

The Bend

Poetry Editors:
Kim Koga
CJ Waterman

Prose Editors:
EddieJoe I. Cherbony
Levi Bronson Sanchez

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EddieJoe I. Cherbonny
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Bendies
Donald Cowan
Elijah Park

Front & Back Cover Photo
Tasha Matsumoto

Front Cover Design
Jen Penkethman

Content Formatting & Design
EddieJoe I. Cherbonny
Levi Bronson Sanchez

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F o r e w o r d

Bend
over.



the editors

Cyndi Vander Ven

DÉPRESSION: UNE PENSÉE

de scent
deep hollowed throat
great grey wings and milky breasts
you shroud-wrap your dark children, suckle
them as you lay light to rest in old tombs

Desmond Kon

DESIGNER DRINKS AT SUB ZERO

to let go, our cupola love of first flares, sudden flax
massive music, beat mixer on three decks

any correspondence reads like a lover's promise
it's possible to say the aubades never mattered

it's possible to be as detached, labels, cold water
because epithets are cheap, effete;

like a good evening out, feigned angst, faux fur
flashcard sommelier when he says it is he who loves

more than everyone else; it is he who doesn't spin
language games; his visions never left tepid

daymark pickle, snivels, yellowing in a jar;
but is this sea chant and table salt?

quizzical himself; the egg has lost its ostrich shell
in vinegar, moon illusion;

show them body armour, what happens anyway
the servile possibility of it, bouguereau in a bounce

3 HAIKUS AND 3 IAMBS: A NON-PLANAR TRIANGLE

thkeindogmotheaisnevi
kealchmerntlaokoi3ngorffien
perawlshne4he5fuondonfeograt
velauehewnte4awyaadnsodlevetthy
inhgahedandbhtouigt6maewtht

Emily DiFilippo

THE PIONEER

There is only one photograph of you, and it was taken after your life was finished. Your eyebrows are heavy and dark, your face surrounded by the white of a wimple. The black veil covering your head is a vow of death, even in life. But it is joyful death, it is freedom from all things of the world. Your body was of no consequence; it was only what carried you.

As children, we were shown this picture. It hangs in the school, low enough for a first grader to see. But we were not afraid. We were sent to kneel before the sarcophagus with “Mother Duchesne” engraved along its shining flank. Your bones did not frighten us, either.

The shrine where they laid you is simple, the walls are tall and white. They built it as they thought you wanted. They cut the altar from cold Missouri granite. Every morning, a Sister practices the organ. The metronome ticks and the sun shines on her white hair. They brought you the crucifix, the one from the Visitation Convent in Grenoble, in France. From when you, too, were a child. They tell me it is lighter than one might expect. Below the corpus is inscribed, in old French: “O bon Jevs crvcifié povr novs sauez novs.”

They say you had a talent for sewing. Here is a chair you were mending with cowhide. Here are pieces of dolls’ furniture that you made for the children in the infirmary. Two hundred years later, their upholstery is still scarlet and rich.

Outside, there are still children, girls in plaid jumpers, boys in knee pants. Red sweaters. No doubt they learn their prayers in French as I did, in the words that you left us. The children will always be here.

* * *

On the day of our First Communion, we made a circle in your parlor, reciting our prayers to the Blessed Mother, to the Sacred Heart. The Sisters gave us each a rosary, white beads, with a case marked “My First Communion” in gold. On the walls around us hung tall portraits of the girls who preceded us in the last century. We wore matching white dresses: long, ruffled, unflattering. We did not wear veils—we were discouraged from the sin of vanity. I wore thick glasses with tortoiseshell rims. It is said that you were expected to grow up beautiful, until smallpox scarred your face.

Your childhood was in the province of Dauphiny, where you loved animals and the outdoors. Even before the Revolution, you listened to the tales of missionary priests who had walked the valley of the Mississippi. When you heard names in the native languages, you wanted to be with the people they described.

It was the turn of the nineteenth century when the Sacred Heart found you. Perhaps he was in a garden, under oak trees, his robes greened with moss, heart pulsing against a ring of thorns, releasing flames. Maybe he pointed to this spectacle, or maybe his arms were outstretched. It was after the Revolution when he called to St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, when she formed the order of the Religieuses du Sacré Coeur. Madeleine Sophie is the patron saint of school girls, they told us. They said we should pray to her when we struggled, that through her, God would enlighten our minds. Her statue stands in the Vatican—I saw it when I was fifteen. She was up high, her marble veil lifted by celestial wind. I was proud to see a saint I knew there, in the drafty shadows of St. Peter’s Basilica, so far from the classrooms where we learned her name.

To you, she was Mother Superior, and she would not send you to the New World. You had a vow of obedience. But DuBourg, Bishop of the Louisianas, knocked at the Motherhouse door seeking teachers and missionaries for his diocese. Then it was decided that you would cross the ocean. You were named Superior of the American Mission. You were forty-nine years old.

The year was 1818, the voyage to St. Louis in the Illinois country was six months. There was a comet in the sky.

When you landed at the Port of New Orleans, you found the moss strange, hanging as it does from the cyprus trees. The people told you it was good for making mattresses.

* * *

The Sisters who taught us wore the Sacred Heart blooming at the center of their profession crosses. The girls’ school was a chateau with white stones and towers.

We wore skirts for field hockey and lacrosse. On your Feast Day, we ate sugar cookies shaped like oak leaves, with orange and yellow icing. This is because your name, Duchesne, means “of oak.” And we did not say they were cookies; we called them *gôûter*, in the French.

The day we graduated, we wore wedding gowns. The threads of brocade flowers shimmered in the sunlight, gold signet rings heavy to our unaccustomed hands. On the rings shone the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, bleeding together side by side. We carried roses.

When you arrived in the Louisianas, you thought you had come, finally, to teach the Gospels to the native peoples. But the bishop sent you to St. Charles on the Missouri River, a village so remote that you wondered if your letters would ever reach France. But you acted under holy obedience. You opened the first free school for girls west of the Mississippi.

In St. Charles, you wrote, the children's fathers liked to drink, their mothers liked to dance. Each little girl made her own pair of shoes and her own dress. The people didn't know how to respond properly at Mass.

I think of your Sisters here. One of your company had been presented at the court of Napoleon. As Mother Superior, you insisted that the holy Rule be followed, even in the American wilderness. In the winter, your drinking water froze in its bucket, even set beside the fire.

I have been far from home and seen a signet ring like my own on the hand of a stranger. There are many of us. For our sake, you endured the frontier.

Here is a set of sterling silver spoons, sent with you across the Atlantic.

* * *

I have often passed your statue at the corner of Clark and Second Street. There is a child at your side, your student. I also grew up to be a teacher. In my desk drawer, I kept the rosary the Sisters gave me for my First Communion.

In 1835, your school in St. Charles looked out on trees and hills. There were orchards, filled at night with fireflies rising like green sparks. You planted a pear tree, and the girls sat with you beneath it. They were gentle girls, with faces like the flesh of the fruit that dropped around them. The only natives you saw were a few elderly people, converted to Catholicism long before.

You were seventy-two years old when the Jesuits took you to Kansas, to the lands of the Potowatomi. The other white people wondered why the Fathers would bring such an old woman, but you were determined. You thought you would bring God, the divine you had found in the cathedrals of

the Old World. But in these damp forests, filtered with green light, buzzing with wings, here was God already.

They say you were slow to learn languages, that the words of the native people were, for you, only sound. No flame descended with the gift of tongues. Still, the children watched you. In school, we learned the story of how, while you prayed at night, a child scattered corn on the hem of your habit. The next morning, the grains had not moved. The people named you, in their language, “Woman who prays always.” You lived among them for only one year.

Here is a wooden statue of the Blessed Mother, carved for you by one of the Potawatomi.

* * *

Here is the room where you died, the planks of the floor wide and the color of coffee with chicory.

Those who came after you raise songs and light candles that reach toward where you are.

In Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, your image is set in shining mosaic pieces, high up on the ceiling. You embrace a native child who offers you a handful of daisies.

Your name, the name you carried in life, is inscribed by the Polish Pope in the catalogue of saints.

Jessica M. English

THE CARTOGRAPHER

We read the bird
on the pavement

like some foreign map,
river crossed

at the throat,
bridge of ants

migrating south.
I'm certain the open

bone points
toward some barren

corner folded & creased
at the break

in the sidewalk,
& the beak

barely open
as if to say

look, we are all
fragile as an egg.

Stephanie Magdalena White

CARTOGRAPHY OF AN EVENING

Bedroom

I'd like to read this naked. Maybe because
you're in your office, settled, maybe because
I have an afternoon alone—
I take off my bra, lie face down,
read like I'm floating, submerged

Kitchen

You pour wine. We make pasta
in tandem and eat on the couch.
We wash dishes, our hands
skinny-dipping.

Living room

The tv entertains you. I am a glass
full transparent—you see only
the light reflect off my surfaces. I spill
onto you. We make love,
get ready for bed.

Bathroom

We get ready for bed. I dry my face
on the towel you use to dry your face,
your stomach, your—

You leave the room when I pee, close
the door behind you—even though
we live alone, even though
you've seen it all.

NOOSE OF THE CORMORANT

If angels were capable of envy, they would envy us...our suffering.

-Sr. M. Faustina Kowalska

A few things about no longer being a mother: eating half a single serving of plain cheesecake still frozen, *before* dinner. With a beer. Still frozen--the cheesecake of course--because I find that the firmer the cheesecake, the mellow the tartness of the cheese becomes, the greater space the graham cracker crust can take against the tongue. It crumbles and spreads while the cheese collapses into itself and settles into a cold sweet mass. Sort of a misstatement actually, "plain" cheesecake. Coldness makes a better marriage of flavors, they don't compete quite as much with one another in the mouth.

Cheesecake before dinner. That's just one thing. Another thing... Another piece! De-freezing on the counter, *triple chocolate*. Ironically, triple chocolate will be *for dessert*. Of course thawing triple chocolate because the chocolate becomes enriched, alive when it warms from frozen to cool, when the ice crystals surrender to the softness of the chocolatey cream and smears over the tiny firm nuggets of the mini-est chocolate chips. That's two things.

So, good mothers don't encourage dessert before dinner, even half slices not yet thawed, and they certainly don't keep secondary desserts on deck for after the three courses of picked-over leftovers that pass for dinner on a Monday night. (Weekends, eating out., alone A smidge of potato salad, two skinny dried out slices of barbecued brisket... I know why I bothered filling a family size to-go styro with such dainty leavings...) I don't even bother dirtying two plates. Brisket. Microwave. Eat the potato salad from the styro, the pasta from Saturday will still be good so there it goes, onto the plate, cover with damp paper towel to catch the splatters (a neat mama trick, count that too) and heat till not too cold to eat. No need to heat to hot then wait to cool, there's cheesecake waiting.

Without them, the kids, and him, I am left alone to burp without muffling, to fart loudly and often, to take leisurely, magazine-reading, door-open shits.

Without the littlest one, I don't have to stir veggies (don't overcook, they're are losing vitamins fast) while balancing him and letting him "stir" the air close but not too close, with his own spoon. A kiss for his baby hair, my lips damp with sweat from cooking steam, he wiggles free, heads to the fridge, watch, watch, move the magnets--who put them so low? There goes the school picture order form, fuck! (I didn't say it *out loud*.) Under the fridge, I'll have to remember to stick a ruler under there, later.

I dirty so few dishes now, my dishwasher yawns when I open the door. I can complete an entire week's worth of laundry in three washes: lights, darks, towels with sheets. As I hang my work pants on cheap clip hangers I think of how often he would confuse my tank tops for hers. He would hang everything that didn't have a cartoon on it in my closet; Tinkerbells and the like in hers. Tank tops her mother bought her, lacy-edged things too old for an 11 year old, he would assume were mine.

I did say her mother, yes, she has a real mother, the woman who gave birth to her and to the two boys, the 20 year old and the two year old. Three children, 20, 11, and 2. She gave birth to them all and they are hers, and his, but for a little time, part-time, they were also mine.

I made a confident corpse during that time, so filled up by a borrowed life, life so completely not-mine that I might as well have been dead. His life, theirs. But it happened so fast, the routine, the closeness, it's like I knew no other life and had a right to it, to be in it.

Saturday mornings he would wake early, unable to break his weekday pattern, and would flip on the TV. *Turn*, he'd say and I'd roll to one side and we would curl together, a cashew. He would fit tightly behind me, or me behind him, until he would hear the baby. He would jump from bed, roughly, and come back, shirtless, wearing only flannel pajama pants, his hair matted down on one side, holding his son. I would still be curled over how he had left me, and the baby would crawl across the bed, using my back to pull himself up to a wobbly stand. I would roll onto my back, pulling my tiny sleep t-shirt into place, and I would just look at them both, savor them.

How can I explain making three types of eggs (round for one him, the baby and me, round two when his daughter woke and finally, a third for the 20 year old), in threadbare pajama pants and bare feet, my glasses smudged from where the baby tried to grab them. Washing pots, crushing eggshells into the garbage disposal. What do you do with a two year old and an eleven year old on a Saturday morning? TV, then showers, a mid-morning nap for the baby, laundry. Cleaning out the fridge (we grocery shopped on Saturdays late, after the kids all went to their mother's), making lists of what everyone wanted for lunch in the coming week and sometimes just hours of play on the floor—puzzles, baby books, Wii and Scrabble.

I felt closest to him then, when we were all together, the crowded intimacy of pajamas, passing the butter for toast, taking turns in the shower. Mine was the only coffee his son would drink, my French toast the only kind his daughter liked (my secret: pumpkin pie seasoning sprinkled into the batter.) Some afternoons we would spread out blankets on the floor while the sun sank and the baby stacked toys in his playpen, his mother running late to pick them up. The twenty year old would be in his room and he and I would watch a movie his daughter had picked, she and I propped on pillows, his foot touching mine from wherever he happened to sit.

He loved to make homemade salsa. The food processor was mine, I brought it, and he fed me salsa from chips as he added each ingredient: a little more salt, a touch more vinegar, what about now, not too much garlic...

he knows I can't eat a lot of raw garlic. We both loved spicy food, hot food, when it was hot enough, maybe just one more jalapeno? We giggled, agreed.

Saturday nights were ours, mostly. About half the time his son would stay home, not visit his mom and the friends he had by her house, so the three of us would smoke pot and watch TV, laughing and snacking. He was so generous to me when he was high, he would make popcorn so I could sit and stare and fall into the blissful stillness. It struck me odd that we would do drugs with his son, but we were all home, safe together, which seemed better and after a while, I got used to not only being surrogate mom who made a third batch of eggs but also dad's girlfriend for whom he'd open the garage door a crack to let out our smoke.

He never drank in front of his kids because drinking made him mean, and he knew this. When all three kids were with their mother, we would make dinner. He could get so excited over food, feeding me from his fingers a taste of a perfectly seasoned catfish, a spoonful of 9-fire chili. We would drink, me slowly, a glass of wine, a single bottle of beer, and him with thirst, a man who'd held back and waited and could now let free. We drank but didn't come together in the moments we had to ourselves. Without the kids, his kids, it was like we became strangers again, he would sit on one couch, work on his computer, I would sit on another, work on mine, watch TV shows without regard to their appropriateness for children. I was there so much I brought almost everything that was me to his life, my hobbies, my belongings. In the kitchen, my gadgets and some tools, in the closet my dense, plush towels mingled with the threadbare hodgepodge he had collected over time. So in those evenings of being alone together we would have our drinks and our hobbies and our time until it got so late that I laid into the blankets on the couch and closed my eyes.

Let's go to bed, he'd say, and I would, reluctantly. Bedtime and booze awoke his demons.

I never understood how a man who had a daughter could be violent with a woman, especially a man who has permanent custodial care of his daughter five days a week, and every other weekend. I never believed that he couldn't see that the same little girl who he tucked into bed every night, whose maxi pads he bought at Walmart, who he grudgingly took shopping for bras when it was "time", was me, would be me. Could he look at her and say "I don't care" if he hurt her and she cried? Could he really push my face down into the pillows to muffle my small sad sounds and not see her?

It might seem obvious, a no-brainer that the first time, the very first time a man hurts a woman, that women, today, with boisterous magazine covers and divas on TV shouting with colors and designer clothes and hair extensions about enough topics to fill a daily time slot 365 days in a row, women today who get hit or hurt would RUN. They would leave, right sista, get up and get your things, and LEAVE that man. Ain't no man gonna treat you, nuh! Don't look back, don't look down, look him in the eye, give him back his keys and GO! No. No. It isn't that obvious, it's not, is it? Not when you're a mother five days a week and every other weekend? When you

rationalize every choice and obligation in your daily routine so it can be explained to an 11-year old?

If you air dry your bras, they last longer, they don't tangle around other clothes in the dryer, scrub dry skin from your lips with a washcloth, wear or carry your zipper-pocket sweatshirt when you have your period, you can zip pads in the pockets and no one will know because no one in sixth grade carries a purse. Put the freezer pack from lunch bag in the freezer right when you get home from school, eat the gummy vitamins *with* your lunch (don't throw them out, at least tell me if you're going to throw them out so I don't waste the money buying them.)

