## **The Shipwright**

*Brandon Marlon*

Gnarled palms sand burrs along the taffrail.  
Satisfied, he faces the prow and sniffs the air  
above deck, identifying distinct scents  
of timber — white oak, teak, cedar, pine —  
as he steps lightly over sawed lumber,  
reeming irons, pitch ladles, and caulking mallets  
to oversee the fill of fresh oakum  
and inspect watertight seams  
running from stem to stern  
while tar dries and lightens in the sun.

He paces starboard to port and back  
listening carefully for creaks in the planking  
or framework groans from keel or ribs  
until certain of a solid hull under his footfalls,  
then rechecks every spar, joist, scantling,  
davit, hatchway, lath, hasp, grommet.

Officers will soon crowd the great cabin  
with nautical maps and instruments  
even as cargo holds are crammed  
with whisky barrels and baggage;  
but this is his moment, time at a standstill,  
when a master craftsman, patient and thorough,  
first perceives seaworthy handiwork  
tenderly wrought by skilled hands.

## **Before**

*Tony Gloeggler*

Yes, that summer. 1979. The one  
before we moved in together.  
You rented a one bedroom  
in Forest Hills and I played  
full court all day, ate at my mom's  
then biked to your place. Suspended  
between growing up and the kid  
I wanted to remain, I sometimes  
stayed the nights. The morning songs  
of the Hebrew camp two yards away  
woke us and I hurried, tried  
to come one more time before  
your alarm clock sounded. I'd watch  
you dress for work, a counselor  
for a woman's health clinic run  
by a crazy lady who preached  
the politics you believed in. Sometimes,  
you'd invite your friends, your sisters,  
over for dinner and we'd sit around  
the table. To delay cleaning up,  
I'd half listen to the conversation  
and try to find a slot to fit  
a word or two in. Maybe music.  
Or maybe I'd play poet, mention  
a poem I was working on, one  
I wasn't sure was ready for your eyes,  
your fingers to lift from my notebook,  
type onto a blank page and make it  
official. Sometimes, you'd drive me  
home. We'd sit at the curb until the sun  
came up and my father stepped out  
of the door on his way to a job  
he hated as we held our breath,  
held in our smiles and he pretended

not to want to kill us. Yes, before  
I started working a job I'd love,  
Before I learned how little  
I knew about loving someone.  
Before I knew I should do anything  
to somehow hold you in my life.



**Lacquerice**  
*Graehound*

## Scraps

*Nick Adams*

*The sun has long since disappeared over the horizon to lands far beyond the city. A pair of feet step carefully, weaving between fallen pieces strewn about ground. The figure kneels at the site of the debris, extends a hand from his pocket into the cold air, and retrieves a manilla folder, the tattered papers inside held securely with a clip.*

*He rises again, and the feet make their way up as a cold wind howls through the night air. It whips past him, tracing his form before disappearing towards some horizon. He sits, thumbing through the pages, and begins to read.*

### **Investigation Journal Jeff Brinkley, 12/28/14**

I'm going to keep a log of my findings along with all the important things I manage to salvage here. Normally I don't keep files for the cases I'm given seeing as most of them just want me to go around their house fumbling with the vacuum cleaner I dressed up to look sci-fi with my sleeves rolled up so they can see my "I want to believe" tattoo. It's not reliable income but it is easy work. I walk in, ham it up a bit, pay them as many visits as I can before they get suspicious, and unburden their wallet as I unburden their conscious. Most of the time their ghosts are rats in the walls or creaky floorboards, but after three years of doing this, I might have something I can actually make a name for myself with.

Mrs. Werner, an old lady, her face obscured by thick, dark glasses and bent down like someone had tied a weight to her nose. She was a local, I'd grown up just a few blocks away from her place but no one ever spoke to her. My parents and the other parents warned us to steer clear of her and her place. It was long ago but I could clearly remember it reeked of cigarette smoke. Even the grass seemed to take on the smell, and as she slunk into my office, the air in the room shuddered and churned with that same childhood memory.

She spoke very little, and what little she spoke was barely audible. She left me with an old, dusty office box, about the size of a suitcase with sides warped and buckling with age and weight of its contents.

