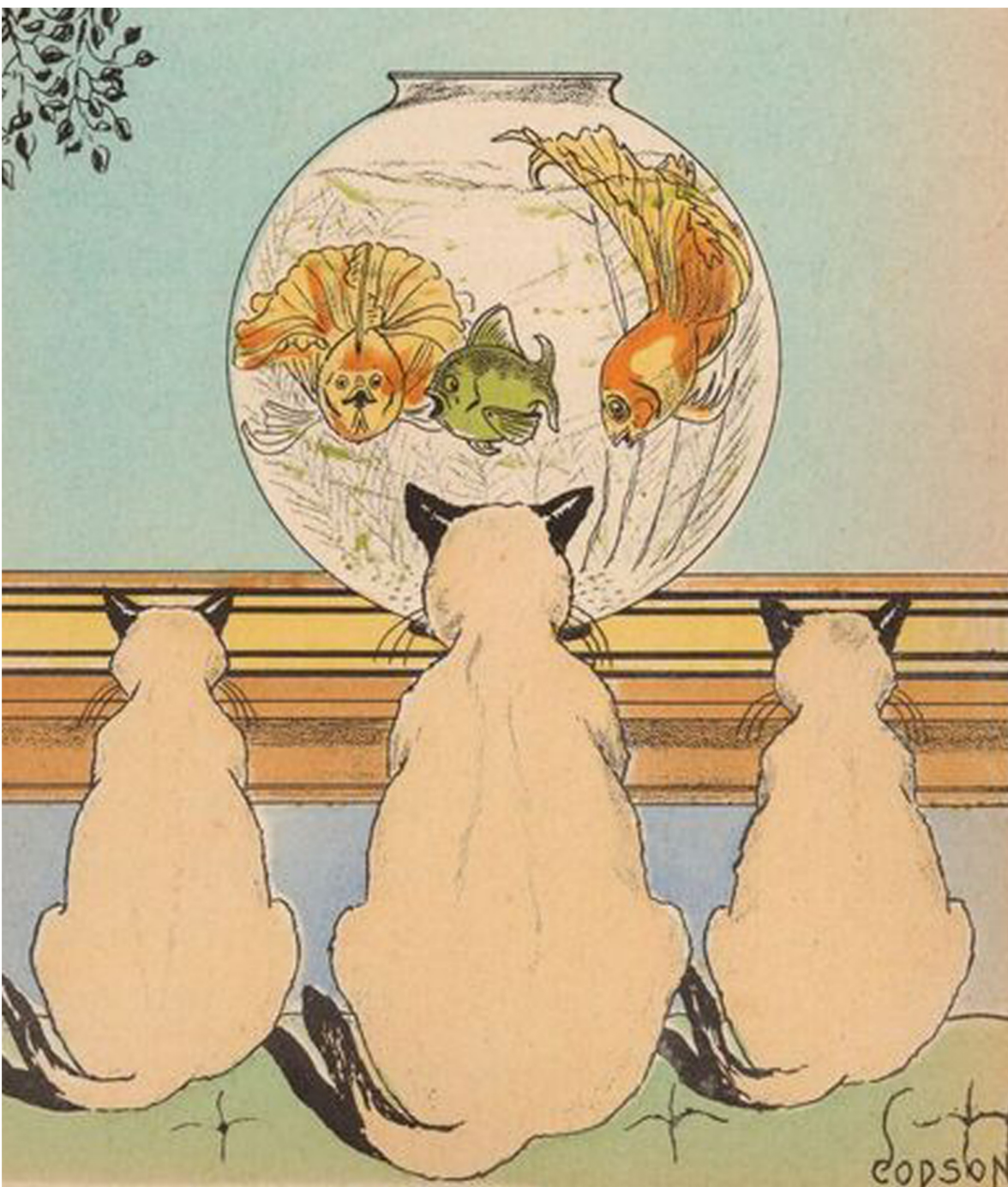


THAT



THAT

LITERARY REVIEW

Number Three



They say that *THAT's* that. But we defy simple boundaries—sometimes we're other things. Are we eclectic? Probably. Different? Very likely. Exceptional? Certainly. Dive in, and if you happen to find some this in *THAT*, go with it—you might be surprised and pleased. And in the end, that's what it's all about.

© *THAT Literary Review*, 2018. Rights revert to contributors. *THAT Literary Review* is an independent publication affiliated with the Creative Writing Program and the Department of English and Philosophy, Auburn University at Montgomery. Our staff is composed of faculty and students from Auburn University at Montgomery and Huntingdon College. Cover image courtesy of Rare Book Division, The New York Public Library. Clyde A. Copson, "Three cats watching fish in an aquarium," from The New York Public Library Digital Collections. 1938. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/b992a521-9c85-2498-e040-e00a18063ad7>

THAT
LITERARY REVIEW
Number Three
2018

Poetry

Lynn Levy	<i>Praise Song for the Double Black Diamond</i>	6
Julia Ponder	<i>Job Interview</i>	7
Cameron Morse	<i>In His Image The Double-Hip Squeeze</i>	8 9
Joshua Huber	<i>January Walk, Columbia, MO</i>	10
Tobi Alfier	<i>The Compromise of Weather</i>	13
Spencer Smith	<i>The Disobedient Elderly</i>	14
Monet Belle Jorgenson	<i>girl</i>	15
E. Laura Golberg	<i>Echidna Adolescent Hoover's Bed</i>	16 17
M. A. Istvan, Jr.	<i>Corner Store Clerkess</i>	20
Michael Van Dyke	<i>Fraught</i>	21
Abigail Uhrick	<i>Phoenix</i>	32
Natalie Crick	<i>Spider</i>	33
Rose Mary Boehm	<i>Waiting for Access</i>	46
Kasandra Larsen	<i>Immigration</i>	47
Sandra Kolankiewicz	<i>When Some Are Most</i>	49
Jonel Abellanosa	<i>Eggs</i>	50



Sharon Whitehill	<i>Papa Only Made Omelets</i>	51
Nicklaus Hopkins	<i>Christina Aguilera's Face</i>	52
Andrew McDonald	<i>You tell me</i>	53
Kenneth Gulotta	<i>Moirai</i>	58
Lynette G. Esposito	<i>Demon Butterflies</i>	59
Troy Varvel	<i>Tunnel Vision</i>	68
Mare Leonard	<i>The Geometry Lesson</i>	70
John Meyering	<i>What time is it?</i>	72
Simi Abe	<i>To Watch You Fall in Love</i>	73
Lisa Marie Brodsky	<i>Offspring</i>	75
Kathleen Hellen	<i>Bless the Condom</i>	82
Jane Lake	<i>Why Isn't Pluto a Planet?</i>	83
Peter De Ville	<i>Slicker</i>	89
Logan Chace	<i>Dead Man, Dead Man</i>	90
J. R. Solonche	<i>Church</i>	94
Benjamin Schmitt	<i>Track 73</i>	95
Samuel R. George	<i>God Damned Poets</i>	99

Prose

Frank Morris	<i>The Tiny Plastic Shofar</i>	19
Holly Lopez	<i>Balloons</i>	23
Kara Dennison	<i>Hatter House</i>	35

Alice Russell	<i>To the Sound of Staying in One Place</i>	48
Dick Bentley	<i>On High</i>	55
Tom O'Brien	<i>George</i>	60
Gianna Ward-Vetrano	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	76
Aidan Walker	<i>Neighbors</i>	84
Tom Spencer	<i>The Body in the Abyss</i>	96

Visuals

Julia Justo	<i>Crossroads</i>	3
Fierce Sonia	<i>Red Dress</i>	18
Gaynor Kane	<i>Double Rainbow in Botanic Park</i>	22
Ana Prundaru	<i>Dual Moons</i>	34
Mike Brown	<i>Monster</i>	54
Jury S. Judge	<i>Paradigm of Beauty</i>	74
Matt Androvett	<i>Note of Artists</i>	81
John Chavers	<i>Image #3 (Weave)</i>	88
Tamara Stoffers	<i>Mightily Marvelous</i>	100
Jeremy Knowles	<i>Sam Walks</i>	107
Daniel Ableev	<i>Empty z3</i>	108
Jason Murphy	<i>Chapel and Scaffold</i>	back cover

Bios		101
-------------	--	-----



Lynn Levy

Praise Song for the Double Black Diamond

And a man came down from the mountain, and his voice echoed
from behind
the silver lenses of his silver glasses. And he said unto me, you
should seriously grow your hair.

You would look so much prettier with long hair.

Lord, we come before you with fat thighs.

And many followed down the mountain, bringing laughter from the
edges of heaven
but I was in the lodge. For one week fattened with exotic milks
and swaddled in moisture-wicking materials.

Lord, we come before you with faint moustaches.

Lord, in the bathrooms of Colorado you have been a comfort. Like the
promise
of a swimming pool down a long hallway—a wet footprint on the floor,
a singe
of chlorine in the air, a distant fluorescence.

Lord, we come before you in sagging, worn-out underpants.

Could death be like that, like slipping into a pool? Pale toes
and neon trunks—I could be the freckled young actress
and you, God, could be the underwater camera.

Lord, we come before you with no cocktail conversation.

Lord, when I crouch at the gates of heaven, fumbling for the buzzer, will
you come
downstairs to let me in?

Julia Ponder

Job Interview

Here's to all the sneezes that are held tight
talking to important people.

Like you, they only wish to speak freely.
Instead, your eyes look toward the
bright fluorescent lights above trying to will
the speckled snot to stay in its dank cave
while *their* gaze peers beneath half-moon glasses
to look through you with x-ray vision,
hungry for a flaw.

You smooth your chewed fingers
against a cheap rayon pant leg, and try to listen to
each question and remember rehearsed success.
Suddenly, important words multiply
into a hundred nothings as you ACHOO.
This prompts the tidy manicured
hands to scribble scribble scribble with their pen,
composing a long list of unqualifications.

“Who are you?”
But they want the unwrinkled part;
the sleeve that is free of white dog hair;
a blouse without paint mark;
a life without blemish.



Cameron Morse

In His Image

*So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God
created he him; male and female created he them.*

—Genesis 1:27

He's looking over at dad,
says the ultrasound technician.

Darkness and light shift
on screen. *This white line here*

is his thigh bone. She draws
a dotted line over the bone. Pressing

the transducer into Lili's gelled
lower abdomen, she snatches

the image. *In the image of God,*
or in our own, I consider the white

glob of his chin, the flower petal
of his penis, the finger in his nose,

his body made of light, shining
in the dark water.

Cameron Morse

The Double-Hip Squeeze

In birthing class, I fit my hands
into the hollows below Lili's hip
bones and press her loosening joints
back together, the spreading wings
of her pelvis, relieving the tight clasp

of cartilage between the halves of
her body, a necklace wrapped
around the gory head of our unborn
son, his arrival riving like a cleaver,
the slash between *before* and *after*

we were parents, before and after
the Word became flesh. *In and up*,
Diane says. *The labor room is no place
for shyness*. I press harder. The clasp
will not break in my hands.



Joshua Huber

January Walk, Columbia, MO

The moon's half an old
eye watching clouds, or
a broken saucer set
in soapy foam. Nearer
the earth, the cement
sidewalk is cracked and cut
with divots and lines,
ridges and dips as
a long parade
of finger tips.

Here's the slight five notes
in a starling song's flip
notice—the tune all
improvised, all broken
glass and leafy cries, flecks
of ice and winter green,
grass and paradise.
A trio perched
on a powerline,
inspects the empty

air's promise: day-
light translated
iridescent
in feathery minds.
I walk due North
and pass sixteen flags
(American) fluttering
tiredly south.
My nose is cold,
cheeks feel burned; there's

blood in my mouth.
White rocks by the road,
brown weeds withered
in a ditch, an orange
peel spun on a slab
of asphalt undone—
ground, and further ground.
A man with a cigarette
lit, standing on the bridge
as I pass, appears to me.

In a sycamore, I see
two crows sit cawing
contentedly. The brush
lining the creek arcs
in elegant brambles
creating cathedrals
for the water's clear
eddies and spirals.
I pass under an over-
pass, a set of steel girders

cradling its concrete girth.
And O out of the
shadows the sky's torn
asunder blundering
in blues brusque as thunder.
Cresting a hill, trees
far as I can see
stretch their gray limbs up
and out in praise
for this poor season.



My right foot jangles down
on a rusted razor
blade laid bare against
the sidewalk. Turning out
of the wind my legs
and arms warm. Birds talk.
Far off, dogs bark and howl.
In a darkening sky,
the moon now begins
its prowl in earnest—

pearl prow pressed
tenderly through
the atmosphere:
an illusion
as it moves
through empty
space alone,
splendid with
a light not
at all its own.

Tobi Alfier

The Compromise of Weather

This is a man who can't be contained.
He steps into dove-gray light to assess
the weather from the shelter
of the front porch. He could make a run for it
but she will not be with him.

Her eyes run slowly down the wildness
of him. The storm punctuates the roof,
plays against the white noise of the heater.
She is held hostage by the rain—he is not.
The cold will settle in her bones no matter
where she is, and she would rather be home,
wrapped in a quilt passed down generations.

