

# **THE BEND**

**9TH EDITION**



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Number 9

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This is the 2012 installment of the showcase for the work of students, alumni, and friends of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame--the journal known in previous incarnations as Dánta, La Rue Barbarian, and The Rhubarbarian.

The Bend does not read unsolicited manuscripts.

Printed in the United States

# Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

The sun shines through the windows.

We drink spoiled juice.

We have computers.

This is a book.

Read for yourself how splendid it is.

Bye.

P.S.: Bend

over

(again).

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C. Kubasta

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## Found Text Text

(Theology syllabus, Zazen intro, Parataxis discussion,  
Fashion as Ideology prompt, & lines from *250 Poems: A  
Reader*.)

Notice every*thing*—anxiety, tension, unconsolable wildness,  
sadness,  
pain, whatever explicit, logical transition words twenty-five  
years later  
would speak English, the one language of fashion and sweltering  
attics.

Y, or chronologically X then Y was intact, but a little ragged  
in his hands. One idea is not subordinated;  
it is the reader who infers fashion as committed to the status quo  
while  
some commentators characterize deer hair, because it's hollow  
and floats  
is metonymic of the obsessive collecting of  
your fingers. It's winter, it's far.



*Margaret Emma Brandl*

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**mise-en-scène:**

## **THE BOOK OF JOB + PERICLES**

[The subject has been chosen because of questions of suffering, because the questions are universal questions. The work has value as a spectacle to show the intense sufferings of Job and Pericles, the contrasting torments of desert and sea, the booming voice of God, miraculous resurrection, reward—as Pericles’s supposedly dead wife and daughter are recovered Job receives back all he has lost, but is it enough? The audience will be unsettled by the happy ending. Is it as happy as it seems?]

Act One: FORTUNE REVOKED

Plays of light and wind so as to suggest on one side desert, on another side sea. Grotesque forms over the sea, hobbled forms beside the desert, and yet the audience will hear the sounds of rejoicing. Job and Pericles appear as instrumentalists and play joyful noise. They are huge, tall, men on stilts with billowing clothes, they step over and through the audience, intersect, flow back together. Sections of cloth suggesting sea and sand float up around them, twist and tangle them, end swallowing them, toppling them.

Geometric towers of some round dispersible material, beads or small balls, on each side, belonging to each man. When the sea and sand swallow them up the towers come toppling down onto

the audience, the material breaks up, the audience may take a piece or several. Before falling, as the towers break, Job and Pericles drop their horns from the full height of their stilts.

#### Act Two: LAMENT

The layers of sand and sea settle and the light dims, plays on the sheets like stormy clouds overhead. Job and Pericles claw their way around under the sheet, joined by other actors so that there is a great monster under each, a great evil—by means of some device the players crowd together so that the sheets become living, breathing things, move toward one another, drag through the audience (envelop the audience in darkness and confusion; sounds of chaos play; large bags of glass and other garbage are dropped from the highest point in the theater—at no harm to the audience but so as to create a great crashing). When the sea and sand have switched sides the other players disperse, stand atop the sheets, tug at them and rip them until Job and Pericles emerge.

With Job, chaos. A movement like dancing and like fistfighting.

With Pericles, eerie stillness. A bustle around but he remains stock still. Shadows of Thaisa and Marina cast across him. The men around him seem to melt.

#### Act Three: TAKING ACTION

Pericles is placed on a ship that glides above the heads of the audience around the room as the scene continues. Thaisa and

Marina are brought out of the sea by sorcerers in garish costume.

Job climbs a ladder and gets back on his stilts but wobbles around, distracted, angry. Men follow him and bombard him with large foam shapes on poles and silk scarves and he raves like a madman, angry with God, almost tripping multiple times.

Thaisa is taken above by figures in all-white on strings. Many figures stand around her forming a temple. Marina stands Virgin Mother-like, still, in the center of a whirling mass of evil things.

Pericles is oblivious.

#### Act Four: THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

Job finally trips off of his stilts and is caught in a billowing thing below the sand-cloth. A nearly blinding spotlight shines upon him from above and figures in white move violently around him, shouting and calling. As God scolds Job becomes still.

Pericles's ship descends and he is dragged off by the things that surround Marina, which then disappear. When he sees Marina there is an explosion of sound of bells and whistles and metallic noises, the jingling of keys and the brassy deep voice of a gong and the twang of the glockenspiel, as many bright metallic voices of as many kinds as can be thought of or improvised, all over—players placed in the audience ring jingle bells in their ears. A system of windchimes is agitated by the fan that brought wind.

Pericles and Marina are under a simple, yellowed spotlight (not

nearly as bright as Job's). Large metal sheets and mirrors are waved about to reflect the light

The noise of the men around Job dies down and he is left in the light.

Act Five: HOME

Thaisa descends to Pericles and Marina. By the time her feet touch the floor the jangling has died down. Wife and daughter resurrected (or so it would seem) are then raised on stilts and tower over Pericles, who smiles but trembles and picks up his horn once again.

The sand rises up around Job and from underneath emerge men and livestock and plenty. They pick him up and raise him above their heads. He, too, regains his horn.

Job and Pericles, first separately, then gradually together, play the same melody in two different keys. None of the actors appear to notice the dissonance and comingle, running back and forth through the audience to give the appearance of joy.

Lights dim and a brown cloth is slowly lowered over the actors and the audience, slowly, slowly, and as soon as the cloth touches an actor he becomes silent and lies down. Soon all is dark.





## **Hoe List**

Big sister is outfitted in pink shoes, yellow dress, white bow. She is 13-years-old. She says, “Come on, little brother.” I say, “What about mummy?” “She’s obviously talking to Miss Myrtle.” I look at mummy, because I want to be completely certain big sister isn’t lying, and big sister isn’t lying, because in the front of the library mummy is talking to a lady outfitted in black shoes, khakis, black top, and the lady is Miss Myrtle, who is our neighbor. Big sister says, “See?” Then she grabs my hand.

The library has merely one floor, because it is the small library. The big library is downtown, and we go to the downtown library uncommonly, because to get to the downtown library you have to ride the train, and mummy says the train is dirty, and big sister says the train is overflowing with homeless, which means you do not have a home, which means you do not have a bathroom, which means you can’t shower, so you’re dirty.

In the front of the library is the checkout desk and lots of brown tables where patrons read and use their laptops, and if you don’t own a laptop, then you can go into a little room and use the library’s desktops.

In the back of the library are where the books are, and the books are separated into aisles. Big sister pulls me into the Young Adult aisle. Then we stop. Big sister faces the bookcase. It has three shelves. Big sister scans the shelves very carefully. Then she licks her fingertips. Then she removes a book. The book is a hardback. Big sister scans the cover very carefully. Then she shows the cover

to me. She says, "Isn't it scrumptious?"

On the cover is a boy, and the boy is on his knees, and the boy isn't outfitted, which means the boy is naked, and you can see the outline of his spinal cord. The book is called *Sexy*. I say, "Intercourse is for hoers." Big sister frowns. Then she puts *Sexy* under her armpit. She says, "I'm a hoe." I look at the bookshelves. Then I look down at my shoes, which are brown. I ask, "Are you completely certain?" Big sister nods her head. She says, "I'm on my school's Hoe List, little brother. It's a scrumptious accomplishment."

A librarian comes into the Young Adult aisle. The librarian is outfitted in black pants, purple top, earrings. She asks big sister and me, "Can I help you find anything?" Big sister smiles and shakes her head. She says, "We're fine, thank you." Then the librarian smiles, and the librarian's smile is bigger than big sister's. The librarian says, "Well, let me know." Big sister says, "Of course." The librarian smiles again. Then the librarian leaves.

Big sister frowns. I stare at her suspiciously. I ask, "So... you have intercourse?" Big stares at me back. Then she rolls her eyes. Then she bites one of her fingernails. She says, "Don't be a dolt, little brother. I merely touch their cocks." "Oh." "I'd touch yours, but you don't have one yet." "That's obviously a falsehood." Big sister grins. She says, "Oh? Then let me ask you this: Can it get harder than a train?" I chew my bottom lip, which tastes like salt. Then I look down at my shoes again. Big sister says, "Like I said, you don't have one yet."