“Make something of all this,” she rasped, “someone needs to do it and I can’t be the one.” I was about to send her away, tell her that this wasn’t work for a part-time paranormal investigator, but I locked my lips at the sight of the check for three hundred dollars with the promise of more on completion of my task.

Upon opening the box, a shred of newspaper, one of the tabloidesque local ones, drifted out caught in the gust of my fan, now struggling to bring breathable air back into the room. The words

**MISSING BOY PRESUMED DEAD, MURDER CHARGE**

**RAISED** printed in fading text danced about the room until I finally managed to catch it and stuff it into the file. I peeked in at the rest of the contents: tapes, transcripts, and all manner of papers and books thrown together seemingly at random. My eyes and grin grew wide.

Maybe I could even get my own book deal; stop tricking scared people to make money when I’m not working.

**Journal page Gabe Benson, 1/1/96**

I went to the scrapyard after dinner last night so I could see the fireworks. Mom doesn’t like it when I go there, but I was mad at her because she went to a party with that man and I don’t like using the microwave for dinner so I went anyway. There is a really tall pile at the scrapyard and when I sit on top I can see the city. That’s where the fireworks are.

I was lonely and still very mad when I got there but I found a dog and now he is my friend. I gave him some of the peanut butter crackers I had with me for a snack because the fireworks were very late at night. When the fireworks started he started howling at them like he was singing. I think he came out to see them as well. I named him Dog.

After the fireworks stopped I got nervous because I didn’t know when mom would get home and I had to pretend to be in bed. I gave Dog the rest of my crackers and asked him if he wanted to come home with me but I think he lives there. I told him I’d come back today since I have no school. I need to wait until mom falls asleep first though. I made Dog promise not to tell mom too. He licked the peanut butter off my fingers so I think that means yes.

**Transcript of Tape Helena Benson, 1/2/96, transcription by Jeff Brinkley**

[Helena]: Hey, Tim, it's me. Listen, I need to ask you if I can borrow some money. I know, I know you took me out to the party last night and you bought all those drinks and I had a great time, honey, I did and I hate to ask you for more, I just need to buy Gabe a new jacket.

[A pause filled by the sound of a slurp from a mug and a sigh]

[Helena]: The back's split clean open, he claims he doesn't know how it happened but I just know he did it climbing through the hole in the fence at the scrapyard. I don't get how kids can be so smart and still not have any common sense, I keep telling him to stay away from there, it's dangerous. What kind of a kid hangs out in a scrapyard anyway?

[Gabe]: Mom? Are you talking to Mr. Werner again?

[Helena]: What did I say about trying to talk to me when I'm on the phone, hm? I gotta go, Tim, I'll talk to you later. Let me know if you can spot me that cash. Call me back when you get up.

[Call ends]

**Journal page Gabe Benson, 1/2/96**

I brought my journal with me to school today so I could write in it at the scrapyard so I didn't have to go home. Mom was real angry about me ripping my jacket, but I don't care because I'm real angry at her and Mr. Werner too. She likes him more than she likes me.

Dog is here with me too, I made sure to save him some scraps of chicken I didn't want at lunch since I forgot to bring crackers. He was upset when I showed him the bruise I got but I told him it didn't hurt anymore so I was okay. When he whines it sounds like a rusty gate and it is very sad so I played him fetch with a metal pipe I found. He's a real good dog.

**Unsent letter Tim Werner (date unknown)**

And you said I couldn't do it. Have a little faith in me, why don't you. Marcella and I are getting married at the end of the month, all the plans are in order. Her father isn't happy about it but what else is new? I'm still fucking his daughter and spending their money.

Did I mention how much money they have? It's more than everyone says. A lot more.

The sex isn't good; she'll be a hag soon, just give it ten years. I'm not worried though, she's got it in her head that I'm some dashing gentleman. She won't notice me screwing around, not with the hours she works. There's this cute mom around the block I keep seeing make eyes at me. Yeah, she's got a kid, but there's no ring on that finger and never a guy with them.

This is my last letter, man. Can't have Marcella or her prick of a father catching wind of any of this so you won't be able to tell me what it's like working for the rest of your life while I relax in this huge fucking house.

Cheers mate,  
Tim.