And realistically he doesn't HIT, he hurts in a way that makes me think he hates me, he hates some part of me that is better than him, that is smarter, kinder. I don't hurt him so he hates me for that. Or maybe he hurts me because it truly pleases him, to stick himself inside me while I can't enjoy it, while a trace of fear tenses my back, when I'm braced and not relaxed and welcoming. It's sometimes a game. Are you ok? Yes, keep going, just finish. I lie, because to admit to the hurt would be to let him win. So he goes on, knowing that he will have to hurt me more before I will admit to feeling it.

He pulled a knife once, an act so preposterous and so early on. My reaction was extreme—tears, mild hysteria, and *What* would you do if someone did that to your daughter? I believed that although that was an obvious question, it begged to be asked. How could he not know? It was a joke, he came up behind me while I did the dishes and I leaned back into him when he put a kitchen knife to the side of my neck. He didn't mean it, he gets that it wasn't funny but he wasn't going to be punished by me for it. I cried and he stormed around the house for two days, shouting at the kids and avoiding me entirely and to them I cannot explain why, of course, nor can I fix it.

Six months, that's all it was, but in that time I understood why women don't leave, why they eat salsa from a chip hand-fed to them in the same day that a glass full of water is thrown in their face before they are sworn at, sneered at and pushed face-first into bed before sex that hurts. The baby, and my bare feet and the board games and folding all of our underwear together, one basket. In one basket, see?

Would I have liked to have excised his demons? To have learned one of those jack-n-coke nights why he was so angry, why he pushed his anger into my body as a way to relieve it from his? Of course, I wanted to know, to understand. But you can't ask a man like that those questions, you can't explain anymore the complicated flavors that blend together to create that pain, no longer the parts but only the soup at the end of the boil. What would I have done to have eased what hurt him, to have proven that I wasn't against him, that he and I, beneath the blankets, his nose tucked deep into my hair were on the same side. What should I have done.

Now I watch a lot of true crime, graphic shows that would not have been suitable for children. It's amazing once you look for it how much around us, on billboards, on magazine covers, in plain sight, is truly inappropriate for

children, for little girls who notice things and can get hurt by them. I watch forensic TV, true life shows, not the glam dramas, I watch real medical examiners determining causes of death, I watch experts gather clues and create stories that make sense from the blood splatter evidence and single shard of glass. I am particularly fond of Snapped, a show about women who kill, and truly, the irony doesn't occur to me for a long, long time.

I check out videos from the library that only I would be interested in. The 1940's British Sherlock Holmes episodes, musical classics, documentaries about obscure people and animals. Ballets. She wasn't actually into ballets, but I am.

A two-DVD documentary chronicles the declining antiquities of China: rebuilding of infrastructures and tiny deaths deep in the ecosystem means that water that was previously held back now erodes carvings on walls that are thousands of years old. In less than one generation the carvings of millennia will be gone, expressions on the faces of walls deliberately scraped away. Endangered monkeys. The few who remain survive in small, tight-knit families on carefully monitored preserves, impassable to outsiders, even those with altruistic missions.

I left at the end of a ten-day angry spell. I had done something this time, had pushed a button. I asked a question so obvious it should have been off-limits, but I couldn't not touch that spot, not reach out to feel the roughness and the texture. I loved him. No flaw was distasteful, I just wanted to know. At night when the kids were in bed we tried to reclaim our sanctuary, we sat alongside one another, the TV turned low, a box fan blowing fresh air in through the window. Our legs were parallel under the blankets, he on his side, me on mine, and the poison spilled from between his lips, soaking the blankets and sheets. I felt soaked and I shivered, but no matter how I trembled, he would not stop. My weakness, rather than curbing his fury, fed it. The days became stiff, I walked quietly on the stairs, I watched my breathing and held my tears as though I would fall with them.

My smile for the kids was sickened with effort, with strain. I leaned over the counter to kiss his cheek when he got home, flinching. The songs of our Saturday mornings poured through my mind, I pictured the baby in his sleepers, my hair pulled back while I cooked. I thought about her, about how someday she would grow up and maybe ask why I left, or at least wonder if she didn't know who or how to ask. I thought about what she had seen and what she would remember and it hurt me more to think that she might have a knife pulled on her someday, that someday she might be face down in pillows and would have no idea what her mother would tell her to do.

I learned that for over a thousand years, the cormorant has been the bird dog of fishermen. Trained and leashed, the birds wear nooses specially fitted to prevent them from swallowing entirely their catch. Fishermen in traditional water-repellent straw skirts and kimono draw their birds into the lake where they entice the birds to catch fish in their gullets. The birds, leashed, return to the boat and are forced to disgorge the fish into primitive coolers. Today, cormorant fishing is economically viable thanks to tour

companies, which offer river cruises where cormorant fishing can be witnessed close up. For a fee, you can look into the boat, peer into the water at a farce done up for tourists. Every 13th or so fish, the bird is rewarded with a loosening of the noose, a fish it can swallow, small motivation to keep them from work-stoppage, from sitting tail on the open air boat and rebuking their training. To keep them from refusing. I hope someday that she understands, although I wish she would never have to know, that I tried. That not the first, but the second time I found a knife at my noose, that I cut it. That I refused.

LUCIDITY

She wanted to grind. Feel her hipbones push, push, push into the hard flesh of a man, her sweat mingling with his. She was sweating already, she could feel one bead, then another, form and then slide. Slide down her cleavage, to pool in her navel, roll into the waistband of her jeans, jeans whose crotch was tight enough to rub her swollen flesh. Maybe it wasn't sweat. Maybe it was condensation, the ice inside her beginning to thaw from the heat of the bar, the heat of her thoughts.

And her beer was empty. She caught the bartender's eye. It wasn't hard, he'd been watching her all evening, and lifted her finger, made a slow circle. He nodded in that too-cool way that said he'd be happy to be the one to pound her into oblivion if that was really what she wanted. A couple of anonymous bodies on a hot July night, fitting Tab A into Slot B, never any different no matter who was involved, a good time if everything fit the right way and the chemistry was there. An empty bang, like the thud of a dud firecracker, if the mixture wasn't quite right.

Either way was fine tonight. It would be a way to pass the time, to fill the hours in which she wouldn't be sleeping. Sleep never came, even after she did, no matter how early she had to be at work the next morning. At 35 her biological clock hadn't started ticking, at least that she noticed. Instead, it seemed intent on keeping her awake for at least 20 hours a day. Her manager loved the fact she could - she would - pull together a major presentation in one all-night session and looked like she'd gotten a full eight hours as they put on the dog and pony show the next day. It made going to graduate school while working a full time job possible. But there were only so many ways to fill her nights.

Tonight she could stay up and work on spreadsheets, she could play games on the computer, look for new blogs, become a voyeur into the lives of people she'll never meet. She could even work on her MBA project. That was the best option but she'd lost the thread of where her research was going a long time ago. She was going through the motions, taking notes she feared she'd never use, reading articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Ad Age*, *Fast Company*, citing sources, letting the details, the minutia carry her along to a destination she didn't care about any more.

In the giant flow chart that was her adult life, getting an MBA had happened because nothing else had. It was something to do besides work beside some other too-cool guy behind the bar in a big city while she looked for

something meaningful. Not that she would even recognize meaningful. Was it doling out meals in a homeless shelter, thankful she wasn't one of them? Was it fighting boredom while endlessly repeating "that's chair, remember? C-h-a-i-r, chair," to a second grader who's empty stomach and crack-addicted mother were bigger problems than not being able to read at her grade level. She'd done both and realized meaningful wasn't the empty gestures she was making., hoping she would feel like the world was a better place because she'd put forth some effort that cost her nothing.

Would meaningful be marrying to Leo, her almost/sometimes boyfriend and starting a family she wasn't sure she wanted? Would it be losing herself in a summer-long trip to Europe?

The bartender slid down to end of the bar, handed her another Heineken with a nod. She passed over her money, told him to keep the change, already bored with the rendezvous they hadn't shared.

This was her fourth or maybe it was her fifth. She'd had two with a group from work, ending their day as they did on most Thursdays, with a couple of drinks to ease the transition from work to home. She had one after they'd left. Or was it two? She was walking, it wasn't a Thursday before a football game when every road, street, sidewalk around South Bend turned into a life-sized arcade game and dodging cars became an art form, so it didn't really matter how many she had. Seven and she'd have a hangover but tomorrow was a floating holiday and she intended to float into it.

She took a drink and the strap of her camisole slid down her arm. She felt the softer air of the room glide over her left breast, caressing it in a way no man ever had. She didn't look but knew, if anyone cared to see, that the dusky upper half moon of her aureole was showing, dimpled with tiny goose bumps mimicking the erect nipple below it.

A burst of laughter from a table just inside her peripheral vision broke through the static of her thoughts, like a clear AM station in the night. She glanced over and caught the eye of the one person at the table who wasn't laughing.

Her impression of him came through as if she was looking into a kaleidoscope, the colors broken and joined, his red hair, thick and long enough to curl along the ends, an azure shirt like a glimpse of sky in the dark room, eyes the color of good Scotch whiskey, the liquid amber of his beer.

A smile played around the edge of his full mouth as he took a drink but his eyes were on her. On her breasts, taking them in in a way that made her want to walk over to him and bare everything, straddle him right there in front of his friends, feel his long, slender fingers on her face, her hair.

The dizzying, dazzling array of color and his glance made adrenaline pour through her veins, mixing with the alcohol, becoming a heady elixir of possibility and longing. The heat of it ran through her, evaporating through her pores, the icicle inside finally gone.

She turned away, pretending to become engrossed in the baseball playoff game on the flat screen over her head. She could still feel his eyes on her and wondered what he was thinking. Did he like what he saw? Most men, some women, did. She could look in the mirror, see the symmetry of her bones, the taunt muscles running had given her. Good genes, she guessed. She certainly didn't lavish much time or attention on her face or body. Running felt good, an endorphin rush that almost rivaled sex, and it was something she could do just about anywhere, anytime. She enjoyed the feeling of her feet becoming their own source of energy, power flowing up through her thighs, then back down again, a cycle complete and self-sustaining. Some days it felt as if she could go forever, a machine whose purpose was nothing more than pure movement for its own sake.

It was one of the only ways she knew to turn her brain off, too, her moving feet stilling the hamster in a wheel feeling in her head, circular thoughts about work that wasn't working, what to have for dinner, how to stretch her finances far enough to go to Europe next summer, being with Leo, a trip to Europe as a way to get away from Leo. Sex with the bartender, sex with the guy at the table, either of them would be a way to turn off all these thoughts for half an hour or so.

Her beer was nearly gone and she needed just one more before she headed back to her apartment with its stacks of books, papers, empty coffee mugs piled in, around the sink, an empty bed. Her phone chimed, signaling a text message. "Luce, we're at Corby's, Leo says to get over here, that he wants you." Leo always wanted her. Sometimes she gave in. Sometimes she didn't. Tonight would be a night she didn't even if it meant a series of texts, increasingly frequent, from him and anyone else he could con into sending for him, followed by calls she wouldn't answer, wouldn't even see until she turned her phone back on tomorrow morning. She flipped it off. Conversation over.

The other bartender looked up as she slide her empty bottle onto the bar. "One more, please," she said, the first words she'd spoken in more than two hours, since telling Leo over the phone that she'd catch up with him later.

She looked over at the laughing table from the corner of her eye, acknowledging she was joining the bar ritual of sorting, theme and variation on a dance as old as fossils, identifying who might leave with who that evening. And knowing in a single moment of lucidity that here was her chance to move beyond a flow chart, a life of fitting Tab A into Slot B, the emptiness of meaningless gestures.

The seat at the head of the table was empty, a small pile of bills resting there. A rush of disappointment went through her, intense and cold. No more colors, no watchful eyes playing over her. The moment of possibility was gone and only longing remained.

Jessica Maich

DIAGNOSIS, OR DARK CLOUD OVER ALL OTHER CLOUDS

The Doctor said that brain cancer is so interesting
in that it spreads like a drop of kool-aid on a paper towel.
I thought about his resectioning knife
and what part of him I'd like to use it on, given the chance
to stop grieving long enough to act.

Calling everyone and the list of people
waiting to hear swells into a tsunami.
Swimming upstream, their questions
full of hooks, shredding my story and splintering
the tiny wooden boat I were building.

And there was you, dismissed from regular life,
spot lit and sidelined simultaneously.
We put on soft shoes and cheeriness,
sat in a house of naps and quiet, waited
and watched you, because there was still you.

Jennifer Stockdale

CONSIDERING YOUR WILL

but who will get
the glimmering wisdom
tooth in your jewelry box?

A NOTE

Remember not to drink
From the ceramic pitcher with
Flowers on it—
Dad put poison in it
Accidentally—
I hid it
Just in case

(Love Mom).

Dónal Kevin Gordon

ALL RELATIVE

For my friend, my dear friend, John Matthias

I cannot, this minute, think
of anything sadder than
this,
that at eighteen I was young,
that at thirty older,
and that, now, as I tip toward sixty,
I am old, so very old,
and yet still young, so very, very
young.

TO FAKE A MARRIAGE

Without fear of contradiction, Izzy knew that within the six-foot three-inch hunk that was Gabriel Parish, any woman would find her fantasy man. Isabel Peabody, with a name so awful she would never forgive her father for impregnating her mother on that fateful night he didn't wear a condom, thus passing the name along, wanted to quit her job so badly. Hadn't she been carrying around the resignation letter for over a month? In an attempt to change her life, Izzy began with her physical appearance, starting with shaving her head, discovering she had a few hidden moles in the mirror, and painting her nails hot pink. She even quit wearing pantyhose, but bought short-skirt suits and shaved her legs clean every Monday in the shower.

Watching Gabriel Parish, *Mr. Parish*, her boss, flounce around the office watering his own plants and organizing files made Izzy feel worthless, as if her job as secretary not only demeaned her, but all the other paper-pushing floozies who wanted to bang his/her boss big time. And he was hot. So hot. Mr. Parish's pupils dilated like a humongous garbage disposal. He didn't even have a vague curiosity about why his secretary, aka personal assistant, would be standing behind him, watching him bent over, his haunches in the air, while he emptied the plastic green watering can into a leafy office plant.

"What of it?" he growled, and turned to face her.

"Mr. Parish, you have to pick a wife." Izzy put her hand on her hip and dared Parish to feign confusion by thwarting her attempts to make him make a decision, which is what bosses are supposed to do (make decisions, that is). Gabriel Parish would never pick a wife in real life. His spine was like infant cartilage, but he had the back muscles of a rock climber. Sometimes Izzy caught him staring at his own forearm muscles, twisting his wrist to make the veins bounce. Watching his anti-reality, Izzy learned that Gabriel had a slew of sexy, naked women dancing through his door, jumping around so that their breasts bounced extra high, revealing augmentation surgery scars, flinging their legs in the air while fucking, only to show that they put in the extra ten minutes to shave a sloppy lightning bolt into their pubic hair. She'd heard stories of women holding him while he cried himself to sleep.

"A wife, Mr. Parish. I put together a portfolio of women who applied for the job, organizing them by hair color and height, just like you like." She inspected her nails for paint chips.

"Do I like 'em tall or short?"

"Short, Mr. Parish." *At least that always seem to be the type wearing your old football jersey in the mornings when I get here.* Izzy rolled her eyes, pissed that her boss had a personal room (plus bathroom) attached to his office. For as often as Gabriel went home, Izzy would bet her meager

stock share that there was dust on the tables and mold in the last-used coffee filter, still in the pot. Probably melted bananas hanging from the banana tree in his kitchen. If he had a banana tree. Or a coffee pot for that matter.

Swinging the portfolio above her head like a monkey with a banana, Izzy shrieked, "For the Yum-Yum account. The owner loves kids and only wants to work with a company run by a man with a family. That would be you, sir."

Izzy could see past the door leading through the bathroom into the bedroom where the blankets and sheets had suffered a large impact potential; she dared not think of what happened last night. Just because her boss was ripped didn't mean she had a right to snoop into his personal life. Parish's personal life took place thirty feet away from her desk, and she wasn't certain that no one had taken the courtesy of NOT having sex on her desk, the drawers banging, the movement mixing up the pens, highlighters, paper and binder clips, the rubber bands shooting out of their coffee mug labeled "Life's a Beach" and snapping onto the walls, knocking off the picture of a deer drinking out of a wooded brook (the painting was there when she was hired and did not suit her tastes). *Get your head right, woman! Your boss is not any of your business! He is just business! Mutate the world and thrive!*

Mr. Parish walked into the adjoining bathroom and washed his face in the sink, careful not to get water on his suit, black, with light blue pinstripes and a light blue dress shirt. He wore a tie of indistinct color, and Izzy wasn't sure if it even matched. The faucet shone gold, the countertops a marble polished to a high shine. A tiny bar of soap still in the wrapper marked "Face Soap" stuck out to her. Izzy's own bathroom counters in her apartment were plastic, an orange marbling color, and the faucet had hard water minerals stuck around the knobs that she couldn't get off with cleaner and a bristle brush.

"Bring me the portfolio, Peabody." His voice sounded like a patient awakening after surgery through the towel drying his face.

"What portfolio?"

"Snap out of it, Peabody. The wife. The woman. Whatever, let's just get this over with." Izzy shaded her view with one hand and slid the book across the counter with the other.

"What's the matter, Peabody, your sex life in the toilet? You look like you've never seen a man wet."

"Your face washing hardly makes you 'wet,' sir."

