

Fall 2017

# Commonthought (2017)

Commonthought Staff

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**C O M M O N  
T H O U G H T**

**2 0 1 7**

# Commonthought

*2017*



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**A Note on Content**

It is our belief that a content warning system is a beneficial tool for keeping literature inclusive and accessible for all, and that it can be implemented in a way that works for those who need it and for those who would prefer not to see it. We have provided a key for reading warning symbols and marked selected titles with potentially triggering themes and imagery. In addition, the pieces within this magazine may contain sexual themes and adult language that are not specifically flagged.

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## Content Warning Key

- ▲ Suicide Mention    ▪ Drug/Alcohol Mention    • Visceral Language  
◆ Animal Trauma    ◆ Abuse Mention    ▼ Eating Disorder    † Death



**Untitled**

*Elisandra Lopes*

## **Misterio de los mayas**

*Olimpia Carias*

the haze of the sun  
blurs the faces  
of my dream

a moon song over  
the grass court  
while they drink  
red water

macaw balconies  
crumble, vines  
whipping in the wind  
with the far cry of  
the virgin

climbing stairway words  
till I find the  
gods of my  
sleeping mind

18 Rabbit and Akbal  
with jaded teeth  
speak,  
*¿Quién eres?*

the glow of darkness  
wakes me slow  
and I remember  
gringos from yesterday  
asking,  
*What are you?*



## Twenty

*Emmaleigh Diecidue*

I believe in an odd number of ice cubes,  
correct grammar, and  
morbid punchlines  
(because no one is good but that's okay).

I believe in over-packing for the tiniest of trips,  
pretending I'm allergic to foods I don't like,  
and using tampons with bright plastic applicators  
(no matter how wasteful it is).

I believe in keeping my heart open wide  
(but my legs open wider)  
and swallowing my gum  
(but never my pride).

I believe in sunrises  
(but not sunsets),  
30-day free trials, runny yolks,  
and umbrellas on the beach.

I believe that my ceiling fan is the perfect lullaby,  
and that Coca-Cola is eating me alive  
(but sometimes I just need something  
to bubble up inside of me).

## ancestors

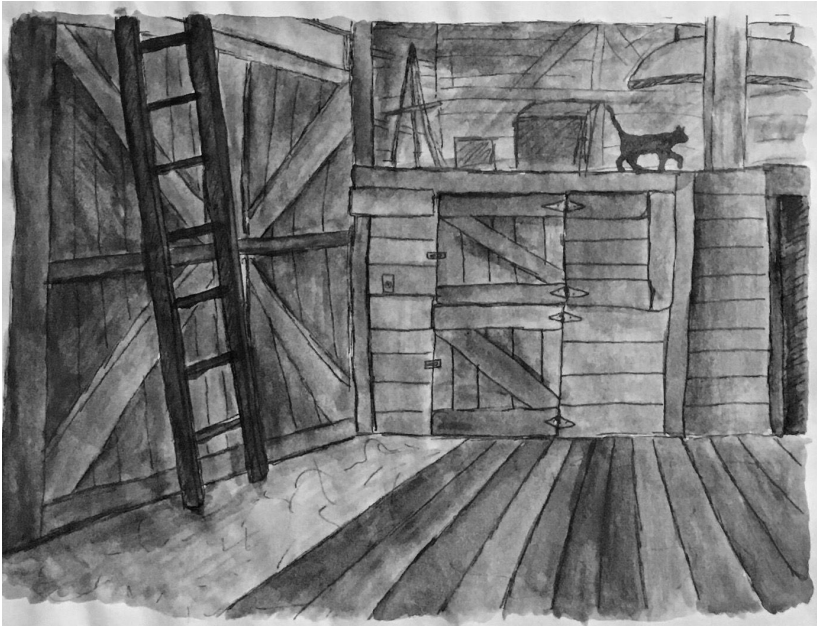


*Kelsey Chaplain*

my dad would tell me as a kid that my nana was spreading her wings, so proud to see me unapologizing, feminist a gem on his tongue as if that's where the fire stopped burning. sour milk scent in my face, curdling my teeth around the past-tense of all the woman was before me. mom would tell me the day she found nana dead, 54, empty bottles all the way down to vanilla extract. cat scratches gouged her dangling calves off the edge of the bed, and the windows were not open.

my bones buzz with heat i cannot feel until i pour all that is flammable into the cauldron of my body. muscles reluctant to pull their energy and synapses snapping fingers, begging to force the steam through me, please give purpose to all that is burning or put the fire out. did you know witches were the first brewers. syria and egypt, taught to romans and greeks, hops the recipe of commune crones. loneliness kept her productive.

cuts on my inner lips, stomach a vat infallible, fear insatiable. nana whispers from corners of the ceiling to let the heat oppress me. we feel the itch of shame on my bubbled skin, the smell of dust evacuates more slowly than the cells that keep dying. red was her color. the world i am burning up will keep being complementary.



## A Ghost Named Sammy

*Lea Nason*

At the end of an old dirt road lined with maple trees, there is a farm. The house is old, the floors groan with each step, and the towering barn is similar in that manner. Generations have grown up there, picking blueberries from the meadow and swinging from the creaky barn rafters, and more generations will do the same. While this farm is eventually where I would make my home, it was originally my gram's house and it will always feel like that.

In the dirt and stone basement, past the cans of ravioli and creamed corn, there's a tall headstone catching the light. It's always been there, it came with the house, and no one's entirely sure of how it got there. I've heard every version of the story imaginable, but the most logical explanation is that the man, Samuel Haines, died somewhere near in the neighborhood in the 1800's. They built the headstone in our basement, but it was too heavy to carry out, so they made another closer to where he ended up being buried. Most of my family is

convinced that Sammy stuck around with his original headstone, and toys with us from time to time. I believe it too.

As a kid, black cats always lurked in the corners of my vision, whether it was in the kitchen at night or in the shadows of the barn. We had three cats, and my parents would always claim that it was one of those felines giving me a scare. However, something about this animal felt different: surreal, almost. Like he wasn't really there in the material world.

Once, as a teenager, I was sneaking into the barn at night to smoke, when Sammy decided to mess with me. Since the horses had died I hadn't spent a lot of time in there, especially not after dark. I would claim that it was because I felt lonely in there, but it was partially due to my mom's self-proclaimed psychic friends telling us that there was some kind of dangerous energy. I'd seen enough spooky nighttime specials to know that you shouldn't hang around in creepy haunted barns. However, when you're fourteen and want to hide your bad habit from your parents, you sneak into the barn to smoke, regardless of who or what might join you.

Night painted a new mood onto the old wood, a greyish blue hue tinting the walls and floorboards. The silence was only broken by the quiet song that the rafters sang as the wind shifted the structure, and the steady squeak of the rope swing against wood as I kicked back and forth. Shadows danced in my peripherals. The outline of a cat would daintily pace along the edge of the loft, details lost to the black of the night.

This one night was especially quiet, and I remember waiting to hear or see something out of the ordinary. Somehow, I just knew that something was going to happen. Then, in the dead quiet, a faint whistling sound could be heard from the loft above. It's completely dark up there, the lightbulb doesn't quite reach that far into the rafters, and we only ever went up there to fix holes in the roof. The loft is piled up with boxes of old books and toys, things from when my dad and his siblings were growing up. The sound carried on, and I listened. It was the sound of a train, the whistle and blow of a train horn and the sound of an engine chugging down the tracks.

At the time, I wasn't about to stick around and wait to see what happened next, so I bolted. I told my dad about it, who merely shrugged it off. Later that week, my brother and I investigated. In the

light of day, the loft simply looks like a cluttered mess of boxes, and we spent some time digging through to the bottom of the pile. What we found was a box of model trains, a favorite hobby of my grandfather. The trains had a small sound box, that would simulate the sounds of a passing train as it strolled along the model tracks. These trains were at least sixty years old, and weren't at all in working condition. Even if they were, there was no way to access electricity up there. We packed up the toy trains, and left the loft as it was.

I saw Sammy again, a few weeks later. I was on the rope swing that hangs from the old rafters, trying to pretend that I wasn't terrified of the dark corners that the light didn't reach. The single lightbulb in the center of the barn created jagged, looming shadows on the wood. I didn't see it at first, but when I finally looked up towards the loft, I saw the shadow of a man standing with his hands on his hips. The image was somehow very clear in the dim light, and I stared at it for a few seconds before it disappeared. I put out my cigarette and ran the hell out of there. It took a while before I was able to come back.

The occurrences are few and far between, but Sammy still makes himself known every now and then. I'm still not sure if it's real, or if these are memories that I somehow fabricated in my adolescent mind. Whether it was finding my hairbrush hiding in the top of a lampshade, or seeing my closet light pop on and off again in the night, I never entirely got used to the ghostly entity that calls my home his. However, he's made it clear that he isn't going anywhere.

## Spiritual Acquiescence



*Linda Wallentine*

Father had a wonderful belly laugh. When something amused him he exploded with energy like a child on Christmas morning; laughter would erupt from his chest, shaking his entire body and jiggling the fleshy folds of his stomach. His smile boasted perfectly imperfect teeth and his blue eyes twinkled with an affection only a father could have. It was almost ten years since his unexpected passing; I still missed him and his joyous nature dearly.

“Oh my goodness, is that George Gershwin?” Mary shrieked. I took a sip of wine and focused on the flamboyant centerpiece on the table before us. I couldn’t stand her sometimes. Mary, my youngest sister, was a slender brunette with long curls that billowed about her youthful face. She had a wild look to her; a sense of hapless adolescent abandon accompanied her every step. I could never be so carefree; not anymore.

Maxine and Jean, the twins, rushed to Mary’s side and peered up at the stage. The pair were quite the anomaly in our family. With their hazel-green eyes, auburn red hair, and smattering of freckles, mother liked to call them her Irish twins. Unfortunately, many people secretly wondered if mother had fancied an Irishman during her marriage; I dismissed the idea. Mother was a virtuous woman, educated, and a devoted wife. She would never stray from father and I couldn’t stand such gossip.

Nevertheless, the vigorous spirit of my sisters was irritating beyond imagine. They still dreamt of becoming flappers and dancing the night away, which is exactly how we’d ended up at The 300 Club in the first place. With scantily-clad hoofers and flappers galore, Ms. Mary Cecilia, better known as “Texas” Guinean, hosted a pretty audacious gin mill. I already had a headache.

“Oh come on, Shirley. Don’t be a flat tire,” Mary whined. “You used to be so much fun; the bee’s knees, really.” Her persistence only aggravated me. I drank a little more and reluctantly peered up at the stage.

“You were right, it is Gershwin!” I exclaimed with fake enthusiasm. Mary’s eyes lit up. Grabbing Maxine and Jean by the hand, the trio

scurried out onto the dance floor in a chaotic frenzy. I watched them in agony.

“You look lousy,” a voice said. I turned as a young woman slid into the seat beside me. She had thick brown hair that was tucked beneath a sturdy cloth hat; a fitted skirt cinched at her waist and a drab blouse hung loosely around her shoulders. Tired, sad blue eyes locked with mine; she looked so much like him. My oldest sister; my ally against the petty dreams of fame and fortune that clouds youthful minds; my confidant and partner in burdening father’s passing; Betty. How things had changed between us.

*I remember the night clearly: it was raining and a cool breeze wafted gently through an open window. It was about six o’clock and mother had just called us down for supper. Father would be home soon. My sisters and I, bless my mother for bearing five of us, were upstairs playing dress up. Twirling about in swanky dresses and dousing one another in ritzy perfumes, we hastened to put everything back in order. We dreamed of becoming the next Lois Long and smoking cigars in New York’s bustling speakeasies. Except for Betty, of course, who—being the oldest—always perched in the corner like a mother hen.*

“Why don’t you all cover your gams and hurry up already before mother comes in?”

I rolled my eyes. “Why do you have to be such a dumb dora?” I sneered back angrily. No longer enraptured by giggling and dancing, the other girls stood dead quiet and focused on Betty and I. Surely all hell was about to break loose and they wouldn’t want to miss it. Betty folded her arms how mother would and made a repulsive clucking noise.

“I’m the stupid one! Really, Shirley?” She motioned around the room at the mess we made. “Look at what you’ve done!”

I forced myself to assess the damage. The dresser, stripped bare of garments once placed lovingly inside, looked mutilated and sad. Dresses and stockings were strewn across the bedroom in disarray. Expensive perfumes from Paris lay scattered on the floor amongst mismatched heels. I was about to retort some nasty thing when mother appeared in the doorway.

I expected her to be angry. Beyond angry, actually; maybe even horrified with our behavior. Instead, her beautiful face, which was always made up to perfection, looked miserably tired. Her eyes were puffy, her skin a strange sallow color. She handed Betty an envelope. Inside was something that

*would change our lives forever and why Betty, of all of us, was the one to read it aloud, I'll never know. She spoke silently:*

*"On returning home from work, June 15, 1920, James William Marshal was killed in an auto accident...died immediately..."*

*I didn't hear anything else she mumbled.*

*Father was dead.*

"I am lousy," I said glumly as another swanky song swept me back into reality. As we watched our sisters jive and sway on the dance floor, a young Sheba, probably in her early twenties, sauntered by us and sat on a man's lap. She wrapped her gams around his waist and whispered something to him. Betty nudged me and scoffed,

"I would rather upchuck than watch some hooper gyp a man of his clams for a dance!" Amidst the loud music of the club, a strange sound escaped me; one that rarely occurred anymore. A scratchy melody: laughter. I covered my mouth with shaky hands and trembled as wet tears cascaded down my cheeks. Betty put an arm on my shoulder—a rare show of affection—and squeezed gently.

"It's okay to laugh, Shirley." I couldn't believe her. "Father would want us to be happy... he loved to laugh with us." I sniffled and tried to compose myself. After all this time, almost ten years, I was still an emotional mess. We all were.

"I just wish I could have said goodbye," I murmured into her shoulder. It was hard to imagine a time before Betty and I were so close. Since father died, we couldn't relate to our younger sisters anymore. We knew life held a much darker reality. However, despite our commonalities Betty was still a hard-boiled woman who would rather throw a line than a sincere compliment; but I grew to understand her and a mutual respect blossomed between us.

There was a long pause before she spoke again.

"Shirley, I've been thinking a lot lately and I know you're not so keen on what I'm about to say. Just hear me out. For your sake and for all of us." I blotted my tears with a napkin. "It will be ten years tomorrow since father —"

"— I know, Betty. Don't say it," I warned. She cleared her throat.

"I'm just going to get to it then," she said nervously. "For the past year, Mother and I have been discussing trying to contact father



through a medium.” My stomach dropped and I felt queasy again. “For closure,” she added.

“It’s all a bunch of hokum,” I snapped. She removed her arm from me and crossed them in front of her; just like old times.

“How do you know? Maybe you’re just afraid!” She seethed quietly and whispered, “Celebrities and people just like us, all over the damn world, are doing this Shirley. And why not just try so we can all know he’s in a better place?”

A waiter walked by with a tray of drinks; I swiped one and took a shot of the unknown liquor. It burned terribly. I have never been a believer in spiritualism. In fact, I’m rather in awe of people like Harry Houdini, who go around debunking mediums. However, in the back of my mind I wondered what little happiness they might glean from this ridiculous practice. If it would bring them even just a glimmer of hope...

Betty stared at me—not with anger—but sadness. Just like how mother looked that night: anguished and defeated.

Shaking my head, I took Betty’s hand in mine and squeezed.

The night of June 15th, 1930, was eerily familiar. The roads were bathed in moonlight and a light rain fell over the city. Everyone had gathered in the drawing room and waited silently. It was five thirty and with every passing minute, I wondered if I was the only one getting apprehensive. A second later: a knock. Mother let out a gentle breath, straightened her skirt, and headed for the door. She opened it.

“Mrs. Crandon, welcome!” Mother exclaimed as if she was greeting a long time friend. I guess that’s what hope does to people. Mrs. Crandon, a middle aged woman in a long black dress and loose pearls, smiled a surprisingly pleasant grin.

“Lovely to meet you, Mrs. Marshal.” She said as she stepped inside. She dragged a rather large suitcase behind her. “And your children,” she added. I watched her carefully. Her long hair was brushed into a loose bun at the base of her neck and untidy wisps of brown hair flew about her face. Her eyes, although an inviting shade of brown, seemed to radiate a degree of lunacy. I could immediately tell she was not a woman of the Bible Belt. If she was, she certainly didn’t exude the qualities of a fundamentalist. As she walked about the house, I was already having doubts.

“If you don’t mind,” Mrs. Crandon said abruptly. “I would like to start preparing for the seance.” Mother nodded and we watched as she carefully laid down her suitcase. In deafening silence, she unzipped her bag and slowly pulled out various sized slabs of wood. She assembled them quickly until a small table was in the center of the room. She spoke quietly, “Please form a circle of chairs around the table so you can easily hold each other’s hands.”

As we moved our seats to her liking, she drew every curtain closed so only a dim light filtered into the room. Without warning, she lit a single candle which illumined her face. She no longer looked so friendly and an eerie draft tickled my ankles. I tried to see Betty or mother, but I felt completely alone in the darkness.

“Now then,” Mrs. Crandon began. “Everyone hold hands, please. I’ll advise you before we start that anything and everything is possible during a seance. Remain calm and quiet. Above all,” she paused, seeming to lock eyes with me. Maybe she knew I had suspicions. That I thought all of this was baloney. I swallowed nervously. “Hopefully you will find closure with your loved one.”

I felt a timid hand grasp mine and I squeezed it gently. We waited. The silence that ensued was overwhelming. I found my thoughts drifting to a different time; when the air was warm and the sun shone brightly amidst a cloudless sky. I closed my eyes.

