

TIDEPPOOLS 2018

VOL 32



2018 TIDEPPOOLS

TIDEPOOLS

MiraCosta College | Volume 32

Acknowledgements

Tidepools would not be possible without the support of many dedicated faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

The editors are indebted to:

- The MiraCosta College Board of Trustees
- Sunita Cooke, Superintendent/President
- Diane Dieckmeyer, Vice President
- Dana Smith, Dean of Letters & Communication
- Gabe Waite, Coordinator of Communication Design
- Jill Malone, Department Chair of Media Arts & Technologies
- Jane Mushinsky, Text Editor
- Becky Kessab, Patron Saint of the Tidepools Project
- Korina Cobb and Ashley Lampe, Graphic Designers

We especially appreciate the work of this year's selection committee, whose members spent many hours painstakingly considering every manuscript we received:

- Daniel Ante-Contreras
- Adam Bishop
- Emily Chau
- Jade Hidle
- Jeff Keehn
- Melissa Martinez
- Katie Montagna
- Katharine Prescott



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ESSAY PRIZE: Origin of Mendacious Bullshit
FICTION PRIZE: Ebb and Ivory
POETRY PRIZE: Tequesquitlan, My Beloved Pueblo
ART PRIZE: The Thinker

HONORABLE MENTION/POETRY:

The Need to Save

Eating Red

Goodnight Lashkar Gah



cerebral

contemplation

reasoning

logical

reflection

abstraction

Chemically Induced Apathy

RUBEN GUTIERREZ



**Is the
fantasy
laid out by
the drugs
greater
than
having
dreams
and goals?**



STRUNG OUT FOR THE FOURTH DAY he keeps pushing on his old waterlogged skateboard. Pushing past his old neighborhood, pushing past his rough childhood, pushing. Pushing past the block known for pushers and pimps, for prostitutes and poignant dreams. Pushing even though he felt buried alive. No real destination or plan, the only thing on his mind was the next fix.

Strung out for the Seventh Day. Not remembering the past three, must have been a load of fun. Spitting out 2 more teeth as the grind is prevalent not only in the streets, but in his teeth from the constant abuse of drugs. No money to eat, but he sure does have Five dolla's on your dime sack. He used to be a cool cat, called him speedy but now he's all twacked, call him fiending. A product of his environment, wonder what roads got laid out in front of him. Wonder what made him start to smoke crack. What made him stop giving a fuck, I just wanna know that.... Is the fantasy laid out by the drugs greater than having dreams and goals?

Guess so, for him life consists of oil burners and torch lighters, bar fights and all-nighters, John Landis and Bradley Park, tweakers and non-sleepers. Residing in the echoes of his old self, he keeps on pushing his tattered skateboard with no destination in mind. Pushing past the block where the homie got shot, past the block littered with crack and rocks. Past the block he learned to kickflip on. Past the block he felt his first love, his first loss. 12 days strung out now and counting. No sense of direction, no intent on stressing or learning a lesson. He's as wild as they come, a loose cannon abandoned. So just keep pushing, the streets are yours. There will come a day when all this shit won't matter.



Burnt House
LAUREN TOOMBS

Figure Study
SHIRLEY LUK



Wondering
FARIDÉH SHEAHAN

Breaking in New Shoes

JOANNE D'AMATO

I collect new shoes. Keep them in their boxes for prolonged periods of time. Occasionally, I try on my latest purchase. Look in the mirror. Admire the style. Walk around my bedroom. Then with care, place each shoe, wrapped in original tissue paper, back in its box, to rest next to my rocker. I repeat this ritual for several months before I step into the world wearing my new shoes. I have no idea why I do this.

Perhaps, it's the familiar feel of a well-worn comfortable pair of shoes. Possibly, it stems from my younger years, being bored on Sunday mornings, kneeling through Catholic Mass. At age five I develop this game. Since, I spend so much time on my knees, not understanding a word of Latin, I look at people's shoes as this slow procession of parishioners make their way up the center aisle of the church.

I find myself trying to match shoes to faces. This form of coping continues through my teens. Styles change as does the world. Mass is now in English, which is good because I never learned Latin. And today, half a century later, I continue to find comfort in my footwear curiosity as my eyes wander to a person's feet to glance at their shoes. Maybe, that's why I keep mine tucked in boxes.

Thoughts After the North Coast Rep Production of *Mice and Men*

LJ SULLIVAN

IN OF MICE AND MEN BY John Steinbeck, audience/readers are struck by the tragic murder of lovable, mentally slow Lenny at the hand of his friend George. But what about Lenny killing Curly's wife?

Was this not equally tragic? Or was she "asking for it"?

Does any woman ask for death or rape? I would consciously argue "no." Yet, like most audiences I find myself all too easily swept into joining the farmhands--judging Curly's wife.

"Jesus, what a tramp!" George decides when he meets her for the first time. Isn't this classic projection? Aren't George and Lenny Depression-era tramps looking for work? Curly's wife is considered a troublemaker. Yet didn't George and Lenny need to leave their last place due to trouble? Aren't they smuggling trouble onto the farm via Lenny's penchant for accidentally killing the soft things he loves to stroke?

This is easily swept under the rug of audience/reader emotion,

perhaps by Steinbeck's wizardry. I too empathize with George, Lenny, and their dream. Just one little farm -- that's all they want.

Yet Curly's lonely wife has a dream too. She says: "There ain't no women. I can't walk to town ... I tell you I just want to talk to somebody." Her dream: connection with another human being.

Online, I read that John Steinbeck wrote to the first actress that played Curly's wife. In this letter, Steinbeck provided backstory for the role: "She [Curly's wife] was told over and over that she must remain a virgin because that was the only way she could get a husband ... She only had that one thing to sell and she knew it" and "She is a nice, kind girl and not a floozy. No man has ever considered her as anything except a girl to try to make ... As to her actual sex life -- she has had none except with Curley and there has probably been no consummation there since Curley would not consider her gratification and would probably be suspicious if she had any ..."



Favorite Place RODOLFO MURGUIA

Is it cultural misogyny that leads this woman to appear threatening? We may scoff at another culture that insists women completely cover their bodies (ostensibly to not tempt men). Yet in America, is there also a deeply rooted feeling among both genders that a woman must cover up her sexuality if men are to behave responsibly?

Is the real tragedy that we don't recognize the validity of Curly's wife's dream? Or even her right to an

identity? Her only name in the story is Curly's wife. His possession.

Did Steinbeck subversively write *Of Mice and Men* to point out – in part – our prejudicial and puritanical American mindset? And have I merged with that mindset?

At one point in my life, I lived in the South Pacific where all the island women were topless every day--I had zero judgements. Recently one Harvey Weinstein accuser appeared in a top revealing plenty of cleavage

and I found myself suspicious – questioning her reliability, though I readily accepted other accusers as credible. Perhaps I owe John Steinbeck a thank you – for calling me out.

Just Your Everyday Usher

COURTNEY KRYSL

“RIGHT THIS WAY LADIES,” I forced the words out probably a little too enthusiastically this time. The same words I have said probably a thousand times over the course of many, many beautiful Friday nights such as this one.

“Row D is going to be the fourth row from the bottom, and seat 15 will be the 15th from the right counting towards the left! Enjoy the show!” My Mom always wanted me say that last bit with a smile, which I strained and forced every night to the point where my cheeks ache. How stupid do we think people are? What do people think when they see that they are in seat C5? “I wonder where row C could be?” Well it couldn’t be right after A and B, because that makes no sense. Thus they hire us Ushers to make sure people don’t get lost in the theater. Getting lost in a theater must be terrifying, seen as it is a huge open rectangular room and all. “Where would column 9 be?” Now that is a great question because it is not always right after 8. People do need reminding of the order seen as we don’t learn the alphabet and how to count until maybe kindergarten. Honestly, that whole L-M-N-O-P section of the alphabet is confusing as hell anyway. Most 3 year olds think it is one long letter anyway, and we would not want people in row O to accidentally sit in row M, because that would be disastrous and embarrassing. That is why they need trained professionals like me who have studied the payout of the theater for a whole thirty seconds to direct people where to go.

“Hi! Welcome to the East County Theater! Would you like help finding your seat?” Wow A1, really? It is right in front of your face. “Looks like you’ve got the best seats in the house! You’re going to be right here sir!” I am so thrilled to be right here on a Friday night. Especially since it gives me an excuse to miss that beach bonfire Emma invited me to. Why eat s’mores and hang out with my Friends when I could be right here showing people to seats that they couldn’t possibly find themselves.

I find my mind wandering to my encounter with Emma earlier that day.

“Kelly! Just tell your Mom you are sick! Then after she leaves sneak out to the beach with us!” She whined to me.

“Believe me, I would, but my Dad is home all day. He would see me leave.” Honestly, I really had thought of every possible way to get out of this commitment every Friday-Sunday, but never found one that would be successful without my parents finding out and grounding me for the rest of eternity.

“Seat D6 will be the fourth row from the front and the 6th seat from the right! Enjoy!” All my friends are out eating s’mores and having a blast, but where am I? Not there. This is it. I can’t handle this anymore.

Crap here comes my Mom. Weird why is she walking towards me? What could she possibly be mad at me for? I am the one who should be mad...Yea...How dare she be so demanding of me! Let her have it. Tell her off. Just look at her and say you’re tired of this and are leaving. Do it. Do it now. There is a s’more calling your name, but you need to act now. The voice inside my head is all I can hear. My Mom is only about 10 paces away now. I am staring at her now, trying to telepathically send her the message that is banging around inside my head begging to escape my lips.

Mom’s smile faded, and turned into a quick scowl directed right at me. “Kelly, please direct this lovely couple to their seats.” She said with a hint of annoyance. “Sorry, this here is my daughter, she is only 13 and already can’t get enough of the theater! She love these shows so much she comes here every Thursday through Sunday night because there is nothing else she would rather be doing

that watching these amazing works of art!”

That’s it. I could feel the lump in my throat, and felt my eyes start to fill up with tears. My fists were clenched so hard my nails cut my hands...

“You know what mom?! I am so done. Every Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday, and Sunday night I am here. Do you think this is where I want to be? Ha! My friends get to hang out at the beach, watch movies together, and act like normal 13 year olds. I am not a theater geek. In fact I would be completely fine if I never saw a play again! I just want one night! One night with my friends. I can’t spend one more night here when my friends are eating s’mores around a campfire! It’s not fair” I screamed at my mom. My mom’s face was priceless. I made a break for the exit knowing I was grounded forever.

“Kelly, you get back here right now! How dare you talk to me like that! I am your mother...” I could feel my mom’s anger radiating off her...

I have ran that rant through my head a thousand times, practiced it in front of the mirror, imagined how my mom would react, picture her face, imagine myself storming out of the theater triumphant. That has been bottled up inside of me since the seventh grade.

My mom is already out the door.

I guess it can stay bottled up a little longer.

“B12 will be the second row from the bottom and the 12th chair from the right. Enjoy the show!” I exclaimed with that well practiced fake smile.



Tranquility: Parker Canyon
LU MOHLER

A Decision Worth Making

KOROSETA BUTLER

THE BELL WAS ABOUT to ring, signaling the students to burst out of their classrooms, head for their lockers and gather up materials to take home. The crumpling of paper, the slamming of textbooks and the clicking of footsteps filled the halls immediately after the last ring of the day. Another day closer to graduation, another day closer to freedom. Sitting at my desk, I decided to stay slightly longer and get a checklist ready to take home. Math homework, check box. English homework, check box. College applications (exclamation point), check box. Trying to balance homework, extracurricular activities and college applications were overwhelming, but I couldn't say it was unexpected. At the top of my list of colleges was BYU, a private university in Provo, Utah owned and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. It was a Mormon school. My mom had

introduced me to idea of BYU because a friend had convinced her to.

I walked down to my locker to pack textbooks for homework. "How are your applications going?" I turned around to see my classmate Laina. "Let's just say I have a lot of work to do," I replied. "What school do you think you'll end up choosing?" she asked eagerly. "Probably BYU," I said. She looked confused as if she had already had a college in mind. I had a reputation for breaking the dress code and voicing my opinions as a liberal, a reputation that didn't exactly fit the ideals of BYU. "It has one of the best accounting programs in the nation," I stated in an attempt to ease her confusion. "Oh, okay... wow . . . so you already know about their honor code?" Unfortunately, I knew all about this. Along with the basic college policies, we had to agree to a dress code and to abstain from drinking caffeine on campus. Why did I pick this school again? "Yeah, I

read through it. I mean it's nothing I can't handle." I tried to sound as confident as I possibly could. Maybe saying this aloud could help me believe it was true.

I knew attending a Mormon school would come with a fair share of challenges, but I convinced myself that I could handle whatever this decision would throw at me. I tried to keep my expectations at a minimum, but I couldn't help but picture the typical college experience. Conversations with teachers, my parents, and high school alumna had painted this picture in my head that I had named "The College Experience." It was filled with a diverse group of friends from a variety of backgrounds, late nights at a coffee shop and road trips with my roommates. Of course, this painting depicted academic and financial struggles, they were overpowered by the amazing memories I would make.

Months turned slowly turned into weeks, weeks turned into hours and hours to minutes before the big road trip to Utah. Within this time, I graduated and my family moved to San Diego. I loved San Diego for its limitless sunshine, vintage beach towns, and unique mix of people. It was the perfect getaway from the Utah cold I was warned about on many occasions. I packed everything I could possibly need for the move and soon enough we were on our way.

Entering the city of Provo, it seemed like I could spot a Mormon ward every mile. The buildings seemed very spaced apart and rarely was anyone outside in the open. The weather was gray and gloomy, which didn't help the lifeless atmosphere I was observing. We were approaching the campus and I could see students rushing back to their cars to retrieve boxes to take up to their dorms. We parked near the building my room was in and started to unload boxes. Once I was settled it was time to

say goodbye to my family, the part I looked forward to but dreaded the most. Everyone shed a few tears; I embraced each of my family members as if that'd be the last time I'd see them, and soon after they were gone and I was left to arrange my new living space.

After a couple hours of unpacking, my roommate unlocked the door and rolled in a suitcase as big as a small casket. Her name was Stephanie; she was a computer science major who spoke in a monotone. She made sure to establish a time when lights went off and the importance of her sleep schedule. After exchanging information I wondered when would be the right time to tell her I wasn't Mormon, or if it even mattered. I decided to tell her while we were trying to get to know each other. "Oh, by the way, I'm not Mormon." I uttered, my eyes fixed on her face to observe a reaction. It was important for me to take into account how people would react to me not

being Mormon. Deep inside I wanted someone to say "Me too!" This way we could go through the experience together, but unfortunately, that didn't happen.

It was the third day of my freshman year and the girls in my hall gathered for a hall meeting. Chattering filled the room; questions such as where you were from, what ward you were in, and if you knew brother/sister so and so came up in almost every conversation I overheard. I looked to the corner of the room and noticed a paper with a diamond ring drawn on it; under the ring a few names were listed. The RA called the meeting order, then started with a prayer. As everyone said Amen, the RA drew our attention to the paper with the diamond ring taped up in the corner. "Congratulations to Emma, Rachel, and Maddie on their engagements. Is there anyone else who'd like to share some good news?" Wait . . . engagements? I thought. We were living in the 19 and under dorms

so I was surprised this was brought up at hall meeting. Further into the semester, I learned that this was normal. After serving missions, RM's (return missionaries) would come back seeking marriage.

Learning more about the culture that came along with Mormonism helped me treat the experience of college as some type field study. I am an anthropologist, learning about a culture and trying my best to be unbiased, I thought. That was until a few visits from very persistent missionaries the following semester. It was a bright Wednesday morning and there was a light knock at the door. I opened it to find two ladies dressed in conservative church attire, with missionary name tags that read "SISTER BROWN" and "SISTER VERN." They both had heavy smiles on their faces and were extremely friendly. "Hi, you must be Koroseta!" Sister Brown exclaimed. I knew this was going to happen eventually. "Yes, that's me," I responded. "We are from

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and we would like to share a message with you if you are willing to hear it." As an anthropologist, it'd be a smart decision for me to take this opportunity to learn. "Yes, sure, come on in." We all sat around and they asked me questions about my religious background. I was perfectly happy with the church I was attending and where I was in my spiritual journey, but I decided to listen and take the opportunity to gain insight. I enjoyed the message, but kindly let them know I wasn't interested in joining the church.

During the week I was asked questions by girls in my hall and my roommate about when I'd be seeing the sisters again. I felt uncomfortable and pressured that people were becoming interested in my spirituality and whether or not I was going to join their church. I let them know that I wasn't interested and all responses seemed the same: "Oh yeah, that's fine too." I felt like an

outsider who everyone wanted badly to make conform. As the week was coming to an end, the sisters came back to visit, again asking if I'd be willing to hear the message a second time. I kindly told them that I didn't.