"Indeed." Watching as his eyes skimmed over each picture and description, Izzy couldn't help but realize, for the millionth time, that Gabriel Parish's eyelashes were long, like slides in the playground at the park. She wanted to give that ride a try, when she realized he was staring at her.

"Do you smoke crack?"

"No, sir."

"Then why the bald head? You look like a Nazi."

“Why don’t I carry the portfolio while we walk to your desk? There is an 8 o’clock meeting with Baxter Sports Equipment. We have a lot to do today, Mr. P!”

“Don’t call me that, Peabody. You make it sound like part of a Muppet song where we get today’s letter.” Izzy straightened her shoulders and marched to his desk, legs straight like a Nazi, while her boss following behind like a handsome dog, juggling putting on his watch and straightening his tie.

“Would you rather look over the portfolio during a lunch? I could book us two seats, just the two of us, and we could check out the women together.” Gabriel looked at her with a newfound interest; his drab assistant might be a lesbian.

“Sir, sorry, sir.”

“Now is fine.” The two bumped hands in the transference of the book, and Izzy sat opposite his desk in the chair usually reserved for clients. She watched as he slowly flipped pages, reading each description, sucking up the contents.

“Read these to me, Peabody. I want to imagine this wife. Describe her like she’s real.”

“All of these women are real, Mr. Parish. As in, they exist enough to have applied for this job. As in, each one turned in an application. As in...”

“For Christ’s sakes, just read.”

“Janet, 32, single, red hair, 5’6”, hair dresser.

Maria, 28, divorced, blonde, 5’5”, receptionist.

Helana, 30, married...”

“Married women applied for this job?”

“It’s just a paying gig, sir. There are no *benefits*.”

“I see. We’re talking sex. Peabody, read the descriptions like you’re a woman. You know, make it really real. And put on a sexy voice. I want to be convinced that I’m going to marry this showboat.” Izzy paused and envisioned the resignation letter in her red leather purse, sitting in the envelope she licked with her own tongue, sealed with her own hand. She remembered learning how to lick her first stamp at her grandparents’ house, them yelling at her that the glue would dry before she ever stuck the flap down.

“Isabel!”

“Hay, baby! My name is Shannon. I love long walks on the beach,” she takes a deep inhale and releases it in a moan, “and pina colodas. Right now, I’m single, but I’m always looking for a good time, baby. I want to be a nurse’s assistant, but right now I’m up for fun.” Izzy sucked on her bottom lip. “Oh, and I’m 24.”

“Sold!” Gabriel stood, twirled Izzy, kissed her mouth like an awkward brother, and left the office. “Call that one and tell her she has the job!” Izzy could kick her own ass and tell all the twenty-something’s of the world to fuck off.

“Would you like kids with that?” She laughed at her own meager McJoke.

*

Isabel Peabody and Gabriel Parish arrived at the airport to meet up with Shannon. They were to meet for the first time, get on the plane to the tropics, and meet the Yum-Yum tycoon. Of course it was in the tropics; where else could the elderly man possibly do business? Shannon was late, and Gabriel chewed at his nails, gnashed his teeth like an alligator, repeatedly picking up and setting down his briefcase. Izzy was almost embarrassed when he stomped his foot twice and crossed his arms over his delightful chest.

“DAMN-it!” He was nearly at tearful levels when a beautiful younger woman approached them with her right hand extended and her left cradling her cheek.

“Shannon?” She nodded. “You’re impeccably late. Do twenty-four-year-olds have something better to do?” Shannon adjusted the ankle strap on her tediously high stiletto.

“Gabriel, I assume. I was at the dentist. No biggie, just a cleaning. Want a great smile for the week-long marriage! Mrs. Parrot!”

“Parish, idiot” Izzy hadn’t meant to throw in her two cents, but this was as stupid as putting out the trash bag the night before, allowing animals to scatter rotten fruit and dried pads up and down the sidewalks. Izzy shivered.

“What’s with your face?”

“Scuse me?”

“Your faaaaaace.” Grabbing the woman’s check with a pinch her mother used to dole out punishment, Izzy knew something was up, that this bitch wasn’t going anywhere. Shannon screamed, blood and pus spurting from her mouth all over Gabriel’s shirt and Izzy’s purse, which she held in front of her face to block the blast. Shannon screamed, running in circles, trying to hold her mouth closed with her hand, but unable to stop the gore from rocketing out. With one final spin, Shannon fell to the floor and lay on her back, legs straight out. “You bitsch. Sheesh a bitsch, Mishter Parrosh.” Gabriel’s eyes filled with crystal tears.

“Peabody, I don’t understand? What does this mean?” He looked at his shirt and blotted the blood with a napkin, doing no good, missing the streak of yellowed pus across his neck. His chin quivered a little before the heavy flow of tears spurted down his handsome sun-tanned olive cheeks.

“Sir, the woman has several impacted teeth. I worked for my uncle’s dentist shop when I was in high school. I know a pus bag when I see one.” Izzy shook her head at Shannon, tsk tsk, pretending she was sorry to make up for the pain the woman felt, as Shannon curled around on the floor like a snake being poked with a stick.

“Bitsch,” Shannon peeped.

“Dentist shop?” Gabriel questioned.

“Well, I suppose this means cancelling the trip. Of course, you’ll lose the Yum-Yum account, sir.” Izzy stood with one knee straight and the other bent at a strong angle.

“Fuck that. I’ll take *you*.” Leaving Shannon on the floor to be scooped up by airport security, Izzy realized she didn’t even have clean underwear or a toothbrush with her, but she phased out to dream of scrubbing her canines up and down with Gabriel Parish’s own tool of hygiene.

*

Before she could blink an eye, Isabel Peabody was flying toward Miami. However, Isabel Peabody was completely and utterly pissed with Gabriel Parish, who not once considered that she wasn’t a puppet or a prostitute, and that she wouldn’t dream of lying to an old geezer with a company name as cutesy as Yum-Yum. She wanted to yank out a testicle hair. Or several.

“Mr. Parish, I won’t do it.”

“Excuse me? Who asked you?”

“The puppet fights back!” she screeched, miming cutting her own marionette strings and dangling dead in her seat. Gabriel was not without laughter, a sound that bounced around the first class section and caught on to other passengers like a virus until the area was filled with, “HA ha. HA ha. HA ha. She’s soooo cute! HA ha. Thinks she can make her own decisions! HA ha. HA ha. HA. HA. HA. ha. Must have her period!”

“I’ll give you a raise! One week’s holiday pay! Double holiday pay! How does that sound, Peabody? And flowers on your desk once a month, so it’ll look like you have a boyfriend, instead of a stick up your ass.”

“Like bribery?” She knew that he knew that bribery would work because he was so handsome, and no woman ever said no to Gabriel Parish. Even if he cried. In fact, a lot of women were into men who shared their feelings via their eyeballs. “You’re going to con an old man into believing you have a wife who makes you dinner and secretly wipes the piss off the seat without complaint so you can make a sale. A buck, sir.”

“A big buck, Peabody. This account could change the way people look at me.”

“You’ll have to quit being a crying sniveler for that to happen first.”

“What was that, old girl?” Old! Isabel Peabody was far from old, and she had the stringy thong to prove it! On the other hand, she truly knew that Gabriel Parish worked miracles when it came to advertising, and by the time he was done working his magic hands all over the body of the Yum-Yum baby food company, the owner would have gold rims on his wheel chair when he retired.

“Mr. Parish, I won’t do it.” Izzy turned her chin up in defiance, but Parish wouldn’t take no for an answer. He never did. She wouldn’t mind being his real wife, a woman who was equal partners with her husband, each taking their appropriate turn changing diapers and making dinner that included ingredients like garlic cloves and white wine. They would have sex every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday morning, before going out to breakfast for pancakes and free coffee refills. Her attention was drawn back to the present situation when she realized Gabriel had taken off her black pump and was kissing up her leg, nibbling and licking as he went.

“Mr. Parish! I’m asking you, nicely, to back the fuck off!” Gabriel sat back in his seat and immediately reclined his chair, his fingers linked behind his head in a relaxed pose. She almost wished he would just fire her, because she obviously didn’t have the balls to quit a job she didn’t like, and instead had become infatuated with her weepy boss. Minutes grazed by and Izzy thought she was going to freak out if the issue wasn’t resolved. She had her purse. She had the letter. She wasn’t going to pretend to be his wife for a week when she pretended every day in her head, like a girl with Barbie and Ken bopping down the isle in their wedding clothes.

Then again, if Yum-Yum baby foods needed her boss’s help, they might be in real trouble. Mr. Parish’s services didn’t come cheap, and Izzy knew the old tycoon was out of touch with reality; the last commercial she saw for the product was a giant dancing jar of baby food, the woman inside dolled up in black tights and high heels. It reminded her more of the old 50s movie pitch for selling concession-stand food, the old pretzel, soda, popcorn, hotdog, and jujubes, than new young parents who also shaved their heads and carried cloth grocery sacks. They probably ate organic and worried about their carbon footprint.

“I’ll do it, but I want double over time.”

“We’ll have to get you a wig, Peabody.” The boss promptly fell asleep.

LUNG CAPACITY

In bed
beside you,
I hold
my breath
because I think
you are listening
and get anxious
when you pay
such close
attention,
not sure
how to respond
when you ask why
I'm breathing
so deeply.

Francisco Aragón

THE BRIDGE

Black raven in the snowy night.
Black rat by the river
in the undergrowth.

In that inky dark we found a sleigh.
But for the black velvet on her shoulders
her whiteness drove away the dark

in me, along with her voice, languid—
singing of southern nights.
There was something birdlike in her

odor, her heart a feathery thing
as if a sign insinuated itself
as we began to cross. The water

was a bottomless pit from which
I felt like having a sip,
the moment enough to want

to sink my fangs into her shoulder.
Drawing air through the falling snow
a burning flower began to sprout

in her—the white wind, our breath
intoxicating: Valentina is who
she became, my star, my dream, O how

her nightingales sang to the core
of me, before the terrible world
began again to emerge

on the other side where things
are too narrow for the heart. It lives
in me still: the delirium

of those kisses, the dark
snare of her songs,
the swift flight of comets.

Black raven in the snowy night.
Black rat by the river,
in the undergrowth.

after Alexander Blok (1880-1921), with Elena Shvarts (b. 1948)

DREGS

(César Vallejo)

It's raining more
than ever my heart

can hardly bear
the pain the afternoon

gentle and why
shouldn't it be wearing

its grace its grief
like a dress showers

over Lima now
and the cruel

cavern of my
ungratefulness

returns block
of ice crushing

her poppy
harsher than her

Stop that black
and abrasive are

my flowers my stone-like
blow enormous

the space between us
glacial and so

the simmering oils
of her silence swiped

the finishing stroke
and that is why

at this moment
an owl burrows

in my chest and women
walk by sensing

my sadness the deep
furrow of it

a trough
they sip from rain

and more rain
O how I

can hardly bear
this pain

IN THE GIFT SHOP

Recalling what he saw in the huge
aquarium,
the boy, 2, when asked by

his father “¿Cómo se mueve un pez?”
moves
just so, from side to side,

his chosen rubber toy.

for my nephew

Shannon Doyne

HOW WE LAUGHED. UNTIL WE DIDN'T

The New World didn't come to us. We did not wake up one morning equipped for it. We didn't have equipment, or maybe all those years, we were building the wrong piles.

We couldn't bring the piles anyway. They had to stay in The Used World. We didn't trust it any more, the world or our piles. Toward the end, they seemed like nothing but slippery shoes.

We swore we had blankets, more blankets than this. We stacked serving platters but we seldom hosted dinners. Someone said wearing the shoes is the only way they stop slipping.

So we fell in the marble lobbies and the doormen acted like they'd help us if we only let our eyes look vulnerable. We walked and our bloody knees made the knees bloody on our good

dress pants, our hosiery. And things got sticky, itchy and the blood came again, just when the scab seemed solid. It caught on a fiber of wool gabardine, we slammed it on that metal thing

under the desk. We were adults, we had titles, we were the fire marshalls on our floors, we had reached a certain altitude on the organizational chart but we had scabby knees and slippery

shoes like children whose parents expected more from them, and still do. We thought it was a cruising altitude, what we'd reached. Before the sliding, we had the piles, we had obsessions

and hobbies and stories worth saving for the restaurant. We got what we needed, we threw it in the basket, kept pricing and planning until The New World started somewhere

but we never heard of it until it hit Manhattan. There we were, at the gym or the airport, reading the closed captioning, smugly aware when the software typed *there* for *their*,

as though the stock market was only smashing the lives of its keepers. But now they're saying it's ours. But all our smarts were no parachute to The New World.

We couldn't bring ourselves to shop. When our credit card balances scared us, we called the company but when they said they couldn't give us a lower interest rate even though we were

such great customers, that was the start of The New World. When we stopped shopping, we stopped dreaming. We can't renovate the kitchen, so we won't clean it either. We stay in bed

hiding from the cold and from everything. Energy is the ability to do work, but no work and no energy, textbook drawing of the man, his face about to explode, from pushing a brick wall all

day. We are all going nowhere. The teacher says *he hasn't moved that wall an inch, so he has done no work*. And we laughed because all of us were going to grow up to be millionaires.

It is one of those winters—everything frozen. The town is only salting the hills and people aren't shoveling. No love for the mailman. He only brings bills, maybe a birthday card with no money

in it. We are afraid to turn up the heat, dread the grocery store, hate to look at our digital pictures because we'll stumble upon old vacations we should have enjoyed more. We stood

in the Aegean, thinking about our offices, thinking we'll surely get back here one day. The charts in the newspapers show us how far we have to go with our unemployment and negative

savings to hit Depression levels, and it looks like a sales goal or billboard that shows donations as a thermometer, outlines of the shattered glass and excited droplets that will in time be filled

in, blue for glass, red for mercury. We all know where this one's headed. It seems stupid to use this time wisely. In The Used World, we'd call this *regrouping*, a word we lost in the mass

layoffs. Or we buried it deep in a hope chest in the attic of a house that's been on the market for two years. Maybe we should forget the economic stimulus plan and move to Canada, where

people seem happier, not believing in magic. Canada, where our student loan officers might not find us, where we might not die of no health insurance. This is how we dream today, of

relief, not envy, our engine, our rowboat's motor choked on the lily pads. Great. Now we'll have to row the boat that should be at least a speedboat by now. Did I tell you I can't find the oars?

How we laughed. Until we didn't.

what's nice about my neighborhood is
the good people are stuck here
the kindergarten teacher and bus driver
know they'll never get the price someone told them
three years ago and it kills them to think
about their roof that is turning to paper, slouching
chimney, the truth about a hunter green kitchen
in the year of our Lord 2010

and the other neighbors, the retired couple who watch
our house, the couple with the son about to go
to college stopped thinking about the suburbs
and have learned to lock the doors that are tried
nightly by the creeping kind, looking for your wallet,
spare change, dropkick your Mary statue,
throw your Obama Biden sign in the street, watch when it looks
like you are away, maybe, maybe not
give your windows a try

the girl up the street comes and goes
like a drug dealer
wears big fleece pants and a ponytail
like she's on the way to the gym
or Old Country Buffet
maybe, maybe not-she's back in forty minutes
sometimes less, morning to night

one hundred years my family has lived
on this street and this girl is eyeing me
like she'll run me out, like she's already
started, I don't think so, though late at night
the cars pull right up to her door
all night she runs out to them and runs back in
does she know about the busts that happen
sometimes there is a white girl sometimes
in the middle of the mugshots layout in the paper
who still has money for drugs, I wonder
and a guy robs the plasma bank across town
in college we debated hypothetical things
the parent stealing groceries to feed the kids
was it so wrong and all the while we knew no one
stole food they stole sweaters but not for the cold

* * *

The unscathed are asking for plain brown shopping bags
for the clothes they'll wear on their secret vacations
pulling into their garages and shutting the door
before taking out their loot out of the trunk but oh shit
the housekeeper is still here
just leave it in the backseat
was it better or worse
when it was only husbands to hide it from?
have to slowly bring it in the house
let it sit in the car a few weeks so you can snap
No This Is Not New
have to buy what looks like stuff you already have
until now because if you are still shopping
you must be okay

* * *

It started with stabbings where murder-suicides used to be
girlfriends stabbing boyfriends in their rented houses
on the right side of town, dudes with a beef over a missing
shipment that dates back to Trenton
firing shots outside the afterhours club in the strip mall
where by day the grandmas go to the beauty shop
next day news footage of a guy hosing blood from the sidewalk

with a look that says he's thinking about washing his car
arsons and threats and people you thought were against guns
loading up the nightstand, everywhere the APX prism sign
thrust into flowerbeds that didn't get planted this year
neighbors wondering if the advertisement for the new
security system is maybe also an advertisement for what
you have inside, and maybe next year, there'll be
money to work on the house again if the arsonists don't
come so far so good they don't seem to know this little
neighborhood, we have to make sure it looks
like someone still lives here

Danna Ephland

CHOICE

i.

Maybe because I have been dancing
eight count phrases all my life, the eight
lines come easily. A container, suitcase,
holding the extent of my stretch, its range
and nuance, my lightest leap. I turn easily,
forget what is outside the door, eat up
the big room in eights, in syllables, lines
broken, repeated, testing to see what fits.

ii.