There's noisy laughter, and big sister looks over at the brown tables, because that is where the noisy laughter is coming from, and I don't look over at the brown tables, because I'm not concerned about the noisy laughter, so I stare at big sister. She says, "How inconsiderate." Then she opens *Sexy* and turns to the very last page.

She says, “A mere 207 pages. That won’t do. We’ll have to get another one.”

Big sister grabs my hand, and we go into the World History aisle. Big sister scans the shelves very carefully. Then she removes a book. It is a hardback, and it is really big, and on the cover is a boy outfitted in black shoes, white stockings, white coat, lots of jewelry, white wig. Big sister gasps. Then she says, “Oh my.” Then she says, “682 pages.” Then she puts the book back on the shelf. Big sister says, “Uncommonly long, little brother.”

The next aisle is the Autobiography and Biography aisle, and at the very end of the aisle is a fat girl outfitted in white shoes, blue jeans, red top. Big sister looks at the fat girl. Then she rolls her eyes. Then she scans the shelves very carefully. Big sister says, “This is a complete waste.” I say, “What about this one?” Big sister looks at the book my finger is pointing at. It is a hardback, and it’s big. Big sister says, “Harvey Milk? Isn’t that the name of an archenemy? Let’s go.”

We don’t go into the Psychology and Philosophy aisle, but we do go into the Adult Fiction aisle. I don’t scan the shelves very carefully. I say, “Mummy says you’re not old enough to read books from the Adult Fiction aisle.” Big sister grins. She says, “Mummy doesn’t know I’m on the Hoe List.” “Oh?” “Scrumptious accomplishments bring rewards.” “Oh.” Big sister smiles. Then she scans the shelves very carefully. She licks her fingertips. Then she removes a book. The book is a paperback, and it’s pink. It’s called *Normal Girl*. Big sister flips the book over and reads from the back, “*At just nineteen, Miranda Wake seems to have it all. Her parents are famous socialites, she’s already been written up on Page Six sixteen times, she’s on all the right invitation lists, and drugs and alcohol are never in short supply.*” Big sister nods her head thoughtfully. Then she looks at me. Then she looks at the book. She opens it and turns to the very

last page. She says, “208 pages... completely perfect.” Then she says, “We can go get mummy now.”

Big sister grabs my hand and we start to go to the front of the library, because big sister is completely certain mummy is still talking to Miss Myrtle, because Miss Myrtle talks your ears away. Then we stop. Big sister stares into the little room where the library’s desktops are. She says, “Look what’s happening, little brother.” A fat boy outfitted in jean shorts, grey top, red headphones, is sitting in front of a desktop, and on the desktop’s screen is a girl, and the girl is on her knees, and the girl isn’t outfitted, so the girl is naked, and the girl is licking a cock. Big sister pinches the palm of my hand. She says, “That’s my future, if I don’t screw up.”





**gchat**

**also  
we're going to write a poem now**

yay

**omg okay**

**I'm going to go to the bathroom, then come back, then pour  
wine and eat chocolate, then we're going to write poems**

**k?**

yes

**you don't really have an option btw**

:P

I will defy your will

**okay**

**what should our poem be called**

our poem should be called bloody hello kitty

okay

123 go

**this is the beginning of this poem: I'm tired of poetry.**

I want poetry to have no lips or vocal cords

**I'm not surprised by your lack of enthusiasm about bodies. I think they're generally very average myself.**

average should be the leverage to our existence. our girlhood orients around non-protruding cuteness which is the necessity of our transcendence into body without organ

**in general what I would like to do is pretend there are great flocks of pigeons descending upon our soldiers. in general, glasses make you look awkward in a good way. I am always awkward in an awkward way. I'm sorry, was that appropriation awkward? is writing awkward? um, obviously, we're writers (not).**

I like making the glasses a signifier of writing. my weakness our weakness to good writing. I would fuck any protruding object as long as it produces good writing. writing is wringing water out of wrong kinds of justices. I need it sometime just so that I can obtain it as part of my collection

**I don't know how to exist without goals, a definite wattage so**

## **my light is not too bright**

I pushed the lightbulb with burnt filament in it off my desk. It extinguished itself as it hit the floor. I felt like a triumphant cat standing over the carcasses of the rats

**and then I tried really hard to be destructive but all I could do was scratch at my skin. I was totally unbroken. I took to the shopping malls and strip clubs. it was whatever.**

self-destructive activities require too much effort. we are better than that

**nu-uh. we are exactly that. I, at least, am attempting responsibility. strike that. make me a good-angled mimeograph.**

ot it's perhaps difficult to be mimetic to our state of being nonsubstance. the nonsubstantial being of nonprotruding existence which is what it means to be a girl, the body without organ, the tragedy without dead bodies

**we're going to write theory b/c "awww, that's so cute." omg we are so fucking cute.**

I'm gonna get fucked up, drink seven bottles of wine and act cute and cuddly before leaning over the cutest boy in the party with the specific angle that flatters my cheekbones. It is intelligent design, predesigned cuteness, predesignated site/sight of

disaster.

**ew I hate ew I hate ew I hate hate**

h8 the sk8ter boy

**h8 all the boiz**

it's terrible to be girlz

**I'm going to grow  
a giant emptiness.  
I'm going to alter  
the ambivalent Great**

giant empathy to the grown girl. the girl that is not beautiful but remains to be cutesy. because she is empty and ambivalent  
**(she has ppl over all the time so no worries)**

(cool cool)

**don't you agree that the proportions of the world are off? that  
everything could be beautiful if beautiful were relevant? stop  
me if you think someone's felt this dumb before. stop me stop  
me stop me stomp me**

stomped face cannot sniff in the delicate way the girls sniff as she weeps& my eyes sink in in the way that i can no longer see anything that is relevant. I want the religion that teaches the sublime beauty yet I want to be the outcast of the outcast of the

leprotic disfigurements at the same time.

**(jiyoon lee)**

**(I cannot respond to this poem)**

**(are parentheticals outside of poems?)**

**(right now)**

(I dunno )

(I like whispers)

(and notes that are passed around during the class)

**(omg m2)**

(do you like me? yes or no type of thing)

**(do we have boxes to check?)**

**(if “yes” I check “yes”)**

(do you like poetry? yes or no)

**(“no”)**

(rip up the note and burn it with your kitchen lighter)

(in front of the boy that sent you the note)

**(let's)**

**(shall we adjourn to a summer's day?)**

(and I will feed the boy the ash resulting from the burning)

(make him swallow it)

**(aka the room in which....we do not have to tell the boy we're going there we'll just go, he'll follow)**

(a summer's day is over)

(and we shall die)

**(then we can eat ice pops and act ambivalent)**

**(also we shall die)**

(i like that thought)

(is \*\*\*\* watching porn)

**(I like typing to you)**

**(and pretending we are not on the couch)**

(I do too especially in parenthesis)

**(omgme2!)**

(but we should not talk about it too much before the novelty wears off)

(i want to live in the parenthesis)

**it's true. 123 we're going to move locations ready 123**

(it feels safe in here)

**nope**



## **Fat Burning Pills and Other Eucharists**

My mother smells “Dead-Christ” outside of Costco. That’s what she calls it.

“Hmm,” I say, pushing the big red button beside the handicap entrance. We’re in no rush. It lazily opens. We walk in to a greeter who shoves a cart at us and mutters something that may well be in Aramaic. There it is: a huge display of hyacinth flowers as well as a large display of maxi pads with new fashionable paisley prints because I am an individual.

She stands there for a moment, as if disappointed that a Saint had not just exhaled this perfume, even though a Saint may well have.

We have no specific shopping agenda but whatever it is, we shall retrieve it in bulk. The broadcasted advertisement reminds us that we too can have that ageless, flawless look. We can take off ten years in ten minutes or five weeks according to our level of commitment. Combined... that’s 20 years. (Ten minutes divided by 20 ounces times number of applications multiplied by 25 tubes... no, 50... and that’s a sound investment in me.)

“Ten minutes? Aisle B5!” I say, grabbing her arm and pulling her past the wall of mascara promising to permanently darken and thicken my eye lashes with only a small chance of permanently turning my eyelids brown.