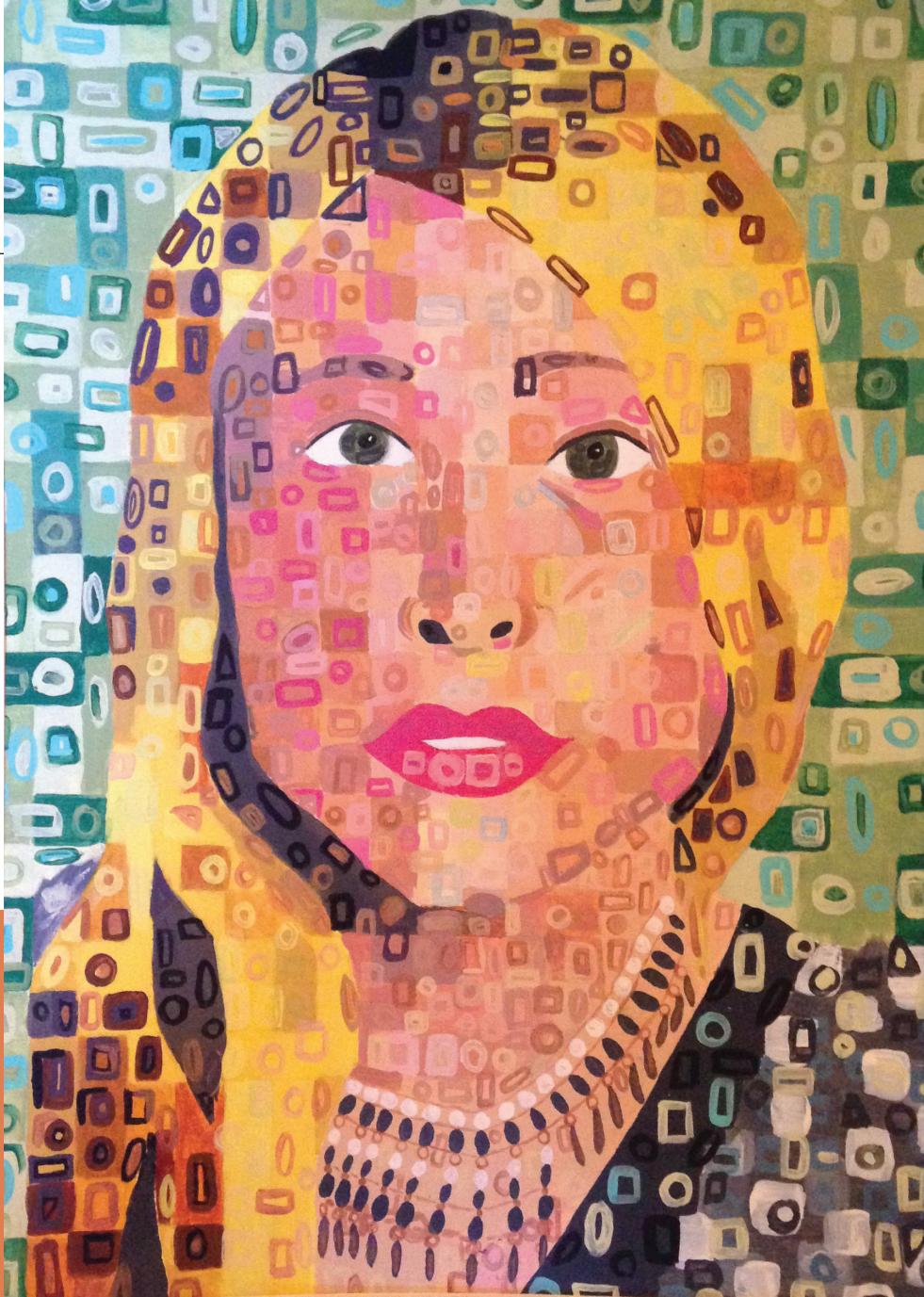
Attending a Mormon school as a non-member for my first half of college led to many uncomfortable experiences that I have become thankful for. Being isolated helped me learn more about myself and what I consider to be my strengths and weaknesses. I learned that it takes reaching a low to help you get to your high points in life, and to never be afraid of making changes that you believe will be beneficial. I decided to transfer after my second year. Being more aware and sure of my decision helped me make the choice. Leaving BYU was an extremely difficult decision because of the academics, but it was also the first time I prioritized my mental health, a decision I will never regret making.

Ego Says Listen To Me

LUIS CASTRO

If you listen to me I can make you a winner
If you listen to me I can make you miserable
Listen
Listen
Listen to me
You can't escape from me
You can't control me
I know your darkest secrets I enjoy torturing you
I 'm an unpredictable implacable inquisitor I can praise you or destroy you in
the blink of an eye
You're either king or slave
I don't forgive I don't forget
I am the voice that distorts the truth
Listen
Listen
Listen to me
You are my prisoner
Insidious is your success
I'm a vulture expecting you to fall so I can devour you like a helpless carcass
So fall
Listen
Listen
You have to listen to me
I am your most implacable insatiable critic
I will polish you
You are my finest craft
If you listen to me you'll never be happy but you'll always be improving
Learn to control me and the world is yours
Sincerely,

The Ego



Chuck Close Inspired Portrait

MOLLIE GRAM

HEAD 025

A Storm of Memory

AARON-JOSEPH RAMOS



All the pent up resentment and awkwardness that had befouled me in that hotel washed away as quickly as a palm leaf in this terrifying weather.



IT WAS LOUD. IT WAS TOO LOUD, too hot, and too crowded. The mid-size resort hotel room was jam-packed with aunts, uncles, and cousins. I wanted to go back to the apartment my father and I shared, but that was back across the island. I took a deep breath of the ocean air as the wind whistled in a sky heavy with rain clouds. I wondered if coming to the island of Oahu was such a good idea. It seemed like a fun vacation at first glance. But I forgot one crucial fact: the extended family package was included.

Don't get me wrong, I love all of them dearly. They just had a habit of grating on my nerves. When we were children, my cousins and I would horse around, nothing abnormal or harsh. But the fact that I grew up as an only child—with no relatives within easy driving distance—made me the oddball in every family gathering. I was the novelty, the cousin who didn't show up often; but when I did I was their plaything, their new Christmas toy. It took me a long

time to understand and accept that their bullying was not targeted malice but playful banter.

I looked up as my aunt's slurred voice called out, "Cuzzo, come over here and drink with us!"

"No thanks Aunty, I don't like beer!" I responded hastily. If I didn't do something quickly I would be captured in a grueling drinking game that always had me as loser and butt of the joke.

"C'mon cuz! You never spend any time with us. Why you gotta be like that?" My large overbearing female cousin shouted.

By design, and because I'm still underage; in fact, so are you, I thought. But I just smiled and waved a go-on-without-me gesture. I made a tactical retreat to the unoccupied bedroom adjacent to the common area and noticed—as I walked past—my father downing a shot of amber liquor with four more lined up to closely follow.

I remembered the first time I ever saw my father drink, last year, for

another cousin's twenty first birthday bash in the Mojave Desert. The entire two story house and the surrounding property had been packed with friends, classmates, and relatives to celebrate the birthday boy's true coming of age. I had slunk off into the shadows of that one as well, worn out from a previous ROTC event earlier that day. Dad drank as much in one hour than most had the entire night. He eventually collapsed in a chair and my cousins proceeded to play pranks on him. It was only when he failed to stir and started having strange convulsions that the partygoers grew concerned. The paramedics were called, and having only a provisional driver's license I followed them to the nearest hospital. My father was very embarrassed when he finally did wake up, but he lived. That's all that mattered.

My worries arose when my father collapsed again this time on an island in the middle of the Pacific. The weather forecast predicted the

typhoon that had been growing off the coast would hit close to midnight. To my relief he woke up after a couple hours, but looking like a sailor fresh off the boat.

After everyone had their fill of drink and fun, the matter of whether to drive home or stay the night arose.

"I'd love to stay but my dad didn't bring his medication. We left it at the apartment." I hoped the excuse wasn't as flimsy as it sounded.

"Your dad can miss one dose, can't he?" a cousin inquired.

"But remember last time? He didn't take them then either," his sister speculated. Good, nice one cuz. I believe in you! I thought.

"Oh, that's right, he should take those before bed. But what about the storm?" Dammit, it's not here yet. The longer we talk, the closer it's getting. Shut up and let me go home I thought, looking out the window.

"And how is he supposed to drive in his condition?" my common-sense-having, no-good uncle pressed.

"I'll drive. I have a full license now so it's okay," I pitched, hoping to end the conversation.

"Hold on a minute: the rental car is in your dad's name, plus you have to be 25 to drive a rental." Shit... I had forgotten about that.

"Well he needs his meds. I'm not having him die on me." A bit melodramatic, but I was getting desperate.

"Well alright, are you sure you're going to be okay?" This coming from my aunt. She was my favorite.

After affirming my safety and assurances that I would be careful, I walked my stumbling drunk of a father to the tiny little Honda Fit we had arrived in. As I got in the driver's seat, the typhoon fully engulfed us.

Now, driving a dinky little car in high winds and pouring rain on unfamiliar roads wasn't the smartest thing I had ever done. But man, it was the most exhilarating. All the pent up resentment and awkwardness that had befouled me in that hotel

washed away as quickly as a palm leaf in this terrifying weather. Not another vehicle was in sight. Most of the motorists, being sensible human beings, hunkered down for this brief spat of the elements. The gale buffeted the little vehicle as I fought winds, rain, and lack of traction to stay on the highway. This is the most fun I've had in years, I thought. I may die in a car wreck, but . . . granted I might have lost my wits a little in the glory and thrill of the moment, but what can I say? It was like the most intense video game I ever played.

The adventure ended all too quickly as I arrived in the hotel block of Waikiki. I woke my dad, who had fallen dead asleep in the passenger

seat as soon as we had left the parking lot, then aided him in getting up the short flight of stairs that led to home and rest. After making sure he drank a glass of water and swallowed his meds, I put him to bed like a child. I soon followed suit.

Briefly, I wondered at this turn of events, a paradigm shift as roles were reversed and the child took care of the parent. I squinted at my passed out father, wondering when I started to feel so old. Or maybe it was maturity. In any case, what had started out as an uncomfortable evening had turned into an adventure in the blink of an eye. Or at a storm's passing.

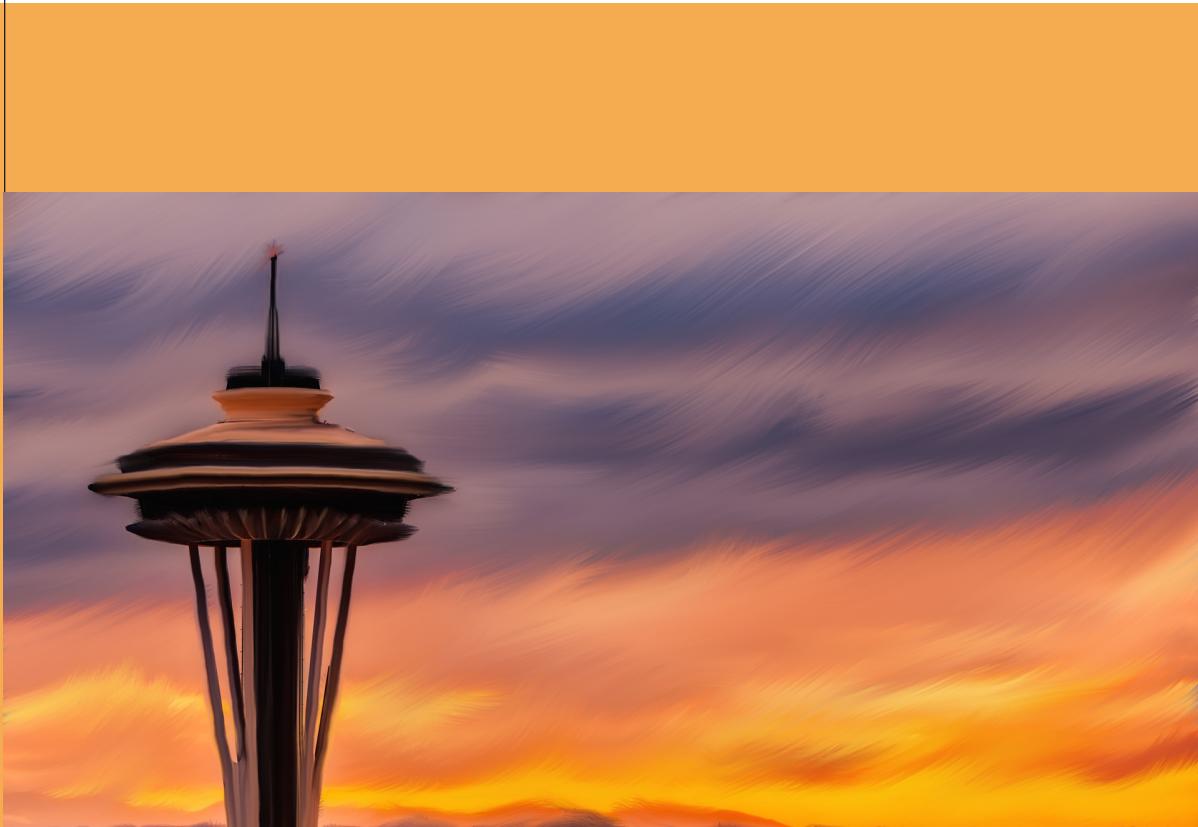


The Thinker
GINNY ENGLISH

Haiku

LJ SULLIVAN

Cut grass: a perfume.
Dad mows our chartreuse backyard
and I am seven.



Space Needle
CHRISTIAN ALVAREZ

On Preparing to Go to a Play about the Donner Party

SUSAN HERRMANN

I have to wonder if refreshments will be on offer
During intermission.
Perhaps I'll just slide a few small snacks
(Of the vegetarian variety, of course,
Out of respect) into my lightweight daypack.
And an extra sweater in there, too,
(In case the A/C is blasting)
Probably my Patagonia fleece
The fuchsia one I took skiing in Tahoe.
And Wayz on my phone, so a knowledgeable voice
Is telling me the shortcuts, since
This place is unknown territory for me.
I really love nature and musical theater
And history and pioneers and all—
I really do.
And I really think it's important that we learn from history
And be thoroughly prepared.

The Clinic at 8:20 on a Saturday Morning

K. DANA KING

IT WAS 8:27 A.M. On a Saturday. My appointment had been for 8:20. Forms and cards and pre-authorization explanations flurried in the foot-and-a-half-wide no-man's-land between me and the admissions counter that was supposed to magically privatize medical discussions. Forty-something white women with jobs and health insurance had other options besides clinics for STI testing, of course, but I was trying to help their cause – bump up their numbers, increase their funding, all that jazz.

It seemed to me that if you offered appointments, you should make an effort to honor them, but I stayed behind my white line, obedient as always, growing increasingly irritated by the pop music loop being piped into the space. I fumbled in my purse for my reading glasses and my Kindle.

I found them just as the trio ahead of me coalesced into a sentient entity and moved to the waiting room. I hung my purse from my shoulder, picked up my boarding bag, and trudged to the counter. The young woman there smiled, almost blinding me with the glare from her unnaturally white choppers, and said, “I’m just going on my break, but Phyllis will help you get checked in.” And my mother walked out from the side door and sat down across from me. My purse screamed, and I slammed it down hard on the counter. “Oooommmphhh,” it objected.

I was stunned. Not only was Mother 3,000 miles away from home, but she was dead. Or had been dead. For three years. I mean, there was no question that the woman across from me lived and breathed, but the last time I checked, my mother was a pile of ashes in a plain crock at the back of my sister’s closet on the other side of the country. My pulse began to race. I could hear my purse trying to get its breath back. I picked it up off the counter, sat down in the nearest chair, and stuffed it under the seat. The purse started to buck and roll. I sat up, and my mother was still sitting across from me.

“I am not a bad person just because I enjoy sex,” someone yelled. I turned

to glare at the guilty party; everyone was glaring at me. My purse burst out from under my chair shouting, “Atta girl! Atta girl! Atta girl!” I tried to kick it across the room, but it dodged and skittered under my mother’s chair, just out of range of my foot.

“Of course you are, dolly,” intoned Mother. “Otherwise, why would you be in a clinic at 8:45 on a Saturday morning?” She handed me her garment bag, which I stowed with the rest of my luggage. A growl rumbled out from under my mother’s chair. I slid down in my seat and tried to swipe my purse out from its lair. It scampered away and started to spit things; my lip gloss bounced off my mother’s calf, and my credit cards flew through the air like a loosed deck of cards. “Oh shit,” I thought, and, sure enough, next came my last female condom. It landed on my mother’s substantial chest shelf with a loud thwack.

She gazed down at the offending item, looked up at me, and suddenly I was sixteen years old, standing in the dining room of my childhood home. I had just passed out in the middle of Catholic mass, confirming my parents’ fears that I was irretrievably evil. Or pregnant, which amounted to pretty much the same thing in their eyes.

“Are you pregnant?” my mother demanded. I could only nod in response.

Somewhere on the fringes of the room my father roared a semi-intelligible oath that might have been either “Jesus H. Christ,” or “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” or even

“Christ on a cracker!” It was hard to tell. Taking the Lord’s name in vain was the nearest Daddy got to church, and he took his blasphemy seriously, but his rage slurred his speech in much the same way that his gin did.

My mother tried to wither him with a glance, but he was not quite ready to yield the floor.

“I knew you’d spoil her,” he seethed, and then he retreated to his darkroom in the cellar, where he stayed for what remained of my forty week sentence.

“You’ll never get into the National Honor Society now, you know,” Mother pronounced, as she fumbled in the closet behind her. She pulled out a faded red boarding bag and handed it to me. “Here – you’ll need to carry this,” she said. “So, let’s get things straight: sex is dirty outside of the sacrament of marriage. Therefore, you are dirty. Not to mention an embarrassment to all of us. Do you understand?”

I wanted to yell righteous and rebellious epithets, but, instead, I gulped out a sob and then vomited all over myself and the boarding bag. Mother led me down the hall toward the bathroom, and we walked through the door into the clinic’s exam cubicle.

She motioned me into a chair and picked up a clipboard. “Reason for visit?” she queried, and I noticed she was wearing a white nurse uniform complete with a neatly lettered name badge which read “Phyllis.”

“STI testing,” I answered.

“Why?” she asked.

Foggy Lighthouse

SIERRA KERR

“Why? Why are you asking why?”

“I’m just reading the questions on the form, dolly. Don’t take your shame out on me.”

“STOP calling me ‘dolly’! And I am NOT ashamed of anything.”

“Calm down, dear, or I’ll have to have the security guards escort you out.”

I pulled my purse off my shoulder and settled it in my lap. I stroked the soft, fuchsia leather and breathed deep. The purse purred in appreciation and settled deeper into my thighs.