The night I call the helpline convinced
I am a mass murderer because I yell
until my head falls back, grip the edge
of the cupboard to keep my fists from
the plaster that I want to level, to leave
me in the open for a change, outside -
away from the new baby, the apartment's
long hallway, its echo and terrible light.

iii.

Mother Earth is a redhead for miles
along the train tracks leaving Michigan.
Auburn I decide - all the leaves, tall grasses
the shade of my mother's hair at thirty-four.
Some of the trees grip a few leaves even
this late in the season. Or is it the leaves
clinging to trees so ferociously as the train
speeds past? I can't decide

DRUNK DRIVING IN BIG CUT WOODS

I'm driving the back roads near Big Cut, drinking beer with my friend Steve. I'm on my sixth, I think. My friend Steve says he's on his seventh, which should tell you something about him. We've decided on this because it beats counting cars in the IGA parking lot. There are no open intoxication laws out here, no heavy-set storeowners spitting career advice, just a bunch of pine trees with a gravel road running through them. Occasionally we'll pass a clapboard shack or two, but other than the wildlife that could jump out of the woods at any moment the terrain's pretty much without a wrinkle. Sometimes the ass end on my pickup gets loose reaching for another beer. For instance, right now Steve's telling me to watch the road.

"You almost hit that possum back there," he says. He's adjusting the passenger-side mirror on my truck, but it's too dark to see what's behind us. If the wind were any stronger, I think Steve would blow out the window.

"What possum?" I ask.

"It's okay," he says. "You missed him."

He twists the chrome dials on the radio. There's a cough of static, and then Steve zeroes in on a Bob Dylan song. Bob says I'm in a chrome horse with my diplomat. Steve must be the diplomat.

"I thought we decided no music," I say. I take a sip of my beer, but it's already empty. I spilled it. Steve hands me another one.

"Five left," he says. His face crumples.

You're like a rolling stone, Bob says.

I listen to pine branches slap the roof of my truck, taking a corner somewhat in the ditch, but not really. The road opens up like a deserted stretch of beach. A complete unknown, Bob says.

"Turn that off," I say.

"Okay," Steve says. "No music."

The cab goes dead. Steve tries lighting a cigarette. The truck lighter won't work. It's broke, Steve says. His Bic won't work. The wind, Steve says. He gives up.

"Just roll the window up," I tell him.

"Too much work."

For the next few minutes we both kind of sit there, not saying anything, and it becomes painfully apparent why they put radios in trucks like mine. It's just me and Steve and the five beers. Four.

"So tell me about Becky," I say finally.

He pulls his jean jacket up to his ears.

"I don't want to talk about that fucking bitch."

"Okay," I say.

Steve cracks another can. The beer hisses.

"She took the cat," he says.

"She took Moses?"

"Yeah," he says. "She took Moses. The love of my life. Both of them."

"You loved that cat." We pass a few log cabins along the road with no lights on in them, no cars out front, no signs of ever having been used for anything except passing scenery. The road ahead is hard to see. I wonder if it's getting darker outside or if it's just me. "Moses was like your best friend."

"Now I got you," Steve says.

"To us," I toast, stopping whatever the hell I was doing.

I pull my can down and focus on driving. I have no idea where we are.

"That was Arty Tulgetske's place we just passed," Steve says, looking out the back window.

"Really? Who's Arty whatshisname?"

"Tulgetske."

"Right." I take a drink. "Who is he?"

"He's just a guy like any other." He scratches at something in his hair. Steve has mopy hair. It itches him sometimes. "He was a retired pole-climber for Hydeker-Wheatley. Dead wife, no kids. Used to always come into the tackle shop to buy chubs. When he bought the place, it didn't have power, so he tried hooking it up himself. Guy was a cheapskate. Didn't want to pay the bills, I heard."

"How do you steal power?" I kick in.

Steve doesn't hear me. He just keeps talking. "So while he's trying to hook his cabin up to the power lines, the guy fries himself. I mean, he had to retire because of the shakes in the first place. I don't know what he was thinking."

"Dumb." I drum my thumbs along the dash and whistle some Bob. We pass the lake. No one's on it. It's like a plateful of maple syrup with moon reflecting in it.

"Some meter-reader found him," Steve says. "Guy was dangling from the pole. Crows had pecked out his eyes. Must've been up there for over a month."

"What did the meter-reader do?" I want to know.

"He got him down, I guess."

"How did he get him down?"

"That's a good question. With a stick maybe." He pulls the tab off his beer can and tosses it out the window. "If you ask me, I say Arty put himself out of his own misery. That's as good a way to die as any. Five-thousand volts, bam, you're dead."

I turn down Lake Nettie Drive where a mohawk of weeds plucks the grille of my truck, a sound pleasantly reminiscent of baseball cards in bicycle spokes. The blue spruce and cedar are thicker now, so the moon is curtained. Steve's so skinny the shadows just swallow him. Not enough meat, too many bones, they would say as they spit him out.

"Slow down." Steve sticks his hand out the window, swoops it up and down like the kids sometimes do. "I don't want to miss any of this."

“There’s nothing to see,” I say, watching all the branches slap my windshield. The top of the radio antenna is now touching the hood.

I let off the accelerator, but it still feels like we’re cruising. Through a break in the trees, I see stars dotting the sky like crumbs on a black sweater. Steve isn’t saying much, so maybe he notices it too.

“Spit it out,” I tell him. “You’ve been sitting there thinking about it. It’s written all over your face.”

“I don’t know if I want to tell you now,” he says. “I’ve thought about it, and I really, really don’t want to tell you now.”

“Remember what you said. If you’ve got something to say to a guy, you come out with it.”

“I don’t want you to think I’m a creep,” he says. “Promise you won’t think I’m a creep if I tell you.”

“I promise.” I put a hand to my chest. “Nothing escapes this truck.”

“Swear,” Steve says.

So I say: “Shit.”

We both laugh, and I instantly forget what it is I’m laughing about. Then it’s silent again, except for the grind of the engine. The meter says I have plenty of gas, but something tells me I should have run out long ago.

“Go,” I say. “Remind me what it is we’re talking about.”

“Okay.” Steve puts a leg up underneath him. He faces me. He’s getting ready to tell me about the thing that’s been bothering him. “First off, none of this was my fault. I want you to remember that once I get to the end of what I have to say. Don’t forget.”

“Not your fault,” I say. “It’s committed to memory.”

“A year ago this happened,” he says. “I haven’t told anyone since. You’re the first.”

“That means a lot to me. You make me feel appreciated.”

“Shut up.” He rolls up his window. He doesn’t want anyone to hear, I guess. “You know that county road back by Jimmy Baker’s hunting camp? The one with all those turns?”

“Yeah.” I know the road he’s talking about. It’s a good road.

“I was driving back there, a year ago, all by my lonesome. I wasn’t going that fast. Forty-five. Maybe fifty.”

“The speed-limit,” I say.

“It wasn’t very fast. But you can’t see around those corners, you know? There’s no way. It’s impossible. Too many trees.”

“You have to take those corners slow.”

“But there was nothing I could do,” he says. “I come around one of those corners, and there’s a deer. He’s standing right in the middle of the road. It was like God said, ‘Deer, I’m putting you right here.’ There’s no time to swerve. Just like that, I clobber him.”

“Fresh venison.”

“I get out of my car. The hood looks like an accordion. Grille’s all smashed up. But the deer’s alive. His little hooves are kicking. He’s trying to crawl back into the woods.”

I'm out of beer, so Steve hands me another one. We're passing over a small wooden bridge that doesn't sound all that sturdy. Beneath us are culverts that look entirely capable of swallowing large pieces of machinery. Spring peepers are peeping. Why don't you keep it on the road? they seem to screech at me from the ditch.

"What did you do?" I ask, steering very carefully.

"I couldn't let him suffer. I mean, you should've seen this thing. His back was broken. There were grille marks from where my car hit him on his side. He was wheezing just like my grandpa before he died that one summer."

"I remember that. He always kept asking me for cigarettes, but I didn't have any. Your grandpa sure liked to smoke."

Steve is quiet for a moment. I can see the words sorting themselves out in his head.

"I beat him to death with a tire iron," he says.

"Not your grandpa," I say.

"No. The deer."

Now it feels like we're creeping. The woods are catching up with us. I look at my feet. There they are, all right.

"A tire iron," I say. "Wow. Now that's not your everyday weapon."

"I didn't have anything else. I wish I would've had a gun. I wouldn't have these problems I'm having now if I just would've packed my rifle that day."

I don't say anything. I just drive my truck down the road with the mohawk.

"He wouldn't die right away, either." Steve gazes out the window. He's contemplating something big up in the trees. "It was late, and there wasn't a soul on that road. I just kept beating him and beating him. It felt like hours."

I'm not sure what to say. I think a moment, and then tell Steve that I'm sorry it had to happen to him. It's not his fault. The deer was asking for it standing on that road with the corners.

"That's not all of it." He's facing me now, but I'm focusing on the road. I don't want to hit anything. "I mean, after I killed that deer, I knew I could do something like that again. The same thing happened right before Becky left."

"What happened before Becky left?"

"I put my hands around her throat." He lets the collar from his jean jacket fall from his ears. "When I saw her standing there with the suitcases, I snapped. I don't know how long I even choked her for. Finally I just let go."

"It's a good thing you did," I say.

Steve's shaking his head for the moment. He's giving it a good shake.

"I'd have my cat right now, at least."

"I know what you mean," I say.

Steve looks at me. He understands that I do not know at all what he means. Ahead of us, the public landing closes in. It's a cul-de-sac, so we turn around on the boat-ramp and green shorewater tongues at the tires. The headlights pick out the refracted retinas of woodland creatures as we head

back the way we came. Take your high beams and get the hell out of here, they seem to tell me.

“We’re out of beer,” Steve says.

I shrug.

We drive for a while, and the cab grows thick with silence. Lake Nettie Drive is now backwards from the way I recall it. I consider the possibility that I have no idea how to get us back.

“I shouldn’t be driving,” I say, after I catch myself falling asleep.

“Want me to take over?” Steve asks.

“No,” I say. “I’m doing pretty all right.”

We pass Arty Tulgetske’s place, a sad little cedar shed with cellophane windows. I can’t see the tops of the power lines, so I’m not sure if he’s still dangling there. The meter-reader must’ve gotten him down with a stick.

“Bye, Arty,” Steve says. “You will be missed.”

I put a can to my mouth and nothing comes out. Dumb, I think, offering it to Steve.

He ignores me and rolls down his window.

“You don’t think I’m a creep now, do you?” Steve asks.

“Why would I think that?” I still don’t know what to do with my can. I put it between my legs for the time being.

“Because,” he says. “Now that I’ve told you all of that stuff, you know what type of man I am.” Steve kicks at an empty beer can buoying on the floor. “You’re invisible now,” he sings, sounding nothing like Bob. “You have no secrets, to conceal.”

“Damn it,” I say. “I just got that song out of my head.”

Ahead of us, a possum wanders into the middle of the road. He’s sniffing dirt, checking things out, staring cross-eyed into my headlights. I wonder if it’s the same one Steve saw before. The one I almost hit. I start to slow down, but I know I could just as easily hit the gas.

What type of man are you? the possum seems to ask.

R. Jess Lavolette

MRS. KNEUDSEN'S LETTER OF RESIGNATION

Dear Mr. Lavolette,

In light of your recent edits and rewrites, I feel I should inform you that I will be unable to appear in your short story, "On Fictional Vortices." Please do not assume that my leaving is in any way an indication of my disapproval of your recent changes. I have the greatest respect for your artistic integrity, and I am proud to have had this small opportunity to work with you. My reason for leaving is far more personal. I have fallen in love.

I have been working part-time at See's Candies in Kahala Mall. Being a minor character in an unpublished short story is a rewarding experience, emotionally, but it does not pay my rent in full. Several weeks ago, on a Tuesday evening while you were at your class, I was restocking the saltwater taffy when a man entered the store. His well-muscled body was as toned and taut as the long bow over his shoulder. He looked familiar, but I could not think of his name. We flirted a bit as I helped him select a box of peanut brittle 'for his mother,' but I still could not remember his name. Only when he handed me his MasterCard was I certain who this celebrity was - Bard The Bowman, from "The Hobbit" by J. R. R. Tolkien.

What was a fantasy novel celebrity like Bard, King of Dale, slayer of the dragon Smaug, doing in Hawaii? Vacationing, avoiding those few members of the genre paparazzi that still follow him, and snorkeling, all of which I learned about on the first of several dates. Our time together has been a whirlwind. Private luaus on secluded beaches, riding in limos, tender archery lessons on hikes through the rainforest. It still feels unreal at times, as though I will wake up and find it has all been a fantasy.

Telling me that my eyes shined like the Arkenstone, Bard proposed to me over the weekend during a private whale-watching trip, and I said Yes. We had a small ceremony this past Sunday at the Hilton Hawaiian Village. He is anxious to get back to "The Hobbit" to show off his new bride, but I insisted on a honeymoon. Since we are both history buffs, we have arranged to spend two weeks in "The Education of Henry Adams." It should be both romantic and fascinating.

I realize this is sudden, but I hope you will understand.

Yours,

Mrs. Margery Kneudsen-The Bowman

P.S. Please give my regards to the Main Character and ask him to feed My Cat for me.

SHAKE MACHINE

Ron was late to work at the Snack Shack, on his first week back on the job, but there was a freight train, so that was his excuse. “It’s not my fault,” he told Marcus, the manager. “Did you see the train, how long it was?” Marcus had noticed the long row of slowly moving boxcars, since the Snack Shack faced the twin rails running parallel to route 14. On the east end of Lofton, there was only the 6-screen movie theater, the Snack Shack, and Wal-Mart on the south side of route 14. On the north, only the train tracks and the parking lot for the office furniture factory—so Ron was expecting that Marcus had seen the train, and luckily for Ron, he had.

“All right, I got it,” said Marcus, his arms crossed, a slight smile on his face. “I mean—it’s your first day back and you’re late. Not a great way to get started back here.” He shook his head. “But I get it—the train. It’s just—your *first day*.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry,” Ron said, “but I couldn’t get across the tracks—”

“No, I get it.” Marcus laughed. “Look, I guess I should just tell you that you might have to leave earlier, if you’re going to beat that train. It crosses by here every Friday night, around 4:00 or 4:30. So now you know.” Ron nodded. He actually lived south of the Snack Shack; he had not been held up by the train but had only used it as an excuse. He was late because he had woken up late and slummed around his mother’s house all morning before finally deciding to take a shower after 3:00. Ron tried to look contrite.

“It won’t happen again, Marcus. I promise.” Marcus nodded and waved Ron away, so he hurried into the kitchen, relieved he’d bought his excuse. Wondering how long he’d have to wait before he tried using the train again, he headed into the kitchen and patted Travis, the other cook, on the shoulder.

“Did you survive without me?” Ron asked as Travis dropped a chicken patty onto the grill.

“Oh, yeah, barely,” Travis mumbled as he watched the patty respond to the heat. “Just don’t leave me alone during busy hours.”

“Hey, give a guy a break. It’s only my first day,” Ron said, which wasn’t quite true. He had worked at the Snack Shack before he had left for college, but after three semesters of academic probation and an inability to find work anywhere else but the Snack Shack, he was working here again and not returning to U. of I., or to any other college either—at least for the time being, he reminded himself. Like his mother and he had discussed, he could work the rest and earn some money and go back to school next fall,

maybe petition the university to be reinstated, or if not in the fall, then some time later, somewhere down the line—it didn't matter to Ron; he was in no hurry. He checked the miniature computer screen for any orders he could fill, but there was only the one Travis had begun preparing: chicken sandwich, large fries, medium chocolate shake. "Want me to get the shake?" Ron asked.

"Sure," Travis said, slathering a sesame seed bun with mayonnaise.

Well, Marcus was definitely still here, as was Travis, of course, Ron noted to himself—but there were a couple of new faces, two kids at the counter, probably still in high school by the looks of them. The guy was tall and skinny and looked pretty clueless, and the girl looked like—well, Ron decided, like a lot of nothing: dull hair, blank expression, scarecrow body. "Some old familiar faces," he told Travis, grabbing a white Styrofoam cup. "Hey, whatever happened to 'Johnny D'?"

"What?" Travis asked.

"You know, that guy who worked here and called himself 'Johnny D'?" Ron dropped the cup under the shake nozzle and flipped the lever for chocolate. "He was here a couple years or so back. Really funny guy." Ron waited for the brownish mixture, which oozed slowly out of the shake machine, but jerked the cup away, three-quarters full, and slapped a plastic lid on top.

"Did his last name start with 'D'?" Travis asked.

"Yeah, I think so," Ron said. "Remember, he used to say that thing about the shake machine?" Travis turned the chicken patty over and shook his head.

"One time," Ron continued, "the shake machine wasn't working—not just working slow, like it still does, but not working at all—and Marcus had it taken all apart to fix it, you know, with pieces all over the place."

Travis nodded. "He still has to fix it sometimes."

"I don't know why he just doesn't get a new one," Ron said, offering him the shake.

Travis shook his head. "I guess it's cheaper to fix it." He took the cup and set it on the counter.

Ron laughed. "See, that's exactly what got Johnny started. That and some of the music Marcus was playing after closing. Okay, so here's what happened: Marcus was working on the machine, and he had music playing, and it was Public Enemy—you know, the rap group? Anyway, Johnny sees the parts all over the place, and hears the music, and then says right to Marcus, 'Hey! You better Terminator X that motherfucker!'" Ron laughed as Travis arranged a piece of lettuce and a tomato on the sesame seed bun.