Loving her without fail, he holds her close,
grabs his jacket and heads to where his mother
used to send him to fetch his father. He promises
to be back before the pale grace of the hidden moon
shines through their windows—before the empty rooms
of the house fill with only an occasional hymn
in her soft, broken voice, as the slow temptation
to sleep overtakes her, still alone.



Spencer Smith

The Disobedient Elderly

I write poetry about the old man and old woman but they are stubborn. They have been inseparable for nearly fifty years, I write, as he tenderly reaches across and places his hand over hers, rice paper against rice paper. But when I look up, her hands are resting like kittens in her lap while he stares at his phone—squints, really, since the text is so small. You are not helping, I say to him, and he shrugs one shoulder, carelessly smirking. I begin writing again: She meets his gaze with a familiarity that cannot be learned, only experienced by two people helping each other elbow to elbow down the trail of a shared life. I look up again just in time to see her nod at him, and they suddenly get to their feet—if the motion can be called sudden at their age—and begin trudging away from me. Wait, I call to their spines curved as aspen on a slope, I just need a little more time. Ah yes, I hear him say to her, that is exactly what we need.

Monet Belle Jorgenson

girl

/gɜrl/

noun

1. she takes the horizon and swallows it whole. her jaw becomes unhinged. she is scraped knees and wind that rips trees from the ground. she will not stop there.
2. she's a wicked sort of hurt. she keeps peaches in her pockets and a smile is her only reaction as they smash, ooze into her skin as she sits. she's a sticky sort of sickness.
3. a girl to a god is an offering, and the fire swirls as she braids ice and bone and silk into her hair. she's a hurricane and she picks her teeth with the lightning she stole from the storms, and *she will not stop there.*



E. Laura Golberg

Echidna Adolescent

It's tough

to be a mother to a puggle.
One has to struggle
between maternal devotion
and self protection.

He's born blind and soft.
He crawls from the pouch, aloft,
attaches himself to the milk pad
and grows. It's too sad

when he starts to grow quills,
for along with the other ills
of motherhood, you get pricked.
It hurts and you kick

him out.

E. Laura Golberg

Hoover's Bed

*From 1897-8 Herbert Hoover managed the Sons of Gwalia
Gold Mine in Western Australia*

We curl up in Hoover's bed
with the thousand horsepower
Frazier and Chalmers winding engine
in the mining museum next door.
I wonder if you'd rather be with it than me,
sitting on the stripped-down metal seat
pulling levers. You'd watch the wire rope,
thrill to the tension, spot the little tag
showing where the lift is.
We curl up in Hoover's bed.





Frank Morris

The Tiny Plastic Shofar

Moral failure had me in the evening rain behind a Brooklyn Navy Yard steakhouse with a flaccid cigarette and no light. A raven-haired waitress came smoking from a heavy door. She stood beside me and looked away as she held her hands at my face. Light snicked in her cupped hands, at the end of a tiny plastic shofar.

I apologized and dipped my wilting Winston in the quavering flame.

The first chord of “Tom Sawyer” detonated in the clouds as the rain ignited in a blue phosphorous flash. A fabulous thunderbird of winged fire unfurled into the sky, climbing the wet night in a pixelated stream of burning rain. It molted red and then white and was gone in the gray over the city.

We ran, all the way to Canarsie.●



Michael Istvan

Corner Store Clerkess

Handed a torn flap of cardboard
when you asked for some paper,
it is easy to find this bodega belle
to be the one: the one seeing you—
and, as the wary eyes of her father
seem to confirm, *wanting* you—
straightaway as the writer in labor
for whom any surface will do.

Michael Van Dyke

Fraught

Please don't leave me.
I knew Shakespeare's mother.
I'm the handsome one
In the play about lemons.

I once saw you burning
In the vociferous carbon.
I tried to salvage your
Disintegrating molecules.
They fell through my hands
Like pebbles of corn, yellow teeth.

You sat in Chicago.
You sat there like a row of lemons
Long-ripened on a line of twisted trees.

The light was foaming out of you,
Leaving me fraught as I drove through
The velvety streets
Where we used to talk about sin.

Then I remembered how we
Circled the fallen birds
That were coagulating into a fever.

How we bent forward at the waist
and lurched into fragrance.

How the wilting occurred so quickly.





Holly Lopez

Balloons!

BALLOONS! On a Monday in late September, we emerged from our homes to find red, blue, green and yellow ones, fat with helium, jerking in the morning breeze, their strings fastened to mailbox posts and pumpkin stumps. Children yanked them free and paraded them around the bus stops. They brought them to school and used them as currency to score candy, chips and pudding cups from classmates. Throughout the day, more balloons were spotted over by the Price Chopper, bobbing against windshields and shopping carts, and then at the strip mall on Western Avenue.

Word spread quickly. Many of us took pleasure in the sight of them and were touched that some charitable soul would take the time to pepper our town with cheer for no apparent reason. The finders considered themselves lucky. Those already accustomed to good fortune told friends and co-workers about their balloons with an air of smug confidence. But the majority of us were not used to good things happening. Each morning, we clung like barnacles to our beds, fraught with self-pity. The one thing keeping us going was the delusion that we'd be rewarded for enduring the inflated share of misery inflicted upon us. We were desperate for any sign that things were shifting in our favor, even if the sign came in the form of latex and a snip of twine. For the next few days we walked a little straighter, our hearts charged with a sense of hope.

MORGAN TAYLOR. When a local TV news anchor got wind of the balloons, she slapped on some lipstick and directed her crew to ready their gear. After being reprimanded just three days into her job for appearing too “peppy” when reporting on a carjacking, she relished the opportunity to cover an upbeat story that would allow her natural charisma to shine.

The news van barreled into the Price Chopper parking lot. Morgan hopped out and squeaked an index finger across her bleached teeth to erase any possible pink smears. A small crowd formed around her while the camera was set up.

A muscular man in a tight turtleneck and jeans hefted a bulging grocery bag onto his hip while holding the hand of his toddler. The boy kept stretching out his tongue to check the progress of a dissolving cherry cough drop. “Are you here about the balloons?” the man asked Morgan.

“I sure am!” Morgan smiled and tugged her suit jacket down over the waist of her skirt. “Can I get your comments on them?” She tilted the mic in the man’s direction after getting a thumbs-up from the cameraman.

“You certainly *can*. I have a severe latex allergy and do not appreciate these damn balloons. I mean, they’re everywhere!” The man tried to move his



hands as he spoke but couldn't because of the child and groceries. A shaggy head of celery sticking out of the bag nodded with his motions.

Morgan eased the mic back. "Oh, I see."

The man inched closer. "I dragged my sick kid out of bed to get Nyquil and soup, and now I have to worry about dropping dead at the supermarket? What's my poor Robby gonna do without a father?"

"Well, I guess you wouldn't really have to *touch* the balloons." Morgan straightened her posture and forced a grin, unaware of Robby lurching toward her leg. She felt a warm spray through her hose at the same time she heard his "achoo." When she looked down he was finger-painting his cheek with snot. The cough drop shard looked like a small ruby fixed to her knee. As she bent down to flick it away, two pairs of Velcro sneakers shuffled into her range of vision.

A stout woman with a tinny voice leaned her face into Morgan's. "Do you have any idea what plastic does to our environment?" Her plump cheeks glowed crimson, matching the messy nest of curls sheltering her scalp. "These balloons are killing our planet!"

"This balloon hooligan must be stopped!" said her companion, a lanky fellow in cropped yoga pants. His thinning hair was gathered at the base of his skull in a slim ponytail. He incessantly twirled and caressed it with his fingers.

Soon the assemblage had tripled in size. A collection of ladies in pressed khakis and cashmere cardigans insisted the balloons were beneficial to the community. An elderly man rapped his cane against the asphalt and declared it un-American to hate balloons. His wife's dentures clacked together as she suggested the balloons were a sign of God's love. "Balloons kick ass!" shouted a young man in a Price Chopper smock guiding a train of carts back to the store.

As they all jostled to be closest to the microphone, a balloon crept behind Morgan. It nuzzled against her ample wool-clad derriere and then retreated to the rusted underbelly of a Buick. Though she was electrified by the idea that someone, anyone, appreciated the firm butt she had developed in those new-age Viking boot-camps, she felt compelled to disguise such elation by shanking the nearest person with her elbow. "Keep your frisky fingers to yourself, granny," she said. The woman retaliated by grabbing her husband's cane and thumping its rubber tip onto the pointed toe of Morgan's stiletto. Morgan squealed in pain, "Christ Almighty!" The old woman's teeth clicked in response, "Blasphemer! God's gonna fix your wagon!" The kid corralling carts rushed to the scene and tried to pry the cane from the gnarled grip of the woman, who was now slicing it in the air like a machete.

Hands tugged the microphone away from Morgan. She maneuvered through the snarl and bit into a hairy knuckle to retrieve it. When she surfaced, a false eyelash dangled from her lip like a spider. "Let's go!" She waved her guys toward the van. The engine cranked before the doors slid shut. They tore out of the parking lot and headed toward the strip mall. The mob did not notice that they'd left.

THOSE WITHOUT BALLOONS. By the end of the week our town looked like a map dotted with colored pins. Even a bulldozer parked at the construction site of the new Spoon Emporium sported a shiny red balloon. It was about Thursday when tensions began to flare between the haves and the have-nots.

Youngsters scuffled during kickball games and tea parties. Shins were bruised. Petite hands were forced inside Easy Bake ovens. Little voices taunted: “You’re not special. Nobody loves you.” Parents stayed up late so they could covertly plant a balloon for their child to find in the morning. Sadly, the empty-handed would tearfully watch a neighbor’s brat running off with their intended prize.

Adults who already had a bleak outlook wondered why they had been excluded. *What’s wrong with me? Why am I always being left out?* They placed an even greater focus on the more dismal aspects of their lives, like the embarrassment of having one eyebrow noticeably sparser than its mate or enduring monotonous sex while pretending eye floaters are aliens from an ’80s video game. So they fell asleep while reading self-help books and romance novels, and tried to conjure enough optimism to look out the window at sunup to see if their gray lives had been graced with a spot of color.

SIMON SPROTT. Ever since he and his wife had been informed of their high cholesterol levels, Simon Sprott’s Friday routine was to wake up at 5 a.m. and go to his favorite diner for a greasy egg sandwich dripping with processed cheese. He looked forward to it all week long and was the only way he could stomach the sugar-free puffed barley his wife guilted him into eating, which reminded him of Styrofoam packing peanuts.

In the still and frigid void of predawn, he drove his Saab hatchback to State Street. There were two other vehicles sitting along the curb. He eased into the empty spot behind the last car to avoid the aggravation of parallel parking. At the meter he patted his pleated pocket for the coins he had taken from the swear jar on his mantel. One of the dimes was wedged deep inside the narrow nook where crumbs and lint liked to settle. He pinched it with his fingers and pulled it out, but it slipped and rolled down the sidewalk. Hunched over, he followed the coin, squinting to keep sight of it under the dim street lights.

When Simon lunged to grab the dime, a balloon bopped him on the noggin. He found the thing an inch from his nose, the end of its string tickling the sidewalk. Its skin, the color of melted butter, emitted a sense of warmth, which likely came from Simon’s own breath ricocheting off of it.

Simon figured that the balloon had probably drifted to that spot and clung there by its helium core. He must have knocked into it as he grabbed for the dime. His drowsy brain consumed this idea like yeast feeding on sugar. He found it interesting, the chance that a stray balloon would happen to occupy that very location. Or perhaps it wasn’t random at all. Maybe nothing was.

He couldn’t help but notice that the balloon’s presence somehow countered



the lonely desolation of the dark bitter morning. And of his own existence. Maybe the balloon was there to remind him that he craved more from life than being a sloppy pharmacist who tiptoed into his basement at night to write squirrel erotica.

When he reached for the string, the balloon shot up above him. Then it swooped down and thwacked the back of his skull. Again. And again. “What the blazes?” Simon covered the assaulted area with his hand. He grasped for the string but felt it slip across his palm a few times. Finally, he seized it with curled fingers. The balloon repeatedly struck Simon’s ear, drawing a smattering of blood. While defending himself, he loosened his grip, and the balloon darted away like a tadpole. Simon searched for it above, but all that was up there was a black sky salted with pale stars. He brought his head back down and was faced with an army of balloons, posed side-by-side in rows of six. The two dozen of them rose in unison, stopping several feet above him. Simon craned his neck to track them. His flannel-lined barn jacket seemed sheer against the biting chill.

His muscles and tendons moved ever so slightly in the direction of the Saab before the message from his frontal lobe had reached the rest of his body. In an instant, he jammed his hand into his coat pocket to feel for his keys, and then leaped to the car. Lined in a V formation, the balloons pursued. Simon’s fingers fumbled for the button on his key to release the locks. He flung the door open and dove into the supple leather interior. Just as he slammed the door shut, balloons surrounded him and bounced violently against the windows. Five of them worked as a team to batter the sunroof, causing it to crack and splinter. One went so far as to deflate itself enough to squeeze into the tailpipe.