“OK,” I said. “Ask away.”

“Are you sexually active?”

“Yes.”

“How many partners do you have?”

“What difference does it make how many partners I have?”

Phyllis doodled on her questionnaire; then she looked over her glasses at me and announced, “I just need to know which one of these boxes to check.” She turned the clipboard toward me. Under “STI Panel,” she had crossed out “Standard” and “Custom” and substituted

two hand drawn check boxes marked “Slut” and “Whore” respectively.

“Bitch!” my purse hissed.

“I never liked that pocketbook,” Phyllis sniffed. “And it clashes with your luggage.”

She was right of course. But it was the faded red boarding bag and the fussily flowered garment bag that clashed – they weren’t my style. There really wasn’t any reason they should go with my lovely fuchsia purse. In which case... maybe it was time to get rid of them.

I set my purse down gently on my chair, picked up the excess luggage, and deposited it in Phyllis’s lap, directly on top of her clipboard.

“Well!” she protested. “I can’t work with all this baggage weighing me down!”

She carried the valises over behind the privacy screen and dropped them on the floor with a thump. When she emerged, she was a petite twenty year old with a nose ring and a good-natured vibe.



Moo Moo's
ELIZABETH HAMUD

The Origin of Mendacious Bullshit

JACLYN CRAIN

THE ORIGIN OF BULLSHIT is hidden among the language, laws, legends, and documents of our lives since the beginning of time. They are the mendacious writings, and myths that have become the doctrine of today. Some have become our laws, some have become our religions, and all have affected, and infected us in some way, and the word ‘bullshit’ echoes in protest. Our homes, schools, work place, and social gatherings, all resonate with frustration to the ‘bullshit’ we are swimming in. From the media, all we hear is mendacious noise being presented as truth. During the last U.S. Presidential campaign shouts of ‘bullshit’ were heard in disagreement to the candidate’s promises to lead this nation away from the entanglement of corporate greed and corruption to save our lands from the threat of terrorism.

Unfortunately, ‘bullshit’ has become the watch word in all our conversations, and of government

policy. Our nation is knowingly, and willingly swimming in bullshit. We all know there is a problem, but nothing is being done to help correct it. The cry of ‘bullshit’ is as far as it goes.

The Urban Dictionary describes bullshit as the intolerance to a lie, however its origin does far deeper. ‘Bullshit’ was originally two words describing different things, but over time, bull and shit have merged to become the single word most used to voice distrust and frustration. Harry Frankfort, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Princeton University, considered bullshit important enough to write a New York Times best seller entitled *On Bullshit*.

Frankfort writes, “so far as I am aware, very little work has been done on this subject, I do not know the words for bullshit in any other language (3).” This leaves the impression... that there may be no other words that more clearly describe the mendacious evolution of ‘bullshit.’ In his small, but aromatic book, Frankfort goes to great

length searching for something of comparison, and finally settles with a work from Max Black titled *The Prevalence of Humbug*. Frankfort notes that “between humbug and bullshit, humbug is less intense (4),”— implying that “perhaps the substitute of humbug, for bullshit, may be more socially acceptable... especially in mixed company.” However, the depth of contamination goes far beyond social acceptability or even the soiling of our shoes. ‘Bullshit’ is contaminating the very soul of our being to the point where we have become numb, and mendacity has become an infectious plague.

I’m reminded of the movie, *A Few Good Men*;— the court room scene where Jack Nicholson shouts “Truth . . . You Can’t Handle The Truth!”— sadly, society seems to have accepted this as a way of life.

Jon Lovett, former speech writer for Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, gave the commencement speech to the 2013 graduating class of Pitzer College in Claremont,

California. The subject of his speech was titled; Bullshit. Lovett states that he is not a fan ... “we are drowning in it! We are drowning in partisan rhetoric that is just true enough not to be a lie,— in industry-sponsored research, in social media’s imitation of human connection, in legalese, and corporate double speak. It infects every facet of public life, corrupting our discourse, wrecking our trust in major institutions, lowering our standards for the truth, making it harder to achieve anything.” Lovett is referring to the modern professional communicator, and those who get paid handsomely, to craft devious messages in the attempt to mislead. Lovett is referring to a writing craft known as, Doublespeak.

In the article, Nothing in Life is Certain Except Negative Patient Care Outcome and Revenue Enhancement, Professor William Lutz goes into detail to explain doublespeak and euphemisms by explaining, “doublespeak is inflated language and misleading

communication; a language that pretends to communicate but, avoids or twists the truth, and creates incongruity between what has been said and what is left unsaid, becoming language that avoids, shifts and denies responsibility.” Lutz continues, “doublespeak is not the product of careless language or sloppy thinking. Indeed, serious doublespeak is the product of clear thinking and is constructed to appear to communicate, when its real purpose is to mislead.” This may be the problem, — we have accepted doublespeak as truth, and let it guide our lives.

In the anthology; Bullshit and Philosophy, editors Gary L. Hardcastle and George A. Reisch, compiled 15 essays from academics across the nation to explain the impact bullshit has influenced our lives. They state, “If bullshit is one of the defining marks of modern culture, then everyone has a stake in it, and everyone can benefit from thinking about it and understanding

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Our nation is knowingly, and willingly swimming in bullshit. We all know there is a problem, but nothing is being done to help correct it. The cry of ‘bullshit’ is as far as it goes.

”

it.” However, to understand it we need to explore its origin and discover why. By tracing the word ‘bull’ back through time we understand that ‘bull’ is the name for, male bovine, the term ‘shit’ is slang for feces, and the exclamation for disgust, or annoyance. These two words merged through time into a single word and became the one word expression for mendacious doublespeak. Research shows evidence of ancient origin. The term, ‘bullshit,’ may have been used for centuries in an effort to express disagreement to edicts, laws, and rulings from elites of the ruling classes. According to Noah Webster, in the American Dictionary of The English Language (1828), the term bull has meanings other than gender. Webster stated that, ‘bull,’ was frequently used to describe a letter, edict, or rescript from the Pope: published, or transmitted to the churches over which he is ruling head and containing some law, decree, or decision. The earliest reported

Bulls were allegedly written on the skins of human infants that were ceremoniously sacrificed. Inscribed with a blend of ink and human blood, they then became, ‘The Papal Bull.’ However, centuries later, the Catholic Church web site reports that papyrus is the material that is now used for these Holy proclamations. Once created, these documents are authenticated by attaching a coin shaped seal made of gold or lead, by a cord, and inscribed on one side with the busts of ST. Peter and ST. Paul, and on the opposite with the name of the Pope and the year of his pontificate. By using the blood and skin of sacrificed infant humans, or papyrus; this document, purportedly becomes a living connection from the Divine Authority above, through the Pope, to the church and its followers, — thus proclaiming this document to be ‘The Holy Word from God.’ Historical documents show that these Papal Bulls were used by Spanish Conquistadors in their explorations

of continents, and used as, ‘Holy Law’ to pillage, rape, and murder indigenous souls under sanction of reigning King. One such historical document is known as the Doctrine of Discovery.

In an excerpt from, *Five Hundred Years of Injustice: The Legacy of Fifteenth Century Religious Prejudice*, Steve Newcomb writes—

Although the story of Columbus’ “discovery” has taken on mythological proportions—in most of the Western world, few people are aware that his act of “possession” was based on a religious doctrine now known in history as the Doctrine of Discovery. Even fewer people realize that today - five centuries later - the United States government still uses this archaic Judeo-Christian doctrine to deny the rights of Native American Indians. To understand the connection between Christendom’s principle of discovery and the laws of the United States, we need to begin by examining a papal document

issued forty years before Columbus' historic voyage in 1492, Pope Nicholas V issued to King Alfonso V of Portugal. (The bull Romanus Pontifex), declaring war against all non-Christians throughout the world, and specifically sanctioning and promoting the conquest, colonization, and exploitation of non-Christian nations and their territories."

To declare a matter of justice or law, this document was displayed in a prominent place for all to read. However, considering the illiteracy of the time, they were commonly misunderstood. If rebellion incurred, after reading or being told what these Bulls said, perhaps the bulls were spat upon, or defaced by other means. Could it be that our nation was claimed through deception ... through bullshit?

My thoughts spirit back to ancient times when this was taking place and envisioning ... maybe 'bullshit' originated from our American



Empowerment
CYNTHIA CARR-BROWN

aboriginals, perhaps, when they saw Columbus wave about a stinky hide marked with an unknown language, shouting, “all this land now belongs to the Crown.” —Perhaps they were the first to cry, ‘bullshit!’ I still envision their disgust, fear, pain, and shock, as they witnessed their families raped and murdered, and their sacred lands pillaged by ‘servants of the king.’ I still dream of native children smearing fecal matter on this so-called, ‘sacred’ document; shouting in their native tongue, ‘bullshit!’ Alarmingly, this Papal Bull — still referred to as the Doctrine of Discovery — is still being used today in the Supreme Court decisions concerning the laws of this nation, and cases are being settled on the foundations of this document. This document is still a primal-corporate document; criminally affecting native Americans, and is impacting all countries where Christendom has spread.

When we examine the past, and present we become aware that this is

not the only plague contaminating this planet. We have become victims to a mendacious infectious disease, known as, complacency. Affected by our sluggish complacency, we have settled for less than the truth; from ourselves, from the Medea, and from those whom we have elected and appointed to govern and protect us. We need to examine ourselves; to see how our words resonate with the spirit of truth and the constitutional base our Founding Fathers have established. Closely examining, and rooting out the mendacious doublespeak infecting us all, including; law enforcement, parents, teachers, friends, and acquiescences, even our places of worship. — Examine everything.

Frankfort states, “The contemporary proliferation of bullshit has deeper sources. We have developed a skepticism which denies any reliable access to reality, and therefore reject the possibility of knowing how things truly are, and who we truly

are.” I totally agree with Frankfort. Mendacious mentality needs to come to a halt. The time has come to wake up and begin to correct the lies — become aware of the doublespeak, gobbledygook, inflated language, and misleading information, that has deceived and robbed us of the freedoms our forefathers fought and died for. Beginning with ourselves.

We have become victims by telling ourselves, — ‘I’m not smart enough, good enough, pretty enough, I’m too poor, or what-ever!’ The time has come to shout! —Yes...I AM! — Yes... I CAN! — Yes... I WILL! — Not, No... I can’t.

We are conscious, creative beings, a creation that is more than capable of creating anything we dream or think. Our planet is awaking to the dawning of consciousness, and is no longer accepting bullshit for an answer. Change is coming. The outcry is now, “Sapere Aude Veritas!” (Dare to Know Truth) — NO MORE BULLSHIT!

Goodnight Lashkar Gah

RJ

“Try not to become jaded, that place will ruin you if you let it” – we all laughed, all of us who hadn’t yet been. The ones who had didn’t need to be told.

Some of us shed no tears during that goodbye. All you needed to know about how or why was in their eyes.

So many hours training for best mates, in hopes we’d avoid an awful fate. Fuck it. We’re ready to spread discontent and hate.

California celebrations with streamers and beer.
Vermont. Ireland. Kyrgyzstan. HERE.

No more if, no more when.

Huddled around sharing dusty photos.
Skelly showed us a picture of his son.
Gabriel was three - grinning ear to ear. Mom must have timed it perfectly.

I still see trouble in a pile of trash on the side of the road. They were clever, that’s how they got Skelly.

Every couple of years we meet up to talk about why we received those medals and ribbons, for a job “well done.”

Some people say a part of you dies over there. That may be true, but I say a part of me never came home.

It stayed in that place of blood soaked sand. The graveyard of empires, Afghanistan.



Self Portrait in Autumn
MELISSA CONLEY

Taquesquitlan, My Beloved Pueblo

AMY GARCIA

Tequesquitlan, my beloved Pueblo
Consumed by its dust storms and vast dullness.
Vibrant colors as greens, reds and yellows
Dance on the wings of women too careless
To acknowledge their fleeting potential.
These wings of theirs remain contained in a
Four walled cage restricting their influential
Presence among the community that day
By day grows distracted by mindless gossip.
As time passes those brilliant colors
Fade along with their history enveloping
Tequesquitlan in blissful ignorance.
These women's wings will never soar serving
As a reminder of what the future holds

Ruthless Storyteller

LJ SULLIVAN



Lock yourself in there right now and hand me that g'damn key.



I 'LL TELL YOU SOMETHIN'. All those people with dark skin, even if they got it from the sun – my sun – there's somethin' wrong with them. Why didn't they stay in the shade? Or move farther north where it gets dark and cold? We need to get 'em outa here. What good are they? Lock 'em up and throw away the key.

And Gays? If they're not going to love the people they should love . . . get 'em outa here.

Lock 'em up and throw away the damn key.

And anyone who has a different religion? NO, I don't go to church or temple or any of that worship stuff – don't have time for it – better things to do – but if people don't go to the church my granny went to – lock 'em up and throw away even the damn spare key. C'mon, what good are they?

And if anyone has that reddish skin tone, or eyes that sorta slant, or thinks females are equal – get 'em outa here. Lock 'em up and you know what to do with the key.

And the ones that don't think all those people should be locked up? Lock them up, too – get 'em outa here.

And put the disabled there too. And the old people – c'mon – what good are they?

And anyone with red hair, too. Red – probably commies. And poor people – lock them up fer sure. No good to anybody.

And the Italians – with their spaghetti and namby pamby shoes – Rome fell, so let the Italians fall. Get 'em outa here. And the Russians – too much writing – all those stories I never read with those names I can't pronounce. Lock 'em up. And the Irish – get 'em outa here. And the French – too stubborn to make English their language – what good are they? Lock 'em up. And the Brits – all messed up – can't even understand their English – lock 'em up and while you're at it – the Australians too with their 'g'day mates' and goddamn



Dicen Que Soy Pedro.
HUGO MEZA SOTO

gun control. Bullshit I tell you – lock ‘em up and throw away the key.

And people who have cats – always sneakin’ around – those cats. Throw the rest of Europe in there with those cat people. And Africa – the whole place – the Middle East, Asia, South America, Canada, too – all of ‘em too far away – get ‘em out. Lock ‘em up.

And the dog people too – leavin’ dog poop everywhere. Lock ‘em up. Throw away the key.

What’d you say, Reader?

That just leaves you and me?

Everyone else is locked up, you say?

Well, I’ve been meanin’ to talk to you about that, cuz you’ve been gettin’ on my nerves. What good are ya? . . . just readin’ there . . . you haven’t added a thing . . . Lock yourself in there right now and hand me that g’damn key.

What Lies Within Us

THOMAS MARREN

TROUBLE DOESN'T PONDER FAIR. That's what I like to tell people who ask me how I managed to be so miserable and get myself into so many bad situations. Someone asked me who said it and I said I made up the quote myself. The truth is I sort of got the idea from this guy in the Bible who God fucked over for no reason. I think trouble is just a way of life for most people who know it. You're born with it and becomes a sort of talent. I'm not talking about kids with a penchant for mischief or anything like that but the people that just get the worst damn luck for no reason.

It started for me when I was born and my parents named me Lum Hatman, which is just about the goddamn worst name a person can have. Lum is a stupid name in itself; it's short for nothing and no one has ever heard it before. It was only assigned to me because it was my stupid grandfather's name who forgot everything he ever knew besides how much he hated the Vietnamese. That's how you can tell what a person is really worth, you look at the stuff they can still remember when their brain is clam chowder.

The second half of the name doesn't get any better. Hatman makes me sound like a simpleton before anyone even knows me. To make it even worse, we Hatmans are supposedly descendants of someone guy who was famous for being an asshole. His name was Henry Hatman and he was given a contract to supply rations to the entire British Royal Navy. He was such a cheapskate that he built

a rickety old factory in Romania where he packed barely cooked rotting dog meat into tin cans. The stuff was so vile and made everyone so sick that they had to throw out like a million pounds of it. Some people even say he almost destroyed the canned food industry, which would have made it impossible for people to store enough food to make it to the new world. .

Things weren't so bad for me at first though. My parents were nice and no one ever messed with me at school. But I didn't even make it until ten years old until I started getting anxiety that I was going to die all the time. It started when I read a book about Yellowstone Park. It said that the whole place was something called a super volcano and that it erupts every 640,000 years. The last time it erupted was 700,000 years ago. When I learned that it was about to blow I asked my Dad what would happen when it did, and he said it would cover the entire U.S. with a cloud of ash and it would kill all the crops and we'd all starve. I think something like that happens to every kid though. My friend Gary was scared to grow up because he thought he was going to get drafted to get shot at like his Dad during Vietnam. That's what it's like for most people. You learn something terrifying when you're ten, you realize it's not true when you're twelve, then you realize it really is true when you're sixteen.

I thought I knew something about trouble until my teacher read us a book about a guy named Louis Zamperini. He fought in world war two but got lost at sea

in an inflatable raft with two other guys without food and water. They fought off sharks, got shot at by Japanese fighter planes, and almost sunk in a storm. When Louis finally made it to shore he got taken by the Japs and they tortured him for two years. But before all that stuff happened, on their second night at sea, one of his crewmates was so scared and hungry that he ate all the rations in the boat while the others were sleeping. When the teacher got to that part, Billy Hennigan, whose Dad was a soldier, cried “what a pussy!” The teacher got mad. But I was even madder because Billy was fat and didn’t care much about other people and he would have eaten all the rations just the same. Then he would have waited until Louis got sunburned to jerky and he would have eaten him too.

Billy was the first person I knew who was a dick. People that didn’t treat other people right were the biggest idiots to me. All you had to do was behave yourself for about seventy years then you could relax forever. Some people are so impatient they can’t make it even half that time without deciding they’d rather fuck around here for a few years here and burn for eternity than behave themselves. I don’t mean that Billy Hennigan was going to hell, his biggest sin was being an idiot. Maybe he was, I don’t know, but there are definitely people that are going to hell and none of them seem to care much about it.