"He better what?" Travis asked.

"You know—throw it out and get a new one. But he said it like that because Terminator X was the name of one of the guys in Public Enemy. It was like a joke."

"Oh," said Travis.

"Yeah," Ron said, but he didn't remember Marcus laughing—or reacting much at all, for that matter. "Anyways, after that, any time we had trouble

with the shake machine, we started saying, ‘Terminator X that motherfucker.’”

“An inside joke.” Travis piled lettuce and tomatoes on the bun. “That guy left a long time ago. He didn’t last here too long.”

“Really? Too bad.” Ron laughed again—at one of the many hilarious things Johnny had done or said, at the annoyed look on Marcus’s face when he first heard the irreverent use of the rapper’s name, at the sudden recollection of the horrendous crash Johnny had made when he clumsily knocked several metal pots to the floor. But several red lines of text suddenly appeared on the screen, the accompanying alarm dinged, and Ron took himself away from his thoughts to tend to the food order.

The nothing girl’s name was Cheryl, and the tall, skinny and clueless guy’s name was Glen, Ron learned a day later, only Glen wasn’t as clueless as he had appeared. Not only did he claim that he was in the top 5% of the junior class at Lofton High, but he was planning to become an ophthalmologist.

“That’s an eye doctor, right?” Ron asked. It was just before closing, so the restaurant was empty except for the two women finishing their mozzarella sticks in the corner. While Ron finished his side work—cleaning the grill, putting the salad dressing in the fridge, cutting tomatoes and onions for tomorrow—Glen mopped the floor behind the counter.

“Yeah, but it deals more with eye disorders,” Glen said, stopping for a moment and resting his hand on the window between him and Ron, “you know, not just prescribing glasses.”

“So, that’s a lot of years of school, huh? We’re talking—what? Six, seven, eight years?”

Glen nodded. “Yeah, four years of college, and then four years of ophthalmologist training.”

Ron felt a little uncomfortable discussing school and a person’s years in college, almost as if at any moment he would have to explain his low GPA and answer for his own circumstances, but he also appreciated discussing a topic he actually knew a little bit about. “And what school do are you going to for all that?” Ron asked.

Glen audibly slapped the mop onto the floor. “Well, for undergrad, either U. of I. or, if I get into it, ICO, the Illinois College of Optometry. After that, I don’t know yet.”

“Illinois College of Optometry? That doesn’t sound like much of a party school,” Ron said. “But U. of I., huh?”

“Yeah, why, what do you know about it?”

“Oh, well, not much, I guess,” he said. Ron could have switched the topic and avoided discussing his history there, but he just didn’t feel the motivation or the energy to do so. “I mean—well, I went there myself for a couple of years.”

“Mmm-hmm? So, what happened?”

“Oh, well, I was having too much fun, not working hard enough.” Ron chopped an onion in to smaller and smaller pieces that were almost lost on

his white cutting board. “So I’m here now—because I needed to take some time off, figure out what I want to do. You know, before I go back.”

“So when are you going back?”

“I don’t know,” he said, scraping the onions from the cutting board into a plastic bowl. “I mean, I haven’t decided. Not yet.”

“When do classes start? In late August, I think?” Glen asked. “You going to go back then?”

“Like I told you, maybe, maybe not,” Ron said. “Maybe there, maybe somewhere else. Who the hell knows? I got to think about it.” But the longer he had been away from school, the easier it was not to think about it—and he liked not having to think about it, not being reminded of what he had done or hadn’t done, not worrying about if and when he would be able to apply himself or work harder or do whatever the hell else he’d been advised to do by his parents, his guidance counselor, hell, even his roommate Sanjay. Ron grabbed another onion and held it in place on the cutting board. It was easier now worrying only about getting to the Snack Shack on time or timing how long to cook the extra crispy fries Marcus liked or cutting onions.

Glen held the mop in both of his hands and looked earnestly at Ron. “Cause if I’m there, you know, instead of ICO, I’m not going to know anybody really and we should definitely look each other up or something—”

“I said I don’t know if I’m going back,” Ron said. “I’ll let you know if I decide anything, okay?” He looked down at the cutting board as he sliced the onion neatly in half.

Ron arrived at work several minutes late, not even bothering to think up an excuse, but just smiling and shaking his head at Marcus. “I know, I know,” he said. “Sorry.” Marcus motioned him to his office, a doorless room barely large enough for a small desk and one chair.

“This can’t keep happening,” Marcus said as soon as Ron stepped inside. He hadn’t even bothered to step into the office with him and just stood in the doorway, although Ron doubted there would have been enough room for both of them. “Look, I like you, you’re a nice kid, and I told your mother that I’d take you back, but it can’t be like this. This is—what? How many times now? There was your first day, and then—”

“Hey, if there’s a train, what am I supposed to do? How is that my fault?”

“—yes, and if it happens again, then . . . well, then that says to me that you don’t really want to work here. Okay? And if that’s the case, then I might have to agree with you.”

Ron looked at the floor. He hadn’t been able to find work anywhere else. He’d had an interview at the office furniture factory, which paid better, but the woman there—a friend of his mother’s—had even said they weren’t hiring right now.

“Do you understand me?” Marcus asked. “I mean, tell me if I’m being unreasonable, okay? Am I making myself clear here?”

“Yes,” Ron said under his breath. “I understand. Okay?” Ron just wanted to leave this pathetic excuse for an office, get to the kitchen, and get to work. He hated how he felt. He felt bad about jeopardizing his job—but on top of that was the horrible realization that he did indeed feel bad about jeopardizing a job grilling bacon cheeseburgers at the Snack Shack. If he didn’t have this job, then what? His mother knew Helen, the human resources person at the office furniture place, but that hadn’t seemed to matter much. Marcus stood in the doorway, still blocking his exit.

“All right. I’m sorry it had to come to this.” Marcus finally backed up, allowing Ron to leave the office.

Taking his place at the grill beside Travis, Ron checked the order screen. There was a cheeseburger and steak sandwich that Travis had already started on, plus three hotdogs and a poorboy. “Hey, just in time,” Travis said smiling, “right before the dinner rush.”

“I’m sorry,” Ron said. “I wish I had an excuse, but . . .”

“Hey, it’s no problem for me,” Travis said, tossing some onion slices on the grill, “just as long as you get here before I get swamped. Tonight, I’d say you’re just in time.”

“I wouldn’t do that to you,” Ron said.

“Well, you never know,” Travis said, shrugging. “I used to work the breakfast shift, at six in the morning, and I was late for that a couple of times.” The order screen dinged, and Travis squinted at the monitor. “So that’s why I work nights only. Hey, you want to get the hotdogs and the poorboy while I get this chicken parm?”

The dinner rush started to slow down around 8:30, but not until some grease from the French fryer splattered Ron’s arm, leaving several small red marks; a customer had complained to Marcus about his undercooked spicy chicken sandwich, which Ron had actually left partly frozen in the middle; and the shake machine, after spewing out a dozen or so shakes, simply stopped dispensing anything but a dry mechanical moan. Most of the dinner rush was over, and Travis’s shift had ended, so Ron too it upon himself to inform the counter crew that he couldn’t take any more orders for shakes. Marcus, however, refused to give up.

“Sometimes the freezer unit gets too cold, and the shake mixture kinda freezes up too much,” he explained, running his hands over the shake machine. “Yeah, it feels cold. You could try adjusting the temperature, but when that doesn’t work, I try turning it off and turning it back on again. Or flip the lever quickly up and down a couple times before you try dispensing the shake mixture.” He looked at Ron and motioned with his hand, moving his fingers up and down and whistling a quick high note and low note.

“How old is that thing, anyway?” Ron asked. He dropped a hot dog in a bun and doused it with mustard and ketchup.

“Oh, she’s got a few more years in her,” Marcus said. “I just put new mixers in it last year, and those should last for a long time.” He took the lever for strawberry and, as he’d advised, wiggled the lever up and down

several times. "Okay, now give me a cup. Here, watch this." He took the cup from Ron and held it under the nozzle. As he moved the lever in a smooth upward motion, a dribble of pink shake mixture splashed into the cup. "See? How's that? It just—"

"But it's stopping," Ron said. The nozzle suddenly spit two small pink droplets into the cup and went dry. "And it's making that sound again."

Marcus frowned. "Hold on, let me take a look." He shut off the mixers and opened the top of the machine.

Ron eased away as Marcus completely removed the dripping metal top piece and laid it on the counter. "Marcus, I've got this hot dog and a gyro after that for the drive thru, and, uh . . ."

"Yeah, go ahead. I've got this." Marcus whistled an unrecognizable tune to himself and reached into the machine as Ron returned to his counter. Moments later, when he had just finished adding the tzatziki sauce and wrapping the gyro in wax paper, Marcus called him over. He had apparently drained the machine and removed some parts, for on the metal counter were various shake machine nozzles and hoses and other pieces, most of which were covered in watery shake mixture.

"There's the problem," Marcus said, pointing at the parts. There was grayish shake mixture on Marcus's hand. "Well, one of the problems, anyways."

"What?" Ron asked.

"The washer." In the middle of the counter was a small bent washer. "It's a little twisted. But you know how much these cost? Maybe a dime."

"I think the hose is cracked, too," Ron said, looking at the other parts. "Look, right along here."

"Hnm, yeah, I think you're right." Marcus studied the hose. "But it's not cracked all the way through."

"And you said the freezer unit isn't working right, either," Ron said.

"Yeah, well," Marcus said, "it's not dead yet. No worries. Look, I can fix this thing in no time at all. I just need to run to Wal-Mart, get a washer, and we're back in business."

Ron glanced at the dining room, which appeared to be empty. The dinner rush was definitely over. "You're going to fix it?"

"Yeah, well, I *intend* to. Why not? You and Glen can manage by yourselves, right? I'll be back in about fifteen minutes." Marcus pocketed the washer, got his coat and, jingling his car keys, shouted to Ron from the door. "Just take care of that shake machine mess a little bit, okay, Ron? I'll be right back." He exited the Snack Shack, whistling to himself.

"Fucking stupid," Ron said under his breath after he watched Marcus drive off.

"Hey, where's Marcus going?" Glen asked. He was wiping down the counter with a dirty towel.

"He went to get a stupid ten cent washer for a stupid shake machine that's still not going to work." Ron picked up the parts and dumped them inside the machine's main mixing bowl. When he removed his hands from the slimy well, they were sticky with melting shake mixture. "This thing is

fucking gross!” he said. Glen stood at the window and laughed at Ron’s announcement. “Terminator X that motherfucker, man!”

“What?” Glen was still laughing.

“Terminator X! You know what that means?”

“Yeah, sure,” Glen said, still holding the spray bottle and leaning through the window. “To terminate something?”

“Something? Yeah, something like this stupid fucking shake machine.”

“Right, the shake machine.” He smiled and pointed the spray bottle at Ron like it was a gun. “A machine, like the Terminator, right?”

“No, man! Not the Terminator; Terminator X. From Public Enemy. Do you know who they are?”

Glen lowered the spray bottle. “That’s like a rap group, right?”

“Yeah, it’s a rap group,” Ron said. “Only the most important rap group like ever.” Glen nodded and continued to wipe the counter.

Well, Marcus did say to take care of it, didn’t he? Johnny D would have had a *field day* with this bullshit, Ron thought to himself. He would have taken care of it all right. There was a small dent on the side of the shake machine, on the bowl-shaped compartment where the shake mixture was added. Ron touched it, pressing gently at first but then more forcefully, and he felt the metal flex. He pushed his fingers into the dent, watching it grow. What a piece of junk. It’s just—this shake machine. This shake machine. He made a fist and drove it into the side of the cold metal bowl, and, sure enough, the dent expanded. His knuckles stung a little from the blow, so he picked up the nearest metal object, a soup ladle, smacked the dented side, and then hit it again.

“What you doing back there, Ron?” Glen asked. Ron looked up and saw Glen watching him, with a slightly confused look on his face.

“I’m giving this shake machine *what for*,” Ron said. The satisfying metal on metal collision boomed quite loudly, so he hit it again and again, until, suddenly, the whole thing crashed to the floor, making an even more satisfying sound. Ron lifted his work boot and brought it down on the side of the bowl-shaped compartment.

“Yeah, what you got, shake machine? Huh? You want some of this?” Ron kicked it across the floor, and it bounced off the wire frame shelving near the floor where the bags and Styrofoam containers were kept.

“Hey, easy there, Ron,” Glen said. He stood and watched, still holding his spray bottle and towel.

Ron lifted the shake machine and dropped it into the floor. “Who’s making shakes now, motherfucker? Who’s making shakes now?”

Kneeling on the floor, Ron drove the machine into the floor with three violent crashes, when some pieces broke off and skidded across the floor, and the entire bowl separated from the plastic base. “Ron!” Glen said. “What’re you doing?”

Ron knelt on the floor, staring at the remains of the shake machine and wondered what he could say when Marcus got back. What was there to say? It was an accident, he could tell him. The thing had shake mixture on it and slipped through his hands. He could tell him that he tripped while carrying

it and then fell on it. But nothing good came to mind, nothing he could think of was plausible, not at all, not for a moment.

Jared Randall

SIX-WORD AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE PARTS WITH ALTERNATE ENDING

Part I:

Couldn't hold back the red curtain.

Part II:

Had enough Rosy.

How about boulevard?

Part III:

Listened.

Shouldn't have.

Should have listened.

Part IV:

Windows thinner than my backyard pencils.

Part V:

Races won

off broken-leg father.

Alternate Ending:

Window-thinner, me

plinked, plinking backyard

dogs, painted races

win-off, stare-off

broken-leg-father

Bay's window shrinking—got these

three spacemen watching

had enough, Rosy.

What's my boulevard?

A walk with friends

cherry bombs.

Listened. Shouldn't have

burned the barrel.

Jen Penkethman

NOTES TOWARD A NEW ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF FORMS

the one with headphones instead of ears. this was alarming until it was discovered how to adjust the volume. then, weeks in, feeling at the sensitive patches of skin just bordering the upper jaw, there was a button which made a difference. a button that produced tunes.

the one who grew stalactites. long and angry and brittle.

the one who carried a concealed planet in the inside of one nostril. if there were weather patterns no one knew them. this was not due to lack of trying.

the one who cocooned at age fourteen, huddled in some junk by the porch's underside. did not respond to voice or touch. did not speak up to say what was lacking.

the one who, when you got anywhere near, rolled up horizontal and became all feet and knees. this way you were looking over a horizon of torso. the face was unreachable.

the one they had to build a giant house for.

the one who mated with a tree.

the one who could fold his own bones, disappearing into closets. it was never a question where he last pleated his spine.

the one they just called 'parking meter.'

the one who came out spotted. no one dared say a thing. when it turned out she liked leopards everyone was pleasantly surprised and nodded knowingly to themselves.

the one who occasionally turtled.

the one eventually discovered by the national weather service.

the one who could say an umbrella instead of ‘an umbrella.’ the one for whom the word was held in the hand and the object emerged from the mouth. the one who was terrified of the word ‘universe.’

the one for whom being born was never as good as hydrogen mixed with helium.

the one who thought topographies.

the one who rained.

the one who, by simply blinking, could become a temple. in the temple there were rooms. in the rooms there were birds, breathing.

the one born in the Mesozoic.

the one who received coded messages from World War III.

the one who could remember a time before the river. the rock was before the river. then there was a birth, flood.

the one who reached into one arm and pulled out a bouquet of water.

the one who looked at pebbles and saw moons. the one who spoke in maths. the one with microscopic vision.

the one made of iron, irresistibly drawn to red.

the one who divided and divided. the one whose divisions divided.

the one who swam and then surfaced. the one who breathed from his back. the one who came up from the pond to write her own history.

the one who knew a hawk from a handsaw.

the one whose eggs hatched angels.

the one who heard a voice in a root.

the one whose bullet became a flower.

the one whose DNA was a church.

the one whose head was a staircase.

the one with no bottom.

the one who killed her own ghost.

BOBBY DISCOVERED HE WAS AN EMBRYO WHILE SITTING IN HIS NINTH-GRADE BIOLOGY CLASS

For some reason in the middle of the naming he felt like crying out.

Heat shock proteins, as a class, are among the most highly expressed cellular proteins across all proteins.

They had drawn him in white on the board and given each stage a name. That every molecule could *have* a name.

YOU TEND TO SYMPATHIZE WITH OTHER PEOPLE
YES/NO

This protein was first isolated by extracting proteins from stressed cells.

In the middle of the room, it had risen from the floor: a white fluttering shape, a carcass or case only half-encoded.

YOU ARE USUALLY THE FIRST TO REACT TO A SUDDEN
EVENT; THE TELEPHONE RINGING OR AN UNEXPECTED
QUESTION YES/NO

Even in this nascent state, it was trying to leave.

That no one had explained to him his own lack of brain or accompanying stem. That there was only a squishy division between right and left, and then the soft cleft of brow.

Heat shock proteins appear to serve a significant cardiovascular role. Hsp90, hsp84, hsp70, hsp27, hsp20, and alpha-B-crystallin all have been reported as having roles in the cardiovascularature.

That a word like cardiovascularature *existed* - it made him think he had a name no one knew about yet.