### **Investigation Journal Jeff Brinkley, 12/29/14**

One whole day of searching and I only found three things that made any sense. A lot of the tapes are busted up, most of the papers are torn and only some have their other half nearby, and absolutely everything smells like tar and nicotine. I needed to get out of the office, away from the stink at least, so I decided I should pay the scrapyard a visit.

It was exactly how I'd remembered from when I grew up here. The small lot was ringed with steel fences garnished with barbed wire, automobile carcasses coated with rust pressing up against the perimeter with brown, dead weeds creeping out from beneath them. The main gate was open, so I let myself in, looking for some kind of office and there I saw the pile young Gabe had referenced in his journal. In the center of the lot, scrap and junk had been piled in an obvious, stairlike pattern, crowned at the top with the front half of a car peering out like the edge of a cliff. I couldn't help myself. Carefully, I wound my way up to the top.

Gabe had been right about the view. The city skyline rose perfectly out of the horizon just across the river. I got so caught up in panorama I didn't notice the owner sit down right next to me. Nearly teetered off the edge in shock before desperately offering my apologies for intruding. He laughed, shooing away my concerns and saying, "lovely view, don't you think?"

We exchanged introductions. He asked I call him Rusty; everyone did apparently. He was a short man with a tired face. A maze of lines stretched across his cheeks and forehead, work and stress, not age, he insisted, fluffing his bushy beard up to show its color unmarked by grey. The air about him seemed to be saturated with air freshener, covering up whoknowswhat from the piles of junk. I explained the circumstances of my visit and asked if I might question him in hopes of finding anything to help guide the search, and he agreed, but warned he might not be of much use.

The former owner of the scrapyard was found cut apart in a power tool accident in the back about ten years ago, grimly enough the second time that sort of incident had happened on the ground. With no next of kin to inherit it and no one wanting anything to do with bad press surrounding the place, he picked it up cheap and picked up right where the previous owner had left off. Unfortunately that left a sizable gap between his experience and the time in Gabe's journal. I asked him if he knew anything about the child, showing him the scraps I managed to salvage in the file. He knew nothing about Gabe or his mother, but the Werners he'd heard of before. Wealthy family, had their names on a couple of the buildings downtown.

He mentioned that stray dogs sometimes wound up in the scrapyard but they were usually feral, not the type to play with kids. It wasn't how he wanted it, but every so often he'd have to call animal control to have them put down. "Poor thing," he said, reading the journal entries over, "probably didn't last much longer. There was a nasty blizzard a week after these were written. Covered the whole damn city with snow."

I pressed him with more questions, but mostly just to keep myself out a bit longer. After a while longer, I bid him farewell and returned to the box, that acrid stench still choking the air despite my fan's best efforts.

### **Journal page Gabe Benson, 1/9/96**

I don't think anyone is feeding Dog. He was so small and now he ate a whole box of crackers today and yesterday and he is getting bigger. When I threw the pipe for him to catch today it broke when he bit it. I hope he will be okay because he started eating the rusty bits in his mouth. I think the crackers will help.

Mom said there's a blizzard coming soon so I'll probably have to stay inside with her so won't be able to feed him. I'll bring him home tomorrow after school and ask mom if he can stay even just for the snow storm. He can sleep in my room with me on my bed.

**Note addressed to a friend Helena Benson (date unknown)**

Thanks for everything, Jane. If you're reading this, I've called you to let you know to check under the safe for this note and I might be in a bad place. I'll explain everything.

Ever since Gabe's father left we haven't been well off financially. Gabe is on his own all day while I'm making money and the house is going to shit. I needed a way to make ends meet and Tim fell into my lap and I jumped at the opportunity. Sucking up to a guy with a rich wife isn't something I ever thought I'd end up doing but he buys me and Gabe whatever we need.

I'm not stupid though. I know how he thinks, the only reason he likes Gabe is that it completes his milf fantasies. As soon as he loses interest in me there'll be someone else, so I've been recording every phone call that comes in and out of the house. I've stored them on tapes and they're all bundled up with a letter to his wife explaining what's been going on behind her back. As soon as things get sketchy, I spring the threat on him, which is where you come in.