When I learned about Louis I couldn’t stop thinking about this story my mom used to read me when I was little about a guy who crashed his plane and got stranded in the desert, where he met a little prince. The prince came from a planet so small that after the sun set, you could just get up and walk a little bit towards it until it rose back up into the sky. Then you could watch it set again. The prince told the lost man that one day he had seen the sunset forty-two times. I didn’t understand how he knew it had been a day because the sun never set, but I bet it was a pretty good day anyway. People would think I was



**That’s how
you can
tell what
a person
is really
worth, you
look at the
stuff they
can still
remember
when
their brain
is clam
chowder.**





Prancing Mantis

JONATHAN BROBERG

crazy for wanting to live on a planet the size of a house, but they already did so it didn't matter to me anyway.

There is stuff you would never believe that you can read in books, but unlike everything else, basically everything you read in books is true. There was a guy I read about, he was a dendrologist, which is a fancy word for someone dumb enough to spend their time studying trees. Anyways, it all started in 1895, when a scientist was researching the Ngoya forest of Zululand and saw a strange tree. No one had ever seen anything like it, it was ten feet thick, topped with giant fronds, and adorned with seed-cones like pineapples. Turns out it was a cycad tree, the most common tree on earth in the time of dinosaurs. Practically every tree there was back then was a cycad, but they had supposedly gone extinct. The story picks up when this guy, John Medley, the dendrologist, was sent to East Africa on a research project. By this time, a hundred years later, no one had found another cycad tree. The thing about the cycad tree was that it needed another tree to pollinate it in order to reproduce. But there was only the one. When John Medley got to Africa he kept his eyes out for another tree, and soon he began to ignore his work and spent all his time looking for a cycad. When his project ended he didn't return home, he just kept looking. He spent the next ten years wandering the Ngoya forest. Eventually he completely lost his marbles and some of his colleagues found him and shipped him back to the states.

He got back home and he told stories of his time in

the Ngoya forest. He spoke of cannibalistic tribes, birds that swooped down and took away children, and elephants that walked on tall wiry legs. Most people thought he was a lunatic or completely full of shit, so they sent him to a mental hospital. I think that anything so beautifully fantastic could not be contrived out of nothing. Those stories were the only way for him to convey the truth of what happened to him there. John told me he had come across basically everything you could think of besides a companion for his lonely tree.

Sometimes I read about something and I just can't think about anything else for weeks. The last time that happened I read about a spaceship we launched a long time ago and it was still moving because things don't stop in space I guess. And by now it had gone crazy far, all the way past Pluto, like a billion miles or something. But the whole point of it was to fly as far as we could and hope aliens find it and it had stuff about earth on it so that they would know where it came from. America was the one who launched the rocket so of course most of the shit they put on it was from here.

Anyway, they only picked one song to put on it and it was an old tune from 1927 called "Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground" by a guy called Blind Willie Johnson. Blind Willie Johnson really was blind but he wasn't born like that. Some people say he went blind because his bitch of a stepmother threw lye in his face when he was seven. Things didn't get much better for Willie because he never

made any money and had to live in a shitty house in Texas. The house burned down and Willie had nowhere else to go so he slept in the burnt rubble on what was left of a couch under the hot Texas sun. He sweated so much he caught a fever, and he was black so nobody much cared that he was sick and living in a burned up house even though he was a talented musician, so they left him there and he died.

But even though he died in a burned up house, his music made it to Pluto. The song wasn't like anything else you've ever heard, because it didn't really have any lyrics. He just hums and hums, so low it sounds like rumbling train tracks. Behind him is a guitar that drags out a riff of notes that are so hypnotising you've never heard anything like it. The notes are played real slow, like they are building up to something, but it never comes. Blind Willie keeps humming, and it almost sounds like the guitar behind him is going to make him cry. I bet the first aliens to hear it are going to think we are a sorry bunch of people.

Butterflies

DAVID REEVES

THERE ARE TWO TYPES of kids, those who are fearless and those who aren't. Those who will poke a stick into an ant hill, or will let a spider crawl up their arm, and then those who will run screaming from any bug that gets near. Guess which one I was. And still am. Even when it comes to butterflies.

On a hike in Ecuador, my friend and I came across a butterfly farm. I was hesitant. "But butterflies are fluttery and beautiful and weigh as much as a clipped fingernail," she said. Ok, fine, as long as they keep a respectful distance.

But they didn't! There were hundreds of them, and they fluttered around aimless and careless about me and my fears. They flew from behind me, appearing out of the corner of

my eye, darting across my personal space. I jumped and yelled like I was six years old.

My friend tried to calm me "They're just butterflies, they can do no harm." A worker put some banana on his finger and a butterfly climbed onto it, and he held it up to me. I jumped. But yeah, I wanted to do that, to have one on my finger. Irrational fears be damned. I scooped some banana on my finger but then came the hard part, getting one to crawl on.

I stuck my finger among a group of them. My heart was beating so fast you'd think I had just run a marathon. The butterfly I had chosen seemed just as hesitant. One leg, two legs, kinda scoping things out, but not willing to make the full commitment. I turned my finger slowly, trying to trick him by scooping him up,



Tree
MONIKA MRAOVIC

but he was smarter than me. In my determination and focus I began to calm down. I realized that I was dealing with a butterfly, probably the most harmless creature in the world. Even a housefly can carry disease, but a butterfly?

Perhaps as I calmed down, the butterfly became less tentative, and gave in fully to the banana on my finger. It crawled on completely.

Slowly but surely I lifted my arm, and brought the butterfly up to eye level. He didn't fly off, but kept his nose in the banana. Thoughts of malaria filled mosquitoes sticking their proboscis into my flesh raced through my brain, but this was no mosquito, I reassured myself. A picture was taken.

Triumph at last! I had beaten my fear! I was stronger than a butterfly!

The Dream Shadow

GINNY ENGLISH

In my cell of dreams,
Shadows float in allegorical fantasies.
Haunting the daylight;
Emotionally encased in illusive memories.

A stark depiction;
Recreated by an every day intrusion.
A merry-go-round;
Ever-revolving, an attempt at resolution.

Spectral images-
Mountains of lava, hurricane winds.
Skyscrapers topple...
In the velvet black of night, I cringe.

The dream shadow comes.
The advance of a predatory menace,
A veiled silhouette;
Waiting to eliminate me – a terrified premise.

Phantoms in my dreams;
Enshrouded by a cloud of vapors, a swirling miasma
Now, coating my skin,
Draped in a cloak of deepening paranoia.

Agony and fear –
Companions that cover me while I sleep.
Compatriots, these –
A childhood inadequacy, never released.



In my cell of dreams,
I cry for help and moan, indecipherable.
Reaching for the light,
The dream-state and reality become inseparable.

And, I awaken
With a prism of light, the sound of jays;
I take a breath
To face the nightmares of my days.



Beauty within the Cold
JOSE LUIS SANTIAGO PACHECO

HEAD 053

Des Moines

DAVID REEVES



I hope I get to the age where I can do things like that and be considered charming, and not creepy.



ONAVERY COLD JANUARY night travelling alone through Des Moines, I sat in my hotel room and did some research and found that the “East Village” is the old part of town that every city is trying (with varying levels of success) to become the hipster/bar/café/restaurant/shop district. So I decided to check it out.

After some kofta at a Lebanese restaurant, I walked around looking for a bar and some Des Moines nightlife (or what there may be at 8pm on a Thursday). There were a few to choose from, but that one was completely empty, this one had loud bad music, that one was far too bourgeois. Realizing that I was going to run out of bars if I stayed so picky, I walked into the next bar I came across, a small generic dive with about five other people inside. I sat at the bar and ordered.

As I sipped my drink I looked at the bartender, the patrons, the neon rainbow Bud Light sign, and realized I was in a gay bar in Des Moines,

Iowa, and I was the youngest one in the bar.

The old guys at the end of the bar commiserated and joked among themselves as I watched Parks and Rec on the TV, then a large black woman burst into the bar at the top of her Aretha Franklin lungs and walked down to join them. Her laugh drowned out the TV. At one point she started belting out “Why do we call them cockroaches! They should be called pussy roaches!” again and again, just in case anyone within a block hadn’t heard her. Well all right. I ordered another drink.

Soon one of the old men started to make his way to the door, but stopped along the way and came up to me.

“I couldn’t leave without saying hi.” He gave me a soft handshake, not a limp-wristed feminized one, but gentle and kind, the handshake of an old man who had a few beers and wasn’t trying to prove anything. He held my hand.



Ancient Tree, North Rim of the Grand Canyon
ZACHARY HALVORSON

“You’re cute. When I see you I wish I was forty and not eighty.” I blushed and smiled. “I’m sorry,” he continued, “I’ve had three beers.”

“That’s OK.”

“You have such beautiful eyes. I didn’t notice before because I was focused on the waist down.” I chuckled flirtatiously, acknowledging the cheesiness of the line but also the charm with which it was delivered. I flexed my dimples. He said his farewell and walked out.

That sure was nice, even if it did come from an 80 year old gay man in Des Moines. I hope I get to the age where I can do things like that and be considered charming, and not creepy.



Art

NATALYA BENDERSKY

The Silhouette

JESSICA ZIMMERMANN

The dark silhouette
Has a face, a heart, a soul
The dark silhouette,
Is not a shadow,
But merely a lost little girl;
She is us
In the light we pretend
To shine in.

Left Behind
SHANE BORGER



057
HEAD

Windows From Childhood

JOANNE D'AMATO

I find myself wandering back
to my childhood bedroom
where fantasy and fear duel
for approval

Two windows meet at the corner
one draped in shades of green
tall willow-like branches
whose spindly fingers scratch
the screen seeking attention

The other window welcomes dawn
in a mist of yellow glow
stretches into day till shadows
smudge the glass panes with twilight

Shimmers of moon dust
waltz on the walls
as night's long hours
weave webs of ebony
over my bedcovers
down corner folds
skulking about the room

Marble-eyed painted dolls stare
stitch-faced raggedies murmur silence
books lean-to one another
the air is stale

I burrow under sheets my blanket
shields and protects
scratching on the screen
warns me beware

Wind whines like violin strings
round the cornered windows
a loud thud drums the wall
behind my bed monsters

Hardest Fun You'll Ever Have

DAVID FLORES

“Hardest fun you’ll ever have,” they explain,
Yearly you’ll face many Gordian Knots.
So meekly a team member I became:
From Harold to Slug, I helped build four ‘bots.
Harold was a delight and took a flight!
Mom’s mecanum drive didn’t get very far.
Mom two, built twice, the string still didn’t hold tight.
Slug flew far and became a shooting star!
While making friends, I learned many new skills:
Programming motors, sensors, and servos.
Presenting our ‘bot has been full of thrills:
Don’t be too silent, don’t be too verbose.
 Be gracious with others, share what you know,
 they might join and the knowledge will flow.



In the Wild
BARBARA LORTSCHER

soul

passion

feeling

sentiment

compassion

love



Ebb and Ivory

JOSEPH HAHN



My approach was slow. I sat, breaking a one-year armistice; it was an annual tradition now, to sit on the bench.



AUTUMN WIND BLEW THROUGH MY HAIR as I walked along First Street. The heads of trees danced as their dying leaves departed, little boats sailing on the wind. My shoes crunched through piles of ships that had come to dock, their forms collecting around curbs and mailboxes.

I approached the outer door to our apartment building. Eleven East First Street, Avalon Bowery Place. I punched in the code, the lock releasing with a staccato chunk. I swung the reinforced glass door open, walking through the reception area. Footfalls echoed about the stairwell as I ascended to the second level.

“Second Story is always the best, Ivory.”

“Why?”

“Perspective. We’re higher up, to see more, to see farther. But still close enough to hear everyone else.”

“Is that why we practice near the window? To see and hear?”

He smiled. “You’re a smart boy, Ivory.”

I stood in the doorway, looking across to that very window. I sighed, turning to hang up my coat, the zipper clinking against a small bowl. The bowl where he used to put his keys; only dust called it home now.

“Ivory? Is that you?” Ma called from her bedroom.

“Yes, it’s me,” I say back, assuring her.

I followed her voice, coming around the corner to a familiar scene. She sat in Evan’s old recliner, rocking gently, bottle in hand. Rice wine. She wasn’t drunk yet; she would remember tonight’s conversation.

“Hey, Ma?”

“Yes?” She shifted in my direction.

“I’ve met a boy. Been seeing him for a few weeks now.”

“Oh? How is he?”

“Good. Special, I think. He plays.”

“Piano?” She asked, pique in her voice.

I nodded. "He's blind."

"Will you tell him?" Her voice was grave.

I turned to leave.

Her hand snapped around my wrist, halting my escape. "It's been two years, Ivory. You have to tell someone." She spoke with a tone of desperate empathy, striking like the ghost of an old friend.

My eyes prickled, suddenly dry.

"Do you trust him?" She stared with a vice grip.

"Yes."

She nodded, turning her attention back to the television. I walked hurriedly from her room.

My periphery was stained by an angular, black object as I crossed the foyer to my bedroom. My feet planted themselves almost automatically.

His Piano.

My approach was slow. I sat, breaking a one-year armistice; it was an annual tradition now, to sit on the bench. This was only the second celebration. The photos of him were dusty, color washing out from his slight grin and crooked nose. His pastel green eyes looked out into mine, their form almost identical to my own. I looked away, noting the dust on the key lid. It was thicker here, last disturbed by Evan's hand. I almost reached to reveal the keys, led on by muscle memory. But my muscle couldn't possibly understand the brevity that that would entail, breaking the seal on what had become a shrine. I turned to look out the window.

I remembered the moon then, and heard the piano singing a song. Evan's favorite: Clair de Lune. He would play it for the moon on the occasional nights she could be seen from the seat behind the keys. I was twelve the first time I joined in, playing for the moon her usual piece. We would take turns from then on, serenading Luna every time she came to visit. She hadn't heard from us in two years.

I brushed my teeth, freshened my hair, and put on some light cologne.

"I'm going now, Ma. I'll see you tomorrow" I said, taking my coat from the rack.

"I love you," she said, her voice heavy with the wine.

"Love you too."

The autumn wind chilled as early evening approached, blowing those crisp ships around my ankles. I walked towards the metro, heading to Union Square Park.

The train ride was short; only two stops. I hustled out of the station, part of the end-of-work-day crowds. I spotted Ben on a bench as I approached the park, his ears turned away from the raucous street. He listened to footfalls as they crisscrossed in front of him.

My boots clomped along the pavement, and his head turned in my direction. I sat down next to him.

"Hi," he said, his silver eyes looking at my face.

"Hi," I said back, sharing a smile between us.

"How was your afternoon?" he asked, unaware of today's anniversary.

“Quiet,” I said, hoping he wouldn’t press further detail.

“That’s good.”

“Where’s your cane?” I asked.

“Don’t need it when I’m with you,” he said, gesturing to the pocket on his hoodie.

“How so?” I asked, head cocked in questioning.

“Like this,” he said, and wrapped his fingers into mine. His hand was incredibly soft, fingers nimble.

“I can walk around with you now.”

“I like this way,” I said with a goofy smile.

“You’re blushing. I can hear it.” Ben laughed.

“Whatever you say.” I blushed harder.

“So the usual spot?”

“Absolutely.”

Our usual spot was a hole-in-the-wall coffee shop a few blocks down. We walked along, hands intertwined. I walked nearest the traffic. Ben’s head was on a constant swivel, following exhaust notes and perking as he heard birds chirp and fly overhead. We sat outside in the setting sun, its warmth a pleasant contrast to the chilly bellows of fall. Ben ordered his regular: a café mocha with extra espresso, myself opting for a plain black cup of pressed coffee. We sat and enjoyed our drinks, jovially discussing things of little importance.

Ben paused, hands cupped around his drink.

“Ivory, what color is your hair?”

“What?”

“What color is your hair? I know that it’s short and wavy, but I can’t feel the color.”

“Oh. It’s black.”

“Like your coffee?” He asked with a smile.

“Like my coffee,” I said, a cozy warmth settling into the both of us.

“Well, now I know exactly what you look like.” He reached across the table, tracing his index and middle finger around my features, refreshing the image in his head.

“This might sound kind of weird, but . . .” he trailed off, and hesitated.

“But what?” My voice quirked with curiosity.

“Your face reminds me of one of my idols. An artist that inspired me to start playing piano. Back when I could see.”

The warmth was gone, snuffed like a candle by fallow air.

“What was his name?” I asked.

“Evan Barbour.”

Ben felt the silence grow. His hand dropped to mine, squeezing it in concern.

“Ben, I want you to come to my apartment. I need to show you something.” My voice wavered some.

“Okay. Let’s go,” Ben said, finding my hand again as we stood.

I paid for the drinks, and we started the short journey home. Three stops on the train, from the station nearest the shop. I punched in the door code for the second time that day, the beeping somehow louder than last. The



Into A Greek Garden
MARLYNN PEAK

Plump
FARIDEH SHEAHAN



stairwell was a cacophony with two pairs of shoes, and my stupid zipper hit the key bowl again as I hung my coat. Ben's seemed to miss it.

"Come here," I said, leading him to Dad's piano.

I sat him on the bench, and he quickly recognized what it was.

"You have a piano?" he asked, both confused and excited.

"It was my dad's. Play it."

He found the key lid.

"Dusty."

He folded the cover back and away. The ivories seem to breathe, finally seen again. Ben runs his hands along the keys, counting spaces.

He plays a note, calibrating.

My heart jumps.

He plays another, this time with the other hand.

My throat tightens.

Ben starts a song. Consolation No.3, by Franz Liszt.

The piano is slightly out of tune, but not enough to be offensive. It grows louder as he plays, the strings within seeming to reawaken, shaking off clots of dust. He moves with the music quite literally; his hands trace along the keyboard to find the notes. His tactile reading of the piano lends itself to a legato style, and he plays this to his advantage. The song is sweet and warm, Ben oblivious to whose piano he plays.

