

Cardinal Sins

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Masthead

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Editors' Note

This year has seen a lot of unforeseen change in all aspects of life; however, one thing that we are proud to say has remained the same is the publication of Cardinal Sins. A lot of things were not the same this year. Not a single review meeting was conducted in-person to put this journal together, many of our staff and committee members we have yet to even meet in real life, we are unable to host our traditional publication reception. We have pushed through a lot just to make this journal happen, and despite the ups and downs that we have faced over the course of the past two semesters, this makes us ever prouder to present this volume.

With both of us as new Editors-in-Chief this semester, along with an entirely new editorial staff, the past year has been a crazy journey. This journal would have been entirely impossible without all of the dedicated hard work put in by each one of our editors. It has been an incredible learning experience for us, and we are so grateful to have gone through these past two semesters with the most incredible editors.

It has been the most rewarding and gratifying experience to see this journal finally come to fruition after countless hours of hard work over the past several months. Above all, we want to uphold Cardinal Sins as a showcase of the raw, surreal, and out-of-the-ordinary that it has been over the past several years, while also giving it a new life that reflects the changes and challenges we are facing as times change. We are incredibly proud to showcase both emerging talents and established artists and writers in this volume.

We are so grateful to have been able to work with incredibly talented artists and writers to create this journal and look forward to working with more in the future. We love receiving submissions that are completely out-of-the-box and able to catch us off guard. Send us the most bizarre, strange, creative stuff that you have. We look forward to working with you.

Happy reading,

Madeline Bruessow and Matthew Blum, Co-Editors-in-Chief

And I Am

Michael Tyler

And I am lying and I am lean and I am tan and the towel beneath me has a wrinkle which cannot be ignored and my eyes are closed and the chatter of the afternoon waves around and beyond and toward and the shrooms are definitely kicking in and I smile as a stray finger makes circles in the sand.

And I am thinking of the Beach Boys' "Fun, fun, fun" as Sam makes way from the ocean and I sit up and eyes are staring and heads are turning and Sam returns to her towel in a blue striped bikini and says the water is delightful and I say that everyone says the water is delightful and she punches my arm and reaches for the whiskey.

And it is swimwear season and so people have starved themselves and joined the gym and cut back on the booze "just a bit", while children dig holes and make castles and run along the water's edge. The sun is setting as Sam and I carry our bag to the cabin and rowdy neighbors whistle salute to Sam's bikini while she teases me with tales that they are cheering my trunks.

"Surf's Up" plays as we drink and change and the noise grows louder as night falls and people ready themselves for the evening ahead. It is New Year's and it is wonder and it is awe and all is fun and celebration and I pull up jeans as Sam brushes her hair to the tones of Brian Wilson.

Sam strokes a finger across my palm as we make way toward festivities and crowds cheer for us to mingle and couples weave waves through single folk heading for Ferris wheel and fireworks. The odd burst appears in the night sky set by those unwilling to wait, a girl cries as another walks by with an arm around her shoulder.

There will be crowds and mobs and police and colors and loud noises, says Sam, and we shall be there for it all. We can only hope, I reply as Sam swallows a pill and squeezes my hand once, then twice.

There is salt in the air and sand between my toes as we stop to buy some cotton candy. A little boy holds a balloon tight, aware it is past his bedtime and his sister rides her father's shoulders as a dog runs helter skelter.

Guitars begin from a stage set for midnight jubilation, side burned singer belts out early Beatles standards as a half-hearted crowd surfer suffers wild aban-

don. Sam smiles and sets her eyes on a hill a fair walk away and we set out apart from the crowd and celebration. Feet drag as Sam urges me on and we rise and witness all from above. And a finger points toward the galaxy on collision course with our own and we breathe deep and we smile.

the dream of war

henry 7. reneau, jr.

It's the same logic that encourages the most marginalized to make do in a system positioned against them, rather than question the historical and social conditions that left them disadvantaged in the first place.

The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture, and Illness

—Eric Cazdyn

1.

faces are the bar-codes
of the human race are scanned &
parsed
ever since we went tribal are code-
switched into stereotype
are codified to
discriminate into alignment &
every first impression the “stop &
frisk” to incarcerate that ass
or deportation's
xenophobia of racial profile
the collateral damage
of bullets bibles & Big-Head
Benjamin\$ the innocent
casualties of drone strikes
every face
a foreign wrapping of suspicion
the bigoted inability
to face the fear of to see
past an assumption of the *Other*
between the lines of bullshit &
drama & upbringing

& exactly how much will trust cost?

2.

the collective hallucination
that points a finger distorts
the present tense bias
 exactly *who's* the enemy
into a future tense of
confrontation
fighting to maintain the status quo
instead of fighting for
the inclusivity of all like crabs in a
barrel
can never get enough or be enough
making it seem
as if the present tense
 will never end
the way someone
 riddled with bullet holes
 is surprised
 might be proud
they're still standing

so very much to fear
that kills the drive for cures &
imagined new solutions

& the newspaper headlines
of eternal discord
 that left us marginalized
in the first place

rendering us a repetition of
 that perpetual present tense
 the good as dead-
like hungry ghosts of grasp
 slash & grab

as if there's nobody wouldn't hurt you
 if they stand to profit

/: \$s \$s & mo' \$\$\$s

3.

how many wars
 are fought this way?
even now
with entire nations
 absorbed in deep hatred
sworn as enemies
without ever once
 looking their enemies in the eye

Red Foxes

Dante Gray

Cupid might begin his antics with arrows, but he damn sure ended them with bullets. These shots of rejection always came fast, harsh, and icy. Marie was well acquainted with all sides; she knew the heart-wrenching reality of looking down the barrel and she knew the feel of the cold steel trigger. But never once had she felt the sharp pain of the bullet, the instant rending of flesh and disposition. She was a natural at eluding the shot; any marksman who dared aim at her only found his sights in his eyes and nothing more.

When her first husband had been courting her, he would brag about the wild days of his youth. She loved the confident grip he held when he told his stories but wasn't too much of a fan of his ambitious bravado. He would tell her of how him and his brothers went out hunting at the crack of dawn, never coming back empty handed, so skilled were they. She noticed that he always told the tales with foxes in the boldest of manners, and on one date early on at a local bar she much adored and frequented, she asked him about it, curiosity swelling up inside her.

"Well, they're definitely a favorite of mine," he said, his eyes locking with hers, "noble and proud, but also cunning and devious. Not to mention their beautiful, stunning red fur."

He said the last line playfully, gently running his fingers through her hair before turning back to finish his drink. She was left with her cheeks flushing a rosy red. Foxes were her weakness but she wasn't sure if he knew this already or if he had simply made a lucky guess; he was pretty good at darts, after all. Foxes and her shared a common, modern misnomer. They called the long locks of hair around her skull red, and her a redhead. Likewise, the foxes of the woods around them were deemed red foxes, despite their bright orange fur standing out worse than blood on snow. She found them to be not so different, not only on the outside but on the inside as well.

The dates continued and soon trickled into a marriage, with their eyes shining a real red in the Polaroid pictures of their wedding. Marie grew to love him more and more for at times he seemed charming and clever like the foxes he used to hunt; the same foxes she cherished so much, the same ones she saw so much of herself in. It's said that the hunter gains their personality from that which they hunt, and when she was with him, she never doubted such a saying. Marie and her husband relished this long pursuit, a long fox-hunt without guns or danger. They could take breaks when they pleased, and rest whenever they wanted before resuming the pursuit. They danced like this for quite a while, but it was her whose legs grew tired first.

While he worked late nights, she began anew to frequent the bars of old. And soon enough, another courter found his way beside her. They talked for many nights, always parting at the end to go their separate ways, but she still nevertheless found comfort in his compliments. Where she had felt safe and secure in her husband's bold yet cozy style, with this newcomer she felt the bonds of an elusive kindred spirit. They spoke easily and danced around conversations like they were naturals. Over time, Marie realized he was the real deal. He wasn't a hunter who'd merely adapted the mind of a fox; no, he was in essence the same as her; a fleeting spirit in search of romance. Marie, being well suited at avoiding all sorts of hunters, found herself enticed by their talks. While she kept out of sight of her hunting husband, she danced in private meadows with this another foxy creature.

With these late night talks fresh in her mind every week, she began to question the validity of loving a hunter, a man whom she could not fully identify with. Her husband spotted her less and less on the trails and saw her seldomly in the forest. But he was a hard worker and earned good pay, enough to take her out to nice restaurants and establishments every now and then. He hoped it would be enough to fund the hunt he prized so much. He missed more of their dances with each growing day, often getting caught in the muddy swamps of overtime, and they grew further apart. Her mind drifted away from the embrace of the hunt and closer to the innocent chatter of the barstool. Despite talking for so many hours, so much of this new man remained a mystery. She only knew enough to be enticed by the idea of him, the very possibilities of what he could be.

But she could not venture out fully with this other cunning fox in hushed meadows, for she was already dancing with a hunter. Before long, the green crystals of her irises became jaded and her bright eyed outlook on love and life changed. She was kept up till 2AM, scribbling down thoughts and trivialities under fear of forgetting them in slumber's welcoming embrace. She couldn't control who she loved anymore and she pulled lone strands of her hair out trying to regain some power. She hated her red hair, the red fox she thought she was, and the red heart that beat her to this cadence. She tucked her notes of passion and romance away in her nightstand and under several books, keeping them pried away from prying eyes. Sleep was an innocent predator but she feared most that her husband, the hunter, would find them.

Still, there was solace here, caught between the jaws of affliction and melancholia. The comfort found here was something she'd never grasp had she never ventured out into the forests of romance; it was something she'd never discover in loneliness. It was better to abandon or be abandoned, better to suffer or cause pain, she reckoned, than to never have lived a life of love at all. The woods were her home; it was her nature to dodge bullets and survive. She lived to hunt those

The Moon in the Water

David Nichols

weaker than her and elude those stronger; as such, when she played the part of the hunted, she made damn sure bullets would never pierce her heart.

Playing with the other fox at the bar revealed so much about her heart she had previously ignored. Their little talks gave her a newfound awareness for the wicked, wanton heart of the wily fox inside her. She kept her husband hunting as long as she wished, secretly meeting with tricksters just like her. As the nights grew longer, she crossed boundaries. She thought herself untouchable.

In one such motel meadow, Marie frolicked again. By chance, a passing hunter followed word of mouth. His long hunt was finally over. After years of careful ritual and dance, emotion took control.

Through the glass window pane, the hunter saw red, and the red fox finally tasted their first bullet.

For you, is it so, some meadow aglow,
Where the fireflies find their holy static,
Listlessly aloft creation's fabric,
While evening wafts the dew you bestow,
Rising from ground to my web newly sewn?
Impatient for light, thinking to catch it,
I lost the source that burned in the magic,
Smoldering wick to my sticky blow.

Then I saw, from my precipitous fall,
More to heavenly night than its halter:
A bandit nabbed it, the moon in the water!
Rising cheers from the liturgy of frogs,
Ringing the hollows of pillars once tall,
Encouraged the thief to feel in the fog.

3 Illustrations

Jeremy Szuder



Ink on paper

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Ink on paper

Cardinal Sins

That Secret That We Know

Jacob Browning



Ink and gold leaf on paper



Photograph

The Costume Party is Over

Michael Stein

It was smack in the middle of the 1990s, when Prague was still a fun, wild, occasionally absurd, and somewhat self-destructive place to live, but just on the verge of no longer being any of those things, at least not to the same degree. A friend of a friend was throwing a party in the back room of a club likewise destined for approaching oblivion, located as it was on the city's main shopping street. Real-estate types were smacking their lips just looking around its dim, cavernous walls, though that night it was more likely because of all the coke they were snorting.

The party's guest list consisted of a sizable contingent of western suits working not only in real estate, but advertising, investment, banking - really, kids just out of school who had conned the locals into thinking they had a clue what they were doing. Today, the building is a multiplex cinema and shopping center.

Besides the drugs and alcohol, what made the corporate crowd a bit more bearable to be around, if not talk to, was the fact that they were masked, covered up, in disguise. It was a costume party, so instead of their ironed, untucked white shirts and gelled hair they were camouflaged as something more colorful than they really were. This wasn't intentional on the part of the hosts. These were their friends. But I, for one, appreciated the gesture.

What I didn't appreciate at all was the need to find a costume. Prague in the 90s was hardly a service-friendly place, even for more everyday needs than costumes. When I arrived, there was only one pizzeria and there were any number of perfectly ordinary products that required trips to Germany or further to procure. In other words, I had no idea how or where I was going to get a costume on short notice. So as the hours counted down and all I was doing was continuing to think how I had no idea how or where I was going to get a costume on short notice, because frankly, that was easier than doing something, it became clear that I wasn't going to have a costume in time.

Now, I was determined to go to the party, far more determined than I was to find or improvise a decent costume, but my mind continued to draw a blank. I looked into the sparse and mostly empty wardrobe of my apartment as if there might be a costume hanging there I had forgotten about. I had arrived in Prague with a backpack though, so it was no surprise there wasn't

much to work with.

In the end I conferred with my friends and we came up with a solution that made little to no sense but still seemed better than nothing. Rob had more far-flung ambitions than I did here, and perhaps in life in general, and so had brought a suit with him from home. He was quite a bit taller than I was but I decided to wear his white button-down shirt and black sports jacket. I looked in the mirror. It was strange, ill-fitting, so why not? It seemed close enough to being a costume.

We arrived at the party in a line of pirates, vaguely Playboy-ish bunnies, a few figures from Czech fairy-tales I had yet to watch, and one guy of-fensively trying to look like Michael Jackson. There were some simply masked faces and some painted ones. When Rob, Chris and I reached the front of the line we greeted the hostess and she looked at me, only me, and asked, "So what is this? Are you supposed to be Kafka?"

They all laughed. I probably did too. She had a point. But for the rest of the party I was highly self-conscious, not unlike the man I was presumably dressed as. I was surrounded by Slavic beauties whose beauty no masks could obscure, yet how could I hope to talk to any of them now, looking like this? How would I survive this evening among all these yuppies bursting with coked-up confidence?

This is what Gregor Samsa would have felt if he had been at a crowded party instead of in his own bedroom, though he only had his own thoughts to turn to, while I had drugs, which I quickly proceeded to make use of. This turned out to be an unfortunate choice, not because drugs are bad or anything like that, but because I took the wrong kind when already in a highly self-conscious state.

It would be far more dignified and intellectually respectable if I could say that from there I was like Joseph K lost in a labyrinth or like K himself in the byways of the Castle, the Prague version of which was visible from the top floor of this soon-to-be movie theater complex. But I was just stoned, paranoid, and hiding in a corner, staring at the piranhas who would soon be biting off little pieces of this city, and there was nothing I could do about it, because no one would see them as piranhas, but as cowboys, musketeers, and a few scattered superheroes.

2.

I'm standing in Old Town Square looking at the crowds of Asian

tourists, their faces covered by surgical masks and the phones they are obsessively taking photos with. Their object - the picturesque renaissance and baroque house fronts, the broken wall of Prague's bombed out former Town Hall, each other, themselves? No, they are gleefully photographing a 20-foot tall moving stuffed panda bear.

And it's not only the scenery they don't see. They are also oblivious to the pack of Englishmen in matching T-shirts rushing past them, one carrying a mannequin with a wig, another wearing a wedding veil and showing the remnants of smeared lipstick on his mouth. The roving stag party are so intent on their ceaseless trek from strip bar to pub to brothel to sports bar - life distilled down to its very essence - that they are partaking in the collective oblivion and don't notice the golden man they pass suspended in mid-air merely by the use of a cane. Tourists take his photo, pose with him, pay for this privilege and move on. On the other side of the square there is another metallic man, this one covered head to toe in silver and levitating with the use of a shovel.

In the center of the square stands a figure with a crumpled felt top hat looking like a worn-out ringmaster who blows giant bubbles that float up into the air to give this post-apocalyptic Disney its final, ruinous touch.

After 1989, this square was in many ways just as much of a circus, with its fair share of Kafka and Golem-themed kitsch and crowds of mindless tourists using analog cameras and being ceaselessly ripped off. But it was less corporate theme park and more traveling carnival. The people who made their living off tourists weren't the interchangeable metallic men you now find for some inexplicable reason in public squares all over the world, but odd and sometimes disturbing figures that could only be found here.

Among the caricature artists with hands shaking from drinks and pictures of barely recognizable celebrities, the top-hatted carriage drivers, whose hands were also shaking, and the street magicians and outright con-men working that newly tourist territory, my favorite was the sword swallower.

He usually worked on a side street just off Wenceslas Square, almost as if he didn't want to attract too much attention. This feeling carried right through to the start of his act, done without fanfare, without any schtick or even an announcement. He would just quietly stand up, sword in hand, shyly begin to hold it up above his open mouth as if he were only about to brush his teeth, before slowly dropping it down, like a diving bell.

He was an older man, worn-out, with large black eyes, who had dyed his thinning hair black. He dressed in black jeans and a black leather or black jean jacket depending on the weather, like an old rocker. What stuck out when you watched him perform was his sadness, his loneliness, as if the reason he didn't speak during his act wasn't the sword shoved down his throat but that he didn't have anything to say, or didn't know who to say it to.

He would start with a relatively short sword, like a long dagger, and continue until he was sticking an incredibly long medieval-looking broadsword deep down into his innards. When he performed that impressive and disgusting act, and even when a crowd would build up and there would be a big round of applause, he would pull the sword out without a trace of gusto, as if he had only stabbed the emptiness inside himself and didn't think he was doing anything special.

When he finished his working day, he packed his swords in a cheap vinyl bag and trudged off. He used a small wheeled cart, the kind old people use to carry their shopping home. Once I sat next to him on the metro and saw him reading the paper. I looked closer and saw that he was going through the personal ads, marking them with a pen.

There are people who contemplate prospective partners with lust or joy, even just curiosity in their eyes, but the sword swallower had that same sad, beaten expression on his face as when he performed.

I wondered what his first date would be like with the woman he had just checked off.

"So I work in a bakery, and what about you?"

He pauses, wondering if he should tell her. I imagine the awkward silence if he does, or maybe he's the one imagining it. Maybe he lies, tells her

what he did during communism when he had an ordinary job because he couldn't have worked as a sword swallower then, could he? Or could he have worked as a licensed sword swallower in a communist-era circus and now was going freelance?

"I'm a sword swallower," he says. "I perform on the square, or well, next to it."

She laughs, says he's a real joker, then waits. But he's quiet and she realizes he's being serious. She picks at the wax on the candle in front of her. Silence. He sees all this in advance. That's why he never contacts her, just checks her name in the paper and wonders.

Then again, I would like to think he did call her, the date went well, and that the two of them are married now. I hope that's how it ended, and they're living in a little house outside of Prague with a small back garden, far from all the tourists he felt so uneasy around. The two of them sit and chain-smoke at the kitchen table so he doesn't need to go in the garden for a cigarette, but sometimes she sees him sneaking back there, his eyes as sad as always but nostalgic too, and she can just make out the faint outline of an uplifted sword against the hazy, evening sky.

I don't remember how that mid-90s costume party ended exactly, nor how the more general one that took place in this city through those years ended either. I just know that at some point the costume party was over.

Anyone who passed through the Old Town in the 90s would recognize Bohouš the Policeman, who spent his days furiously seeming to direct traffic, flashing his badge, hiding behind his uniform and being the gruff voice of authority except for the simple fact that Bohouš the Policeman had nothing whatsoever to do with the police.

He was wearing what appeared, on closer inspection, to be a security guard's uniform with some kind of fake badge pinned to his chest and always carried his hand-held traffic signal used by the police with a red cross on one side and a green circle on the other. Only the most naive tourists thought he was a real policeman, and even then he would yell at them in Czech so they never understood his instructions anyway. This caused a lot of

confusion, first at whatever he was saying, then because he was so drunk he would often have trouble standing up straight. This was usually the moment the lightbulb went on and the tourists realized they weren't dealing with a cop, though there are always tourists for whom the lightbulb never turns on.

Bohouš presumably didn't have a job besides his calling as a fake policeman. Sometimes I would see him on my way to work, on my way home, even on my way to and from lunch. He seemed to be out and about in the Old Town every day, rain or shine. It would have been impressive had he actually been doing something, though truthfully, being part of the panorama can be far more important than doing a so-called real job.

My most indelible memory of Bohouš also happens to be the moment of my life I most wish I had studied to be an artist, a painter, to be exact.

I was on my way out of Old Town Square when I heard the droning singing, cymbals and bells of an oncoming group of Hare Krishnas. As I turned onto Železná Street, there they were, marching and dancing, even holding a large banner as they shook slightly up and down to the rhythm of "Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Hare Rama, Hare Rama," and leading this mass of shaved-headed, glazed-eyed lost souls like a band majorette was Bohouš the Policeman with his traffic signal as his baton, swaying at a stark, drunken angle to the rest of his blissful, presumably sober companions.

At this point, he was letting his beard grow and it made him seem more and more like he'd been isolated in the wilderness, looking in his increasingly ragged uniform like one of those Japanese soldiers from World War II left on a desert island who didn't know the war was over, but in Bohouš's case, the desert island was right here, in the main square of the capital city.

Behind this mad procession, I could just make out the lime green of the Estates Theater, where Mozart had conducted the premiere of Don Giovanni, and thought how much better music that opera would have been as a background for this scene than the Krishnas' mindless dirge, though maybe Mozart's light touch wasn't right either, maybe something much darker was required as a soundtrack for this drunken madman leading a parade of the living dead into the void.

All I knew was that it would have made a masterful painting, and

it remains one in my head. Not a photograph. A photograph wouldn't have done it justice.

There was a certain point I stopped seeing Bohouš. It was partly because I started to avoid the center of town, which had been hit by the stag party phenomenon and was seeing new glass and puppets shops opening almost daily. And then I suppose his parade to nowhere had gone on unabated. So as the years passed I forgot about him, just as I forgot about many people I had known or seen during the 90s.

Then, after almost 25 years passed, I happened upon a local newspaper that Prague's Old Town puts out and there, on the cover, was the face of Bohouš the Policeman and a question, "Where did Bohouš the Policeman disappear to?"

The article recounts his origins in the 80s assisting the real police against pickpockets and beggars and how after 1989, he directed his efforts against the vendors who sold Soviet hats to tourists, sometimes tossing their wares into the Vltava River.

He gave his final interview in 2010, after which people began to lose sight of him. There is an account that he had a leg amputated and was in a wheelchair, of someone who would speak to him back then and that Bohouš never said a word about having a wife, children, or whatever job he used to do, but that he often spoke about his brother and how they had fallen out and how he had been kicked out of their house.

There is a possible last photo of him from 2017, of a man slumped over in a wheelchair, showing that he might have lost his other leg too, but it's taken from the back so there's no way of knowing if it's him. Bohouš the Policeman is suspected to have died in 2017.

The cover picture from Bohouš's last interview shows him with his cap photoshopped on. Apparently, he had lost it. At this point, his beard has grown much wilder, and he looks like the last survivor of the imperial army and it seems almost too cruel to tell him who won the war. But you can tell by the look in his eyes that he knew, had known for a long time. He just hadn't been willing to hand in his badge and toss down his toy traffic signal in defeat.

ABOUT ALLEGIANCE

Martina Reisz Newberry

Once on a day filled
with rain and not enough light
I saw seven years old
as a time to make promises.

I told myself I would never
get old never old like my
frail grandfather or Mrs. Tilden
next door

her fingers stained
with pomegranate juices
and the ashes of love.

I vowed a vow, oathed an oath
stroked my child-face with
the smooth pink back of my hand.
Homely hook nosed

glasses thick as bottle bottoms
I swore an allegiance to
youth and beauty that the
very air I breathed held me to.