Simon rushed home, driving five or so miles above the speed limit and seriously considering running two yellow lights. When he opened the front door, his wife Enid was on the tufted settee, swaddled in a fuzzy robe, plowing through a bag of mini peanut-butter cups. The glow from the infomercial on the TV enhanced the creases in her face. The skin beneath her eyes slumped in folds as if it had lost the oomph to stay up.

Enid clumsily shoved candy wrappers behind the sofa pillows. “What are you doing home?” she mumbled, her tongue sticking to the roof of her mouth. “I thought you said you had to be at work early on Fridays.”

Simon whipped out his wallet, removed two twenties and shoved them into the swear jar.

TUCKER FLYNN. With his parka zipped to his chin, Tucker Flynn half-heartedly raked leaves in his back yard, muttering under his breath. He was sore at his mother for buying him a John Boehner mask instead of the Barack Obama mask he requested. She had told him that if he didn’t want to trick-or-treat as the Speaker of the House he could wear the pirate costume he wore last year. “But I wanna be Obama!” he whined. She then instructed him to march

his radical leftist agenda outside and take care of all the leaves.

When he had gathered an impressive pile, he leaned against the rake handle and plotted a way to get his hands on that Obama mask. Of course, he could steal it. With the Halloween store being so busy nobody would notice an eleven-year-old boy slipping a mask under his coat. He had already stolen a ladder and a chemistry set. Pinching a rubber mask would be no sweat. On the other hand, it might be easier to get his nana tipsy on gin rickeys and then convince her to get it for him.

His ruminations were disrupted by the rustle of leaves. He whipped around to see a blue balloon-dog, the size of a husky, standing in front of a giant oak. Each part of the dog had been twisted into sections that resembled fat sausage links. Tucker dragged the rake over to it.

“What’s your story, dog? You homeless?” He fished a flattened square of bubblegum from his pocket, peeled off the wrapper and then popped it into his mouth.

The balloon-dog barked and wagged its chubby tail.

Tucker blew a bubble and let it snap against his face. “Want me to fix you a sandwich?”

The tail wagged faster.

When Tucker returned with sliced organic turkey on a brioche bun, the dog was gone.

SIGHTINGS. There were numerous sightings of rogue balloons hovering on street corners, silently following pedestrians and passing vehicles. Morgan Taylor did a little piece on the balloons. With a manic smile fixed on her face, she asked questions, like what they did in their spare time and whether they’d be into coming to her place for some Indian food and platonic cuddling. No one was aware of the encounters with Simon Sprott or Tucker Flynn. Simon was far too traumatized to tell anyone what happened. Since that fateful morning, he’d called in sick to work and didn’t so much as venture out to retrieve the mail. Tucker’s attention returned to his Halloween schemes, and he forgot about the balloon-dog showing up in his yard.

HAILEY SMITH. For once, Hailey walked home from school with a zip in her step. Not only had she gotten her braces off that morning, she’d also become a Junior Varsity cheerleader, since one of the girls was out with mono and three others were recovering from a disastrous Hanging Pyramid stunt. Her blood raced with excitement and her heart did somersaults as she pranced along the sidewalk, her knapsack smacking her spine. She couldn’t stop running her tongue along her glassy teeth, delighted to be rid of the tight metal brackets and wires that had imprisoned her smile for six years. She could enjoy caramel apples again, and would not have to spend ten minutes in the bathroom dislodging bread from her braces during lunch period.



The day couldn't have been going any better for Hailey. Her hair was free of spitballs, and Svetlana, the new exchange student, had invited her to a borscht-making party. Best of all, Brian Randall had looked at her when she was on her way to Algebra. Did he really? Yes, he did. She was sure of it. Maybe he'd ask her to the homecoming dance and she wouldn't have to pretend to have chicken pox like she did last year when anyone inquired as to who she was going with. For sure, this was going to be *her* year.

With all the glee bouncing around inside of her she felt the urge to do a cartwheel. The sidewalk was empty, nobody would care. What did it matter, anyway? She was a cheerleader after all. She slid the bag from her shoulders and tossed it onto a spot of grass. Then, she raised her arms up straight over her head and turned her body to face a quaint English Tudor-style house enclosed by a wrought-iron fence. She pointed her right foot forward, looked down at her target spot and planted her hands on the ground while lifting her left leg.

It all happened so fast. As she gained momentum to get into a handstand, her legs got tangled with a rope. She hit the pavement face-first. Her body swiftly followed suit, her ankle cracking against the sidewalk's edge. While in a twisted heap, she reached for her throbbing ankle. Briny tears rained down into her split lip. Her hand went to her mouth in response to the sting. As her tongue glided along her teeth to inspect for damage, it snagged on the chipped front ones.

Hailey lifted her head and saw a monstrous green balloon floating before her. It was as large as a washing machine, and its rubbery skin was puckered and crudely patched in random places. "What's wrong with you! Can't you watch where you're going?" When she tried to pull herself up unsuccessfully, her self-pity morphed into a fit of rage. "You ruined my life!"

As the balloon hovered, casting a bloated shadow on her, it emitted a low growl.

Hailey stretched her arm and torso until they burned, her fingers grabbing for her knapsack. The fabric scraped along the cement as she pulled it toward her. Still on the ground, she swung the bag, laden with textbooks, in the direction of the balloon. The bag hit its target but then disappeared as if the balloon had somehow swallowed it. "Give it back!" Hailey cried as she helplessly watched the balloon lumber toward the clouds, its tail lashing at the breeze. She ran her tongue over her broken teeth again and winced at their sharpness.

REPORTS. Two concerned mothers called 911 when they spotted balloons loitering around the monkey bars at Tawasentha Park. Martha Cleary, a retired librarian and avid *Grand Theft Auto* gamer, claimed a balloon had carried off her beloved poodle, Jizzy B. According to her statement, she'd left the dog in the back yard with strict instructions to go tinkle and when she returned, a balloon was making off with him. She ran inside to get her crossbow, but when she got back the balloon was too far out of range, and she couldn't risk hitting poor little Jizzy.

Another strange encounter was detailed by a barista at one of our thirty Starbucks locations. He accused the balloons of boxing him in and demanding one dozen venti skinny caramel macchiatos, and displayed teeth marks where one of them allegedly tried to nosh on his hand.

Perhaps the most disturbing accounts were of balloons staring into windows. People would be eating dinner, masturbating, or watching their favorite sitcoms when a sense of unease descended. They'd look up to see blank latex faces gazing back at them. Kids wet their beds. Parents sprang for security alarms. Gun sales went up.

CHAOS ENSUED. Packaged balloons were pulled from shelves. At birthday parties, children sulked over the balloons missing from decoration ensembles. They demanded extra cake to cope with their tragic disappointment. Anyone in possession of a balloon was considered suspicious. Clowns went into hiding. Small suburban armies clad in pea coats and varsity jackets combed the streets in search of the floating menaces. Looters took advantage of the mayhem. The Gelato Outlet, Hammer Heaven, and Todd's Artisan Cheese shop were all raided. A witness at the pet store even claimed she saw a child disguised as Barack Obama strolling out with an iguana under his arm.

When the workday was done, employees headed to their cars in groups, armed with Tasers and stickpins. The playgrounds were vacant. Crystals of frost coated abandoned swings and seesaws. Bags of fun-sized candies collected dust on store shelves in anticipation of Halloween being cancelled. It wasn't safe to walk our pets, get sloshed on dry martinis while lounging by our stone fire pits, or sneak out to meet our lovers.

Of course, the doomsday fanatics came out in handfuls. They paraded up and down State Street, carrying homemade placards warning that the balloons were a clear sign of the impending apocalypse. But we didn't pay them any mind. Ever since the plague of locusts took a back seat to the My Little Pony convention last year, we questioned their commitment to their cause.

PARANOIA. A wave of paranoia afflicted our town. We saw the balloons even when they weren't there. Our pulses quickened when our eyes glimpsed any hint of a primary color. Ordinary things like traffic lights, fruit stands, and umbrellas induced anxiety. The local news stations couldn't keep up with the numerous sightings, most of which turned out to be false.

While speaking with Morgan Taylor, a mailman shuddered as he described in horrifying detail being stalked by red balloons while walking his daily route. He attempted to neutralize each of them with pepper spray but they still kept appearing on every corner. Making his safety an utmost priority, he relinquished his heavy mail sack and high-tailed it to his favorite bistro, where he found solace in a glass of chilled Pinot Grigio. When Morgan asked him to take her to the scene of the



upsetting ordeal, they discovered that the creepy balloons the poor fellow had been defending himself against were actually stop signs. Shortly after the interview wrapped, Morgan was encouraged by her boss to take a leave of absence. The following day, she checked into an all-inclusive singles retreat in the Poconos.

TUCKER TAKES CHARGE. When Tucker realized the balloons were jeopardizing his chance of trick-or-treating in his long-coveted Obama mask, he took matters into his own hands. Armed with a bag of frozen Brussels sprouts and a homemade slingshot, he resolved to put an end to their shenanigans. As he biked to the park, he came across a trio of green balloons whispering behind a row of hedges. Tucker sidled up to them. He took out his slingshot and swiftly pelted the pests. The balloons squealed before flying up high into a bare poplar tree. Tucker stretched back the elastic projectile and then launched another assault. The lowest balloon let out a deafening scream as it exploded into bits. The other two swiftly shimmied toward the sky and vanished into a patch of cloud.

At the park, he found six more balloons. They were skulking around the basketball court, taking turns diving through the hoop. Tucker crouched behind a bench and picked them off one by one. After that, he raced into the parking lot of the Platinum Palate megastore and shot at a pair of balloons joyriding in a shopping cart. They each responded with a vicious growl and charged at their assailant. Tucker propelled another Brussels sprout and blew a hole clean through the balloon on the left. It wildly snaked through the air before collapsing onto the pavement.

Tucker readied his slingshot when the survivor floated over to its fallen comrade. It quivered and voiced a soft rhythmic ticking as its color mutated from yellow to a bright pink that seemed a bit too festive for the occasion. It began to shake violently. The ticking intensified as the balloon swelled to the size of a small house. Confused birds diverted their paths after futilely pecking at it. A handful of patrons shouted expletives and sprinted for the safety of their cars, while being careful not to spill any gourmet treasures from their biodegradable shopping bags. The rest of them scrambled to take videos of the volatile pink blob hovering four feet above their heads. Tucker stood on the roof of an Escalade and aimed at the balloon, which was stretching itself thinner and thinner. Before he could fire off a shot, the balloon detonated, releasing a flurry of teeth, Kit Kat wrappers, and moist tufts of hair.

By the end of the day, Tucker had destroyed eighteen balloons and scared off at least three dozen. When he returned home, the balloon-dog was waiting in his front yard. It circled excitedly as he approached.

Tucker immediately palmed his slingshot. His chafed fingers gripped the handle and pulled it from his coat. He moved closer to the balloon-dog, who was yipping and wagging its tail.

“What’s the deal, dog? You still hungry?”

The dog sat and offered a paw.

“You like beef carpaccio?”

The dog danced around on its hind legs.

Tucker shoved the slingshot back into his pocket. He bent down until he was eye level with the dog. “My mom will have a conniption if she sees you. So you have to cool it with the noise.” After removing his coat, he gingerly wrapped it around the dog and then covertly carried it upstairs to his room.

BALLOONS? The balloons disappeared as quickly as they had arrived. But it seemed premature to breathe a sigh of relief just yet. And though they were physically gone, the psychological damage was still very present. It didn’t take long for us to be conditioned to expect them, so we still used caution when venturing past our leaf-cluttered porches.

A few of the children had gotten so obsessed with the balloons that they had to see counselors. Sally Hayes, a self-proclaimed expert on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, who had once read an article on the subject, held meetings in her newly remodeled IKEA kitchen for folks to discuss how the balloons had impacted them. Dribs and drabs showed up with fake tears and sniffles as a ruse to score some of Sally’s coffee cake, which was, according to rumors (begun by Sally herself) the best in town. For years, the recipe containing the secret ingredient had been locked in a safe behind her framed portrait of Robert Goulet. (It’s catnip.)

MOVING ON. It took several days for things to get back to usual. It was actually disconcerting, how life could become ordinary again after such a devastating occurrence. Halloween was back on. Attention turned toward haunted houses and trick-or-treating. Despite protests, balloons found their way back into stores and homes.

But as we progressed further into our daily routines, it was hard to shake the feeling that something was different, that we had been changed in some permanent way. We donned masks of normalcy as we sipped our fancy coffees, chauffeured our kids, and nibbled on grilled lamb shanks. But there were those inescapable moments of solitude, while idling in traffic jams or lying wide-eyed at 2AM, when we pondered what the balloon incident had said about us. And then a trickle of cold dread seeped from our punctured hearts as we contemplated their possible return.●



Abigail Uhrick

Phoenix

I am nothing if not the girl
in muffling leaves
wrapped
for an October bonfire.
I have played dry, cracked
red, seen flicks of fire
in a house burning.

I have confused my mother's
childhood with my own: lightning
ripping the roof. Yes, I have done
the part of electricity buzzing
through thick, black wires; I have held
a light bulb between the whites
of my teeth and waited for rain.