*He called us his little lovelies. Every summer, we danced about under a big oak tree, seeking shelter from the hot sun. Soft grass tickled our bare feet and little ants scattered beneath us, scurrying back to the safety of their dirt homes.*

*“Do you believe in ghosts, father?” I asked. Taking a seat on one of the oaks’ giant roots, he smiled and hoisted me up onto his knee. I looked into his blue eyes and snuggled against the softness of his shirt.*

*“I don’t think so,” he said.*

*“Why not?” I asked. He took my hand in his and looked out into the grassy field where the rest of the girls frolicked and giggled. Mother sat at a distance, elegantly fanning herself beneath the precarious shade of a white bonnet. She gazed at father and a small smile spread across her lips. Father winked at her and she laughed. He looked down at me, seeming lost in*

*thought; what do you tell a child about death? I felt my heart racing, waiting for him to speak. I was afraid all of a sudden.*

*“My little, Shirley,” he said looking at me peering up at him, as if he were God. “I like to think when we die, we leave our bodies and the earth behind and rise up into the sky. That we’re carried through the air, higher and higher, maybe on a summer breeze — ” he gestured around him and the great oak rustled with a sudden gust of wind. I gasped in wonderment.*

*“— and we end up somewhere amongst the sun, the moon, and the stars. And then,” he paused, gazing at me with a hint of sadness in his eyes; as if he’d suddenly realized one day he too would land amongst the stars. “When we’ve reached the highest point, we find a nice spot to settle down and watch over our lovelies.”*

“Is there anyone here?” Mrs. Crandon's whispering voice brought me back into the cold darkness. “Give us a sign.” Her words echoed off the silent walls. “Give us a sign.”

Head pounding, my palms began to sweat. All at once the air grew heavy and it was difficult to breathe. In the dim light, Mrs. Crandon's lips moved furiously in prayer. She started to shake and sway back and forth. Her possessed eyes still locked with mine; the candle light flickered about her ghostly facade. And then, when I could no longer watch her spastic seizures for fear of the devil, a gentle knocking began.

Knock, knock, knock.

“A sign!” She crowed. I nearly jumped out of my skin. The knocking stopped abruptly and again we were in silence. How would we know if that was father?

“Answer me spirit...” Her voice wavered like the air we breathed. “Are you the father of this loving family? One knock for no, two knocks yes.” I took a deep breath. If he responded, could I believe it was him? Could I disillusion myself in to believing this crazed woman just for the sake of closure?

Knock. Knock. Yes.

It isn't possible. It can't be real.

“A sign!” she exclaimed again. “Oh spirit! Are you in any pain?”

Knock. No.

“Are you with your family, watching them, protecting them every day?”

Knock. Knock. Yes.

She continued to ask questions that mother previously suggested over the phone, but I further fell into a state of disbelief. I kept thinking about Houdini and how he would gaze upon mediums with eyes of scrutiny. Disguised as a gatecrasher, he would often debunk people on the scene and prove how they performed their trickery. Unconvinced that father would reach out to us through Mrs. Crandon, I imagined I was Houdini himself. I slowed everything down in my mind; her mumbling prayers and violent tremors seemed out of character for father. He was a gentle, peaceful man and if Mrs. Crandon could really channel his spirit—even in spite of father’s own dispelling of ghosts—I imagine she would dance freely like he did with us beneath our oak tree. That was my father; not this crazed lunatic wreathing upon our furniture.

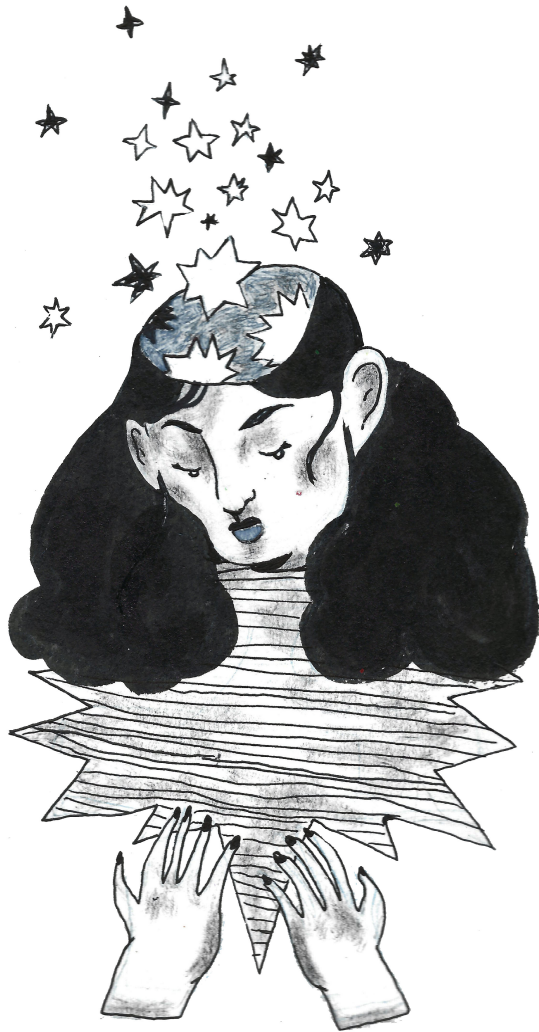
As I analyzed her every movement—every sound that escaped her frantic lips—I finally realized a key element to her charade: the knocking. At each knock I felt a tremor beneath the table. It would seem that her case of the shakes was possibly an ingenious distraction. Her own feet were probably banging on the table beneath us, claiming to be father!

How could she be so low? To snake beneath God and Heaven, giving people like my family false hope, was devils’ work. Yet, amidst my disturbing discovery I concluded maybe Mrs. Crandon didn’t mean harm. She was still wrong, of course, yet maybe a lie was what we needed to move forward in our lives.

I’d never thought much of it, but maybe father had lied? Beneath our great oak tree, I never once questioned his poetic notion of death and even as I entered adulthood, I still clung to his words. I chose to believe him and was never swayed by the spiritual fads of the changing times. If only he could see us now; seated around a tiny table, holding hands, desperately listening to a mad woman stutter and moan to the high heavens. All of this madness in the hopes of finding comfort though an elaborate spectacle of allusion.

I looked around at the faces I loved; all of them seemed enraptured by the spell Mrs. Crandon had so masterfully created, and I took a deep breath. Letting the air escape me, my shoulders relaxed. I squeezed the soft hand in mine and a sense of calm washed over me. Despite everything I believed, I concluded maybe lies are what keep us going in the first place.

I told no one of my discovery. Father would have wanted it that way; for his lovelies.



**the everything the nothing**

*Danielle Maio*

## GHOSTS



*Annemarie Jonsson*

I sit behind an unkempt hedge—  
sweaty knees kissing pebbles until my skin  
is bruised—waiting.

We are in a game of ghosts in the graveyard,  
and Peter says he'll "be right back"  
almost an hour ago.

Staring at a pile of sunburnt dog shit,  
peeling white like the skin on my shoulders,  
I think I hear the distant linger of my own name—  
but I can't remember when I stand up to look—  
just the dirt that clings to my numbing knees,  
the sweat in my sneakers squelching on an empty lawn.

The door opens and his mother answers,  
saggy skin and purple under the eyes—  
I can't remember ever knocking—  
just the wood that splinters my knuckles,  
the scent of a cigarette  
smoking in a tray behind her.

"Peter had an accident. He'll be out soon."  
The door shuts in my face.  
I wait in the driveway,  
but he never joins me.

If there are ghosts here, I know they'd tell me what I can't see,  
but their silence tells me to turn around and forget.  
I can't remember when I decide to agree.

I ride my bike to the end of the cul-de-sac that night,  
I move so fast my feet weld to the purple pedal.

## **heat**

*Zofia Provizer*

My dog watches her  
paper skinned mother who is alone  
in the cimmerician-living-room. She sits  
grey-haired and on her hands, tendons in her neck  
straining against the skin as she falls asleep.

I am trying to change  
the lightbulb on the ceiling.  
I am trying to make sure  
the dog does not pee  
on the carpet.

I watch her from the  
third rung. She watches  
my mother. Her tongue  
drips from between  
her teeth.



## **From Down Here**

*Sophia Lynch*

I resumed looking out for stars  
after coming back from Mexico,  
as promised, and without dying.  
I'd stood under the arch  
and not kissed you.  
I'd given you sugar cane,  
told you it was safe to eat.  
"Chew on the end,  
suck the sap down."  
I'd seen your hidden away thighs  
and thought I might churn, unravel  
and dizzy scatter across the black.  
It was the next winter when  
that old scarecrow Orion and I  
locked eyes over your shoulder.

English tongues have told me  
that there is a plough in the sky  
in the place reserved for a spoon.  
I catch stars one at a time,  
once in a blue moon  
once that blue moon sets, thank them  
for things they've never touched.  
Holy shadow puppets,  
child-grown divinities in a lantern march  
puncture my earthly sense,  
and holler, "Helpless God and Heaven,  
Ploughman and Atoms all together!"

## Grace

*Olivia MacDonald*

The bird rests cider-brined and glazed  
in a roasted brown sugar skin.  
A saucer of warm juices awaits pouring  
atop the buttery fluff of potato.  
Ripe cranberry nectar pools  
beside sweet morsels of corn.  
Dribbles of spit on their knit sweaters.

Eyes devour the harvest of color  
flowing down the gold table runner  
to my fork and knife.  
The empty plates will soon be full.  
Then empty again—

*We must first say grace.*

Empty as the hands cupping a craving,  
the frail little girl crouched  
on the other side of the table,  
in the fields taken by the drought.  
Her deep blue eyes trail tears  
in the withered corn stalks.  
She prays for just a crumb of crust,  
for just a shower of grace  
to flood this barren land.

# The Day The Parson Died



*Chris Flisher*

Deep in January in the northeast hills of Connecticut, the weather gets so cold it burns. The Arctic blast moves down from Canada like a giant oozing slime, painting its way across the weather maps of the northern hemisphere while the wind chill sinks to temperatures of sub-human tolerance. The desire to keep warm judiciously drives away the will to be healthy in everyone, but the parson.

Feeling flush from a check-up the day before, the parson decided to heed his doctor's advice to loose some weight and get some shape. Well on his way to his 69th birthday, the parson thought that it was his unyielding faith that bought him his time, or possibly his unfaltering confidence, or maybe just the blessing from the doctor who gave him the clean bill the day before. Either way it was an enduring drive, a need to impulsively react, a desire to see a chance and grab it that pushed him out into the climatic fray.

The parson pulled up his boots, wrapped a scarf around his white-collared neck, yanked on a beret, and fingered his woolen gloves. He stepped out into the Arctic grip and before the sun washed away the haze of dawn, the parson was quickly moving. Steam and wood smoke rose from chimneys, rooftops and dryer vents.

*“Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...”*

“Briskly walk,” said the doctor. So briskly walk he did without a care for temperature or physical reserve. Marching down the street, with the stride of a soldier, the parson fire-and-brimstoned his way around the block. His was not an evil walk, veiled in authority; just forceful, determined, resigned, religious.

*“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven...”*

With broad, pumping strides, his arms and tired muscles toiled against the heavy fabric of the wool greatcoat. The parson moved with a rhythmic fluidity that was musical, graceful, fanatical. He grunted and pushed, anxious to feel pain, to take the punishment for a body too long overlooked. The pork roasts, the hams, the eggs and gravies, the candied yams were evaporating wishfully through sheer will with each step he took on the crispy, creamy, fluffy snow. Cold breath wrapped his head in a mist while the crunch, crunch, crunch of the parson's steps

fell into mechanical cadence as he moved through the quiet streets alone with his weight.

*“Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...”*

To live his life over he would do no different. Again, there would be the church, the colorful and heavy vestments, the stiff collars and suits of black, the determined, little wife, and, of course, the children.

The parson moved around the block with a vigor he reserved for sermons and parishioners, his flock and his word. Turning the corner he quickened his pace. The parson was hungry and breakfast was waiting, plentiful and warm. The walking was right and eased some guilt, but a tightness in his arm threw him, gnawing through the dense fabric. “Best slow down,” he panted.

Dragging his feet through unplowed snow, the parson walked toward the driveway, the doorway, and the dining room table. Unwrapping his coat, scarf and beret, he moved down the hall. The aching throb continued and pounded with an erratic surge and filled his eyes with tears. The burning crept slowly through his arm, chest, and stalled at his throat.

He whimpered, “I love you, dearest.”

Suddenly, a pain too great to ignore lunged through his veins and slammed down his chest, searing through his arms, radiating out to his fingertips. His breath came quick and faint.

*“Deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory...”*

“Dear God,” he fell to the floor, his heart in revolt, losing to a devil called pain. The parson’s eyes flickered, closed. Blood trickled down a ripple of his chin.

The cold snap continued and the hard soil was too hard to break. Church bells rang, calling faithful to their pews while the widow pawed through vestments and collars, looking for a light that never shone again.

*“For ever and ever...Amen.”*

## **A letter from Icarus to the Sun**

**(A letter from me to you, using a thinly veiled metaphor)**

*Emma Brousseau*

All odds point  
to it not working.  
My wings weren't built to withstand you.  
But they feel so strong  
and your pull is so inviting,  
all bright, all warmth.  
I fly in lazy circles around you,  
just far enough  
to keep the burn at bay.  
I push my luck sometimes,  
fly a little closer  
until I feel the warmth turn my wings hot,  
the faintest smell of smoke.

You seem comfortable with my circles  
so long as they don't get too close.  
You keep a respectable distance  
but I wonder if you ever imagine  
our collision,  
fantasize about what could happen if it went right.

I'm going to fly into you  
sooner or later.  
It feels like some predestined fate,  
star-crossed star crossing to get to your flame.  
I am too enamored with you  
and all you promise.  
I can't stay at bay for long,  
I wasn't meant to.  
Somewhere inside me,  
I think you want it too:  
the light, the fire,  
and us

## **September**

*Jackie Gold*

Under the willow tree,  
She weeps  
as cheerful crickets play  
their dog days tune,  
yet Summer  
had already sung.

## **Urban Puddle**

*Michael Coleman*

Gray cardboard islands  
Float lazily aboard  
Black and white ripples  
as powerlines buzz in the heat  
Angry feathers are heard  
but seldom seen.

## **butchery in a tiny bundle**

*Olimpia Carias*

●

little devil delia  
tied her eyes together  
wanting to see  
everything she shouldn't.  
your veins ripped open  
and a slack jaw,  
she liked you better like this.  
red meat bleeding  
slow. a hollow  
throat, dry tongue  
served on a bun.  
she washed her  
cherry fingers and  
sat beside you  
with a fork and knife.  
dig in,  
little devil delia.



## Thiago, The Drug Trafficker

*Flavianny Kelle Silva Rabelo*



A mouse shaped man running the family business.  
Your left arm is covered with hearts of the women who left you  
and your ribcage is an excerpt from the Myth of Sisyphus.  
A tiny little man with a sweet tooth,  
who owes the government at least four more years.

We got engaged by convenience.  
We got married in a jail cell that reeked of porronco.  
That was three months ago, where is all of that drug money?  
Where are my Fabergé eggs?  
Where is my penthouse with a beach front?  
Thiago, you have a brain like Warren Buffet and the empathy of a  
thunderstorm

In conversations about international cinematography  
you laughed while telling your plans for the future,  
When you'll kill your cellmate with a broomstick  
because you got friends in high security  
And they got away with chopping men up and hiding  
corpses in walls.

Thiago, Thiaguinho  
Born to make mansions out of jail cells.  
Your mother was a zombie, your dad a ghost  
What kind of abomination does that make you?  
You're scum and you adore it.  
Clean yourself, pull up your pants.  
The guards will be here soon.



**Black Moon**  
*Noah Grigni*

## When I Was a Passenger



*Diane Griffin*

We were nomads. My family packed up all of our belongings into a van or a station wagon and the trunk and back seats of a second family car many times, to travel along the cross of I-25 and US 50, over the mountains to Arizona, all the way across the country to Maine, or even just a couple of towns over: each time a new start, and another, and then another. We sometimes thought of ourselves as Okies in reverse. We began as a family in southern California, then rolled around in the dust bowl. Most of my childhood was spent in southern Colorado on the eastern slope; the wide expanses of grey steppe that begin in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains and run a thousand miles and more to the north, east, and south. Even there, we lived in many different places. I've counted; all of the schools I attended from kindergarten through twelfth grade average out to a one-to-one ratio: thirteen schools in thirteen years.

I remember finishing fifth grade in Cañon City, then moving to Denver at the end of the school year, only to move to the little town of Fowler at the end of the summer. When my dad's business failed at the end of my seventh-grade year, we moved into a rundown shack and a hastily-purchased house trailer, twelve miles away in Crowley, the even smaller town my mother had grown up in. We lived there for a year. After that, Mom, who started working for the civil service when Dad's business began to falter, became the cause of our moves. First to Pueblo, then, when she got accepted into the Border Patrol and later the Immigration Service, to Yuma, Arizona, and then to Calais, Maine. Finally, we went back to Yuma, where she was a supervisor at the San Luis point of entry.

In my own lack of focus, I see my father's influence. Dad was mercurial, whimsical, prone to fascinations and profanity-laden tantrums. Yet he never held a grudge. He had a goofy, skewed sense of humor.

Once, my Grandma Matthews returned from a beauty appointment, coming up the steps to the porch to find Dad, Mom, my brother Michael and myself sitting with Grandpa. She gave my Dad a dirty look, and he perked up.

“Hey,” he said, accusingly. “Where have *you* been?”

Her tone supercilious, Grandma replied, “I’ve been to the hairdresser’s.”

“Oh,” Dad said, suddenly sympathetic. “Didn’t get waited on, did you?”

Most of my mom's family adored him. I did, too. When I was little, I thought he was perfect: the funniest and smartest man ever. As I got older, I saw us both more clearly. We went through rough patches, but I loved him intensely. I sometimes think that he saw me more truly than anyone else, but it could simply be that he accepted his offspring just as we were.

Mark, the youngest of us, was frail, though through his interests and inclinations, he was the most athletic of us. Mark was accident prone as a toddler, so worry and compassion fueled much agitation on my father’s part. Anything that happened to him upset my Dad terribly. Mark would have to be taken to the emergency room for any cut he got, which happened often enough that my parents had to defend themselves against suspicions that they were abusing him. They weren't.