Tim's not going to take it sitting down, he'll go down swinging before he sees he's trapped himself. If I need to resort to blackmail, I'll call you ahead of time and tell you to look under the safe. If you don't hear from me within a day, get the tapes in the safe to his wife. And so help me God, if he lays a finger on my boy I'll make his life hell myself.

The password on the lock is Gabe's birthday. Thank you so much,  
Jane,  
Helena.

*The sound of a siren in the distance disrupted the figure's reading. He stirs, and somewhere beneath him, a rumbling sounds. Patting the metal seat beneath him softly, he coos and shushes, coaxing the rumble to an easy thrum. The siren comes closer, then turns away down another street, and the figure's chest contracts, letting out an audible breath. He turns back to the folder.*

**Journal page Gabe Benson, 1/11/96**

Mom said I couldn't keep Dog in the house. She got real scared and tried to hit him with the broom and he broke it when he caught it with his mouth. I got mad and told her not to hit him because I don't like it when Mr. Werner hits me and her face got really white and she started taking off my shirt to look at my bruises and crying and saying sorry. I was still mad at her though so I locked dog and me in my room.

He went around looking at my stuff and got into a box of crackers while I put some blankets and a flashlight into my backpack. I put my cut up jacket over his back so I could get on him without hurting him and he ran all the way back to the scrapyard with me on his back. When we got here he showed me where he sleeps in a tunnel he dug beneath a car and we stayed hidden. It's nice and warm in here, and I don't think mom will find us. It was already starting to snow when we left and no one was out on the streets.

**Transcript of tape Helena Benson 1/11/96, transcription by Jeff Brinkley**

[Helena]: Answer the fucking phone, Tim, I know you're there. It's not like you do anything all day. Pick. Up. The. PHONE, TIM! I know about the bruises. You thought I'd never find them? He's my son! And I hope you're fucking happy because I won't have you hitting my kid but I still need your money. All those calls? All the phone sex and the date invitations and the venting about your wife? I've got it all, Tim. I've got it all recorded and ready to show up at Marcella's office, her dad's office, and everyone who could possibly fuck you over's front door, you hear me? So you watch your step. You're going to pay for what you did to him and

[Sound of wood breaking and a metallic clinking from the background]

[Helena]: What in hell was Gabe, what are you doing? Gabe, for the love of God, please get away from whatever that thing is! Come back to me, we can

[A sharp noise like steel grinding against steel erupts, peaks the receiver, and there's a thud as the phone presumably drops to the floor]

[Helena]: Gabe! Come back, that is not a dog! It's not safe!

[Sound of splintering wood and then wind followed by about a minute of silence]

[Helena]: ...Oh God, oh God, oh God, oh G [Call ends]

### **Local newspaper clipping 2/10/96**

#### **MISSING BOY PRESUMED DEAD, MURDER CHARGE RAISED**

Local resident Helena Benson, 28, has been formally charged with the murder of Tim Werner, husband of local philanthropist Marcella Werner. His body was found torn apart in the Simmon's Scrapyard after an anonymous caller dialed 911 reporting the sound screams coming from the scrapyard. It took police several hours to reach the scene of the crime through the blizzard, by the time they arrived, the body was frozen to the ground.

Benson was found nearby, huddled in a stripped car frame and was immediately sent to Saint Lawrence Hospital for treatment, where she was later placed under arrest for her connections to the grisly event. It was later discovered that the two were in the midst of an affair. Benson claims she entered the scrapyard looking for her son, Gabe, who had disappeared earlier that evening, and upon arriving there, was attacked by Werner. She claims he was then attacked and ripped apart by a monstrous creature. Her lawyer is pursuing the insanity defense, citing her ramblings and adamant defense of the existence of the supposed creature. No one in the Werner family could be reached for comment.

Gabe Benson's whereabouts are still unknown, and nearly a month later, is presumed dead, possibly at the hands of his own mother.

### **Journal Page Helena Benson, 4/13/97**

Marcella, I've left this journal to you because you more than anyone deserves the truth.

I'm so sorry for what I did with your husband, and I won't ask your forgiveness. I only ask that you understand that all of this was for Gabe.