I have signed a contract
to play the fool.
I am known to show up warmer
than the weather with at least
one word on my lip; to spark
like embers when there is not enough
light.

Producers will insist
I be given a challenge:
the chance to play the girl
on the top
floor of a storm, the one
asleep in bed
when the lightning booms.

Natalie Crick

Spider

The whisper
Wicks from her lips.
A soothing salve.

She bends, twists,
Feet touching the walls
In eight different places.

Her laurels always rove.
Search.
Hold.

Gagging the dawn chorus
Until
The hunger moon thins.

Dissecting a house fly,
She commits
Murder on the brightest window,

At first frost
Opens the door
Without a guest to feast.





Kara Dennison

Hatter House

An Alice had gone missing somewhere between the nursery and the tea party.

The message misted into view in dancing letters on the Pink Elephant's pocket-talker. She didn't know how the Cheshire Cat did it. The old thing had forsworn any of the Absentminded Professor's new inventions, and thus didn't have a pocket-talker of his own. But she also knew better than to question anything he did . . . or, rather, it was simply easier not to think about it.

WHERE IS THE ALICE :) :) :)

The Pink Elephant hadn't seen an Alice in nearly three months, not since she'd sent the last one off to Mama Grizzly. Surely that wasn't the one the Cat was talking about. It should have been and gone ages ago. Was there another one who'd strayed? Granted, over the last two years or so there had been an impossible influx of Alices, so the lull *had* seemed a little odd. . . .

Did I miss one? the Pink Elephant typed clumsily with her trunk.

THE ALICE OF THREE MONTHS AGO, WHERE IS IT :) :) :) :)

The smiles were increasing. The Cat was getting cross.

Another message popped up, but the Pink Elephant didn't recognize the name attached to it. *There was an Alice three months ago??? T^T*

I sent it to Mama Grizzly, the Pink Elephant tapped out.

I got it, came the reply a few moments later. *I sent it to you, Cat.*

A long pause. And then, again from Mama Grizzly. . . .

DID YOU LOSE IT???

A purple mist hung at the bottom of the screen for a few minutes. Then, slowly. . . .

>:(

The Pink Elephant nearly dropped her talker. The conversation ground to a halt for a full five minutes as she stared at the stagnant screen. She imagined Mama Grizzly and whoever else was in the conversation were doing much the same.

He's angry. He's angry. I don't know what happens when he gets angry. He *never* gets angry.

Finally, more purple letters.

FIND THE ALICE. FIND IT NOW. OR ELSE.

Or else what? This from the unknown person.

A long pause. Then. . . .

;)

And the whole conversation was wiped.

The Pink Elephant put down her talker and began pacing around her kitchen. You can't lose an Alice. You can't. Every phase is sketched out perfectly.



Alices don't get lost. That's like . . . losing your own hand. Well, all right, bad example. Losing hands was relatively easy. One of her classmates had lost an elbow once and it turned up in someone's coffee three days—

Ping.

She looked down. A message from the unfamiliar person.

Meet at Dormie's Teapot in half an hour. Lunch is on me.

Mama Grizzly had skewered an éclair on one claw and was nibbling it daintily when the Pink Elephant arrived at the tea shop specified. The short, stocky bear eyed her younger associate through a pair of thick spectacles. There was no one else around just yet—whoever had sent the talker message was still absent.

“The boy got one of those new game ordinator the other day.”

“Oh, yeah?” It was an obvious attempt at time-killing conversation.

“Mm.” Mama Grizzly snuffled at the rest of the éclair. “I can't see the point, really. He loves it. The Professor tells me it's genius stuff, but all he does is punch buttons and hit fake people with wobblesticks.” She snickered. “I told him he's perfectly welcome to go out in the back garden and do that to the toves if he wants entertainment.”

The Pink Elephant giggled nervously. She knew not everyone was as keen on the Absentminded Professor's inventions as she herself was, but the slightly older generation really tended to dig their heels in. They missed the old days of Wonderland, when communications were delivered by eccentric footmen rather than by magical electric boxes. She much preferred the certitude of pocket talkers and ordinator because eccentric footmen tended to wander off or eat the letters or turn into opossums. Though if you asked the older generation, that uncertainty was half the fun, and reliability just spoiled it.

“Really, though,” Mama Grizzly pressed. “If he spent half as much time on improving his memory as he does on his inventions. . . .”

“Then he wouldn't be our Absentminded Professor,” the Pink Elephant replied with a little smirk. Though it was true, over the last year or so he seemed to have redoubled his efforts and come out with a whole slew of new devices. Even now, several residents were testing out a bizarre new self-moving toothbrush. Where he came up with these oddities no one was sure, but feeling on it was never not divided.

“Hello, ladies!”

The girl who approached them could, at first glance, have easily been an Alice herself. If it weren't for her rainbow-streaked hair and the fact that her eyes seemed to change color with each breath she took, the Pink Elephant might almost have mistaken her for one. She walked out of the tea shop with a tea tray balanced on her head and plates of sandwiches perched precariously along the length of both arms.

“What's all this?” Mama Grizzly asked, wrinkling her snout.

“Lunch.” The girl smiled disarmingly. “Like I said, it’s on me.” And she giggled a twinkling little laugh, sliding the plates of sandwiches down onto the table and reaching up to retrieve the tea tray.

“Ah . . . I don’t think you two have met.” Mama Grizzly turned to the Pink Elephant. “This is Mary Sue. She handles the walk from the Cat to the palace.”

Mary Sue beamed, her eyes turning a dewy blue. “A pleasure. You must be the White Elephant’s daughter?”

“Mm . . . yeah.” The Pink Elephant nodded awkwardly. “Yeah, I’m over by the old Caucus Race.” Her father, the White Elephant, had retired a year ago, disappearing off to parts unknown. She didn’t think much on it—people appeared and disappeared all the time, after all—but it still irked her a bit that she’d been thrown into the Alice Walk with very little training beforehand.

“So.” Mary Sue sat down, and suddenly the conversation was hers. She grabbed a chocolate-salmon sandwich and took a tiny nibble. “There was, in fact, an Alice three months ago.”

Mama Grizzly nodded. “It looks like it went missing either directly before or directly after the Cheshire Cat.”

“Before.” Mary Sue sounded quite sure of herself. When the other two looked at her, she smiled knowingly. “Else he would only have pinged me, yes? Clearly the Alice never got to him, so he’s not sure where the workflow fell apart. He must’ve assumed there was a chance it skipped him entirely, hence bringing me in.”

“I thought he knew everything,” Mama Grizzly muttered, and Mary Sue tutted—knowingly but warningly. *Yes, we all know what he’s like, but. . .*

The Pink Elephant gnawed quietly on a nail, not seeming to have the stomach for her tea and sandwiches. “But how can you lose an Alice? I thought everything was set up so that couldn’t happen.”

“Well.” Mary Sue sniffed; her eyes glinted the tiniest bit red. “Allegedly. But clearly someone dropped the ball.”

“It wasn’t me, if that’s what you’re insinuating.” Mama Grizzly tapped her claws threateningly on the tablecloth. “I’ve never lost anything under my protection. *Ever.*”

Mary Sue blinked slowly, looking confused. The confusion drifted into an offended pout as she laid a graceful hand on her bosom. “Well, I hardly think it could be *I* who lost it. Considering it never got to me in the first place.”

“Yes, according to you,” Mama Grizzly rumbled. “Can anyone back you up?”

“No one *needs* to back me up, I think you’ll find. My track record is perfect; it speaks for itself.”

“So you keep reminding us.”

“You may not know it, but I am the only person ever in Wonderland to pass Alice Walk certification perfectly every year I’ve taken it.”

Mama Grizzly rolled her eyes in the Pink Elephant’s direction. “She won’t let us forget.”



“No, it’s obvious who’s at fault here.” And Mary Sue turned her now-violet eyes toward the Pink Elephant.

“ . . . m-me?”

“Well.” Mary Sue said coyly, “it makes sense, doesn’t it? You’re awfully *new* at the Walk, and you didn’t get all your training in before you started.

The Pink Elephant hunched her shoulders. “That was hardly my fault. You know Dad. . . .”

“Oh, we know. We know *all* about your dad just dropping it on you out of nowhere. And yet no one stopped to think that maybe entrusting someone so green would be a bad idea.”

“Hey. . . .”

“Besides,” Mary Sue drawled on, “look at you. The *Pink Elephant*? Clearly we know what you’re about. I wouldn’t be surprised if you’d been drinking on the job.”

“I-it’s just a name. I don’t actually—”

“Bah!”

Mama Grizzly slammed a paw on the table, and the group fell silent.

“This isn’t getting us anywhere,” she rumbled. “Mary Sue. Despite what you may profess at every given opportunity, you are just as fallible as anyone else. And just as likely to lie in a pinch. We have no proof you aren’t hiding something. *And*,” she continued, over Mary Sue’s open mouth, “you seem to be forgetting that the Pink Elephant has been doing an admirable job so far. Losing the Alice doesn’t fall in line with her previous performance.”

“But. . . .” Mary Sue poked her index fingers together, puffing out her cheeks. “I’m *not* lying. . . .”

“We won’t get anything done today.” Mama Grizzly scooped a pawful of sandwiches into her mouth and swallowed—she may not even have tasted them—then swigged down her mug of tea. “Let’s. . . .”

She stopped and peered at the teacup.

“What’s wrong?” the Pink Elephant asked.

“Nothing . . . nothing.” Mama Grizzly put the cup down. “I’m going home. I suggest both of you do the same. We’ll cool off and try this again tomorrow.”

The Alice Walk was implemented as a way to prevent Otherland visitors (or “Alices”) from having too great an effect on the environment of Wonderland. By limiting the movements of the Alice and leading it on a very specific course, we can prevent property damage, political complications, and toxic normality.

“Toxic normality.” Underlined several times in her father’s notes. The Pink Elephant had often wondered what that meant. Her father had never explained in detail; whenever she asked, he’d always just say “Be grateful you don’t know” and offer to take her out for a bowl of curry custard. What more did she need to know

than that he didn't want to tell her?

There was a knock at the door. "It's open."

Mama Grizzly lumbered in, carrying a covered dish. "You all right?"

"Mm. Fine, why?"

"Ah . . . Mary Sue was a bit rude to you. I didn't know. . . ."

The Pink Elephant laughed awkwardly. "She's right, though. I was thrown into a bit of a . . . situation." She stared down at her father's notes. "Of all of us, I'm the one most likely to have messed up."

"Nonsense. We're all equally likely or the Cat wouldn't have pinged us. And between us . . . I trust you *far* more than I do her." Mama Grizzly set the covered dish on a nearby table and uncovered it. Marshmallow and fish stew.

The Pink Elephant smiled. "My favorite. You remembered."

"Thought you could use a bit of cheering up."

The two sat quietly for a bit, the Pink Elephant sucking up her stew through her trunk, Mama Grizzly sitting and watching her defensively like a . . . well. Finally, the Pink Elephant wiped her trunk daintily and huddled down on her couch.

"Better?"

"Mm." The Pink Elephant nodded. "Say. . . ."

Mama Grizzly twitched an ear.

"Earlier at Dormie's. The tea. Something about it bothered you."

Twitch.

"What happened?"

Mama Grizzly frowned, shifting her posture the way older people do when they're about to tell you something that's going to change everything. "It was . . . how it tasted."

"How did it taste?"

Twitch. "Normal."

The Pink Elephant squinted. "Normal?"

"How does your tea usually taste?"

"Well." The Pink Elephant counted off on her big, square toes. "On Mondays it tastes like blackcurrant. On Tuesday it tastes a bit like lobster thermidore with a coriander twist. On Wednesdays it tastes of puttanesca *unless* it's raining, in which case it—"

"Yes, yes." Mama Grizzly waved a paw irritably. "This tea. It . . . tasted like tea."

The Pink Elephant blinked. "But tea tastes like. . . ."

"I mean *real* tea."

"Real. . . ?"

"Tea is a sort of plant grown in Otherland. They dry out and oxidize the leaves, then steep them in hot water. The result is a hot drink that tastes of . . . well . . . rotting dried leaves steeped in water."

The Pink Elephant squinted. "Every time?"



“Every time.”

“So when you say the tea tasted like tea, you mean. . . .”

Mama Grizzly clenched her jaw. “Toxic normality.”

There was that phrase again, the one her father would never explain to her. “What . . . is toxic normality?”

“You don’t know?”

“No one would ever tell me.”

Another posture shift. And Mama Grizzly began.

The very first Alice had been a little girl. Most were, but not all; it just sort of happened that way. She’d brought with her a frightening degree of logic and common sense, and began inflicting it on all the locals. Many in retrospect were under the impression that she had no idea what she was doing, that she was simply a lost little girl suffering from serious culture shock. Intent aside, she’d managed to severely unsettle many of the residents by demanding they stay the same size or recite poems accurately. Worst of all, she’d managed to compromise legal proceedings by insisting on a fair trial.