The piece comes to an end, and Ben turned to me.

"Do you play?" he asked.

I sat down beside him.

"Do you want to know why my face reminds you of Evan Barbour?"

He nods slowly, his eyes locked on my voice.

"He was my father. He died two years ago in a bus crash, and I haven't so much as touched a piano since then."

Ben's face twisted in realization.

"Ivory, after my accident . . . when I lost my sight, I thought I would be better off dead. I'd always be a burden, couldn't really do things for myself." He paused to wipe his eyes.

"Music saved me. Well I guess my mom did, really. She wanted to hear me play my favorite song. She wouldn't give up on it. Music was always a feeling to me; a mix of emotions. I realized I didn't need eyes to feel. So I started to play like I do now."

Silence returned to the parlor, the splendor of Ben's performance fast-fading.

"He taught you, didn't he?" Ben asked.

"Yes. I could play piano before I could walk."

"And you haven't since your father died?"

"No."

Ben grabbed my hand again, this time lifting it as though it were a puppet. I inhaled sharply as my fingers

touched the keys. He pushed them down, and the piano answers. It sounds like dad. My entire form freezes. Ben feels my body tense again.

“Are you okay, Ivory?”

My emotions come roiling back to the surface with the force of a silent avalanche, that simple chord that Ben and I played ringing on endlessly in my ears. I knew in that moment that I’d been lying to myself. I look out of the parlor window through my teary eyes, and see the moon peeking over the horizon.

I serenade Luna, playing her signal song. The notes come to me, my fingers barely noticing the time since last acquainted with the keys. Ben scoots away, allowing me to take the center of the bench.

I play, emotion filling my eyes and running down my cheeks. I play, notes sweet and heavy, warm and unfamiliar, eerie and calm. My soul continues to rise as the song progresses, a massive weight finally lifted. I smile through my wet eyes. Playing this piece again, here in the parlor and on Dad’s piano; it’s almost like I’m speaking with him. I can hear every accent, every rest, every pushed pedal, everything. It sounds just like him. It sounds like me.

I’ve finally done it. I’m playing.
Playing piano for Dad.



Waiting for the Green Flash
GINNY ENGLISH



Solace of Rain
JONATHAN BROBERG

Eating Red

WANG-AN YU

in 1941 my great-grandfather fled the liberation army
killing his commanding captain
his longing for home slips after the sunset and the
captain's half-empty rice wine
hemorrhaging over the cliffside

years later i spatter my toast with blood orange marmalade
opiate and saccharine
its waxy, candied rind, still burstingly bitter
i pocket cherry sours and parables letting slip
what laymen do when a civil war knocks on your village to recruit
a nation's remaking: five-pointed stars held afloat by acerbic, oxidized blood
in one hand poppies and in the other, revolution
on one hill cowardice
and over it
a man racing the countryside to the birth of his son

the rust on my tongue eats back at me
a blood orange
a mortal blight

days after he collapsed home, my great-grandfather died of fevered dreams
and an anxious heart
liberated

Passing Through

ROBIN KILRAIN

Rush to the door—that person could be Mine!

A dog's anxious refrain reverberates
as a shelter kennel becomes his new home.

Moving forward
though,
gradual adjustment.

A wagging tail soon prevails as
desperation to reunite with The Person of the past
evolves into
enthusiasm to meet with The Person of the future.

Enduring canine faith and hope conquer fear and sadness
while opportunist sparrows flit through gaps punctuating
the metal crisscross of the door.

Perfect size for these stealthy birds
(or the stately snout of a senior Mini Pin: You know who
you are, dear Becker).

Errant kibbles from a
half-full dish
disappear, airborne.
Water from a
half-full bowl
quenches feathered thirsts.

Patiently tolerated,
this is not what's important now.
Vigilance.

Seekers stroll slowly by.
Volunteers step inside for a cuddle.

Between human encounters,
amid brightly colored toys, on cozy bedding,
one ear/one eye remain always alert.
Awaiting.

Suddenly,
emerging through a diamond-shaped hole near the
bottom of the fencing,
not a bird!

Blatantly ignoring myriad signs that warn against this
action,
an eager finger enters,
aching to stroke the muzzle of a dog
who's equally excited to meet a soulmate.

And in the flick of one ear/the blink of one eye . . .
Rush to the door—that person could be Mine.

The Strength of Storms

RUBY ARROYO



Seeing it in person had a greater impact than reading about it on the news. As they say, 'A million deaths is a statistic, one is a tragedy'.



“A HOT BATH. FINALLY!”
“Stop exaggerating, Ruby.”

“But it’s hot water. I don’t care that it’s been heated up on the stove. Let me have this.”

It was the first time in three weeks since the water I used was even remotely warm, and it had been wonderful. The night before there had been a mild storm. The wind knocked about the curtains and the sound of the rain was a whisper. I had no trouble falling asleep. Waking up to the hot muggy air I had decided to take a bath but there was a problem. There was no running water, no electricity, and no reception. I had thought blackouts like this were normal in Guatemala.

The family of my family, third cousins thrice removed so far that I don’t even know how we were related, were rich there and so they had their own water source, a huge concrete built well that was five feet wide and four feet deep. I was shown how to

bathe with water boiled on a stove and buckets of cold water to cool it down.

Taking that bath, warm water running down my face and torso, was like breathing out after holding my breath for hours at a time. Getting dressed for a sweltering day I finally emerged from my room and asked about the blackout.

Turns out that I was so used to falling asleep to the godawful snoring of my family, their breath creaking so loudly every time they exhaled that I was surprised they did not wake themselves up the first month I stayed with them, that I missed out on a minor hurricane. Our plans on going to the ruins of El Mirador had to be postponed.

“What is happening right now? Was anyone hurt? Were people dying?”

“I don’t know.”

That answer was repeated many times that day. It was debilitating, the feeling of being useless. The air was hotter, the cloudy sky was ominous, everything was heightened; it was

not good. At the time I thought it was ironic, gallows humor, that the feeling of water that was so soothing in the morning could cause such panic in the afternoon. The breath I let go of was being held again, and I didn't know when I would feel secure enough to let it go.

We decided to assess the damage to the properties my Tio owned. If I had stayed I would have regretted not being able to help, to not even know what had happened, and so I went. The tranquil fields I had passed by days before were flooded. Cows were knee deep in mud and water. Trees were in the powerlines and on the road. There was a stream of water running through several houses. The feeling of seeing your home like that, I could not come close to imagining the misery.

A man had gone down to his home in the mud and the water and was taking things up back to his family. Were they his family? Was he a stranger helping them get back some of their possessions?

'I don't know.' This time those words were not weakening. It did not

matter who he was to the individuals he was helping, just that he was doing something. On the road people were cutting up the trees that were blocking vehicles. The thuds of the axes coming down were like drums signaling other people to get to work; they had things they needed to do to get back to order.

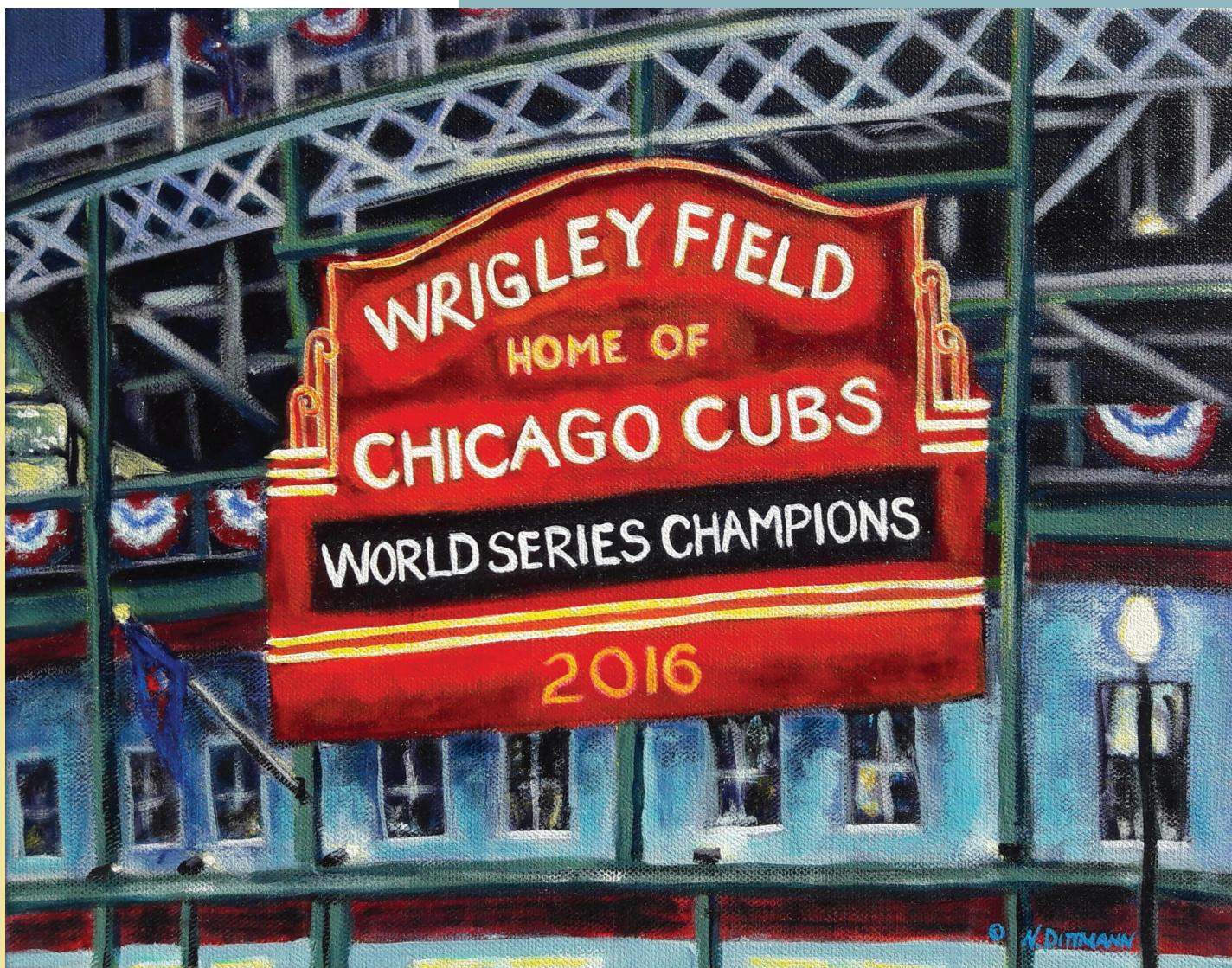
As we slowly drove down the road I saw more examples of compassion. Individuals were helping other people put back things that had been blown away in the storm.

It felt rehearsed, like the population was used to the floods happening and it was the practice that made them efficient in the clean-up. I was suddenly reminded of my bus ride through Belize to get to Guatemala. Some houses were raised on wooden stilts like spiders. They were used to this type of weather. I knew I could not stay to help and that fact burned me. The tickets had already been bought to go back to Chetumal in a day. Instead I acted like a typical American: I recorded the roads that were flooded with water, I took pictures of the fallen trees, and I

made sure I would not forget.

My family made sure that the people taking care of and living on my Tio's properties were unharmed. When we came back to the house we started to pack all of our belongings then my Tia Lupita somehow negotiated with the bus service to go back that same day. From 7am to 4 in the afternoon, those short hours altered my outlook on people's capacity to care for others rather than themselves. Seeing it in person had a greater impact than reading about it on the news. As they say, 'A million deaths is a statistic, one is a tragedy'.

I did not want to think about what I had witnessed, the fear and the helplessness. It wasn't until I had gotten back to the States that I felt safe because I was finally home. I found out that 14 people died during the floods and the mudslides; 1,060 were evacuated. I had gotten my answers. The damages and casualties could have been so much worse. Life went on, the people were going to be alright (the strength of storms couldn't compare).



Wrigley Field Marquee
NANCY B DITTMANN

If Only

SARAH OLSON



“You forget,” said the worm, “that everything you do and everything you give may not convince someone to love you.”



THE FLOWER WATCHED as a golden-winged butterfly drifted down from the blue sky and landed softly atop his petals.

“Good morning,” he said to her. “How are you today?”

“The same as every other day.” She answered and busied herself with his pollen.

“The sunshine is beautiful this morning,” he said, but he was not looking at the sunlight streaming down through the leaves of the trees surrounding his meadow. He was admiring the way the light made the butterfly’s wings glow.

“I suppose it is.” She sighed.

“The light feels wonderful,” continued the flower, yawning his leaves.

“It’s a little warm for my taste.”

Then she lifted her wings and took to the air above him, already searching for the next flower.

He stretched up with a start. “Have you nothing to say to me?” He asked her.

“What do you mean?”

He hesitated before he said, hopefully, “You come to me every morning. Doesn’t that mean something?”

She looked down on him. “What am I supposed to say?”

“I don’t know, ‘I love you?’” He said, indignant. “I stand here every day and offer everything I have, and every day you choose to come to me and take what I give. You should love me. Without me, you would not eat, you would not fly.”

A brief pause ensued. The flower swayed in the breeze.

“I don’t need to love you,” the butterfly laughed. “There’s nothing else I want.”

The gusting breeze caught her wings and she twirled away with it. As the flower watched her go, he wished his petals could transform into wings. He

imagined that he could take to the sky and chase after her. She would want him if he had wings as stunning as her own. Yes, she would want him then.

“You should love me,” said the flower aloud, “after everything I’ve given you.”

“That’s not how love works,” A worm below him, hearing this, answered.

“I wish it were.”

“If only,” The worm said, clearing another path for the flower’s roots.

The flower looked down at the dirt. “What do you know of love?” he scorned.

“I know what it is to give love,” the worm said, “and receive nothing in return.”

“Well,” said the flower, and scoffed. “Who would love a worm?”

The worm paused his work. “Flower,” he said, “why do you love the butterfly?”

“For her beauty and her presence.”

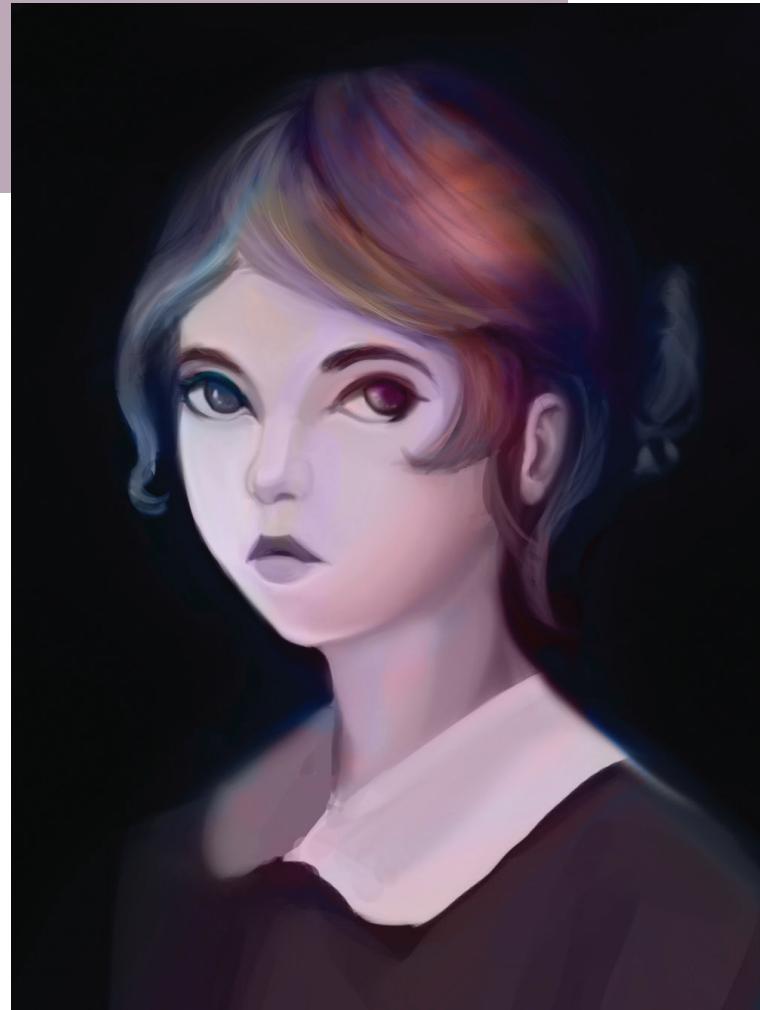
“And what do you do for her?” asked the worm.

“I give her everything I have, every day.” Answered the flower. “Isn’t that enough for her to love me?”

“You forget,” said the worm, “that everything you do and everything you give may not convince someone to love you.”

“If only it could,” the flower sighed.

“Yes,” said the worm, resuming his work for the flower’s roots. “If only it could.”