He was later diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a congenital condition that caused every tissue in his body to be hyper-elastic. He'd bump into something and get a little cut, then the wound would spread wider and need stitches. Because they often occurred when we were playing, I saw most of his injuries happen. He really did run into doors and trip over himself, or bang into something that he never would have if he were watching where he went. He was just an active little boy. He was trim and lithe, and loved to run: a beautiful little towhead with angelic blue eyes. He was imaginative and hilarious: a natural physical comic. Dad felt profound sympathy for him, and we all thought that Mark was the most like him of all of us.

Michael, older than Mark and younger than me, was more sociable and well-adjusted than either Mark or myself. It has been easy for me to gloss over his story as a member of our family, at times, because he was generally less trouble than either of his siblings. He got good grades in school, found it easier to make friends than I did, and had the favor of the grandmother who hated Dad and seemed not to care for me either.

Even in his most blustery state, Dad never became violent with us. He was never physical at all beyond the very occasional swat on the butt or spanking with a belt. Once, Michael and I were walking down

the street to go play in an empty field a block from our house. We'd been told it was OK to do this, but Mark had been told that he couldn't, because he was tiny and because he would almost certainly find a way to get himself hurt.

Of course, as soon as we left the house, little Mark came dashing after us. We were almost to the vacant lot as Mark came dashing down the street, Dad chasing him, yelling for Mark to stop and go back to the house. Michael and I had stopped, turning to yell at Mark to go home. Mark was listening to none of us. He kept running. He was going to play with us no matter what.

As he ran, Dad was pulling the belt from his waist. Rolling it up in a loop with the buckle last, Dad grasped the buckle end and then let the belt fly out like a snake. He was almost close enough to catch Mark, but he would probably have had to run a bit farther. The belt closed the gap, and the tip snapped against Mark's behind as he toddler-waddled after us.

Dad's belt connected with Mark's little butt as he ran. Surprised, Mark let a loud burp escape. Suddenly, everyone was laughing, including Dad, who had been angrily intent on catching the defiant 3-year-old a moment before. Mark tripped and fell, but was up immediately. Dad took his hand and led him back to the house. He had a story to tell Mom. We continued on to the lot to explore and play among the weeds.

We never doubted that Dad loved us very much. Still, his cursing apoplexies intimidated us, and by their nature they would happen at the worst times. Dad's temper tantrums were only rarely directed at people: much more often at things and situations. They came when he felt frustrated, afraid, or out-of-control. I've witnessed temper tantrums directed at rusted bolts he couldn't get loose, Jimmy Carter through the TV set, and bands I liked that he thought didn't make music – just “God damned, no-talent, asinine racket.”

There was a musicality to his cursing; reminding me, in retrospect, of a cross between Fred Flintstone and Johnny Rotten (whom he hated). He liked to twist and turn the name “Jesus Christ.” He often added the middle initial H, which is standard stuff, but he would embellish it, when amazed or moderately frustrated, into “Jesus H Kee-O-Rist.” He tended to refer to a certain brand of automobile that he didn't care for as a “Christer”. In full-bore rant mode, that surname

would drift into other parts of speech, such as the gerund form "Christing." His casual blasphemy did not endear him to our very Baptist grandmother, his mother-in-law, but then, she despised him anyway.

His fascinations often became family projects. He built a couple of cars for drag racing. On summer breaks, we went on weekend trips to meets in other parts of the state, often camping out in the back of our Greenbriar van. He went hunting one year and we ate venison through the winter. My brothers and I each had bb guns and then .22 rifles and took a safety course from the NRA.

There was the year we all thought we were going to immigrate to Australia., until someone we knew who had lived there for a time explained about poisonous spiders and claimed that the place was technologically backward, that some people used washing machines that had wringers and others still used washboards to do their laundry. There was a constant stream of car projects; in addition to drag racing there was the Studebaker collection, rebuilding wrecks for resale, and restoring Model Ts.

Many of my childhood memories are of road trips: stopping in campgrounds, parking at little roadside spots in the mountains on our way to California to visit Dad's family, driving straight through to visit my mother's brother Clyde and sister-in-law Wanda – my favorite cousin Becky's family – in Texas.

Once, we were in the new Galaxie 500 station wagon my parents had bought, going from Cañon City to Pueblo to attend the state fair. We drove up US 50, which was a two-lane highway in those days. There was a lot of traffic on a summer Saturday afternoon. Someone pulled out to pass the long line of cars, and as we approached a rise, that driver could not find a space to get back into our lane, so Dad pulled off the road to let them back in. We hit a couple of good stiff bumps before we got back on the road. Over the top of the rise, when we got back up to speed, the tie rod snapped, allowing the front wheels to move independently of each other and making it impossible to steer the car. We went sideways at 70 miles an hour in the rain. The car slid off the highway, flipping over. We landed upside down in a ditch.

I had the most serious injury: a very black eye for the next two weeks. Nobody else got worse than scratches from the broken glass strewn across the ceiling of the car as we all climbed out; we'd all had

our seatbelts buckled. Still, we were pretty shaken up. Through all of this, Dad didn't yell, either during the accident or after. Was it because of the seriousness of the situation?

His calm seems strange in context, because the car was where his more hyperbolic fits of temper happened most. Possibly they seemed like bigger deals to us, his captive audience, in the close quarters of the family sedan or station wagon or whatever project car he was test-driving at the time. Once, we went to a drag meet at the Erie, Colorado airport, situated between Denver and Boulder. We'd taken a wrong turn and were headed out into the open prairie, in danger of arriving too late to qualify for the elimination rounds.

"Where the God damned hell are we?" He leaned over the steering wheel, scanning the brown, empty landscape. It certainly didn't feel like we were headed towards a drag meet. There were no other cars on the two-lane blacktop, and nothing ahead of us but flatness.

"Where the FUCK is this place?" he cursed as he leaned back.

"Are we headed towards Stapleton?" I asked, thinking of the Denver airport, which was in the general direction we were going, north and east of town. I'd seen it named on a road sign a few miles back, and thought we might end up there eventually, though we seemed to be headed off into the limbo of the Colorado plains.

"No, I don't think so," Mom said, in her usual role as our navigator, poring over the map in her lap.

"I don't want to end up in fucking Chicago God damn Illinois!" He waved his arms in emphasis, letting go of the steering wheel. The car drifted towards the other side of the highway.

Mom raised her voice. "Ted, watch where you're going!" He jerked the wheel, getting us headed down the road at just before we went off the left-hand shoulder.

"Will you look at this son-of-a-bitching, Christly map and figure out where the fuck we are?" He grabbed the road map as though he wanted to examine it himself, then threw it back in my mother's lap.

"GOD FUCKING DAMN IT!" All four of us cowered in silence, wishing we would just get where we were going. The minute we found our way, which we always did, the storm clouds of his anger cleared immediately. That day our little B/Altered roadster made it to the finals of its elimination bracket, coming in second, which was an unusually good result for us.

We drag raced when I was in elementary school. At the end of fifth grade, my parents both took jobs up in Denver. Dad quit his job at the Ford dealership and went looking for something and someplace new. My brothers and I finished out the school year in Cañon City, staying with our Uncle Merle and Aunt Edna and our cousins during the week while my parents worked up in Denver and found us a place to live. We spent the summer in the suburb of Littleton, then moved to Fowler where Dad ran the auto body business and gas station that eventually failed, our family's ultimate financial disaster. We moved to Pueblo at the beginning of the new school year, my first year of high school.

That spring, Dad and Mom signed up for lessons at a flight school at the Pueblo airport. By the time Dad had gotten his private pilot's license, we lived at the airport, in a u-shaped court of small, run-down apartments about a block from where the Rabatins, George and his son Buzz (George, Jr.), had their flight school and Piper Aircraft dealership. Mom never completed her training or got her license, but she had her solo ticket, so she could fly alone, or with passengers as long as there was a licensed pilot in the other front seat. On family trips, she fell back into her role as navigator.

The move to the airport necessitated another change of schools for my brothers and me. Except for the social scene around the Rabatins' flight school and the associated chapter of the Civil Air Patrol, my parents' party crowd as much as anything, the airport was a desolate place to live. There was a small restaurant in the tiny terminal, and a gift shop. A few hangars and other private aircraft dealers dotted the pavement along the runway. To the north and east, there was only what the explorer Zebulon Pike called "The Great American Desert," endless grasslands, sere and brown.

The airport grounds were a half-mile from the highway; the intervening ground was a field of dried grass broken up by a grid of dirt roads, and beyond that, the Santa Fe Railroad. Our little apartment complex was the only living space on the airport grounds.

I became fascinated with flying and started hanging out at the flight school, hitching rides on lessons or people's flights for pleasure around the area. I loved the up-high perspective on the land around Pueblo, the vast expanses of brown grassland, the green-and-gold blanket of farm fields, and the gridded anthill of Pueblo laid out below me. I liked the little dropping sensation in the pit of my stomach as the plane lifted off



of the runway. Most of all, I loved escaping from the ground and my lonely life. I'd go for a ride with one or another of the regulars at the Rabatins' pretty much any chance I got. It was quality time with someone outside my family, mostly professional men who could afford to fly. I wanted to learn to fly myself when I got a little older, so I started asking if I could go along on flying lessons, and was occasionally allowed to.

After I'd done this for a while, I was allowed to go on a lesson with someone who was working towards his instrument flying certification. The student pilot sat in the pilot's seat with a huge plastic-hooded visor on his head to block out anything he might see except for the instrument panel. Jerry Childers, one of the flight instructors at the school, sat in the co-pilot's seat. He told the student to close his eyes. Jerry then gyrated the plane around wildly to disorient the student pilot, repeatedly stopping when we were in what he called an "unusual attitude." The plane would be banked at an odd angle, pointed at the sky or the ground, sometimes stalled, sometimes set up so that the plane was about to stall. Then he told the student to open his eyes and get the plane righted and flying level, using only the instruments.

It was, as intended, disorienting. I got scared. I tried to sit quietly in the back seat, but I groaned loud enough to be heard in the front seat of the plane. Jerry said, "Sorry, I can't cut the lesson short. We're on the clock, this time is paid for." I would have to sit tight until the lesson was over. I told him that I understood, and tried harder to be unobtrusive. I have never been motion sick, not even in this situation, but the sixty-minute lesson seemed interminable.

When we arrived back at the flight school, I wobbled back through the lobby, out the front door, and across the lot to the back door of our apartment. I decided I was done going on flying lessons. It was probably just as well. I don't think that I'd have been allowed on another one.

I was still interested in flying, though. I thought maybe, over time, I'd lose my anxiety and fear. If I kept at it, maybe I'd stop imagining myself hurtling towards the ground from thousands of feet above, sometimes inside a plane, sometimes with no plane around me. I had these thoughts every time I flew, like a waking nightmare.

Part of the process of earning a private pilot's license was to complete ground school, where a pilot learned the theory of flight,

some applied math, navigation, and meteorology. Buzz Rabatin was the main ground school instructor. I never attended any of the classes, as you had to pay for that privilege, but I often found myself listening in on conversations related to what was taught in that course while hanging around at the flight school.

Sometimes I heard Dad trading horror stories with Buzz, who was dark, trim, and mysterious, with black hair and eyes. I thought he looked like a Russian spy. Dad would hear stories from other pilots and ask Buzz about them. One of the scariest things the pilots talked about was CAT, or clear air turbulence. The type of CAT they all came back to in these stories, as private pilots in Colorado, was something called a mountain wave.

When the atmosphere heats up, it gets more active. There are faster updrafts, downdrafts, and wind shears, which are caused by the air going one direction right next to a place where the air is going a different direction or at a dramatically different speed. A strong enough wind shear can take a plane apart. On a windy, hot day, as air circulates over mountains — especially high, dramatic mountains like the Frontal Range of the Colorado Rockies, the air will follow the contours of the ground below, exaggerating those contours and producing updrafts and downdrafts with wind speeds of up to two thousand feet per minute.

Even after my notorious instrument lesson ride, there were still pilots who were glad to take me along on flights for company. Frank McConnell, a doctor and one of my parents' friends, took me along on a flight over the Rockies on a hot day. Flying over Greenhorn Pass on the other side of Westcliff, Frank and I found one of those mountain waves. Approaching the pass, we hit a downdraft that produced a sinking feeling and then a jarring bottoming-out thump more pronounced than anything I'd ever felt in the air. Recognizing that this was a downdraft on the approach to the pass, it was pretty easy to surmise that there was a patch of very rough air ahead.

Frank said, "I don't think we'll try the pass today," and immediately banked hard left. Still in the bank, we hit a hard updraft. This steepened the bank so that the plane's wingspan was perpendicular to the ground, the plane's nose pointed down in one of those "unusual attitudes." Frank very calmly recovered and got us back to the airport and safely on the ground. I was in tears, and that was the very last time

I hitched a ride in a small plane. I was cured of my infatuation with flight.

One summer Sunday afternoon, we were returning home by car from a trip to visit my Grandpa and Grandma Matthews in Crowley, an hour away. Right at sunset, we were approaching the turnoff to the airport, and a small plane flew over us, very low to the ground. It crossed directly in front of us going left to right, lining up with the runway that ran parallel to the road on the other side of the railroad tracks.

"They seem like they're flying awfully low," I said.

"No," my mom said. "They're just on approach."

Nobody else paid much attention, but I kept watching. I was on the right side of the car in the back seat. About a mile short of the runway, I saw them disappear behind the slight rise of the tracks.

"I think that plane just crashed," I said.

We came to the turnoff and drove onto the airport grounds. There was silence in the car. We went straight to the flight school, because we were meeting three plane-fuls of friends who were returning from a day trip.

Our friends the Chantals walked in through the airfield door almost simultaneously with our entrance from the parking lot.

"Dave!" I said to their father. "I think I saw a plane crash!" He just looked at me, then walked right out the door into the parking lot without saying anything. His wife Donna and their two daughters, Tracey and Tammy, came through the door from the hangar lot next, crying.

I'd witnessed a terrible accident that killed a family of four. Just a couple of days earlier my brothers and I had been playing in the lobby of the flight school with the boy and girl, named Bobby and Lisa. I later overheard an airport worker saying they found Lisa's body strapped into the back seat, one arm holding her doll so tightly they couldn't pry it out of her grip, her other arm ripped from its socket.

One of my parents' rationales for taking up flying was that family trips could be shorter and easier. West Texas, where my favorite cousin, Becky Jane, lived, was a hard eight-hour drive away, but flying there was quick enough to make a day trip possible and practical. Trips to southern California, a two-day drive, could be reduced to half a day.

We could visit my dad's side of the family over a three-day weekend instead of having to block out a two-week vacation to make the trip worth considering. The drives to either place were exhausting, and Dad's ugly temper was likely to pop up more than once in each direction.

I remember a Christmas trip to California, going over the same range of mountains I had flown over with Frank McConnell. At dawn on Christmas morning, the air even over the mountains was like a mirrored lake, not a ripple to be felt anywhere. We had lifted into the sky at the first hint of daylight and the eerie calm and the rosy dawn colors against fresh snow created one of the most memorable vistas I have ever seen. Every few minutes it renewed itself as we flew over each successive mountain ridge.

Making the trip over a 4th of July weekend was a very different experience. We'd hoped to get in the air early enough to avoid the heat and the worst of the turbulence, but we'd been delayed for an hour or two for reasons I can't remember now, but possibly having to do with our being a family of five with three pre-teen to early-teen kids. We'd gotten pretty far over the mountains and out into the high desert of southern New Mexico by nearly noon. The thunderheads were mushrooming around us and the air was getting rough.

"We need to land pretty soon," Dad said. "We need to gas up and if I don't get to stretch my legs, they're going to start cramping up." I knew that you control the rudder of a plane with foot pedals. I suddenly, urgently wanted us to land.

"How long to Deming?" I asked from the back seat. Deming, New Mexico was our lunch and refueling stop, according to our flight plan.

"Probably about twenty minutes," Mom said.

I thought, *I can stand another twenty minutes of this*. Almost immediately I had to question my resolve, as the air, already pretty bumpy, got noticeably worse. I gripped the bottom of my seat with both sweaty hands.

"Shit," Dad grumbled. "Babe, look at the chart and see if you can find me a way to Deming Airport without going over this fucking mountain."

Bump. Bump.

Mom unfolded the chart and started poring over it.

"Could you fucking hurry it up, please? We're about to go over this motherfucking mountain and it's going to fucking suck."

Mom studied the map. In the back seat my brothers and I alternately cried and prayed aloud. After a minute she said, "I don't know, Ted."

"God damn it," he said, and jerked the yoke to the left and held the plane in a circling pattern. "Look at that fucking chart, both directions around this Christing mountain range and find me a fucking way through. We need to land. We're going to run the fuck out of fuel and my God damned legs are starting to cramp. I'm fucking hungry and if you boys don't shut the fuck up back there I'm going to come back there and knock you six ways to Sunday!"

Michael said, "No, Dad, don't!" The three of us, heads down, made an effort to cry and pray silently. I promised anything I could think of if God would just let us get safely on the ground.

Presently Mom said, "I've found one gap in the mountains, but you'd have to fly fifty miles there and fifty miles back on the other side. It's in Mexico, so we can't use it."

"God *damn* it, Lyn! Here: you fly this sonofabitch and give me the fucking chart. I am not flying over that fucking, motherfucking, fucking mountain to get fucking sucked into a motherfucking suckhole and die!"

Mom kept the plane in a circling pattern while Dad squinted over the map, cursing. The plane bumped and yawed.

"Mother fucking God damn Christing, Christly son of a bitch!" he said. "I guess we have to go over the God damn fucking, *fucking*, FUCKING mountain.

"Shit."

He took the yoke and pointed us over the mountain towards Deming, radioing ahead with a request to land, his voice calm and clear. I refreshed my sweaty grip on the seat bottom and restarted my prayers. We began our descent.

I expected the air to be rougher the closer to the mountain we got. I glanced out the window to see bright sunlight and desert-brown mountainous terrain, mottled with dark grey where the growing anvil clouds around us cast their deep shadows. I remembered every bad thing and near miss that I'd been involved in when the family was travelling together, like the time we had rolled the car when I was in

first grade, and the thousand car crash dreams I had in the years following that accident. I had the vision of all of us falling through the air. I'd long feared that we would all die together in such a crash. I thought that today might be the day.