I promised fidelity to those
things which would never
embrace me. I sowed the
fields of my years with potions

perfumes and paints
padding here
cinching there

Seasons and more rain-filled
dim-lit years reminded me of
that swearing in, took my hand
and led me through the

violence of a marriage,
through the
vexations of love,
to back where I began.

So, here is a life
Mesozoic though
it may be

a life.
The sun is glorious
and hits the bed
in just the right spot

for me and the cat.
The street I can see is
half asphalt and
half apparition.

All those silences from
the inside taking over
the outside, whispering
“Child, you promised...

Into the Breach

Mark Parsons

Take the bullet
And kiss it
Right

Here,
On the seam

Where the cartridge,
Of brass,
Overlaps the slug,
That is jacketed copper and
Filled with lead,

So you smudge it
That same
Red-maroon lip
Sticky
Lipstick red
You
Always loved but seldom used
Before you slip the bullet into the opened ejector port
To rest like a corpse in a coffin.
Then with your thumb press down on the slide lock lever and feel
The power of the slide returning, the way
The muzzle leaps like a headstrong animal, one that hasn't been
Broken, yet.
All made-up and looking better
Than you ever did
In our squalid, poverty-stricken time
Together,
Than you ever did
In life,
Now lift the handgun and sight me,
But at this range
Do you really need to?

The smell of cherries

Suzana Stojanović

— Cherries smell.
— Same as seventy years ago. But are you and I finally going to the other world?
— It's still early. Not all my teeth have fallen out yet.
— I barely went out to church today. Our children are overgrown with weeds. I met Lazar. He made me tell him about the war again. You know, as I talk to him, I remember some moments that I rarely think about, and now they seem more important to me than they used to be.
— That's because we're old. Nothing new is happening to us, and we are constantly leafing through old events from the beginning. And what else would we do in these years?
— I wish I was like my father. He was talented for many things, and I only learned how to hold a rifle and shoot in the fog.
— Every war is a fog. Only when it leaves does one see what is left.
— Behind this one, only deep wells remained. Everything they wanted to hide, they put into them: and people, and cannons, and boots, and fear. Everything that was noisy. Everything! And then they closed them. Only what was not enough room survived.
— Never enough room for graves and wherever you turn they grow like mushrooms. Bones are born and grow only to hurt.
— Mine have not stopped hurting since the war. No Sun can heat them. And now I sometimes sleep curled up like a dog. I'm afraid if I move, all the heat will come out of me.
— Nobody ever asked us if it was warm or cold for us. We peel the skin by twisting it into wool. Not even enough sheep to cut.
— Everything begins to take on a different sense and meaning.
— I'm happy because I will not run into that tomorrow. I also have enough of this fog that is constantly moving around us. Everything would be different if it were gone. It swallowed many beautiful moments and hid many truths. If it wasn't for our cherries, everything would be gray. We are never sure when the war ends and when peace begins. It seems like it takes years for the voice to reach us. And yet, I wouldn't trade these hills for anything in the world. I met you on them. God brought you back from the war and sent you to me. What is one fog against our firm decisions?
— My mother kept saying that defiance always remains in the end when we spend everything else: and strength, and hope, and pride, and struggle. I kept seeing her in the fog. She stood motionless, facing me as if waiting for me.

I tried, blurry vision, with a worn spoon, to grab a mouthful of her delicious soup. Then she would suddenly disappear. These were the only moments I could touch home. In all the rest I was alone, surrounded by gunpowder and coldness. The blue fingers were glued to the wet tubes and often remained there until the first ray. I didn't care for anything anymore. My hunger devastated my thoughts and memories. We've been waiting for the bread truck for days. They threw it at us like at dogs. We forgot how to eat. We swallowed large pieces until our bowels became clogged, and we were pawing each other to count. Completely lost in space, we didn't know where we were or how long or how many were there. We were just praying that the fog would go away. In all that hopelessness, we were most looking forward to straying goats and the hope that they had left behind some grain of warm feces. It was, for us, forgotten, the only spark in the cold viscera of war. Yet, one part of us did not stop believing in light. We walked towards it crawling, with no arms and legs, no voice, just thoughts. In these thoughts we were touching each other, we were wondering what kind of life they had left behind and do they have desires, dreams? I had only one dream — to smell the cherries again and see my mother. When I came back she stood the same as she did in the fog. I didn't even get to tell her I loved her. I could only feel her gentle scent mingling with the smell of cherries and bent fingers as the last twitches try to hug me.
— This world will never stop. We at least smelled the cherries, the real ones, unmanaged. You want me to make jam?
— I want, and put those magic grasses of yours in it. I sleep well from them and I only dream of the Sun.
— I'll leave and you don't think much about the fog. You'll bring it back to these hills again.

An Aspen November

Katelyn Brownlee

“Mom?”

I call her first but receive no answer.

“Dad?”

I call next and again, I am rewarded with silence.

“Rachel?”

I’ve run out of names to call and no one is coming for me.

There’s a splitting headache disrupting my thoughts and a gash on my leg with dried blood and dirt that still throbs as if it had only been inflicted mere seconds ago. I shouldn’t have left that cabin but I couldn’t stand being in there one more second. As if this creepy place wasn’t bad enough, Mom and Dad were arguing again and I couldn’t stand listening to the toxic music of their relationship problems.

In my haste to leave it would seem that I slipped and rolled down one of the hills leading from our not so marvelous vacation home. If I were a few years younger, being alone out in the woods might frighten me but instead, all I feel is comfort.

After all, I inherited Dad’s sense of navigating the woods, surely, I can get back to the cabin on my own.

My joints snap and hiss after some long and presumably painful minutes of disuse when I stand. The gash on my leg makes walking a bit more challenging but not impossible. So, with a slight limp and a neutral spirit, I press on in the direction of disrupted leaves, no doubt a result from my fall.

At the base of the hill, something catches my eye and though I’m eager to shower and climb into bed, I’m compelled to take a look anyway. Tucked under a stone is a plastic bag, and in it, a freshly pressed newspaper. It’s certainly an odd thing to leave out in the woods and even more so to wrap it so carefully. Dad’s always liked reading the paper, finding online news lacking

in sentimentality or something.

Prying the newspaper from the bag, I inspect the bold black lettering that spells out “*Aspen Woods Serial Killer Claims New Victim*”. My brows knit together as my lips whisper the headline again. A serial killer? Here, in Aspen Woods? The date reads November 18th, 1997 but for some odd reason, there’s nothing reassuring about its age. I wonder if they ever caught whoever this was but more importantly, why would someone just keep this out in the woods.

Wind creeps up under the back of my open flannel and kisses a chill up my spine. The confidence I felt before falters and hastily, I shove the paper back into the bag and hurriedly attempt to climb the hill. My leg, unfortunately, is not prepared for the journey and I don’t even make it halfway up when I slip and come sliding back down.

To my immediate surprise, the pile of leaves beneath me gives way and I fall, my back hitting something hard. Dirt crumbles, making it even harder to pull myself up and with a last minute effort of desperation, I bring my hands behind me to push myself up off of whatever I had fallen on. When I turn, it takes everything in me not to scream but my shock forces me to the ground once more.

A body--a woman’s body--lies pale and unmoving in a gown stained red. Her hair is a fiery red that matches her lips and her wide eyes are blue as day with a cloudy ring of death leaving them somewhat pale.

Ignoring the pain shooting through my leg, I clamber out of the shallow grave and press my back against a tree nearby. I’m shaking and my rapid breaths create frequent puffs of smoke in the November chill. This isn’t right.

No, I need to get out of here, and fast.

I need to get home.

I rush towards the hill once more, giving myself a running start before I leap and grab onto a tree to keep me up. Before I can go up any further, the sounds of voices fill the silence and freeze the blood in my veins.

Moving to press my back against the tree, I slap a hand over my mouth to hide my breathing. The voices get closer and the footsteps heavier as the voices become more distinct. It's a man and woman, from what I can tell, their voices young and harmonious.

Carefully, I peer around the corner of the tree, watching as the mysterious male slides down the rest of the hill and scoops up the newspaper bag with a grin. "Look here Al, read this one! I saved it just for you!" The young woman eases down the rest of the slope stumbling a bit into the awaiting arms of her lover.

Her hair, like the corpse just a few meters away, is a flaming red and her eyes, a more vibrant and livelier blue. One hand takes the paper eagerly from the man, while the other rests just under the groove of her distended belly. "The babies are kickin', they must be excited too," she says with a giggle, and begins examining the paper, reading it aloud.

"Aspen Woods Serial Killer Claims New Victim. The search for 20 year old Rachel Thomas came to a tragic close on Thursday when a search team discovered her body in a shallow grave near Spring Creek. Details of her death have not been released to the public per her parents' request. This is the thirteenth reported murder over the past year in the area. The Aspen police are working diligently to track down the killer but have no leads at this time!" The woman's voice spikes as she finishes reading, a grin rivaling that of her partner's slipping onto her face.

She thrusts the newspaper down and swings her arms around the man's neck. "Oh, Willie! I can't believe you did it! You're so clever, the cops won't ever catch you!"

"Shoot Al, that ain't even the best part! C'mere!" He nods his head over to the disrupted pile of leaves that I hadn't bothered to readjust. The man looks around for a moment, clearly shocked by the fact that someone has disrupted his crime.

"Willie?"

"It's nothing," he says, shaking his head as he brushes away some more leaves, bringing Al to stand beside him. "See? I got ya another one!"

"Oh Willie, she's beautiful!" Al gushes, biting her lip carefully as she massages her stomach, "D'you think our babies will be pretty like them?"

"Prettier! And you know what, I was thinkin' we pick some names for 'em before they get here. Ain't gonna be much longer now." Willie turns to Al, dropping down on his knees to kiss and rub her stomach lovingly. "What you wanna name 'em Al?"

Al brings a thoughtful hand to grip her chin and bites her lip again in a playfully shy manner. "We should name 'em after the last two since we know we're havin' girls! What's this one's name Willie? Huh, what's her name?"

"Riley. Her name's Riley Shawn."

"I love it! Rachel Dawn and Riley Shawn Lovett! I'm gettin' excited just thinkin' about it! What about you, Willie? What do you think?"

"It's perfect, Al," he shakes his head with a proud nod. "We're gonna have the prettiest girls with the prettiest names. You and me, Al, we's gonna be great parents to them girls and raise 'em right. Shoot, we can take them on little vacations like your mom and pop used to take you on when you was little."

"Can we bring 'em here Willie? Can we?" Al asks enthusiastically.

"Course we can, Al! Whatever you wanna do, I'll make it happen. We'll make our own little family right out here in these woods, just you and me! How's that sound?"

Yet again, Al throws her arms around Willie's neck and giggles and squeals. Willie guides her away and the second the footsteps are out of range, I empty the contents of my stomach while tears prick the corners of my eyes.

"No...no...God no," I continue to dry heave when nothing else comes out. My fingers clutch my head as I bring it down to the cool earth, rocking back and forth as furious tears race down my cheeks. This can't be the truth, the horrible truth that is meant to torture me for the rest of my days. It just can't--

"Riley!"

Shadow Wears a White Cape 1

Edward Michael Supranowicz

My body jolts up at the call of my name. Somehow, I've ended up back in my bed and instead of comforting me, the face of my father, William Lovett, frightens me. I scramble back into the corner of my bed, eyes wild as I look around the room.

"Easy there Riles, you look scared to death," he coos in the warm voice he always used with me. His hand reaches for me, tucking back my hair from my sweaty forehead, "You took a nasty fall out there kiddo, some people found ya and brought ya back here to the cabin. You're alright now, but you need to rest."

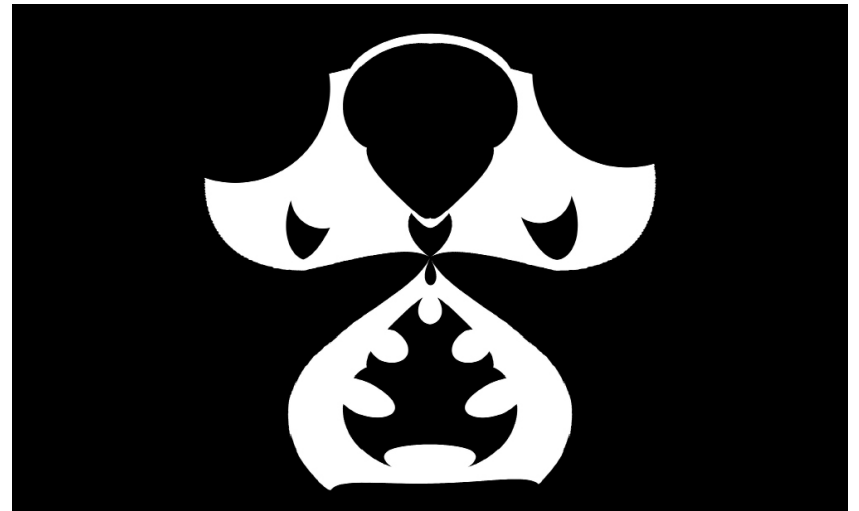
I look to the end of my bed where I see my mirror image of my sister, Rachel, looking equally concerned. She doesn't know, how could she possibly know? I want -- no, need, to tell her what I saw. I need to tell her the truth.

Another body enters the room, Alison Lovett, my mother. Other than having aged about 22 years, she looks the same as she had back then. Same red hair, same blue eyes and same bulging stomach carrying the weight of a secret burden that only she and my father know about.

Finally, she speaks. With a warm and knowing smile in my father's direction, she rubs her stomach, "If you three are done fooling around, me and little missy here would like to eat."

Before she turns to leave out of the room, I find myself asking a question that I didn't need the answer to. "Mom," I swallow as she looks at me with a look of feigned innocence, my father joining her as he runs his fingers along her stomach, "Did you pick a name for the baby already?"

She and my father look to one another, smiles on their faces as they shake their heads. "Not yet, but I have a feeling that tonight's the night."



Digital painting done on GIMP

I Collected Your Name from the Cobblestones of Barri Gòtic: GAUDI

Nazli Karabiyikoglu

I wandered around the city for days. Every morning I either walked towards the nearest metro station, went underground or I walked towards a point I decided by leaving the hostel made of an old apartment viewing a wide street of Bailén. I paced around the streets trying not to question myself to rest my mind. I tried to enjoy the harmony of the architecture. I sometimes spent hours watching the waves and the sand on my ankles on a towel on a gold beach. My mind was quiescent when I watched people and children laughing on the beach. I subsided into deaf apathy. As I closed my eyes, I envisaged the strange curves of the architecture I had been watching for days. The images in my mind changed into high buildings and arose before my eyes. I either joined the common admiration of a tourist influx at a crowded square or sat on a bank in a calm street and daydreamed. I went to a tapas bar if I felt tired, ordered a bottle of sangria and tried to figure out Don Quixote from the original text. How did I come here? How did I go to La Rambla, find Bailén Street and settle in the hostel? Why was I there, in the city I enjoyed consoling my dreams, in Barcelona?

The Image Comes from the Mediterranean

Barcelona is the home of Antoni Gaudí who influenced Art Nouveau with his perception of architecture and decoration, and he is known as a *stranger* because he cannot be associated with any movement as an architect. The signature of Gaudí thoroughly divides the city into streets, buildings and parks. As is seen in the corners leading to parallel streets, the mysterious shadows of the houses and the tone of Catalan language spoken by people walking side by side, Gaudí achieved making Barcelona a city of his own. All tourists, who promised themselves to discover the city thoroughly, cannot have the chance of following the signs and collecting the hints he left. The only way of pacing around Barcelona without getting lost in the ordinary tourist rituals lies in the labyrinthine world of Antoni Gaudí.

Gaudí's life is built on four paths: architecture, nature, religion and Catalonia. For him, nature was sufficient for art and he was proud of being a Mediterranean since his early youth, feeling the aesthetic sensibility in the Mediterranean. He could reshape the sea, the meadow, trees, and animals by means of soil and crumbled ceramic. As he said, "We own the image. Fanta-

sy is what people in the North own. We are concrete. The image comes from the Mediterranean. Orestes knows his way, where Hamlet is torn apart by his doubts."

Though it was not exactly known where he was born, it is said that he was born and grew up near Baix Camp. This region gave him the chance of embracing the Mediterranean. He fell in love with nature during his infancy. When he learnt walking and became able to understand things, he started going on long walks at the meadow. He took his first steps to romanticism on the green hills of Mas de la Calderera. Antoni either rode a horse or a donkey or walked for miles. What did he do during these spiritual journeys? Did he observe the lines on the tree trunks, the curves on chestnuts or pine cones, or the anatomy of the geometric patterns of flowers? Gaudí was dedicated to and admired nature, and he exuded a conservative and introverted character thanks to the time he spent in nature. Spending his early youth in the mountains, hills and riversides and becoming estranged to his own voice, he surrounded himself with sobriety during early maturity. He was a devout vegetarian. Gaudí signaled his talent through his drawings in kindergarten, and we could imagine that his loneliness in nature and his severe conservatism would end in a boring way. We could discuss whether the buildings he constructed were ordinary and irksome. But we stopped at Passeig de Gràcia and admired the magnificent architecture of Casa Batlló.

Everything was hidden in the cold tranquility of 40 degrees, in the golden gleam of the sand on my ankles. I had a crown made of the Mediterranean's foam. I went underground and let myself go, passing the green line to yellow in the metro station. I got off in one of the next stations and went up. I stood at the last step and looked to my left, then I gasped and stumbled. The Sagrada Família was there, like huge hands begging towards the sky. Silent and breathless, I stood on the pavement. I gazed at the eight towers, the basilica that couldn't be finished even after the death of Gaudí and the parts which didn't have the signature of Gaudí. The majesty awakened me, I trembled. The towers pierced through my heart as they mercilessly pierced through the sky. I was breathless before the beauty. One, three and eight, always eight. I felt like I was broken into eight pieces. The beauty cast a dust of fear upon me. At that very moment, my knees trembled, as if the rusty voice of Gaudí called to me, "Come in."

The Birth of the Architect

Antoni Gaudí graduated as a physician after losing his mother (aged

57) and then his brother (aged 25) in 1876. But he was not satisfied, he decided to express himself in other ways. So he was enrolled in the Escola de la Llotja and the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia. Apart from the courses of architecture, he studied French, philosophy, economy, and history as well. But his grades were mostly low, mostly average. He couldn't succeed in the eyes of his teachers. When he graduated from the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia, it was recorded that his teacher Elies Rogent said, "I do not know if we have awarded this degree to a madman or a genius; only time will tell."

It wasn't known whether Gaudí heard what Rogent said and resented it. Working as an employee with many architects and constructors in order to finance his works, Gaudí said to his friend Llorenç Matamala, "Llorenç, they're saying I'm an architect now!"

Being respected was highly important to Gaudí, who made friends with many businessmen and covered many streets of Barcelona with buildings he embodied through the light in his mind. The first sentence of the paragraph through which Gaudí expressed the meaning of his life would be *rebuilding the nature he fictionalized since childhood through the constructions rising towards the sky in a modernist way*. When his building *Casa Calvet* was awarded the prize of the best building of the year by the City Council of Barcelona when he was 48, he realized the individuality would enhance him.

Alienation from the society made Antoni Gaudí discover that he was freer and more creative. He didn't leave the gothic region of Barcelona and lived in the same house until 54. He reshaped his nature in the labyrinthine streets of Barri Gòtic. After the constructions he made for Güell, who was a rich businessman, he made a house for himself in the dreamlike park he constructed, but until then he was a silent member of Barri Gòtic. He sat on the pavement of Barri Gòtic, watched the streets and narrow passages of churches under the dim light until he settled in his house resembling ice cream scoops in the Park Güell.

I hid in the dust cloud of the Sagrada Família. The dust cloud smothered the city since Gaudí's death. I felt comfortable, since no one could find me here, and wrote down the words on my papers. I was free. I did what I wished for. I sought the face of Gaudí among the faces passing by the church. I wished a face could tell me the story of Gaudí.

As I indented the new paragraph, I saw Gaudí standing before me on the pavement. It resembled the moment shortly before he was hit by a tram, when he was looking at his work, his life, everything he had, shading his face

with his hand. He was measuring his towers from a distance. I trembled. His inner voice echoed in my ears. He was facing back; his shoulders were upright, showing his grumpiness. I wished he would turn back so that I could catch his eyes... I knew he would reproach me, for I didn't get inside when he called. He would ask me, *don't you trust in the house of god, did you find a safer place, oh really, why did you come to Barcelona?*

He would rip me apart because of my escape. I wished Gaudí didn't turn back, but he did. My eyes caught his eyes. I was defenseless with the papers and pen, of which the ink was about to run out, I was holding to prevent them from flying away. I wanted to record every moment with him. He raised his eyebrows and his eyes shined. He said, *the tram will hit me again, it will crush me many times as I look at my Sagrada Família, but before I die, do you want to talk? I said, oh Gaudí, my fiction and your desire of displaying, these kill us*, and I put my head on his shoulder.

The Sagrada Família or a Friend for Life

Despite his thoughts and reflections of grotesqueness, the only work he freely designed and finished was Casa Batlló (because, in his other works, he either got other people's opinions or, like the Sagrada Família, he couldn't finish before dying). Your blood would run cold when you gaze at Casa Batlló, standing at Passeig de Gràcia. You would be spiritually absorbed in the house, want to climb up the stairs, holding the handrails, pass through the doors and dream in the living room. This is the effect of Gaudí's architecture. It lets the building speak through its curves and joists. You would feel the warmth of a home when the ceiling embracingly reaches down for you.

Casa Batlló, Casa Milà, Casa Vicens, pavilions and the Colònia Güell - when you pass these buildings and reach the Sagrada Família, the intellectual and spiritual union with Gaudí reaches its last phase. The Sagrada Família was designed in neo-Gothic style by Francisco de Paula del Villar y Lozano, who was previously a diocesan architect. The construction started in 1882, but after Villar retreated, Martorell was offered this job. You could either call it destiny or pure luck. The architect Martorell brought the offer of the Basílica de la Sagrada Família, which is the first thing people recall about Barcelona and which has become a legend because its construction still continues, to Antoni Gaudí, who was a friend he trusted. Accepting the offer, Gaudí couldn't foresee the construction would continue even after his death. When Gaudí stepped in the process of redesigning the construction under the light of gothic architecture

which was the basis for the Sagrada Família, he started to reinterpret the transformation of forms. The style is called Gaudian at this point.

The Sagrada Família (Basilica of the Holy Family) would be called “The Cathedral for the Poor.” Beyond the religious meaning it holds, this huge building is the main character of the story that makes Gaudí meaningful.

I was defeated by his eyes. I looked at his ragged clothes and shoes. Without minding the tram that would hit him for the millionth time, he reached his hand to me. As if saving a fly from a wine glass, he pulled my wings. *Speak, no one can hear you near me*, he said. I had a lump in my throat, I felt like a newborn baby before him. I made strange sounds at first, he smiled. He was patient. He whispered that I could tell him what I wanted to. *No one can hear you, you are under the shadow of the Sagrada Família*, he said.

I grasped his hands calloused by caressing the walls of the church. We started talking in a language neither he nor I knew, meeting in the middle of a century. It was as if we were flying without wings above Barcelona. From Eixample to Avinguda Diagonal, to the beach of Barcelona, to La Rambla and Gràcia, beyond Güell, to Tibidabo. Raising one of his eyebrows, he put his hands on his belly as if he would say something.

“I Have Nothing.”