Running my strengthened, fortified fingernail over the endless boxes of creams, I am trying to drown out the guy next to me who

may or may not be speaking to an actual person over his blue tooth. Either way, go-getter would like us all to know about his personal investments and the available real estate in Santa Fe. It's as if he doesn't know that with just a dime size of this light and creamy stuff, we can refine our fine lines overnight. Better than amniotic fluid and with less mess.

“When I was a child, there were these Good Friday pilgrimages,” my mother says. “These women... I remember they would crawl ...on their knees... to this crucifix and kiss His feet. Most of them were very old. The women, I mean. Very, very old,” she says, tapping out the final syllables against the box she likes. I grab two cases and realize the person that the blue tooth guy was speaking to was actually in the same store. They are now loudly talking to one another via cell whilst shopping in the same aisle.

“Then some of them, after all that, they would get back on the line and start from the beginning again. It was such a long way and I remember they would tear their hosiery doing this so that the second time, they were crawling on their bare knees. The Church always smelled like hyacinth and... something. Cheap *and* expensive.”

“Common, lady, let's crawl to the douche aisle,” I smile. She gives me that look like I should have whispered that word. The televisions, however, are not so concerned with my verbiage, rather my ability to be confident standing silently in an elevator and other enclosed areas. I think about preparing bodies for their wakes. Perhaps they have “Extra Super Unusually Confident” fragrance so that I won't have to wear a gray hoodie and an ashamed expression in that elevator.

Her attention goes to the Amber Alert now being broadcast rather unenthusiastically by a woman uncertain of how to say a

child's name. It is official. We are in lock down until Pedro Jesus Martinez, last seen in the light bulb aisle and possibly wearing denim jeans, a green tee shirt, and carrying an Ipod, is rescued, found or we simply toss in the towel and encourage his mother to have another one.

When a young woman who is texting with great focus walks right into her, my mother says "Excuse me" with great sincerity. The girl goes on texting oblivious to the presence of another human. This must be critical. We have all experienced confusion in the teeth whitening aisle. (Teeth whitening, note to self.)

"Douche?" I ask loudly, to no one in particular as I toss boxes into the cart. My mother raises a brow.

We loop back for that mascara stopping only for those pills that promote our colonic balance and shed pounds in days. "Plenty of water, a balanced meal... um, not so much on the exercise but no worries, I'll take two... Yes, I *am* tired of that belly fat and my own sluggish behavior. Thanks for asking. Mom? Are you also tired of your belly fat?" She doesn't say anything; just throws another box into the cart and turns just in time to get hit in the elbow with some woman's shopping basket. "I'm so sorry," she says, rubbing her arm. No response.

We're all set for the self checkout line as the one scheduled cashier looks desperately annoyed by the complaining shoppers. Apparently, Pedro Jesus Martinez knows how to get under the floor boards or something because a good fifteen minutes have passed and it's still missing. An irate crowd stands at the exit door. During an Amber alert lock down the one thing all people with nothing to do can agree on is that the victim better be half dead in the mesa and not in the john.

"Anything else before I hit 'Accept'? Mom?" She's staring at

the flowers. Or maybe the maxi pads. They *do* have paisley prints. “Mom, go grab the flowers!”

“No, no” she says, waving me off. “They die so quickly.” Suddenly scattered shoppers start pointing to the Amber child who is being dragged toward the door by its appalled mother. All is right in the world. We carefully bag in plastic and take joyfully the spoiling of our goods.





*C. J. Waterman*

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## **Notre Dame des Merde**

God pulls up in his chauffeured limousine as I'm shitting on the sidewalk. Doves scatter in the pattern of victims fleeing a suicide bombing. Exiting the vehicle, God offers me dinner. I clean my ears with Lemon Pledge. They always clog in the presence of deities, needing the type of cleaning typically reserved for a warzone. The burning of a city, whether from heaven or from human, feeds my soul for weeks. As for my stomach, I won't be cornered into a ramshackle nutritive agreement in the presence of greatness. My intestines have sauntered through some rough neighborhoods. They went to art school & learned to create great works. They made a sculpture that even God came to see.



## **The Rabbit**

I spent almost three weeks living with The Nurse. It was terrible. She had this rabbit she bought the day after I got there; it came with a cage, she put it in the living room. Three days later, it had two babies, ate them; then it had two more, started eating them, too—this industrial, methodical gnawing. The Nurse came out of her room. She acted all horrified, then tried to hand me those bloody morsels of meat.

She was crying. She said, “Please, you have to kill them.”

They were blind, missing limbs. I said, “You’re the one who bought the damn thing.”

I grabbed a plastic grocery bag from the kitchen, took the rabbits from her, put them in the bag. Should I stomp them? I went outside and walked around her neighborhood until I found a garbage can far away from her place. It was the middle of the night and I was in my boxer shorts. When I came back, The Nurse was in her room with the door shut, the rabbit was sitting in its cage in the living room in the dark.

\*\*\*

The Nurse’s place was in North Phoenix, one of those crappy little adobe houses on one of those shitty little adobe streets. The room she’d given me had a futon. I’d arrived on the bus; as the days wore on, I bought a bicycle from a pawn shop and rode it all over. That part of town was Mexican and I spoke Spanish, so that was fine.

When The Nurse would come home from her shift in her scrubs, she'd slip off her mules by the door, shake out her hair, take a shower. She kept the curtains in the house drawn because of, I don't know, the neighborhood; the AC blasting; she had a tiny yard out back with maybe three square feet of grass and a high wall around it like a prison. She wanted me to smoke out there; fine. I'd bring the rabbit with me. It'd sniff around the edge of the wall like looking for an exit. I'd think, what kind of thing eats its own fucking kids?

The Nurse was kind of stupid. Sometimes when she'd get home, she'd say, "What'd you do all day?"

"What do you think I did?"

The Nurse owed \$137,000. She wasn't supposed to be a nurse; she was supposed to be famous, right? She came home one time with bags from Saks. I was like, "You crazy?"

She was like, "I know! I know!"

The problem with The Nurse and I was that we were having sex. It wasn't even good. She'd get on all fours like expecting an earthquake. Anyway, when they'd call me, they'd say, "What's going on out there?" I'd tell them, "She says she's waiting for some check."

"You smoking crack?"

"No."

"Then you're fucking her."

\*\*\*

Anyway, The Nurse could be fun. We'd go out to the one white bar in her neighborhood: Peckerheads. Country and western; they had a big mason jar full of cherries soaking in alcohol; they cost something, I don't know what; we'd pop them like candy. Then The Nurse would climb up on the bar and start taking off her clothes.

It was because she had those brand new tits. Everybody'd holler; she'd leap down on my back, spur and ride me around. Then we'd sing karaoke.

We started hiking together on her days off. We'd go up to the top of Camelback, or North Mountain. One windy evening on North Mountain, we sat on a rock; the sun had already set; the city below looked like a circuit board. I asked her, "Why do you buy all that shit? What's with the gambling?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"I don't know."

"Can't you stop?"

"I don't know."

"But don't you want to stop?"

"I don't know."

We took a trip up to the Grand Canyon. Then we drove down to Puerto Peñasco. One night down there, we were watching TV and I asked her, "You want to have kids?"

"I don't know. What about you?"

"Me neither."

When my phone rang the next day, it was them. "She get that check?"

"No."

When The Nurse came home from work that evening, I took her by her arm into the bedroom. "Can you get the money?"

The Nurse began to cry. I told her to lie on the bed, and she did. I climbed on top of her, smothered her with a pillow. She tore her fingernails down my forearms; I could feel her twisting under the pillow.

When it was over, I tucked the pillow beneath her head. I fixed a

turkey sandwich in the kitchen, then took the rabbit, drove away in her car. I let the rabbit loose in the desert. Something would get it out there, thank God. I hadn't liked it much anyway.





*Jessica Maich*

---

## **Waiting for Someone to Die**

Holmes County, Ohio, where the Amish live,  
is hilly for the Midwest, and the rains come  
hard in late March, turning the south field,  
across the road, into a spread of sop and mud.

This afternoon, as every afternoon, evening  
approaches and the cows make their way,  
single file, up and over the small rise to the worn  
barn and the pleasure of food and release.