He was such a bright boy. He had so much promise and I just couldn't live with myself if I didn't find some way, any way, to make life live up to what he deserved. I was desperate, I was weak. What I did was terrible and what it led to has haunted me every night since I was admitted to this facility.

That night, he came home with some kind of creature. He kept calling it a dog and I couldn't get him to listen to me. Its mouth was pitch with oil, its skin looked like it had been put together with pieces of scrap metal. And the eyes. Every night I feel those empty eyes on me judging me for what I've done. He wanted to keep it in the house and when I told him I wouldn't have it he ran off, but not before showing me the bruises Tim gave him. I called him and threatened him and in the middle of it all Gabe burst out into the snow with the creature.

When I got there I started searching the place. The owner had left for the night already and there was no one left to help me in so I crawled through the hole in the back. Tim must have seen me going through and followed me after because in the middle of my search he came at me with a knife, drunk and swearing. I closed my eyes and I prayed to God that I would live.

His weight lifted off my body and I heard him scream, and then that terrible noise came. Like a buzzsaw jamming. I opened my eyes and saw him pinned down by the creature, its jaw clamped around his neck and its claws digging into his chest, ripping him apart chopping the pieces. I'd never seen so much blood. It turned to face me and stared at me like a hunk of meat.

I fainted, and when I awoke, I was being ushered out of an old car and into an ambulance, Gabe's journal clutched in my frostbitten hands. It all turned into a blur. I was put into intensive care, I was arrested, I was questioned, I was evaluated by a psychologist. All I remember is knowing my boy is still out there somewhere and no one will believe me. I read his journal every day, once when I wake up and once when I go to bed.

I can feel myself slipping. All I can smell is that thing's breath. It's sunk into the book and my hair and no matter how much I wash the smell never comes out. They tried to sell my house but no one wanted it when the smell crept over everything back when I was free to live there. I don't think I'm much longer for this world.

I leave this journal, the tapes, and all the scraps I've kept in my office box to you when I leave. Someone needs the truth.

If they ever find him, tell him I love him.

### **Investigation Journal Jeff Brinkley 12/31/14**

I've checked through the box twice now. Most of it was taxes, much of what wasn't was molded or shredded. I think I've found everything that I can find now, all that remains is Gabe. At first, I assumed he must be dead and that his mother had lost her shit but too many things seemed right with her case. The lingering stench, the noise from the recording, this was the sort of stuff that a paranormal investigator was supposed to be working on, not vacuuming ghosts out of the walls.

Last night I checked was the scrapyard. It was locked up for the night, so I walked around the place. Sure enough, the hole was still there. I snuck through, acquiring a few scrapes and bruises on the way, and scoured the lot for the tunnel Gabe described in his journal. If it was there, then I might have something.

It was nearly sun up, and I still had nothing. I kept checking the file for any descriptions in his journal pages but there was nothing that indicated where in the lot he hid. There was nothing to suggest that a hole existed or that one had ever existed, just scrap and rust and the smell of orange air freshener. It should have been obvious to me at the time but I was so dead tired. I caught a whiff of that ashen, tar smell for less than a second. It was just a hint, but it was there, Just underneath the chemicals in the air.

I resolved to continue my search again the next day after some rest. Unfortunately, that amounted to me waking up in my clothes, face down on my couch at well past noon. The smell from the box was mingling in the air with the smell of the air freshener on my clothes. I really hope it'll fade out eventually.

Quick note! I got so caught up in work I completely forgot that tonight's the big night. I'll do some searching and then take a quick break at the top of the pile for the fireworks, see if Gabe's recommendation was right.

*Rusty's eyes finished off the last page of the file, laying it down on the hood of the car and scratching at his beard with his free hand. The edges of*

*the papers shuddered at the wind whipping off the waterfront. From where he sat he could see every light in the city, each filament and bulb working past the ends of their usual shift. He drew his jacket about his chest and folded his arms, nestling his hands in the warm folds of the fabric. Somewhere beneath him, a glint of metal rushed by, the light from the city just barely catching the tip of the metallic spine.*