The plane lurched up and right, down and left. Dad went silent, concentrating on keeping us level and in our landing pattern. I realized that even though we were being shaken around like dolls in a tin box, the imaginary child shaking us seemed to be staying distracted and listless. The turbulence got no more violent, though no less so.

Twenty minutes later, our shaky legs under us on the pavement of the grandly-named Deming International Airport, we all stood shaking in silent relief and gratitude to be on solid ground. Mark looked up at me with a lopsided grin. "Sucked into a suckhole," he said. We both started laughing, and then Michael, Mom, and finally Dad joined in.

## 8

*Zofia Provizer*

this: time capsule with everything  
collected inside the flesh, and out.  
i am fifty inches tall, holding  
the red moon glow.  
my harsh firebird's feathers  
are made from the bonfire  
in my backyard, just past  
turbulent flame. they burn  
hands, entire rooms, bone.

firebirds live at night  
with princesses who love them.  
those pretty russian girls,  
talking to dolls  
with open arms,  
waiting for their red knights'  
armors to spread dawn  
against the copper forest.

## **picked roses**

*Kelsey Chaplain*

today i fail to honor some childhood  
tea party spent alone, big and golden.  
beady plush puppy eyes looked at me  
sitting on barbie blanket in front yard grass patch.  
today i am retching masculinity to scoop it back up,  
wear it in a way un-natural.  
puppy had asked me  
if my name was a flower for her.

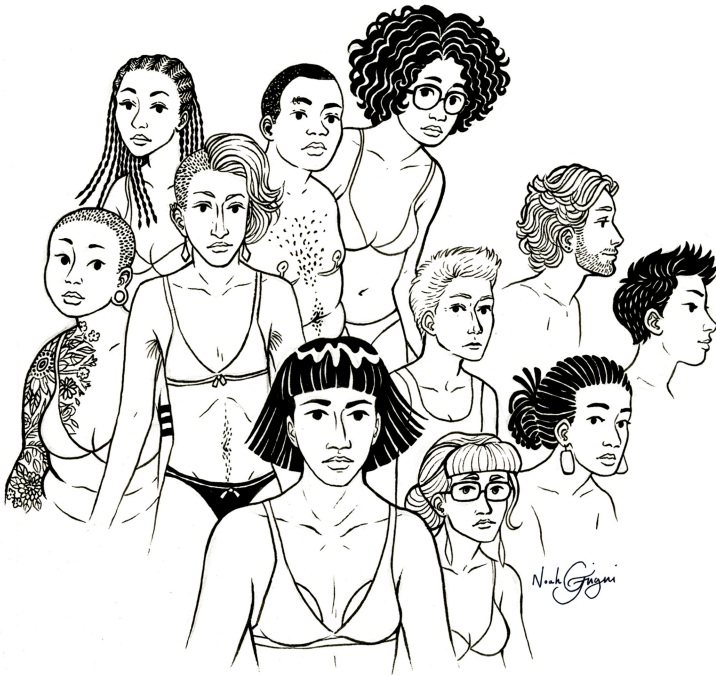
magenta red femme bathed in river mud  
to let the gaseous green become her new sense of self.  
spent years learning boy in caught toads and burping.  
did know matron, did not quiet her.  
in imagining the transition to be seamless,  
in growing out first and up later,  
pretend tea would not grow cold.

birdhouse-born cardinal calls out into the yard,  
“are you ripe yet? are you falling?”  
now multiplying time spent blush-painting one self  
as pink as sunset, soft as a blanket,  
my fingers question the curves of my own face  
and feel nothing but skin.

i cock my head and close my eyes,  
waiting for the evening light  
to warm me: violet, pink, and tender.



# WE ARE GOLDEN



**We Are Golden**  
*Noah Grigni*

## **The Generation of Communication**

*Linda Wallentine*

Nine people in an ill-lit classroom.  
Stiff plastic chairs and blank walls.

In uncomfortable silence,  
we wait for the professor.

Someone sighs;  
another yawns.

The room is quiet again.

I tap my pen.  
A girl fidgets in her seat.  
A boy sifts through his backpack

making crisp lined paper crackle.

I can't sit still either.

Thoughts  
Whispers  
Heavy breaths.

What's the point in being here?

I study the faces around me.

All of them familiar,  
but all of them strangers  
absorbed in their thoughts.

Yet, we are the communicators;  
the technology savvy utilizers;  
the record setting  
'Texters'.

A faint glow slowly fills the bleak room:  
rectangular devices illuminate  
who we *really* are.

I sigh deeply.

Detached  
Alone  
Silent.

I toss the pen in my bag and  
reach for my phone.

## 6 PM Gridlock

*Olivia MacDonald*

I'm sinking deeper into my seat.  
Contorted faces by clenched jaws  
grind tension between their teeth  
outside my thin glass window.  
Swelling veins pulse in their necks  
as they glare sharply  
into the eyes of other drivers beside them.  
Their hands pin the horn down  
with blasts of rage.  
I hunch over the wheel  
and tilt my hat below the line of sight.  
A red glaze shines atop my windshield  
under a moonless sky.  
Tree silhouettes rustle from the sidewalk as  
two crows peer down from the power line.  
Behind me, two men spit curses  
at each other from their driver's seats.  
A woman yanks at fistfuls of hair,  
scrunching and tangling it  
while one man grips his son's little league bat,  
lifting it slowly from his seat.  
I escape at the change to green.  
From my rear-view mirror,  
the cars stay  
fuming in a black haze.

## **Fear of the Potential**

*Marissa Milkey*

***What are you afraid of?***

*Nothing.*

I'm lying.

*It's just a night in the club. You've always wanted to be shitfaced in the club.*

***What are you afraid of?***

*I'm not afraid.*

I'm lying again.

*It's just class. You've missed it three times this month.*

***What are you afraid of?***

*I told you. I'm not afraid.*

I'm still lying.

*It's just a concert. You've always wanted to see this band.*

***What are you afraid of?***

*What part of not afraid do you not understand?*

I am lying once again.

*I know it hurts. **What are you afraid of?***

*Nothing.*

*Everything.*

*I'm afraid of dying.*

And with a breath, I tell the truth.

## The Bugbear

*Nick Adams*



I awoke last Wednesday to find that I had a bugbear. It stared at me from the foot of my bed with its two eyes, black pits that reflected no light set into a face covered in brown fur and bristles. It was no larger than my cat, and when I moved to get up, it ducked behind the footboard of the bed and resigned itself to my peripheral vision for the rest of the day.

When I brought it up at lunch, my coworkers seemed more than a little surprised.

“A bugbear?” asked Graham. “I haven’t had one of those since high school.”

“Really?” said Brynn, chewing her meatloaf thoughtfully. “I had a small one for a couple days a few months back. How big is it?”

I swallowed my mouthful of sandwich. “About the size of Leopold. Same color fur too.”

“That’ll be confusing,” said Graham with a laugh.

Brynn rested a gentle hand on my shoulder. “Just try not to think about it. It’ll go away on its own.”

By Friday the bugbear had doubled in height and had taken to walking over my stomach in the morning. I would wake up to its footfalls shifting my sleeping form about followed by a rough stomp on my gut. By Saturday morning I had a lasting pit in my stomach.

I considered cancelling my lunch plans with Sara. I really didn’t feel like eating. Still, Sara would be expecting me and the bugbear was lingering around where I was charging my phone. Whenever it buzzed the bugbear would swat at it with its long furry arms and short, dull claws. I did what Brynn suggested and ignored it.

I managed to get myself dressed in the last of my clean jeans and out the door by the time I was supposed to be at the restaurant. She was a noticeably upset by my lateness, but relented a little when I told her about the bugbear.

“Jeez, bro,” she said in her tar voice. “You’ve always had a problem with those, didn’t you?”

I nodded and nibbled a fry from the pile we had ordered. “You used to tease me about it.”

“Whaaat?” she said, pushing her bangs out of her eyes and swatting my shoulder playfully. “Nah man, get out of here. I’m not like that.”

She took a handful of the fries and mashed them into her ketchup. Her eyes were puffy and red. I remembered a bugbear I had held onto for a full month back when we had been in adjacent rooms at the old family home. When I would leave to hang out with friends she would use my room to smoke so her room wouldn’t reek. It still did in the end, but I would unload an entire can of air freshener to vanquish the smell as much as possible before mom could get home from work. It stung my eyes and lungs. I found dead flies curled up in the windowsills, fallen in their attempts to escape the fumes.

Eventually Sara got caught and all future blame fell on her. Over the next few days the smell had vanished and the bugbear went away with it.

“So what’s this bugbear about, hm?” she asked, licking grease off her fingers.

“I’m not sure,” I told her.

“Trouble with the girlfriend?”

“I don’t have a girlfriend.”

“Boyfriend then.”

I shook my head.

“Well whatever it is, you have my full support little bro,” she said, slapping down her half of the bill. “You can always call, you know.”

“Yeah.”

When I got home, stomach tight and teeth ground, the bugbear was waiting for me on the coffee table. It had grown to the size of a teenager over the past few hours and had strewn my unopened mail about the floor. When it saw my disappointment, it flashed its two rows of sharp teeth in what might have passed for a grin. Then it retreated again to the shadows and corners of my vision for the rest of the weekend.

Monday rolled around and my coworkers could tell immediately that I hadn’t slept the night before. My eyes were beginning to feel like the sunken holes in the bugbear’s face.

“Christ, what happened to you?” asked Brynn. “It wasn’t the bugbear was it?”

I nodded. I was shifting uncomfortably in the only button up I could find without a visible coffee stain. The bugbear had taken up residence in the washing machine and would glare at me whenever I drew near. I needed to think of a plan for the rest of the week. I considered stopping by the shops on the way home to pick up some cheap shirts.

Graham smoothed down one of my greasy cowlicks. “Hey man, do you need to get drinks after work and talk about it or something? Nothing against you but you look awful.”

I drew my lips into a smile, pulling up the bottoms of my eyelids to complete the picture. “I appreciate that, but maybe not tonight.”

The rest of the day dragged on. I nearly fell asleep twice at my desk, managing to keep myself going on cheap coffee and candy from the vending machine. I found myself unable to concentrate on my work as my mind drifted to the bugbear. Why had it come? It wasn't Sara, not that she'd helped. It had to be something big to make it grow so fast, but as I ran the fingers of my conscience through the catalogues in my brain I kept coming up blank. It was just there.

I remembered Brynn's advice and tried pushing it out of my mind. All I could think was that it would still be there when I got home.

Sure enough, it was sitting down in my kitchen propped up against the fridge. It was my height now, silhouetting my form almost perfectly save for its strangely long limbs. I dropped my bag of ill-fitting, itchy button-ups for the rest of the week on the table and consulted my options for food in the shelves of my kitchen. I hadn't gone food shopping since last week and the leftovers were all in the fridge. I settled for a box of crackers and a can of diet soda before going to bed early, still in my clothes. I needed to sleep.

That night I dreamt I was still at home. Sara was fighting with some guy in the room next to mine and dad had left a note on my door saying he'd be home late. Mom was off at the hospital with her own bugbear. I got off the squeaky twin size and decided I needed to get out. Whenever I moved towards the door or the window it would shift along the walls. The floor stretched out and kept me just out of arm's reach of anything. I sat back on the twin sized mattress and decided that this was what I wanted.



I woke up to the sound of my phone alarm and immediately dismissed it. The bugbear was sitting on my chest. He had grown to the size of my fridge now and sat perched like a cat with his giant mitts just below my neck, his claws hooked on my collarbone.

I tried rolling over. Maybe he'd just topple off and I could roll up to work late in my itchy new shirt. He didn't. I didn't have the energy to try again after the second attempt so I spent a few minutes staring into the inky blotches set in either side of its face. His mouth was overcrowded with long teeth plastered in a passionless grin, dripping flecks of saliva onto my face.

"I have to go to work," I said.

The bugbear said nothing. It leaned its weight onto my chest and kneaded my wrinkled, sweaty shirt. Each roll of its paws wrung the air from my lungs and sapped my limbs of strength.

"I need... I need to call out of work." I managed.

A burbling sound like a growling purr rose out of the bugbear's throat. Without moving its lips, pulled tight over black gums, it managed a word.

*"S... L... EE... P"*

I didn't feel like calling out anyway. I'd made so many excuses about still having a bugbear. It had been a week now, they wouldn't buy it. I thought of Graham and Brynn. Of Sara. Their concerned dug into me like teaspoons too blunt to break the skin, digging for some kind of truth I couldn't even make sense of on my own. Too much thanking. Too much explaining.

I was tired.

I closed my eyes and fell back asleep.

## THE HARDEST THINGS TO SAY

*Annemarie Jonsson*

I used to be afraid of nightmares,  
but I think dreams are made of more  
heinous things; like a totally solid you,  
standing in front of a cottage window,  
vibrant sun crowning your fatigued head.  
I hear the T.V. still on in the next room,  
and the tapping of your impatience.  
You are looking at me with that blue stare—  
the powdered cerulean in the carpet  
or your favorite summer t-shirt—  
and I let the silence fill before  
I wake, breathless.

## Ground-Nesters

*Sophia Lynch*

For fledged and hollow-boned sailors of drafts  
who have loved the footholds of the earth  
so much so that they buried, burrowed,  
committed their night bodies to the ground,  
we have waited years,  
stopped listening, in fact.

And we have loathed the pillager, his snout,  
his rooting missions into logs,  
his founder, father, ferryman,  
the unconscious extermination  
of dark unanswered sounds,  
the sticky shells he left behind.

I listened only for a mourning sound.  
The bird in my mind was black,  
a patchwork piece of gloaming,  
never toady or tortoiseshell,  
never laughing, squatting, self-satisfied.  
I held out for a monastery bird.

He prefers the blue-black, an echo unimpeded  
by the cattish squawks of grayer angels.  
We drench our ears in the dark: Could that be it?  
At last? The giggle of a fountain, amplified?  
Underfoot, underlit, leaf litter  
could just as well be hollow bones and ash.

## Soul

*Scott Bausemer*

It wraps around my left wrist and stays  
mostly put.  
When it moves,  
it's by force.

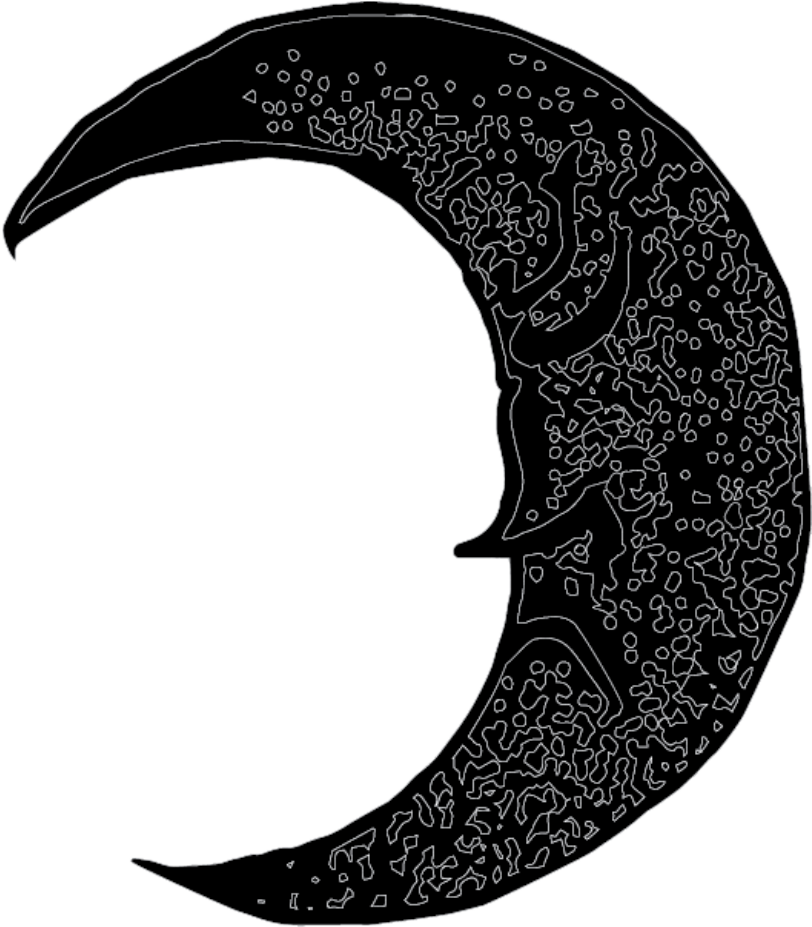
Underneath is a shadow,  
molded into skin by sweat,  
fastened by brown leather,  
the face is shiny yet sleek.  
Light bounces off the face,  
yet it is no mirror.

Holding my wrist to the light,  
the lamp reflects.  
I rotate it back and  
forth,  
my wrist cracking with each  
movement.  
It spins, twists, and jerks,  
like an acrobat.

When I look at it head on,  
in the perfect lighting,  
I see a bit of my glasses,  
dancing across.  
I move my head and it follows  
the rhythm,  
until it disappears and  
becomes a number.

It wraps around my wrist  
like a snake;  
a constant reminder of time,  
what I was doing, what I am doing, and

what's next.  
Second by  
minute,  
by hour.



## **Why Can't I Sleep, Moon?**

*Jackie Gold*

## **Numb**

*Jackie Gold*

Ma told me “not to worry,”  
so I don’t.  
Instead, I drink.  
Gin is like saltwater to my lungs,  
but I’m already drowning.

Dad told me to “just be free,”  
but I must still remind him:  
I never learned how to fly,  
like a seagull in a cage; I’m a prisoner.

So I will run to the shore  
with my arms wide open;  
wind and Summer’s storms  
will make my skin feel numb.

Running,  
running,  
*running*

until 10 feet under  
the sea looks like my mind  
when I close my eyes  
for too long.