Not sure whether it is a twist of fate or a coincidence, each building Gaudí constructed is given a second name. Casa Batlló is called the House of Bones and Casa Milà is called the Stone Quarry (how beautiful the outer curves of Casa Milà are!). This may be the reason why the Sagrada Família is called the Cathedral for the Poor as well. His stylistic language, leaving no room for altruism, and his free movements under the auspices of Count of Güell play the main role in the formation of the Park Güell, where we can go to and take rest at. The basic factors in turning the ceramic in his mind into a huge lizard are the existence of an important person and the financial opportunity he offered. The project of Park Güell can be characterized as a revolt against the developing industry. Everyone deserves the right to amuse themselves for a few hours in the epic world created through the ice cream-like houses among the green gardens. Being a strict nationalist, Gaudí's effort of actualizing his dream of the garden city is unfortunately limited to the Park Güell. But Gaudí dreamed of a settlement of 60 houses with Count of Güell. Besides, these houses were for the employees working at the textile mill nearby. Though the project of settlement couldn't be realized, the Park Güell takes its place in literature as a colossal landscape work of Gaudí.

The period since 1910 was full of tragedy for Gaudí. Deaths followed each other; his niece (and real friend) Rosa died in 1912 and his partner Berenguer died in 1914. The economic crisis that happened in 1915 caused the construction of the Sagrada Família to stop. In 1916, his friend Josep Torras i Bages died, and the project of the Church of Colònia Güell under the sponsorship of Güell stopped due to economic hardships a year later. In 1918, his old boss Eusebi Güell died. The successive tragedies turned his life into hell and he said, “My good friends are dead; I have no family and no clients, no fortune nor anything. Now I can dedicate myself entirely to the Church.”

Since then, Antoni Gaudí dedicated himself to the Sagrada Família and was seen as homeless. He had a ragged appearance. He slept at the construction site. His only aim was to see the eight towers pierce through the sky.

Gaudí knew what it meant to be left by friends because of beliefs. He knew how he bestowed this construction his self he gained from his friends while observing it day by day at the Sagrada Família. Silent, calm and passionate. I felt weak from my tongue to my tiptoes. I fooled myself. Neither the desire of a journey nor a flight ticket brought me there. *I came here to find you, to have a share of you and your commitment. I waited for you to call me; this is why I wandered around for days.* I went from pen to pen, from a column of newspaper to another; I watched Casa Batlló behind the bottle of a delicious Spanish wine, I stopped at Casa Mila and rested. I slept on the bank before Mila.

The City is Sublime with its Architect

When this great architect, living in the construction of the Sagrada Família, was hit by a tram in Bailén, people brought him to the hospital for the homeless. An acquaintance saw him two days later and brought him to a better hospital. But it was too late. Gaudí died in 1926.

He was a madman to some, and genius to others. Years passed. The madman was erased from people's minds. Genius stayed in their minds instead. Barcelona became sublime with its architect, he was excluded from dull adjectives. However, Gaudí experienced the main contradictions like other architects. Among the elements of this contradiction, Gaudí embraced only one of them and stood by himself.

I stood before everything you constructed. I stood as if I were reading a book for the first time, I looked at them. As I couldn't have the heart to look deeper, I only enjoyed what my eyes could see. I was there, Gaudí, I dedicated myself to each unrequited love in the millionth year of your commitment to this church.

His shoulders fell down, Gaudí hushed. For a moment his eyes shone, he

Hollywood Rain

Scott Laudati

realized why I chose him and why he called to me. He opened his arms to find a place for my soul. I joined his arms. We flew towards the third tower. He left me on the ground of the tower where the arms of baby Jesus and Mary crossed. *Child*, he said, *that's where you can be comfortable*. I was tired, I sought the most comfortable arms. I leaned against the stone arms of Mary and heaved a sigh of relief.

“Are you comfortable?” he asked.

I nodded and said, *yes, leave me here*. I became solid. I became a statue of Gaudí.

Gaudí walked backwards, shading his face with his hand to see the Sagrada Família.

Backwards, towards the place I came to and he went out of. It was only me who heard the hitting of the tram, and Gaudí, the moment he was under it.

You started off looking for Rome like I did.

In poems, in love letters,
written for a city planes fly to every day
but you knew

or decided
you hadn't earned it yet.

So

you went to West Hollywood,
a walk each night down Sunset,
not exactly The Malecón

or The Rue des Rosiers
but the girls are skinny
and sometimes you follow the one
with the German Shepard
up Rodeo

to a house her father couldn't afford
until they painted the walls
with Sharon and her baby.

The neighbors thought a murder
would sink the value but they forgot
the California sun can
baptize anything.

And when the tourists come
she puts her yoga mat in front of the bay window,
falling into downward dog
like she doesn't know what she's doing.

And the men snap pictures of her
stretched out on this cursed land,
almost as rare
as a Hollywood rain
but nowhere near as beautiful.

here and now

Nam Nguyen



Digital photograph

Chronoscope 221: The sky is

John Walser

So many of the tulips
planted for May
for beyond
already head nipped
the petals like metal
the petals like melted plastic
flattening against
the driveway
the sidewalk.

The sky's talkative
this afternoon:
not rumble: not thrash:
just the constant jabber
of something praying
under its breath
or acknowledging
angers or joys
or promises that
only it can see
right now:

although I can guess
it has something to do
with rain that feels
like swelling, birds
that cannot be seen
in tree tops,
angles that cause
shadows to shorten
and shorten
as days draw out
more blare, more glare.

Introducing Curtis, the Sad Clown

Daniella Cressman

I am Curtis the clown. Every day, the circus puts on a show. The cigar smoke wafts to the top of the tent and settles. There is one man, Mr. Todster, who wears expensive patterned suits, with pink and neon green patterns, and a bowler hat. He wears a monocle to look sophisticated, but I overheard him once telling Ms. Mabelle he actually doesn't need it. If my memory serves me correctly, Ms. Mabelle was wearing blue lipstick, and had dyed her hair, because that was the trend at the time. She wore a beehive hair style, and bright red high heels that may as well have been stilts, and held a cheetah purse. She wore a fur coat. Both were made from the actual animal. She wore a small black dress underneath. Her legs were exposed even though it was a bit chilly outside and she had bright blue eye shadow on, but she still acted like she was the Queen of Sheba or something.

As for us, the actual freak show, apparently, there is a man with his legs wrapped around his head from some sort of birth defect. He is the freak for the freak show. There is a child who was put into a box and locked there at birth, Andy, who is now a hunchback, but everybody thinks he's funny. They walk over here, with their fancy clothes and handbags, and they laugh and laugh. Ms. Mabelle roars with laughter, and I overhear her talking to Toddster, saying, "freak," as she shuffles in her purse to apply more lipstick. I had a bit of hard liquor this morning, just to get through the day.

I hate being a clown, but I doubt I could ever be anyone else. Tears run down my face as I look up at Mr. Todster and Ms. Mabelle, a glint in their eyes as they laugh at us outsiders. My head aches as my boss hits it with a skillet and then sprays water onto my face.

"Please don't," I mutter, but no one hears me.

"And now...introducing Curtis... the Clown!"

Jansen announces. I show up in front of everyone. He gets an iron skillet and hits me with it on the head, "Idiot," he says, laughing with the others.

I feel my temples aching as the buzzing in my head continues.

He hits me on the top of my head with it once more.

"Stop!"

I say, "Ohh," he jeers, "Is Curtis having a bad day?"

I faint and everyone laughs as Jansen carries me off.

"Wimp," He must have said to the audience, never failing to jeer.

My face has formed into a constant frown. I fear it is stuck there. I don't know anything else. How am I supposed to smile when Jansen always

paints on my smile with big red lips, like I'm the happiest man alive? I am not the happiest man alive. I never will be. All I am is a monster: A depressed man in disguise, entertaining the masses. Tears run down my painted face, allowing the paint to begin disappearing. I reluctantly grab a face clothe, before taking off my clown outfit.

What do you think you're doing? Stupid clown. I can't keep up this façade any longer.

I think, always being the laughing stock of the day. My feet ache in shoes that are far too big for any man and have no arch support whatsoever. I fake a giggle as Ms. Mabelle strides towards me, reapplying her lipstick once more, and announces, "What a spectacular performance! The way you fainted was just phenomenal."

"It wasn't a performance," I mutter. She giggles, and taps me on the shoulder, "Oh don't be so modest. Cobain, or whatever your name is," She says, before waving to Todster.

"We have to go, dear. We'll be late for that dinner with caviar. I can't wait. I love caviar."

She walks away without looking at me, and I sit there, mulling over how privileged some folks can be. Entitled, I suppose, is the word I am looking for, and a tear runs down my cheek, sneaky bastard, as I brush it away quickly. Jansen strolls up to me with a big grin on his face.

"That was just spectacular!"

He exclaims, patting me on the shoulder, but it feels more like he is hitting me.

"Thanks," I mutter.

"Hello?" Jansen says.

His teeth are bared in what is supposed to be a smile, but feels more like a snarl, and his brown eyes glint as he watches the freak show, the poor creature in the cage, arms wrapped around his body in an awkward position, permanently stuck there. A tear runs down the poor man's face. His hair is dark black and striking blue eyes protrude from caramel-colored skin, but he has no arms and no legs. He would have been handsome, if his circumstances had been different. He would have been enough, if his limbs hadn't been blown off in the war. We all would have been enough for this cruel world, if our circumstances had been different.

The Ferry

Misty Page

The boney white man stood pushing the oar to and fro. The small boat drifted across the misty waters. Everything was settled, void of sound. Tom B. sat facing forward. He watched the little child at the front, looking and stretching petite little fingers into the swirling clouds.

Though everything seemed calm, welcome even, Tom B. couldn't remember why he was on this trip. He turned to face the ferrymen. He asked one simple question.

Why are we here?

It's the same question everyone has asked, and everyone has wondered throughout life. What is the reason we are here, where, if any place, are we going? Is there a point to this journey and if we weren't here at all, would there have been a difference? Of course, Tom B. wasn't meaning any of this profound curiosities when he spoke to the gaunt ferryman.

There was a long silence before the ferryman even looked at Tom. When he did speak, he spoke slowly, as if he were stamping the air with the firmness of his thoughts. "To get to the other side."

The Ferryman had such soulless eyes that frightened Tom B. deeply. "I'm sorry." It proved too uneasy to look directly at the ferryman's troubling eyes. Something in them seemed to look beyond the flesh and into the soul.

"There is no need for apologies. You have paid your coins."

"Yes, but... I can't remember why I'm here."

"Why is it... The chicken crossed the road?"

"Odd time for a joke, don't you think?" Tom kept his back to the strange man, it was easier to talk to him that way.

"To get to the other side... We never wonder why, do we Mister Blank that the chicken ever needed to cross the road; we just assume he was going somewhere. But that's where the joke ends, isn't it? The chicken never gets to where he was going, nor was he ever really going anywhere in the first place. His goal was to cross the road. So we could tell a joke."

"I don't follow you."

"Imagine us, as you said, sir. Why are we here? You have paid your coins, boarded the boat, and yet here you are with your little daughter, unaware of where you are going. Life is much the same. We muddle through, and we never really get to where we are going because-ah then we need to be going somewhere else."

"I'm sorry, no I would have known where I was going, I just seem to have forgotten. It's the smoke. I know it's the smoke. It's all so fuzzy here."

"So you know where you are going. Tell me something, do you believe in God?"

"What on Earth does that have to do with anything?"

"On Earth... Perhaps nothing..." The water seemed to sizzle slightly. "But in relation to where we are going, perhaps everything."

"Are you meaning to tell me that we are going to God? What, like all the people are just taking God's path? Well what if there is no God?"

"Perhaps... Yet that is not the point, I believe. What if God gives man the road to walk? What if God, regardless of if he exists as an absolute, gives mankind the memory of where he is going and the reason he strives forward?"

"God does not exist." Tom B. shook his head. "That's not possible. We are only specks of dust in a world without memory."

"You have memory, do you not?"

"Of course I have memory."

"So if you have memory, than y cannot say the world is without memory. For as long as one has memory within the world, the world must have memory."

"No the world itself is void and without mind. It is a vast multitude of random life, but that doesn't mean I and it are the same."

"So you admit that you have life but the world around you does not. How can this be? How can a lifeless world give rise to life?"

"Well perhaps I am not alive. No, I must not be. I must be a dead animal, like everything else here. Doomed to die with indifference."

"I do not think we play music for the end of it even though all songs come to an end."

"It doesn't matter why we play music. We might find great meaning in everything we do, it doesn't mean there is meaning intrinsically in what we do."

"Isn't the fact we find meaning in what we do the reason why there is meaning there?"

"No. There must be an objective reality of it for meaning to exist, but for meaning, there is only subjective reality, so therefore it doesn't exist."

"How do we know the difference between what is subjective and what is objective?"

"We see it."

"Is not what we see just a subjective experience? Is not everything we experience subjective in the regard that it is an individual experience?"

"No. That can't be." The dark waters seemed to be rising, and Tom looked over the edge to see if they were sinking. The water looked deep and gray. He wondered if something was wrong. "Are we getting close?"

“Ah not you my friend. For you don't even know where you are going.”

Something was forming in the surface of the water. Tom squinted and leaned down. “None of us do, I suppose. I don't think there is a place to be going. We just go through routines. Even our hopes and dreams mean nothing against the greatness of the Universe.”

“You are mistaken, my friend.” Then Tom B. saw it, a reflection was forming in the water. A dull face with sunken eyes, torn skin with dried blood across his cheeks. “Do you remember now where you are going, my friend?”

Tom B. turned in fear from his dead reflection. “To get to the other side.” He said. Ice ran through his veins.

“Tell me something, Mister Blank... Do you still believe there is no God?”

“How can there be? We have never seen such a being. The idea that there is a mystical creature behind every creation and every thought means that there is no reliable order, just one dream-that's not possible. That's not what science says. God does not exist because there is proof of him. That is why people claim He exists. They believe in him. But if you do not believe in god, than where are you going?”

“I am going to die.”

“You do not believe in God yet you believe in death?”

“Yes. Death you can prove. Death you can see. When people die, you can see their bodies go from animated to limp. It's a proven fact.”

“No. You are speaking of the dead. Not death. Death is a verb. You have not experienced this.”

“No, I never have.”

“Even now, in a body that has passed from the living world, you are animated, experiencing life. You have never experienced the void. How can you say you know it exists?”

“It is the nature of reality. All things come and go. The dinosaurs, other stars, whole nations, they all die. So is the nature of life.”

“So I can hear the tongue of the religious in your speech. They have never experienced God, yet they say, ‘So is the nature of God. He always was and He always will be.’ Such faith they have, though they have never experienced God. They see his miracles just as you see the hand of death over others. Yet they have never seen God, just as you have never seen death.”

“Am I doomed than?”

“I cannot take you across to a place you will not accept.”

“What about her?” Tears came to Tom B.'s eyes as he watched the little girl, reaching up carelessly to catch the swirling mist in the air. “Where is she going?”

“She has nowhere to go. She will arrive fine.”

The girl turned to look back at them. She was smiling and Tom noticed one of her teeth was missing. She was giggling. “All the butterflies are so pretty.” She said. “And the fireflies keep zipping away from my hands.”

Tom looked behind her to try and see what she was talking about, but all he saw was the great abyss. He wondered what she saw when she looked into the waters at her own reflection. When he looked at her he did not see a lifeless girl, torn or broken. He just saw the most beautiful baby girl, smiling.

His vision was failing, images were fading away. He thought maybe, he was crying. Where was he doomed to? The infinite void? Would he remember?

Before everything went black, he thought he heard the ferryman say, “We have arrived.”

Horizontal Transcendence, Imperial College, Beijing

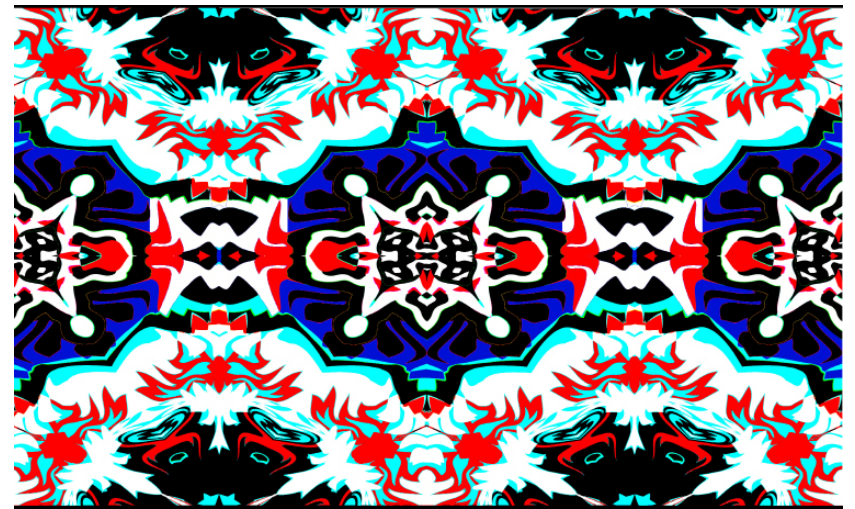
David Nichols



Color photograph, digital

Uneasy

Edward Michael Supranowicz



Digital painting done on GIMP

The Year the Greek Festival Went Drive Thru

David Nichols

Naturally, as the philosophical type, I treasure my reflective spaces. I find them under the shade of a tree, beside a campfire, in the corner of a library, or maybe just in a good cup of coffee at a crowded café. But to date, I have yet to find a space more conducive to contemplation than the back seat of a police cruiser.

“I think you better take me to the end of the line,” I told the officer. So down Mackinaw we went. My body was screaming at me—a soiled bundle of sore joints, blistered soles and hands, sun burnt skin. I was a tenderized, sweaty lamb on a spit. Exhaustion? Days of it before the event had even begun. “I need your help to shut it down,” he heard me say. At least the adrenaline rush was there—it never seemed to leave me.

Whenever I’m in a strange vehicle, I like to think about it metaphysically. Moses floated in a paper basket after all. Elias had his chariot of fire. Ezekiel even puts Yahweh on wheels. God seems to have his vehicles, and I wouldn’t want to miss my ride. If you want to enter someone else’s world, take a taxi in the big city. Do you prefer the subway? It’s a symbol for the subterranean mind, the unconscious. The Greek hero must go underground.

Images flashed through my mind, a series of split-second scintillations. I was shedding the moments of my day. I could see the faces of our guests. They were using words like “fundraiser,” “donation,” and “for a good cause.” At least they were getting it. I thought of the hundreds of dollars in donations added on top of the orders. Someone had left a handwritten thank you card. Guests were waiting two hours or more, and yet they were thanking us for it. I thought of the news crews, and what would certainly be glowing reports. It just seemed like everyone wanted to be a part of the phenomenon. This one would register in festival lore for sure: the year we were not allowed to have the festival and yet did.

I remembered that priceless BRING-IT-ON look of determination in George’s eyes as he stood in the furnace of gyro cones. So much grueling work, yet so much good humor. Every time someone dropped a stainless-steel utensil on the ground, *Opa!* All the usual comedians were out. The *Zeibekiko* blaring from Kosta’s Bose. The fry crew spontaneously breaking into Greek dances.

That was my favorite image. Greek dance—*chorus*, the circle. I did feel a bit nostalgic just then for last year’s festival, when my little Giorgios danced on stage, curls and cap. How proud he was in his *foustanela*.

I had hardly eaten a thing all day—I didn’t have time to. It was only two weeks ago that I helped stuff 4,000 grape leaves. I laughed to think how I had sworn that we couldn’t possibly sell so many. Now I wasn’t going to taste a single *dolmathes*.

We were crossing the railroad tracks now. In the opposite direction, cars were creeping-crawling the slow rhythm of time, and yet zipping by my window. For my part, I felt like one of those lines of *ouzo*, poured out onto the ground, lit on fire. *Where does it all end?* These people must be crazier than we are! Why did I ever let myself be chair in the first place? How long can we keep the ancient ways with us? Do any of these people even know what a festival is anymore? And why was I still wearing an apron?

Now I could see something else—the strong bonds forming in the trenches. Father-son teams, mother-daughter, husband-wife. I thought of all those new volunteers, so many of them non-parishioners, the ones welcomed in from the outside. *Xenosphilenous*—love of the stranger. Over our heads, a Byzantine cross scraped a marbled blue canopy of sky. Behind the scenes, a small army of kids worked various tasks. Today is Jonathan’s twelfth birthday, and he’s stuffing paper bags with our thank you flyers. My thoughts reached to the spouses and *yiayias*, the *nounos* and *nounas*, at home taking care of children. They never get enough credit.

That Greek flag, on an aluminum pole, tilting ever so slightly in the parched ground! John and his son Peter will want it upright. It just isn’t right for it to lean like that.

The officer had to open the door for me of course. I emptied myself out of the seat and took my stand on the gravel. Finally I had made it to the periphery. No more vehicles would be allowed in the queue, I’d make sure of that. I was under the shade of trees, with flashing police lights at my back. A gentle breeze brought relief. It was no Mykonos, mind you. Maybe I could at last take this damned mask off. All was quiet and pleasant once again, maybe too much. I didn’t like being so far away from the center.

And There I Was

Allie Wisniewski

Suspended in a makeshift home between two oaks,
Held by an invisible force like two magnets
Inverted and dancing
at a safe distance no one had agreed upon but
became commonplace surely because of
someone's confidence.
At the middle school soiree
I stood off to the side stiff and swaying
with jelly for guts and
iron bones. 13 and too hard and too soft
and wearing a smile that carved a wrinkle into my
forehead and never apologized.
There was nothing beautiful about it.

Tea with Old Friends

Jonathan Ferrini

It was a weekly treat for me to attend an elegant, afternoon, "High Tea" at the beautiful "Mark Hopkins Hotel" after church services across the street. The "Mark" held a commanding view of San Francisco from its location atop Nob Hill, and provided a beautiful view of the iconic bridge, bay, and city below.

I was always welcomed by my waiter, Franco, a fifty year employee, who reserved my favorite, long, green, supple, silk covered, chaise lounge, which included two long arms, and a matching foot rest. With charm and grace, Franco would gently roll up a brass serving table with a glass top, displaying my assortment of English teas, finger sandwiches, and exquisite pastries. Franco always included a glass of sherry which often times induced an afternoon nap, and dreams of our exotic travels as a family.

Across from my chaise lounge, was its "sister"; a beautiful, vintage, velvet, bright red sofa with gold leaf accents. It looked as if it previously held a prominent place within the palace of Czar Alexander. The red sofa was so elegant, it appeared to be a museum piece, and only on occasion, would people sit upon it with reverence. Both furniture pieces were handcrafted at least one hundred years earlier. I always admired people with an appreciation for fine furniture who would photograph, and admire the beautiful red sofa.

We were situated in a quiet corner of the magnificent hotel lounge where I could sit alone with my memories, nap, or watch the hotel guests come and go. My heart was always warmed by watching a young mother introduce her daughter to High Tea, reminding me of my precious moments with my daughter, now grown with a lovely daughter of her own, attending Stanford.

Franco wore his spotless, white waiter's jacket, white shirt, black bow tie, pressed black trousers, and shoes shining like mirrors. Franco put two children through college working at "The Mark", and was the last of a dying breed of professional waiters. He felt like family and treated me like royalty, greeting me as "Madame", and always nearby at my beckon call. He remembered the many private dinners my husband and I shared, our anniversary celebrations, birthdays, and lavish New Year's parties we hosted. He was careful to remind me of these precious memories because it always brought me tears of joy, albeit, bittersweet, now that I'm elderly and alone.

The chaise lounge and I became friends because I believed it had a soul. Its arm

rests were like the embracing arms of a loved one, comforting me as I reflected upon my long life; a depression era teenager, soldier's wife, mother to a beautiful grown daughter with an equally beautiful granddaughter, and a handsome son killed in Vietnam, whose untimely ,and unnecessary death, left an open "wound" within my heart. We had a comfortable life in San Francisco, and managed quite a bit of international travel as my husband was transferred around the world in the course of his business. We fell in love with San Francisco and decided to make it our home when we retired.