But the weakest Holstein, the oldest girl,  
Is having trouble, slipping with each attempt,  
and panicked, she calls out as she grinds  
the familiar daily hill into a muddy slide.

The others have gone on, as is their habit,  
and her struggle continues, to remain a part  
of the herd she's sheltered with, season  
after season, as the earth fills with water.





Tom O'Connor

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## Little Bucket of Sunshine

—for Alicia (on her 5th birthday)

There are no toy guns allowed in preschool  
*But our fists can break you into sun drops*

\*

We are wild horses neighing you right outta here  
*With looks so dirty you'll have to take a bath*

\*

Don't worry: if we knock down a tree, it'll land on its branches  
*We gotta paw till it's all drooping candles and Kumbaya*

\*

Life's a video game; we gotta reach the highest level  
*So let's blow out our lobes*

\*

And steal the sword of the night sailor  
*With one word, he can trap us in a traffic light*

\*

Luckily, we adore new-feeling clouds, convertible cars  
*"Of Moons, Birds, & Monsters" is our number 1 romper-stomper*

\*

We're all movie stars because we watch movies  
*Yep, we're all living in one BIG movie*

\*

Thinking is nothing but playing in your own head  
*And doing laps around a cloud*

\*

Each dusk, mountain lions bring us mountains to stand on  
*Our black sails swelling with dashes of nightfall & candy corn*





## **DAWN**

Swarms of white bees teem in the streets, clouds of stars.  
Houses, cars, streetlamps pitch and careen: the world spins  
anchorless as silence drowns the hours one by one until time  
shrinks and stands alone, banished to a shadowed corner. The  
space it leaves behind floods with whispers. *We come from  
nowhere, and go away nowhere.* To hide its secrets, the snow  
builds a room without walls, a house in the wind, and the  
moment, free of before and after, wears nothing but a robe of  
watery light.



*Thade Correa*

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## **GOTT'S ROADSIDE, NAPA**

The hand of evening opens,  
& spills its gold across the lawn.  
The canopied picnic tables  
drowse in dappled light.  
Free of the day, released  
from arithmetic and dishes,  
children run, roll, improvise  
dances in the dense, manicured grass.  
Their parents, wearing polo shirts  
or summer skirts, bow their heads  
over hamburgers and milkshakes,  
meditate on the ebb and flow  
of the market, & speak  
quietly now, their words  
vanishing into groves  
of moss-laden cypresses.  
Blackbirds  
& their shadows  
flit by.



## **BORN BENEATH PEDRO'S SOMBRERO**

I was born beneath Pedro's sombrero during a thunderstorm in early March. Mom labored seventeen hours, long enough for management to tack up "SEE WOMAN GIVE BIRTH BENEATH PEDRO'S SOMBRERO!" on billboards fifty miles to the north and south along I-95. Even in the rain, hundreds came to watch my birth. We received no royalties, though Mom got a free t-shirt with a cartoon drawing of her in labor and me, wearing a sombrero just like Pedro's, coming out from between her splayed legs. "Pequeña Pedrita," they called me after that. But even then I preferred just plain Rita.

South of the Border. Stuttering neon, greasy food, tacky t-shirts, sweat shop snow globes to last a thousand lifetimes.

Hell. Home.

Doesn't matter which word I use. Now, I can't say whether growing up north of here would have been heaven, purgatory, or maybe just another kind of hell. That's not for me to know. Still, having seen thousands of road-worn tourists who share a glazed yet guarded look, I cannot confidently claim South of the Border to be the only hell there is. As a kid, I spent whole afternoons drinking Pepsi and eating Pop-Tarts straight from the silver foil package, watching the gas-pumping tourists watching me over the tops of their cars and minivans. And when we looked at each other, an unsettling awareness passed between us, both knowing about each other the things we could not see about ourselves. So we looked

away, the tourists to the pumps in their hands, me to the Pepsi in mine. Sometimes we even closed our eyes against the brightness of sun and sky, at ease only in the shadows and darkness of our own heads.

Kudzu. That's what I knew tourists to be. Kudzu multiplying crazily, vines and leaves grasping to hold onto something, going everywhere all at once yet nowhere at all. Beautiful from a distance out there on I-95 when they were still travelers. From the top of Sombrero Tower I watched lines of cars moving forward in both directions, going all the places roads can go, still unstoppable but also beautiful in their motion. Mysterious and exotic and powerful, a thing to wonder at as they drove to chosen destinations.

Travelers pull off on Exit 1, become tourists, invade South of the Border. Kudzu tumbles out from backseats and sliding mini-van doors, clamors and crawls over all the Pedros, stands in line for hot dogs, sneaks inside the Dirty Old Man shop, hits balls at the Golf of Mexico, swims and sleeps at the Pleasure Dome. Which is good, I guess, because without kudzu's grip, this sad and desperate place just might blow away.

Maybe it's good that South of the Border is here to give even an invasive species a place of welcome, even if only for an hour or two before pushing them back out on the highways. Kudzu clamoring after the promise of a clean toilet, a cheap hot dog, a flashy bumper sticker, and a family photo at the top of Sombrero Tower, but driven to push through.

I wondered sometimes what exactly it was that kudzu knew about me.

First memory: I lick Pedro's toes, flake off scratchy brown bits that scrape my throat when I swallow. I cough but they don't come back up. I swallow again, but they don't go back down. They stick

where I cannot see, paint me brown on the inside.

From the very beginning, I felt like something *less*. But mostly I think I just felt scared all the time. My first four years, I swear I never looked up, never realized there was more than Pedro's sandaled feet, big enough to crush one so small as me.

Maybe life wouldn't have been so bad if Mom hadn't had to work the toilets. Maybe life somehow would have been better if Mom hadn't had to clean up pee from all the kudzu brat boys, unclog toilets stuffed with bloody pads, bleach down diarrhead stalls. Mom used to try and smile, be friendly, show the "true spirit of Pedro." I remember that. But after awhile she just sat by the door in her orange plastic chair, smoking her Slims, staring through them all. By then I had started to see South of the Border, and when I started to *see*, I became angry. On my sixth birthday, I took the keys to my mother's broken-down brown Chevette and chiseled my name—Rita—in the big toes on both feet of the main entrance Pedro.

The address on our junk mail read 3346 Highway 301 North, Dillon, SC 29547. That confused me since we never lived in Dillon but at South of the Border. I never understood why our mail wasn't sent to:

Dolores and Rita Epiphyte,  
Bright Orange Trailer with Broken Screen Door and "No  
Trespassing" Sign  
Behind Pedro's Pantry West.  
South of The Border, SC 29547

The summer I turned eight I met a kid named Louie waiting for his dad to come out from the Dirty Old Man's Shop. He was hungry and Pop-Tarts come in packs of two, so I gave him one of mine. Between bites, crumbs splurting from his mouth, Louie told me that the town he lived in was called Wanatah. "Wanatah," Louie said,

“means ‘knee deep in mud’ in some Native American language.” Louie must never have left Wanatah before because he couldn’t shut up about how he loved Pedroland and the Golf of Mexico and most of all the Sombrero Tower, how he loved our rusted out, shit-smearing Sombrero Tower (only he didn’t say it was shit-smearing and rusted out). “Oh Rita,” he said, “I’d love to live here. I wish I was you.” I gave him a drink of my Pepsi which shut him up long enough for me to think but not say that I would trade lives with him in an instant, that I would rather live in Wanatah, wherever that was, than live at South of the Border.

Nobody living at South of the Border likes it. Not really. Some are pretty good at self-deception for survival’s sake, but nobody really likes it. I knew just enough from reading the hundreds of brochures in the Pleasure Dome lobby to understand that South of the Border is not like some national park. If I had lived in a national park, I doubt I would have been so dissatisfied because, really, it’s not the tourists that bother me most and I would get to be out in nature where things are beautiful all the time. Or, if not beautiful, then at least real. If I had grown up in Yellowstone and Louie had come along and told me how lucky I was, I’d have said, “Yeah,” because it would have been true. And if there were a giant concrete Mexican named Pedro at Yellowstone (or even all seven of them), nobody would even notice because they’d be too busy watching the geysers and looking for bison. Nobody would take Pedro’s picture. If anything, there’d be a big “Admission FREE to anybody who dynamites the big guy with the hat” sign at the gate.