IT IS EASY FOR YOU TO COMMUNICATE IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS YES/NO

YOU RAPIDLY GET INVOLVED IN SOCIAL LIFE AT A NEW WORKPLACE YES/NO

The shape was like a voice. It said, *You were living, you were just little.*

These activities are part of a cell's own repair system, called the "cellular stress response" or the "heat-shock response".

He prepared to approach the shape like it was a relative. He called toward it like a scared kid in the woods. The shape became a mouth on one side.

He moved until he was inside the shape, and then kept traveling through the viscous whatever there was.

Slipped into the helix like a wind roaring down a canyon, and then the shape lit.

He was inside. He was in the volcano, the fleshy flag of pain.

The incompleteness of himself and the completeness of himself merging instantaneously to create the man on the train with the galoshes.

(Or perhaps the man standing in the middle of a storm with a kite string.)

YOU TRUST REASON RATHER THAN FEELINGS YES/NO

Birtherd like that. A hole opening into another hole, the cycle.

Approximate molecular weight (kDa)

THE LENGTH OF THE TRAIN, WHEN MEASURED AT REST IN THE STATION, IS EXACTLY L METERS.

He was in the shape and the shape was trying to teach him something. The shape was saying about pressures and breakage.

Muscles rubbing against each other, fomented by a new presence.

YOU PREFER TO ISOLATE YOURSELF FROM OUTSIDE NOISES YES

Something would take him down, and he would have to be there for it. Blood.

Wars of stress proteins, prolonged over time *T*.

YOU ARE ALWAYS ON TIME TO APPOINTMENTS YES/NO

The repeated descent of pain. The days stretched over it, like tarp over a skeleton.

The voice said things like, *It's not about the destination, but the journey.*

He thought he had something to say inside the shape and then lost it. Lost the thought and lost the moment. Now the thing was a myth.

He was in a rocket ship. He was curving along the sphere of time and going past. The voice was like something tiny preserved in bone.

The fucking endlessness of feeling.

The two strands twist around the helical axis once every 10.4-10.5 base pairs of sequence.

How such things could be coiled inside. How he breathed them in as letters and breathed them out as blood.

YOU ARE EASILY AFFECTED BY STRONG EMOTIONS

The heat shock of being inside became the heat shock of being out. Nothing else changed.

The world shivered and contracted like a muscle.

The voice said YES but no longer said NO

And being somewhere was a pure kind of hell. But he had missed it.

Understood: they would not have a name. There could be no name.

Renée E. D'Aoust

MUSINGS ABOUT ANNA HUBER AND ANGULARITY IN SWITZERLAND: A MODERN DANCE REVIEW (I THINK)

As in most of her work, in “Eine Frage der Zeit” Swiss choreographer and solo performer Anna Huber appears alone onstage for over an hour, piecing together fragments of a life, walking, running, stitching. But one should abstract away from all those motions to get a sense of this ultra-contemporary choreographer. It isn’t necessary to paste a narrative onto the evening.

We deal with “the matter, the question, of time” – “Eine Frage der Zeit” – but Huber amends the perception of time’s passage through her existential, unaffected, and genuine presence. According to Huber, “Time is not what passes; we pass away.”

Disclaimer: The preceding paragraphs open my dance review published online at *Explore Dance*. I use them as an introduction and to jump to the paragraph below.

In a small space off a small square in a small village called Verscio, pronounced as “Ver Show”, this is what I thought while watching Anna Huber: *I am passing away*.

Talk about the noise of daily life. Huber races everywhere and nowhere, and do you race the same? Why?

Talk about fretting. Talk about headaches. Talk about noise. Make some noise. Oh, yeah, dance a little. Why?

Because if you’re going to cause a commotion and make others pay attention, make it worthwhile. Say something more. Write something more. Dance like Anna Huber. She’s alone, there onstage, but she is not lonely. She’s neither narcissistic, nor obsessed; she’s doing her thing.

Movement matters, it’s been said, but why? Because the body is a full tank of meaning, and the body matters more than the self-perception we build up about ourselves. That me, me, me could pass away, and we’d never miss it—or you—at all.

This is all what I thought watching Anna Huber dance, and then I thought, again: *I am passing away.*

Think of the late David Foster Wallace's reflections on "the ambient volume of ... life's noise". *Wallace has passed away.* His world is no more.

And while we lose those who matter most, consider that we don't matter at all. We pass away. We dance while the dancing is good. We marry and we move and we think and we sleep and we don't sleep and while I am at it, I wonder if you've taken a deep breath lately and just felt that tiny spot in the center of your chest where it does not matter whether you live or die and it matters terribly whether you live or die, because I am telling you: **SHOUT IT TO THE SKY.**

Life's noise is too much, yet like Anna Huber we could push the boundaries of existence, push away that noise, by using methodical movement and structure in unconventional ways. In my youth, I thought abstract dance was suspect. How shallow.

And now? I don't think much. I don't think much at all. *I am passing away.*

Grant Osborn

PUZZLING

my indiana baby

rummaged

in morning's

permutations—

words sow

rows

mulls on corduroy

for symmetry—

menagerie-boxed

bodies contort

a spinal staircase

sweet homophones

couches, ribs open

a face still

space for her to fill—

letters, fonts

a mouth dilating

a new story

her pages, the *times*—

frayed

breath percolating

fingers that cross

tallies, fists unfolding

altogether

WAKING, YOUR NAME FRAGMENTS

rummage goosebumps	scabbed in ice storms
the skin of winter trees	with windows sleeved
to muffle morning	an isolation
each round	parting goodyear cipher
muses	rumbling cubicles on
sullen thunder	<i>9 - 5</i> ers belting lyrics
that grope	steering wheels
for fingers	over drum solos
of stolen refrains	beyond our bedroom
tracing pitch	fresh tracks (in cul-de-sacs)
stale faces	siding, bus-stop kids
vinyl	spinning posies
blotted behind blinds	stir, orbit each other
where we	with eyes that cut glass
before alarms	& backstroke
protract chords	strip robes
rouse the sun	where angels flap
from sparrow throats	sprawl as light

THAT TUESDAY

That Tuesday thousands of ants hurried out of the dishwasher, scurried earnestly along the countertop, in the sink, around the sink, continuing to the cook-top as if they had an agenda to keep. That Tuesday the cat's nose bled from her left nostril; she eloquently cleaned herself up, but, alas, the red returned as if, like the ants, it had a mission. That Tuesday a man in the park asked me, "Where do you go when you think you're losing your mind?"

"Excuse me?" I said even though I had heard him perfectly well. I looked at my phone though I knew I hadn't missed the two calls I was waiting for. I couldn't ignore the ants, so I had left a message for the exterminator. Neither could I ignore the cat, so I had called the veterinarian leaving a message for her too. But I most certainly could have ignored this tall man who stood in front of me as I sat on the park bench waiting for my phone calls to be returned.

I took an extra long time staring at my silent phone. I could feel he was still there, and I was having a difficult time pretending he wasn't standing in front of me. I finally glanced up at him, and I could tell he was tall even with just a glance and even though I was sitting and even though most people, including some ten year old children, were tall from this perspective of mine on a park bench. Then I knew I shouldn't have glanced because like the marching ants and the bleeding cat, he was determined and said again, "Where do you go when you think you're losing your mind?"

I wasn't sure if he was asking a rhetorical question or if he wanted some kind of reasonable answer, so I didn't say anything.

"May I sit down?" he said.

"You can have this entire bench," I said without hesitating, and I immediately got up and started to walk away while staring ridiculously at my phone, using visualization to try to make it ring.

"No, no, please sit with me."

I stopped walking and against my better judgment, I considered his request. I tried not to look back at him, but I did. Aside from being tall, he was thin but not skinny. He was neatly dressed in beige slacks, a blue button down shirt, and a tweed jacket. His hair was sandy blond, straight and tidy, and he had very blue eyes, and though I was terrible at guessing ages, I would have guessed that this man was around sixty years old.

I would also have guessed he was a professor if we weren't in this working class part of town. Though I imagined that if he were losing his mind this part of town would be a great place to lose it in because there were fabulous views of the harbor and the ocean from most everywhere, and the

temperature was never extreme in either direction on the thermometer. Though I wasn't sure if panoramic views and a year round moderate temperature mattered much to a person losing his mind.

"Do you have family to go to?" I said. I didn't sit next to him, but I did take a few steps closer to the bench where he now sat.

"My ex-wife hates me," the man said.

Already I didn't like the way things were going.

"I don't blame her," he said.

"Do you have any other family?" I said.

"A daughter."

"Can you go to her?"

"Her husband hates me."

I wanted to ask him why her husband hated him but didn't. Instead, I said, "Where does she live?"

"A few miles from here."

I was now wondering about his very-close-by daughter and wanted to ask why he couldn't at least talk to her about getting help for his mind that that he was losing, but I said, "Do you live near here too?"

"I live in Sacramento." He paused. "I used to live in Sacramento. I just got here this morning."

"Where are you staying?"

"I arrived just two hours ago."

I looked around for luggage but didn't see a suitcase or back pack or laptop, and his lack of luggage made me unexpectedly envious.

"I took a bus from Union Station."

"There was a bus that took you to Averill Park?" I was entirely ignorant about the bus system in Los Angeles.

"I walked from Gaffey."

I was beginning to think that this man was, in fact, losing his mind, for taking a bus and walking in Los Angeles weren't activities most people ever considered doing, especially not professorial looking ones.

"I've always loved this park," he said.

"You've visited your daughter here before?"

"I didn't know where else to go."

"Going to your daughter is the right thing to do," I said without really knowing if it was the right thing to do, especially since her husband supposedly hated her father.

As if to confirm my thoughts, he said, "I'm not sure if Janna would feel that way."

"Does she know you're here?"

"I left a message for her before I left Sacramento."

"So she's expecting you. That's good." There I was again, saying what was good regardless of whether or not I knew it was good.

"She doesn't know I'm here."

I was losing patience with this man who was losing his mind, and for the next few moments I visualized myself answering my ringing cell phone.

"What would you do?" the man said.

“Call your daughter,” I said.

“I meant what would you do if you’ve lost your mind?”

Spend all the money I have was what I wanted to say. Instead, I said a very unhelpful, “I don’t know.”

“Would you want to do something if you were aware that this was happening to you?”

“Would you like to use my phone to call your daughter?” I held out my phone.

“Aren’t you tired of standing?” He patted the seat of the bench.

As if on cue, my phone rang, and I saw it was the exterminator. Ecstatic that my visualization had finally worked, I was relieved to be talking to the man who was going to murder the ants that had invaded my dishwasher, and I scheduled their executions for Thursday morning.

“I have an insect problem,” I told the man who was still sitting on the bench. “Ants.” I then kicked myself for telling him anything about my life.

“Very strong creatures,” the man said. “Do you know they have two stomachs?”

“Is that why they’re in my kitchen?”

“They’re very tidy and clean critters too.”

“It’s true that they really don’t leave a mess. They’re the mess; there are zillions of them.”

“Put sugar outside your kitchen. They’ll like that.”

“That’s a cheap solution if it works.”

“It’s better that they stay outside. That way they can aerate the soil.”

“Why don’t I drop you off at your daughter’s place?” I was suddenly upset that I had offered to give this stranger a ride, but I couldn’t take back my offer.

“She doesn’t know I’m here.”

“It’s a surprise.” I said this knowing how much I’d hate it if someone, especially a parent who didn’t live around the corner, unexpectedly dropped by.

The man was quiet and looked extremely uncomfortable with my suggestion.

“Of course,” I said, becoming more uncomfortable myself. “You can just stay right here. This is a beautiful park. I love the stream and the waterfall, and the stonework along the paths is amazing.”

“If she doesn’t let me in, would you bring me back to this park?”

After a moment’s hesitation I said yes, but I hoped that wouldn’t be the case, and though I understood how his daughter might not welcome her father’s unexpected visit, I was taken aback by the idea that she wouldn’t let him in her home once he was on her doorstep.

I pointed in the direction of my car and even though I knew the answer, I asked him if he had any luggage.

“Only my wallet.” He tapped his pants’ pocket.

He suddenly looked so forlorn, and it couldn’t have been just suddenly that he looked like that. He had to have looked that way the entire time we’d

been talking, and it just took me until that moment to see him that way. Now his lack of luggage didn't look quite so attractive.

Once in the car and before I asked him his daughter's address, I introduced myself.

"Very nice to meet you, Kalyn Mazzoni," he said and shook my hand. "I'm pretty sure that Mazzoni is Italian, but where does Kalyn come from?"

"My mother made it up."

"My name's not interesting," he said. "Nathan Knowles."

"There's nothing wrong with your name," I said and started the car.

Nathan Knowles' daughter lived in Vista del Oro on South Patton Avenue in a beautiful 1920s Spanish style home that had a view that spectacularly lived up to the neighborhood's name.

"Great place to hang out if you don't know where else to go," I said to Nathan as we sat in the car looking up at the house.

"Wonderful place," Nathan said. "I just can't."

"Can't what?"

Nathan shook his head.

"I'm sure she wouldn't mind if you hung out on her terrace until she gets home from work," I said though I had no idea if she was at work or if she even worked.

"Please bring me back to the park."

"But you didn't even give this a chance."

"I've had plenty of chances."

"Would you like me to talk to her?" I knew just then that I was getting too involved in this stranger's life.

"Would you?" Nathan said perking up a bit.

At that moment a helicopter was overhead, and I waited to speak. And I waited. But it started circling the neighborhood.

"I'll be right back," I said loudly to Nathan, and once I climbed the many steps to get to the front door of Nathan's daughter's house, I wondered what I was doing. But I rang the doorbell anyway. I waited and getting impatient, I rang it again. This time a woman answered. She had Nathan's blue eyes.

"Are you Janna?" I said.

"Who are you?"

"Your father is sitting in my car in front of your house," I said.

"My father?" She stood on her tiptoes and looked past me.

"Did you drive him here from Sacramento?"

"He took a bus and doesn't have anywhere to go, and he doesn't have any luggage."

"Who are you?"

"I was at Averill Park, and we started talking."

"You don't know him, do you?"

This entire time Janna and I had been shouting above the noise of the circling helicopter, and I paused for a moment.

"Can I get him from the car?" I said.

Janna glanced beyond me again though she didn't stand on her tiptoes this time.

"How is he?" she said.

"He said he's losing his mind." As soon as I said that I knew I should have lied and said the same old thing that most people say when they're asked how someone is-- oh, he's fine -- whether he is or not.

Just then my phone rang, and I looked at my purse. I decided to ignore the ringing.

"Can I get him now?" I said.

Janna looked up at the helicopter, and I followed her gaze. It was the L.A.P.D..

"Yes," Janna said.

I hurried to the car to tell Nathan the good news.

"Does Janna think me being here is good news?" Nathan said to me as I stood next to the open passenger door waiting for him to get out of my car.

"She's waiting for you."

"Did she ask how I am?"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"You're fine."

"Did she believe you?"

"Let's go see her now, okay?"

"The helicopters didn't do this when I lived here."

"You lived in San Pedro?"

"I grew up in this house."

"Then you must be excited to see it."

"You're making an assumption."

"I'm good at doing that."

"I made assumptions about soil."

"I'm sure the soil didn't take it personally."

"My job was to make assumptions about the soil, but my employer didn't like my assumptions."

"Dad?"

I turned around and was relieved to see Janna.

"Tell Kalya that my assumptions about the soil were justified," Nathan said to his daughter.

"What are you doing here?" Janna said to her father and held out her hand to him. "You should get out of this nice lady's car."

"Her name is Kalya," Nathan said.

"It's too noisy out here. Let's go inside and talk," Janna said.

"Does that include Kalya?"

"You're welcome to come inside if you'd like," Janna said to me.

"I've got things to do," I said though the only thing I really wanted to do was check to see if I had a message from the veterinarian.

"I'd like to show you where I grew up," Nathan said to me.

I didn't really care to see where Nathan grew up. I wanted to let him down easily and was trying to figure out what to say, but Los Angeles' finest

prevented me from having to do that. Two police cars turned the corner, and one slowed down next to us.

“We’re cordoning off your block, and it would be best if you went inside,” the police officer said to us.

“What’s going on?” I said.

“We’re looking for someone,” he said.

“Perhaps they’re looking for me,” Nathan said to us, then to his daughter, “Did you file a missing person’s report?”

“You’re not missing,” Janna said.

“Please go inside,” the police officer said to us.

And so the first thing Janna and I did once we got inside Nathan Knowles’ childhood home was shut all the windows in an attempt to lessen the noise of the helicopter. Nathan followed us from room to room as if he were a dog.

“Double paned windows are on our to do list,” Janna said as we shut the windows in what was Nathan’s boyhood bedroom. “But since we don’t close the windows much when we’re home, I didn’t think it was urgent.”

“This is where I dreamt of being a scientist,” Nathan said as he looked around the room, now Janna’s home office.

“Your dream came true,” Janna said.

Nathan grumbled something I couldn’t understand.

“You’re an excellent scientist,” Janna said and for the first time since he arrived at her doorstep, she touched him, placed her hand on his arm for a long moment.

“Then I grew out of this room,” Nathan said to me. “When I was thirteen I convinced my parents to let me use the room above the garage for my bedroom. That’s where I conducted my experiments.”

“What kind of experiments?” I said imagining creepy things I’d seen in the movies.

“Biology in the beginning,” Nathan said. “Later chemistry and physics.”