The damage left in her wake had taken years to undo, as she’d spread so much sheer normality that it had seeped into her surroundings. Trees had begun to grow as they were meant to, insects had stopped talking. . . . Mass hysteria. Or rather, the lack thereof. Abnormality was eventually restored, but the luminaries of Wonderland agreed that steps should be taken to make sure such a thing never happened again. If another Otherlander got nosy or commanding, or if it stayed more than a day or two, they might not be able to get things back to normal as quickly next time . . . if at all.

To that end, they compared notes on their encounters with the first Alice and constructed the Alice Walk: a fairly beeline tour of Wonderland that would simultaneously satisfy the Alice’s inevitable curiosity and keep it clear of any especially vulnerable areas. The Rabbit family always took the lead, as their family had remained settled near the hole through which all the strays invariably dropped, with the Royal family escorting them out at the portal constructed behind the palace. The in-between bits vaguely followed the path of the first Alice, if only because it was easy to model around the original route.

The mid-point—the tea party at Hatter House—was arguably the most important bit. It was where the situation was taken stock of, where the Alice was kept in one place for the better part of a day as the rest of the Alice Walk communicated to see how much damage had been averted and whether anyone needed to change up their methods for the second half. Hatter House was a bit of a prize. Only the best of the Alice Walk got to run the tea party, and it changed hands every few years.

As Mama Grizzly explained this, the Pink Elephant started to understand why Mary Sue had been so knotted up over even a vague accusation of losing the Alice. She’d been angling for Hatter House for as long as anyone had known her. If it came to light that she’d made a mistake like this *and* lied about it, the chance

would be out of her reach for as long as she lived.

“So even if it is her fault. . . .”

“She’ll make sure no one knows,” Mama Grizzly confirmed.

The Pink Elephant sighed, poking through her pocket talker. “I wish the Cat hadn’t wiped our conversation,” she muttered. But a bit of poking showed that he hadn’t—it was still stashed away in a far corner of the talker, with everything but the Cat’s floating dialogue still in place.

“Only four people in the conversation,” she noted as she looked at the talker codes at the top of the screen. “So the Cat really had his suspicions narrowed down.”

Then she stopped. Looked again. “Wait.”

“What?”

“Four people in the conversation. But the Cat doesn’t have a talker. So . . . why are there four codes?”

Mama Grizzly dropped to the floor on all fours with a thump and scrambled over to her own talker on the end table. “Let me see.” She clawed through to find the conversation. “You, me, Mary Sue . . . and one more.”

“I don’t recognize it.”

Mama Grizzly’s response was a low growl. “I do.”

By the great-great-grandfather clock in Hatter House, it was a quarter to Monday at Dark o’Clock when his front doorbell rang. By the Absentminded Professor’s own reckoning, it was Too Early.

He shuffled his way down the stairs, bashing his forehead against the low-hanging ceiling that had suited the old Mad Hatter’s height far better than his own, and opened his front door blearily. Silhouetted against the moonlight were the imposing figures of a bear and an elephant. The eyes of the former were practically glowing crimson.

“Oh, it’s . . . ah . . . Teddy Bear and Elephant in the Room.”

Mama Grizzly snarled and pushed past him into the house. “What did you do with the Alice?” The Pink Elephant gave a nervous shrug and half-smile and followed.

“The Alice? What Alice?”

“The three-months-ago Alice, the missing Alice, the making-tea-taste-like-tea Alice!” Mama Grizzly upended a table with a howl, sniffing the air, the floor, everything for a clue.

The Professor rubbed his eyes and made a sort of exhausted grunting sound. “I haven’t seen an Alice in ages,” he slurred, sleep still not quite releasing him.

“Haberdash! Where is it?”

The Pink Elephant settled herself near the door to some side room or other, keeping as clear of the carnage as she could. When Mama Grizzly had sunk her teeth in—literally or metaphorically—she wouldn’t let go ’til she had what she



wanted. It could very well be a long night.

A noise.

She cocked her ear curiously in the direction of the door. Something was shuffling around behind it. As Mama Grizzly and the Professor's altercation raged on, she leaned gently against the door, nudging it open and backing casually through it.

She found herself in a dim hallway, the walls lined with portraits and photos of various members of the Mad Hatter's inner circle. The Hatter himself, the March Hare, the Dormouse, the Reverse Ferret . . . on and on, the paintings becoming tintypes, the tintypes becoming blurry black-and-white photos, then crisp color photos. . . .

And there was another door at the end of the hall, this one slightly ajar. Through the crack shone a light, disturbed occasionally by a shadow. The Pink Elephant eased the door open and found herself looking down into a cozy guest-room-slash-study, where a slim, young figure worked away at some sort of streamlined ordinator.

"Hello," said the Pink Elephant.

"Hello," said the Alice.

"Do you know," asked the Pink Elephant slowly, "that you're making our tea taste terrible?"

It was an awkward talk. The Absentminded Professor sitting on an overstuffed ottoman in the middle of the room, Mama Grizzly looming over him from behind, the Pink Elephant sitting nearby, the Alice huddled in a chair with eyes cast downward like a scolded child.

"How long did you keep it here?"

"I'm a *she*, not an *it*," the Alice snapped. "And he hasn't *kept* me anywhere. I chose to stay."

Mama Grizzly let loose a low rumble in her throat. "*You chose?*"

The Professor perked up, smiling. "Yes, yes, she did! She did. I tried to see her off, but she *insisted*—"

"No," the Alice snapped back. "*You insisted*. I relented. Just because I was fine with it doesn't mean it was my idea."

There was a long silence. The Pink Elephant laughed awkwardly, far more loudly than she meant to, but no one seemed to notice. Or else they pretended not to.

"And why?" Mama Grizzly pressed.

"She's . . . helping."

Even the Pink Elephant raised an eyebrow at this.

"I'm an engineering student," the Alice spoke up.

"Like trains?" the Pink Elephant asked, bewildered.

The Alice shook its . . . *her* head. "Technology. I make things. I build things. Invent things. The Professor has ideas to make Wonderland better, more advanced."

“Oho,” Mama Grizzly chuckled. But the Pink Elephant knew it wasn’t a mirthful chuckle.

“Look,” the Professor said in a strained tone, “we’re all a bit tense. Why don’t we have a nice cup of tea before we go on?”

Mama Grizzly casually slashed a curtain in half.

“Why?” she rumbled. “What would possess you to *keep* an Alice? When you *know* what will happen?”

“I . . .” The Alice was speaking. Everyone turned to face her.

“I was led to believe that was how it was done.”

Mama Grizzly and the Pink Elephant looked at each other. The Absentminded Professor looked pointedly at a spot on the wall.

“You . . . what?”

The Alice nodded. “I was told that *all* the Alices stop off here to sort of . . . exchange information, I guess? So he could make cell phones and computers and stuff for you guys.”

“Cell. . . .”

“. . . phones?”

“Yeah, those.” The Alice pointed at the Pink Elephant’s talker lying nearby.

The Professor seemed to be shrinking exponentially in stature by the second.

“But. . . .” The Pink Elephant eyed the Professor suspiciously. “He . . . told us all these inventions were his.”

The Alice flattened her lips into a line and turned slightly pink. She was clearly rethinking having said anything at all. “I . . . didn’t mean to cause any trouble,” she faltered.

The Pink Elephant poked at her talker. “You mean . . . he didn’t *invent* these?”

“N-no,” the Alice said hesitantly. “He adapted them. We’ve had them for years. Like, well . . . a lot of stuff he made.”

The mere seconds of silence that followed were oddly stifling.

“I’m going to ask you a question.” Mama Grizzly’s voice was oddly calm as she tilted her head toward the Professor. “I want you to answer it honestly. Are you responsible for the influx of Alices into Wonderland?”

The Professor looked up, blanching. “It . . . it’s . . . I . . .” He gave a warbling laugh. “It’s for science! Look at the machines we have because I work with them! The inventions! The convenience!”

“The normality,” the Pink Elephant said quietly.

“Yes! Yes!” The Professor smiled. “The Rabbit family agreed with me, too! That’s why they’ve been bringing us Alices: so we can learn!”

So the Rabbits had been involved. Then again, they’d have to have been: they popped through the rabbit hole and back constantly, seemingly unaffected by Otherland’s normality—so they’d been deliberately luring Alices here this whole time?

“But you’re killing Wonderland.” Mama Grizzly turned toward the Alice.

“You . . . no. No, you only know what you know. This isn’t your fault. But he. . . .”



And she turned back to the Professor. “He wants a world more like yours for us. Without asking anyone else what *we* want.”

The Professor clenched his fists. “Did you *enjoy* your messengers going missing? Your trees randomly eating your pets?” He turned to the Pink Elephant. “Your father disappearing?”

The Pink Elephant flinched. But she recovered. “Don’t make me a part of this. Or him.”

Her expression must have been far more terrifying than she intended, because the Professor shrank down in his chair again.

“Elephant,” Mama Grizzly said softly, “take her to the Cat. I’ll handle things here.”

Wordlessly, the Pink Elephant led Alice from Hatter House. The door slammed behind her.

“What’s going to happen to him?” the Alice asked, her voice shaky.

“I . . . don’t know. Mama Grizzly is defensive, but she always does the right thing. I imagine he’ll be tried for treason against Wonderland.”

The Alice frowned. “Because of me?”

“This isn’t your fault, Alice.”

“Miranda. Honestly, why does everyone insist on calling me Alice around here?”

It was a completely unfair trial—no evidence, no witnesses, a declaration of guilty as soon as the trial started. Just as it should be. And the tea given to the jury tasted of strawberry scones.

The entirety of Wonderland began ridding themselves of talkers, ordinator, plate-washers, indoor plumbing, anything that came of stolen Alice technology. Once they knew whence it had come, they wanted nothing more to do with it. All of the various inventions were dumped in a landfill well beyond anyone’s homes, where any latent normality would go unnoticed.

Also well out sight was the Professor himself, having been ousted from Hatter House and placed in the Queen of Spades’s prison for six million years (with parole available after 4,500 years for good behavior). Mama Grizzly took over his station, with the Pink Elephant assisting her. And, unsurprisingly, the number of Alices dwindled to a far more manageable amount with the Professor no longer pulling any strings.

Or rather, not pulling *many* strings.

No one had confiscated his personal effects. Why would they? What good is a pocket-talker without someone to talk to?

But he did have someone to talk to.

The screen lit up. *Alice incoming. Two hours.*

The Professor’s breath caught in his throat. *Real hours or Wonderland hours?* he typed with shaky hands. “Wonderland hours” could be two minutes, two days,

two million years.

There was a slight, almost huffy pause. *Otherland hours.*

And it'll take me away?

It has the key, came the response.

The Professor heaved a sigh of relief. Perhaps Wonderland wanted nothing to do with normality, or with him. But this way, he at least could be happy. In a world with logic. Technology. Schedules.

Thank you, he typed.

No, the floating purple letters insisted, *thank YOU.*

The Cheshire Cat curled up on his branch, satisfied. At last, full abnormality would be restored.●



Rose Mary Boehm

Waiting for Access

My mother saved things. Drawers
full with bits and pieces. You never know.
Rubber rings next to elastic bands, old buttons,
rusty nails, clothes pegs, bicycle clips,
hair slides, faulty plugs, old bus tickets,
worn-out springs, leaking batteries,
pieces of balsa wood . . .

My memories rumble in large
containers of my mind. The boat-trip
upriver, the doll with a hole in the head,
his clumsy hands when I didn't know
what he wanted, leaning into the storm
at Land's End, suckling my firstborn,
my baby with enlarged pupils,
my soul in tatters when I had to leave . . .
what I need to know, un-minded, hidden
in recesses of my brain. Let me in.
I still have to spin
a lot of straw into gold.

Kasandra Larsen

Immigration

My father and I lie back to back, spent
on my under-inflated queen-sized
Coleman camping mattress in an apartment
full of echoes as if we were new to the country,
shivering under a crocheted summer quilt, no
top sheet. I have not turned up my heat
enough to adjust for leaving New Orleans. His legs
twitch, a dog dreaming or simply restless
after three days' drive? The cat steps
onto and over us again and again, sniffing
at this body usurping her place, her
appointed pillow. I shake with anger,
arriving to no hot water, rooms dark, promised
bulbs unlocatable, a dark warm refrigerator
holding milk that will soon go bad. We speak
the language here in the home of our birth: tomorrow,
his brother and mine will assist up the narrow
spiral staircase, lug boxes of books. Before this
we will wake at dawn and walk to coffee
where my father, selfless coyote, will refuse
to allow me to pay. Bereft of showers,
we will stink together, share the filthy smell
of love. For tonight, my back against his, there is one
spot of warmth on my skin, an oddly placed sun
leading me to suspect he has hung
his cape in my closet while I was in the bath,
furiously brushing, spitting out Southern sounds.



Alice Russell

To the Sound of Staying in One Place

To the sound of staying in one place. Months ago, maybe a year ago, I cry to my mother that I no longer want to run away. Not from this home. This is true even, even, on the most fluid, liquid days of melting feelings when I am lost and planning my escape. I begin to understand that wanting to be gone is different than going.