*It scaled the pile, a hulking mass the size of a car rising one step after the other, bestial in stride but intelligent in poise. It met the man and joined him in peering across the river. He reached over its neck, as thick as his torso, and worked his fingers between the jagged shards and rusted plates, the beast letting out a contented sound like a purring buzzsaw. A smog issued from its nostrils with the sigh, puffs of heat issuing from between its teeth, rows of shrapnel lined inside a crooked maw chittering and gibbering squeaks and whines.*

*He smiled as he stared into its eyes, abyssal and glinting in the city light. Taking a towel from his toolbox, he gently began cleaning the blood from its claws, tempered and bent like curved blades. Silhouetted against the skyline, one would only have seen a shifting pile of rust as the first firework rose into the night sky and a dull cheer erupted, carried to them on the winter breeze.*

*“You did good tonight, Dog,” the man said, shutting the file. “I’m not letting anyone try to separate us again.”*

*The bloodstains removed, the man tossed the soaked rag down to the ground below. It fell limp, writhing in the wind until coming to rest on part of an arm bearing the truncated phrase “to believe” in black ink.*

## **Mabel (Kin to Meredith)**

*Shabnam Piryaee*

With ashy elbows and a bucketful of brains, he steps through a humorless Tuesday: the butcher's son, singing like a music box. A yarn baby unraveling. The heat extends its legs. Acorns flicker like sexed bulbs in deep evening lamplight.

Carelessness creeps in with the heat. The treeroot upends the sidewalk with an infinite jerk of the shoulder. She stumbles. Nothing descends in aid: not antennas on dusted roofs, those apocalyptic sedating arrows. Not the faltering butterfly.

When he tore the legs from the wet frog's body, he stood shivering from pond water. She eyed him from behind a tunnel of flashlight. She follows him again, her body a slow, gaseous current. His song filling her with all the tiny lit pleasures of a carnival.

He stops and turns. Her throat lays an egg. Its thousand babies thread their tumble down to her belly like an hourglass.

They collide with summer's potency. Two hexagons. Two indigo pleas.

Her gratitude bears the tenderest of whips. Together they feed crocodiles from the bridge-cusp.



**Fence Monotype**  
*Elizabeth Bauman*



*Olivia Hourihan*

## **What He Was Missing**

*E. Christopher Clark*

She wore a sun dress in a rain storm, but even when it was soaked through and she was shivering and they could see everything there was to see of her, she didn't care. She didn't care because she wanted them to see, wanted them to gawk.

"Where are her boobs?" a small boy asked his mother.

"Never you mind," said the mother, turning his face away.

"They're gone," Ashley told the boy, who was peeking at her through his mother's fingers.

The mother stood, took the boy's hand in her own, and walked him to the other end of the train.

Ashley grabbed hold of one of the overhead handrails and steadied herself as the train lurched out of the station at Lechmere, toward the Science Center and the river beyond.

"You get yourself a new phone?" asked an older fellow, pointing at the white bag she held, the silver apple on its face.

"I did," she said.

"Those things'll give you cancer," he said.

"Well, I've already had that," she said. She pushed her dripping bangs away from her wet forehead. "Doesn't that make me immune?"

He chuckled. "Wouldn't that be grand?" he said.

"Just like the chicken pox," she said.

He nodded. "Everyone should go through it once."

"Makes a man out of you," she said, with a fierce nod of her own.

He chuckled again. "Not much left in the world that'll do that, these days."

"And not many men interested in being real men besides."

When they were through, she was worried about him. She'd heard heavy breathing before, prided herself on inducing it, but this was something else.

"You okay?" she asked him.

"Wasn't sure I could still do that," he said, panting.

She wanted to ask him when the last time he'd done it was, but she was afraid of how he might answer. So, instead, she brought it back to her: "You ever been with someone this flat before?"

He said nothing for a moment, as if unsure how to answer, as if uncertain their banter on the train could continue here, with her naked, exposed. Then his face lit up with a wide, toothless smile.

"Yes," he said, slapping his knee. "Took me a minute to remember her name, but as a matter of fact I did. Girl name of Tildie. Sweet young thing when I was in the service doing basic training. Last one picked at the whorehouse, but those boys didn't know what they were missing. She was a great kisser, that Tildie. Mmm hmm. And pretty as all get-out, long as you kept your eyes up where they belonged anyway."