“I took those classes,” I said, relieved that his subject matter was so ordinary.

“Did you pursue science?” Nathan said.

“Nope,” I said. “I was a ceramics major.”

“You’re an artist?” Janna said.

“I don’t earn my living that way,” I said.

“What do you do?” Nathan said.

“I re-glaze bathtubs,” I said. “I’m the Bathtub Queen of the South Bay. Have you seen my ad? It’s always in a few of the local circulars.”

“That’s sort of scientific,” Janna said.

“Sort of a scientist like that husband of yours,” Nathan said. “Are you still married to him?”

“He’s at work,” Janna said.

“I don’t consider it scientific at all,” I said, eager to lead the conversation away from the husband who supposedly hated Nathan.

“He works at the aquarium,” Nathan said to me. “He scrapes scum off the fish tanks.”

“He’s a biologist,” Janna said to me. “And he doesn’t scrape scum from the fish tanks.”

“Someone has to do it,” Nathan said.

“So you set up a laboratory in your bedroom above the garage?” I said.

“I certainly did. I slept on a cot in the corner of the room,” Nathan said. “My mother worried so much about my back, but I refused to let her put a bed in there taking up too much precious space. And when Janna turned thirteen she had the option of a cot or a bed.”

“I chose a bed,” Janna said.

“You did experiments up there too?” I said.

“I continued the family tradition,” Janna said.

“Will the family tradition continue?” Nathan said.

“Please, dad, don’t start that now.”

“Is the room above the garage still a laboratory?” I said.

“Let’s show it to her,” Nathan said to his daughter.

“It’s not an interesting room anymore,” Janna said.

“What have you done to it?” Nathan said. “Has Cliff made it into a pool room like he said he was going to do?”

“He has nothing to do with that room. He has a junk room in the basement.”

“Is there a bathroom up there?” I said.

“It has an old bathtub,” Janna said. “Which I’ve been wanting to replace.”

“Like the windows?” Nathan said.

“Re-glaze don’t replace,” I said getting serious, thinking that I may get a job out of this very inconvenient police situation. “I can give you an estimate.”

“I don’t know,” Janna said.

“You can at least let her give you an estimate,” Nathan said.

“I’d love to see where you both got your starts as scientists,” I said hoping I sounded genuinely interested and not simply like a business person wanting to make a sale. “What kind of scientists are you?”

“An unemployed one,” Nathan said.

“He’s a retired soil scientist,” Janna said.

“You make it sound so voluntary,” Nathan said to his daughter then to me, “They forced me into retirement.”

“What did you do as a soil scientist?” I said.

“My passion was nutrient uptake and management.” Nathan looked wistful.

I had no idea what that meant and didn’t want to ask. Instead, I asked Janna if she too was a soil scientist.

“She carried on her mother’s career,” Nathan said.

“She’s a scientist too?” I said.

“They’re both employed and successful scientists,” Nathan said but didn’t say it as if he were proud of them. “I’m surprised that Janna took the day off. I’m afraid she’s a bit of a workaholic.”

“Mother and I are food scientists,” Janna said to me. “Dad believes we both sold out to big business.”

“You did,” Nathan said.

“What do you do as a food scientist?” I said to Janna.

“I come up with ways to extend the shelf life of food.”

“That sounds useful,” I said and meant it.

“What kind of nutritious food lasts three years on a shelf?” Nathan said.

“Would you like to see the room above the garage?” Janna said to me.

“I’d like to take a look at that bathtub,” I said even though I had the feeling that she wouldn’t have been so willing to show me the bathroom above the garage if her father hadn’t been hassling her about her job.

“She does a lot of work on edible coatings too. Lots of our food now has a shell even if it isn’t an egg,” Nathan said as we walked into the backyard.

“What a beautiful yard,” I shouted to Janna, for the helicopter happened to be directly overhead. “It’s an English park with fruit trees.”

Janna nodded and hurried us across the backyard to the garage and to the stairs that led to the now defunct laboratory.

Nathan let out a gasp and then a heart sick sigh when we entered the room above the garage, for it most certainly wasn’t a laboratory. The entire room was a clothes closet. Though it was a clothes closet with windows on three walls. And a clothes closet with a view of the bridge, harbor, and ocean.

“I ran out of space,” Janna said.

“You’ve run out of space here too,” Nathan said.

“Everything’s on wheels.” Janna demonstrated by rolling a rack of pants about two feet to the left.

“Do you have a uniform for work?” I said since the pants on that rack looked identical.

“Of course not,” Janna said. “Why?”

“Those pants look the same,” I said.

“They’re the same style, but there’s a variation in shades. See?” Janna motioned to me.

I stepped closer, and sure enough she had about thirty pairs of casual pants in about ten different shades of beige. I noticed that some of the pants had the price tags still on them. Forty-eight bucks. I did a quick calculation of thirty times forty-eight. That was almost the cost of three bathtubs in need of re-glazing, and it was definitely the cost of three when I had a sale.

“Do you actually wear all of this?” Nathan said as he walked around the room running his hand across the racks and racks of blouses, skirts, dresses, pants, blazers and whatever else Janna had mixed in.

“It’s my hobby,” Janna said.

“Collecting new clothes?” I said.

“Shopping,” she said.

“Your taste is rather eclectic,” Nathan said as he glanced at a rack of evening gowns. Then he parted the poufs of chiffon.

"I know what you must think," Janna said.

"It must be difficult to keep young men confined to this closet of yours," Nathan said.

I looked over to where Nathan parted the dresses. There was a man in his twenties sitting cross legged on the floor.

I shook my head, and Janna yelled.

"I didn't do anything, dude," the young man said as he started to stand.

"I have no idea who that is," Janna said.

"Whoever he is has discovered your hobby," Nathan said.

"He has to leave," Janna said. "Right now."

The young man stood quietly with his hands in his front pockets.

"You've got to go," Janna said.

"I can't leave," he said.

"Of course you can," Janna said.

"They think I did it," he said.

"Did what?" Janna said.

"Who's they?" Nathan said.

The young man pointed to the ceiling.

We listened to the helicopter.

"If you didn't do anything then there's no problem," Janna said, opening the door to the balcony that wrapped around two sides of the room.

"The dude died at the hospital," the young man said.

"That could be a problem," I said.

"Innocent until proven guilty," Nathan said.

"Maybe for you," the young man said.

Probably not for a gang member was what I thought, and a gang member was probably what this young man was.

"Did you know the dude who died?" Nathan said.

"I'm not saying nothing," he said.

"How long do you think you can hide in this--" Nathan paused. "Here?"

"It has a bathroom," he said.

"Good point," Nathan said.

"Have you already used it?" I said to the young man.

He gave me a strange look.

"Did you happen to notice the condition of the bathtub?" I said.

"Are you serious?" Janna said to me.

"I don't take baths," the young man said.

"There must be a shower in the tub," I said.

"There was when I lived here," Nathan said.

"So you think you can walk right in here and stay here because there's a bathroom?" Janna said. "And how did you get in?"

"Just like you said. I walked in."

"Just like that?"

"The door wasn't locked."

"Did you walk up the front steps and go around the house and through the backyard?" Nathan said.

“You think I’m crazy?” The young man motioned behind him. “The alleyway.”

“Makes sense,” Nathan said.

“No, it doesn’t,” Janna said. “He’s trespassing.”

“Would you mind if I looked at the tub?” I said to Janna.

“Is that all you can think about at a time like this?” Janna said.

“Actually, I’d like to check my voicemail,” I said. “I’m expecting a message from my veterinarian.”

“No one’s stopping you from checking your voicemail,” Janna said.

She was right, so I checked while everyone watched me.

“The veterinarian did leave a message,” I said as I put my phone back in my purse. “My cat needs more antibiotics which I’m going to pick up today.”

“But you can’t leave,” Nathan said to me.

“I’m going to,” I said.

“The police officer suggested we stay inside,” Nathan said.

“The cop told you that?” the young man said.

“Do you know anything about this?” Janna said to him.

“They might be looking for me, but they’re wrong,” he said.

Suddenly the L.A.P.D. announced itself clearly and loudly from the helicopter: “Our search dogs are looking for you and when they find you, they will bite.”

“Do you need to be driven somewhere?” Nathan said to the young man.

“I’m not driving him anywhere,” I said.

“Don’t worry, Kalyn,” Nathan said. “I wasn’t volunteering you.”

“I’m not driving him anywhere either,” Janna said. “He’s going to walk out of this door and walk out of my yard and into the alleyway.”

“And get bitten?” I said.

“I’ll drive you somewhere in my daughter’s car,” Nathan said. “Where do you need to go?”

“You could take me to my cousin’s house in Long Beach,” the young man said, looking like he was going to cry.

“Fine. You’ll just need to put this on.” Nathan handed the young man a pink chiffon gown.

“Fuck no,” the young man said.

“These police officers won’t be looking for a woman in a pink dress,” Nathan said.

“I’m not going to let you use my car as a getaway car,” Janna said.

“Would you rather the cops think you’re harboring him after they see him leave here through the alleyway?” Nathan said.

“I’d be able to explain that he broke in and trespassed,” Janna said.

“I didn’t break into nothing,” the young man said.

“Anything,” Nathan said.

“You’ll return my car after you drop him off?” Janna said.

“I don’t have anywhere else to go,” Nathan said.

So Janna and I dressed the young man in the pink gown, which fit him quite well, and applied make-up to his very boyish face. To finish off his ensemble, Janna gave him a floppy hat and sunglasses. Though he never would have made the pages of *Vogue*, we believed he could get out of Vista del Oro without being detected by the attack dogs or their human partners, and Janna and I watched from the windows in the room above the garage as Nathan and the lady in pink chiffon slowly drove down the alleyway.

“Would you like to look at the tub?” Janna said when we could no longer see the car.

“I saw what I needed to see while we were applying Javier’s foundation, and I think you really do need a new tub,” I lied, and Janna walked me to my car though the helicopter still circled directly overhead, and the yellow police tape blocked off the intersection.

That Tuesday I made it through the police barricades and to the vet’s to get the cat’s medication and finally back home where thousands of ants had overtaken the kitchen counters, and the cat was sneezing clots of blood.

Sheheryar Sheikh

PODOPHILIA

(a response to Billy Collins' Marginalia)

Wouldn't say it's a fetish, but something. Take
toes, for instance. Wiggling like they have stories to tell, if only we'd
quiet down for a second. Or the heel when it's
excited, conducting operas from its LaZboy ankle.
The hand is too full of fingers. Cordoned off by wrist,
clawing air. Soles are better off, being grounded. No need to hold things,
just lie flat or arch. And if this were Billy Collins
writing he would mention socks, it would be
a considerate poem, with nothing unsaid about the
special feet of his world. He wouldn't wander or wade,
or smell and tell you how stale fragrance differs among the hot summer
noon
in slippers, and the cool shade where clothes are taken
off, beginning with the shaking free of flipflops,
especially when the girl has auburn hair. There would
be no dove-feet—no hooves—certainly, certainly you'd notice
the absence of much odor, which would be filmed
through and lost, bitten by snapdragons he'd not forget to mention. He
wouldn't
dangle sentimentally on someone like I have and am.
Favoring a topspin, he'd lob the sentiment over the
head of this poem, into a moment grasped with someone
at a point in life that for him seemed a new page to write on, a flash of white.

Sarah Bowman

A MATTER OF TIME

No one suspects the days to be Gods
-Emerson

you do not live gently or give
w/o quarter praise

passion offence
the jolly premise of apples & ass

or
what are the chances of chances
being the same?

scholars network the nearest way
to slumber rockin' on a cat's tail
all with nothing to lose

so shimmy loose a lull
the years still to the touch
& point to a fancy bum melancholy

while I burn to catch you first
to shape this roguish wish

to tumble as leaves
to fill your wet blush

b—
sleepwalk softly on my shoulder

as the chorus bells two moons
two moons

shimmer round that lucky sun
a target

your laughter wakes
to fancy

the closed door the burnt toast the empty bed
early morning couriers

reminding me
a thought does not start

our love involves the same
flow between body and breath

the distance between views
is crucial

but one thing's true—no one knows
what memories are

there's a lot of happiness left
[even if] returning loves comes hard

[even if] you eye the sky
with your tangled blue worry

your land over—leaning the water
[we can do things like this, baby]

one full morning still sings
as you move through the house

as you sit in a square of sunlight
reading and pointing to

I Hope To See You Again Green Friends
with our son

green lantern green river gray green bottle green
junebug green flower pot green river green bird
green
grass green pond green creek green fern green

lily pad green

I am astounded by how the pages rest
rather densely on a single word
& a lot of labor

before he's 5, our son will read
baskets of figs, spirits in the hollows
love love love

so see—
from such starts we become

the copper lanterns in the green green glen
the mossy forests through which we run
the days before us deciding where to go

while the breeze teases us back
every now & again

& again
here's to the smile
to combing old days from parallel tracks

when you walked towards me
the sun at your back

the scattered magic of that long long day
turns to this morning's wish

that we live these hours
move all about our bodies allowing
anything

the tree chases the hare
luck chinks the thinking cap
that little cup [that delicate thing]
your hand upon my back

where do we go from here?
baby, I wish I knew

life's been one long drive from town to town to town

but we've learned the luck the universe affords

its travelers sometimes
a smile an evening shared

we've watched the sun come up and set
and stood upon an ancient wall

and kissed as the planets lined up
the way they will again in a thousand years or so

& on this day
we get to be the lovers

the seasons will show [in due time]
the fine pressures of the years

a melody will hold this blossom
underfoot

or something thus
an empty street & winter in all the polls

except for a spring-like whim
calling something young

to pitch dirt
to build a home

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY: BREAK GLASS

I am staring at a Corgi. This is MY Corgi, apparently. “Mine” meaning the chance of its eviction equals the likelihood of its shitting on my new rug again. Insert VISION OF Neil Armstrong planting the flag on the moon. But don’t worry yourself as this is NOT a dog story. I am compelled to mention, however, that when a dog dies, people have that tendency to say, “Well, it’s a just a dog.” That is the equivalent of getting the “Born to Lose” tattoo or saying shit like, “The only two things you *have* to do is pay taxes and die” when in fact, no one was born to lose anything but the occasional set of car keys, you don’t HAVE to pay your taxes and uh.... Ever hear of everlasting life?! But I’ll get to the point.

Yes, there comes that moment when a snow flake has landed on your skin and begins to melt so quickly you fully understand that you are fleeting, trivial and every as bit as minor as that melting snowflake. The negative integer you’ve somehow become is **your one** claim to accomplishment. However, the departure of your own shell is far more complex than it seems.

Part 1

Typical outs (What a bore)

“Never run with scissors”: Cutting any major artery. You’re going to leave a blood bath for someone else to find?! Why not just leave a Flame thrower outside the door politely labeled “For use on your own eyes before opening this door. Trust me. This is a vision you’ll never lose.”

The Dangler: See above. Having witnessed this one myself some twenty years ago... I STILL see that body hangin’ and that poor bastard who found it desperately necessary to try and lift his dead weight from the strangulation. They’ll never be able to do it, so be kind enough to book their asylum stay in advance.

“Better call Maco!”: Driving your car of a cliff or overpass... etc. What if you live? Now you’re a crippled jackass and far worse... put into that

suicide watch ward. Now, you've got NO chance of leaving that shell what with being strapped down or drugged into oblivion. By the way, enjoy that colostomy bag.

“Friendly Fire”: Gunshots. Okay, seen that one, too. Cannot begin to tell you what it's like to see brain splattered on a wall and, in this case, his jaw was actually embedded in the plaster wall behind him. Just don't do it. It's beyond malevolent. Now picture the one that has to pry that jaw out of the wall and clean the brain matter. At least live the gratuity out.

“Wine is Fine but Whisky's Quicker”: Who has that sorta time?!

(Dog just pissed on the rug **again** staring right at me with that same unabashed oh-so-proud look even the finest dog will give you as it scoots its ass across your carpet. That champ!)

“Too much candy will make you sick!”: Overdosing. In 1944 film star Lupe Velez put on a lavish gown, did her hair and makeup and laid in a bed of roses before swallowing a bottle of narcotics. This was to be a discovery that looked so tranquil and devoid of drama; such a fine attempt at sparing the discoverer those ingrained visions. Well, turned out the narcotics caused her to vomit profusely and long story short, she was actually found with that head of striking hair drowned in the toilet, in her own vomit. (Oh, how the finest intentions can rain down like mortar!) Go on. Check out it in the Hollywood Babylon books!

The Discount face peal: Kissing the train. Seen that happen too. See ghastly vision mentioned above. Plus, conductors see trains again! Lovely memory catalyst if not bound to cause ... “early retirement.” Now consider the job market and his/her mortgage. And of course, let's not forget the undeserving S.O.B that has to scrape the remains of your face off the bottom of the train. And you thought a door-to-door vacuum sale was a bad gig?!

Only Cross on Green: Stepping out into traffic which is all too common among American Indian Tribes as it's easy and somewhat acceptable in New Mexico. No lights, winding blind corners ensuring you couldn't see this coming until it was too late to even swerve your car. You think someone should have to pay that deductible for the wind shield replacement? Might drive up their coverage rates! I know two people who “killed” people this way one of whom never drove again, the other still remains in an asylum some 8 years after that gift!