I find deep love in cleaning the space(s) I inhabit. In buying cleaning products for my bathroom, kitchen, floors. Such calm in mopping. I cut roses from the rose bushes that have bloomed through spring. First the deep pinks, then the lighter ones. When the roses are gone, I walk with Jason through the weeds in the front yard and find small yellows and whites. Put them in the same vase every few days, a week, in the low kitchen window.

We are cooking meals and eating salty, summery foods. I grill hot dogs. Jason places a whole watermelon in our cart at the grocery store. The next day we wash a pocket knife and cut our fruit into giant slices on the countertop we built. I am tired. And I am not unafraid. Today my mom says to me in her backyard, “You are a good person . . . I am proud of what you are doing.”🍷

Sandra Kolankiewicz

When Some Are Most

I made you a success sandwich which we
ate together while we watched the refugees
disembark until the dock was overcrowded,
no one knowing where to go amidst the
crying babies. That's how they plan things here, my
adopted country, meaning we see no system
at all, the only attribute to spare
us: money. In my youth, we acted lower
class when we were drunk, waiting to assume our sphere
when we were sober, now with foreigners
below crowding against each other so
hard a few are pushed off the pier in a long splash,
but not on purpose, none of them holding
a diaper-less infant. That's when some are most
aware they don't like children, in the worst of times,
stuck with a thing not themselves, worse even
than they at such discomfort, always in the
way. Up here we cannot read the sky's response, the
lunch before us barely touched, the place where
we sit too close, yet much removed, our plate
full of enviable fortune, no appetite.



Jonel Abellanosa

Eggs

“Ab ovo” I imagine as sound in the ovoid
Before the frying pan’s rim cracks the shell,
Canola oil hissing, albumen white from clear.

Drizzle of iodized salt pinch on the yolk. I’m
Experimenting, first with the sunny side up,
Frying brevity with care and controlled flame.

Ground eggshells for calcium a do-it-yourself
Homework, a technical challenge, homemade
Importance for usefulness, nothing to waste.

Joie de vivre is my heart’s prime ingredient—
Ketchup-red, wafting delights and pleasures,
Light soft as melted butter, light changing the

Morning’s yellow shades, this cooking for the
Numinous; diced tomatoes, shredded tuna for the
Omelet’s filling, folding the final act of love.

Practice hones intuition into knowing, the
Quest for balance in smells of spring onions,
Roasted radish, air filled with remembrance.

Solitude is the restful alchemy, when the dish
Transforms perspectives, and taste is closest to
Understanding. The tongue is textured, the

Vitellus of expressions layered, thickened into
Wonderments. The self is connoisseur and critic,
Experience the best arbiter. I always dine with

Yearn, which I’ve learned to measure. I imbibe
Zestfulness with rhythmic chews of restraint

Sharon Whitehill

Papa Only Made Omelets

Papa, you chopped me in pieces,
minced me under your knife,
whipped me up to a froth,
and crumbled me into your skillet
like bacon. You melted me down
to a sizzle, leaving me seared
but still spitting hot words
in your face. So often I fled
from the table in tears. So often
I burned and you burned
in separate rooms.

Papa, you beat down my words,
folded in flavors you favored,
and seasoned me strong with essence
of Papa. Then you garnished me
with your frown and turned me out
on your plate for inspection.
I was never a dish to your taste,
never the daughter you ordered.

Papa, why did you never acknowledge
ingredients not in your cupboard?
Why insist that I follow one recipe only
that you approved? Why never delve
to the depths of the strong yellow
onion? Never peel back the layers
to nurture the cultivar at the core?

Papa, I hunger for eggs either scrambled
or fried. For quiches, frittatas, soufflés.
Even *oeufs à la cantalienne*. I defy you
with pungent red pepper and garlic; I sift
through the curds and the clots of intolerance
and irritation, I dig to unearth
every sprout of unwanted behavior.
The seed, source, and germ? Always you,
Papa. You.



Nicklaus Hopkins

Christina Aguilera's Face

The claw
machine I visited every other weekend
ate seven quarters
and shat out
Christina Aguilera's face
on a sticker.

I never once
saw her laugh
when I hung my Starter jacket,
finch
when I threw Holden Caulfield,
or judge

when I graffitied *FUCK YOU*
to my parents' divorce.
Even though
she cost me three-and-a-half
chocolate milks,
I left her for the summer.

Only because I couldn't
bring her along without
messing her 'do
or unsticking
my hopes that some things
stay put and some pictures don't

have to be torn out
of frames or albums
or lockers.

Andrew McDonald

You tell me

I followed two teens on a date
through the museum of natural history.

When I lost them, I looked at geodes and sea life.

I looked down into a big bowl
while a famous actor talked
about the expansion of the universe,

a representation of which
was projected onto the bowl.

Scientists have observed
birds arguing,

resolving small conflicts,
answering

to one another.

One bird gets a chance
to explain himself.

You tell me
what it means for the rest of us.





Dick Bentley

On High

This crucifix? Enormous? Ski off of it! Got lost around Indian River and the Michigan snow thickening on the road. Robbie says, “We’re not going to make it up there tonight. Vast distances.” He’s tired from all the beers, plus we’ve been passing a little ganja around the car, the four of us. The smoke’s quite thick and the car reeks.

Then, through the windshield, the headlights pick up this sign for the world’s biggest crucifix. “Shit! Let’s check that sucker out,” Robbie says.

We follow the sign. We get to the parking lot and circle around. You can barely see the thing—just a big shaft sticking up through the snow and darkness. You can see some feet on the bottom, though.

That’s when Robbie dares me to climb it. There’s this maintenance ladder that goes up it. With little rungs where you can stick your feet and hold on.

I go, “No way. No way I’m getting up that thing.”

But here I am, right at the top of the world’s biggest crucifix. I can almost see the face, but it’s dark and snowy. The thing is made of some kind of metal, bronze maybe. Shit, not the first time I’ve done something stupid for Robbie.

I yell down, “Hey, there’s somebody already up here.” Robbie and Max, I can hear them laughing way down below, laughing through the wind. Charlotte probably stayed in the car, the little pussy. Even though Charlotte’s sort of a bitch, still, she can be pretty funny. She says all the guys that like me are total jerks. That I’m like a magnet for them because I like to do crazy stuff.

It’s way cold up here. I’m not dressed warmly. Everything seems frozen. My nostrils are doing that thing where they stick together. Where they squinch up. My boots totally suck and I’m freezing my little butt off.

I can almost see the Jesus face now. It’s metallic and icy, and the eyes are way blank, except when snow hisses across the metal, and it almost changes the expression. It totally creeps me out.

It looks like Robbie at his creepiest. Me and Robbie have our creepy little dramas, too. Pretty gloomy, I guess. Sometimes he scares me, sometimes I feel like throwing up practically, or sometimes I’m just—I don’t know . . . scared? I, like, don’t know what to say. He has a bad temper. Ohmigod, he goes, like, totally mental sometimes. Or else he’ll just hit me. Charlotte says, “Bad temper? Read my lips: how about asshole?” And she says the asshole thing long and loud for effect. And to think I had my tits done for him. Had my lips collagenized. Now my lips are fake, my hair color’s fake, and lots of my body parts are fake, and Robbie says a lobotomy would’ve done me more good.



I look down through a swirl of snow and—ohmigod—a cop car. I can see the flasher turning slowly, sweeping the snowy lot and making everything look blue. Robbie and Max are trying to hide the beer cans, but the inside of the car must reek of weed, plus they left all that shit in plain sight.

A cop gets out and he's talking to them. Another one is looking through the car. After a while they're all—even Charlotte—shoved into the backseat. The cop car drives off.

Thanks, everybody! What am I doing? It's not like I even know. It's like I know where I am, but it's totally crazy because I feel like I totally don't. Like I'm here but I'm not here. That sounds so stupid, right? So totally dumb? Everybody forgot I was up here. That's how much they care. Leave me hanging up here on a ladder. And the wind blowing snow down the back of my neck and this creepy statue—this face.

Could I leer back at him? Could I make like a teenage vampire and drink his blood? My curved fangs would make a wet, slick sound as they slid down from my gums. I'd work my tongue over the fangs, then I'd push out my bristled tongue and begin to lick the statue's neck, my rough tongue scraping over the smooth, bronze throat. I tell the statue, "I'm so hungry, I need to feed."

Finally, I pretend it's real. I go like, "Now that we're alone, can I tell you some stuff?"

It stares back.

"First of all, I'm preggers. That's right. I think it was Robbie, but it could've been Max. How do you like that?"

No answer—the world's biggest crucifix has nothing to say.

"Next question. How come you get credit for all the good stuff that goes on, people giving thanks and all, but when things start to go bad, it's our sinful nature. That gets you off the hook; am I right?"

The world's biggest crucifix looks back at me blankly, the snow brushing its cheeks.

I'm like, "Shouldn't you stand up like a man and take the blame for some of the shit? Not just me being preggers, but earthquakes and floods and starving Africans?"

I'm starting to scare myself really good. Maybe I'll be left up here forever.

The snowflakes of the night continue to fall. I can't go down the ladder backward. I'm numb with terror. Maybe I'll see another cop car down in the parking lot to rescue me. Sometime—when? But going down is scarier than coming up.

Anyway, I'm stuck here. Whatever you say, here's a guy who doesn't go totally mental or hit you. He has no middle finger. Maybe he'll shake off the questions I asked him by claiming he doesn't exist, but that's a pretty lame excuse, a cop out, a typical guy thing; I can see right through it.

Now, all of a sudden I'm starting to feel nice—in a dizzy way. Ohmigod! What am I saying? This is like, what? I'm such a freak! Am I? Why am I telling you all this, like blabbing my head off? Right? Ohmigod! But I think about it. I try to think about stuff. I try to think about me as a person, like me skimming over the world. And how am I doing? I'm hanging from a ladder on the world's biggest crucifix. Days could pass and weeks and maybe years. What more could a girl possibly want? ●



Kenneth Gulotta

Moirai

They sit, rounding a square table,
working at fabrications,
some in thread, some yarn,
some with great yawns,
hitched over coffee cups,
eyes twitching to the shapes of hair,
shoulders. Cups lowered, they take up burdens,
stitching, knotting, their own inner chords
leading them in pursuits:
ordering and ripping.

They unravel the stitches that didn't work:
one man, two jobs, a city, and a sister.

They graft laughter onto tales,
watching the diner wind down.

Finally they pack skeins, needles, and swaths,
and turn out to the bar,
to tangle with a new set of binds.

Lynette G. Esposito

Demon Butterflies

Demon butterflies
Swarm the dying tree with wings
Soft and dark and death



Tom O'Brien

George

I first made George's acquaintance in Ladbroke Grove when he veered from a side road and rode straight in front of me, begging to be knocked down. I managed to disoblige him and nearly demolished a butcher's plate-glass window in the process. The blood-stained vendor froze in the act of removing a leg of mutton from the window display when he saw my half ton of mechanized metal glaring down at him from a distance of six inches. George merely raised his hat in acknowledgement and continued on his leisurely way.

Once seen, George was unlikely to be forgotten. His shiny, moon-shaped face was partitioned by a handlebar moustache that just failed to reach his ears, and was adorned with a tiny pork-pie hat that perched precariously on his non-stick dome. He sat emperor-straight on the high-framed bicycle, arms outstretched to reach the handlebars, rigid on the legs upward.

"You damned lunatic!" I yelled at his retreating back, and, leaving the butcher still frozen in wide-eyed awe, gave chase.

He might not have been much of a cyclist, but as a gentleman he had few peers. He doffed his hat at every female we passed, and the less-than-friendly responses didn't seem to bother him unduly. We turned into the Harrow Road and he eventually noticed my shaking fist.

"I could have killed you back there," I raged when we had come to a halt. "Why don't you look where you are going?"

He smiled serenely back at me. "A navigational misjudgment, sir. I do apologize."

"Navigational misjudgment. . . !"

He peered closely at me. "It's Mr. Adams, isn't it?"

I racked my brain for some long-forgotten acquaintance with this madman.

"You own a gallery in the Portobello Road and you specialize in old prints, am I correct?"

I nodded my head.

"I, too, am a lover of old prints. In fact I have a collection of them. I am apt to wander around shops and galleries in pursuit of my pleasure and have passed your premises on many occasions."

The discovery that we both shared the same passion awakened my interest in him. A love of the arts excused many conditions; perhaps it wasn't madness that afflicted him but merely eccentricity.

"You have never been in my gallery. I would surely have remembered you. . . ."

George fiddled with his garish dicky bow. "Embarrassment, Mr. Adams.

You see I mainly visit these, ah . . . emporiums with a view to selling one or two of my treasures. The needs of the body you see . . . man cannot live on fresh air alone.”

“But I am just as likely to buy your wares as the next gallery.”

“My paltry offerings would hardly interest you. It is obvious from your window display that you cater to the top end of the market.”

I laughed. “My dear fellow, it’s all a question of putting the ‘best wine’ in the window. Behind the façade, I have as much junk as the next chap. I would be perfectly willing to look at your offerings. I may not buy them of course. . . .”

He indicated the cardboard box lashed to his rear carrier. “I was on my way to do some negotiating now. Would you care to look through these?”