Tied

RODOLFO MURGUIA



Beautiful Bird with Wispy Feathers
BECKY KESSAB

Och, a poem

KYLIE NECOCHEA

What good is a poem
It elongates the verbose and gives them time to think
Just do things, she's tired of thinking, and waiting, and dreaming
Hope is good, false hope is deadly, she thinks
She used to sit, she used to fidget in her brain--
rattling with dreams and things for the future
She used to be afraid of a knee scrape,
now her knees are fractured and her calves are black and blue,
beat up and worn by the ground she knelt on and the falls she's taken off cue
But she loves it
It feels good to fall, she knows there's only one way up
It creates a sense of "it can only get better"
and she knows it can hardly get worse
What good is standing
if you don't know the badness of facing the ground?
What good is walking
if you don't know the importance of legs?
Och
her calves are tighter than a coiled chromosome
from walking the world,
Well, *world* is a strong word
Mainly the neighborhood,
but to her it's a world and a half
Or a world and three quarters if we're being precise
(and we are).
She used to be afraid of the dark
Now she dances barefoot in it because her feet are kinder without shoes
She used to talk fast and breathe in shallow bursts of *ifs*

She used to be nervous and fearful of the future, a
mistake,
a misplaced comma

,
Now she talks quietly, and slow,
Breathes better, but does not think about breathing,
rather being
She's still indecisive, but that'll burn off with time
Or in a big explosion of difficult proportions,
she's unsure though hopefully the former

If you met her, you wouldn't think much of her right
away,
You'd be polite, because she is, and you'd feel obligated to
be nice
You'd get shifty eyed and look over her shoulder to see if
there's someone else to talk to
And she'd know, because it happens all the time
And she'd smile and say nice to meet you, because I'm
sure it was
And you'd do the same
And it would be pleasant but nothing special
She's not particularly striking and her hair parts in a way
that makes you feel uneasy about the
whole thing

She's not a "wow" type of first impression
Her strengths lie in the 40th understanding, in the winter

Like warm gold on a cold day, you would then understand
her and her worth

It took you long enough but who could blame you
She's reserved

She's not molasses in the summer, not sticky in the sun
But marigolds in the first week of May,
pure and I want to be like her someday,
she says I will be soon
Soft light of a waxing moon
She's glue, not glitter
Plain but not bitter

I promised her when we were twelve and drove by the
ostriches that I would remember

And I did

And I have

And I do

Don't worry, my knees don't work and my calves are black
and blue but I can still remember

Don't you?

Thorns

JOANNE D'AMATO



**He finds
me crying
under
the rose
bush. He
examines
my side.
Large
thorns
puncture
my skin.
Pierce my
bony hip.**



AS A CHILD MY GRANDFATHER'S GARDEN INTRIGUES ME. I follow him around while he tends to his prize beauties, held captive by his every word. "The canes of a mature rose bush have strong spiny thorns. Be very careful. A prick from their woody barbs is quite painful." His serious look makes me nod. "Good girl. It takes patience to prune a rose bush. Someday, I'll teach you."

Whenever my family visits our grandparents, I reach up into Grandma's embrace. She squeezes me tight against her full bosom. Gives me a big kiss. Hands me a sesame seed cookie and off I go to join Grandpa in his garden. My eyes fill with wonderment as I step from the French doors. The stones that encircle blue hydrangeas and magenta roses glisten when wet. A gentle fusion of moist soil with spicy-sweet dew makes my nose tickle as I weave my way along the paths of floral snowballs and pastel petals. I duck under boughs of purple figs, dripping from their trees, like huge teardrops. A handcrafted wrought iron fence scallops the perimeter of the yard designed to invite the neighbors view.

"This garden is a tribute to love." Grandpa smiles as he cuts a rose, strips its stem of thorns and hands it to me. This is how I have chosen to frame his memory.

At the age of seven, I am too naive to comprehend grief. I don't know the depth of my grandfather's pain. All I know is I love Grandma. To watch her wither into the white of her sheets and leave my life forever was beyond my understanding. After her death, only my father and I go to visit Grandpa. I continue to join him in his garden. Cherishing each opportunity to hold the memory of my grandmother close, here where love grows. Grandpa keeps to himself now. He no longer takes the time to share with me the secrets of his garden. My inquisitive nature, wanting to learn more of his secrets and my questions about Grandma make him turn toward me.



“Stop speaking about her.” He pushes me into a rose bush, then turns and walks away. The pain that tears through my heart, hurts more than the stabbing of thorns in my tender flesh. My screams bring my father to the garden. He finds me crying under the rose bush. He examines my side. Large thorns puncture my skin. Pierce my bony hip. Blood trickles down my leg. Soaks the cuff of my sock.

“How did this happen?” my father asks as he gathers me in his arms.

“Grandpa got mad at me for talking about Grandma and pushed me into the thorns.”

“Are you sure Grandpa did this to you?”

“I’m sure, Daddy.”

“Sweetheart, didn’t Mommy and I tell you not to talk about Grandma when we come to visit Grandpa?”

Through my blur of tears, I see the pain in my father’s eyes. “Yes. But I miss her.” I hiccup. “I just want to bring her some flowers.”

My father knocks on Grandpa’s bedroom door to tell him we are leaving. Silence trails behind us as my father carries me out to the car.

At home he comforts me with a warm bath. It soothes the hurt and softens the thorns’ grasp on my skin. In an attempt to restore my spirit, Daddy tells me the myth of cupid and how thorns came to be. *Cupid was stung by a bee and started shooting arrows everywhere.* This made me giggle. *Some of those arrows hit roses and because the sting was in the arrows, thorns took root and have been there ever since.*

“You are like a rose.” He dabs my nose with his wet finger. “You know, Sweetheart, I’m going to have to pluck these thorns from your side. Think you can be a big girl and help me, by being brave?”

I close my eyes like I’m making a wish, take a deep breath and exhale. “I’ll try, Daddy.”

Things That Disappear

KAREN KENYON

Tonight I looked for the small poem
on pink paper
by a South American woman who knew how to write
about love.
But I can't find it.
I wish I could find her words--
so much better than mine.

Is it with the ring I lost last year,
and the people before that?
And now you,
who came so suddenly into my life --
Will you too
go the way of lost watches?

Anger

GUILLERMO PEREZ

My anger embodies waves

Thrashing against monstrous rocks.

It is permanent like a tattoo.

Dark with its mark.

Hurtful with its promising results.

Bold with its decision.



Serenity
FARIDEH SHEAHAN

Muse, corrected. (or Brown-Haired Spy)

KYLIE NECOCHEA

Muse, corrected. (or Brown-Haired Spy)

Comma use is my secret obsession
It's something that I have grown into-
become.

My grammar usage
develops into clover loves.

An empty summer,
with secrets in our gloves,
Filled deep with maybes and sort of
By the most heinous text-
don't be vain now.

I'm left to read from the beginning
I have to see what you were missing
Stop and breathe,
my heat is spinning.

With a brain on fire what do we do
We dance till sweetheart becomes the new perfume
We love the meaning of the art not the rules
Distant travels-
take up too much time
We dance forever as we wait in line
To go nowhere but we live for alive
And finite
and miserable
but who cares...

we look cool.

We cut out our paper crowns and plastic lungs
Wear them to the church, see what we've become
If we could order, all these things around
It'd be nicer
and quieter,
But we'd drown.
are we now?

I'm left to read from the beginning
I have to see what you were missing
Stop and breathe
my brain is spinning

Perfect

I know that you are not my life-
So it goes-

And I don't think you know the half of me-

And it shows-

And I don't think you know that type of man, predisposed

You latch on

To my genes

Epigenetically

enclosed

I watch from afar

how my DNA glows.

I broadcast the emotions I feel inside my chest
The ones I think are real, but haven't happened yet
I talk in secret to my future muse
He answers me in the quiet solitude
Of the dark,
in my mind,
I'm his "until it happens" food.

I'm imbued
from all the meaning
But darling you, are inbetweening,
Keychains lit up, where did we park?
Our crescent moon
We thought was waxing,
Stumble in the dark
Is it weaning?

We talk forever,
wait until sun up
Normally I'm
only with myself,
but this time I'm
underneath your spell.
You didn't answer me the last time I talked
It felt rude
but,

Overdue
if not.
It's time we waltz with the truth
Of our crippled solitude.
The violence of the catastrophe
I was so heavily avoiding,
A danger on my chest, dripping wet on my bones,
Got bigger as I ran,
It ran underneath our breath.

Brown haired introvert with a mean sense of verbs
Action in the past tense is how I learn



Groovy Fruits
CHRISTINA CURIEL



Traveling Soul

ISLEY LOPEZ

I've got a traveling soul,
One that's best fit for the open road.
I've got maps tattooed on the backs of my hands,
And a good compass heart.
It points to the forest, the city,
The sand, another country,
The top of a mountain, the depths of the sea.
This heart of mine has never known a boundary.
If I asked you to pack up and leave,
Would you agree and leave with me?
I've got a traveling soul,
But you make me want to notice more,
Notice what is right outside of my window.
You make me want to find comfort in a worn out home.
It's never bothered me before,
But now, I don't think I could stand doing this alone.
I'll never feel like I've properly packed.
When I'm driving away, I'll always look back.
If I asked you to leave,
I think that you'll want me to stay.
I'll consider it for one day,
And then another.
Maybe another.
We'll flip through calendars, spending time with each other.
You make me believe in the funny word home.
You're calming this unease in my bones.
They're usually so light,
Like a bird, ready to take flight.

But you're making them heavy again.
I know that the road has no end,
But the miles seem to go by faster with a friend.
You'll take my atlas hands,
Try to make me understand that I can settle down for a
while,
And I'll just smile.
You never make it sound like an empty promise.

I never think that we've had our last kiss.
I'll tell you that on the roof of my car,
I can put up glow in the dark stars.
You can stick on the brightest one that points north.
Just like you,
This north is true.
You tell me that it will lead me to where I belong,
Without knowing that I am already there.
I don't care where you drive.
With you at my side,
We could go to the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty,
Coast to coast, east to west.
The place at your side is the place I love best.
You and I could drive in circles around the block.
You never leave the door to your house locked.
You don't mind,
When I walk in uninvited.
You make sure that home is easy to find.
It's open for any holiday,

Any fire, any tragedy.
Your house is always open to me.
No matter where I go,
My body will be my first, my last, and my favorite home.
I'm done chasing the greener grass,
Done trying to leave behind my past.
Any place you offer me, I can make my own.
I'm getting weary of the open road.
The maps on my hands keep on unfolding,
But it's your hands I would rather be holding.
This open road is getting cold,
My traveling soul is growing old.
You tell me that I can stay for a while,
And I just smile.
I can see myself growing old in a different way,
My hands getting wrinkled, my hair turning gray.
I want a house that ages with me.
You tell me that I can park my car on the street,
Just in case I ever get itchy feet.

I think that even if I try to run away,
Something will always tell me to stay.
Maybe not your voice,
Just the gentle background noise of the sprinklers in the
yard,
The laundry in the dryer,
Your gentle breathing as you get tired.
No one has ever made me doubt my heart like this.

If I left, there are things I would miss.
As you drift off,
I want to tell you about the places I've been before.
Across the floor,
I'll lay out my maps, show you every road I've ever met.
Every one of them intersects,
Right on the corner where I've made a home.
Instead, late at night, I'll sneak out for a bit.
I'll hit the road, but remember my way back.
I'm not gone for long,
So there's no need to pack.
And if you want, you can come with.
You can have passport hands,
And we'll fill them with stamps.
I'll ask you to leave, you'll want me to stay,
And you and I will make it, day by day.
It's beautiful, what I've found with you.
Like the north star, it's something true.
A traveling soul and a worn out home,
It shouldn't work, but we do better together than we do alone.
It might not be perfect,
Feel painful some days rather than patient,
But we really do try.
If anyone can make it, it's you and I.
You have a mind like the ocean, and I have a love like the sky.

Untitled
PHYLLIS FAGALY



Could I Make This Up?

MAHANEY TERI



**It was 1974,
and river
running was
testosterone
territory,
altogether
removed
from the
civilized
concept of
feminism
and equality.**



AFTER THE DIVORCE, I evacuated. I left everything behind, and I mean everything. I left the house we built intact, down to the silverware and bath towels. I walked away from the shoe business and art business: I signed over the free and clear ninety acre land investment I had negotiated. I took my paid for Camaro and \$4,200 cashed out from my whole life insurance policy. Just enough for a few months off - to rebound and redirect--and get serious about a real career.

I moved to Dallas, where I had two proposals in two weeks from almost strangers, which I took as an affront. I needed a radically different and more benign landscape. Woody and Linda, close friends from my previous life - my married life - were staying in touch. A ski patroller who delivered emergency rescue and medical services on remote mountainsides, Linda was an ingrained helper. When I complained about predatory city men, she invited

me to spend the summer with her.

Woody had bought a white water rafting company and a permit to run the Salmon River in Idaho, the River of No Return. Rivers designated as Wild and Scenic are protected from overuse by a National Park Service permit system that limits the number of trips per season and number of people per trip. Commercial permits for companies were rarely available - and priced accordingly - making them a guaranteed profitable investment. That's how Woody sold the idea to Linda, anyway, who was assigned officer manager duties at base camp for their first summer.

To locate a base camp site, Woody flew his Cessna over the 4.3 million acre Salmon-Challis National Forest, searching for a flat space long enough to land on, so he could commute from his Frontier Airline pilot day job. He spotted a sheep pasture nestled between timbered peaks, located between nowhere and nowhere on any map. It was within an hour's drive of a small sandy beach

on the river where he could launch trips. In Woody's eyes, it was ideal.

Base camp was three single wide mobile homes and a warehouse. A phone line snaked out of a window in the office, sagged along leaning poles parallel to the runway, and abruptly disappeared into the heavy forest, its origins unknown. All business took place over that tenuous connection. Woody and Linda had a more reliable two-way radio for their nightly talks. Camp was natural and unpretentious, remote and isolated, peaceful and majestic. Like Woody, I found it ideal. And it was a man-free zone, except for two younger brother-like boatmen, and Jack, who managed operations.

A full time gymnast PE teacher from Amarillo, Texas, Jack had spent every summer running rivers for two decades, and he was a prankster penultimate perfectionist mentor for all things river. He taught history, animal lore, geology, and flora and fauna as we quiet-floated between rapids. He prepared gourmet meals

complete with iron skillet fruit pies when we could harvest berries. He backed out of every campsite sweeping down the beach behind him with a leafy branch. He didn't even leave footprints.

Linda and I started off alternating river trips and office duty, but she preferred base camp and relegated the river trips to me. Paradise Found. I spent five days a week suspended in a Disney-like forested never-land. Wilderness trips can be raw core experiences for newbies, where their authenticity is birthed, often after a difficult delivery. Boatmen are skilled at navigating treacherous white water: not so adept at maneuvering through passenger personality episodes. Inevitably, I became trip hostess and camp counselor, liberating my bros from this bane. In return, they made me river royalty, released from trip tasks and waited on, starting with my morning coffee in sleeping bag /bed (though Jack later confessed that was a ploy to see if I slept alone).

Floating a hundred river miles per trip on a see through blue green ribbon river threading through stately wild life infested forest, I transcended being a societal misfit divorcee and flourished as a pampered wilderness woman. I felt emancipated: I lived exuberantly: I travelled light. My river uniform was a pair of cut offs, halter top, and tennis shoes: I took along 1 pair of long jeans, 1 sweater, 1 long T-strap silk nightgown, four pair of lace hipster underpants, and a small sundry bag with Ma Griffe perfume, Clinique soap and moisturizer, shampoo, hairbrush, razor, and a small towel. When we tied up for camp at day's end, before unpacking the boats to start dinner, my bros dug out my sequestered bottle of fine red wine. Filled glass and sundry bag in hand, I hiked around the bend for privacy, where I sat on a rock in the river and stripped. I sipped while I bathed, shampooed, shaved, and sprayed. If it wasn't shivering cool, I air dried. Graced by the water's concert, wreathed in the pine scented

towering trees, I communed and reflected on “another f—ing day in paradise.” No five star spa treatment anywhere - from Hong Kong to Santa Fe to Nairobi - has ever equaled this nirvana. I can close my eyes and be there now. AHHH.

We floated in seventeen by seven foot inflated sausage-like rafts that weighed about two hundred pounds empty, over a thousand pounds packed, and up to a ton filled with water. Rope ran through fourteen D rings positioned along the outside tubes — to secure gear and serve as hang-on-and-stay-in-the-boat life lines. Two cross tubes created equal sized back, middle and front sections. Trip gear was packed in the back section in World War II surplus ammo cans, with kitchen supplies and food, air pumps, repair and safety kits — the necessities to sustain a group of twenty to twenty-five people for five days in remote river canyons. Each passenger had two water proof bags: one for a sleeping bag and ground pad, and

one for personal gear. They also had a small ammo can accessible throughout the day for sun screen, camera, and other items. There was no concession for excess.

Boatmen reigned over the boat from the middle section, enthroned on a rowing frame mounted on the cross tubes, elevated to read the water and leverage rowing. Voyeur passengers sat in the back section with the gear, where they could observe in-rapids action for a few suspended seconds before being whip-snapped into the white water roller coaster themselves. Up to four passengers sat in the front - balancing on inflated side tubes, with one foot jammed under a cross tube as an anchor. In rapids, the side tubes became like the mechanical bull in the Texas Cowgirl Museum, bucking and heaving and twisting.

“If for any reason you should become separated from your boat, grab the top of your life vest, tuck in your elbows, pull your feet up to your chest and point them downstream

to kick off of any rocks you might encounter, and when your head is above water, breathe.”

We had two days between trips to unpack, wash, clean, and repack. Clients flew into Missoula, Montana, and we trucked them over mountain roads to base camp to bunk out before launching the next morning. We drew straws for who would make those trips. Long straws got to stay in camp and rest: short straws made the all day haul to civilization and a grocery store. It was best to have your bros review the shopping list. One trip, we didn't have paper plates. Not too hard to find substitutes - from ammo can lids to flat oar ends. Not so easy for the trip without toilet paper.