Living at South of the Border I saw thousands of kudzu tourists, none of them happy when they arrived, and all of them sick when they left with five dollar Pedro t-shirts to stretch over their bloated bellies. Still, I envied the visitors because they got to leave, got

to go home to somewhere better than South of the Border where the neon doesn't ruin the sunsets. Somewhere better or at least somewhere different, even if it was knee deep in mud. I wondered if they even realized how lucky they were. Lucky like my dad.

I never knew him and mom only knew him for twenty-three minutes. Some balding gap-toothed trucker with silhouettes of naked women on the mud flaps of his sixteen-wheeler. Mom met him in the Dirty Old Man's Shop when she was delivering a case of chocolate undies after her shift at the toilets. "Hola, señortita!" That's what Mom says he called her, "señortita." And from what I've been told, that's pretty much all he said before hauling her off to the cab of his truck. The least he could have done would have been to treat her to one of the Pleasure Dome's famed "heir-conditioned" honeymoon suites. I have no illusions about Mom loving him or about him someday coming back for me. Better that way. Who needs some shriveled up kudzu hanging to us with gnarled woody roots?

I knew plenty of other kids like me, fatherless kids whose moms cleaned toilets, sold T-shirts, or worked the Sombrero Tower. Some spent their days watching trucks roll in and through, hoping their fathers would recognize them. Those were the kids whose mothers told them their fathers loved them. Those were the mothers who believed the fathers would one day return and want to be their husbands. The mothers who knew the truth said nothing about the fathers, or if they said anything at all they spoke of how the fathers were once alive but now were dead. I pitied those who would wait and hope, but still I wondered sometimes what that would be like.

It's hard to live at South of the Border and not have at least six days of the week be down days. On down days, it's hard to move, to do anything at all. But on down and dissatisfied days my skin

seems an uncomfortable fit that I itch to get out of, and I was having one of those days when it happened.

I had spent the morning riding the glass elevator up to the top of Sombrero Tower then back down again. There wasn't much to see from the elevator, just smeary pigeon poop and feathers clinging to the glass, but I liked the motion of moving up and down, up and down, and the rush that came when I stepped from the elevator and walked to the lookout railing, leaned down and felt that rush of awe and fear as my gut bottomed out, like I was freefalling even with my feet still firmly planted on Sombrero Tower's metal grating. I had run out of quarters after my fifth trip, but Beulah was having a down day and didn't care whether or not I paid, so I just kept riding. When the elevator opened at the top of what I knew would be my last ride of the day, I stepped out and walked to the railing, gazed out over this not-so-vast, not-so-perfect place, hoping (if not exactly expecting) to see something grand, but all I saw were the roofs of the same old buildings—Rocket City, Pedro's Hot Tamale, El Drug Store, Mexico Shop East and Mexico Shop West—that never went away and never changed. All flat and grey and boring and desperately sad. I counted the Pedro statues. I watched the traffic on I-95—smart travelers passing by, kudzu taking the exit.

And then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw her, bright and gleaming against the rusted railing, this woman I had not seen on any of my forty trips up the tower that day. I knew right away she wasn't kudzu, but I couldn't quite tell what she was. She is so vivid in my mind, yet I can't quite conjure her up. Sometimes I picture her in a butter-yellow sundress, and sometimes I think she wore a wispy green shift. I know her hair moved in waves, that she rippled like a mirage in the South Carolina summer heat. Kudzu stepped off the elevator, vining around her to look over the railing, but I

could see through them as if they just some ghostly vegetation.

She turned to see me seeing her, so I stared down at my feet, flip-flopped and filthy. I moved to the opposite side of the tower. “Why don’t you jump?” she asked, her words like warm honey, her breath a blazing chill on the back of my neck. I felt the rush of near-freefall, but this time without the fear. I knew that I could tumble all the way down and stand back up again. She hadn’t asked, “Why don’t you kill yourself,” or “Why don’t you rid the world of your presence?” She had asked, simply, “Why don’t you jump?” I surveyed South of the Border below—Pedro’s Diner, Autobahn Club, Golf of Mexico, Ice Cream Fiesta. “You won’t die,” she said. “You won’t even stub your toe.”

I closed my eyes, saw my mother leave work unpaid to come and rescue me, saw me jumping up and saying I was just fine, saw another line added to my title, another billboard, a new job. “Pequeña Pedrita: See the child born beneath Pedro’s sombrero who jumps from Sombrero Tower without injury—every hour on the hour!” I would have made a good Old Faithful geyser. But I shook my head. No.

Aside from the packet of oyster crackers Beulah had given me that morning, I had eaten nothing since the day-old chocolate doughnut Mom had brought home from Pedro’s Diner the night before. I had hallucinated all kinds of things at the top of Sombrero Tower on days like this, mostly tourists walking around with hamburgers for heads and French fries for legs. I tried to think whether this woman who stood behind me might be a hallucination, but she didn’t morph into some other creature when I turned to face her and did my rapid blink test. She didn’t change, only flickered the way that neon flickers against the black of night, a staccato pulse of colors. “My dear,” she said, locking eyes with me between blinks, “how hungry

you must be!” She cupped my face in her hands, smoothed back my straggly hair, and pointed to the bird poop and feathers that peppered the cement under our feet. “Tell those bird droppings to turn into burgers and they will.” But this I could not even imagine, so disturbing was the idea of food coming from pigeon poop, even if I would have been well fed. So my stomach rumbled on. My ever-present hunger remained.

And then she did one final thing. She stretched out her arm, motioning over all of South of the Border and said, “See all this?” Now, I had watched scenes like this in movies, and whenever some mysterious person stood at a high point and said, “See all this?” the next line was invariably, “All this could be yours.” But this woman said, “All this I can rescue you from.”

And I was hers, all hers.

It’s hard to recall the order of events that followed. I know I came down from Sombrero Tower, though I do not remember taking the elevator. I know the woman said her name was Aurora, that she always stood behind me, that I moved within a cocoon of honey mist. I know she told me I was “meant for something greater.” I know she always called me “Rita,” never “Pequeña Pedrita.” I know I never asked questions. I know I never went hungry.

I suppose I should have asked, “Where will you take me?” And I certainly should have asked what she meant by “something greater.” But I didn’t.

We walked and Aurora talked, my mind buzzing with possibilities. She fed me small yellow cakes that both satisfied and made me ever hungry for more. She told me all I had never known about a place beyond the Borderland. “I chose you,” she said, looking me full in the face, “to be my sister.”

How stupid I was! I did not know what “sister” meant. Oh, sure,

I knew the basic biological meaning, but beyond that? Not a clue. We walked past Pedro's Pantry West, past the Autobahn Club, all the way to the Golf of Mexico. "I'm going to bring this place down," she said quietly, even mercifully as I think about it now. "Bring it down and clean it out."

I guess when she said, "bring it down and clean it out," I expected something dramatic, something earth shattering, like she'd bring in tanks and heavy artillery, dynamite all the Pedros and short circuit the neon, leave South of the Border in rubble. I expected she would set up her own system to replace the old one, set the two of us up in charge, and we'd be fair and just and righteous, exalting those who did right and condemning those who did wrong. The toilet attendants would become bosses, the bosses would become toilet attendants, and the truckers who frequented the Dirty Old Man shop would be castrated. She would make things right because she could, and I would help her.

I saw our first opportunity to make things right that first night when we went to meet Mom as she was getting off work. It was Friday, payday, and like all other paydays, her boss had lowered himself to visiting the toilet attendants as they exited. My mother, who had the least seniority, had to stand in the back of the line. Aurora and I watched from a distance as one by one the attendants got their cash-filled envelopes, as opening the envelopes they were forced to frown rather than smile—sad resigned frowns as if nothing would ever change for them. Ever. I thought I could help Mom by getting her all the money so she'd at last have more of something, be better and bigger than all the rest.

I didn't know how we could grab the cash and get away, but I felt somehow Aurora had power and that people with power got what they wanted. If I made the first move, I reasoned, Aurora would

follow, convinced that what I wanted would be what she wanted. So I ran forward, grabbed the envelopes out of the boss's fat hand and started running. "Come on, Mom!" I yelled.