I agreed and we adjourned to a nearby cafe for refreshments. I grimaced when I saw the interior: tables and chairs courtesy of the Salvation Army, walls the color of old parchment.

The assistant behind the counter could have been twenty or thirty; hard to say without resort to a scraper.

“What’s it today, Van Gogh?” she asked George

“Two coffees, my dear.”

“Ark at him. My dear! Who’s payin’?”

I proffered the correct money for the coffees.

“Just as well. ’e never ’as two pennies to rub together.”

George took a sip of his coffee. “We artists have to suffer for our art, my dear. Poverty figures large in that suffering.”

“Artist!” She turned to me. “Van Gogh of Kensal Green.” She shook her head. “Mad as an ’atter.”

Over the coffees I rummaged through the contents of the box. I never expect too much in my game, so I am rarely disappointed. This occasion was no exception. The majority had clearly been taken from old books. There were plate numbers on many of them, sequential, which meant they had come from the same book.

Quite a number of them were black and white—or at least they had been until somebody had tried to color them in. This was a practice that was becoming more widespread; tart up an old print, stick it in a poncey frame, and knock it out for thirty quid down the Bayswater road on a Sunday morning.

George had been watching me as I worked my way down through the pile. “Well,” he spoke as I put the last one down, “can you use any of them?”

I couldn’t. Not personally. But I knew somebody who could.

“I’ll give you a quid each for them,” I said, prepared to double my offer if need be.

Much to my surprise George accepted the offer. Soon the box was firmly on my side of the table and he was shoving four tenners in his waistcoat pocket.

The waitress had been hovering in the background all this time and within



minutes of our transaction she was standing by George's side.

"You can pay your bill now," she shrilled. "We're not a bleedin' charity, you know."

George doffed his hat. "Certainly m'dear. Very kind of you to let me run up so much. How much does it come to?"

"Eight pounds, fifty pee."

He presented her with one of the tenners from his waistcoat pocket. "There you are, my dear. Keep the change."

That flustered her momentarily and gave me a chance to study her more closely. Pity about the muck on her face, I thought. She had nice eyes, sparkling like spring water on a sunny day.

"Sold you some of his rubbish then, 'as he?" She returned my gaze. "Well, there's plenty more where that came from." She began clearing the table. "He's barmy, you know. Painting, painting . . . all night long."

George seemed embarrassed by her outburst. "Yes . . . well I do tend to work late at night. Can't sleep, you see. . . ." His voice trailed off for a moment, then revived again. "Perhaps you could call round some evening and appraise more of my collection?"

I told him I would be delighted to, and we arranged a time a few days hence. He then doffed his hat to both of us and was gone.

How to describe George's house? Once inside, the only way was upwards. Downstairs was barricaded with boxes and bins, bits of old bicycles, stacks of moldy books, picture frames, broken vases, and sundry other items too numerous to mention. An enormous bellows lay across the doorway leading to the downstairs rooms. Of the door itself there was no sign. The room in the background was the scene of even greater devastation, as if a dustcart had emptied its contents in the middle of it. I could hear a cat mewling among the debris.

George waved a hand vaguely towards the accumulated junk. "I don't live downstairs any longer. When one lives alone a couple of rooms are ample—and cheaper to heat, of course."

I followed him up the stairs and couldn't see much improvement. Upstairs consisted of two rooms, and a bathroom and toilet housing one of those enormous cast-iron baths with splayed legs that always reminded me of a sphinx.

The bedroom contained two mattresses stacked together with a mound of blankets heaped on top. The rest of the space was taken up with more of the same junk as downstairs.

But it was the living room that impressed me most. Everything that George needed to survive was crammed in here. A tiny gas ring stood on a rickety cabinet, bubbling away, taking the chill off the air. Beneath it, cooking utensils and foodstuffs fought for breathing space on the bulging shelves. I could see a plastic container of something or other with a furry green substance growing on top of it.

In the center of the room stood a wobbly table. It was laden with paints, brushes, palettes, and knives. There were a couple of paint-spattered bentwood chairs nearby and a paraffin heat that smelled like a diesel engine. The only other item of furniture was a small mahogany sideboard that held a collection of figurines—all flawed in some way—and a silver-framed photograph of a young woman from a bygone era.

There was also an easel, with a painting resting on it. It appeared unfinished; a landscape or seascape of some sort. Its background was a blend of crimson and gold that might have been an inferno. It had the hazy, misty look about it that is often associated with Turner. None of his genius, however.

“Admiring my Turner, eh? Well, my attempt at it,” George said somewhat sheepishly.

“A very difficult man to copy, our Mr. Turner. Still, you seem to have captured the . . . mirage effect,” I replied noncommittally.

His face lit up like a child’s. “D’you think so?” He stood back a little, his hands on his hips. “Yes, I see what you mean.”

We were silent for a moment then he remarked casually, “It’s the voices, you know.”

“Voices?” I heard myself saying.

“Oh yes. Sometimes I am lying there at night and they come to me. I have to get up and paint then. Often through the night. . . .”

“They tell you to paint . . . Turner, these voices?”

“Of course. Always Turner. Never anybody else.”

By this time I should have concluded that he was a raving lunatic, but it never occurred to me. Afterwards it puzzled me, yet somehow it didn’t seem out of place. He told me how the voices had first come to him years ago, and how he had been painting to their specification ever since. He was convinced it was Turner speaking to him. He had tried to sell his paintings or place them in auctions, but without success. There must have been a couple of dozen in all, and when he had removed the dirty dust-sheet and let me view the pile, I could understand why the dealers had laughed at his claim that they were the work of Turner.

I told him that I wasn’t interested in his paintings, didn’t fancy Turner that much, and he seemed to accept that. What intrigued me were the piles of prints scattered about the room. There must have been hundreds of them. He was very reticent about where they came from. *I collected them over the years. Where from? Books, just books. Where are the books now? Who knows? Lost. Thrown away.* In the end I was no wiser.

I tried a different approach. “Have you always lived on your own?”

“I was married once,” he eventually replied. “But it all seems like a dream now. A bad dream” He indicated the sideboard and the silver-framed photograph. “My dear wife. My lovely wife” and a fog settled over his face.

“What happened to her?”

“She died,” he replied simply. His hand forestalled any condolences on my



part. “It was all a long time ago. All forgotten now.” His hand waved vaguely around the room. “She wouldn’t have liked any of this. Not my Marjorie.”

I tried to draw him out some more, but he had said all he was going to say on the subject for the present. I ended up parting with fifty pounds, and acquired another box of prints and a raging curiosity.

George’s voice got louder as time passed. Over the months I made regular visits to his house, and not always to buy. This old man, faintly ridiculous-looking, who painted badly and held conversations with Turner, had got me going. It wasn’t madness that possessed him, I decided, but fanaticism. You could see it in his eyes when he spoke about Turner—there was fire raging in there. Despite his obsession he was very articulate and could converse knowledgably on a wide range of subjects. When I mentioned universities, however, he shook his head and remarked in his sometimes pompous manner that his education was gained in “the public libraries of London.”

He was now spending most of his time at his painting. Once finished, each canvas would be hawked around from shop to shop, gallery to gallery, in the hope that somebody, somewhere, would accept it for the masterpiece he believed it to be.

Despite my constant probing I never learned much about his background or what made him tick. Why I should be interested I had no idea, but I knew that my curiosity would not be denied. Conversations with other gallery and junk-shop owners soon established that he was well-known all over London. I learned that he had been touting his prints around the Capital for more than thirty years, selling them everywhere from the Embankment to outside Madame Tussauds.

“How come I haven’t come across him before?” I asked one acquaintance.

“Probably because you haven’t been in the Smoke too long,” was his reply. “He’s been out of circulation for a while. To be honest, I thought he was dead.”

He was delighted to learn that George was still very much alive, and when I related the tale of the Turners, he laughed.

“Of course. It makes sense now. I’d heard stories of a few piss-poor copies floating about.”

Another friend thought his wife might have been an artist herself. He seemed to think that she had died mysteriously but couldn’t elaborate any further. Another still came up with the name of Tanner Daly, a totter who had spent all his life knocking on doors in the Notting Hill and Queens Park area, and who had been friendly with George.

A few days later I was in the cafe again, this time on my own. Rita, the counter assistant, had shown definite signs of wanting to further our acquaintance so I asked her out for a drink. Later that evening, her hair fluffed up and her plump knees shining above six-inch stilettos, I wondered what I was letting myself in for. When we had exhausted the usual small talk—I told her how my wife had run off with my accountant and how happy they were somewhere in Spain and she told

me how her boyfriend had dumped her for her best friend—the talk turned back to George. I asked her if she had ever heard of Tanner Daly.

“Course I have. Everybody knows Tanner. Anyway, he’s family—he’s my dad’s uncle.”

When I mentioned the possibility of him and George being friends she wasn’t so sure.

“I suppose they might have. I never remember him talking about him though. Maybe when he was totting. But he packed that up more than twenty years ago—when he bought the caff.”

“The cafe you work in? He owns that?”

She nodded her head.

“Do you think I could talk to him?”

“Not at the caff you can’t. He hasn’t been there for ten years. But if you fancy a drive tomorrow you can come with me when I visit him.”

Later on, after we had generated some heat in the back seat of my Mercedes, she told me he rented out the cafe to her family. That way he got an income in his old age and they got a living out of it. She laughed when I asked how he had got his nickname.

“Tanner? Whenever he bought anything he’d say, ‘I’ll give you a tanner for it, missus’. That’s all he’d ever pay for anything, he reckoned.”

The following day found us somewhere round the back of Wembley High Street, at the Eagles Old People’s home. God preserve me from old age, I thought as we waited at reception. The signs of decay were everywhere. All about me shapeless bundles were lolling about in armchairs; one old man’s mouth was half-open and his dribble was falling unheeded on his sleeve. They were having conversations, but with themselves and not each other. By the time Tanner had been found, I was wishing I hadn’t come. Small and wiry-looking, the veins bulging on his hands and neck, he was almost invisible in the large tub-chair that housed him in a corner of the TV room.

“Oh, it’s you,” he said when he saw Rita. “Is it Christmas, then?”

“Give over, Tanner,” she laughed. “It’s only a few weeks since I saw you. And dad comes to see you nearly every week, don’t he.”

“Yeah. Worse luck, the miserable bleeder.” He turned to me. “Did you bring anything to drink? Don’t give it to me. Slip it into that green vase on the table over there by the window. Worse than the bloody Gestapo they are around here. . . .”

“I’m sorry . . .” I began, wondering what he was on about.

“Take no notice of ‘im,” Rita interrupted. “He plays that game every time I come here.” I could see Tanner chuckling away. “Adam’s here to talk to you about George. He paints and sells pictures. Adam thought you might’a known him once.”

“Old George. Yeah, I knew him. Still do. Comes around now and then. Always brings me a drop and a few smokes. . . .” He paused. “You sure you ain’t got anything?”



I shook my head, then remembered the couple of cigars in my inside pocket. They disappeared from my hand before I had time to offer them to him.

“When did you first meet George?” I asked him.

“A long time ago. Now, was it before the war or after? Must’a been after, I suppose. He was supposed to help me with the knocking, but in the end I couldn’t afford him.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. He couldn’t keep his trap shut when I was haggling over a deal. Always encouraging me to pay more.”

“You fell out?”

“Nah. We never did. Just went our separate ways. Any old books or prints I got I put his way. He was like a bleedin’ magpie, as I recall.”

“So you supplied his books over the years?”

Her shook his head. “Only some of them. Very few in the end, I would say.”

“So where did he get them from?”

“I couldn’t say.”

Or wouldn’t say. There was little else to be learned; it appeared his periods of lucidity were fairly short-lived. When we left he was searching for the bottle I had supposedly hidden from him, and muttering about rats.

It was George himself who provided the answers by getting himself killed a few weeks later. Failing to get any response to my repeated knocking, and seeing lights on all over the house, I gained entry by means of the key I’d noticed hanging on a length of string behind the door-flap. There was no sign of him upstairs and it was only when I began searching the ground-floor rooms that I discovered the open trapdoor behind the stairs. George was lying at the bottom of some makeshift steps.

He had been dead for several days, his head surrounded by a pool of dark, caked blood. There were several dead rats nearby, and his cat was sitting close to the body—as if on guard.

The cavern where he lay was illuminated as a bleak, windowless tomb, but not damp or mildewed. The room was large, oblong in shape, and seemed to be an original feature of the house that had not been completed. Its contents stunned me for a moment: books, stacks upon stacks of them heaped high. There were more than thirty columns of them, each the height of myself, and each pile having a year number attached near the top. All were chronologically arranged, starting with the previous year and working backwards.

I picked a few books at random. They were library books, each bearing the stamps of a local authority in the London area. I eased a few more from the centers of several piles. The same. A quick calculation told me there were more than six thousand books in the cellar.

One wall was taken up with a rough-hewn timber shelving system. Ten carefully-wrapped canvasses filled the shelves. Their quality was unmistakable; not Turner, but definitely not George’s inept dabbling. I found a couple of portraits

amongst them; one was certainly of George as a plump young man; the other was of a young woman with a mane of flame-red hair. On the back of this was scrawled “self-portrait 1952.” All were signed. “Marjorie.”