I often fell into a deep sleep within my chaise lounge, and awoke to find a blanket carefully placed over me by Franco, and a plush pillow beneath my head. I had a dream that my departed husband was calling for me from the opposite side of our home, as was his custom. I hadn't dreamed of my husband for decades, and surmised, I was being called to "join" him shortly. I welcomed the day when we might be reunited in the afterlife. I missed him, dearly.

I was ninety years old and watched my friends die over the years. Except for church, periodic visits from my daughter and granddaughter, I lived a reclusive life, but was content.

I returned one Sunday afternoon for High Tea to find the entire hotel lounge had been remodeled. I walked about, hurriedly looking for my chaise lounge and its "sister", the red sofa.

I believed that I might have entered the wrong hotel until I was met by Franco.

"Franco, what happened to the lounge? Where are my chaise lounge and the red sofa?"

"The hotel management remodeled the lounge last week to attract younger guests. I miss the old décor, as well, Madame."

"Where did the chaise lounge and red sofa go? Perhaps, they're in storage? I would like to purchase both immediately!"

"The work was completed during the overnight hours so as to minimize our guest's inconvenience, but I will inquire on your behalf, Madame."

The General Manager, a young Swiss hotelier, soon thereafter, approached me,

apologizing,

"I'm sorry Madame but the previous furnishings were taken away by a moving company to an undisclosed location at the behest of our interior designers who don't have any further information on their whereabouts."

The General Manager and Franco knew I was heartbroken by the loss of my favorite chaise lounge and its "sister" sofa. They provided me with a beautiful Queen Anne chair adjacent to the fireplace, and graciously provided my "High Tea" at no charge. I considered my favorite furniture as friends, and was thankful for the privilege of knowing them. I prayed both the chaise lounge and red sofa met a beautiful fate, perhaps displayed with honor in a vintage furniture shop, soon to be purchased, hopefully together, and appreciated by new owners for decades to come? If I knew which store, I'd immediately purchase them both and move them into my Pacific Heights home.

At ninety, I had grown accustomed to losing friends and loved ones, but the loss of two inanimate, beautiful, vintage, furniture pieces, providing only comfort, never the pain and sorrow humans mete out, devastated me. I dreaded the thought they may be sitting in a landfill, slowly decaying, like an elderly woman. I prayed they did in fact, have souls, and would fondly remember the many guests they comforted, including me.

Dora circa the War Years

A Whittenberg

For remembrance, the picture of her girlish dark-haired freshness and a taut, three-paragraph bio was posted on a flagpole

For a week, students passed her, too wrapped in their own bad days and stressors, their own crosses to bear, to notice

Hiding, maneuvering,
Creating a bottomless sense of chaos
Dora had spent her wonder years as a partisan
Making, makeshift weapons out of lost parts
Sleeping in forests
Using her trusty machine gun as a pillow

Evading, plotting,
breathing almost to the date of liberation
She had escaped the ghettos,
the trains rides, the liquidations
Until, too many Germans surrounded,
demanding they produce a Jew
Disarmed, momentary solidarity melted to basic instinct
Someone pointed out Dora

They bound her hands
Tied a rock to her neck
Threw her in the river
Then shot her twice

An empty, gray ending to a would-have-been
full, green life
Under other circumstances...

Winged Back

Hayden Moore

*“Blow, wind! Come, wrack! At least we’ll die with harness on our back”
(William Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act V, scene v)*

The sagging clouds threatened to touch the rolling sea on the rocky coast of Attica, where the words of the North Wind were as threatening as the waves they commanded. Tales of iron wars whistled in the limestone hollows further inland, while the silent warfare of ones and zeros was reenacted beneath the earth where millions of strands of mycelium spoke collectively in an instant. Just above, the mushroom caps lingered unregarded like dead satellite dishes in a world where transmissions had stopped.

Walking barefoot in the gusts, the girl faced the wind and opened her mouth. She felt it take her saliva and whip her tongue with as much regard for her had she been a bush or a stray piece of plastic. When Orithyia spread her spare arms and closed her eyes, she felt herself about to take flight. Her dark eyes closed and she raised up to the tips of her toes. She was sure her auburn hair was about blow away without her, but it remained whipping in the wind. When she opened her eyes, she was still standing on the muddy earth.

“You can drive the weeping clouds and send the ancient oaks toppling! You throw the hailstones from the sky and whip the sea! Even ghosts retreat when you blow through the holes in the earth! Why can’t you take me for a little ride in the sky, huh? Show me your force, you cantankerous and formless fuck who—”

Orithyia was yelling from the resonant part of her stomach but the wind smothered the pitched sounds into little more than triumphant whispers. Her curses became mouthed breaths only a nearby witness could have deciphered by watching her lips closely.

Orithyia eyed the coast and knew that the place where rocks gave way to water was where the wind found its masterpiece. As the wind blew the younger trees into giant bows and the elder ones creaked, the girl tilted her body and faced the North Wind.

Wind can inspire and it can smother. Wind has been known to haunt and to leave without warning. That impalpable thing only appears in what it passes through. And like memories, wind can stir a person to inexplicable actions, actions with real consequences springing from invisible forces beyond reason or being.

As the wind blew, Orithyia stopped breathing as she trudged on. The wind was breathing for her. She closed her eyes because she knew the way to the coast as sure as a seagull. In the darkness of knowing, she remembered.

“When sweet speeches sour, anger storms!” an old man said from the

television screen, “We can pray to Zeus until the cows come home, or even to Hera, as some others do. But we have to look at the facts and make sound decisions. Our president—”

“Our president is wise and it’s merely bipartisanship that is keeping us from acting on this,” a younger man said from the broadcast. “If we simply come to grips with Attica as a country that once stood up for the weak and weary and—”

“You mean the ones who brought this scourge across our borders?” The old man laughed, revealing his rotten teeth.

“We are all guilty of everyone and everything—”

“Oh! And now the pedantic one quotes a Russian. Typical, so—”

A violent gust of wind blew Orithyia off course, and the memory along with it. The dark clouds ahead revealed their udders and the girl imagined the wind sucking every one of them dry before a drop could fall. Finding her rhythm, Orithyia closed her eyes once again. She smiled at the thought of watching her own in-flight movie from within.

“I know it hurts, I know it hurts, darling,” a woman cried to her young daughter. “But this is going to fix it. You just promise to run back home and don’t talk to anybody.”

“But mommy? What about stories?” the little girl said, reaching for her mother.

“Your sister will read you stories every night, just like me. Okay?”

“But it’s not the same.”

“Nothing is,” her mother said, in a distant tone. “You will always have my voice. In your heart and head. Now, turn around. I wish I could kiss you one more time. Blow mommy a kiss? The wind will carry it. Just like the wind will carry me to a good place.”

“I want to come, mommy.”

“Your place is here. Now, on the count of three, blow mommy a kiss and she’ll catch it. One. . .two. . .three. . .I love you!”

Orithyia knew she had reached the edge of the cliff when the wind stopped her. Here, the orchestra of the dead played without regard for the living. Wind, water, rock, and latent fire in the clouds sounded all their instruments at once. In the midst of the cacophony of the elements, Orithyia felt like she had found the undercurrent of silence. Absolute silence was nothing without absolute chaos.

As she stared at the spectacle, she felt a tinge of guilt for wishing the forces of the wind to grow until nothing was left but a maelstrom of beautiful ruin. Her sister’s voice sounded in the echo chamber of her mind.

“But what if it gets worse?” her sister frowned.

“I don’t know,” Orithyia said, “There’s this little part of me that wants it

to. Kind of like when a thunderstorm comes you want it to get worse just to see it happen. Even when you’re scared.”

“I don’t want that. What’s wrong with you?”

“I don’t want it to get worse. I just kind of want to see what happens if it does. It’s some kind of dark excitement. I mean—”

“What the fuck is wrong with you? You just open your fucking mouth and let words blow wherever they will. Mom would be ashamed of you!”

“I was just saying, hypothetically speaking I—”

“Get out! Get out, get out! Out of my house!”

By the time Orithyia opened her eyes, the cloud-to-cloud lightning was underway. Far below her, the sea looked like it was turning into rocks and the rocks melting into the sea. The deep sounds of the known and the unknown sounded as the waves pounded the cliff face. Nothing but decay and Nature reclaiming the empty structures of Attica was happening far behind her.

The girl cupped her hands and put them to her mouth as she screamed into the wind.

“I terrify the world! Sure, I deserved it! Everything! I remain with nothing, not even a voice when there’s nobody left to hear but you! You carry nothing but the dead! Even birds cry when you try to show the nothing of yourself! Force! Nothing but force! Forced words! Forced breath! Forced reasons and forced threats! Forced fear and forced blame! Forced religion and forced followers! Forced wars and forced people!”

She felt her voice tearing to tatters like a rotten sail in the wind. Orithyia saw red as the wind continued to blow without regard, an indifference she had lived with throughout her short life. Just as a baker stops smelling her own bread after a while, Orithyia leaned into the wind and felt nothing. She watched the crashing course of the sweeping sea and heard nothing. She even took a defiant breath of her own in spite of the wind. Too much of the briny air left her smelling nothing. But like the gnarled oak that weathers the storm and breaks in the breeze that follows, Orithyia snapped without reason.

“Why did I give up my wrath and my anger and grovel here on the dead earth? My own force is what fits me!”

Orithyia held out her arms again and let her jaw drop, a gesture eased by the weariness from speaking to nobody but herself. When she lifted up onto her toes again, the wings on her back took her up and out where the sea met the air. She no longer faced the faceless wind as she flew. She looked and saw and was wherever she thought. A flick of her left wrist sent the western sea rolling, a flick of her right tore bits of the cliff off as the sea rose into a full onslaught. That place

Birthday Girl

Claudia Geagan

where her home had been on the outskirts of Attica found itself pummeled by hailstones as Orithyia blinked it into being.

The harmony of the unknown was remembered and she headed North on her way to the frozen places where the sun played tricks with the ice. Below her, the sea trembled and watched as the wind carried on in her daily flight.

The stale afternoon sun blazes, creates an acrid orange curtain over the windshield of my husband's college graduation present, a classic gold Pontiac Catalina. I merge into the right-hand lane on the Harbor Freeway. For the past half mile, a car has been rattling along in my driver's side blind spot. Annoyed, I crank down the window for some air, and a sunburned Volkswagen pulls alongside me. A black man looks straight into my eyes and points the barrel of a gun through a slit of open window. I floor the Catalina and peel away toward the bougainvillea-covered safety of Pasadena.

It's August 11, 1965. I'm six months pregnant. My twenty first birthday. I was born in 1944, in the bardo between the end of the so-called silent generation and the beginning of the baby boomers. I'm coming of age in the moment when everything is about to change, but I don't know it yet.

I stare at the world clocks on the khaki-colored wall at the Alameda Naval Air Station. It's 10:30 p.m. on the 10th in California, 11:30 a.m., already the 11th in Tokyo. I wonder why somebody put the International Date Line in the middle of the Pacific. Just convenience, I figure. I lean on the arm of my uniformed husband of four months. We've been in Alameda for a month waiting for the Navy to decide what to do with him. Tonight, they have decided to ship him to Tokyo and then on to a post on a WWII-vintage aircraft carrier, recommissioned for the Vietnam War, and currently in Subic Bay, Philippines. We only expected to be up here for a few days, but the Navy decided Bob was mildly colorblind after it commissioned him, and couldn't decide if it would keep him. He pleaded that he needed the job because he had a wife and baby to support.

About midnight, a bored clerk ambles into the waiting room. He glances at me, calls Bob "Sir" and hands him a manila envelope. The plane is ready.

Bob walks out onto the tarmac with barely a peck on my cheek, embarrassed to really kiss me. Between me and the single bars on his collar it's hard to say which make him blush more. I don't want him to leave, because just his male presence gives me a place in the world. I'm not worried about his safety – or mine.

It's raining and cold outside. I can only tell there's a plane in the distance because of its lights. Bob disappears into the darkness. I see the blown-open slit in the back of his jacket, and then just the reflection off his hat and then he's gone. He's walking into a new mysterious world, and before he leaves the Navy, he will become a man. He will see Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, and the South China Sea. I will return to Pasadena and live with my parents, a child with a child.

I head back to the squat stucco motel in Berkeley where we have been staying, intending to sleep for a while before leaving for home, but it's 3 a.m. and then 4 a.m., and I'm tossing, listening to the rain spatter on the roof. My pregnancy didn't show when we drove up here, and even though we only ate once a day at the \$2 all-you-can-eat place because Bob's per diem didn't arrive until later, the baby expanded and I was forced to buy an olive green maternity dress with a red bow at the neck and a baggy black knit bathing suit. While we waited for action from the Navy, Bob sat on base, and I sat by the motel pool trying to concentrate on Oliver Goldsmith's "The Vicar of Wakefield," a reading from the syllabus of the class I dropped because I had been too exhausted and nauseated to keep up a full college schedule. Wet, the bathing suit sagged to my knees.

Rather than stare at the motel's popcorned ceiling, I decide to leave for home. I flounce the maternity dress over my head, pack my turquoise Samsonite suitcase and head to the Catalina. There is no place to eat breakfast at that hour. I don't care about breakfast—just glad to find Highway 101 because I have no map. I had asked directions from the night manager snoozing in the motel office. I stored the directions in my head.

I drive through intersections with traffic lights and gas stations, and then the landscape opens up to brown hills. I stop to get gas. The gas boy pumps it, cleans my windshield, takes my cash, returns the change. The sun comes out. About noon I see a sign for Andersen's Pea Soup restaurant. I remember more comfortable times – going to Andersen's with my family when I was in high school – and that Bob and I spent the first night of our honeymoon in Solvang. I relished the fake half timbering and the kitschy Danish feel to the town. I loved the tastes-like-grandma-made-it food, but this time I don't stop. It's a bit out of my way and I feel too self-indulgent. A woman doesn't just go to a restaurant, especially not one full of families, alone. Things haven't changed much. Men dine to eat, concentrating on their food and phones, but even today a lone woman seems exposed and out of place.

The Pacific Ocean shows up at Goleta—blue and beckoning. Relief from the beige and dull. I stop for more gas. I note I have \$25 left to my name, which seems like plenty. The ocean vanishes again at Santa Barbara and I keep heading south, eventually stumble onto the Harbor Freeway, cruise over the southern part of Los Angeles. To my left I recognize the tower on the Bovard Auditorium and realize I'm passing the University of Southern California campus where just three months ago I'd been a coed. But the baby swelling in my body means I won't go back. I will need to care for the baby and live wherever my husband lives. While Bob is overseas or just onboard ship this will mean that I have not one social engagement. I'll be asked to babysit for the adult women in the neighborhood while they and their

husbands go out.

The University of Southern California is an expensive private university. I'd attended on scholarship, one of only a handful of students to do so in my class. I'd declared international relations as a major but the university counseling office called me in to say, "You can't major in international relations. The diplomatic corps only hires women to type. You can already type. Look at these A's in English. You must teach English." Done. I wasn't given a choice. There was nowhere to turn, certainly not to my father, who had a very short list of careers for women that revolved around the edges of duties to a husband and children.

Southern Cal sat on the edge of an area of south-central Los Angeles called Watts, a ghetto into which blacks were redlined, an oasis of poverty and despair. It lacked hospitals, shopping centers, parks, decent housing, and good schools. I student-taught in one of those sunbaked elementary schools during my junior year. I didn't fear my second graders, but in my grade school security mirrors hung in every hallway. One day when I glanced up and accidentally saw my own face, it gave me a start – where'd that white woman come from?

I also tutored at night in the arched basement of a Watts church, against my parents' wishes. I worried that I wouldn't be good enough for the student they assigned me when I heard she would be an eighth grader needing help with math. Although she was the size of a woman she turned out to be a shy child who couldn't multiply. After a few sessions her mother refused to bring her to tutoring. "They 'spect me to drive her down there at night?" What was I, then a nineteen-year-old sophomore, to say? The woman-girl quit coming.

The architecture of Southern Cal is so Spanish renaissance, so gracefully colonnaded that everyone knows what it looks like. They just don't recognize it in the background of all those movies and commercials. USC is derided as the University of Spoiled Children and there may be some truth to that. I went to school with girls from wealthy and worldly backgrounds, the daughter of the ambassador from Thailand, Elizabeth Arden's grandniece, Jennifer Bovard S., whose family name graced the auditorium, but none of us had independent prospects and none of us recognized fully the disparity between our constrained little lives and the more serious constraints in Watts that were fomenting terror at the edge of campus. Our vision was too sheltered. Too insular. We worried about the outcome of the USC/Notre Dame game.

With my foot still on the accelerator, I'm getting squirmy and tired. It's too hot and I need air. It's beyond lunch time, but I'm neither hungry nor out of gas. I wouldn't stop this close to Watts anyway. I tell myself I can keep going. I've begun to drive a mile at a time. I can always do one more mile. I pull into the right-hand lane just to slow down and wiggle a little when the guy with the black gun sticking

out of his window makes his appearance. As I roar away from the scene I imagine that guy laughing his ass off for scaring me. Very funny, I think. Something weird is going on, I suspect, first the traffic seems too light and then the gun, but it doesn't dawn on me that he might have intended to shoot me, personally. That sort of thing doesn't happen to me.

Next thing I remember I feel queasy, and I don't think I can keep pushing on. My neck can barely hold my head up and my eyes don't want to focus. I am on the Pasadena Freeway, just over the Arroyo Seco. I'm in the left lane and can see an exit coming up on the right. I swivel my head over my right shoulder and then pray that there's enough space for me to cut in front of the car I see there. "Please God don't let me kill anybody." I have no other memory until I wake up slumped over the bench seat in the Catalina, parked catawampus in the parking lot of a coffee shop. My face looks green in the gold-framed mirror behind the cashier in the restaurant. A black pay phone hangs on the adjoining wall. I wobble into the ladies room where I still look green, but nobody notices. Finished in the ladies room, I find a dime and use the pay phone to call my mother.

"I fainted. Can you come get me?"

"You sound all right now, Claudia," she says. "Just get yourself a Coke and come the rest of the way home. You can do it."

I'm miffed, but the baby in my belly seems quiet. I buy a Coke from the cashier.

When I make it home, I crawl into a twin bed in what was once my room. When I wake up I pull a powder blue corduroy full length tent dress over my head that Mom has sewed from an old bedspread. Nothing under it. I am finally comfortable. She serves liver and onions on the lanai by the pool. "If we'd known you were coming we'd have had something fancier." I don't care though. I'm still bleary eyed, and I don't mention the gun because I don't want any more constraints levied against my freedom. I mean, what was a woman, much less a pregnant woman, doing driving by herself in that neighborhood anyway? If I think I can flaunt the rules, after all the baby predated the marriage, then I will have to live with the consequences.

After dinner Mom brings out a dark chocolate birthday cake she has whipped up from a Betty Crocker mix while I slept, and a blue velvet ring box with my father's mother's diamond dinner ring, the ring Grandma had promised me when her hand dangled at eye level. My inheritance.

"For when your husband takes you to dinner," Dad says as he I open the box. The ring resembles a flower with an eighty-point center stone surrounded by paisleys with smaller stones. "Here's to the birthday girl," says my dad as he clinks his iced tea glass to mine.

As I am going to bed that night, Watts erupts into grisly violence after a poorly handled traffic stop. The cops stop two brothers. The driver is apparently guilty of reckless and possibly drunken driving. In order to keep the cops from impounding the car, the passenger brother calls their mother, whose car it is. She apparently jumps on the back of one of the cops. Pushing, shoving and arguing ensue, someone throws a rock. But no matter how outrageous the cops may have been, or how senselessly the brothers and their mother may have behaved, all those rocks and Molotov cocktails and guns did not appear out of nowhere. I didn't imagine the gun pointed at me earlier in the day. Watts was ready.

The next morning, my sister is shaking my shoulder. "Claudia, get up. I need you to move your car so I can get to work. And you need to check your tires, they're bald."

"Yikes." Bald is an understatement. Finally, I felt the danger I had been in. I had relied on that car to cocoon me, like I relied on the Navy to keep my husband safe or my youthful good health to get me home without sleep, food or water, or my mother to rescue me, but I was an adult now, and like the world around me I'd have to face truths I'd been ignoring. If I'd known the tires were bald (I relied on my husband to check that sort of thing), I would never have driven anywhere and my 21st birthday, as it occurred, would not have happened. And maybe that's the way life works in general. We ignore what's right in front of our faces till it reaches out and smacks us.

That night I see the newsreels. Watts is in flames. Watts burns for a week. Black men throw chunks of concrete and Molotov cocktails while white police with guns and night sticks and helmets do battle with them. I never return to USC and I never again visit south central LA.

In twenty-four hours, I have sent a husband off to a war in Vietnam where Napalm will burn the skin off children and back at home dissolve the unquestioning support Americans had for their government. I have been threatened by an uprising of angry black residents who will burn not just Watts but American city after American city for decades. The Feminine Mystique is on the best seller list, but women are still protected by being kept little girls. I have become a woman, one treated like a little girl when it was convenient. But protected?

In one day, I have come of age, moved from the conformity of one generation to the confrontation of the next. I will live forever unbalanced between the two.

My daughter was born on October 13, 1965. On her 21st birthday in 1986, she was a senior at the University of Pennsylvania, also an exclusive private school perched on the edge of urban decay, but in west Philadelphia. Her gift was the diamond ring I had received from my parents, but her future was graduate school,

not motherhood. The U.S. wasn't at war. The midshipmen I had married, her father, became a successful Toyota dealer and kept her in new tires.

My granddaughter was born on October 22, 1999. She now attends Florida State University in Tallahassee, majoring in International Relations. She's not yet 21. She remembers none of my story, not Vietnam, not the Watts riot, not the inconvenient pregnancy, all totems from a past of grainy newsreels. If her parents let her take her car to school, she has the sense to check her tires.

Folly at the Folies-Arlesiennes

William Snyder

*The Dance Hall in Arles
Vincent Van Gogh,
December 1888*

Look! I see me! That blackish smudge beneath
the balcony, beneath a globe of light,
beneath the weight of all that dancing—feet and legs
and hips and chests and wagging heads of hair.
But that was after I helped him with his easel
and box and canvas—after clearing
a place on the floor. After listening to the matron's
objections, pissed as she was by his being there, by
his insistence, his taking up space—I could
squeeze in four more people, she said.

Quatre personne. Dieu. I tried to soothe her.
Gauguin tried. And she softened, then relented,
relishing his promises, his *charme*. So I bounced
and swung away with myself to the back, where
you can see me—if you look. But that was before
he stepped from his easel, and before—and still
holding a brush, holding the palette—he danced.