## honeycomb in my left ventricle

*Emma Brousseau*

you turned my blood into honey.  
everything was sweet but  
heavy,  
my heart strained under pumping  
such viscous liquid.  
like king midas  
everything I touched turned goldenrod,  
a sticky residue left  
marking each move.

we don't have room enough for the honey  
in our house, Honey.  
it overflows every container.  
flies coming in from every window,  
every little crack in the walls.  
we sweeten everything until our sweet teeth break;  
too much  
of a good thing.

maybe the pink peonies blooming in your cheeks  
stopped producing pollen.  
maybe you knocked over one too many mason jars,  
spilling honey on our golden wood floors  
leaving stains that never came out.  
maybe I left too many sticky handprints in places they didn't belong,  
leaving a road map to my mistakes.

my heart works easier now,  
but blood is still washing away at the remnants of  
the heavy sweetness you once left.  
I miss you, Honey,  
but now I drink my tea black.

## **The Injection of Perfection**

*Olivia MacDonald*

Open lands invite her—  
endless freedom swaying among a serenade of green.  
Mysteries untold, rolling in the gold of fortune,  
She plants her toes entwined in the root of a Tentation.  
Her fingertips reach to grasp an apple's glisten.  
Its stem is a coiled ladder of molecules  
a double helix of GMO DNA spiraled into the core.  
She steals its seeds to inject  
Perfection.  
Its skin is stitched back with new threads of faux life  
and she hangs it back upon the branch of a Tentation  
leaving it swaying among the others, strung up to grow.  
Their juices spill upon the fertile grounds.  
Her toes constrict around the root.  
She wears a white lab coat, the engineer.  
All purity has been diluted.



## **Ode to the hotdog**

*Michael Coleman*

Salty and proud, you sit on my bun.  
Bright red and plump I clothe you:  
onions, mustard, peppers,  
a pickle spear!  
Tomato, relish and celery salt.  
Those that don't know you are ignorant to beauty

## Dinner Time

*Erik Hendrickson*



A man lifted a flat of corrugated metal, and ducked into the rusted-out shell of a downed air craft. The last light of the day began to fade as the sun fell behind pocked, and crumbling sky scrapers in the distance.

“Meow.”

“*You know—*” said the man, dropping his pack and a spear on the dirt floor near the door, “don’t even start with me.”

He reached down into the pack, pulling out a glass jar. Unscrewing the lid, he held it up over his open mouth. A single drop of water fell, landing on his nose. He dropped it back into his pack with a sigh.

“Meeoow.”

“*Would you shut up!*” The man collapsed a chair, which had been scavenged from one of the many rows of seats behind him. It was now stabilized around its base by several large rocks. The padding of the arm rest frayed around the edges which he absently picked at.

“Meeeooww.” The cat sat on the opposite side of the cold fire pit staring back at him. His fur was patchy and bare skin showed through in spots around its head and tail.

“Yes, I remember,” the man said, “I told you I would catch a squirrel, but you know what— there were *no* squirrels.” A cool breeze picked up, whistling through the holes in the walls and ceiling causing the old metal beams to creak.

“Meeeoowww.”

“*Of course I tried!*” he snapped. He leaned forward resting his head in his hands. “You’re not the only one that’s hungry.” The man’s stomach groaned as he rose and knelt by the fire pit. He assembled a small pile of leaves and began leaning smaller twigs around its edges.

“Meeeooww.”

“No. There were no rats either.” The man began striking his flint, and the cat flinched. Showers of sparks rained down and bounced about the small pile of kindling. The cat made its way around the fire pit and stood beside the man.

“Meeoow.”

“I know how to start a fire! Leave me alone.” The man brought his hands closer to the pile and the leaves caught with the next strike of

flint. An orange glow flickered over piles and stacks of metal and wood scraps covering the surrounding walls. A flash of lightning briefly illuminated the sky through the rusted-out holes that riddled the fuselage. The man and the cat looked up. Thunder rumbled.

“Meeeooww.”

“I know! I know!”

The man ran over to set of four sticks protruding from the ground, a torn bit of tarp dangled from one. He grabbed the tarp quickly, extending one corner at a time to each of the branches rapping them with rope until it was suspended in between the branches, dipping down in the middle. A wall of rain tailed the thunderhead that was passing. Droplets began to fall through a hole in the roof directly above the tarp. The cat scrambled up a pile of scrap metal and jumped up on a wooden shelf slinking through rusty pots and pans till he got to the end near the water catch and sat. The man licked his lips, his tongue like sandpaper dragging across a shedding birch tree. The cat reached out with one paw toward the water begin to collect in the center of the tarp.

“Meeeoowww.”

“Not yet!” the man said, swatting at the cat. “And stay back! You’ll knock it over!” He glared at the cat which sat next to a frying pan. His stomach groaned again at the sight. The orange glow inside began to fade, and the man spun around rushing over to the dying fire. He added more leaves and small sticks, and leaned down blowing on the fire to coax it back up. The cat leapt from the shelf making his way to the bent over man. It purred and rubbed its head along the mans’ side, its’ skull getting caught on every rib before knocking into the next.

“Meow.”

“No, I’m not going back out there.”

“Meeoow.”

“I’m am not a scare-dee—”

“Meeeooww.”

“Why don’t *you* go find some food for once!?”

“Meeeoowoooo—”

The man raised a branch above his head and brought it down quickly; the cat darted around the fire and ducked behind a rusty hub cap, which leaned against a pile of rotting two by fours. Exhausted from the sudden movement, the man sat on the ground, back leaning on the

chair. He tore a piece of bark from the branch and eyed it for a moment before popping it in his mouth. He chewed, his teeth grated along the fibrous chunk, not making dent. The cats' eyes reflected the flame of the fire from its hiding spot. He spat the bark from his mouth at the fire and it disappeared in splash of sparks. The ache in his stomach peaked and he laid down on his back, staring at the rusted metal roof. He closed his eyes listening to the ticks and pangs of the rain drops impacting above. Thunder bellowed, and—

“MEEEEEEEEEOOOOOOOOWWW”

The man jumped, and the cat, which had snuck up directly beside his ear, scurried off under the water catch knocking down one of the supports. It disappeared into black depths of the plane. Water spilled over the dirt floor.

“NOOOO!” the man cried, running over jabbing the fallen support back into the ground. He pulled the corner of the fallen tarp back up and retied the rope that had come loose. He took a deep breath and stepped back.

The rain stopped.

“No, no, no!” The man fell to his knees pressing his face to the floor trying to lick the remaining water from the ground, but only moist dirt met his tongue.

“Meeoow.”

The man rose with clenched fists.

“*Oh yes it was your fault!*”

“Meeoow.”

“No,” said the man cocking his head, trying to gage the location of the cat, “no I do not forgive you.”

“Meeoow.”

The man turned zeroing in on the source. He picked up a rock from the stone fire circle and threw it into the dark rows of seats outside of the orange glow of the fire light. A pang of stone on metal followed and the cat shot out of the shadows between the mans' legs.

“Meeeoowww.”

The man turned to see the cat once again on the opposite side of the fire, its head and shoulders low, ears back. Its eyes wide and jet black behind reflected orange flicker. He stared back. His stomach groaned.

He broke right, bounding around the fire. The cat shot backwards and then up a pile of plastic gasoline jugs, and old street signs, and then

across a section of metal piping balanced on top of them, which spun under its weight and fell causing the entire lot to collapse into the path of the oncoming man. He skidded to a stop lowering his gaze to avoid the mess which scattered out into the space in front of him. There was silence.

“Meow.”

“You don’t have to run.” The man turned his head in the direction of the sound.

“Meow.”

“Where did you go?” He scanned the shelves of cooking ware. A small tuft of fur stuck out from behind the base of a large pot at the end of the shelf.

“Meow.”

“Mad?” the man gently placed one foot in front of the other carefully stepping amongst the junk that now littered the floor. “No... I’m not mad.”

“Meow.”

The man was crouched and had nearly reached the shelves.

“Everything’s fine.” He rose slowly. “I just don’t want you to miss dinner time.” From some hidden reservoir in his mouth, saliva began to flow. He lunged, throwing his entire weight forward. He slammed into the shelves his left hand simultaneously swung behind the pot and grasped the cat by the tail.

“MMMMERRRRRRRROOOOOOOWWW”

He yanked the flailing tornado of fur and claws into the air, straightening his arm out as far as it would go.

His arm jerked back and forth with the violent contortions of the cat trying to get free. He lowered the cat toward the mouth of the pot, its claws grasped desperately at the rim preventing it from going any lower. He glanced up and spotted the lid to the pot on the top shelf, sticking out from under the corner of a steel tool box. He lifted the cat back into the air behind him and reached up with his free arm. On the tips of his toes his fingertips barely reached the bottom lip of the lid inching it off the top shelf. An old metal tool box, stuck on the knob on the top of the lid, inched with it. He took a breath and jumped just enough to grasp the lid and with a quick tug, it slid free. He knelt the cat back over the pot, and batted at its paws with the lid knocking them from their grip, and shoved the cat in and slammed the top down.

His stomach screamed in expectation. He could feel the cat pushing back from inside. He paused at a slow sound of scrapping from above, and looked up just in time to see the tool box, which had been left precariously teetering on the edge of the top shelf, begin to plummet toward him. He heard the crack of the steel connecting with his forehead and then darkness.

He opened his eyes to a blurred orange flicker of a sideways fire. He could feel a warmth flooding rhythmically down the side of his cheek. His body did not respond to his internal orders to rise. He opened his mouth, but no sound came out. Then he heard the metal clank of the lid of the pot and then a thud as it hit the ground. It rolled passed his head from behind into his field of view, wobbling as it lost momentum and tipped over. The edge of his vision began to close in as the silhouette of the cat trotted before him, sniffing the fallen lid. Fire glinted in its eyes as it turned to the man. It slinked closer, completely eclipsing the fire.

“MEEEEEEEOOOOOOWWW”

As the fire died, the cat took its place in the man’s chair, and licked itself clean of its long-awaited dinner.

## Ginger-Flavored Sheep

*Marissa Milkey*

One time I bit into ginger root  
and it was bitter.  
My tongue was on fire, shriveling  
with the thought  
*How could I be so stupid?*  
hammering in my head  
just like when you told me you loved me.  
I laughed.  
You were a friend and nothing more  
but you cornered me like a wolf would a sheep  
and tore into my flesh  
when I said I loved him  
or maybe you, but not the same.  
I wonder how I tasted  
since I was your ginger root  
and I was bitter.

## **bone of contention**

*Emma Brousseau*



bone bone bone  
like an ivory horn.  
peel back the  
skin fat muscle tendons  
to milk white calcified  
mass.  
bone bone bone  
try taptaptapping  
collarbones  
try leaning,  
stretching  
skin over ribs.  
measure success by the amount of  
bone bone bone  
in the mirror that first shows  
fat flaws disgust  
before success  
before death.  
think about  
bone bone bone  
before caving into your drawer of  
calories shame fat.  
cave cry  
find the comfort  
in running your hand  
over death.





NOAH RAFFAELLO GRIGNI

**Tied Up**  
*Noah Grigni*

## **DIRTY**

*Carly Colombo*

I remember the first time I wanted to be dirt. I traced my hands around the coarse pebbles that rested on the garden floor. Ants began weaving in and out of my hair and I could see the small alcove of sky peeking through the forest of kale bushes. Oversized zucchini lay parallel to me, my pinky fingers grazed their tough skin as I made angels in the soil. What I wanted more than ever was to be engulfed by the rich darkness. I closed my eyes and envisioned the worms oozing into my pores, hollowing out my chest, creating space for roots; they could wrap themselves around my ribs, and suck water from my veins.

I wanted to give life to feed the world, it was better than anything else I was doing. I wanted a purpose I could feel good about, this dirt to envelop my skin so the kale I ate that day could enrich the baby sprouts. It's so funny to think of these baby sprouts, escaping from the dirt I yearned to so desperately be a part of. I pushed down with my palms, as if the soil could just swallow me whole and digest me to compost.

I remember they told me to get up because I was filthy. As I brushed my sanctuary off me my organs became heavy again. To this day I bring my stagnant soul to open land and I ground myself, because being covered in dirt never made me feel so clean.

## **Before Kennedy**

*Chris Flisher*

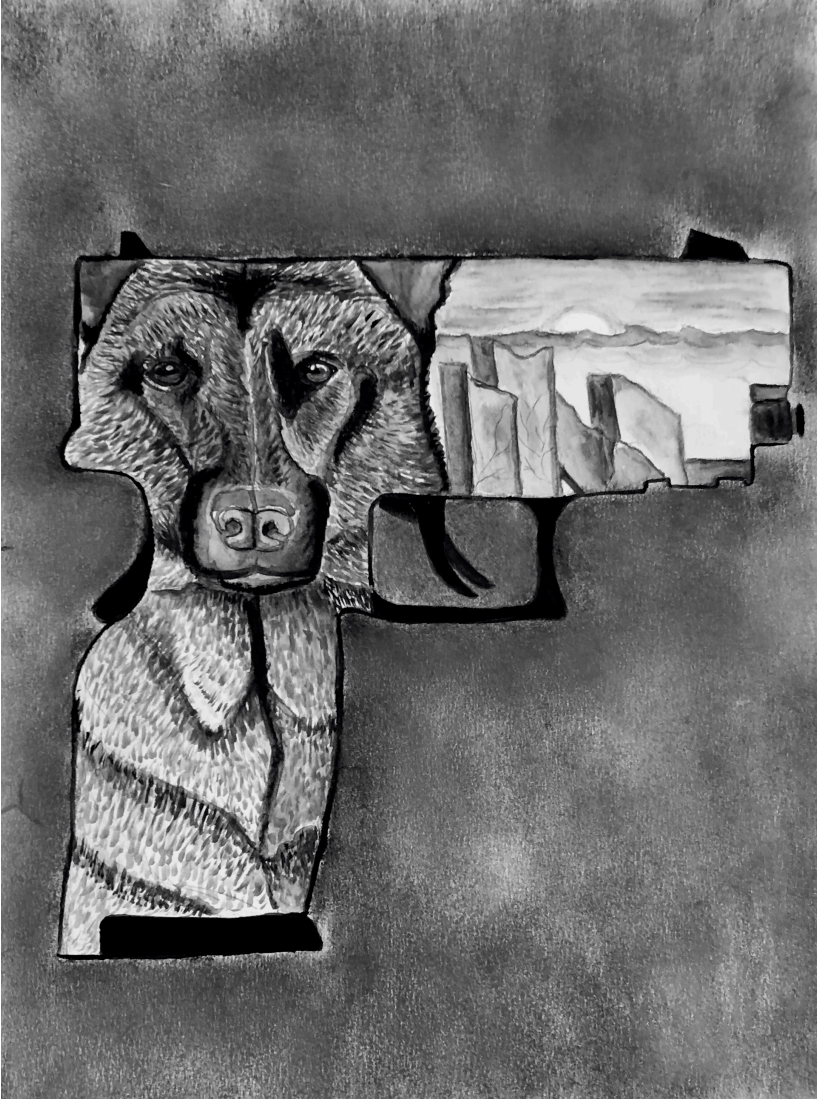
White socks and soda fountains,  
Canned music, pure as pure white could be  
Go Tell It On The Mountain  
"My country 'tis of thee, sea to shining sea"

Cub Scouts, Boys Scouts, Brownies too  
Girl Scouts green with envy in home economics  
"Surfer Girl" and Beach Boys, "Be True  
To Your School." Archie, Veronica, DC comics

Space race, no, riot race, there is no place  
like home, Dorothy and Toto too  
Young and fresh, a polished blue-blood face  
Communism's gonna get you

Duck and cover under your desk  
Siren sound piercing the quiet  
Suburban Sunday false alarm unsettled test  
You had us and we did buy it

The sun may never set on Camelot  
The moon must rise by nine  
Jungle heroin chasing Pol Pot  
We may never see another like this time



**Untitled**  
*Hope Seasholes*

## What Has Been Lost



*B.G. Reece*

Jackson and I walked along Ellsworth's Street. Jackson was ahead of me, about five or six yards in front. I stayed back watching him walk with his tail swinging side to side. His fur bounced with each step he took. Jackson is a German shepherd my husband and I rescued at the animal shelter. He's been by my side since the start of this disease epidemic. It's been a long journey, but we've gotten this far without catching the disease or getting killed. But, so far it's been ten months and I still haven't found my husband, Darren. He left for a business trip to Florida a week before this whole destruction of the world happened. I'm not losing hope, not yet.

So many street names and numbers were burned into my head. Everywhere I looked more street signs would come into view. I could not stop myself from looking at them, I was so worried about missing a turn or taking the wrong path. Sometimes we would be forced to travel in the wrong direction to avoid scavengers.

I looked at the orange sky and watched the sun set down on the mountains in the horizon. It got darker every minute. I took my eyes off the sunset and looked at what was around me. There was a neighborhood that looked safe enough to stay overnight. I ran my my fingers through my brown hair that hadn't been washed in 3 weeks nor has my body, thank you, deodorant. I could feel my body ache with exhaustion, I needed food and I was sure Jackson wanted some too. With the lack of food we have consumed, I have lost most of my body weight, but I've managed to stay strong as has Jackson. It was time to call it a night and get rest before another day of searching.

I whistled to get Jackson's attention. He stopped and turned his furry body towards me. "Come on Jackson, that's enough walking for today."

Jackson walked to my side, I took the gun that was hanging around me like a satchel and held it up, prepared for whatever could be in this neighborhood. The neighborhood we found looked safe enough even without scouting it. Every car parked perfectly in front of their houses. No house had the same paint color but all looked the same. I never trusted any neighborhood that looked safe; something could look pretty

but end up being a trap in the end. We walked slowly on the main road surrounded by houses and I scanned every house making sure no one was hiding to mob us for our supplies.

A trash can fell next to us causing a loud sound to ring loud through out the neighborhood. I aimed my gun towards the sound with my finger steady on the trigger and Jackson slowly crept to the sidewalk. As Jackson got closer, a rat ran from behind the trash can and disappeared into a house.