What a view!: Leaping to your exit. By now I hope I've made it clear to avoid all witnesses so just skip to asking yourself, "Hey? What if I LIVE?" Now you're crippled, (Hello full body cast, physical therapy and that new wheel chair!) with a crushed face. IE. Now you're uglier.

The Sylvia Plath: Carbon Monoxide. Okay, great artists are tortured and yes, you DO have a good shot at this the first time. (You're getting sleepy.... Very, very sleepy....) But seriously, Lady Plath? Really?! Stuffing rags under the kid's door was your concept of parenting? (Parenting is a VERB! Not a NOUN!) What? Not one person on the earth could take that baby that day?! (Yeah, okay, getting a babysitter is not always easy!)

*Incidentally, back in what? 1996? I was living at Turtle Creek Apartments. (NOTE: If it still exists, perfect place for the aspiring writer. Slum version of Melrose Place and **nonstop** amusement. Not the point.) One day these Hazmat trucks pull in-all these people in full bio gear accompanied by no less than 11 police cars. **IT WAS APRIL.** Hour later they emerged with a leathery corpse. Apparently, he'd pulled the Plath back in **DECEMBER.** Do the math. (What on earth is that rancid and permeating smell?!) Turtle Creek **TIP** of the year: Maybe it really takes that long to get evicted for non-payment of rent.*

"Hey, Idiot... the light is GREEN!": The garage approach. Know those garage measurements! Now go thank Obama for pushin' them low emission cars! **THIS COULD TAKE ALL DAMN WEEK...** unless you just run out of gas and get yourself discovered half asleep! Welcome to the suicide watch ward! ("Let's just put on this robe 'cause it's not only fashionable but comfy as a Snuggy!")

"I'll show him/her! How they will suffer now!": See **"Some Like it Hot"** starring Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemon. Marilyn cries and Tony Curtis lifts her face and says, "No tears, sugar. No guy's worth it." Just sayin' is all!

Part 2

Imbecilic prepping

Don't make that jackass mistake of giving away possessions beforehand. Dead giveaway. Honestly? You can't just put those items in the mail before

your departure? What? Saying a dime? (Refer to all you need are two pennies for the eyes. Pay the damn toll man for that ride across the River Styx. Are you really that cheap?)

Part 3

How to make the greatest exit

If'n you're just dead set on this... do it the day before the milk, eggs, meat... etc expiration date. The day BEFORE rent/ premiums/mortgage payment... etc... is due! Hell, have the car's tank on empty! Maybe jury duty starts the next day! And, while this will be a difficult one yet well worth knowing: try and find out WHEN the Seven-Year Tribulation begins! You really think this move will qualify you as a Saved One in the Rapture? Granted, this all will take a lot of arranging.... So many phone calls but WOW! Wouldn't you just die laughing?

Part 4

“Ahhh... He looks so peaceful!”

For the love of God, pick out your own Wake clothing your damn self. If you are set on a Wake... get over yourself already and buy the plot, casket and headstone yourself. You won't be paying back that credit bill, needing your savings and so forth any longer! And do remember: NO WAKE means no ½ inch of mismatched makeup on your face, rosy blush and lips and eyes glued shut. And let's not forget that funeral director pulling off your jewelry before closing that casket! (“Gold is at an all time high!”)

Personally, I'd recommend The Body Farm. They LOVE a good corpse. They collect them and do such obscure tests on them for the FBI and the police. Such as: What does a corpse look like rotting after X amount of time? What if we leave it out in the sun for one year? What does it look like after immersed in battery acid? Coupla weeks exposed to subzero temperature? A day? Barbecued? Oh come on, do SOME level of good in this world. *Word to the Wise guy: ever see morgue workers with the bodies? I accidentally saw that! They were literally playing with the bodies... exposing them naked for the hell of it and making... observations... laughing their asses off! Sitting the bodies up... doing impersonations. More reason to ship yourself straight to The Body Farm.*

Part 5

Gotta love a good eulogy!

“Make ‘em laugh! Make em laugh! Don’t you know all the world wants to laugh?! Now you can be a dancer and be light on your feet.... Ya slip on a banana peel.... the world’s at your feet!” Yawning in the church is YOUR fault. When my mom made me read “Letter to the Corinthians” at a family funeral, I was fighting between making it sound exciting and trying desperately not to look up at my sister. Why? When we were kids and the Priest would say turn to page blah blah for the Letter to the Corinthians... we’d whisper “Dear Corinthians... how’s the weather? I have hammer toe....” On and on. How about audience participation? A “Choose Your Own Adventure”? Maybe an indoor pig roast and someone attractive is pushing a drink cart? Tossing money into the crowd?

Part 6

The Finale

Just in time for the Corgi to crap right next to me again! GOOD GIRL! Not to be mistaken as some cry for help but not three days ago, my real dog-- my coveted seizure detecting dog was quite literally murdered. Now THAT is the sort of thing I’d call an “assassination.” (Tupac fans... just cope with it.) **That’s** *my* ultimate ponder till the tenth of always.

So do the whole world a favor (including yourself): don’t let your car ever drip antifreeze or oil or assume that snow or rain cleaned it away. That only dilutes it so once said pet steps in the water, licks its paws... it suffers the most horrific death you’ll ever see. If nothing else, keep in mind: don’t go shitting on other people’s rugs. Scrub all you like... it still leaves a stain.

Elizabeth Smith-Meyer

GALLERY

When the fly won't die, won't even be caught,
but buzzes and does his lazy jump from
arm to leg to hair stricken with sleep--
even worse, when the lean mosquito bites
and the cut flowers wilt and the phone lies in silence--
when one shoe is found and the other is lost
(but what does it matter when the box hides all)--
when the clock gambols ahead of every shoeless step
and the poor men weep and lonely women sweep and
the dark night still falls even without gentleness
because that's all the time there is--sorry

Alicia Guarracino

BEFORE

Black breath
of crickets
in the throat of night.
I hold my lips to the sky.
The metallic tang
of rock.
On the wind,
a white moth. Its wings,
petals, beating
like an argument
between two people, still
malleable and merciful.
In late summer,
late in the summer,
inside the late summer,
a silence as wide as Montana.

AFTER

Rain, supple tassels
of water.

The prairie
is green again. The grass,
as tall as the lions.

The thunder has been feeble
since you have left.

Daisies, their cold roots dangle
from my hands
like scalped hair.

I am tender to the light,
that tenuous bead of sap.

The petals of the moon,
FOLDED SOFTLY INTO MY MAP.

DURING

Your hair, dry
as coconut shells.
Spongy lips.
Spine of powder.
Your liver, cold moss.
Eyes. Tapioca pearls
at the bottom of the lake.
Gaping mouth of minerals.
Trace sulfur, copper crave.
Lungs of bark.
Riptide of cigar smoke
in the hollow of your pubis.
Rungs of ribs, molten flutes.
I come to you, a balm to hot teeth.

Iris Law

MARIA MITCHELL

Night comes to me
through the eye
of my telescope,

flushes my naked vision.
I loved you when I
was a girl, and you

(star melting to streak
of gaseous white)
had taught me

what it was to fall
from the sky:
drunk on gravity,

one blazes out only
when passing
too close to the sun.

FIELD NOTES, LICHEN MORPHOLOGY

Beatrix Potter by Night

Listen:

that
 resp. The fall
of fractured

trees
 predates

 the quiet lying

 down, the waiting;
 groans, a throaty

hum. The ancient

tooth in barky bed, its

ostenato
 dance.

 In pairs -

one eats, one shelters,

sleeps, and crawls.

 Small limbs encrust
 with thalli, spread

their fruiting
 fingers

 to the sun. The hillside:

half-light seeps,
 a colony

of hoarfrost,
 fairy green.

Donald Cowan

EAVESDROPPING

Some things depart from what you'd expect:
how didn't they see me,

I was there.

It's easy enough to overdose your sense
when you're ignored; it half triggered me
into wandering off onto cemeteries again,
except for what they said.

When the sun rises
we reflect its arrival with quiet,
how hanging colors awake being kind
within us, and sleep, being close,
abates.

I am not one from whom
the morning retracts.

When they spoke,
it reminded me of how I thought death
might be:

I should overhear their wists
and earn parted lips, like little smiles.
Nothing strong, nothing vile, nothing
that would spurn me for
eternity.

Now,
when snow comes down slowly
as if the sky condescends to incarnate the soil
I know enough of nor'easters to play.

CONTRIBUTORS

Francisco Aragón ('03) is the author of *Glow of Our Sweat* (Scapegoat Press, 2010), a collection of poems, translations, and prose. He is also the author of *Puerta del Sol* (Bilingual Press, 2005) and editor of the award-winning *The Wind Shifts: New Latino Poetry* (University of Arizona Press, 2007). His poems and translations (from the Spanish) have appeared in a range of anthologies and journals. He directs Letras Latinas, the literary program of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He is also the editor of *Canto Cosas*, a book series from Bilingual Press featuring the work of Latino and Latina poets. He is a member of the Macondo Writing Workshop in San Antonio and on the board of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP). Visit his website at: <http://franciscoaragon.net>.

Sarah Bowman (99) lives in Port Townsend, WA, with her husband Mark Matson (98) and their kids Niall (4) and Rosie (6 months). Sarah is General Manager for the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute - a nonprofit center focused on helping cities and towns become more walkable, bicycle friendly, sustainable, socially engaging and welcome placing.

Donald Cowan was born and grew up in Baton Rouge, LA. He is interested in teaching and writing poetry, and spend his summers in New York city teaching at the Erasmus Summer Institute, a summer program for high school students. He is currently a second year MFA student at the University of Notre Dame.

Renée E. D'Aoust (ND/MFA '06) is currently supported by an Arbutus Foundation Fellowship.

A. Faith De Betta is an MFA graduate of Notre Dame, class of 1996. Go Irish!

Lisa De Niscia is the Coordinator of the Adult Literacy Center at the Wilmington branch of the Los Angeles Public Library. My other job is to keep Oxalis out of my garden.

Jeanne De Vita graduated from Iowa State University with a B.A. in English (1996) and the University of Notre Dame with an M.F. A. (2000.) Her 9-to-5 is handling asbestos claims for a Chicago insurance company. She has spent hundreds of hours of volunteer work with special needs kids over the last 5 years, including two service trips to Romania. She is currently

nursing her dog back from cancer surgery, coincidentally just a few months after her father went through treatment for cancer. The ten years since she finished her MFA have passed far too quickly, but she has been hard at work during that time both creating and gathering material.

Emily DiFilippo's short fiction is forthcoming in the Spring 2010 issue of *Natural Bridge*. Her work also won first place in the 2007 St. Louis Writers' Guild Short Story Contest. Emily holds an MA in Spanish from Washington University in St. Louis. She has taught the language at both the high school and college levels since 2004.

Shannon Doyne ('00) is still at it.

Danna Ephland (class o' 2006) was born in Buffalo, N.Y., danced in Toronto, studied & danced more in Berkeley, and fell madly in love with poetry in Chicago. She lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan where she teaches First Year Comp at Kellogg Community College. She delights in facilitating independent creative writing workshops and retreats. Her poems have appeared in *Tea Party Magazine*, *Indiana Review*, *Letterhead*, *Rhino*, *Permafrost* and others. She is included in an anthology of collaborative poems, *Saints of Hysteria* by Soft Skull Press. Her chapbook *Needle Makes Tracks* is due out Spring 2010, even if she has to mimeograph it herself.

Jessica Martinez English ('09) lives near Savannah, Georgia with her husband.

Alicia Guarracino received her MFA from the University of Notre Dame in 2009. She is currently adjunct teaching at various colleges throughout NJ and singing with The Buick Club Jazz Band. Alicia writes poetry, prose, screenplays, and music. And she has recently added blogging to her repertoire.

Dónal Kevin Gordon (MD, MFA '96) loves Notre Dame. He is today the family physician he is entirely because of Notre Dame. As for the poet Dónal was, and still hopes to be, John Matthias gets all the credit for having been there at that moment, that day, back in 1994. Apart from that, Dónal is today a family physician in Iowa, on the faculty at the family medicine residency in Cedar Rapids and clinical adjunct faculty at the University of Iowa College of Medicine. Still, despite having turned that ND MFA into an MD, he remains, at heart and in his soul, the poet he always aspired to be.

Desmond Kon (Zhicheng-Mingdé) has edited more than 10 books and co-produced 3 audio books, several pro bono for non-profit organizations. His work in lifestyle and developmental journalism took him to Australia, Cambodia, France, Hong Kong and Spain, and saw him writing numerous stories, including features on Madonna, Björk and Morgan Freeman.

Trained in book publishing at Stanford, with a theology masters in world religions from Harvard and fine arts masters in creative writing from Notre Dame, Desmond is a recipient of the Singapore Internationale Grant and Dr Hiew Siew Nam Academic Award. His poetry and prose have recently appeared in *Cerise Press*, *Diagram*, *Everyday Genius*, *Gulf Coast*, *Luna Park Review*, *Monkey Bicycle*, *New Orleans Review*, *Pank*, and *Versal*, with work forthcoming in *Blackbird*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Ganymede*. Also working in clay, Desmond sculpts commemorative ceramic pieces for his Potter Poetics Collection. These works are housed in museums and private collections in India, the Netherlands, the UK and the US.

R. Jess Lavolette is the Sparks Editorial Assistant at the Notre Dame Review. His work has appeared in *Witness*.

Iris A. Law will graduate from Notre Dame's MFA program in May 2010. She received her B.A. from Stanford University in 2008, and is the founding editor of the online magazine *Lantern Review: A Journal of Asian American Poetry*. Iris's poetry is forthcoming in the 2010 issue of *LUMINA* and has also appeared in a number of online venues, including *Chaz: An Asian Literary Journal* and *Kartika Review*. In 2009 a selection of her work was nominated for the *Best of the Net Anthology*.

Corey Madsen received his BA from the University of Michigan in 2002 and his MFA from Notre Dame in 2004. He currently resides in Carbondale, Colorado. His first novel, *An Evensong For Father Bob*, is available on Alibris.com.

Jessica Maich graduated from the Creative Writing Program in 1997. She lives in South Bend with her husband, Paul, and teaches at St. Mary's College.

William McGee Jr. lives in Joliet, Illinois with his wife and two daughters.

Grant Osborn hails from the Northeastern states and graduated magna cum laude from the University of Notre Dame with a BS in Biological Sciences in 2006. He is the author of *The Human Market* (Luapatir Press 2007) and winner of the 2005 Long Reach of African American Poetis Competition. He is a lover of soul and thinks everyone should have at least a couple of vices; some of his favorites are whiskey, women, wine, and song.

Melanie Page was inspired to write this story when her mom bought her a cheesy Harlequin romance to read on the way to Montana, which is where cowboys and buffalo roam. Page graduates from Notre Dame in May 2010

and hopes to be perceived as a serious writer based on other works in her repertoire.

Jen Penkethman was born, adapted, migrated, mutated, and is currently an arthropod living somewhere off the coast of Florida.

Jared Randall received his MFA degree in 2009 from the University of Notre Dame where he also worked for a variety of print publications. He was a nominee for both the 2009 AWP Intro Journals Award and the 2009 Best New Poets Anthology, and his writing has appeared in *Controlled Burn*, *Crucible*, and online journals such as *Bulk Men's Fiction* and *Subtle Tea*. Randall works as an adjunct professor in Michigan where urban sprawl cramps old farmhouses. His first book of poetry, *Apocryphal Road Code*, is due to see print in Spring of 2010.

Cyndy Searfoss is a 1995 graduate of the Creative Writing Program and insomniac, which allows her time to work on her second novel and other bits of writing. During the daylight hours, she is the Director Advancement at Stanley Clark School in South Bend where her two sons attend school and recently became an adjunct faculty member for the St. Mary's-of-the-Woods distance learning program. She tries to retain her sanity through running and riding fast horses.

Sami Schalk is from Southgate, Kentucky. She leads community workshops in South Bend and back home in the Cincinnati area with Women Writing for (a) Change. In May 2010, Sami will officially earn her MFA in Creative Writing from Notre Dame and continue on to a yet to be determined doctorate program in the fall.

Sheheryar (Shero) Sheikh lives in London, across from the Lord's Cricket Ground, which is the birthplace of his favorite sport. Having lived in New York right after graduation, he loves spreading across the globe a good word about Notre Dame du Lac, where he changed his life around from being a C- student without hope to a rejuvenated A+ non-alpha male lover of life.

Elizabeth Smith-Meyer graduated from the MFA program in May 2000.

She's currently teaches literature and creative writing at a Montessori school in Indiana and helps to orchestrate a Model United Nations simulation for middle-school students in New York.

Jennifer Stockdale is an MFA candidate at the University of Notre Dame. In 2007, she earned an MA in creative writing from Miami University, where she served as poetry editor for *Oxford Magazine*. Her work has been published in *Salt Hill*, as well as online in *Hot Metal Bridge*, *Pomegranate*, and *Other Rooms*.

Cyndi Vander Ven is a graduate of Notre Dame's MFA program.

Stephanie Magdalena White reluctantly left Canada for college, then gladly stayed to get an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Notre Dame. She now lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where she is working on a PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, despite being thoroughly tired of school. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Dialogue*, *DIAGRAM*, and *The Notre Dame Review*, and she has published a chapbook of poetry and photos called *This Heavy Sky*. She likes it much better when Ryan Glenn Smith writes her bios.