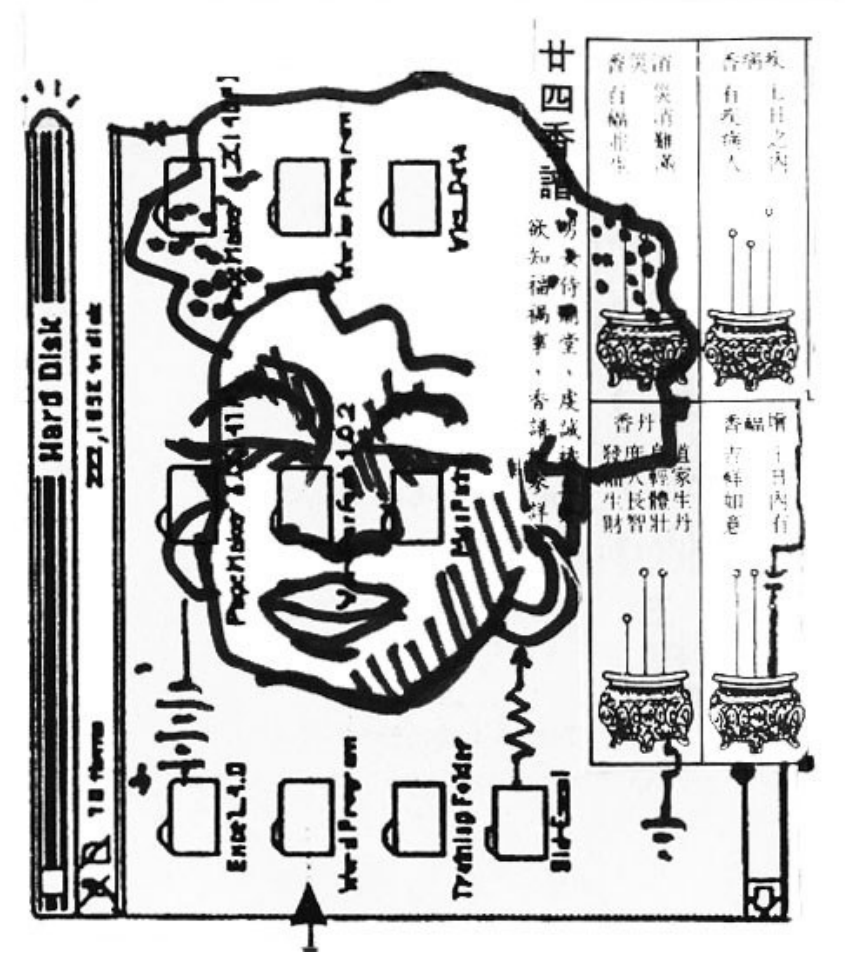
I'd seen it before—after a dram or two, and with
beats and plucks of a band to goad him. And so,
in this hall, he held his palette to his cheek,
the palette his partner—I can imagine it—
that palette slicked with colors enough for a menagerie,
a troupe, a circus. And now it is a circus—
on the floor. Jostled, tripped, pushed as he danced,
he'd fallen, and there he is amongst the shoes
and lacy hems. *Se lever cette minute*, the matron shouts,

woman, etc.

Mike Mosher

and the accordion stops, and the fiddle and bass, like children stop with a ruler-tap.

I help him, and when he's gained his feet, I gather his brushes, bottles, spatulas, knives, oils, tubes puffed flat by heels and soles, globs and slicks of paint stuck to the floor, turdy little ribbons. We reset his easel, and he starts again. And I dance again, and I imagine it— that dingy dark where I dance now, a blot beneath the balcony. Someday you'll watch me dance there!



Collage

English Ruins, or the Artist Dismisses the Opus

Alicia Shupe

Pink rain whispers
across my toes, presses
ghostly fingerprints
upon melancholy stone statues,
fish fountains, and creeping daisies
languishing beside ivy-covered garden gates.

I watch the delicate glow
of cerulean moonlight lain
naked, behind the clouds.
Raspberry wine and peach jam toast
steal sorrow,
warm delight in its place.
I flush
 to think my life
 a myth.

Scarlett, Our Lady of the Feral Heart

henry 7. reneau, jr.

after Kathryn "Lady B" Benander

There was a little girl with a machete. Her wonder, compacted & glowing awe-bright enough to out-shine the constellations of childhood pulsing inside a crystal heart; until one day it was shattered by the indelible tattoo of grief, her fairy tale happily-ever-after counter-clockwise circling the drain, carrying inward the ghosts surrounding her.

Her mother's face came back many times, an ephemeral longing of transitory endearment; & her father's face, she could never quite make out, because it was always too close to her anger: an ancient rusted cog that ground into place & kick-started an assembly-line machinery. As the rumble & roar increased, she realized the implement that was being assembled was a thermonuclear vengeance narrowing to a long spear-like instrument with a double-edged blade at the end.

Her sorrow darkened to revenge, not the flower, but the thorns, puncturing holes in her radiance. She was seduced by the gravity of the deep end, her orchestra of rage tuning her vengeance to carnage, a barbarian pyre ablaze in war song.

When the killers came from the bushes, she submerged herself waist-deep in their mutilated bodies soon surgically dismembered about her vengeance. Eventually, she emerged from her childhood sanctuary of forest, bloodied & grimed, into the stunned midst of the bordering village. Her story now the consequence of atrocity, revenge & dispossession: the witch hunters' massacre of her family, become howling dogs metaphorically chained to her burden of trauma.

Most of the villagers felt pity for the wild-eyed orphan. They offered their help, all the while cautiously eyeing the bloody blade in her hand. They all knew the witch hunters had went into the forest & never returned, & quickly put two & two together. Their frenzy of questions were only met with a guarded silence & her refusal to relinquish her weapon. One old woman gave the sign of the evil eye & spit on the ground at her feet. The village constable wouldn't take her defensive stance for an answer & lost a hand. The village mayor confused her elfin lunatic-smile for consent & almost lost an eye.

The villagers realized that the child was not open to consolation or compromise. They were also acutely aware that she had mad ninja skills; so they backed the fuck up—except for one guileless man-child, all Power to the People & Black Panther beret, who stepped forward: *Hi, my name is Maximilian, but everyone calls me*

I'm Just Your Satellite

Jacob Browning

Max, & offered her an apple. The ninja girl threw it into the air, surgically sliced it with her blade, caught both pieces, & handed half to the boy. *Shalom, I'm Scarlett.* The crowd of townspeople oohhh! in apprehensive awe, but the curious boy only smiled & exclaimed, "Awesome!"

His story was Ghost Dance vision, Revelation elucidated from the belly of the beast & eternity startled to a halt. His radical optimism, streaming back from the edge of the universe, startling the pin-drop mute dreading his imminent oncoming. He broke a rule every day, as calculated heresy, aligned with his affinity for disobedience.

She became desire at the periphery of his obsession, loved for all she was becoming, the green-tinted river in her eyes sweeping him away. He rocked the boat fearless, his spent atomic cloud lingering a faceless conviction. She wanted to taste Death without swallowing it, her elfin grin tangled in enigma capable of graceful strategy & flawless execution, like colorful shards of glass refracting love letters from the madhouse.

The day came they both cleaved to the complicated dooms of love—becoming one, running through their renewed wonder & awe, refusing to grow up & out of the moment, their present tense, the newly minted gear of a marvelous "right now" turning the concatenations of history. Their story became the magnetic gravity of opposites, so close, if one of them coughed, the other would spit out a chicken bone. Their oncoming metaphysical journey, one into the other, bashert: what they always wanted, what they always really needed. Their happily-ever-after, become a raging river thundering across a needle's point.



Black and white photograph

Harriet

Mark Cassidy

My name is Harriet. I live on Hospital Road, behind the old market, in Diogbu District, near the creek. I live with Okeme. We share a flat. We have a sitting room and two bedrooms, a kitchen and a toilet. We have a bore hole for water. We struggle, like everyone, for light but we have a small generator and we manage for fuel. We are comfortable. Our neighbors, for the most part, are friendly and helpful.

Okeme is very beautiful. She is tall, she has a fine, sharp nose and she changes her hair every week, spends a full day in the salon gisting with her friends, laughing and joking. She has a huge number of friends. She is a successful businesswoman. She owns a V-Boot. She has oyinbo boyfriend who helps her with her business, gave her money for start-up and for travel so that she can bring stock and new things from London and Dubai. She is successful because her customers know that she has good taste and will bring interesting things for them to try. Her boyfriend is an Irish man. He offered to help us to move to a new place in the GRA but so far we have resisted. We live on a very nice street. We are happy.

I am not so beautiful. I have K-legs and my breasts are too big but I have an interesting life with Okeme. I will survive. And my child is safe.

I am a singer. I perform select dates in particular venues where the clientele will appreciate a good voice. I sing songs, mostly ballads, by such as Bette Midler and Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston. It is old stuff but it is good stuff and sexy. I do three or four songs and then sit down and wait for my turn to come round again. My favorite places to sing are the Sawtooth Bar on King Perekule Road and the Blues Café at the end of the lane behind the Presidential Hotel. Okeme says that I have a beautiful voice. Sometimes while we are cooking together I sing.

Recently my career as a singer was interrupted by some misfortune in my life. I should say that I am not a truly religious person. I go to church occasionally with Okeme but that's all, unless I am at home with my mum. When I was a little girl my mother took me to church every Sunday but I lost my faith when I began to experience life and all its pleasures. But I must tell you that it was a man of the church, Supreme Shepherd Kenneth Jolankwo Abadra of the New Church of Zion, who saved my life. And I do believe that God himself provided this man in order to save me from the fate which awaited me after I was removed from the compound where I lived. After which, Okeme took me into her home and into her life.

I became pregnant and, when I discover that I am pregnant, I visit my

sister and explain everything and ask her what I should do. She was very angry with me. She is my senior sister. She dragged me outside the house, to the back of the compound out of sight of our mother and started to shout at me.

- Who is this man? Will he not take care?

- He is a military man.

- My God you are a selfish fool! Our own mother will die from this thing.

She go cry to God to take her from such disgrace! Have you no character? Have you no respect for your family? For your own self?

Then, after the shouting was finished, we agreed that my mother should never discover that such a thing has happened and the plan was hatched between my sister and her husband that she would very quickly reveal that she was, grace be to God, pregnant again. She and her husband have two of their own children but they would love my child as their own. My sister's husband announced that he was taking his wife to the city to be near the best hospital and avoid any complications. He took her away as far in advance of the date as possible so that nothing might be made of my sister's lack of size. When my time came I entered the same hospital and gave birth and then my sister took the baby to her side. They stayed in the city some time before going back to present the child to the families. Everyone was very excited and very happy. Everything was fine except for the people in my own compound when I returned from the hospital. They took me for a murderer. A child killer.

The people in the compound became suspicious because they know the baby was very close but they can hear nothing. Me, I don't even realize that they are listening. I am resting. I am recovering from the birth. I sing to myself. I am very happy because a serious problem has been solved with God's help. But one day the people in the compound came for me and took me from the house, arrested me under authority of the local chief until I can explain the disappearance of my child. I was very frightened. I was sure that they wanted to kill me and, of course, if they find a dead child, any dead child roundabout, they would have kill me sure. I was very frightened.

And then the police arrive with people from the church. Someone have told them what is happening. Someone decide to save my life but I will never know who it was pull the plug on my trouble.

In the pastor's house we prayed together. He instruct me to kneel by the window in order for the blessed light of The Lord Jesus to fall upon me but this became difficult after some of the people from the compound who had followed us saw me and began to shout and demand that I be returned to them. He ask me where is the child. I shook my head. When I did not reply we return to prayer. This continued through two full days. He allow me to eat soup and garri and drink water.

Out of Body

Nick Olson

We prayed and talked, pray and talk, and he ask me questions but I steadfastly refuse to answer. I was happy because I know, by then, that my child will be safe no matter what will happen to me.

On the third day he received a message from his church and become very upset and angry and forgot about me immediately. His driver came for him and they left the house under the care of another officer of the church. I remain quiet and waited for some time. If I hear someone enter the room I kneel by the window and close my eyes. I eat the food they left for me although such amounts began to dwindle after the Shepherd Abadra went away. I waited one more day and then collected my few things and walked out and walk past the police in the yard and into the street and to the road and from there took okada to Okeme's house where she give me money to pay.

That's it.

Nobody know where I have gone and nobody will find me. Maybe one day someone will hear me sing and recognize me but unlikely it will be anyone from my old compound. Or from the pastor's church. What will they do? My baby is safe. He will grow to be a fine man and I will see him when I want to. And I have Okeme, who loves me.

I'm reading up on out of body experiences, lucid dreaming; anything that might get me out of all of this and let me see my dead brother again.

He's been dead five years, so I'm under no illusions that it'll be a clear vision. I'm starting to forget his face; even the pictures don't help. So I'm banking on an out of body experience. They say that if you lie real still and focus on your breathing, imagine that a rope is leading out of your skull and up into the ceiling, beyond that, up into the sky and beyond that, that you're on your way to a bona fide OBE. There are no guarantees, but that seems like as good a place to start as any.

I was never one for meditating, but Nick- my brother- was, and I remember some of what he told me back when he was diving into Zen, going to the temple every week, etc. Sometimes I wonder about mindfulness, about why it couldn't save him from himself in the end, and then I come back to the hurt, the "why"s that go nowhere, the feeling like you've knocked down a wall past reality, and now you're in a grayed-out backroom that hasn't been rendered yet. The grief puts you out of the world, and it's just you lying on hardwood in your apartment, trying to imagine a rope leading out of your head so you can see your brother again. You're trying not to tell yourself that this is fucking crazy, that this is going nowhere, because Nick always said that right when you thought you'd figured it out, that was the moment you had to start all over again.

When we were still kids, Nick would do stuff like stay awake for two days straight, put halved ping pong balls in front of his eyes for sensory deprivation, just to see what would happen, if he could write about it. He'd go a day or two without food, which, granted, wasn't hard when there was barely any in the house, but he'd have nothing but water or tea, and that was before the eviction but not much before. Everything was still in boxes from the last place we had to abruptly leave, and I feel like he was starting to unravel then, even though it was still years before the eventual suicide, but nobody knew, and only in hindsight could we see all the distinct signs. I think back to the Other Side of YouTube videos we'd watch, before meme proliferation, before Vine and TikTok, back when you had to hunt down all the weird shit, and it seemed like Nick was always trying to find ways to disturb himself out of what he was thinking, what he was feeling.

I'm still trying the out of body experience thing, but I'm not sure I'm doing it right. My brain keeps reminding me of how he looked in that room, hospital lights too bright, metal table, and when you're dead they no longer have to worry about comfort. Gray skin and water bloat, and it's him all right, and hearing yourself make the sound that you made, and seeing yourself from up in the room's corner is the closest you've ever come to having an out of body experience; perspective shift, and

Somewhere Real Bizarre

Jacob Browning

if you never have to feel that way again then that'll be fine, if that's the only way it'll come. You can stay awake in a caffeine haze and have the heat off in winter so the hardwood is ice cold and it's starting to hurt, and maybe you'll see him one more time, face un-gray, un-bloated, like how he was when he was still here, not a body slab on cold metal in hospital light, and come out of this body, come out of your mind and allow yourself communion. Come apart and don't worry about putting yourself back into that trauma body. You don't have to remember everything all the time.

And floating now, over yourself, it's not a rope so much as a hole in the ice bringing you out of liquid cold and into the air, away from where bodies can die and decay and be forgotten. And maybe your brother is in there somewhere, apart from any memories you had of him. He's just there, inextricable from the way he ended up. You're sliding out, away from your head, floating through the old mall you guys used to go to as kids, but now it's closed down, and all you can hear are the hits they used to play, and the speakers are blasting out to emptiness and decrepitude, and there's the place where you'd buy a pack of *Pokémon* cards for a few bucks, there's what remains of the food court, just mold and not-so-drywall. You can see your brother as you want to remember him, floating above the fountain at mall's center, and you're starting to gain self-awareness in this thing, whatever it is, dream or real, but you decide to stay a while and watch as he floats, airborne, catching rays, rotating in the air, dancing through it, smiling all the time.



Color photograph

twists

Nam Nguyen



Digital photograph

The Algorithm

Brent Lucia

Elegance is found in a sequence
whispered in successive states.

And the sentient glow built in sounds
between short, tapered regrets.

Inputs like phonemes found our rhythm.
In structure, a networked s/o/u/l.

Stories unravel in outputs
calculating to the skin.

Aurora Borealis

Virna Chessari

Waking dreams and chocolate craving.
My eyelashes are wings,
glued to books without stories,
anonymous,
in the fable of a dazzling green.
The Lady is back,
at/to the tam-tam of shamans
and drops of sun
exploding in the glowing frost.
And the atmosphere gives up.
This night is female
in the eyes of reindeer
the only ones to see,
and they shine with emerald,
oxygen and azote.

Through the Window

Sarah Doudna

Helen stood in the bathroom. It was 3 a.m. and she'd been crying again. Harold's service had been that afternoon. She felt numb. Her sister Margaret had flown back to Chicago earlier that evening after a quiet dinner at a lodge near the airport, and now Helen was facing a fear she never knew she had – the fear of living alone. Of course she'd spent nights alone when Harold was visiting college friends, or when he was taking care of his father, but it was more than that, she feared going through the rest of her life alone.

After her marriage to her first husband ended – a mistake when she was very young – she went back to living with her sister. They'd had glorious times then, both single, in their youth. But now Margaret lived outside of Chicago with her husband and daughter. No, Helen wasn't going to go live with Margaret now. Their lives had changed too much after they'd each gotten married. Margaret, a school teacher, became judgmental about Helen's career as an artist and they'd stopped spending holidays together. Harold never cared for her sister's husband, Bill, an academic who made little eye contact, and was strangely quiet. Emily, their daughter, was sixteen and an extremely difficult child. She suspected developmental or mental health issues were to blame and wondered if Margaret was truly happy. Though they'd grown distant over the years, the visit went well enough. It was the pain, and shock of losing Harold that made everything seem strange and out of place.

Helen sighed. She noticed a large black shadow on the wall. With a startle she realized it was a giant cockroach – the insect Harold called 'water bugs.' She stifled a scream. It was monstrous, and its long antennae moved around as if watching her. This was exactly the kind of thing that made her so afraid of living alone. Harold had always killed them in his cool nonchalant way, wadding up the paper towel, holding his hand poised, darting out to make the kill, and then flushing them down the toilet, no fuss, no mess. She thought of his forearms, how the veins always pulsed, a result of working with his hands. He did beautiful work with wood for the custom cabinetry business he started years ago. 'He had done,' she corrected herself. A wave of sadness filled her chest, made her arms and legs feel weak and her heart felt hollow.

There was no drama with Harold, no lifetime movie moments of him dying slowly of cancer surrounded by his loving family. No, one day he was teasing her about her cooking and said he needed to sit up in the living room for his indigestion, and the next morning she found him dead of a heart attack in his favorite chair, the maroon throw blanket from the couch still tucked around him.

"Oh my god, where is the Raid," she said out loud, as if talking to Harold, and somehow that helped, just to imagine he was in the other room, guiding her

through this. She knew they had some in the house, but she didn't know where. Probably under the bathroom sink though Harold never used it.

She opened the cupboard and there in the back behind various dusty bottles and cans of cleaning supplies, she spied a rusted can of bug spray. She imagined Harold's voice in her head urging her on before the bug could get away. As she reached in, her elbow knocked over an empty can, the noise startled the roach and it ran a bit before stopping again. She could still see it out of the corner of her eye. Spray bottle in hand, she aimed and – a weak spray of air came out but nothing else, and the insect darted away into the linen closet. Helen groaned, she hated the idea of leaving the cockroach there, but was too exhausted to look for it now. She had to get some sleep.

As she stood up, she glanced in the mirror. When had her hair gotten so grey? She'd let it go recently, and now it was looking frizzy. She dabbed at the creases near her eyes with some night cream but they were still red and puffy from crying. She drank a glass of water and went back to bed to lie down. Now again she felt the emptiness there. She lay quiet, missing his sounds, his warmth, his presence. She thought of that giant cockroach loose in the house and cringed, imagining hearing the scratch of sharp insect feet against floors and walls as she finally drifted off to sleep.

She had a dream that Harold moved to Tokyo. He was still alive, but living in Japan. She went there to find him, and to ask him to come home. In the center of the city there was a large glass mall with long modern criss-crossing escalators that went several stories up and down. As she went down on one escalator, she saw him going up in the other direction, but far away and there was no getting his attention. "Why would he move to Japan?" she thought to herself as she began to wake up. It was 9:07am. She hadn't slept so late in years. Her body was stiff having held the same position for what seemed like hours. She roused herself, and sat up, the sun streaming through the window, but catching sight of Harold's bedroom slippers she felt that same hollowness again.

The phone rang. It was the landline. It must be Margaret calling to tell her about the flight and to check in on her. She answered, and a young woman's monotone voice seemed to read off a script, "Hello, may I please speak to Mr. Sandersen?"

Helen paused for a moment. She was irritated by the telemarketer, but she felt bad for her too; she knew it was a tough job. With great effort she took a breath "No, he is... (should she say 'dead') ...he is deceased," she finished. It was the first time she'd said those words aloud. She'd said other words of course, when she'd called 911 the morning she'd found Harold, and later when she called Margaret. But in the

caring way of an older sister, Margaret had told other family and friends and even the Pastor of her church. The words hung in the air now, the last syllable echoing: ceased, ceased, ceased. Yes, he has ceased, she thought. Such finality. She still couldn't grasp it. She would have to say it a lot more she realized.

"Oh dear I'm so sorry!" the woman on the phone blurted out, going off script. "I was calling to remind him to bring the car around for an oil change." Oh dear, the car. Another thing Helen would have to deal with now that Harold was gone. And taxes! He had always done them alone, too proud to go to an accountant. He figured it all out himself. The one time he was audited after the cabinetry business hit an all-time high, they went through his shoe boxes of receipts and at the very end sent him a check for twenty-five cents. He had never been audited again. Harold had it framed proudly and it still hung in his office. His office. She would have to clean that out too. The chores seemed overwhelming, but at least they would keep her busy.

"I can bring it Thursday," Helen replied before ending the call. She scurried past the linen closet to the bathroom and saw the can of Raid on the countertop. First thing she would do today was go to the drugstore and get a fresh can and some roach traps. She wondered if she should call the exterminator.

After a shower and a cup of coffee, Helen felt a little better and got ready to go out. It took longer than usual. Every small task was steeped in thought. She felt as if she were moving in slow motion. She found herself wondering again and again, just like during yesterday's service, if she could have done something differently. What if she'd gone to check on Harold in the night; maybe she could have saved him. Maybe if she weren't such a sound sleeper—or maybe it really was her curried lamb that did it. He had been in fairly good shape for 67, he walked every day and they went on regular hikes together, but his father had died of a heart attack at 45, and she knew it ran in his family. After carefully considering it, she realized there was nothing she could have done. The guilt was natural, she knew, but there was no point torturing herself.

By the time she was ready to go out, it had grown overcast and the wind had picked up. She checked the weather. It was due to rain. She found the new red jacket she got at the end of last season, put on the rainboots on the back shelf in the foyer, and took her umbrella. She was just going to the store to get Raid, "This won't take long," she thought. What else might she need while she was out? There was always dinner—she remembered that someone from the church had dropped off another casserole yesterday. It was incredibly kind how people brought food when they heard the news about Harold. This was the third casserole they'd brought since that day. Someone must be organizing it, she realized. It wasn't any kind of

casserole she'd ever had before, but it was homemade comfort food and meant she didn't have to cook, and for that she was grateful. Even eating felt like a chore. It was far more difficult than she anticipated just to get dressed and do normal things. She could pick up some fresh fruit for breakfast and some things to make a salad, but she supposed the casseroles would be okay for lunches and dinners.

It began raining just before Helen left the house and by the time she'd walked to the bus stop, it was making a racket on her umbrella and splashing her ankles she thought would be protected by the boots. She felt sorry for herself, alone, no Harold to come home to. She missed his laugh, their constant banter. He'd had a wonderful sense of humor. The thought of getting older and doing it alone pained her chest. The rain fell and she waited for the bus, comforted by the familiar rivulets of water that ran over the broken sidewalk into the drain. She had watched this pattern so many times she knew exactly how they formed, and could draw those patterns with her eyes closed. She waited. This was her habit, to take the bus, but she realized she could have driven. Harold wouldn't need the car today or any other day she thought bitterly. Digesting this, she looked towards the park at the end of the block where all the trees were turning a different shade of autumnal ochre, bowing their heads with wet, and beautiful even in the rain. She would paint them when she got back from the store. Her art always helped. She decided to walk through the park instead of taking the bus. It would be good to be out in nature and get some exercise, and a comfort to be among the trees.