"Pedrita, you fucking cunt!" the boss yelled. "Get your ass back here." He didn't follow, just stood there all puffed up and red like a giant hot tamale and told Mom she'd give him his money back or be fired. Aurora looked at my mother, then moved to stand behind her. Mom smiled. Even as the boss yelled and cursed, Mom smiled. Standing there with a stack of envelopes in my hand, I felt stupid.

So I got it in my head that the Pedros were the problem.

That night, after everyone was asleep, I armed myself with a spray can of red paint and wrote "Rita" on every Pedro, telling myself as I did so that when I had marked them all with my name I, not they, would have the power. But seeing my name spelled across the knees of all the Pedros still standing tall, still grinning down at me, only made me look down at my feet, which gave me another idea. So I snuck into a trucker's cab, stole a screwdriver from his toolbox, and started chipping away the big toes of all the Pedros, filling my pockets with concrete. But my attacks only made what was already ugly and distasteful even uglier and more distasteful, and now I had not only signed my name to them, I had made them less whole. With heavy pockets, I went home and waited for what I knew must happen next.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

I was asleep in my bed when South of the Border's so-called border patrol busted down our broken screen door, armed with a search warrant. My mother cried, but I just stood watching. When they found the toes I felt numb, almost relieved. I had thought I was doing something important, something great and covert and defiant, but all of that grandness, all my striving towards something

greater washed out of me when I was turned over to the Dillon police.

Standing before the court, that unsettling, ungrounded feeling came again—like I was sliding outside my own body into somewhere else. I watched from above as the judge extended his arm through his black robes to point at Pedrita, stone-faced and ashamed. And I wondered where her bravado had gone, what had happened to her sense of rightness as I rested invisibly on unseen branches, with Pedrita not looking up. I listened as the judge sentenced Pedrita to forty hours litter control in the town. I watched her head drop and wished she could raise it. I saw my mother weep and beg and promise a full month's wages to spare her daughter such a fate. I saw that Aurora stood not behind Pedrita but behind my mother, hand on her shoulder, squeezing it slightly. And then just as suddenly as I had felt myself separate, I slipped back inside myself, constrained by the tightness and heaviness of ill-fitting skin, full of bursting with mixed-up feelings. Grateful to my mother, ashamed and confused at myself, and angry with Aurora for not stopping me. As we walked back to South of the Border, I tried to give my mom a hug but she didn't hug me back, as if all that mattered was being late for her shift at the toilets. So I hung back and Aurora linked her arm in mine.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I demanded. "The least you could have done is told me."

"You didn't ask," Aurora replied, her voice so soft. "You needed to find this out for yourself." In that moment, I remembered what it felt like to hang loose from those branches.

My brain is numb, my fingers paralyzed. I want to write, get right the words to explain this radical thing that has happened. My

hands hover but won't write, not even in spasms. My brain refuses even to conjure the words that should come, about impossible events. Aurora. Her name like waves crashing, pulling back into itself and out again to sea. Aurora. Aurora. Endless ebb and flow. Aurora. Tongue tumbling in my mouth. Aurora. A footfall on sand. Aurora. Swept back and churled up again in undertow. Let it out, take it in. Begin somewhere, anywhere. Begin with Aurora saying, "I'm going to bring this place down, bring it down and clean it out."

Frightful liberation. That's what I felt. Like for the first time I was aware that I was separate from South of the Border, knew suddenly that what had sustained my whole life hadn't been Beulah's oyster crackers or Mom's stale donuts but had come from the air around me and from the rain when it fell. I was Spanish moss hanging from live oak, looking like a part of that twisted tree but with no roots except toward the sky. I may have been born beneath Pedro's Sombrero, but I had never understood that it was the thunderstorm that mattered.

Trust does not come easy to me, and I cannot hold hope in my hands. But I know that Spanish moss can blow into the sky and soar a bird in flight, or dive into the sea and surface a dolphin. Holding tight to nothing, I could become anything, could become everything, or perhaps become nothing at all.

Strange how I could have been pregnant for nine months without realizing it. I should have suspected when I felt first the stretching inside, the early cramps of growth that tugged in mostly small ways but occasionally in sharp and sudden ways as well. I thought, naively, these cramps were just more of the same, waves of menstrual cramps that could feel like change but never got me anywhere but back to where I had begun. Those pains were never more than temporary, part of my body's way of saying, "You may

have potential, but you will never fully realize it.”

I should have known when, in quiet times, alone and away from Aurora, I felt a rhythmic thudding, a pressing hard from the inside, somebody wanting to get out. But I shrugged it off, even when I could see with my own eyes that something inside was moving. Knees, elbows, fists striking out, stretching my skin. I don't know why I didn't know, but I am glad I didn't. For had I known, had I any idea how I was to end and start all over again, I would surely have aborted my half-formed self.

For nine months I traveled with Aurora on the outside, away from South of the Border. Away from the Sombrero Tower, the Golf of Mexico, and the Pedro statues, I could see and breathe and hear and taste and touch better. Everything was better, if only in small ways. Aurora, though, wasn't always kind. I can't say she was cruel, exactly, though she sometimes seemed so. But it was in the way of a midwife severing the umbilical cord.

Oh, I know how confusing this all must sound. And if I could pin down in concrete details and facts all that had happened, I would. Really, I would. But gestation and birth are such confusing things to make sense of—particularly one's own birth—that logic fails, facts do not exist, and the only truth that remains is the proof of one's birth and the sweet small swell of afterbirth that quickly disintegrates, leaving no trace.

All I recall, all I can share, are fragments.

Aurora takes me to the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, shows me brave tigers pacing back and forth, back and forth behind glass at Tiger Forest. I think they are beautiful and strong. I am glad they are here behind glass so that I can see them. Aurora cries for them in this

place. I do not understand her tears, cannot possibly understand why she would want them to be anywhere but in this zoo.

Swimming. I have never before been swimming so Aurora takes me to Lake Michigan. I don't know how to float or swim or breathe underwater so I flail and go under, flail and go under. Water rushes into my nose and mouth, makes me gag and spit, gag and spit. Aurora laughs, floats on her back, dives under, resurfaces ten feet from where she'd started. She swims like an otter, fluid and beautiful. Aurora takes my hands and when she pulls us both under I am ok, as if she is a mermaid who breathes for us both.

I stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon, frightened by its vastness and my smallness. I want to go back and sit in the car but Aurora has locked the doors and pocketed the keys. She crosses the do-not-cross ropes and skips along the edge. I am so scared that she will tumble over and be gone from me forever.

At Disney World Mickey Mouse squeaks a muffled and mousy, "Welcome to the Magic Kingdom" and I say hello. But then Aurora calls him Amanda, and from somewhere deep inside the rubber suit sings a steady sweet voice. "Oh, Aurora! How are you, my sister?"

The Sonoran Desert, domain of the dry and the dead. I have hurt Aurora, or is it me? I did not mean to, but I have. Something about a knife, about cutting. Accident? I can't recall. "I know you want to be born," she says, "but not yet and not this way. It is not time." I am angry that I don't know what she's talking about, why she must always talk in metaphors. I don't remember even holding a knife. Her tears fall as she stitches together the slit in my abdomen. I feel

nothing, only lie there silent and scorched between sand and sun, waiting for night to fall and the saguaro to bloom.

The edge of the sky is a cold white place, and I blaze and burn inside. Between contractions, Aurora soothes my scalded lips and starved tongue with tender morsels of cool sweet cake. Inside a wall breaks and I am pulled under the surface. I am drowning, but still can't let go of whoever is inside fighting to get out, even as the contractions quicken. Aurora cries, "Push! Push or you will die!" and presses a cold cloth against my forehead. *Contraction.* Thunder inside me. *Contraction.* Aurora. *Contraction.* But I can't! *Contraction.* Can't let myself push. *Contraction.* Can't let myself swim. "No!" Aurora throws herself into the North Wind and the bitter cold of night, walks into it, away. The sky, fluid with waves of brilliant greens. I hear a roaring laugh, too big for any one body.

I push.

I scream.

I turn inside out.