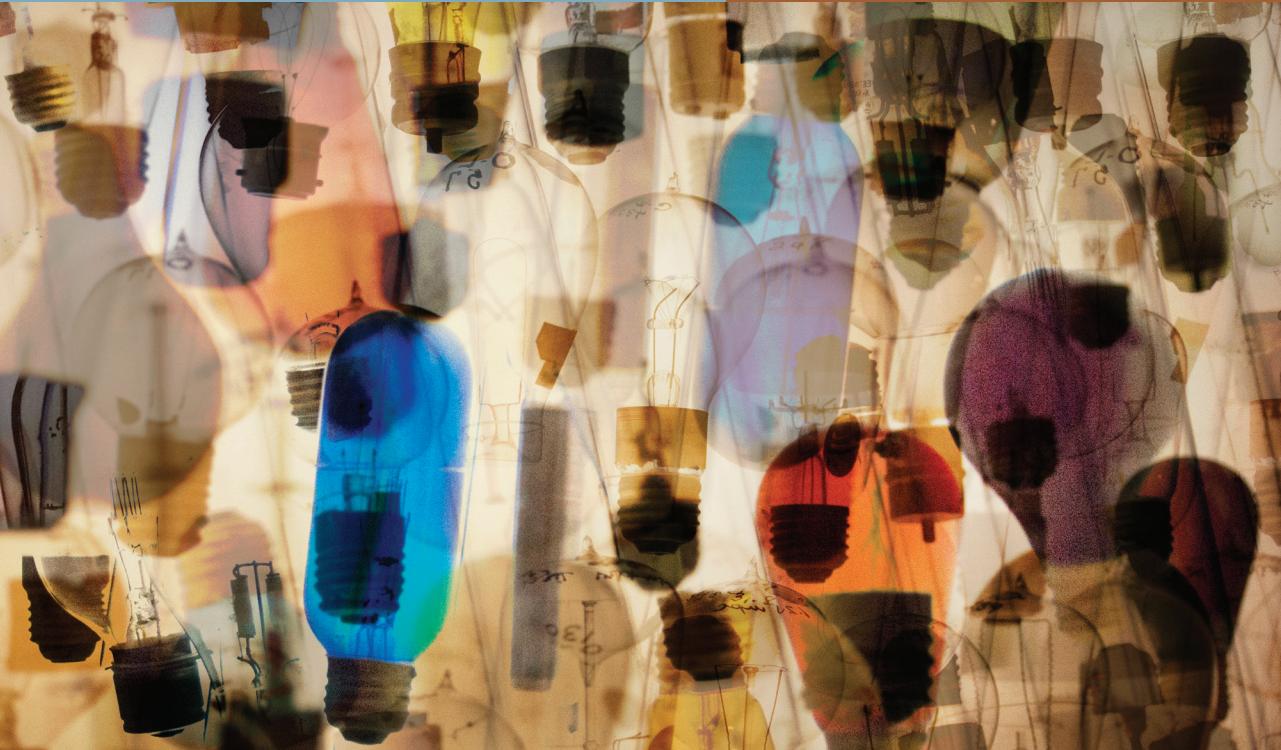
Rowing my own boat never seeped into my psyche until Sharon came along. Sharon and Hank had their own river company, and we hired Hank as an extra boatman for a large trip. At the launch site departure morning, where Hank was to join us, a diminutive and endowed woman in a flowered bikini came striding



Joshua Tree
NANCY B DITTMANN



Ideas, A Plethora
JAMIE PEARSON



down the sand beach. Boatmen's eyes popped, and jostling began for whose boat she would ride in. As senior boatman, Jack had the prerogative of meeting her first. Surprise. It was Sharon, whom Hank had sent in his place as our extra boatman. The warm boatman banter turned to icy silence, as my bros sucked air, crossed muscled arms, turned browned backs, and mumbled they weren't running with any woman!

It was 1974, and river running was testosterone territory, altogether removed from the civilized concept of feminism and equality. There were a scant dozen or so women on the rivers across the US, nearly all guiding half day or day long You Paddle trips on smaller California rivers. In the whitewater pecking order, this hardly counted. Of course, there was the legendary Georgie White who pioneered commercial trips through the Grand Canyon in the early 1950's, hauling passengers on gigantic motorized pontoon boats. Though Grand was the status symbol,

motoring was a betrayal of the experience, and insulting to the river itself. Controversial because of her flamboyant personality and behavior, but mostly because of her poor safety record which included several severe injuries and deaths, Georgie was beyond the pale.

As Sharon stood her ground on the beach, I joined her to play hostess while Jack got the boatmen in line. She wore half of a silver heart on a silver chain hung between her partly exposed breasts, engraved with "Hank's Woman." Hank wore the other half, she told me, engraved with "Sharon's Man." Jack got the boatmen in line, albeit grudgingly, and Sharon was assigned a boat, now loaded with the heaviest gear. None of the passengers would ride in her boat, so I did. Before many bends in the river, we had the short version of each other's lives, with 4 1/2 days left to float. She offered to teach me to row, and despite the fear of dying at my own hands, I accepted. I was

a river reader student by lunch and a three small rapids rower by late afternoon camp.

When we docked, I hardly noticed the different treatment from my bros. I could, after all, get my own wine. Sharon joined me for the evening bathing ritual, and we headed around the bend, wine bottle in hand. Two river nymphs, we toasted my apprenticeship. Who knew we were consecrating my next career — my most engrossing, enlarging, and exhilarating professional experience.

Thanks, Sharon, wherever you are.

Just A Young Man
SUSAN KOGAN



I Am Not Broken

MONIKA MRAOVIC



If you are a man looking to give me a gift, I will gladly take a pearl necklace from you but not freedom since it never was yours to grant me.



“NO, I AM NOT BROKEN.” This thought crosses my mind when I am packing up my belongings again. The movers arrived and we are loading my few possessions into my SUV. “I lost so much and yet I gained a lot,” another fleeting observation startles me as I carry the boxes through the doorway. On my way out, I glimpse at the house that I used to dwell in but never felt mine. For the last time, I gaze at the garden I loved and spent many hours tending it. A rose bush, jasmine and passiflora vine tenderly wrapped around the fence will stay behind as a testimony of love that once lived here. I close the garden gate, walk away and start the engine.

I revisit the thoughts that were stirred earlier as I drive to my new place. “No, I am not broken,” again reverberates through my mind. In fact, I am convinced that I am stronger than ever. I have trusted, loved, risked and got damaged in the process of life but I never quit, I never gave up. Each time, with a naivety of a seventeen year old, I invited this guest, called love, into my heart. Each time my heart got scarred and sometimes it took a long time to put it back together. I pieced it with a rope, band-aid and covered it with honey. It healed and it looked better than ever. I felt as if my scars gave me a deeper perspective on life. This time, however, I am adamant for the first time to trust again. I park my car and start toting my boxes upstairs to my newly found refuge overlooking a pool. It doesn’t matter my new place has no garden; I know I can make any place beautiful. Indeed, all I need is the safety and freedom to be just me.

I open the door of my new apartment and glance at the stark-white emptiness of the walls. I sit in the middle of the uninhabited room and start opening a box I brought with me. It contains a beautiful teapot and a teacup among other things that are still waiting to be unwrapped from a tissue. They survived the move just fine and not a single piece is broken. As I place them on the kitchen countertop I smile in anticipation of many future moments of joy

that these pretty objects will bring me. I already envision the artwork, books and my plants in this space and it doesn't feel cold and uninviting any more. I know I can start spinning my dreams here. Then I pause...

I notice a moth trapped between the kitchen window and the blinds. It twirls in an insane jig trying to free itself from its entrapment. I contemplate the analogy between this insect's flight for freedom and my own. "Must all my relationships end like this moth's struggle," I ask myself in bewilderment. This is a common denominator that runs through my adventures in love – I end up feeling controlled by my partner. The moth is still hysterically beating its wings against the indifferent pane of the window but its dance will soon come to an end. Exhausted, it will fall and die. My own quest to remain free has always led me to break the relationship with the men I loved. There is no greater pain that anyone can inflict on me than make me feel small and control me. And most men I have been with tried to do exactly that. I feel suffocated and unable to breathe and I beat my wings against an invisible window like that moth. Today, I realize I am so weary of that battle I don't want to do it ever again.

I go back to my car and start bringing the rest of my boxes. As I am opening each one I become aware I am unpacking my life in front of my eyes. "Does being a woman mean one must always surrender," I ponder even though I already know the answer.

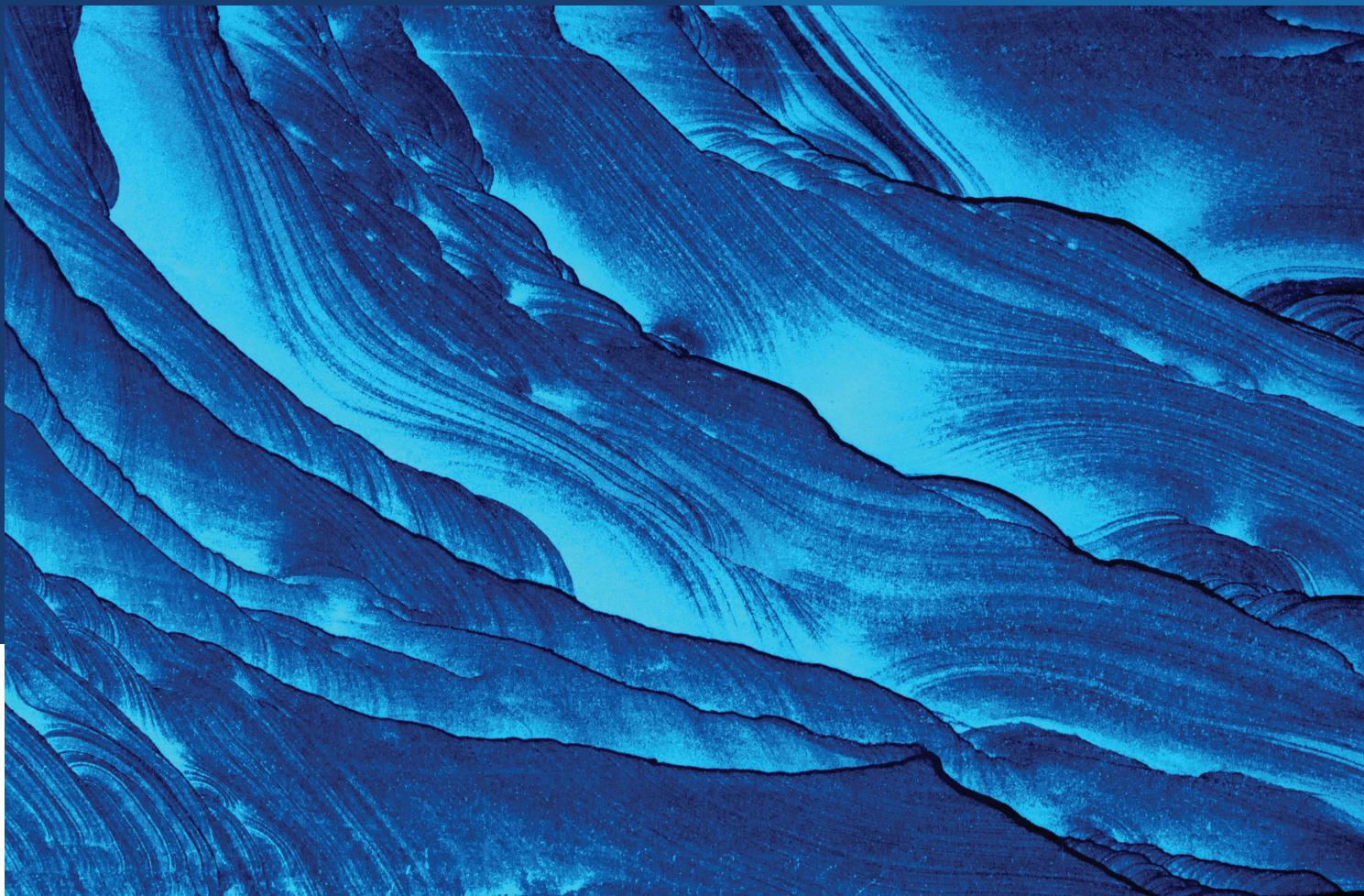
Each of my past lovers offered me the biggest gift he thought he could bestow on me, "I will give you freedom to be who you want to be." Yet, the stronger his assertion was the bigger lie it turned out to be. They meant freedom on their terms. I would be free as long as I followed their rules. I would be loved and cherished as long as I didn't question their behavior, revolt or show my emotions. The truth is that freedom cannot be gifted, at least not in today's world. It lies deep within one's soul.

While I might be confused, uncertain or not ready to exercise my independence it still remains my birthright. If you are a man looking to give me a gift, *I will gladly take a pearl necklace from you but not freedom since it never was yours to grant me.* I will take my liberty to walk away as soon as you make me feel less than I am. I won't settle for anyone who wants to control me and I will rather be alone.

I gaze at my porcelain teacup sitting in my new kitchen. Its round shape tempts me and I decide to take a break and leave the unpacked boxes on the floor. I boil water, pour it over the tea leaves and wait for the tea to steep for about three minutes. Once it reaches the perfect temperature and aroma I pour it into the teacup. As I take a sip I savor the rich bittersweet taste of solitude. A wave of strange contentment ripples through my body and I smile. I will cherish all good memories we made together and will try not to dwell on the bad ones.



Oversaturated Sandstone
SYDNEY STEVENS



Space Queen 421

RUBEN GUTIERREZ

Enough poems to last me a while
No Room to reconcile
Not enough memories to make you smile
Made a young fella feel so wild
With the way i could see your face
in a crowd point it out
Poignant now,
No room to reconcile
Spell it out with no doubt
You the angel the devil warned me all about

Green

GIANA ROGERS

Like the rolling hills in Dublin, vibrant and endless
Or the timeless beauty of an Emerald stone
You see it, but just for a while
You have to leave, or you can't afford it
It isn't yours to keep, but how you wish it were

A forest in springtime
The color of life; a symbol of safety, of freshness
The color of your eyes, gleaming, you blend right in
Green, lively like us, I think I've found a four-leafed clover
How lucky am I

But you change with the seasons
How did the winter come so soon to wilt your leaves?
You're only dormant but you're good as dead
It's been said that green can improve your vision
But hard as I try, I can't see you anymore

Green, the color of envy
Can she love you like I used to?

If I Were

MONIKA MRAOVIC

If I were to run into the waves to get salt-drenched in the ocean
With my eyes set on the moon and my hair in disarray
-you would let me.

If I wanted to gaze at the darkest, starless sky with no words to tell,
All alone and wrapped in a heavy shroud of thoughts
-you wouldn't mind.

If I had to dry my salty tears of defeat on your chest
Conquered by the world but not quite ready to surrender
-you would let me.

And if I told you I weaved my dreams with a golden thread,
Magnificent and delicate, yet incredibly strong
-you would adorn them with sapphires.

If you set off to conquer the rapids in your daring vessel
Alone, against the rest of the world
-I would wait for you.

If you were to swim across the jet-black waters
On a moonless night to the sound of your own heartbeat
-I would swim with you.

Gaudy Gale

SANDY CARPENTER



“I needed to see you,” she whispered. “I wanted to test myself because I’m going to start to forget you completely Monday morning.”



IF NOTHING ELSE, GALE’S CLUTTERED APARTMENT IS HOT. “Hello, little Home,” she says. “This is Jeffrey, Home. And Jeff, meet my Home, sweet home.”

I said the required hello to her new apartment even if one wall was shiny scarlet. In the living room an antique fan sent warm air around. In a tin vase roses were dying, a big marooned cluster stinks.

“Don’t they smell wonderful?”

“They’re dying,” I reply.

She cranked the window open saying, “That’s symbolic.”

“Of. . .”

With dramatic hand over heart, she moans, “Love.” She makes her exit into her orangey bedroom, feigning grief. I want to strip down a bit, instead open the glass pane wider, then reach for the kitchen window but it’s painted shut. Running a glass of water, I sink into the low lime armchair by the door. Bright neon colors crowded this small space.

The mostly-pink room has high ceilings of pine-strips. Plants stand before that single window staring across the street at crowded apartments opposite. Gale marches from her room in electric-blue shorts and aqua tee-shirt, pulling them in place as she switches the stereo to guitars. Propped on her elbows, lying on the dingy carpet, she removes her earrings. “I’m jealous,” she whines, then it becomes a song. . . *J-e-a-l-o-u-s-y*. The fan cuts her voice to pieces.

I settle on the rug beside her, flinging an arm about her waist as I said, “Gale. . . you know that isn’t what you want. Getting married without a plan, nothing saved, they have to be nuts!” My hands begin to sweat, from the room’s heat but also from her eyes full of tears.

Someone is walking above us, then a toilet flushes, we wait for the return of the footsteps high over our heads. Gale’s eyes close, heat but also from her eyes full of tears.

Someone is walking above us, then a toilet flushes, we wait for the return of the footsteps high over our heads. Gale's eyes close, she nestles against me. "What are you thinking, Jeff—No one should ever get married till rich? Your brother seems to see that idea differently."

Actually, I am thinking that she has the smoothest skin in this light and that her nylon shirt is mine. Mislaced, left here, or lost? And which of those were we? The thought passed quickly that I missed the taste of her mouth after a month working up north. I kissed her neck and recalled how she had chewed on the long grass stem from the field near my Anaheim motel when she visited me one weekend, after I had just moved for the new job. How her teeth and her lips were green when she smiled and how her mouth tasted of grass when she said, "Kiss me, you hard-worker, you silly, dedicated artist painting ceilings instead of canvases."

"Why wasn't your mother at the wedding, your brother must have hated that?" On the wall above the couch photos of her brother and two sisters, each holding up gorgeous, gaping babies. A gentle lake with evergreens looked almost painted. Zach was much taller, big brother, big smile, big nose, huge shoes. The girls just the opposite—tidy, cute, serious. I've no answer for her, through with all that nonsense.

"Like I do, Jeff." She stared at him, waiting, making a ticking-clock sound with her tongue. "Honk, she says, 'time's up.'" She walked out her gaudy, floral-decorated

front door before I had time to ask why. Disappearing blues at the end of the block, the afternoon over.

The day is thick and humid. I walked downtown a couple of blocks away, the old San Diego Grant Hotel rose before my eyes, then I caught sight of a farmer's market down the road, vegetables and green smell of crushed leaves drew me. I bought two apples and sat on a bus bench to eat one. A skinny man asked me for some change, he didn't like apples. Suddenly the day caved in completely as an October rain shower surprised me. The train was the only answer.