Jackson growled and was about to step into fool sprint. I quickly whistled, catching Jackson before he pounced. "Slow down, fluff ball. Save your energy for some real danger." I laughed. "I think we are safe staying here, that sound would have brought someone out already. This house will do." I point to the blue house with white trim in front of me. It was the one house that didn't have a car in the drive way and also looked like it hadn't been touched since the whole outburst happened.

To be on the safe side I still held the gun up before slowly opening the front door. I snapped my fingers signaling to Jackson to check the upstairs of the house. I followed behind him inside and turned the corner before he walked upstairs.

I took each step with caution. Every room was empty and untouched. Strange to see such a clean house. There were your dusty and dirty windows, but nothing was on the floors, each picture was centered on the walls, and the guest bed down stairs was neatly made. Nothing was out of place; even the plates and utensils were neatly placed in the cabinets of the kitchen.

I wouldn't have minded staying here for a while, but I had a job to do. I needed to find my husband. That was my first and only priority. Once I found him, I thought, we could come back here and live peacefully.

I heard a loud bark come from upstairs. My heart skipped a beat, because that was Jackson's signal that he'd found something, or someone. I ran upstairs and saw Jackson in front of a door at the end of the hallway. He stepped aside so I could get through. I took one hand from the gun and grabbed the door knob. As slow as I could, I turned the knob and moved the door open to an inch. I poked the nozzle of my gun through the opening and pushed it open with it.

I stepped inside and scanned the room. I turned to face the bed and took a step back on what I saw. Jackson growled. "No, Jackson! Shut

up,” I said. I walked closer to the bed and a tear slipped down my cheek. There on the bed laid a couple, dead. It didn’t look like they were killed by the disease. As I got closer to the bodies, I looked at their deteriorated faces. On each of their foreheads, right smack in the center, was a bullet wound. Both wounds were identical to each other. A gun laid by the hand of the male. I picked up the gun and looked at the chamber. Two bullets were missing.

I wiped the tear away from my face. Why am I crying? I thought. I never got emotional when I see dead bodies. I’ve been a cop for so long and no car accident, shootings, or bank robbery killings made me feel this way. Even from my situation now, I’ve had to kill to stay alive and nothing has made me flinch. But these two were different. These two made me think of my husband and me. Darren was still out there and I was so scared I would find him like this.

I heard a whine come from Jackson who nosed my hand that held the gun. I shook myself back into reality, putting the gun that I got from the bed into my bag. I patted Jackson on the head. “Let’s go Jackson,” I said walking out of the bedroom.

I closed the door and laid my forehead up against it. I heard another whine come from behind me. I turned my head ever so slightly and made eye contact with Jackson. I turned back to the door and took a deep breath before turning my whole body to face Jackson. “Ok, let’s go find some food shall we?” Jackson started to bounce up and down when I mentioned food.

I scavenged through all of the cabinets and drawers but no food was found. Luckily, I found a few frozen dinners in the freezer that looked like they were safe to eat. I unwrapped two of the frozen lasagnas and plopped one into the microwave.

The one good thing about this whole apocalypse is that there is still electricity in the world. Well, not everywhere, just the places that have solar panels, which nowadays seems like everywhere.

Jackson sat looking up at the microwave while I made my way towards the living room that was connected to the kitchen. I made my way towards the book shelf that was next to the TV. The shelf was filled with DVDs. They were organized alphabetically. I ran my finger on each one of them looking at each title. Starting from *Abducted* then ending at *Zombieland*. I stopped my finger at a title that was all too familiar with me. It was Darren’s and my favorite movie; it was the first

movie we saw together in theaters. It's cheesy too: we couldn't decide on what to watch because we didn't want to make the other upset for picking the wrong one. So, we went with "Up".

I opened the case and grabbed the DVD then plopped it into the DVD player. I pressed play and watched my favorite movie appear on the screen in front of me. I turned to the kitchen to check on the food, and I caught a glimpse of Jackson laying on the couch watching the movie. He liked the part when all the dogs show up and talk to each other.

I pulled our dinners from the microwave and served them on a plate. I set one plate down on the ground for Jackson to eat. One quick whistle and Jackson was devouring his dinner. I sat on the counter watching the movie from afar, while eating my lasagna.

Half way through the movie, Jackson and I had finished our dinners and were lying peacefully on the couch. I had rid my dirty jacket and ripped up flannel to the ground, now only in a t-shirt and ripped up jeans. I had a blanket over Jackson and I. Jackson had fallen asleep with his head on my thigh. I patted him on the head, soft enough not to wake him.

This is usually the time of the night I start day dreaming. Thinking about finding Darren and living together in this new world. I don't care how awful the world has turned out, just as long as I'm back with my husband I will be happy. I pray every day that he is safe and not in any harm. I know he is still alive; I have that gut feeling inside of me that knows he is not gone. I will find him, even if I have to die trying.

My eyes started to droop while watching the movie. I wanted to finish it but it was no use, my eyes took over. I fell into a deep sleep within seconds.

I had woken up to a blinding light from outside. Thankfully it was just the sun and not some attack. The last time that happened I had to run out of the house with bullets flying past my head. I was also woken up by a wet nose nudging my face. "Jackson, leave me alone." I said pushing him away. He begins to lick my face. "Ugh... Ok, I'm up, I'm up."

I checked my watch to read the time. I frustratingly looked at Jackson. "There better be a good reason you woke me up at 6:00 in the morning." Jackson wags his tail. "Fine I will make you breakfast." I scratched the top of his head and began to make my way towards the



kitchen. “Jackson can you grab my backpack so I can load up on supplies?” Jackson walked to the couch and grabbed my bag lying against it. With his mouth, Jackson carried my bag to me. I threw the bag onto the counter and opened up the main pocket of the bag. I sifted through each cabinet, grabbing whatever canned food I could find. Luckily, I was able to find a few cans of soup, stuffing them into my bag.

I took one of the cans of soups and ate that for my breakfast. I left half of my soup in the bowl and placed it down on the ground for Jackson to eat. I zipped up my bag before throwing it onto my back. I heard something fall on the ground. I looked down beside Jackson and saw a pair of keys with a Lego Man key chain on it. I reached down and picked up the keys.

That’s weird, I thought, there was no car in the driveway, but in my hand there is a Toyota-labeled key. I walked outside and looked around the streets for a Toyota vehicle. I turned back to the house and noticed a shed near the back of the house. The shed was small but a reasonable size for a car to fit in it. I tried to open it but there was a lock with a combination. “Damn it,” I growled. I heard footsteps behind me. They were soft, almost like they were trying to sneak up on me. I stayed still and stared at the shed. I counted their steps and listened as they got closer. It was strange, it almost sounded like there was another set of feet. I grabbed the gun from my thigh and quickly turned. Jackson jumped backwards, I took a deep breath calming myself. “Sorry, Jackson. I thought you were someone else.” I slipped my gun back on my thigh and turned back to the shed.

I scratched my head with the gun, then let my head rest on it while I thought of a plan. We’ve been walking forever and we are barely gaining any ground. It had taken us 3 months to get from Washington to Arizona. A vehicle would be perfect. My last car broke down when Jackson and I hit Oregon. Traveling by foot is not the best and driving get’s us to places faster, which means I can find Darren sooner than later.

I tapped the gun lightly on the side of my head, then a thought passed through my head. I closed my eyes tightly and ran my hand through my long tangled hair. “I am so stupid.” I said before aiming the gun at the lock and quickly pulling the trigger. The lock broke and fell to the ground. I reached out and grabbed the door of the shed to open

it. Dust filled the air making it hard to see what was inside. After a while of letting the dust clear, I could make out what the object in the shed.

Inside the shed was a dark blue Toyota Prius. “Oh god” I whispered. “Well, it’s better than walking.”

After a while of packing the car up with supplies for the next few days we were on the road. I was able to find some gas in abandoned cars around the neighborhood, so we were good for traveling until we hit Texas.

We were three hours into driving with about a half a tank left before I needed to fill up. I had about 3 more gallons in the trunk but this car was really good on not wasting any gas. The one thing I liked about a Prius.

I looked around at the sights during the drive. We were literally in the middle of nowhere but it was so beautiful. It reminded me of Darren and our yearly road trip. It was a thing we did. Every New Year’s Day we would take a map of the United States and tape it to wall. One of us would close our eyes and throw a dart and where ever the dart landed was the place we would drive to for our first trip of the year.

My thoughts are interrupted by a car blocking the road. I slowed the car down to a stop. The car is about 50 yards from us, two guys sitting on the hood. “This is going to be interesting.” The men start to approach the car. I begin to notice the weapons they had on their bodies. One, looking like the leader, had a knife strapped to his right thigh and on the other was a hand gun. The second guy held a machine gun close to his chest.

I hear Jackson in the back seat growl. I quickly shushed him and motion for him to stay low and stay quiet. I covered Jackson with a blanket in the back seat so the men couldn’t see him.

The men approach the car on the driver’s side. I roll down the window. “Hi, may I help you?” I asked.

The leader stepped towards me while the other looks around the car. “Sorry, you need to turn around.”

“I’m sure you can let me pass through. I don’t mean any harm.” I keep my eyes focused on the leader but still aware of the other one roaming my car.

The leader laughs slightly. “You think I’m going to fall for that act? Now, I will give you a choice. Either turn around or we kill you. Your choice.”

I smile. “Ok, I choose option three. You let me go and drive away peacefully.”

The leader laughs louder, then turns to the other man. “We have a clever one here...” He pulled out his hand gun and aims it at my head. “I don’t like clever.” I didn’t flinch but Jackson who was under the blanket in the back seat growled. That got their attention. “What was that? What do you have in there?”

“Why should I tell a man who has a gun pointed at my head?”

“You should tell him so he doesn’t kill you.”

His hand is shaking, he’s nervous. “You won’t shoot me; you’re too scared to shoot me. I bet you haven’t killed anyone. You’re just trying to be threatening.”

The leader becomes angry and shoves the gun onto my head holding it there. “Is this better?” A louder growl comes from behind me. “You’re hiding something in there.” He gets the other man’s attention. “Check the back seat.”

“I wouldn’t do that if I where you.”

“Shut up!” The leader yelled, shoving the gun harder on my head.

I reach for my gun at my thigh, slow enough for him not to notice. The other man carefully walks to the back seat door. He aims the gun at the door. “Well, what are you waiting for, a candy gram? Open the fucking door!” The leader yelled in frustration.

“I’m warning you, for your own safety, don’t open that door.”

“Shut the fuck up! Open the god damn door before I shoot you!”

The man slowly opens the door. He sees the blanket and uses the nasal of the gun to lift it. In the blink of an eye Jackson launches with teeth out towards the man, knocking him to the ground, throwing the gun to the side. “What the hell?” The leader yelled. I grabbed the gun from my thigh lifting it up towards the leader, shooting him in the shoulder. He falls hard to the ground. I opened the car door and look over at Jackson who seems to have the other man under control. Well, more like in pieces. The screaming from the man stopped, and out from behind the car came Jackson.

I crouch down beside the man who is bleeding out from his left shoulder. “I’m going to give you a choice, either bleed out here or we

kill you right here, right now. Your choice.” The man tried to open his mouth full of blood but only moans come out. “Wrong choice,” I said before shooting him straight in the head.

I motion for Jackson to check their car for any more men. Luckily, it was just the two of them. They weren't stocked well, all they had in their back seat where a few canned soups and two water bottles. I pack their weapons up in the back of the car before taking their gas from their tank. They almost had a full tank, was good for us in covering more ground in less time.

Jackson climbs back into the car while I click on my seatbelt. I start up the car and we leave the two dead men alone. I did warn them to not open the back seat.

Like I said before, I don't care about killing. I never killed before when I was a cop, but after this whole issue occurred a switch turned on and there is no emotion when I pull the trigger. I have one goal, to find my husband and no one is going to stop me.

It was around 10:00 by the time we hit Dallas. I tried to stay away from the city so no one could find us and scavenge for our supplies which would lead to killings. I'm wasn't proud about what happened with the two men, but I had to do what was needed. Plus, they wouldn't have survived another day with the food they had and if they ran into scavengers. So, either way they were going to lose.

We came across a deserted neighborhood and decided to stay in a house that looked like it was safe enough to stay in for the night. Nothing and no one was found inside. I quickly heated up some soup for both Jackson and I for dinner.

Because of what happened earlier today I moved all the furniture to block all entrances. Then I took a few pillows and blankets and laid them down beside the front door to make a bed. I wanted to make sure I was prepared for anything. Jackson laid by my legs while I held my gun close to my chest as I slept.

I was woken up by Jackson wining loudly by my ear. I pushed him away and rolled over on my pillow. Jackson nosed my back a few times. “Jackson, leave me alone.” Just then I heard voices outside. I jumped up leaning my back against the front door and grabbed my gun holding it towards my chest. The lights of a car shined through the windows. I looked through the window and saw five figures on the street in front of the house. “Shit” I whispered.

Jackson sat next to me waiting for a command. I put my finger towards my lips signaling to stay quiet. I tried to listen on what they were saying. “This car was not here earlier today.” A man said. “You were on watch. Why is there a car here? If there is a car that was not here earlier today than there must be someone here that shouldn’t be.”

“I...I don’t know where it came from, sir,” A shaky voice said. He sounded like he was just a kid, maybe 21, 22.

“Listen dip shit,” a woman said. “If there is someone here in any of these houses, it’s your fault for not killing them. This is private property that belongs to us. You messed up and let them trespass.” I heard a grunt from the kid, the girl probably hit him in the gut. I looked through the window again and saw the kid sitting on his knees holding his gut. The girl walked next to him grabbing his hair and pulling it so she was face to face with him. “There are no mistakes in this group. When you make mistakes you die.”

“Please, I...I can do better.” The kid stuttered. “Just give me another chance.”

The girl let go of his hair and stood next to him. “You lost your chance.” She said before she took out a hand gun, aiming it at the kids head and pulled the trigger. The kid fell face first onto the pavement with blood oozing out of his skull. The girl laughed and soon the other men laughed with her.

I looked away from the window before looking at Jackson. What do I do? Think of something fast, I thought, or else you’re going to end up like that kid with a hole in his head. I looked around for something to use against them or to get their attention. My eyes landed on my back pack and hanging from the side were the car keys to the Prius. I turn to Jackson, “I got an idea.” I whispered.

I grabbed my bag and held the car keys in my left hand while in my right hand held a hand gun. Jackson and I both ran out the back and then to the side of the house, ducking behind some trash cans. I held the car keys tight in my hand, I closed my eyes and took my thumb and pressed the unlock button. The lights of the car lit and an unlock noise sounded.

The group jumped in surprise and held their guns towards the car. That’s my cue. I ran out of the shadows swiftly not to make any noise. I aimed the gun towards one of the taller men and shot him in the back of his neck. He fell hard. “Shit,” the girl yelled, turning around. Just

before the other man turned, I shot him in the leg and as he fell I took another shot hitting him right through the eye. “Shoot, you piece of shits,” the girl yelled at the other man standing next to her.

“At what?” He yelled back.

As quickly as I could, I ran again. But the girl saw me. “That!” she yelled. The man shot at me, luckily missing me. Just as he took the shot Jackson pounced on him biting into his neck. “Holy shit,” the girl yelled again.

She aimed the gun at Jackson and just before she pulled the trigger I came up behind her and aimed my gun to her head. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” I said calmly, though a little bit out of breath.

The girl raised her hands in the air with the gun loosely hanging on her pointer finger of her right hand. She turns her body towards me. “Can we talk?” she asked.

“I don’t like talking.”

“W...Wait, I can help you. Just please listen to me.”

“I would but since you didn’t give that kid time,” I motioned towards the dead kid, “why should I give you the time?”

“Be...Because I have supplies that you will need. A... And once the rest of my team gets here I can give you half of the supplies that we collected. You just need to wait a little bit.”

I chuckle slightly. “I don’t have the patience for you.” And just there I pulled the trigger and down the girl went. There was some blood spots on my face from her head that I wiped off with my sleeve.

I looked down at Jackson who had a little bit of blood rolling off of his nose. “Well, that was a nice wake up call.”

I didn’t want to stay any longer at the place. As quick as we could we packed up the car, raided that group of their weapons and where back on the road within minutes.

The thought kept passing my mind of the girl saying that the rest of her group was coming. How big is her group? Are they armed? If they found me would they kill me? I kept trying to shake off the thought and focus on the road that will soon lead me to Darren.

It had been about a day in a half before we finally reached Florida. It was such a long journey but I still feel worried that we won’t find Darren. What if he isn’t here? What if he went looking for me and left Florida?

I'm not leaving this place until I've checked every inch of Florida. I don't care how long it takes me, I will not stop until my husband is found, dead or alive.

Our car had ran out of gas by the time we entered Florida. We abandoned the car and continued on foot.

Each day that past was spent doing the same thing. I wanted to look through every neighborhood, beach, and city; not matter how dangerous it was. I could feel myself getting closer to Darren and I'm still not ready to give up.

Around our 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> day – I lost track after 3 – we had made it to Miami. This was our last city to find Darren. He had to be here.

We walked through the city of Miami, slowly and carefully. I became cautious of my surroundings, jumping at any noise heard from the distance. The words “my team” ran through my head every second of the day. They probably already saw the aftermath of what Jackson and I did to the group back in Dallas. Are they going to come after us? Will they torture or kill us? Are they behind us?

I turned around again finding nothing behind me. My paranoia was taking over my body. Half was trying to find Darren while the other half was worried of an attack.

I started to get a head ace of all the rush of emotion that was flowing through my body. I needed to rest, but I kept telling myself to ignore that part of my body and keep moving forward, away from the monster trying to take control of me.

I heard another sound come from behind me. Don't turn around, just ignore it, it's your mind playing tricks on you again. Jackson turns and growls towards the sound, it's probably another rat. “Jackson, shut up, it's nothing,” I whispered.

“I would listen to that dog of yours,” a voice said from behind me.

My eyes went wide and my heart stopped. I turn to see four men and one women standing below the street lights of an intersection that was in front of me. My grip tightens on my gun as I quickly raise it and Jackson bends lower in running stance, growling showing his teeth.