I begin to swim. I just swim and swim and swim, not sure what I am swimming toward or away from, only knowing that I love my body in motion, love the water's push and pull on me, love the taste of salt in my mouth, the motion of water around me and throughout me. Just water, everywhere water, and me seeing all the way to the pulsing red horizon on the edge of forever. Drunk on salt water, somersaulting with joy, feeling within myself the first shimmer of becoming. Taking in my mouth small new fingers that wiggle and twist until my mouth fits the thumb, just hold it there, sucking. Again I swim and swim and swim until my swim stretches the red horizon, clings to me, takes on my shape. Tasting like iron, feeling

like a balloon, smelling like blood, sounding like Rita, Rita, Rita footfalling in my head. Red and veined, moving and alive, me and also me. I push my face into the translucent horizon. I somersault back and find only more horizon rounded up and around me. I curve over, encircle myself into myself as tightly as I can.

The pounding of the surf. The beating of two hearts. The pause in my swim. Punching out. Kicking through. Salt water spilling out and me sliding through to find where my sea has gone, to reclaim it. I open new eyes and see my deliverer for the first and last time, blue on the horizon.

And then, as a newborn, I journey back from the edge of the world to the place where I was first born.

I rest above the kudzu now, Rita Epiphyte. When Mom comes home from her ten-hour shift at the toilets, I slip off her stained canvas shoes, place her feet in a warm bath of Epsom salts. I feed her warm loaves of buttermilk bread and steaming bowls of chicken soup with rice, and I tell her that I love her.





Jessica Martinez

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## Sketches of Motherhood, Pre-Term

1.

A year from now, you'll be diapered & seated on the hardwood. You will study my modified C hand moving up & away from my brow toward some incandescent certainty: moon, luna. Your faces follow the mystery of there, in the space where my fingers pause, & somehow, *there*, between the pages of a board book. You will study my hands, staring into the place above your head, even as I end the sign, as if you remember some shared, warm light, blue & radiant once, the ebb & flow of your blood—a distant scar.

2.

I didn't feel the stitching. I cradled you as they pumped air into your brother's lungs across the room—deflating bag over crescent blue mouth. Your daddy told me you were both about three pounds. Someone in a mask called out the times, seven minutes apart. Then, someone in gloves took you both out of the room. I was left with the perinatologist shaking his head as he scratched through your brother's placenta with a pointed object, like a boy with a stick

pokes through a dead, opened animal.

3. Cow heavy in my hospital gown, I pump. Flange over nipple, I pull & tug, coax & wrench for a drop into a labeled container: Baby A, Baby B. Every two hours I pump, wash parts, shuffle down the hall to the unit, to give what little would come. I peer into their Isolettes & whisper something to them, my breath collecting on the plastic. Bilirubin lights beam ultramarine down onto their watery movements: one's arm, buoyant beneath the glass, feels for the IV in his head, the other doesn't brush a bruised hand across his face. *Don't worry, a nurse offers behind me, you'll make more milk when you're allowed to hold them.*
4. Before I held you for the fifth time, I got into trouble for holding you without first watching the video. I tried to explain to the new nurse that I'd already held you Kangaroo Care, I'd already held you four times, I had only one hour before I'd have to go pump. The Parents' Lounge was empty, except for a dad asleep on the couch, his dark forearm draped across his face, shading his eyes from the light. But I knew him; his baby was in the incubator next to yours—her alarms were constantly sounding, he rarely left her side. Later, in the pump room, her mother would tell me she was a 26-weeker. Later, toward the end of the video, through the cracked door, I saw Dr. Sandler trying to explain something to a couple at their baby's

bedside. The mother was young, with eyes like crystal—she was crying hysterically.

5.

*I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it's the hormones, I told the nurses as I wiped my face, This isn't me, I'm not like this. I don't cry.* One of you (*the B Baby*, they'd said) had gotten down to two pounds ten ounces &, through an NG tube, they were pumping you full of all the colostrum I was bringing to them; & you, despite that you were only a few ounces more, despite the skin stretched thin over the ribs, they withheld me from you. *I don't care what happens, this is for both of them; they are both to get my breast milk*, I was trying to explain. My own mother stood behind me as I sobbed into the chest of my powder blue hospital gown—there was nothing at my shoulders, nothing at my side.

6.

Your daddy & I lay side by side in the starkness of my hospital bed after the pediatric hematologist /oncologist left our room. She was wearing blue jeans. It was Super Bowl Sunday. *Your son's neutrophil count,*

*Baby A*, she was trying to explain, is at two percent. All we heard was *precursor to leukemia & blood draws every two weeks for a year*, then *bone marrow biopsy*. I imagined her digging into your thigh, silver pointed object, tip of a star. Her mouth was drawn as she left the room. We were too tired to do anything but

hold  
on. *We should try to sleep*, Daddy said. I pulled the white sheet up over our heads & asked him to  
wake me up  
in ten minutes.

7. When you came home, within minutes you'd stopped breathing. You let the air spill out of your lungs  
the second we lay you down in your bassinets—you might forget, they said, to suck, swallow, &/or  
breathe. *Here*, they said, *this machine will tell you when*. But I saw your skin fail to a pale blue-  
grey before your heart monitor even started, & I had you breathing again before it had a chance  
to finish—





*Kristen Eliason*

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## **IN THE GREEN OF SECOND YEARS**

We could be blocked together in old stone: the elephant of the dream, mossed over on the east side. If the cement, in its wet infancy had known.

If the genesis of solid eyes and tusks had also mapped bowls of space to cup us from disintegration, green and flowering.

Readied, you would spin the pillows, pull palm fronds across the door. I would unfold viney, follow east to east unraveling, to know its stony mouth.



*Alan Lindsay*

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## **Leda**

Or was it that the boy was so beautiful  
she called him a swan  
though he really was not a swan  
as she'd made them  
as they were willing  
to believe. He wasn't  
a swan and he wasn't  
a boy. He just looked like a boy  
innocent and harmless, someone  
you could handle if you had to.

It was just better to say that something divine  
entered an innocently beautiful creature grazing  
the tender shoots of soft grass on the banks  
of the infinitely flowing river, better to believe  
a curious deity knowing she would come this way  
violated an innocent beast and that  
the violated beast raised its head  
with double seeing  
and drove this god curious for beauty before he knew  
it was happening to the crest of the hill until  
even a god became a victim  
of a swan's desire.



*Rumit Pancholi*

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## **Drown**

At the empty wharf,  
a lighthouse glow tiptoes

from one shadow  
of a yacht to another,

hurrying to see  
how you define drown

when it can't keep back  
its puppeteer instinct.



*Jayne Marek*

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## **Windspace**

I wear small earrings with chips of turquoise      mounted along a twist of silver  
in a style I have forgotten the name of      made in the Southwest where my mother  
lived much of the end of her life      and my father too until he died  
the crescent shape of the earrings is      like swift air that carries away leaves  
the pieces of turquoise are slivers of sky      this stone made of sky  
or the chips could represent people      ancient marks on the walls of caves  
showing the passing days years other things      one wishes to remember  
try to hold amid time's winds      or rushing waters over bright  
gravel that trickles in the currents      follows the churning  
riverbed for its miles      the pebbles roll inches at a time

not knowing where they are going so slowly      changing shape to get there  
becoming smoother so that at the end      one may think the journey was easy

it is not      every collision every tumble under the surface  
hard      under the desert's eye so harsh

it brings tears      my mother gave things to people to show  
she was thinking about them      once in a museum shop

we browsed separately companionably      although she could hardly walk  
she loved looking at jewelry of coral      obsidian turquoise mother of pearl copper

and silver shadow box      you can't be sure about the symbolism  
said the shop woman      shapes can mean different things

my mother chose for me these earrings      while I wasn't looking  
in those last days before the sound of winds rose in her mind

tearing words to shreds between rocks      pushing her further downstream  
where I could not reach her      to say thank you I understand

*Jayne Marek*

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## **Snow Geese**

Urgent their necks and wings outstretched their wingtips flicker black and their pale bodies  
feint against buffeting wind

they move so quickly

into feathers of snow

one cannot count them whirring toward the horizon

as they turn and become one color

with the late day

and now invisible

sound of a beating heart



*Michael Collins*

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**an excerpt from**  
***The Solitude of Lot***

The Agency picked me up in one of those sweeps they began to make a half decade or so after the initial attacks, trawling the wasteland of what was left of our society. They found me at the college, or by then, the college had morphed into a commune, a brave new world of collective twenty-somethings all orphaned by the first series of attacks on the major metropolises that tore asunder communication and transportation.