"Like a gentleman," said Ashley.

"I suppose so," he said.

When the cancer came back, it hit her first, but it hit Sean the hardest. Sean, that was his name. They'd spent three days in bed together before she'd thought to ask for it.

"Can't hardly take a piss," he said now. "It's into my balls," he said, massaging his wrinkled sack, hairless now because of the treatments.

"Mine, too," she said, replacing his hand with her own, cradling him, not sure whether something more vigorous would hurt or help.

"You have balls now, have you?"

"Ovaries," she said. "Same difference. They were the same, in fact, back when we were babies."

He set his hands on her abdomen. "Whereabouts are those things, anyway?" he said.

She pulled his hands lower, until they were in place, until the inside of her ached at his touch.

There was a tear on his cheek. "You'd think He could have spared one of us," he said.

He. Ashley couldn't bear the thought of that capital H, the one she was sure she'd heard in his reverent tone.

"Maybe he did," she said. "If he's up there, he spared me the disappointment of believing."

He looked as if he were about to say something, his tongue slipping past his gums, his chapped lips. But then he pulled it back, held it in.

"I hope you weren't expecting a prayer from me, once you're gone."

He laughed. “A prayer?” he said. “Hell no. I’m Irish, Ashley. All I expect is for you to get plastered and cry in your Bushmills.”

She didn’t go to the wake — she’d never been properly introduced, after all, and she didn’t feel like explaining herself to the niece from Manhattan who was running the thing, that woman who was older than she was. Instead, she rode the subway, sipping whiskey from a paper bag and trying not to stare at the bald kid who got on at Charles/ MGH — the hospital stop — a pale boy with headphones like hers, a phone like hers. She tried not to tell the joke, the one the old man had told her, but when the kid smiled at her she couldn’t resist.

He couldn’t resist either. When she asked him to come home with her, he looked into her eyes and he said “Yes” without a moment’s hesitation, without a moment to look down and see what he was in for, what he was missing.



*Olivia Hourihan*

## **Dusk Amid the Cornfield**

*Brandon Marlon*

Clad in plaid and denim overalls, the solitary figure  
traipses at twilight across acequias into elongated rows  
of husky stalks bedizened in tassels, silk fibers,  
drooping leaf blades, internodes, and brace roots.

She counts the ears as high as five while  
listening to sunset's susurrant gusts,  
palming cobs and fingering kernels,  
hardly noting the diminuendo overhead.

Peace's hour fleets too swiftly for her tastes,  
yet time remains to shuck, boil, and butter  
a meal's worth for her kin and even leave  
a little something for fawning does to nibble.

She doesn't believe in going back to the land  
because she'd never dream of leaving;  
hers is the lineage of stalwart tillers,  
roaming at gloaming with barrows in tow.

## What Comes After All This Living

*Kate Bond*

I'll spend all day on the swing in the front yard  
and maybe after death, I'll get my feet high enough  
to touch the leaves on the highest branch  
that always hung out of my swings arch.

After death, mom or brother will hang the swing  
back up — forget the risk of renter's injury  
*it's what she'd want*  
and in the morning while mom sips her coffee  
and smokes her breakfast cigarette with emotional overcast  
I'll swing high and steady and she'll watch  
she'll thank the wind for a reminder  
of what used to be.

My sibling will take a walk down the beach to the edge  
of the dock like I often did and away from the office  
he'll see the boats turn to face him, feel the thick salt,  
smell our old world all around him.  
When he remembers me through the whisper of the sails  
he'll know I loved him  
and that all the things I was put on this earth to feel,  
I felt all over, everyday, and that he couldn't  
have ever known that this would all be so brief.