The larger man that was in the middle of the group rose his hand in a stop position. “Put the toys down before you get yourself hurt,” the man said.

“Why should I? It protects me from strange men like you,” I said.

“Oh... I’m sorry. Where are my manners? Let me introduce myself. My name is Victor and this is my team.”

“My team.” Those words sent chills down my spine.

“The girl is Gally, then you have Rodger, Dunkin, Ted, and Kyle...” Victor paused for a second. “You feel safe yet?”

I still hadn’t moved from my place. My body was frozen where it stood. “I think you know the answer to that question.” I said taking a steady step back.

“I wouldn’t move if I where you.”

“And why shouldn’t I?” I asked, gripping the gun tighter, with my finger close to the trigger.

“You are really a dumb piece of shit aren’t you?” Victor laughed. “And here I was thinking the clever cop in you would come out.” How does he know that? “Didn’t think I knew you were a cop did you? Well this will give you goose bumps...” Victor paused for a second. “Have you found your husband yet? Isn’t his name... fuck! What’s his name again?” Victor asked Rodger.

My heart is in pieces, he knows Darren. I can’t feel anything now, only my heart beating a hundred miles an hour. I lower my gun down to my side.

“Shit! Why can’t I think of his name? It starts with a D... hey Steph? Can you help me out here?”

‘Steph’ that’s what Darren calls me. He knows where Darren is.

“Come on Steph, help me out here. If you help me, maybe you can see that husband of yours.” My head pops up. “Oh, now you want to listen to me.”

“Where is he?” I asked.

“Where’s who?”

“Darren! My husband!” I yelled.

“That’s his name! Darren. Oh yeah I don’t know. You see he escaped a little while ago, wanting to go out and look for you. I tried to stop him by cutting his throat but I missed and cut his ear off.”

I was full of rage, I wanted to kill Victor for what he did to Darren. “You’re lying.” I yelled.

“If I was lying, why would I have his ear right here?” Victor took out a folded rag from his

jacket pocket. He unravels the rag and pulls out an ear. “Is this good enough proof for you?”



I raise my gun with my finger place firmly on the trigger. “No.”

“Wait!” Victor yelled. My finger stays still. “Wait you little piece of shit. Boy you are not good at talking are you? Now be a good girl and lower the gun.”

“I don’t like that idea.”

“I don’t give a fuck if you don’t like my idea. Put the god damn gun down or let my team do it for you.” Gally, Rodger, Dunkin, Ted, and Kyle all armed themselves with an assortment of guns. But Victor stayed still. “I’m going to give you to a count of ten to lower your gun. Or my team here blows both you and your dog’s fucking brains out... Ten... Nine...”

Think of something quick, I thought to myself. There’s six of them and two of us.

“Eight”

Two have hand guns, one has a shot gun and the rest besides Victor have automatics.

“Seven”

I’m in the middle of the road, which means no cover.

“Six”

I could shoot two in a second but that gives the rest time to shoot at me.

“Five”

We are far enough away where Jackson can’t reach them before they shoot.

“Four”

I am literally out of options here.

“Three”

I should just surrender and escape later

“Two”

There is still time to find Darren

I closed my eyes ready to lower my gun. Suddenly...BANG!

I opened my eyes, I look down at my body trying to find any blood stains. There was nothing, I wasn’t shot. Wait, I wondered, then where did the bullet go?

I looked up and stared at Victor who was holding his hand on his stomach. He slowly lowers his hand letting the blood drip down his hand and abdomen. Victor slowly lowered to the ground on his knees.

Falling flat on his face, a man stood behind him holding a gun up at eye level.

“One” the man said. But that wasn’t just any man, that was Darren. That dirty blond hair, longer than when I last saw him, letting it hit just above his brown eyes. He stood so confident, no scars, no bruises, no dirt, no blood stains, he was clean. Army jacket, t-shirt, and jeans, he blended in with everyone but looked like he just started fighting in this apocalypse. He kept his gun up. “Hi Steph. Do me a favor sweetie you want to raise that gun up again and help me finish these fuckers?”

I smiled, tears forming in my eyes. Jackson was stood in a running position. I raised my gun up again. “With pleasure,” I said before pulling the trigger hitting Gally on the shoulder and as she fell Darren fired a shot to her head.

Rodger aimed his gun at Darren while Kyle aimed his gun at me. As they turned both Darren and I shot the opposite person aiming their gun at us. Both fell down lifeless. Dunkin and Ted where the only ones left. I aimed my gun at Dunkin. “Wait!” Darren yelled. “Let’s give someone else a turn.” Darren smiled.

Just as he finished, Jackson launched forward biting down on Ted’s arm and flipping him backwards. Before Dunkin could grab his gun Jackson pounced on him bighting at his face, tearing it apart.

Darren whistled for Jackson to stop. Jackson turned to Darren and ran to him. Darren knelt down to Jackson’s level, bringing him into a hug. “Hi, buddy, I missed you!”

Darren takes his attention off of Jackson and looks towards me. I smile while walking to him. “My turn.” I said before putting my hands at his neck pulling him down to me, bringing his lips to mine. Darren wraps his arms around my waist, lifting me up to where my feet where off the ground. Those arms are what I fought for, to be in those arms. Tears ran down my face. I was so relieved; I have finally found my husband. He’s here in my arms. My arms wrapped tighter around Darren’s neck. One hand rested on the back of his head, letting my fingers feel his hair.

Darren slowly set me back onto my feet before breaking the kiss. I rested my forehead against his, feeling his warm breath against my face. “I found you.” I whispered.

Darren smiles, “No, Steph... I found you.” He leaned his head up, kissing my forehead. “Come on, let’s go start a new life.” Darren lets go of me, bending down to grab his bag by his feet.

There he is, holding my hand. It’s finally over, we are finally together again. After so long I’m with him. I never want to let go of him again. I love him so much. I don’t know what I would do without... BANG!

My eyes go wide, I gasp for air. Darren looks up at me in shock, standing up as fast as he could. He looks behind me and sees Victor holding on to a gun lying on the ground. “Fuck you.” He said before aiming the gun at the bottom of his head pulling the trigger.

Darren turned to me still holding my hand and looks down. On the left side of my chest was a through and through bullet hole. He turned his gaze back to my face. I lost my balance falling into Darren’s arms. “No, no Steph you need to stay with me.” Darren said lying me down on the ground.

I move my hand away from the bullet hole. I raised my hand up to eye level seeing the blood drip off of my fingers. I there was a tingling sensation in my hands and in my feet. Darren put pressure on the wound making me groan in pain. The tingling sensation started to move up my legs and my arms. Darren was trying to talk to me but I couldn’t hear him or at least I couldn’t pay attention to him. My mind is in a million different places right now. He’s trying to keep me awake, saying that he can stop the bleeding if he puts pressure on it. But I knew what was going to happen. The tingling stopped in my limbs and a numbness took over. I didn’t feel any more pain. It was like I didn’t have a body.

I looked up at Darren who had tears running down his eyes. He put more pressure on my wound but blood still oozed out of the cracks in his fingers. I reached my hand up to touch his face. His gaze locked onto mine. I rubbed my thumb on his cheek. “Please don’t go.” Darren whispered. “Please don’t leave me.”

A tears formed at the corner of my eyes, some falling down the side of my face. “I’m never going to leave you. Not again.” I said slowly. “I fought to find you and I succeeded. You’re alive.”

“But you’re dying. You need to stay alive. Please.” Darren pleaded.

“You know I can’t.” Darren dips his head to his chest tears falling down to my abdomen. I move his face to face me again. “You can’t give up because of me. Stay alive and live. Try for me.” Darren shook his

head no. "Please Darren, promise me that you will fight from this and move on. Promise me." I demand, tears falling from my face.

"I... I promise." Darren stuttered. "I promise only if you never leave my side. I still need you."

"I'm never going to leave you. Not again." Darren leaned down laying his forehead against mine. "I will always be with you."

"I love you." Darren whispered before touching his lips to mine.

My hand on Darren's cheek slowly slides off his face, leaving traces of blood on his chin. Darren breaks the kiss feeling my breath slow. My eyes stay shut. I took one last breath. "I love you too."

My soul left my body, passed through Darren and watched as Darren screamed. He was so loud, so scared of the future without me. He held me tighter and cried harder with every breath he took. Jackson laid at my bodies feet whimpering. It took Darren awhile to calm down but eventually he slowed his breathing and let go of my body. He looked over my body and let a few more tears slide down his face. Gaining as much strength as he could, Darren grabbed my left hand and took my wedding ring off. He also went to my shoes and untied the dirty shoe lace from my shoe. Looping my ring through the shoe lace he tied it around his neck and wore my ring as a necklace.

Darren then got up and threw my body over his shoulder. He made his way, with Jackson behind him, to the beach. He laid me down on the sand and gathered some wood that was scattered around the beach. He was rushing, wanted to get this process over with. As fast as his body could, he gathered enough wood to surround my body. He was also lucky enough to find a bit of alcohol on the beach in a small bottle that he splashed around the wood. Taking a match from his back pack he lit it and stared at my body for a few seconds.

He didn't know it but I was standing next to him watching as he stared at my body. He didn't want to do this, once he did it would be over. But, he had to know I would always be there for him. Even if I was gone, my soul still would stay with him.

I reached up and tried to grab his hand, but it went through his. He couldn't see me but for a second he closed his eyes and let go of the match letting it drop down to my body. Slowly, the fire spread around the wood and onto my body. The fire got bigger with each second. Darren and Jackson stood watching the fire cover my body. I tried to hold Darren's hand but I couldn't. No matter how hard a tried, my

hand kept passing through his. Yet, I was still happy, happy to see him alive. And that's all I can do now. He may not be able to see me but I will forever watch over him and stay by his side protecting him from any danger. Because he will always be my husband.

“Goodbye Steph.” Darren whispered to himself and let one final tear slip down his face.

And that was it, game over, for me at least.

## **Sea Mist Woman**

*Flavianny Kelle Silva Rabelo*

The secret garden is a rocky island  
surrounded by algae and cold sea water.

The wind is my greatest of friends  
when he makes skirts go up and hair tangle

The secret garden is nested on a freshly baked sun,  
Its clouds are empty thoughts;  
it's a shelter for cowards on the run like me.

The secret garden is an idyllic version of myself  
A woman who lets leg hair grow past her ankles  
and lives on a sturdy boulder on the middle of the ocean  
She swallows wind like salt water and wakes up at 5 AM.

The secret garden lives in the two freckles on my left toe  
In the question about multitudes I have yet to ask;  
In a runny nose and Nihilism; frost bite in August.



**Glow**  
*Noah Grigni*

## Stockholm Syndrome

*Emmaleigh Diecidue*



Waist deep in a murky pond  
palms flat against the water's surface  
so still I forget what surrounds me—  
heartache's wet dream.

Water crawls up my nose,  
slides between my legs,  
creeps into my pores,  
slaps me across the face,  
wraps its palm around my throat,  
slithers its fingers into my curls,  
yanks my head back and  
drags me deeper and darker  
until I can't tell land  
from water.

*Just get out.*

As if it was that simple.  
As if I could climb out  
just as easily as I fell in.

I sink into its blows,  
embrace its abuse,  
cherish its faults—  
shut my mouth,  
as I open it wide.

It only hurts  
when it's over.



## October 29, 1985

*Dan Chou*

This was written using the font Georgia. It reminds me that my parents emigrated from Taiwan to the United States in 1984. My dad's English name is George because they spent time in Georgia before him and my mom, Anna, eventually settled in Massachusetts. A couple of years ago, my dad had his 70th birthday celebration at a Chinese restaurant. He ordered an entire farm's worth of beef, chicken, pork, and duck, as well as noodles, soups, and vegetables. Everything was safe for me to eat, a good thing because I have a severe peanut and tree nut allergy. I carry EpiPens in a red first aid kit just in case I accidentally take a bite out of a cookie with walnuts in it or if the scent of cashews is so strong that I react, need a shot of adrenaline, and an ambulance ride to the ER. My kit has at least 90% more color and is 100% less embarrassing than the black fanny pack I used before, which I nicknamed "The Girl Deflector".

As the party went on and everyone had their fill, the conversation turned to *my* birthday. Growing up, I repeatedly heard about the 10 years of struggle my parents went through trying to have a baby. For most, if not all the party guests, it was their first time. My dad told them in Mandarin, "We went up and down Taiwan going to different hospitals. One of the doctors looked at her in the eye saying, 'You will never give birth to a child.' Anna and I are so blessed to have Daniel as our son."

By God's grace, I was miraculously born on October 29, 1985 at Emerson Hospital in Concord. I'm 32, but there's more to it than just becoming another year older. The story will not end with cake and presents. It begins with mom being in labor for 36 hours. That alone could have killed us both. Out of the womb, I was a month premature, had a seizure when I was 33 hours old, and spent 40 days at Mass. General's ICU. *But wait, there's more!* There's always more. My primary care physician once told me 10 years ago, "When you were a baby, you had sepsis, which is a blood infection, but for some reason, God wanted to save you." He also saved me from hydrocephalus, a condition where excess cerebrospinal fluid in my brain had to be drained out when I was a newborn. Since I endured numerous medical trials and tribulations,

my name in Mandarin means “Gift from God.” If you think I should never use that as a pick up line, I agree.

Throughout my life, several Christian friends who know about my health problems have shared Psalm 139:14 to encourage me. It reads, “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” The psalmist who wrote it was David, of David vs. Goliath fame. The word “fearfully” is translated from Hebrew as “with reverence”, but sometimes, I think to myself, “I’m afraid God made a mistake” in making me the way he did.

If he’s all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, why didn’t allow me to be born healthy like my younger brother, John? Why do good people suffer? Why do *Christians* like me suffer? These are questions I’ve asked as someone who is a fighter, not a lover. It’s vital to wrestle with God now and then even though I’ll never be able to pin him down. I still tell him how there are times when I feel trapped inside myself and wish I could escape. I think most people feel that way every so often. You could say that’s normal, but for me, “normal” is out of the ordinary because my desire to be an attractive white male like Tom Brady is rooted in feelings of hatred towards myself that pop up every now and then. You can’t always see my handicaps, but I know what they are and I tell myself I’m ugly and I’ll never be good enough because of them. Part of my self-hatred is because many Asian cultures are honor-and shame-based. You are expected to obey your parents and do great in school, piano, guitar, and sports. If you don’t, it’s as though you’ve disgraced your family for five generations. Why five and not four? “Four” rhymes with the word for “die” in Mandarin. Ain’t nobody got time fo’ dat!

My Most Embarrassing Moment Ever happened to me at church and is a reminder of how heavy of a weight shame can be. I asked a friend of mine before a Bible study, “Hey, Molly, do you like mussels?” while involuntarily flexing and yawning at the same time. I hid in the bathroom as she cried from laughing so hard. What I was *trying* to say was I watched a cooking show earlier that day and the host, Ming Tsai, demonstrated a French technique to eating mussels. He used an empty shell of an eaten mussel as a pincer to get the meat out of the other mussels. I should have known better than make a fool of myself. Talking to women isn’t my expertise, but I am a pro at making mountains out of molehills. Two anxiety-filled days passed until I saw

and apologized to Molly's boyfriend-now-husband, Dean, for my flub. He laughed it off, said it was okay, and not to worry about it. That's when I knew it was safe to climb down from Everest. I've told the story to others since it happened 5 years ago and slowly learned to embrace the humorous side of it instead of looking at it as though I broke all 10 Commandments in a single day.

C.S. Lewis once said, "I think that if God forgives us we must forgive ourselves. Otherwise, it is almost like setting up ourselves as a higher tribunal than Him." It's a quote that I come back to now and again to remind myself that even when I've screwed up for the trillionth time, that it'll be alright, and my mistakes, no matter how big, will not bring about the Armageddon. However, it can still be difficult to maintain a healthy outlook. You may have heard that "Asian without the A's is 'sin'" (which is true). Contrast that with who I am — a Christian who believes that Jesus Christ died for my sins (which are many) — and you have a fantastic recipe for an identity crisis. A recipe that's one part trying to fit in as someone part of a minority, one part holding onto my cultural identity without totally Americanizing myself, and one part person of faith in Christ (salt and pepper to taste). It's important to taste food as you're cooking to know if adjustments are necessary. Maybe a little bit of honey to cut the sourness of lemonade is needed or a couple more drizzles of soy sauce when making pork and chive dumplings, one of my favorite foods.

I also enjoy scallion pancakes and hand-pulled cumin lamb noodles, but after a while, they all kind of taste the same. I find myself craving barbecued brisket, collard greens, cornbread, and an Arnold Palmer instead, much to the chagrin of my parents. They speak a Taiwanese dialect called Hakka to each other and Mandarin to my brother and me. Our mom used to say that I would sing children's songs in Mandarin, but stopped when John was 2-3 years old. By then, we were both in school and more comfortable speaking English. The first time I went to Taiwan was in 1986. My parents wanted to show me off to my relatives who were just as surprised as anyone that I existed. They plan to move back permanently in a few years. My father said it's because Massachusetts is too cold. Plus, he and my mom are dual citizens and have benefits in their homeland. They won't return to the States unless it's for my wedding. I haven't told them that I don't plan on getting married for as long as I shall live 'til death do I part. Something I've

learned recently is that I need to stop hating myself because it's not healthy or biblical. If I can't even love myself, then how can I love someone else?

Perhaps sooner than later, I'll also learn how to depend on God despite all of my weaknesses and know that he's the One who will strengthen me even when I feel totally helpless, ugly, and inadequate. On the other hand, maybe that's just a platitude said by Christians because other Christians said it to them. I'll try not to be a Daniel Downer and end on a more positive note. Writing this has reminded me that I'm blessed and should be more thankful simply because I am *alive*. Hopefully, I will finally realize that my life is a gift from God not only to my parents, but to me as well.