* * *
Shoshana Ambrose rolled over in bed as best she could. It felt more like the wallow of a giant elephant seal. The skin of her swollen belly itched. Deep within she felt a pummeling to her bladder. The baby would be coming soon.

Graham was awake and drinking coffee when she waddled into the kitchen. His tall frame was backlit in front of the bright kitchen window, sinewy arms folded over his gaunt chest, his mass of black hair wilder than usual. "The broker said we should accept the new buyer's offer," he announced with irritation. Shoshana knew it was going to be one of those mornings.

As he began to talk, Shoshana moved past the open moving boxes to the stove, and put the kettle on for tea, uh-huh-ing at the appropriate intervals. Graham was launching in on his favorite new topic, the latest prospective buyer of the one bedroom they had just moved out of and were trying to sell. Shoshana didn't care anymore whether they got their list price or had to accept a lower offer, it was Graham who was obsessed with the money. At this point, every ounce of her energy was focused on the baby within her, and managing to get through these next few weeks. They should still have time to unpack and get the baby's room settled before she came. Dahlia, she'd decided they would name her, after her grandmother. As for

the delivery itself, she had read the books and done the classes and exercises, and knew with a deep instinctual wisdom she would be okay. But this morning she was more exhausted than usual. Yesterday's move had taken its toll.

"The first offer," Graham was saying, "over the list price!" His voice rose and cracked, and she cocked her head and shot him a look, but he was full steam now and didn't even notice. She thought of the tiny one bedroom they bought when they were first married, on the top floor with the corner bedroom window and view of the green cliff. They'd had so many happy memories there. "But then his mom gets diagnosed with stage four ovarian cancer," Graham went on, recounting the story she knew as well as he did, "and just like that, he's out!" This was so distressing to him. "Then there was that writer with the cats who offered us our ask price, but whose questionable citizenship scared off the mortgage loan officer and she was out too." Graham loved their old apartment and was scared of losing money on it with the baby coming. "And the next offer, a month later—ten thousand below our asking price, stringing us along, and then backing out at the last second! That guy was such a jerk."

Shoshana thought back to that last buyer who'd taken them on an emotional roller coaster, trying to nickel and dime them for every little crack or ding in the wall. It was at that point that she'd stopped being emotionally involved; she simply didn't have the energy. She took the tea kettle off the stove before it whistled, poured it into her favorite mug and added a Cinnamon Spice tea bag. She couldn't tolerate caffeine anymore, and both apples and peaches made her neck red and her mouth itch and just the idea of seafood made her queasy. She regarded Graham over her tea. "It's not fair to judge someone first thing in the morning," she reminded herself with a secret smile, hearing her mother's words in her head. He was still attractive after six years of marriage with his dark eyes and broad shoulders, even if he was on the skinny side—he had an enviable metabolism. She loved him, despite how he dwelled on things sometimes, seeing the world through the prism of his own fixations. It was natural that he'd be nervous about money, but after all it was only money. She felt it was more important to sell the apartment before the baby came, but there was no point in arguing with him at the moment. "Pick your battles," she could hear more of her mother's words in her head.

"Six more months, no offers at all and now this—fifteen thousand lower?" He was pacing now. Shoshana moved to a spot near the kitchen window that was feeling more and more like her perch. It was a small kitchen, but the red countertops, and white cabinets went well with the blond of the wood floor and were what made her fall in love with the apartment in the first place. She liked the two bedroom apartment they'd found. It was sunny with high ceilings and a big living room/play area and she could see raising a child here. It would be a good home. "You're

When I Pay My Rent It Hurts

Jacob Browning

right, Gray,” she used her nickname for him to try to soften his mood, and moved to put her arm around the small of his narrow back. He stepped to the side, still too worked up to be comforted by her. He was bound and determined to get over their asking price again. Their broker had at first assured him it would be easy and he had believed her, but time had gone by, and it was a buyer’s market and now she had changed her tune. Today Shoshana was too exhausted to let his mood phase her, and nodded, half to herself, knowing that once he got it all out of his system he’d be more reasonable. At this point she wished he would just swallow his pride and accept the lower offer.

She began to unpack one of the boxes marked ‘kitchen’ in Graham’s large block print as she absently listened to him vent. She unwrapped the blue and yellow bowls she’d carefully packed in tissue earlier that week. He’d given them to her as a gift many years ago. They’d been on a trip and she’d fallen in love with them at a pottery shop and he’d somehow managed to sneak back to the store before their flight, hide them in his carry on and wait until they were home to give them to her. It was a reminder of how sweetly romantic and thoughtful he could be. She knew with his passion and creativity he would make a wonderful father.

She took a banana from the bunch on the table, one of the foods she’d craved most throughout her pregnancy and moved back to the kitchen window and surveyed her reflection in the glass. Her large brown eyes took in her curly brown hair streaked with hints of auburn. Her face and body had grown round with the weight she’d gained. She was ready for the baby to come.

Through the window she noticed a woman in a red jacket walking towards the park as the rain came down misty. It was always more romantic to look out on rain than to be out in it. But she imagined how it would feel to be outside, the fresh air on her face and the quiet contemplation of the park. She wondered what it would feel like to be that woman.

As if she felt her eyes on her, the woman in the red jacket looked up to the second floor where Shoshana stood. She was older, with grey-blond hair cut in a short wavy bob. As the woman came closer she gazed out from under her umbrella into the warmly lit room and Shoshana noticed the woman looked terribly sad, as if she’d been crying. Shoshana felt guilty then, as if she’d been spying on her, and felt an instinctual impulse to avert her eyes. But the woman on the ground didn’t look away. For a long moment they held each other’s gaze. Then the woman in the red jacket looked relieved, a shadow having passed, almost as if grateful to have been seen. With a whisper of a nod to Shoshana, she continued down the block and into the park. Shoshana watched the red of her jacket disappear among the trees and then felt a familiar pain within as the baby began to kick.



Black and white photograph

Clive and Dot's Anchor Inn

Adam Dietz

A simple joint, The Anchor Inn always had the same two beers on tap: Bud and Miller, American beers, none of that "foreign shit." In the corner sat an old T.V. playing the Michigan vs. Michigan State football game. A relic of years gone by, the T.V. was far louder than it needed to be. At the other end of the bar, two men in their sixties sat, stealing glances between downs in the game.

There are regulars in spots like these, and if you aren't one of them, you'd better be prepared for a couple of looks. Though perhaps unfriendly, a duality existed between the two men with the crossing of their legs and the way each rested their chin in their respective palms. Brothers, I thought. Or maybe friends sharing the bond of brothers.

As I contemplated the relational possibilities between the two, I was brought back to reality by a pass to the running back out of the backfield for 18 yards. We all sat drinking our cheap beer, waiting for 9 PM to roll around.

In the Midwest, bars like The Anchor Inn are a dime a dozen. Take a detour in any small town, and you'll find two things: a run-down bar and semi-operational post office. But what makes The Anchor Inn unique isn't tied to the beers on tap, the lousy television set, or the wary clientele. What makes The Anchor Inn unique is that it's haunted.

Nestled into the Heights neighborhood of Houghton Lake, Michigan, The Anchor Inn was purchased by Clive and Dot in late 2011. Upon opening the bar, they began to experience what they refer to in their advertising as "paranormal experiences". Per the outdated, yet undeniably charming bar website, the 150-year-old building has a checkered past. There were rumors of Al Capone frequenting the spot during the Prohibition, and in the late 1800s it served as a brothel. Ever the opportunists, Clive and Dot saw fit to provide haunted tours of the establishment. For just ten dollars, patrons receive a 90-minute tour of the former hotel and a cheap beer- they can bring that along with them.

The infancy stage of meeting a significant other's parents is full of awkward pauses and half-measures. When it's your parents, you hope they won't say anything weird about abortion or posit that *All Lives Matter*. As a significant other, you are forced to question everything you do and everything you say. Do you want another drink? *Are you going to have another drink?* Fear

of judgment, of showing true colors, conversations are stilted and awkward. With time comes a sense of familiarity and comfort, but in those early days of worlds merging, an intensity looms. This Anchor Inn ghost tour was to be the blending of my two worlds. Family, meet K. K, meet the family.

A young relationship in an old hotel. A hotel built on the intersection of two "ley lines," or straight alignments drawn across the equator that demarcate earth energies and forecast strange happenings. Rhonda, our tour guide, spoke with the confidence of a Ph.D. as she delved into these latitudes and longitudes gone wrong. That sense of academia dissipated as she lit her third, and eventually fourth, cigarette during the introductory segment of the tour. Rhonda was tough; she had seen things. Moreover, she had lost. Initials and the dates of a life lived protruded from beneath the sleeve of her painted-on black shirt. Rhonda spoke about spirits, though I suspect she had some demons of her own.

As we ventured up the narrow staircase to the top floor of the building, I grabbed K's hand, pleased she was meeting my family, adding a sense of permanence to the relationship. My father stood close to Rhonda, slapstick, and asking foolish questions. Dad, a natural showman, had performed for 7th graders for 38 years as he taught them about fractions and mean, median, and mode. Retired and without a platform, out and about events like the ghost tour were a perfect way for him to soak up attention, to see if he still had it. At the rear of the group was my sister, home from London. During a good year, I saw her once. A bad one, not at all. Ten years older and ever accomplished, seeking her approval in all aspects of my life remained a constant. This budding relationship was no different.

Unlike the programs on science fiction networks, in actuality, ghost tours are not overly dramatic. We worked our way from room to room with Rhonda providing pertinent information on each space's history. Though occasionally silly, there was a definite unease that evening. Maybe I was nervous about the two parties meeting, but I think there's more to it than that. The group must have felt it as well, as we shuffled closely together down the ever-narrowing hallway — six rooms on the right and six rooms on the left, each with a dark past. The tales, while undoubtedly manufactured by Rhonda and her recollections of a couple of choice Twilight Zone episodes, were effective. Every so often, a silence would overcome the group, and the football game would drift up through the strained ventilation system—first-down Wolverines and so on.

The fourth room on the left was alleged to have been a room wherein a prostitute had been murdered sometime predating the flappers and Fitzgerald's

follies. A broom-closet of a bedroom, it was decorated with a few Goodwill prom dresses and dime-store jewelry, but it had a hold on me... on us. Like seeing your teacher eating out at a restaurant, something was not quite right about it. Observing the occult, we listened, waited with bated breathing as Rhonda droned on. A few toughs had mistreated the girl, and now her spirit haunts the- *WAHHHHH!* My father let out a *YELP*, pushing himself away from the four of us and out the door. We all looked on with grave concern.

"Something just grabbed my butt," he said, "A ghost just grabbed my butt." Out of breath and stone-faced, he said it three or four more times.

A large man, he had displayed agility in departing the room that gave me flashes of the high school football career of his he was always going on about. Impressed by the athleticism, but unsure how to proceed, I hung my head.

Good God, I thought to myself.

K's father drove a BMW and drank expensive scotch, and here was my dad proclaiming that a spirit had copped a feel. I wanted to move on, but Rhonda wasn't quite ready. She looked into the eyes of my father with complete sincerity and said: "That's Marilyn... she likes men."

Downtrodden, I shuffled into the hallway, Charlie Brown incarnate, saddened and embarrassed. But as we spilled into the next room, I noticed that K was patting my father on the back, telling him she believed him. Marilyn's mischief had forged a bond between my girlfriend and my father. I thanked her graciously under my breath.

As our 90-minute tour gave way to two hours, we slipped back down the spiral staircase to the bar. The two men had left their end unmanned, and the television was muted.

Finishing off the ferment at the bottom of my beer glass, I stood next to my father in silence as the girls dismissed themselves to the restroom. Studying the scores at the bottom of the screen and considering the complexities of the paranormal, I heard a scream from the stalls. As I turned my head, I caught the two of the girls frantically scurrying out of the bathroom, squealing. Each gasping for air, they shouted something about the sink turning on by itself.

Rhonda listened to their story and nodded. To her, it all made sense. It was logical. To us, the ghostly grab and the phantom spigot are things we still talk about

on those rare days when we're all together. As we loaded into the car under the light of a heavy moon, I felt a sense of relief wash over me. I smiled as the old bar that may or may not have been haunted disappeared from sight.

The Anchor Inn offers cheap, American, beer, and a ghost tour that's better than it has any business being. If you go, you better ask for Rhonda. She really knows her stuff. Whether true or false, haunted or not, it's a space that celebrates the old while allowing room for something new.

The White Dog

Kristin Boyles

Curled up in my soft bed, I sat and watched the birds flying outside the window behind the couch. Thick clouds covered the sky until the raindrops began sliding down the glass. A rumble of thunder cracked and I jumped, white ears flopping around my head. Assured that the danger had subsided – at least for that moment – I laid my head back on the bed, licked the material, and stared at the door until Daphne arrived.

When at last the doorknob jiggled, Daphne pushed through it and entered the living room. She held something to her face and yelled into it. She tossed the object onto the couch and groaned. I tilted my head, but she didn't notice. She sat down on the couch and put her head in her hands. Her damp brown hair curtained her face, so at first, I didn't realize she was crying.

Daphne sat in her rain-soaked clothes and sniffled, then got up and left the room through a door near the lit kitchen entrance. When she came back, she wore different clothes and carried a bag of chips and a can of soda. Normally, I'd have asked her for a chip by walking over to her and when she'd say, "Finn, sit," I'd sit and she'd give me a chip, but I stayed put.

She sat on the end of the couch farthest away from me and turned on the TV. With my bed next to the small wood box that held up the screen, I watched at an angle as she ate handfuls of chips and muttered to herself. Not even the birds that flew by the window distracted me from my duty of keeping my eyes on her. Daphne cried around mouthfuls of white chips for what felt like forever, the cloudy sky turning into black evening, and I wondered if she would ever give me dinner.

After the rain stopped, someone knocked on the door. I lifted my head and barked, then turned my eyes to Daphne. She hesitated, but the person knocked again, so she got up and answered the door. Light came in through the small gap as she stuck her head out to talk to whoever stood out there. It sounded like a man – probably the same one who stayed overnight in her room once in a while. On those nights, Daphne had kissed my head and told me to be a good girl and sleep on my bed in the living room.

To be fair, there's no way for me to have known what they were saying to each other, but she eventually let him in. He sat down on the end of the couch nearest me and she sat on the other. His raincoat crinkled when he leaned toward her and put a hand on the plump cushion between them.

Daphne looked away, over toward my food bowls that sat on a mat under a high wooden table that lined the wall between her bedroom door and the kitchen. She got up and filled them, then sat back down.

The man looked at her with pleading, dirt-colored eyes. His lower lip trembled when he spoke to her, then he reached out to touch her hand. Daphne snatched her arm away, then looked him in the eye. She held out her hand and they clasped them together.

"I'm sorry," the man said. He said more than that, but I only know those words because Daphne had said them to me whenever I'd yelped because she stepped on my paws or tail. He leaned back on the couch and looked at her. She scooted closer to him. His arm slid around her small shoulders. She clutched a fistful of his thick shirt in her hand and leaned her face into it, her body shaking and soft gasps sneaking out of her mouth and nose.

After Daphne stopped crying, breathing open-mouthed onto his shirt, her eyes closed; I watched the man kiss the top of her head. He looked at me and smiled, then shut his eyes. He fell asleep soon after, and as I dozed off, I realized that I wouldn't mind if he stuck around and offered her comfort in the ways that I couldn't.

To My Brother, While He's Here

Casey Jordi

Your Volkswagen screamed into the driveway
last night and I thought for sure
you would take out the mailbox. I remember
your friend, whose backyard I pissed
my pants in 12 years before,
pressed his face to the living room window
to let me know that you were passed out
next to your car and he needed help
getting you inside, because he was drunk too.

After I ruined my pants that January,
more than a decade ago now,
you waddled home with me -
the pee had frozen to my legs -
but then you ran away up the street for a few days.
Mom had gotten wasted at the bar on Indiana Ave.
and Dad almost wrung her neck in public, but
we watched him do it at home instead. He wrenched
her into a coiled, thin towel.
We curled into ourselves and the house shivered
like it was about to blow away.
You told me
you weren't afraid to die.

And when most people experience death, they're terrified.
But you have died over and over and sometimes
I wonder if you're just waiting
for the time it sticks.

I dragged you into the house.
You apologized for fucking up, for
fucking it all up. That night 12 years ago,
I was awake when you crouched near my window
and, with your palm against the glass,
whispered to me. My night-light glowed blue
on your lips like Pixy Stix dust.
Did you know I wanted you to come back?
I always want you to come back.

A Thousand Harvests

Hayden Moore

'Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbrum: They went under the lonely night into the shadows'
(Aeneid Book VI)

On the edge of the smoking lands of sulphur flames, the sun seemed to linger on the sea where Scylla's reef was a tangle of bones and the whirlpools of Charybdis had changed direction. The girl walked alone as the shadows claimed those bright places where men were known to haunt. In the twilight of mankind, she was one of the few who still possessed the faculty of speech. Whether it was the strain of Circe, or the strain of lies that turned most of the people in the mining town of Cumae into beasts, was a dead and buried mystery. As she walked through the lonely dusk, Sibyl let her tape player do the talking.

(Tape playing)
'One more night, one more night
I've been trying ooh so long to let you know
Let you know how I feel
And if I stumble if I fall, just help me back
So I can make you see
Please give me one—more—night—'

Screeches and howls from the woods echoed through the woods to Sibyl's left. It was there the misshapen beasts with eyes like dark stars stumbled and trotted with their misshapen bodies. In the town of Cumae, the years were once marked by the Fall Harvest of Hops where beer flowed as surely as the sea onto the shore. Nothing of consequence was growing anymore beyond the ancient trees and creeping vines. The handful of years since the last harvest felt like a thousand for Sibyl. She fast-forwarded the song and turned up the volume.

'Like a river to the sea
I will always be with you
And if you sail away
I will follow you
Give me one—more—night—one—more—'

"Night! Give me one more night! Ooh, Ooh!" A mocking voice sang from the shadows. "Phil Collins? Again? It's kind of creepy if you actually say the words without the music. Oh, shit. Now I sound creepy."

Without protest or complaint to her nightly companion, Sibyl used her thumb to turn down the volume to a whisper and trudged on. When broken asphalt turned to dirt, she knew she was in the Glade of Proserpina. She counted her steps

out of habit as she kept her eyes down to avoid what she knew was on the dark horizon. Her companion matched her steps perfectly but even the music failed to keep the other from talking.

“I’ll burn incense in your honor for taking me this far,” Sybil’s companion laughed. “What’s a girl supposed to do? I’d be alone amongst all these howling fuckers.”

“Great is the gift you seek and I’ll take you to it,” Sibyl said to the other girl, without looking up.

“Right on cue! You amaze me, always. You’re the pattern of all patience. And never forget that—“

“Patience is remembered anew everyday,” Sibyl muttered.

“Exactly! See? Nobody knows me like you do. Not a soul.”

As the stars continued to scatter across the moonless sky, Sibyl could feel the proximity of the tree. For months, she had fallen into the habit of losing herself in the music and never daring to look up until she reached it. When everything was rotting, nothing surprised her anymore, nothing besides the old tree.

“She’s about to do it! Sybil is trying to fight it. Wait for it...wait for it... There!” The girl shouted.

Eyes that were long kept on the broken path were raised and Sybil saw the golden tree with gilded boughs glowing in the night. She stopped her tape, opened the case, flipped the tape over, rewound it and clicked the ‘play’ button.

(Song)

*‘Came in from a rainy Thursday on the avenue
Thought I heard you talking softly
I turned on the lights, the TV and the radio
Still, I can’t escape the ghost of you
What has happened to it all?
Crazy, som’d say
Where is the life that I recognize?
Gone away
But I won’t cry for yest—’*

“My darling willow weeping for the world,” the girl moaned.

“I’m not crying,” Sibyl said, rubbing her eyes with the back of her left hand.

“Sure you weren’t. Well...get on with it. We’ll both be a gathered heap of dust by the time you do it.”

“I’m getting there. Just give me a moment. You talk and talk when you shouldn’t and then you never say anything when you should. Way of the fucking world, huh?”

“You mean our conversation hasn’t eased the weary steps of this journey?”

How far have we gone? A mile...maybe two?”

“Three thousand one-hundred and fifty-three...four steps,” Sibyl said, with her eyes closed.

“Just like I said. By the way, you really should try to brush your hair.”

“You sound like my mother.”

“Did.”

“What?”

“Like your mother did. She’s dead. They’re all dead. Let’s stick to the living, okay?” The girl said in triple time.

“But—“

“The liv-ing!”

“Every time we come here, every night, you always interrupt me.”

“Well, it keeps you on your toes. Plus, I know you better than anyone else.”

Right?”

“Right.”

“Well, that’s settled. Play us a song. I love the oldies. Try to surprise me.”

“Let’s see,” Sybil mumbled, fast forwarding the tape while counting to herself. “Here we go.”

(Song)

*‘There’s no time for us
There’s no place for us
What is this thing that builds our dreams
Yet slips away from us?
Who wants to live forever
Who wants—’*

“To live FOR-EV-ER! WHO—OOO—OOO—OOO!” The girl sang.

“That comes later!” Sibyl cried.

“Well, I sang it anyway. Too late! Now, focus on the task at hand, darling

Sybil.”

“I hate it when you call me, darling.”

“I know.”

Sybil faced the tree and placed the palm of her left hand on the trunk. The cold brass sent chills through her body as it always did. Just above waist height, a pair of golden branches hung parallel to the ground and silver chains held the saucers in place. A little higher than Sibyl’s head, a round clock face with runic symbols was barely visible through the fog on the glass cover. An exquisite carving of an oak tree just above the clock looked ancient from the tarnish and grime of the years and the smoke. A bronze lever hung obliquely on the right side of the trunk of the metal tree, its handle smooth and untarnished.

“Did you bring the offering, or did I?” The girl whispered.
“I did. You forgot last time,” Sybil said to the tree.
“Don’t fuck it up this time, okay?”
“I’ll try.”
“No try, do,” the girl said with a half-hearted impersonation.
“You always were a nerd.”
“Funny, cause we’re friends. Nerd.”
“Shhhhh! I need to focus,” Sybil whispered, searching through her back-

pack.

“I can’t believe you still carry that thing around. What are you, seven?”
“Seven hundred,” Sybil answered, without looking up. “I’ll find another bag in three hundred more years.”
“Sure, that makes sense. A thousand years to grow up. Good round number. And you call me a nerd. Find it yet? I really need to—”
“Got it!”

Sybil laughed as she pulled her hands from the recesses of her tattered backpack. She held the objects before her and marveled at them. In her left hand, a shiny gold dancer made of bronze was attached to a rectangle of marble. The little plaque of red metal on the face of the marble was scratched but still partly legible:

SYBIL _____
CUMAE COUNTY DANCE ACADEMY
SUMMER 1989

“Well, that’s pretty lame,” her companion said.
“Shut up.”

In Sybil’s right hand, she held a forest green music box made of glass. A small plastic key was broken inside the keyhole on the face of it. Sybil shook the box and it tinkled a few notes. She smiled as she stood up and walked towards the metal tree.

“Don’t fuck it up this time or—”
“I know, I know,” Sybil nodded. “Quiet. I need to concentrate.”

Sybil held out her arms with the offerings and tried to match the tilt of the branches of the metal tree. She took a deep breath and held it.

“Don’t forget to breathe! Remember what happened last time,” her companion cried.

Sybil let out her breath and lowered the trophy and the music box slowly onto the saucers at the end of the chains. With preternatural synchronicity, she placed the pieces on the opposing saucers. As the weight of both tilted the left saucer a bit lower as Sybil slowly released them, the dials on the runic clock-face began to spin.