## **In Sevilla, My Student Sings**

*Whitney G. Schultz*

We climb the ramps,  
    one floor after the next,  
        ankles weak from the incline

Keely's voice rises as we climb  
    up into the bell tower —  
a private aria for the masses

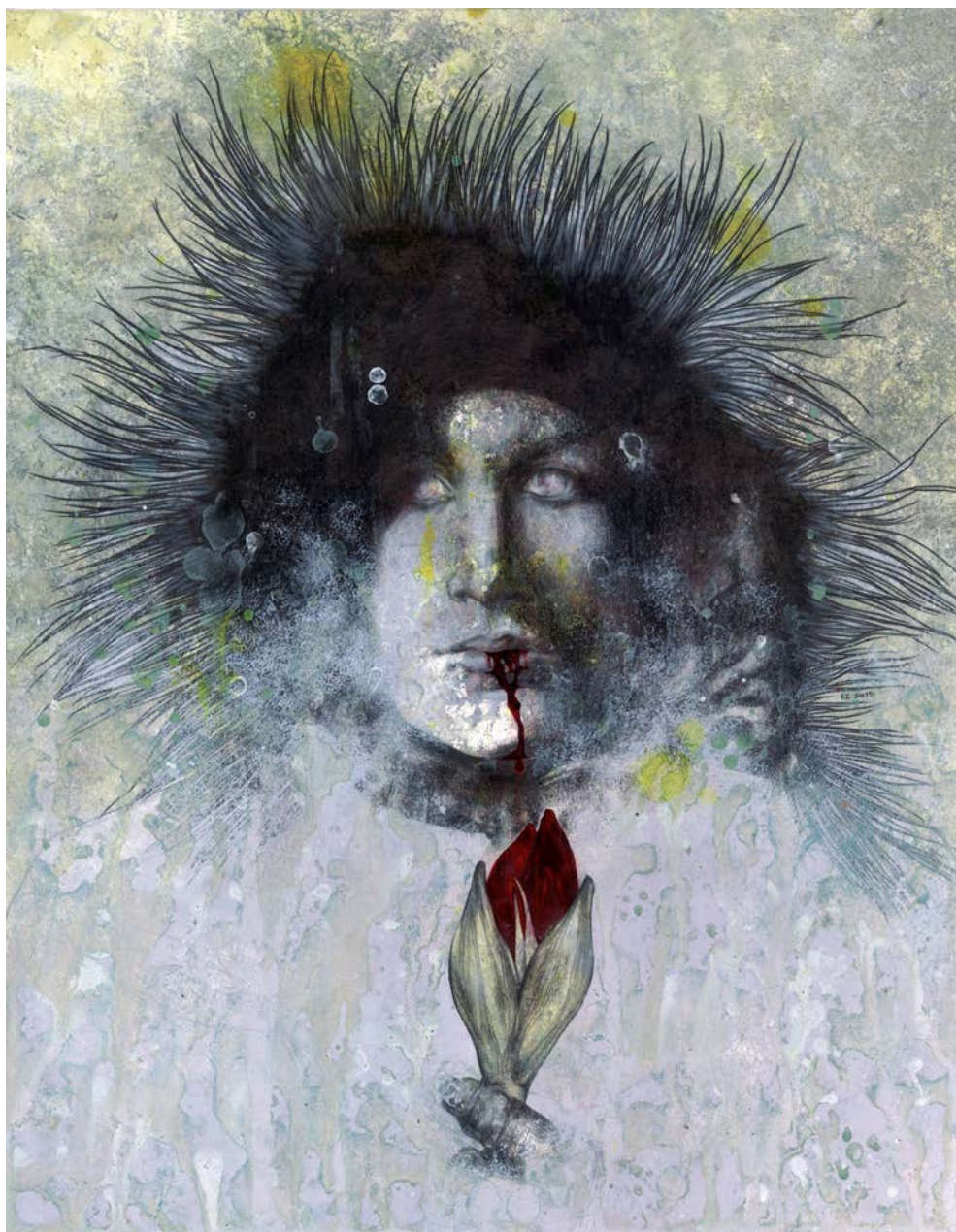
We trace grooves on walls,  
    the smooth bricks brushed  
        by thousands of hands before ours

up, we climb  
    up, and we lean into corners  
        up, until we reach the top

Her voice spills into the bell tower:  
    a sparrow released into a room —  
        a flutter then  
final disappearance

We feel heavy, we feel heavy bells  
    looming above our heads —  
the echo and clang of voices  
    rising to meet ours

From the top, we see Sevilla:  
    dotted countryside of white houses  
        a river snaking through cobblestone  
            unblemished blue sky  
  
    and her voice  
        the highest point



**SADist**  
*Graehound*