## **fertility**

*Kelsey Chaplain*

when stone was torn to metal  
smog enveloped the buildings  
gaseous abandoned dirt seeped  
out from the foundation, chest cavities  
iron rods, beams, and netting—

silver ferns try to grow from sediment still in my lungs  
i hold the gray town in the crook of my elbow  
and let my body rust around it

collection in my chest shrinks, grows  
travels with me to new soil  
a new patch of sunlight, bees on that window sill  
but allergens can sweep into immunities sometimes

the skin-cell dirt has a way of packing itself inside of me  
waiting for the opportunity  
to swallow

## Catalyst

Caitlin Hanley



The few people who rushed into their suburban homes pretended not to see Rachel biting back her lip and staring blankly at the lifeless body in front of her. Her shoulders drooped down –her whole body was numb. The Lexus on the other side of the street had the left bottom corner of its hood concaved. The blood painted across the bumper of the car was drying in the sunlight. She could still see Nina colliding into the Lexus. The owner of the car was outside tapping his Edward Green oxfords while waiting for the ordeal to be over. Every few seconds he would glance down at his watch. Rachel's stoic face indicated that she wasn't actually looking at the body, but instead somewhere in the distance, searching for something that would deny what had just happened. Her knees were starting to bleed from the cement sidewalk digging into them.

She stroked Nina's warm golden fur as the situation settled in. Her dog was dead. *She's gone. I'll never get woken up by her jumping in my bed.* She still remembered the time she came home to find Nina's paws daintily placed over the edge of the new couch her roommate had bought. She had stared straight at Rachel with an expression like a child, who was fully enjoying something they knew they weren't allowed to do. Nina then jumped off the couch and with a wagging tail, innocently trotted over to Rachel. She had to laugh as Nina let out her signature bark, requesting her welcome home greeting.

Rachel's body remained listless and her hands continued to absently brush the golden fur. Maybe if she kept petting Nina, then she could hear that bark again. *She was barking just minutes ago. She always did it to get my attention and it never failed to comfort me...* She remembered a time when she was feeling frustrated and upset after a particularly bad argument with her mother. Rachel had curled into her pillow as if it could take all the emotions out. Nina scampered toward her and nudged her hand. Wanting to be alone, Rachel hid her hand under the pillow. Nina continued to nudge her, trying to offer comfort, and Rachel kept swatting her away. "Not now Nina. Leave me alone." Nina saw she was being ignored and ran to her bed on the other side of the room; picked up the cushion in her mouth; and threw it across the

room, hitting Rachel's back. Rachel turned around, shocked from what had just happened. She faced Nina only to find her with the bed cushion in her mouth again, paws mounted in play position...

Nina was her best friend. *So why. Why can't I cry.* She knew she had to feel sad but it was as if the emotion was floating deep inside her, not quite within her grasp. *Cry. Curse. Do something.* Yet as she mentally commanded her body, she felt the rush of blood building up in her clenched toes. Memories of voices began flooding back to her...

"I don't want to hear it. It's not my fault, you're upset" Rachel could still see the scornful face of her mother, always lecturing her. Rachel had grown up her whole life never seeing either of her parents vent. There was the occasional yelling when she had done something that pushed them over the edge, but for the most part their dissatisfaction was expressed in passive aggressive comments. "Dear, it would be great if next time you take your shoes off, you put them in the shoe rack." This is how Rachel grew up; constantly watching people bottle up their negative emotions behind a pleasant smile....

As the memories played, she let out a quick, low laugh. Her shoulders briefly fell, only to curl back up. She didn't want to keep it inside. She didn't want to be like her mother.

Rachel's hazel eyes glanced back across the street at the man who had hit Nina. He was conversing with a police officer. The man rubbed his hand across his forehead. Nina's fur was now brittle from the blood drying against her head. *I should have held on tighter.* She could still feel the fast burning sensation of the leash slipping out of her hand as Nina dash into the street determined to catch the squirrel that had scampered across. The following moments played oddly through her head— it happened too fast to process yet she could see it clearly. The white Lexus edging toward Nina. The car suddenly slamming on its brakes, screeching its desperate attempt to stop in time. Its failure to do so, as it swallowed up Nina and spat her back out on the side of the road. The car had veered to a stop in the opposite side of the street and Nina flopped next to Rachel.

The man moved his hand from his forehead and pointed in Rachel's direction. He wore an expression that barely contained his thoughts of being inconvenienced, his feet still tapping away. His obvious display of impatience irritated Rachel. Yes, it was mainly her fault, but he was the person who had actually hit Nina. So why was he over there acting so

goddamn rude. She bit down harder on her lip to prevent the angry stream of words from slipping out of her mouth. She cursed herself for once again, holding back her emotions. The officer nodded and trotted toward her. She thought back to how her friends would cry or yell. She remembered her mother, who underwent therapy last month due to not being able to manage bottling up all her emotions anymore. *Looks like her little motto about keeping it in finally bit her in the ass.*

“Miss, are you alright?” the officer was leaning down looking at her.

The question stirred something inside her. *Am I alright? My dog just died, so why the hell would I be alright. I... I can't even process what I'm feeling ... sadness, guilt, anger, annoyance. It is all so jumbled up I want to scream. I ... I just can't...*

“Miss are you alright?! He repeated with impatience beginning to show in the corner of his eyes.

“I am fine.” Rachel muttered as she finally picked herself up and turned away – refusing to let him see the tear sliding down her check.





**Untitled**

*Kevin Fang*

## Bleeding Blood

*Sara Stanton*

My gums are bleeding,  
and in agony  
I shake.  
My voice was unflinching,  
but now it's muffled from waves.  
It's like a waterfall of red,  
and it falls from me  
dribbling down my chin,  
coloring my once upon a time pale neck,  
pooling just above my shirt  
right where my heart used to throb.  
It sinks into my porous skin  
trying to fill the spot  
where hope was kept  
except it fills more,  
and I continue to bleed.  
There's no end to the blood, wherever it's coming from,  
and it engulfs each vacancy until there is none.

Then it moves past that hole and drowns my lungs.  
I feel it spill over as I breathe,  
and each breath is like my body smacking concrete.  
I open my mouth once more trying to talk,  
but who knew there could be so much blood long after your heart was  
clawed out.  
And more slips past my lips, pouring and gushing,  
and soon I can't even recognize my skin.

I feel my body fill up, and, with nowhere left to go, I blink.  
It's just enough to help the blood flow.  
Now it slides down my cheeks, and I can't see at all.  
Finally, it fills my brain. The blood can't escape fast enough.  
I'm dead. I'm dying. I'm numb and swimming in my own head.  
Nothing. Not even words can trespass, but then it happens.

The blood stops and starts to drain. Out my mouth and eyes and ears  
and nose.

I can think and see and smell and hear.

It leaves my lungs and I can breathe. I can talk.

It exits me slowly; it's almost all gone.

It bursts from my cracked fingernails- they're more like claws.

It's eager to leave.

What's left is in that little hole where my heart once was.

It starts to congeal and coagulate.

It's thicker and heavier and trying to become whole.

It's shaping and condensing and learning how to be.

It's now the form that was missing inside of me;

It beats my new blood and keeps me on track.

It's no longer bursting and pouring.

It's simply flowing and bleeding

my new heart's blood.

## Les Chiens Phantomes

Alice Fristrom



Fear. She didn't like it. She wasn't used to it either. It felt cold. As if someone had tried to give her a fur, only it had been frozen before it was draped over her shoulders. Despite this, she continued ploughing through the snow, chilly through her heavy wrappings. She could hear howling in the darkness of the forest, and knew she wasn't alone.

If things got bad, the pack would come for her, even though they, too, were fighting through the snow, and the bear both outweighed them and had a head start. She continued to dig her way through the drifts, hearing nothing but the howls and the screams of the bear behind her. It was cold—normally that didn't bother her, but the fear was seeping even deeper into her skeleton, chilling the marrow. This wasn't normal cold, like the kind that came in winter when she rolled in the snow with the pack. It was biting ice, that made her feel fragile and vulnerable. Years of living and running with the pack had made her strong and agile—she had never been a large girl, but she was sturdy—which was a good thing, given that the wolves raised her.

Even she, however, was having trouble fighting through snow that reached her eyes, with a bear bent on her destruction tearing after her. Still, it never occurred to her for a single moment that she would be harmed. If the bear got too close, the pack would save her, just as they always had in the past. It never even occurred to her that they might not be able to; after all, they were far from normal wolves.

There were rumours about them in the local villages, any place that bordered their forest. They called them monsters, demons, or *Les Chiens Phantomes*, if they were feeling respectful. Their fear was not unjustified—the creatures had a habit of appearing and disappearing without so much as a rustle of leaves, or a growl. They were beings of smoke and shadow; none could tell if they were illusions or real wolves and they unnerved. They were known for taking things—even human children.

She had never seen any other pups like her, however; in fact, she had never seen any other pups at all. She had been raised by the pack her entire life, and they were all she knew. They were intelligent, and knew she needed food, water, and furs and would bring them to her... But

they did not know love the way humans did, and they could not give that to her.

That was why the fear was so alien to her. She had been brought up with nothing more than the basics—the essentials of need and survival. The bear, however, triggered something inside her that she had never known. It was an instinct—a speeding heartbeat and unconditional panic that sent her scrambling through the snow. She was accustomed to most of the creatures in the forest, but something so large and powerful had never tried to harm her before. She was not used to being prey.

She could hear the creature gaining on her through the snow, its growls and bellows coming ever nearer. She did not look back—that would only slow her down. Then, there was a snapping sound, the like of which she had never heard, and there was a tremendous roar, a shudder in the ground, as if a tall tree had crashed to earth. She did not turn until she was sure the bear was silent, and even then, she found she still wasn't alone.

There was another figure, wrapped in furs, standing over the animal, holding a strangely shaped stick. As she stared at it, it lifted its gaze from the bear to stare at her, and its eyes widened a bit in surprise.

The pack had never been very expressive with their eyes, but this figure bore deep brown, questioning ones. She faltered back a step, but it held up a paw. It did not make any sounds, and, even against her better judgement, she found herself hesitating, analysing the new arrival.

It was walking on its hind legs, but closely resembled her in shape—but as far as she knew there were no other creatures in the forest like her. She inched back a little, unnerved. It saw her discomfort, but seemed unable to guess the cause. After a moment of consideration, it set the stick on the trodden snow, then held up its front paws. This intrigued her, and again, she hesitated. For a while, neither of them moved, until she was certain that she could risk a glance at the bear. She was greeted with another surprise.

There was some sort of long, thin, stick protruding from its eye, the tip marked with feathers. This one was straight, unlike the one the figure had laid on the snow. She knew no one ever tried to catch *Les Chienes* because all traps were left unsprung, but the odd sticks were new to her.

It saw her looking, and glanced over at the bear. There was another moment, and then it moved, reaching its paw over its head. She tensed, ready to spring and run, and for a second was certain it would attack. The paw returned, however, holding a similarly long stick. As this one was not embedded in the bear's eye, she could see that the end that was not feathered was pointed, carved from some sort of strange and shiny stone, she thought. The figure took a deep breath, holding the stick out toward her, and again, the eyes spoke. Not in any language she understood, there was certainly something moving behind them. It was a gentleness—and awareness that had never been in the expressions of the forest creatures, and most certainly not her pack. She felt an odd calmness spread through her, like the eyes were easing her panic. She was not about to risk going nearer, however. Not to something she didn't understand—especially not after being chased by a bear. When she showed no sign of coming closer, it merely bent down and laid the stick on the ground carefully, before straightening to look at her again. They stared at each other for another long moment, until the howls of the pack echoed through the darkness, closer this time. They had sensed the stillness, and wanted to know if she was well. The figure flinched, surprised by the wolves proximity, and fell back a bit. It looked back at her, then, stooping to grab its stick, turned and vanished into the snow, leaving the other stick behind.

Once she was certain it was gone, she called back to her pack, letting them know that she was, indeed, whole. They replied, and then their calls moved off again. They were heading back to the den, she guessed, and it was best she followed them. She turned to go, then stopped, looking back at the stick that the figure had left on the ground. After a bit of deliberation, her curiosity won over her suspicion, and she moved back to it, bending down and taking the wooden shaft in her teeth. Certain she had a hold of it, she turned back to digging her way through the snow, towards what she knew as home, leaving the dead bear for whatever scavengers wanted it—the pack brought her food, but they never ate; she could leave this meal for others.

She continued to force her way through the drifts, digging and clawing. Her mind did not stay on her encounter for long—she met odd creatures in the forest from time to time, though never quite like this one. She was not certain what the thing she carried was, only that it

interested her, as did many things she found and brought home on the forest floor.

So she kept moving, teeth clamped tight upon her new plaything.

## **We Were**

*Jackie Gold*

It was the beginning  
of what I thought could be;  
Something magical,  
like an unwritten fairytale,  
a long-awaited adventure.

When we held each other,  
god, I felt so at home.  
We were happy,

but then we weren't.  
It was over for you.  
Without warning,  
you left;  
like what we had was nothing.

Your shiny armor now scuffed  
from scrubbing away  
every fingerprint I left behind.

I never wanted to lose you.  
You would always say "you won't."  
Though when I said "I *need* you,"

You paused

and said "I don't."



# Hardwood

*Sara Stanton*

Groaning in pain  
and clicking and squeaking,  
scratched and abused from the years it's been settling.

Dusty and dirty or  
shiny and smooth,  
it's fossilized time installed in each room.

Discolored in places  
And stained in some others.  
Longer than a half century  
receiving brothers and  
sisters, mothers and daughters,  
fathers and sons, and  
grandmother, grandfather.

Over these years, so much has changed  
the house and the people  
and itself, it's aged, but  
the memories ingrained will never fade.

It will lie there remembering and reminding of the days  
when hardwood was just hardwood being arrayed.

## Disassociation Meals

*Flavianny Kelle Silva Rabelo*



Ma called during lunch  
to say she had dinner plans with death.  
So, with a mouthful of chicken,  
We yell at each other.  
I say “I’m the only suicide in this family”  
She says “Wipe your mouth,  
you got it all wrong”

Then I spend three days without food  
Because while I do look good on my knees  
with a toothbrush in my hand  
drool and spit down my chin  
and a whole burger down the toilet,  
It leaves me with a full stomach sometimes.

Ma told me I was overreacting  
while licking the tapioca crumbs on her fingers.  
She called me honey, called me sweet potato bun  
She complained we never sit down  
to eat breakfast anymore.

## Untitled



*Michael Coleman*

I am filled with fuzzy warm happiness when I look back to my first memory of my father. He and I were sitting in the corner of my room and the blunt plastic keys he dangled in front of me were entrancing in a way primary colors can only be to a small child. I can remember his torso, and crossed legs, but the fact that I can't remember his face probably speaks to the fact that I *really* wanted those keys. Why then, was I so disappointed when he got up and tossed the keys to me?

The loss of my mother was long and drawn out when I look back at it as an adult. They found the abscess when I was in fourth grade, declared it cancer when I was in fifth, and for three long years I was sheltered from the fact that there was no hope for her, that she had already decided to die. My father did his best to give me a normal life. He would take me to the card shop on Saturdays, and sometimes the stacks of trading cards I opened were just as high as his football cards. When he got to his last pack he would rub it on the top of my head for good luck, hoping for a special autographed card; or a piece of jersey.

No amount of good luck could stop my mother from leaving on September 30, 2004. I cried in private, angry at the world for taking her from me; even though I knew it was going to happen sooner or later. My sister cried and grabbed at me to hold her, and all the usual "it's going to be okay"'s evaporated in my chest before they could hush through my mouth. The thing that will shake me to this very day though, is the memory of my father looking up to get the news that Lisa had passed, and then shoving me into his chest to sob. All of my notions of this man led to nothing. Dad doesn't cry, but this man is truly horribly wracked. I got to watch what he had been holding in for 5 long years rip out of him, and I don't think he's ever been able to stitch that hole completely shut.

I am often worried that I am in one of these long drawn out plateaus with my father now. I almost lost him two years ago when he decided try and sleep off the flue he had. It wasn't influenza, and if he had fallen asleep that night instead of going to the emergency room congestive heart failure would've made sure he didn't wake up. I tried calling him

the night before, and was slightly annoyed when he didn't answer. What kind of dad doesn't want to talk to their kid?

I was woken up at 6 a.m. the next morning to the news that his heart had stopped at least once during the night, and I would have to wait until he was stabilized before I could see him. My professor at the time found me wandering outside his office, and watched me break down, sliding against the lockers and slamming on the ground. He told me to go see him, and to worry about class later. I sat in class and tried to participate until I got the okay to come see my father.

My father made a relatively fast recovery, but I can't get that moment out of my head. I call him every day to see how he is doing, and try to sound cheerful when I say "that's good, just be careful" even when I know he's lying about how tired he is. It's when he doesn't answer his phone that I truly worry about him now. What if his voicemail is the last set of keys he'll hand to me?



## **Let me tell you about the day the sea became my lover.**

*Olimpia Carias*

i was still so young and i carried the sun in my skin. My cheeks, streaked with its rays; my hair light as café con leche. Tasting sopa de caracol in my throat, i licked my chapped lips as i slipped off my sandals. i walked out of my tío's house looking for a place where my mind could roam freely, where my body could exist outside of itself.

The dirt of the road dusted my ankles as the flies kissed my ears. i didn't bother swatting them away, i relished in their existence. i kept walking, passing by the community horse and the clay houses that reminded me of pan de coco. i could feel the sweat trickle down my back while the humidity cradled my face. Soon the sand was in my view and the orange glow of day that led me forward.

Bliss was her body, her hair scattered along the shore. i stepped on her teeth, a slight tickle to my feet. She felt warm as i entered her. She enveloped me in her soul and she lapped up the slick sweetness of my shoulder. i ran my fingers through her and she came in waves. Crisp whispers of heat singing along with her sighs. i fell deeper and deeper into her till i couldn't breathe. i drowned in her love.

She pushed me away, far away till I was facing her once more. As if it was the first time. I was dripping in her tears as I turned away, unsure if I'll ever return. I walked back to my tío's house, her splashing cries playing in my mind. I saw my tío's stomach in the hammock before I saw his face, an empty bowl and squeezed limónes on the ground. He smiled at me and said, "You've never been so tan."