Heading back to Orange County, people wave to me as we pass the coastline, like they knew me. Yet even I didn't really know me. I didn't get off the Amtrak as I wished to, just sat there in a blank stupor. The city devolves into trees and hills after the sea, clouds run shadows over them, and hawks circle while the beach towns disappear. Telephone wires slope up and down, endlessly passing until my stop finally comes. At home the mat aired on the railing of my porch. I made myself iced tea and sat with my mail in the gray loveseat by the door, beginning to appreciate the autumn twilight.

Someone, even me, sets out following a preferred passage as fall dims and red-lit leaves turn brown before debris blows away and I find there's no real dragon to mourn. Yet I'm turning forlorn. The sycamores, empty of dressing, chorused through their dance of black movements. A postcard from my new sister-in-law made

from a snapshot of them honeymooning, gnarls like the gargoyle between them. It pushed me to telephone Gale but only reached her answering message. No need to leave meaningless words there, I hang up.

The afternoon before Christmas my office has its party. I sit in a circle, eating cookies with sparkles of red when somebody knocks at the hallway door. It's Gale, standing right beside those decorations, homemade streamers looking corny in this otherwise stark office. "Your boss said it was okay to come in here, do you think. . .?"

I don't think anything but the flush comes up my neck to my cheeks and I have to smile. After the punch and cookies have disappeared and the others have looked her over as thoroughly as they found necessary, I said to her, "Don't tell me, let me guess."

"Okay, go for it." She didn't grin when she said that, but a sparkle in her eye seemed to.

"You've appeared out of the fog from love and want to elope." No smile from me either.

"Exactly!"

"I knew it was only a matter of time." No need to discuss how I'd missed her.

On the way to my home, Gale's headlights follow me. I could see her silhouette in the rear-view mirror. Her head leans a little to one side like she's preparing a question. Still, no query came forth when we'd parked and climbed the front steps. We ate tuna casserole I'd planned for my own dinner tonight and I didn't apologize. Pay day

was coming up Friday and she'd caught me short-handed, but no need to say that. Bowl had an onion sliced over it and she adored grilled onions so dish seemed festive enough, I guess. Like I had planned to please her.

Afterward, Gale lay on the couch pulling a coverlet around her shoulders that she had crocheted over a year ago as a gift for me. The color was her strong shade of turquoise, planned certainly to bring out her eyes' color. We sat together a long time in silence after I'd put the plates in the dish-drainer.

"I needed to see you," she whispered. "I wanted to test myself because I'm going to start to forget you completely Monday morning."

"Why?" The word came out easily enough, but my pulse started to pound.

"Well, the guy in the apartment downstairs says he loves me. He wants us to be together in the new year. And forgetting you is the only way possible, for that."

"You're always on my mind." Said as I watched her shake her head in denial, knowing silence was the mode I had taken to show that fact.

"Shhh, don't say anything, Jeff. Don't say you're sorry. Please just tell me I'll be okay. That is what I need to hear. Tell me this will be the last time we see each other. You may tell me you love me but say it quietly like it's the last time. Tell me how wonderful I am then say, Bye".

So I obeyed her wishes, did just what she expected. Then watched her walk down the porch. She said nothing more yet I listened to her. She seemed to say,



Dreamscape
LU MOHLER



My heart is breaking, over and over again. Don't let me go. Don't let me leave here. Don't lose me, Jeff.

The sky moved its charcoal clouds to the north. It must have been the wind that did it all. I'd like to blame that wind for being in my eyes, accuse the weather of everything cold and unyielding. I telephoned her apartment, knowing she wasn't there but a message would do. I listened to her voice, then hung up—before I dialed again, listened to her words repeating that silly message over and finally gave up, leaving silence for her to find.

Opening my door, the wind had lifted the sky, cleared it away. The palms were shifting their feet, rocking back and forth all around the yard, swinging their weight. And the clouds had arrived in my yard to settle on the huge oleander bushes. They were softer now, more subtle with the mist on them. And soon they were pulling me toward them, but instead. . . a vital message occurred to me, one I had to leave right now. One as gaudy as Gale, full of neon's glow and no nonsense. "When I am with you, the only place I want to be is closer."

Rain on Poinsettia
MARLYNN PEAK

The Need to Save

JACK SABRAW

Two sparks dancing under the same darkness, or light
The symbols simply tangle
what I wish to express
My only apology: explanation
For the light of those green eyes
never called for help
I misunderstood
My wildflower requires no lessons
she simply loves reminders
of her innate perfection
Nature revealed herself to me
A dog tooth violet who preaches
simply through being
I spoke too much
unknowing that love that was enough

The Day I Tried Basketball

SARAH OLSON



Was I really going to give up the chance for time to work on what I loved to be ordered around by a coach alongside girls I barely knew, doing something I didn't really care about?



I STEPPED ONTO THE BASKETBALL court beneath a sky full of gray clouds swollen with rain. The other girls who had signed up for the team were already scattered throughout the court, stretching their legs and chatting with each other. They looked comfortable in their Nikes, but my stiff new shoes rubbed against my ankles. Their lean bodies were shaped by years of playing sports. I wished my shirt and shorts would hide my awkward body. I didn't look like the other girls, but I wanted to be like them.

I chose to do this, I reminded myself. But as I strode towards the girls, my muscles lacking the definition of their tall, lank bodies, I found my thoughts wandering. What was I doing out here on the courts when I'd never done this before? I settled down to stretch beside a girl I recognized from middle school. I glanced over at her. I was curious to see how she'd changed from when we knew each other years ago. Now she was just a freshman, but I had heard

she already dominated the team. I'd watched her play before. She was rough and aggressive. Had she grown kinder than the gruff, cold girl I had known back then?

My mind drifted back to a day we sat in homeroom, a book on the tabletop between us. I picked it up and turned the heavy book over in my hands.

"It's really long," I said.

"I've read bigger ones," she said, lifting her chin. "I read books this big when I was nine."

She smirked when my cheeks flushed. I knew I was a good reader, but I couldn't keep up with her ferocious appetite for books. Reading has always been my thing, but she managed to make me feel bad about it.

I guess I still can't keep up with her.

"I'm surprised to see you out here." She said, dragging me back to the present.

Her friendly voice smothered the stale words.

“Hello, Ashley.”

Her cool gray eyes analyzed me. Her assessment made my stomach sick. It had been years since we used to sit in homeroom, when she would say things that made me feel terrible about myself, and that I wasn't the reader I thought I was.

The books in my backpack told a different story.

I pushed away the recurring memories invading my mind. I could still hear her mocking voice, reminding me over and over that I'm not like her. I felt my face flush with humiliation. Here she was again about to school me in something I'd never be as good at as she was. My fists clenched.

I'm not that scared kid I was in seventh grade.

“Are you going to be able to keep up?” She asked.

“I guess we'll find out.”

She laughed. That high, sharp voice was mocking me again. The words hung in the air like a noxious gas around my head. I looked back at

the school building and felt my heart ache. Here I am standing outside with girls who want to be athletes, girls who love this, and I want to be back inside with the debate team and the chess club and quiet, nerdy artists. Would I actually fit in out here?

I didn't have time to ponder my impulsive decision to try out for basketball--the coach called us out onto the court.

Now I found myself chasing after balls that escaped my hands much too easily. I kept tripping over my own feet while I ran and jumped and avoided crashing into the others. Ten minutes in and I was soaked in sweat. The clouds lazily opened up, splattering us with fat raindrops. We ran faster.

No one tossed me the ball. Not once.

It was a relief when the coach--a small, sharp woman with clipped dark hair framing her face--finally hollered for us to take a break. I fell in line with the girls as they marched towards the water fountains. They

ignored my presence, just like they had through practice. As we stood in line, I watched them joke around with Ashley, laughing and sharing jokes.

I was the odd one out. I stood off to the side, awkward and uncomfortable. I should enjoy trying something new, I thought, this is supposed to be good for me. I stood there, panting from exertion. Ashley approached me with a smirk in her steely eyes.

“Looks like you're having a little trouble out there,” she said.

I wanted to glare at her, but I instead I gestured back at the school. “You know, I'm usually inside. I think I'm more artistic than athletic.”

When I said it, I knew I it was the truth.

She smiled, “I guess you'll just have to keep working.”

“Yeah,” I said. But doubt had already clouded my mind. What was I doing out here trying to fit in with these girls? I didn't even really care about playing basketball. I had just wanted to try something new. I

thought I could change myself, but instead had realized something else.

I didn't really want to do this.

When we walked back onto the court, my feet balked. It felt wrong to be out here. Was I really going to give up the chance for time to work on what I loved to be ordered around by a coach alongside girls I barely knew, doing something I didn't really care about?

No, I was not.

I strode straight across the court and up to the coach and thanked her for her time, my voice strong and determined despite my shaking legs. I told her I had to leave. She gave me a funny look. I turned on my heel and, without looking back, ran from the basketball court. The other girls stopped to watch me go, finally noticing me. An exhilarated grin broke across my face as I thought about the puzzled faces watching. But I was on my way inside the school and I felt resolute. I came through the door, strode to the front desk, and asked to change my elective to the writing club.

I wonder what might have happened if I had stayed at that practice. When I recall the whisper of my shoes scuffing the pavement as I ran back to school, I realize that what may seem like running away was not that at all. I ran towards who I am and away from what I thought I needed to be. I have found my happiness, and although I am still envious of those athletic girls playing basketball, I'd rather be writing about them than be them. I know they are as happy playing their game just as I am content to write about it. It's not worth changing who you are to impress anyone. Life is about finding what you love and doing it. Always I return to that moment and remember the truth that leads me back to myself—that I am a writer, above all.



Path to Swamis
ELIZABETH HAMUD

The River

MARILYN WATLER

In this strange exciting journey becoming all of who I am,
I feel kinship to the mighty river held back by the concrete dam.
Her source a tiny trickle, perhaps on a mountain high,
When the Winter snows begin to melt under Spring's blue cloudless sky.
As the rich brown earth begins to stir, the seedlings break the crust.
They know not why they start their growth, only that they must.
So the mountain stream begins her flow sparkling clean and bright.
She doesn't ask which way to go, she takes the path that's right.
Tumbling, dancing, skipping by, on her journey without end.
Nurturing flora and fauna, she's Mother Nature's friend.
From tiny stream to babbling brook, she has so much to say.
She speaks of the wonders of love and life as she makes her merry way,
Over rocks and hills, round curves and bends,
On a joyous journey that never ends.
And the earth responds with verdant growth as the river wends her way.
Growing fuller, more vibrant and powerful with every passing day.
Her momentum takes her flowing on where these waters have not been before.
And yet she knows with certainty, she follows the path once more.
To the edge of the cliff, the drop in space, the eternity in midair,
To cascade in a thundering waterfall, the creation of glory is there.
White water foam, and explosion of power, then a turn around the bend.
She slows into a pool of serenity, gentle resting, not journey's end.
And as she rests, she opens her arms to God's creatures large and small,
Like a Mother suckling her infant child, she cradles them one and all
The doe comes to drink, the trout grows fat, while the river murmurs her love,
And down below, man waits with his dam, to harness the power above.

She could safely stop safely here, just cease her flow,
Yet she's compelled to go on, she does know,
That the dam will confine, halt her freedom to be,
That she'll struggle and rage with the to be free?
And still she flows on, her purpose is clear,
She'll grow murky and stagnant if she stops here.
Does she view the dam, not as an enemy or for,
But a turn in the journey, another place to grow?
The power she shares will light up the land,
Once more out of love she'll reach out her hand.
And the lake that forms will cradle once more,
The children of God as they play on her shore.
They swim, sail and fish with this new found friend,
Well, it's not so bad if this is journey's end.
Journey's end? Oh no, that just cannot be,
The river and I have a right to be free.
Then, lightning and thunder, the storm clouds that brew,
The river is ready the journey anew.
She swells with new challenge, excitement and fear.
The waters rise rapidly, is danger here?
Man watches and waits in the cold grey dawn.
He knows it is time for her to move on.
His placid blue lake has changed in an hour,
To an awesome, heart stopping mass of power.
She rolls and she boils like an angry black sea,
Crying her need to escape, to be free.

A foot, than another, and just a bit more,
Then over the spillway her waters will pour,
In a dark silver sheet with sparkles of spray,
She rushes along and is gone on her way.
Through farmland, past city and over the hill,
Her journey resumed she goes where she will.
The prison of concrete and steel made by man,
Not meant to stop her, just part of the plan,
She'll flow on forever, this river of love,
From the source of her being in that stream up above.
She frolics and dances, she ripples and plays,
She gently gives birth thru the nurturing days.
She's soft and serene, she's angry and wild,
Both warm loving mother and petulant child.
Always she knows, as she flows on, you see,
Her heart and her soul sing, the difference is me.
Her power and beauty, her wisdom and song,
Inspire those who see as flows along,
On this endless journey, this quest to be free,
Till she reaches her goal and joins with the sea.
Journey's end, new beginning, embracing the foam
Complete, whole and free, the river's come home.
How can I tell her story? It's simple you see,
I am the river. The river is me.

Openhanded

SANDY CARPENTER



The loud voice of youth and fear seemed to fill the quiet restaurant while the girl stared into her lap as an embarrassed flush appeared on her cheek.



THEY SAT SILENTLY IN THE EMPTY CAFÉ OF THE MOTEL, not quarreling, just exhausted. They had left at seven that morning but the intense heat, the intermittent flash floods of Arizona and the constant bickering in the backseat of the car had caused them to stop earlier than planned. Their two young children, similarly worn out, were content to stay in their adjoining motel room resting with cartoons. It was good to get away from them for a while.

Jill toyed with her drink, looking out at the hot, dusty street. She had already forgotten the name of this town but it must be near a reservation because she could see Indians sitting in the shade with red and gold blankets to sell. A latticed divider separated them from the entry space but it too was deserted. She supposed, without much interest, that they would have dinner soon, something to do. Silence hung heavily between them.

Family vacations put a strain on people, she thought. Perhaps it would have been better to take a cabin in the mountains and just let everyone do his own thing. She thought wearily of the hours of driving next day to Grand Canyon. Still, the kids were seeing western America, a long-term plan of both her and her husband. Would the children ever appreciate this effort they made?

The sunset has barely lit the sky rose and she can scarcely make out this town, as a gritty haze sets in. Way too tiny to be intriguing. Sand intertwines around the beams of the houses across the one boulevard but someone calls this home. Not a town of many jobs either. This restaurant must be one of the few employers around here. Quiet and a bit deadly compared to San Diego's coastal cool.

But she wished her husband would talk to her. He could be entertaining if he tried. For the past three days Brent had seemed to feel that driving the car was his sole responsibility—everything else was up to her. Was this the beginning of a new era in a decade of marriage?

Then a door opened and two young people entered the restaurant. The boy had his hand on the girl's arm, and Jill heard him ask the waitress for a table by the large, front window. She smiled at that request, since all the tables but theirs were empty.

The girl was pale yet attractive, in an aqua sun dress with a straw hat almost hiding her black hair. How could she look so cool when the perspiration dripped down her own plaid shirt? Then Jill noticed Brent staring and she couldn't help wondering what her husband was thinking. It had been a very long, difficult day and impatience bent the space between them.

The boy ordered two strawberry milkshakes, reaching into a torn pocket of dirty Levis. The loud voice of youth and fear seemed to fill the quiet restaurant while the girl stared into her lap as an embarrassed flush appeared on her cheek. She had no purse, nothing in her hands—which Jill abruptly noticed were sunburned and a bit discolored with dust. Even that cute straw hat had a missing band Jill discovered, looking more closely.

"Where do you suppose he got the money to eat here?" Jill became aware suddenly that this café was rather ritzy, something she hadn't noticed when being seated. Then across the large room she heard the boy say, "We'll split a chicken-salad sandwich too."

"This is an expensive restaurant for them, but then there was nothing else for miles . . ." she

recalled. "Why would they eat here, there must be fast food down the road."

"No, this is it. I studied the map myself wondering if we were close to another town." Brent shook his head, then leaned toward Jill. "I gave him a few bucks after I checked in, they looked so tired and hungry out on the porch and said they didn't have the nerve to come in here."

Together they watched the teenagers sipping their milkshakes, waiting for the single sandwich. Jill put out her hand and her husband squeezed it, their weariness forgotten. Tomorrow would be a good day.

Abruptly, her father's long ago suggestion settled in her mind, *Keep your words soft and tender because tomorrow you may have to eat them!*



Fish Sandwiches
NANCY B DITTMANN

Smaller Things

KYLIE NECOCHEA

This thing they fight over
It seems like a being lost to the tales of “once when”
Two decades ago before it came to pass
She was one
She was with both and she was one
In a scuffle they got up from the table
So quickly they forgot to leave her, they both took her
Each week one way
Each week next way
Before then she had a way with pretending
Now she has a way with being
A way with words, they say
A way with being, she knows
Tug at a baby, bring her with you both ways, little things,
he said
Little things.
Tug at a baby, break her two ways, better than one
Lean back, you want her, pull back, you want her
She is an asset,
like the house,
like the car,
like the dishwasher and the shoes,
the one sided friends and

The stale social cues.
A broken hearted muse
Bring her back,
she is confused
Bet you rue the day you ripped the daughter’s brain apart
Bet you miss the way he carefully drove the car
Bet you hope the day comes soon
Whose is she, whose?
Tell her please, she is confused.
Daughter, she is.
Be bright
Daughter
Be love
Daughter
Be hope
Be not purple, be green
Green like the grass that you grew from,
Green like the seed you became
Like the stem on which you grow
Green like the thumb you hope to have
Green like the ripening tomato
Green before the rain has got you
New and fresh like before, yet unlike anymore.

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