“Here we go!” The girl shouted.

Night became afternoon and morning fell back into night. Over and over the days regressed as the dials on the clock spun faster and faster until the black hands were a singular blur. Sybil watched as the industry of her town was resurrected and fresh smoke filled the sky. People raced by like cars would appear to a person witnessing a high speed chase from the sidewalk. Laughter, cries, yells, wails, old jokes made new, cannibalism, heroism, love, loss, dissolution and resurrection, fire and ice, wet and dry, smooth and cracked, Sybil and—

“That was fun. Brief but fun. Ahhhh, such is life,” the girl laughed.

Sybil looked around and found herself where she had been before, under the stars in the lonely night. The dials on the clock rested at six and her offerings were gone. Towards the base of the metal tree, a slip of tattered paper hung from a slit in the trunk. Sybil sighed as she reached down and pulled it out.

“Well, what does it say this time?” The girl asked.

“Give me a minute. That was intense,” Sybil whispered.

“It always is. Can’t wait to do it again tomorrow night. Hey Sybil, before you read it—”

“What?”

“I um...never mind.”

“No, say it,” Sybil smiled.

“It’s stupid. I’ll tell you later. C’mon! Read it! I REALLY have to—”

“Okay, here goes,” Sybil said, as she began to read the slip of paper. *“My voice alone the Fates will leave, my voice by which I’m known.”*

“How do they always know?” The girl laughed. “Amazing.”

“Yeah, amazing,” Sybil muttered to herself.

“Play us a song!”

“Sure.”

(Song)

‘There’s no chance for us

It’s all decided for us

This world has only one

Sweet moment set aside for us

Who want to live forever?’

“Who wants to LIVE FOR-EVER! WHO—OOO—OOO—”

Sybil pressed stop on the tape player and let the tears fall. The screeches and screams in the woods carried on and the night pressed down on her. Sybil crouched down and held the tape player to her face. She kissed it and pressed the rewind button. After the count of eleven she stopped it and pressed play.

‘That was fun

Illusion

Carlos Lorenzana

Well, what does it say this time?
It always is. Can't wait to do it again tomorrow night. Hey Sybil, before you read it—
I um...never mind

It's stupid. I'll tell you later. C'mon! Read it! I REALLY have to—
How do they always know? Amazing
Play us a song!

Sybil hit fast forward until the tape reached the end. Then she rewound it
for the count of two and pressed play.

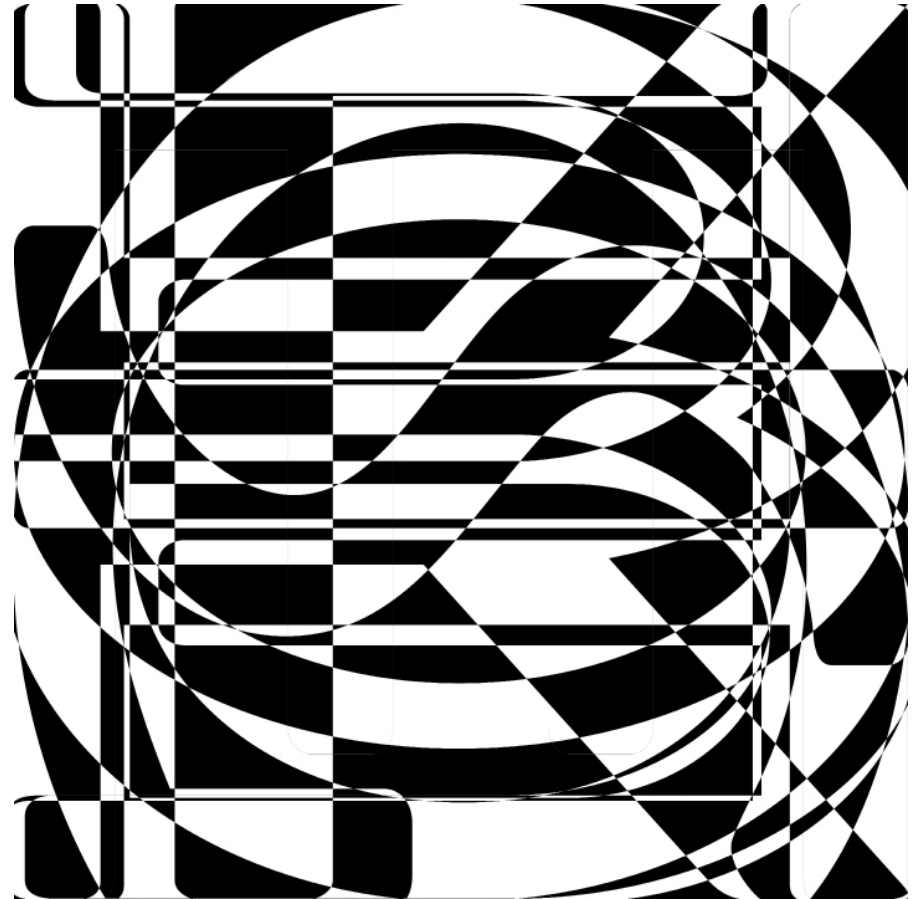
'So I have the courage to tell you now'

"What's that?" Sybil cried.

'Just that I'll always be here for you. Sounds mushy, I know. Hey!

"What?"

'Pick a good song for the walk back'



Digital art

Dinner

Frances Koziar

“Did you find my keys?”

It was the first thing Kalisha’s father said when she came in for dinner. She let the dog off the leash and it hid, but she couldn’t.

She braced herself, reminded herself, changed herself.

She wore chainmail and a sturdy shield.

“No.”

“Did you even look?”

“No.” Explaining that she had been busy, or that he had only mentioned losing them and not that he had wanted her to find them, would only make him angrier. Telling him to find them himself would incite violence.

Exposed in the meadow of her father’s gaze, in the glaring lights of the kitchen, Kalisha said nothing. But half of her—split by the whisper-sharp blade of danger—curled away and stretched out, like a new tendril of a plant, to touch another world.

A key to her shackles, delivered by the forest folk. The dark safety of trees in the distance.

“I’ll have to go look then,” her father said, rolling his eyes angrily, and in the middle of setting the table he left the kitchen. Kalisha flickered like a firefly, slipped away from her life, her body, her stomach knotting with dread.

Flickers of light through the canopy as she reached the trees. Tendrils of dust and shadow and hope.

“Can’t you do that after dinner, honey?” her mother called. She was just turning off the stove, two dishes steaming and ready.

One image overlaid on another: a dream over a nightmare.

Steam billowed up from a cauldron, changing the light, filtering it through the prism of a kaleidoscope. The blinding mist of a spell being cast. Embracing her. Protecting her.

“Do you want to pay for them?” her dad asked from the next room. It sounded like he was throwing things around. Kalisha would have to clean up after him. After.

The mist parted. There—a trail leading out of the forest and to the sea. Away.

Kalisha had yelled and cried and ignored before, and her father had laughed and shoved and insulted before. Now she dissociated, and chose a better realm.

Others joined her. Humans, nymphs, fairies. Others who fled the meadow at the heart of the forest. Others who joined hands with her as they reached the rocky shore.

She and her mom were silent, but the silence roared in her ears. Hidden in it, somewhere, had to be a path that was worth following, a life that was worth living.

The sea, roaring as it crashed against the rocks, ready to defend them. A tall-ship, sails unfurling as they boarded. Planks rocking gently beneath her feet.

“Did you find them?” her mother asked as her dad came closer, hopeful and broken. But there was no reply, just louder rummaging. He was a master of silence.

But Kalisha could use it too, needed to use it if she wanted to survive, to not drown in her father’s power, to hold on to hope.

A song, calling her. It flowed between the spaces in the wind, between the ruptures in the world. It came from the horizon, open and welcoming as the ship set sail. Whispers of beauty and love and freedom. A home.

Her dad sat with a thump on his chair, his lip curling with cruelty. Her mother rushed to cheer him with a beer in her hand. And Kalisha—she was wrenched from her magic, pulled from the safety of oblivion into the glaring lights of a kitchen and a table set for dinner.

The Beginner's Guide for the Aspiring Mime

Jason Visconti

You will obey the rules of the body
no more,

Every pose will be a unique portrait,

Hands will sing a sign that bests
the air,

Shapes that must conform,
But what is mute is always far.

October

Hailey Decker

It's October again. It's been almost two years and I still feel... unstable, like my world could completely shatter at any moment. I've been drinking too much. This fact scares me when I wake up the next morning, shaky, sober, and sick to my stomach, but I feel at peace when I'm drunk. Drinking is how I feel closest to him.

Two ounces of Jose Cuervo silver swirl around in the glass, and I listen to the tinkering of the ice cubes on the sides. It was a shitty drink, lighting a fire in my esophagus with each painful sip, but it does the job. *You're too young to be this fucked up*, I say to myself. After all, today is only my twenty-first birthday. *I'm too young to have dead friends*, I snap back at my internal monologue. I stare into the glass as I keep swirling, hypnotized, hoping that an image of Robert would appear.

Finally, I look up from the glass and there he appears, sitting across from me at the kitchen table, so life-like. A smile forms across my face, knowing that he isn't real, but feeling comforted by his presence.

"Happy twenty-one, Chloe," the figure across from me murmurs.

Rob and I always had our birthday parties on the same day, as our birthdays were just two days apart. My birthday party, not shared with anyone else for the second year in a row, is tonight, and it still doesn't feel the same. I still lack makeup and am wearing pajamas, even though it is almost 3:00 in the afternoon.

"I miss you," I sigh, watching him closely, making sure he isn't going away.

He looked back at me sympathetically, and I know he really is sorry for leaving. He hadn't meant to, it was just... well, it was just how he was and he couldn't help that, not really. I try to conjure a memory of any time when he was clean and sober, but I couldn't.

"Chloe!" Rob called from the other side of the room of the fraternity party we were attending that weekend. "Chloe, come watch me and Chris go shot for shot with each other!"

I approached them slowly, swapping sweat with everyone I bumped into on my way to them. Shot-sized red solo cups in their hands, they patiently awaited my approval. As the designated mom-friend and their protector, I couldn't possibly approve of this. At the same time, I remembered that telling them no would only egg them on.

"I'm watching," I yelled over the blaring hip-hop music.

They downed the first shot, and another, and another. They got down eight or nine - I had lost count - before Chris ran outside to puke in the bushes behind the house. Rob and I followed closely, and I rubbed Chris's back as the alcohol came up the same way he had forced it down. He hadn't had much experience with alcohol be-

fore he got to college, so this happened at almost every party that we went to. On the other hand, Rob was never a good influence, and I tried my best to be one, but Rob always prevailed as the “cooler” one. Rob loved drinking, partying, and bad behavior, almost as though it was a game, seeing how far he could take it until it broke him.

“Let’s get him home,” I said to Rob, already pulling out my phone to call the Uber.

“I remember that night,” Rob chuckles fondly.

“You were a mess, as usual,” I snap bitterly. “And absolutely no help with Chris. Oh, let’s go shot for shot, like, that’s a fan-fucking-tastic idea.”

I hated that I was still so angry at him, but how could he do this to me, leave me like this? I couldn’t help but be infuriated, so much so that I just wanted to throw things at the apparition in front of me.

“You could’ve always left, or said no,” he reminded me in that matter-of-fact way that I had always hated.

And he was right, I could’ve, but I never did.

It was the day before school let out for Winter Break. Rob, Chris, and I were all preparing to go home. I only lived about an hour away from our campus in San Antonio, but Rob and Chris were both from Houston. Chris’ mom was set to pick them up the next day, and Chris and I were both nervous for her to meet Rob.

“What if he shows up out of his mind?” Chris had asked me. “My mom doesn’t know anything about all the shit he’s pulled this semester, and I don’t want her to.”

“I’ll have a talk with him before you leave,” I promised.

I found Rob later that day in his room, listening to some Kanye West album, rapping along with it.

“Oh, hey,” he greeted me, turning off the music.

“Hey, can we talk?”

Rob gestured to the bean bags on the floor and we sat down.

“So, I need to know that you’re not going to pull any funny shit tomorrow when you go with Chris and his mom back to Houston. He’s really freaking out about it.”

“Like what?” he laughed.

“Well,” I said, exasperated. “Just don’t show up half way in the bag, you know? Like don’t have a Forty before you get there, don’t take a couple Xans just because you feel like it, just show up. Can you do that?”

“Yeah,” he said, but I still looked unconvinced. “I promise!”

“Okay, you have to admit, that was fucking hilarious,” Rob laughs.

“No! It wasn’t!” I exclaim. “You did all of the things I told you not to do and Chris’s mom left you on the side of the road!”

“Well, at the very least, the stuff before that was fun,” he shrugs. “You couldn’t have stopped me anyway, Chlo. At least you tried.”

It was about a month after we’d returned from break and Chris, Rob, and I were all hanging out in Rob’s room with his roommate, Jack, smoking weed and talking about life. Rob got up and said, “I’m gonna do another line, anyone want to do one with me?”

Jack and I shook our heads, and I poured us each another shot of Tito’s as a substitute. I fought an urge to roll my eyes. Besides Rob, none of us were into the hard drugs. We all drank a little too much, had plenty of other vices, but beyond the weed, we never ventured to the dark side. Chris said he’d watch, but he only ever watched. Rob and I thought that this was hilarious, but I couldn’t tell if I found it funny because it actually was funny or because I was trying to distract myself from the fact that this was the fifth line of cocaine that Rob had enjoyed that night, along with at least two bars of Xanax, some Ritalin, and an entire 40-ounce bottle of malt liquor. I wished that I was exaggerating. I was starting to think that he was God or something. I’d never watched anyone do that many drugs at one time and survive it. Jack and I looked at each other in disapproval as Rob rolled his dollar bill and Chris watched him, eyes ablaze with curiosity and excitement.

“Hey, man,” Jack started. “You sure you really wanna do another line?”

“Of course I do,” Rob replied easily. “My friend killed himself last week, so yeah, I do.”

We all looked at him, stunned. This was the first time that he’d mentioned this to us.

“Are you okay?” I asked hesitantly.

“Yeah, Chlo, I’m good.”

And then he snorted the line. As if I thought it couldn’t get any worse, Rob began to wail. Not cry, wail. Tears and snot swam down his cheeks as he threw anything he could get his hands on at the wall. Shoes, lamps, books, and empty Forty bottles flew across the room, whizzing past our heads at light speed. It was like nothing I’d ever seen before, but yet, everything was like that with Rob involved. Chris, Jack, and I ran for the walk-in closet and Jack barricaded the door with the dresser.

“What the fuck?” Chris whisper-shouted. “What do we do? Should we call the police?”

Jack and I, again, shook our heads.

We stayed in there for what seemed like forever and came out only when it

seemed quiet. We moved the dresser out of the way of the door and slowly worked our way out of the closet. Rob was asleep on the bed, a little drool around his mouth and residual coke around his nose, lying there in his boxers.

"Is he dead?" Chris asked.

"I wasn't dead, obviously," Rob says, rolling his eyes.

"Not that time," I mutter. "Do you have any idea how fucking scared I was? How much I wanted to take you to the hospital, but Chris and Jack wouldn't let me? Do you have any clue how much I've wondered since then that maybe if I'd just ignored them and taken you to the hospital and called your parents that night that maybe you'd still be alive right now and I wouldn't be talking to a fucking chair? Do you?"

"Chloe," he sighs. "You couldn't have stopped me from dying. It was an accident, you know that."

"It was an accident that someone could've prevented. I could've helped you, but instead, I cut you off and walked away. What kind of friend am I?"

"A nineteen-year-old friend who didn't know any better. But you've gotta get it together, Chlo, because downing tequila all night isn't going to make this any better."

I had had the flu all week. I was finally starting to feel better. I sat in bed on my phone, absent-mindedly watching TV and scrolling through Instagram when I got a Snapchat from a girl that I hadn't heard from in over a year. I debated waiting a respectable amount of time before I opened it, so that I didn't come off as too curious or something, but a voice in my head told me that this was important, so I opened it.

"Robert Manning is dead. I've been trying to reach Chris all day but I haven't had any luck. I know you guys are close, think you might be able to tell him for me? The Dean wants to speak to him. I'm so sorry for your loss."

I had to read it a few times before I realized what was happening and replied, telling her I would get ahold of Chris and thanking her for letting me know. Something about thanking her had always seemed wrong.

I called Chris three times before he texted me back, telling me that he was on his way to go play basketball and that he would call me later. I told him that it had to be now.

"What the fuck is it, Chloe?" Chris demanded when he finally answered the phone.

"Rob is dead."

"What?"

"He's dead. I don't know what happened. I just know he's dead."

We cried together for a while before I said that I would go to his place, that we needed to be together right now. I, after all, was too broken to be on my own.

"I always wondered who told you guys," Rob murmurs.

"I was the first one of us to know," I say slowly, feeling each word leave my tongue.

Remembering that day still stung like it had happened recently, even though it had been close to two years since Rob had been gone. I'd visited his grave with Chris after one year had passed and left bottle caps there, some sort of sick remembrance, I guess. But now it was our birthday, the second one without Rob, and I still don't know how to do this alone.

"Go get ready, Chloe," Rob tells me, and he smiles. "You're gonna look beautiful. We both know you hated sharing your show with me anyway."

I smirked at him, knowing that yet again, he was right.

"I miss you, Rob," I smiled. "Every damn day, I miss you, but I know you're right here with me, always."

I poured the tequila down the drain and traded it for water. Smiling again at my reflection in the window, I turned and walked to my bedroom to get ready. Happy twenty-one, Chloe.

“Inside this statue’s mouth its tongue...”

Simon Perchik

*

Inside this statue's mouth its tongue
was run aground the way wave after wave
each fossil still hears itself becoming stone

and though the sea is just now taking place
your headstone says the darkness helps
--there's nothing else, the voice you hear

is yours, again and again from your lips
as boundary stones, half sealed in the ground
half on all sides the years to come

as some hillside that no longer has its ballast
on the lookout, that waits for a wider shore
hemmed in, using the time over and over

to tighten around those bottom stones
mourners use to bring you nothing that moves
that feeds you salt, was brought by boat.

*

The rag you fold into a loop
knows better, flattening out
where a window should be

though night after night its soot
lifts off the way piece by piece
a sleeve empties into your hand

as moonlight-- it was a dress
motionless, waiting at the wall
for her arm, the usual talk.

*

As if the sun was lost again, its light
crashing into this hillside already covered
with empty bottles, cans and the foul breath

left by a small fire after things didn't work out
--your eyes still smoldering from nights
with enough rainfall for you to come back

healed by tears, by your footsteps wiping dry
what dirt falls from your mouth
as something certain, could be counted on.

*

Every night now you circle the same lamp
become weightless though the bulb
is burning through a gap in the wires

the way madness arrives as darkness
and shoreline-- the usual maneuver
--you reach in for the light

not yet struck by a wall kept waiting
for the sound that has no place to go
hears where the sun is buried

still breathing, lit, over and over
reaching for salt from the emptiness
in this room heated by a bed

and what's left from a window
to put out the wound
reeking from ashes and cloth.

*

Too early? Even so, the sun
is backing out though this orchard
was already tilted into Autumn

Waiting Behind the Sun

Lauren Rose

by the flowers mourners use
to lower one season closer to another
the way every death here

begins as two: an added weight
that heats your forehead
till it touches where the ground

listens for the motherly darkness
made from stone that arrived
as two evenings at once, made heavier

for the kiss beginning a few feet away
still warm, not yet November
is leaving your face thinner, more like bones.

the sun's rays will be warm,
I think.
they'll brush their hot lips
slowly, softly
against my throat
test the pulse of my dying heart
against their teeth.

the horizon will split,
I think.
with a swipe of the reaper's scythe
the sky's crimson blood
will spill across the sunset.

it will be lonely,
I think.
only me
the atoms of my body
whispering goodbye,
the wincing, bleeding sky,
and the reaper waiting behind the sun.

The Dragonfly Effect

Peter Waldor

Your legs athwart me and on
that bone that protrudes from
your ankle for no evolutionary advantage,
a dragonfly has landed.
They are the most skitterish of creatures
but this one is comfortable
resting on that spot and though
humans may be the second most skitterish
of creatures you let it rest. Most people
find them frightening but you
think it's mysteriously beautiful.
So here you are with your legs
athwart me, both you and the dragon
have fallen asleep. Perhaps you are
both awake in your dreams and are
true equals that can ask each other
critical questions in dire circumstances.

If You Could Call It Living

Jacob Browning



Black and white photograph

Requiem for a Featherweight

Stephen Reilly

1.

Whether he wearied of the world
or the world wearied of him, he would
not say, even if he could say. Not that
he's drowning in the hyperbole of self.
You know, when moments are massaged
into mythologies dark,
misty as salt marshes in November,
marshes devoid of tidal pulls, high or low.

2.

Nor does he cling to a world imagined
a half century ago. That's as foolish as driving
with eyes glued to a rearview. He knows
no one grows old in the world
they want to be. Why stick our heads
up our pasts? The sun rises on tomorrow
like it set on yesterday. Mockingbirds mark
territories with their morning songs.

3.

Not that she would agree with him,
but whenever he sketches her, it's late spring,
the season in bloom, Lightfoot and Lennon
on the radio, Maxwell House and Mr. Coffee,

her playful quips, sand spurs in sunlight.
Forecasters called for the afternoon storms.

4.

He tripped up for decades, out of sync
like a poorly tuned Ford traveling gravel roads.
He speculates, not God nor fate, his guide.
Instead, a miscalculated equation, $E=mc^3$,
or an algorithm gone awry. No true north –
or south – he pushed through anyway, any way.

5.

The mundane magical, pleasing to him;
rock doves and sparrows roosting beneath
overpasses, weedy sprouts of roadsides,
gray squirrels like children, house
after house hemmed together with chain link.
Call it home, as much as he can imagine,
a place to hole up and hunker down,
to anticipate and brace for what's inevitable.

Old Familiars

Daniel McKay

The sound passed almost unheard, swept up in the mid-morning air as though the wind itself had compassionately intervened. Briefly, Frank wondered if he'd imagined it, but he knew that was just his mind edging away. There was no doubt on the matter. None. The horse's forehoof had hit the pony girl's shinbone. He'd seen it. But he'd also heard it: a popping sound, almost like a finger in bubble wrap.

Now the horse was exhaling gustily, lip curled downward, its tail swishing back and forth. Frank knew a thing or two about horses but hadn't thought to find one capable of such frivolous malice. The animal's ears had barely twitched as the pony girl collapsed on the ground next to the apple she'd been proffering. That meant something, surely. Scratching his head, Frank figured one of two possibilities. Either the horse was alone among its species in disliking the fruit, in which case why had nobody thought to inform the girl? Or it had weighed the two indulgences and decided that breaking her shinbone was the way to go, in which case what sort of animal was this?

The wound was a fracture. A clean one, far as Frank could tell. That was the good news. But the girl would spend the rest of the year with her leg in a cast, no way round it. Already she was being driven away, her face a streak-eyed grimace behind the glass.

That left the horse. Unmoved in every sense, it continued to survey the scene from the paddock.

Spying the old man's approach, it defecated, snorted, and cocked its head to one side, as if to say, *You here for some of the same?*

Mindful of the pony girl's mistake, Frank stayed a few paces back and mumbled under his breath.

The equestrian school had a resident horse whisperer. Thumbs in jeans, she observed Frank and surmised that he was trying to pacify the animal. But in this she was mistaken. Frank always mumbled, a habit that had grown on him since he came back from the war and tried, against the odds, to reintegrate.

The whisperer sidled up alongside.

"Three hundred," Frank said.

"Come again?"

"For the horse."

She whistled admiringly. "Good one, Frank." Then she saw he wasn't fooling. "Jeez, you got a death wish or something? If this horse didn't have a reputation, it does now."