When the Agency arrived, it was our first real understanding life existed in any real approximation of what had come before, but they brought with them such stories of unimaginable suffering and destruction they staved off any want to venture elsewhere.

Famine continued to stalk the legacy marauding bands from the great metropolis exoduses who roamed the vast interior in search of food. The hinterland was a fiefdom of encircled fortifications in constant struggle against attacks. Ecologically, the effects of societal breakdown spiraled exponentially, the Gulf of Mexico a fireball of gas and oil spills, a toxic cloud that continued to spew into the atmosphere. Nuclear power plants had gone into meltdown. Cholera epidemics raged as abandoned municipal plants, water and sewer facilities, led to a general contamination of the water table. Ecological disaster was a way of life, a silent killer reaching the most isolated populations. Death permeated everything. It only furthered our sense of isolation and conviction to stay outside the fray of life elsewhere.

In the time they stayed, they eventually found me tending to the gardens out back of the commune with my charges. I was an afterthought to their general interest in our new life.

I said looking up from the toil of the day when they finally approached, “Progress is not always about moving forward, but looking backward.”

They liked how I put things into perspective. I saw they had my thesis in hand. They looked out on the amber waves of wheat, the rows of corn, on the renewal of life here. They were interested in the seeds I had planted, whether they were acquired before or after the attacks.

I said in a forthright manner, “All is not ruin. The things we never needed have simply ceased to be.”

I pointed to the toil of twenty-somethings with their new children by their sides, spoke of the collectivism of this new beginning. I called them, “The Indifferent Children of the Earth.”

The Agency wanted me to come with them in the easiest and yet most persistent of ways, leading me from my calling in the way I think Jesus led the apostles from the Sea of Galilee.

I could do naught to resist.

They walked on either side of me.

I did not look back.





*Margaret Emma Brandl*

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## **Workshop Poem**

by a number of people (unbeknownst to them)

curated by Margaret Emma Brandl

*for E.B., B.D., L.H., K.L., W.O., S.O., & E.T.*

*("it's ok to steal things... because you're saving them for mankind,  
person-kind, whatever-we-have-kind")*

I don't know if anything should start this way:  
this is the most opaque first sentence I've read in fiction;  
there are some words I don't know what they mean;  
the problem with this book is it's about horse racing;  
we have to move the plot along so we can all agree what the plot  
is;  
there are a lot of words

your pop culture rolodex  
gives the story gravity,  
Freudian typos  
and not that the flavors of vacuum cleaners isn't compelling

on the Eiffel tower they stapled rollercoasters  
yeah, I really don't like Coldplay  
there were crazy baking people

(making sense is overrated)

this dwarfish Spaniard woman,  
she's a little dynamo,  
I watched her eat a salad and reject the sun-dried tomatoes

one of the biggest problems when writing a novel  
is getting the novel written—  
putting the verb before the horse  
or the subject before the cart  
(whaddyoucallem... yeah, the horses...?  
carousel.)

molluskation  
Heckyll and Jyde  
you could be marrying a chimera;

COSMIC FORCES  
the parental whatever  
some house in California that's slanted—

this may or may not conjure up something;  
I keep wanting to make it what I want to make it  
(good thing you're gay 'cause you know how to look at men)  
but now my mind feels broken  
my thought-train's crashed

how I feel about people that are ridiculous in the world:  
he's very much a lunatic but he's my favorite lunatic,

he was there and I saw him in a hat

Lydia Davis makes me secrete  
Lydia Davis is your bro  
you're free, culturally diverse, and over 21  
(what is the point of life  
when you're dancing in a bean shape of girls?)

I sometimes show my ankle

we're all just star motes

## CONTRIBUTORS

Chorister, percussionist, and anime convention-goer **Margaret Emma Brandl** is a first-year MFA in prose. She recently started an online literary and arts journal for high school students, *Filter and Fibre*, and had work published in *Specter*.

**Tony D'Souza** (fiction, 2000) is the author of three novels. His most recent, *Mule*, was optioned earlier this year by Warner Bros.

**A. F. De Betta** graduated in 1998 in prose.

**Michael Collins** graduated in 1991 in prose.

**Dawn M. Comer** ('98) lives in Defiance, Ohio. She teaches creative writing at Defiance College and keeps busy with occasional freelance editing and writing gigs and her own projects, including *Born Beneath Pedro's Sombrero: Tales from the National Association of Tourist Attraction Survivors*, and *Fella With an Umbrella: Finding Joy on the Autism Spectrum*. Dawn has twice won the Paul Somers Prize for Creative Prose from the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature and been published in various journals.

Born and raised in Northwest Indiana, **Thade Correa** is a first-year MFA student in poetry enrolled in the University of Notre Dame's Creative Writing Program. He has previously studied at the University of Chicago and Indiana University, Bloomington. His work has appeared in various literary journals, including *The Aureorean*, *Ibbetson Street*, and *Modern Haiku*; and he has recently been honored with the 2012 Billy Maich Academy of American

Poets Award through the University of Notre Dame.

**Kristen Eliason** received her MFA from the University of Notre Dame, where she spent an additional year in residence as the 2008 Nicholas Sparks Prize recipient. Kristen's work has appeared in *DIAGRAM*, *Six Little Things*, *Two Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Makeout Creek*, *Juked*, and her chapbook, *Yours*, is available from Dancing Girl Press.

**Carina Finn** is the author of *I HEART MARLON BRANDO* (Wheelchair Party Press), *MY LIFE IS A MOVIE* (Birds of Lace), and *LEMONWORLD & other poems* (Co.Im.Press). She likes accessories.

**C. Kubasta** teaches writing, literature and gender studies at Marian University in Wisconsin, where she lives with her partner John, long-lived cat Cliff, and mastiff/St. Bernard mix, Ursula. Her poem was inspired by her current students, as a part of a pastiche exercise in a postmodernist creative writing class.

**Ji yoon Lee** will graduate in 2012 in poetry.

Constitutionally incapable of a narrow focus (but awed by those who are), **Alan Lindsay** writes in all genres. His current project is *Beyond God and Tina*, a novel, the story of a fundamentalist, an intellectual, and a ghost.

**Jessica Maich** is an MFA graduate of the Notre Dame Creative Writing Program. She has published two chapbooks and anticipates the publication of a third, *Treatment Island*, in August of 2012. She resides in South Bend, Indiana with her family.

Recently, **Jayne Marek**'s poems have appeared in *And Know This Place: Poetry of Indiana* (Indiana Historical Society, 2011) and *Tipton Poetry Journal*. She also had a substantial book review in *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies*.

**Jessica Martinez** (class of 2009) lives just outside of Savannah, Georgia with her husband and twin boys.

As an Irish and US citizen, **Tom O'Connor** has had the great fortune of living in places like New Orleans, LA; Kansas; Texas; Indiana; New York; and Madrid, Spain. He also has an irrational fear of household chemicals and cleaners, as well as robotic voices. But, thankfully, he can still wake up every day excited to face a challenging world because his poems have been accepted by magazines like *MARGIE*, *Poetry Southeast*, *South Carolina Review*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, and *Soundings East*, among others. His scholarly articles have appeared or will appear in *The Journal of Film & Video*, *Pedagogy*, *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *Horror Studies*, and *Social Semiotics*, among others. His first scholarly book, *Poetic Acts & New Media*, was just released from The University Press of America.

**Seth Oelbaum** is the CEO and founder of Bambi Muse. His publication credits include *Rhino* and *Red Lightbulbs*.

**Rumit Pancholi** is a 2008 graduate of the University of Notre Dame MFA program. His poetry has appeared in *Gertrude*, *Harpur Palate*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and others. His work has been finalist for a number of awards from publications such as *Black Warrior*

*Review, The Atlantic Monthly, and Kennesaw Review*, and he has received fellowships and awards from The University of Maryland, University of Notre Dame, and The Maryland Higher Education Commission. He currently works as journal production editor for Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

**C.J. Waterman** is still walking the earth. You can read his chapbook *Unstoppable Citizen* in the first issue of *The Chapbook*.