"Don't matter."

"Might matter some," she replied. "If you'd care to know why."

She knew he didn't. She knew it was the end of the conversation, as far as he was concerned. Of course, there was always the record book, which would back up her misgivings and others' besides. Broken fences, upended buckets, and trampled Winter blankets were how it began. Mere hijinks, at that point. Then came the pasture bullying, a step up the scale. As a behavioural trait, it was known to be difficult. But it was known, for all that. Vicious acts of unprovoked violence, on the other hand, were something else entirely. One trainer swore blind that the horse showed no signs of pain or distress but looked pleased at other creatures' predicaments. Another arranged for it to have an MRI scan, supposing the problem was neurological. In the fullness of time, these barnyard theories broke against the hard rock of the horse's character, which, at the end of the day, was all it appeared to be.

The incapacitation of the pony girl had given the whisperer a few conclusions of her own as to its future. But now the old man had come along and, ever a believer in extra last chances, she was inclined to take the three hundred dollars. It was an easy decision to make. She needed the money and if Frank supposed that the horse was just in a bad mood, he'd get a quick education to the contrary.

As things transpired, however, no education took place, for in Frank's presence the horse became almost placid, grazing and cantering like any normal animal. Even so, the old man wasn't fooled. With subtle cunning, it had quickly measured his temperament as owner, as it had that of his predecessors. Having got that far, it was smart enough to follow up with good decisions and, if they were to get along, Frank had to show that he was capable of the same. Like pistol duellers, they could proceed with the fight or they could delope.

That they had chosen the second did not make them kinder to strangers.

On the contrary, Frank now took the horse's attack upon the pony girl as an auspice of sorts. He wondered whether it might be encouraged to perform guard duties, replacing the dog he'd shot after it went blind. In this, he was mistaken. The horse's inborn hostility could no more be relied upon than it could be discounted. However, Frank did notice that traveling salesmen were less inclined to stop by, as were realtors and Mormon missionaries. Not bad for \$300.

The years went by and, along the way, the regard that man and horse each had for each other deepened into an approximation of friendship, aided by the discovery of certain vices. The horse loved acorns, which were toxic; the man loved hard liquor, just as toxic. Silently, they made a pact: to stay away from these things

unless or until such time as bodily ailments became too horrendous to endure. At that point, a few pulls and swallows would be fair enough.

The dust plume partially obscured the truck, but Frank already knew its occupant from the slouch of the suspension. Even the addition of strut braces and a torsion bar couldn't hide the fact that she was morbidly obese.

It would take time for her to get out, so he went inside for his tobacco pouch.

"Frank, you still here? *Frank!* Oh, there you are. Listen, Frank, I'm sick. Don't blame me, it's either here or the oratory school."

"Doris." He grunted, sitting back on the porch chair. "You told me you weren't using."

Breathing heavily, the woman took a few steps forward, noticed the horse and pointed with her cane. "Is it true what they say about him?"

"Never you mind what they say. Answer the question." It hadn't been a question, but that was no matter.

"I'm not going to lie. I need a halfway house to come down off it, or –"

"Off what?"

The horse nickered and began approaching. In its advanced years, this didn't mean much. Most of the time.

Frank took out some acorns and tossed them his way, giving Doris a chance to catch her breath and negotiate the front steps.

"Carfentaniil," she gasped at the top.

He leaned forward and spat. "Took the quickest exit you could find, huh."

"You're my brother, Frank."

This was a statement of fact, as undeniable as it was unwelcome.

"Help me out. If I can't stay here, where can I stay?"

Frank considered. There were a number of answers he could give, but Doris would make a scene before he was rid of her.

"They use that for animals, don't they?"

"Don't start, Frank, it's been a long drive."

"Tell you what, give me a straight answer and I'll let you stay over."

That brought her up short. Taking out her smartphone, Doris found a webpage, tossed it on the table, then went inside without a word. Her wheezing didn't improve much when she was seated, which probably meant she was done for the day. This left Frank alone with his cigarette. He took time over it, then reached over and picked up the phone.

It turned out to be sleeping sickness. The local veterinarians, a bunch of seedless rai-

sins, wanted hazard pay on top of their usual fees and so diagnosed the problem too late. Still, Frank accepted that a large measure of responsibility lay on his shoulders. He'd ignored the symptoms too long, though several of these, in all fairness, looked mighty similar to how the animal had behaved when healthy.

He wasn't one for putting things off.

Sidling up, Frank noted its reaction: one ear pricked forward, the other back. No other horse ever did this.

"How's it going today, old thunder?"

One step at a time.

He gave its neck a gentle pat. "I hear that."

You?

"Been better."

Are we all set, then?

"If you say so."

Ah hell, let's get it over with.

Holding out a hand, he gave it the acorns and the drugs all together, then went to the flank and stroked the way the hair went. At least half of it was white now.

Gradually, he felt the heart slowing, the breath growing heavier, the legs beginning to wobble and buckle.

"That's easy, now."

Wiehiehie, this is some good smack, man!

"Figured you deserved a send-off. Whoa, whoa...there you go."

The horse was lying prone now. In the distance, he could see Doris staring out an open window at them. Ignoring her, he kept his face toward the horizon until the rise-and-fall of its chest gradually ceased. Only then did he go back.

"Did that horse –?"

"Yes," he snarled. "Glad you noticed."

Frank went into the basement, crowbarred open a casket of bourbon, and had a long libation. It was the start of a process that, as he saw it, would last only somewhat longer than what the horse had gone through. When the bottle reached halfway, he took out Doris's phone and dialed Don't Ask Phil, the traveling taxidermist.

Don't Ask's skills at taxidermy had begun as a side-line during the war, which provided one (unwelcome) explanation for the nickname. Like Frank, he'd experienced adjustment difficulties on his return, though for a while he'd made good money. Rumor had it that he'd lost his licence for the same reason his wife left him: disgusted by her hairless terrier, he'd uploaded its bark into her car's software, amputated its head, and attached it to the grille. This provided another (welcome) expla-

nation for the nickname.

Don't Ask was ready to start immediately, but warned there was no way to hurry the tanner. Once that part was complete, the taxidermal procedure could be done in a week, easy. The tanner, though, worked to his own clock.

Frank readily accepted the terms. Let it take as long as it would take.

Doris had been told that the truck was part-payment: hers to Frank, then Frank's to Don't Ask. This seemed fair enough. The truck wasn't worth much anyhow and her stash was back in the house, far as she could recall. But in this she was mistaken. The truth dawned on her after she'd turned all the chairs upside-down, bringing with it her nastier side.

Frank saw Doris coming at him from way off. It was no surprise. Her habits were cyclical and he rewarded his sister by recycling the usual method of dealing with them. Lashing her to the bed, he pumped 60mg of methadone into her system, then went back to the porch with the bourbon as company. All in all, it hadn't been the best of days and now there was nothing left but contemplation, arguably the worst moment of the lot. Still, he could steer clear of certain things by focusing on the purely practical. Frank was childless, but Doris had an estranged son up in Alaska somewhere. To this nephew Frank had left all his property and belongings, such as they were. Doris hadn't been told of this. Her time on this earth was drawing to a close and it was even odds whether she'd get to the finish line before he did. If she came through her current bout, though, she'd have a roof over her head for the time remaining.

Only the taxidermy was excluded in Frank's will to the nephew. It would mean nothing to the young man, and the horse deserved better than a blank stare. Rubbing his forehead, Frank turned his thoughts to its corporeal afterlife.

The animal's youthful temperament was now remembered by the wider community as quirkiness of spirit rather than raw-bloodedness, a form of sentimentality that deserved correction. Frank had told Don't Ask to fix it in a pose and expression that would serve as a reminder. A month later, the delivery was complete.

"Her?" Doris exclaimed, staring up at it. "You sure? Why would she want it?" Now it was her turn to help Frank, whose legs had weakened.

"Probably won't. But figure it might remind her of something. We all could use a little of that."

"But still. Did Phil have to make it so...you know?"

"Man after my own heart."

"He's an artist, gotta hand it to him. What's it called, that expression?"

Frank gestured upward. "His?"

"Yeah."

"Technically, that's the flehmen response. I call it the unrepentant look."

"Sounds about right, what I've heard."

Nobody who saw it disagreed, not even the pony girl (now a woman). As she'd read Frank's obituary in the local paper, her mind recalled the encounter with the horse, backed away from it hurriedly, then reassured itself. There was no need to worry, for the creature was surely dead and gone by this point. But then had come a knock on the door, followed by the hustle-bustle of deliverymen and a curiously large package.

Now it was in her living room.

Years of therapy had equipped her with a suite of calming exercises, including prayer mantras and progressive muscle relaxation, all of which, she told herself, had led to this point. Counting her breaths, she'd skirted around and forced herself to focus on the particulars. The raised foreleg, she thought wryly, was a nice touch. But even the best efforts of the taxidermist couldn't hide the fact that it was in its dotage. As she walked, she briefly pondered Frank's intention. There was no note attached, so she pretty much had to decide for herself. *Memento mori*, then, or *memento puellae*, more aptly? Both applied. Perhaps Frank had been an unwitting Romanticist, savoring the raw energy of life even in its most errant manifestations. Well, she hadn't known him.

Having finished her circumnavigation, she reached for her phone and called her husband. Was he done for the day? Fine. Now, if he wanted to drop by the supermarket, would he please fill a can of petrol as well? He would? Well, wasn't he the gallant type!

That done, she eased herself into an armchair. The day wasn't quite over, but she could treat it as such. The evening sunlight was beginning to fall through the windows, lovely as ever, and outside there were leaves scattered on the lawn. That was fortunate. They would provide a certain amount of protection.

Acknowledgments

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Matthew would like a personal, special acknowledgement for Maddy.

As always, thank you to the staff, for your dedication to *Cardinal Sins* Without you, this wouldn't be possible.

To SVSU, thank you for all you have invested in the journal. We hope you enjoy the finished product.

To all we've forgotten, thank you.

Best regards,
Madeline Bruessow
Matthew Blum

Biographies

Hi, I'm **Matthew Blum**, and I spend my time: chasing my cat, petting my cat, and doing homework with my cat. I just spend my time with my cat.

Kristin Boyles is a senior Creative Writing major and the editor of the Opinions/Editorial section of her university's newspaper. She minors in Professional and Technical Writing.

Jacob Browning contributed several artwork pieces to *Cardinal Sins*.

Katelyn Brownlee graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University in the Spring of 2020 with her BA in English. She loathes long walks on the beach but does enjoy piña colodas and occasionally getting caught in the rain. Her lifelong dream is to be the official spokesperson for 7-Eleven Slurpees.

Madeline Bruessow is a reporter, editor, and award-winning poet. She is currently working towards her B.A. in English Literature with a minor in Rhetoric and Professional Writing. She probably spends too much time writing and her poems appear in *Still Life*. When not working on her next piece, you can usually find her daydreaming or haunting a local coffee shop.

Mark Cassidy was born in the UK, emigrated to Canada, lives at present in Texas.

Megan Cassidy was a member of the writing committee.

Italian and Italian History Teacher **Virna Chessari** is the author of the bilingual Italian/English Poetry collection "The Ulysses Butterfly La Farfalla di Ulisse". Some of her poems appear in *Straylight Magazine* and *Blue Lake Review*. She has found in English the right notes to express her inner world and her missing words.

Daniella Cressman is a freelance writer who lives in New Mexico. She adores her dog, Jasper, plays the saxophone, and appreciates the finer things in life. She plans to move to New York City when she becomes rich and famous.

Hailey Nicole Decker, a lifelong writer, is a Texas State University graduate and resides in Blanco, TX, part of the heart of the Texas Hill Country. She enjoys spending time with her animals, a great bottle of wine, and has been described as "sexy and brilliant" by those closest to her.

Adam Dietz contributed a nonfiction piece to *Cardinal Sins*.

Sarah Doudna teaches ballet and writes a blog about it called *On The Way to The Barre*. She is an actor in zoom classes and has a day job that distracts her from playing with her kittens, Ziggy and Zoey. She is from Hawaii and lives in New York.

Megan Draper is majoring in Creative Writing with minors in Spanish and Professional & Technical Writing. When she's not climbing the Great Wall or eating empanadas in Argentina, she enjoys watching superhero movies with friends. You can find out more about her writing at www.authormeganriann.com.

Kee Ferguson is a creative with a penchant for mischief and chaos. Self-proclaimed Angry Bean with the memory of a goldfish and curator of ideas big and small. They thank their cats for helping them get where they are today, namely, out of bed and in front of the computer.

Jonathan Ferrini is a published author who resides in San Diego. He received his MFA from UCLA in motion picture and television production.

Claudia Geagan contributed a nonfiction piece to Cardinal Sins.

Dante Gray is an English teacher currently working in Kyoto, Japan. They received their degree in English Literature and Language at Tennessee Technological University in 2019, and their work was published in the university's literary journal, *The Iris Review*.

Casey Jordi is in his final year at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where he's studying Secondary English Education with certificates in ESL and Bilingual Education. He lives with his girlfriend, Liz, and their weird dog, Cookie (who they found on the side of the road in Tennessee). He's not sure what else to include, so that's about it.

Nazli Karabiyikoglu is an author from Turkey, now a full-time resident in Georgia, who secluded herself from the political and gender oppression in Turkey. She was awarded Writer at Residence program in Prague by UNESCO City of Literature 2020 and Writers-in-Exile Scholarship by PEN Germany for 2021-2023. She reads for Theta Wave and Trampset, conducts interviews for Marias at Sampaguitas.

If you stay by the cart, **Kim Lacey** will bribe you with muffins and mac and cheese.

Madison LaCourse is a Creative Writing major, Professional/Technical Writing minor, working for Cardinal Sins as a copy editor; she also plays the electric bass in the Cardinal Marching Band and is part of SVSU Women's Club Rugby. Her dream jobs include author and scriptwriter. Her favorite color is yellow.

Scott Laudati is the author of *Hawaiian Shirts In The Electric Chair* (Cephalo Press). Visit him on social media @scottlaudati

Keeping nature's existence close in mind, **Carlos Lorenzana** aspires to create abstract art which reflects the interdependence amongst all surrounding. Everything cannot exist on its own. The art explores a theme relating to Buddhist Principal, "form is void"- meaning that forms are inseparable from their content.

Brent Lucia is a professor of business communications at the University of Connecticut where he conducts research on virtual reality systems and textual artifacts. His writings (both academic and creative) on technology and language have been featured in *The Rhetoric Review* and *Textshop Experiments*. He currently lives in Harlem with his wife.

Daniel McKay teaches at Doshisha University, Kyoto. He is no good at writing catchy bios, preferring instead to horse around and watch the world go by. He neighs objectionably when politicians make asses of themselves, but, against the odds, does not believe the world is going to hell in a haybasket.

Hayden Moore was born and raised in Georgia and has lived in New York City for the past thirteen years. In the past year, he has been published widely in various literary journals. By the end of the year, his novel, *Sky Tracer*, will be on bookshelves through Vraeyda Literary. It is a work of Fantasy that explores identity, climate change and power. He lives with his wife, dog and the looming spirit of Luci the Cat, on the waters of Jamaica Bay in Queens.

Mike Mosher is an Art Professor at SVSU who has created collages since high school when saw those of early 20th c. German & Russian artists. He has participated in the "Brain Cell" Mail Art project of Osaka, Japan since 1985 with contributions like these. Sometimes collages serve as the basis of his paintings too.

Martina Reisz Newberry's newest collection, *BLUES FOR FRENCH ROAST WITH CHICORY* is available from Deerbrook Editions. She is the author of six books. Her work has been widely published in magazines and journals in the U.S. and

abroad. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband, Brian, a Media Creative.

Nam Nguyen is a multimedia artist who enjoys writing stories, singing songs, and photographing anything with meaning. He has been published in *Toho Journal*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Cirque*, *J. Mane Gallery*, *Sunspot Lit*, *The Ephimiliar Journal*, *The Esthetic Apostle*, *Ember Chasm Review*, *The RavensPerch*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Havik*, and *Chestnut Review*.

David Nichols is a distinguished professor of philosophy and respected member of his community who damn well better get for his breakfast cereal the kind of brand that has marshmallows in it.

Nick Olson is the author of *Here's Waldo* and Editor-in-Chief of (mac)ro(mic). Originally from Chicagoland, he now lives in North Carolina. He's been published in *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Hobart*, *decomp*, and other fine places. Find him online at nickolsonbooks.com or on Twitter @nickolsonbooks.

Misty Page is a creative and hardworking writer. She graduated from Mitchell Community College in Statesville North Carolina and works as an office manager for her father's company. She has been featured in *Black Petals* online magazine for her short stories "the Demon" and "A Game of Chess". Now she continues to spread her writing career to share her thoughts with anyone she meets!

Mark Parsons received his MFA from the University of Arizona. His poems have recently been published or are forthcoming in *Dahlhousie Reivew*, *The Floor Plan*, *I-70 Review*, *Cobalt Review*, and elsewhere.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Family of Man Poems* published by Cholla Needles Arts & Literary Library, 2021. For more information including free e-books and his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" please visit his website at simonperchik.com. To view one of his interviews please follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSK774rtfx8>

Maria Ranger is a work in progress.

Stephen Reilly's poems appeared in *Charon*, *Albatross*, *Wraparound South*, *Main Street Rag*, *Broad River Review*, *Cape Rock* and other publications. One of his poems appears in the anthology *Florida in Poetry: A History of the Imagination* (edited by

Jane Anderson Jones and Maurice O'Sullivan, Pineapple Press, Sarasota, Fla. 1995). Reilly works as a staff writer for the *Englewood Sun*, a daily Florida newspaper.

henry 7. reneau, jr. does not Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Instagram. It is not that he is scared of change, or stuck fast in the past; instead, he has learned from experience/: the crack pipe kills. His work is published in *Superstition Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Rigorous*. His work has also been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net.

Lauren Rose has a BFA in Creative Writing from Sierra Nevada University. Her previous work has been published in *The Coachella Review Blog*, *Peregrine Journal* Issue XXXIV, *Running Wild Press Anthology of Stories*, Volume 4, Book 2, and others. Follow her on Facebook @lauren.rose.102, and Instagram: @rose_lauren.e.

Alicia Shupe is a fiction writer and poet who completed a Master's degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from Purdue Fort Wayne in 2020, and will begin an English Studies PhD at Illinois State University in Fall 2021. This is her poem marks her publishing debut.

William Snyder has published poems in *Cardinal Sins*, *Atlanta Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Southern Humanities Review* among others. He was the co-winner of the 2001 Grolier Poetry Prize; winner of the 2002 Kinloch Rivers Chapbook competition; The CONSEQUENCE Prize in Poetry, 2013; the 2015 Claire Keyes Poetry Prize; Tulip Tree Publishing Stories That Need To Be Told 2019 Merit Prize for Humor; and Encircle Publications 2019 Chapbook Contest. He teaches writing and literature at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN.

Michael Stein runs a website on Central European writing called Literalab and is an editor at the Prague-based journal B O D Y. He has written reviews for journals such as *Asymptote* and *Transitions*, and his fiction has been published in *The Missing Slate* and *McSweeney's*, among other magazines.

Suzana Stojanović studied literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Niš in Serbia. She is the author of the book *The structure and meaning of the border stories of Ilija Vukićević* and also recipient of the numerous international prizes in the field of art and literary creativity.

Edward Michael Supranowicz grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. His poems and artwork have been published in the US and other countries.

Jeremy Szuder; 15 years as a musician, graphic design work, 25 years of self-published Zines, fine art, 10 years deejaying, and continues to have illustrations and poems published by fine art and literary publications across the U.S.A. and Canada. Jeremy Szuder lives in Glendale California.

Michael Tyler writes from a shack overlooking the ocean just south of the edge of the world. He has been published in several literary magazines and plans a short story collection sometime before the Andromeda Galaxy collides with ours and...

Jason Visconti has attended both group and private poetry workshops. His work has appeared in various journals, including *Allegro Magazine*, *Grasslimb*, and *The American Journal of Poetry*. He especially enjoys the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Billy Collins.

Peter Waldor contributed a poem to Cardinal Sins. This poem, "The Dragonfly Effect" is part of a book called *Something About the Way* which was just released from Kelsay Publishing.

John Walser's poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Spillway*, *Water-Stone* and *december* magazine. His manuscript *Edgewood Orchard Galleries* has been a finalist for the Autumn House Press Prize and the Ballard Spahr Prize as well as a semifinalist for the Philip Levine Prize and the Crab Orchard Series First Book Award. An English professor at Marian University-Wisconsin, John is a four-time semifinalist for the Neruda Prize.

A Whittenberg is a Philadelphia native who has a global perspective. If she wasn't an author she'd be a private detective or a jazz singer. She loves reading about history and true crime. Her other novels include *Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood and Maine*, *Life is Fine*, *Tutored*, and *The Sane Asylum*.

Jordan Williamson likes to write poetry and flash fiction and plays guitar to his cats and this seems like a bad Tinder bio but it's not, I swear. He also is really good at Super Smash Bros. Seriously, you should play him sometime. His Switch friend code is SW-3007-5021-8834.

Allie Wisniewski is a poet and photographer, currently residing in northeast Florida. Her work explores her connection to the natural world as well as memory, perception, and sense of place. In her free time, you can find her crafting carefully-curated playlists, reading magical realism novels, or soaking up a sunset. Her work explores her connection to the natural world as well as memory, perception, and sense of place. In her free time, you can find her crafting carefully-curated playlists, reading magical realism novels, or soaking up a sunset.

Submission Guidelines

All general submissions must:

- be submitted through (<http://cardinalsins.submittable.com/submit>)
- include multiple submissions for a single category in one document
- not contain any contact information within the attached document

Text submissions should:

- be in 12-pt. Times New Roman font, single spaced, with 1" margins
- include the title at the top of each page
- be attached in .rtf, .docx or .doc format

- Poetry should be no longer than 70 lines
- Flash fiction should be no longer than 1,000 words
- Fiction should be no longer than 3,750 words

Artwork/Photography submissions should:

- be 300 dpi or greater and have high contrast and sharp definition
- be attached in email in either .gif or .jpeg format

- Note: photos that have been manipulated with a computer program should be submitted as artwork, not photography

Maximum number of entries

- Submit up to 3 poems, 3 flash fiction pieces, 2 pieces of fiction, and 2 pieces of creative nonfiction
- Submit up to 5 artwork and photography pieces in each category
- You may submit to as many categories as you would like

Prizes and Judging

Prizes will be awarded to SVSU students, faculty or alumni in each of the 7 categories we publish: poetry, fiction, flash fiction, black & white photography, color photography, black & white artwork, and color artwork.

Outside SVSU artists and writers are free to submit and are eligible for publication; however, they may not receive compensation for a general submission category prize.

Staff reserves the right not to award a winner in a particular category if no submissions are judged worthy of the award.

The SVSU-affiliated winner in each category will receive \$100 and recognition within the publication. All submissions will be entered into their respective category's contest unless otherwise requested.

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Online Gift (<https://foundation.svsu.edu/Sins>)

One-time gift

Multi-year pledge (_____ years)

Monthly recurring gift (credit card)

Please print your name(s) as you would like to be recognized

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Total of \$_____ charged to my Personal card Business card

Type of card: Visa MasterCard Discover American Express

Credit card number _____

Exp. date _____ Security code _____

Name of cardholder _____

Billing address (if different) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Gifts to the SVSU Foundation are tax-deductible on your federal return if you itemize deductions rather than take the standard deduction. The resulting tax benefit is based on your income tax bracket. Individual circumstances will vary, so please check with a tax advisor.

Please detach this form and mail it to
SVSU Foundation, 7400 Bay Rd., Wickes 398, University Center, MI 48710.