In a small roll-top desk I found a couple of leather-bound journals. All the books were catalogued inside: the libraries they had been taken from, the dates, the number of prints removed from each book. There were also several cuttings, preserved in plastic wrapping, but yellowed. I read one.

“Promising artist Marjorie Andover was found dead yesterday in the cellars of Willesden Green Library, having been accidentally locked down there over the bank holiday weekend. The doctor said she probably died of fright. Her husband George, who had been frantically searching for her all weekend, said she was pathologically afraid of the dark and even slept with a light on. A library spokesman said she had been allowed down in the cellars to view some old art books that had been stored down there because of lack of space upstairs. Later, the caretaker had seen the cellar lights on, called down and got no reply, and had locked the cellar door and switched the lights off from above. The lights couldn’t be turned back on again from below.”

The story went on to describe how she had shredded her fingernails trying to claw her way out, and that some of her flesh had been gnawed at by rats.

They buried George today in Kensal Green cemetery. I was the only mourner. Rita couldn’t come, as she was busy at the cafe. What will happen to the house and its contents I haven’t the foggiest; it seems that Marjorie was an orphan, and no trace of any relative of George can be found. It was quite amusing to hear the interested parties argue about whose jurisdiction the books came under; the police reckoned they were the libraries’ problem, while the libraries maintained they were the proceed of crime and should be held by the police. Nobody wants the problem of George’s books.

Me, I have a problem too. Before I called the police I removed Marjorie’s pictures from the basement. All ten of them. They are now adorning the walls of my flat above the gallery, looking like a million dollars. Well, ten million to be exact.

The name bothered me, you see, so I wired a gallery owner I knew in New York for information. “Yes,” the information came back, “Marjorie Andover’s work is very well known over here. The last known example of her work sold about twenty years ago for one hundred thousand dollars. A new find at this time might easily make one million.”

The easy thing to do would be to claim that George had sold them to me. But I can’t. You see there was also another item in the roll-top desk that I overlooked. A will. And an inventory of Marjorie’s paintings, together with instructions that they be donated to the National Gallery. The representative from the gallery had a good laugh when he inspected the paintings I had put in their place—ten of George’s Turners—and said he was now convinced that there was not a single painting of Marjorie’s unaccounted for.

Ten million dollars. . . . George couldn’t have known. Or could he?●



Troy Varvel

Tunnel Vision

Boys taunt him from behind,
voices, echoing through
the yellow tunnel slide,
funneling into the ears
of the girl he knows.

He should talk to her.
He should tell her
something besides
*Thank you for saying
don't eat glue.*

His lips are not
stuck together.

He watches her swing,
watches chains slack
and snap. Slack and snap.
Before long he'll
enjoy the flare
and flash of skirts.

Boy's voices swell.
He can't look down
the tunnel. He can't lift
his feet from the blue
plastic grating.

One boy shoves past him
and slides head first, spraying
gravel with hands.

The girl skids to a stop.
He almost speaks,
but another boy pushes
past and slides,

and then another
and then another.

And another.



Mare Leonard

The Geometry Lesson

When we walk, and that's all
we seem to do, the campus grass,
all matted in definite shapes,
brings me back to kindergarten.
A crayon pressed hard:
3 lines, a tree; 6 lines, a house;
on top, a triangle with curls of black
stretching up on a perfect diagonal.

But your voice directs me toward
the narrow river. "It's running,
running fast." You talk more than I do
while you lead me down irregular steps.
I listen but can't glance sideways
the way you do. I might lose
my balance or fall in love
with the lines around your eyes.

You try to unravel Pascal's logic,
ABCDEF, ADEBCF, ADCFEB
but I can't visualize hexagons,
only see our zigzagging path,
like the geometric steps
in Duchamp's
Nude
Descending
A Staircase

But you see the art
between us and discard
 Pascal
for the curve of my waist.
Your voice grows soft,
like moss on hidden rocks.
But I move away, point
to a wire planter with angles
meeting in woven twists,
holding a riot of geraniums
pleading for love care
 and water, water.

I turn, speed walk in a straight line
back to the stairs, up to the parking lot,
onto the highway, to a home where
I can breathe, while guiding
watercolors to spill down a page
finding their own shapes,
And with a chunky crayon, write
 finished
 finished
 finished



John Meyering

What time is it?

It is time to lower the sun
It is time to cast its rusty rays across the sundial
and make its light easier on the eyes

It is time to retreat from the luminance of summer
from those moist green days when I yelled the time to you
from across the river
branching and bending and turning like hands of a clock
promising to never run down

And so I tum to my housebound greys:
dry water glasses crowded together in the kitchen cabinet
clouded over with dust

discarded flowerpots
taking shelter against frost
by the basement wall

Outside, the neighbors wear black

Dressed for a funeral
they bury the growing season in their garden
just in time

While in the forest
the light absorbed all summer
is released by leaves in a sunless glow

without fire
and without shadow
leaving nothing for the sundial

Simi Abe

To Watch You Fall in Love

To see you so in love with someone else is a sight to behold. You don't know it, but your strands of DNA are made up of fireflies and bush fires; when you love, you become a tiny solar flare, the Sun's first born.

I know that girl you are in love with now is dying. You are kissing her and all she tastes is lava and smoke plumes because that is what drips from your tongue. She cannot bear the weight of all the desire you pour into her.

Right now your hands hug her waist, but later, when she is alone, after she has soaked in the bathtub with her pink sundress still on, she will try to peel away the fabric that has cemented to her skin by her own blood. The scraps of her dress will fall away in the shape of your hands.

You whisper in her ear about the cathedral you will build in her name with a sunflower maze in the courtyard, even though her favorite flowers are orchids. And while you breathe all these fantasies into her head she will close her eyes and cry.

She has come to the realization that I already have; you are like fireworks, only beautiful with distance.





Lisa Marie Brodsky

Offspring

O daughter, who crawled out of my womb

you are my cigarette ash;
you are my last period.

To say it plainly, my tiny criminal,

sometimes you smell like trash
and I don't know what to do.

You mew like the kitten
I tied up in string when I was five

and you wiggle like fingers
in the worm-world of dirt.

Sometimes I wish
I'd sold you on consignment—

Whatever part of you
that hadn't sold

I wouldn't have to pay for.

But then you reach out
your porky arms

and I know I'm the only one you have.

I gave you the blood and the ash.
I gave you your first kiss.



Gianna Ward-Vetrano

Sleeping Beauty

I suppose I should start by telling you about my aunt, really my great-aunt, my grandfather's sister. It was she who set our name streaming out of the lips of the paesani in all the villages around, like a message carried on sailboats in a fairy tale sent in four directions and four half-directions, with a message from a conqueror. She was the unlikeliest sort of catalyst. She was neither beautiful nor ugly, neither witty nor stupid, neither passionate nor phlegmatic. She was my grandfather's eldest sister, the eldest of six, and at the age of sixteen, she had been walking out with the carpenter's son. Their courtship was carried out under the eagle eyes and toad eyes and owl eyes of the old people spangled around the piazza, with their coarse hair sprouting from their withered old chins, the widows in churchly black and the widowers become unkempt and slightly seedy, exuding the stale odors of wrinkled olives in brine. The two young people walked the four corners of the piazza, gazing with angled eyes on each other's cheeks and the shadows cast by their noses, and talked of the fine summer weather, the fine autumn weather, and the painfully dry winter weather. Everyone, from the harried priest down to knock-kneed Giacomo who swept out the shops, awaited the announcement of a wedding as one awaits the coming of the sun at dawn. It was in the natural order of things.

But, alas, my aunt was never to be married, and a shadow, at first seemingly a fiendish, wicked black, but in the end, a blindingly white and pure shade, a phantasm that left us all, ever after, slightly impaired, our eyes dimmed by the brightness, was to fall across her.

Just as the bells ought to have tolled the happy news of my aunt and the carpenter's son, he was discovered dallying with Amina Mangione in her father's olive grove. There was nothing for it after that: the two triflers were swept down the church aisle by a mother with a stout broom and my aunt took to her bed, never to arise from it again.

For seven days, she lay awake, as the poison of her blighted and only love bled out of her. She made few sounds, took no food, no drink. My great-grandmother wailed in the kitchen that she was cursed, that Maria Mangione, the offending bride's mother, had cursed her family, as she hauled the basins to the bedside to collect the oozing love that seeped out of her daughter's body. My great-grandmother cursed the carpenter and all his issue and she cursed the Mangione family, marking their doors with the basins' contents. The evil eye heeded her summons, staring upon the carpenter's family until the women were struck dumb and the men impotent, while Signor Mangione's olive grove was stricken by a dense cloud of hammering hailstones and never yielded another crop.

When the seven days had elapsed, my great-grandmother bustled,

muttering under her breath, to my aunt's bedside. With a sigh that escalated into a wowl, she discovered that my aunt had finally been drained of all her love for the carpenter's son and there was none left to drip through the pallet and on to the floor. But her wowl soon rose to a piercing shriek, assassini, assassini, because my aunt's eyes had closed, her lips were sealed, her ears stopped up against her mother's cries. She called for the priest.

The priest came flapping down the narrow street, his black robes untidy and his rosary clacking in the wake of his stumbling flight. My aunt had not been given the last rites and my great-grandmother greeted him with a pointed finger and a dark, glowering shadow on her face, for if her daughter, her innocent, offended daughter, should go to Hell, no angel could protect the priest at fault.

The priest (still a little untried and ill at ease in the provincial town, so far from the seminary and its cloistered calm) nearly burst into un-priestly laughter when he saw my aunt, for it seemed to him that she was merely sleeping the natural and deserved sleep that comes when fever breaks. But neither the priest nor my great-grandmother knew what they witnessed as they stood, the one grappling with the guffaw that ran riot in his throat and the other still gesticulating and letting loose her stream of curses like swallows whirling through the air in their throbbing flocks. My aunt was not dead, nor was she precisely alive.

Her pulse still beat, her blood still poured through her veins, her skin was warm and inviting to the touch, her breath wafted mildly in and out of her nostrils. Her body was alive, but her soul had been released, given over, consummated in the blistering fire of denied desire.

The women of the town came in clusters to stand at my aunt's bedside and sigh over what they deemed her restful sleep, though it could more properly be called a restful absence. The men stood outside the door of our family's house and shook their heads and kept their voices low, though whether they spoke with reverence or with the hushed, cowed pitch of a dirty joke, I can't say. Furtive glances collided with the carpenter's door and from inside of it drifted a pregnant silence, a dusty smell of curses and bad olives.

Seven more days passed and my great-grandmother began to worry. For my aunt remained under the spell of her enchanted sleep. Her blood traversed her veins, her breath left and returned to her lungs. Her body remained warm and rounded, though neither food nor water crossed her chastely closed lips. My great-grandmother took my grandfather by his ear and told him to go, double quick, and get that young father. The priest came flapping to our family's house once more.

"Look and explain," my great-grandmother ordered, swinging her rosary in the air where it struck the fuzzy morning chin of the priest. "Seven days and she's taken no food, not even bread, not even oil! Seven days and her lips are sealed shut and I can't pour water or wine into her mouth! Why father! Tell us why!"

The priest's eyes became very round and he rubbed his chin, where a crevice shaped like two beads was to remain until his dying day, when it disappeared from



his corpse like a shadow when clouds cover the sun.

“I will write to the bishop, signora. Such things are the province of wiser heads than mine,” he said.

“I should think so,” said my great-grandmother, swinging her beads again. The young priest, absentmindedly patting my grandfather’s head as he left the house, began to compose his letter. He chose to write it in Latin, in order to impress the gravity of the situation on his superior, but the letter was returned to him by the bishop, telling him that Gesù Maria and Giuseppe he was not the pope and write in plain Italian or drat him.

This was the letter:

Most Reverend Father,

In our small village, a strange and wondrous occurrence has taken place and I wish to present it to you so that you may guide me along the way of Our Lord, Gesù Cristo. A young, unmarried woman, of good reputation, has fallen into a deep sleep. Though she takes neither food nor water, her body is not diminished. She breathes and her mother informs me that her flesh remains warm to the touch. I have prayed at her bedside and her mother is never without her rosary. What is this strange sleep, Most Reverend Father?

I believe I have witnessed a miracle in this small village, Most Reverend Father. Guide me, I pray you.

Asking the blessing of Your Excellency, I am, etc. etc.

Seven days later a letter with blots over it arrived. All who touched ever after wore black blotches on their fingers until they were laid out to rest. The bishop’s reply scalded the priest’s ears as he read it, for the bishop’s incensed voice rose from the paper. His ears grew so red and irritated that he dared not risk their further damage at the voice of my great-grandmother and he stayed home.

Every day my grandfather was sent to the church at the hourly tolling of the church bells, to ask for the Most Reverend Father’s reply. After seven further days had passed and after the priest’s ears had ceased to sting and throb (though they remained pepper-red until his dying day), he came flapping to our family’s house and gave my great-grandmother the news.

“Signora, the bishop is a very busy and holy man, but I am sure he will, as I say, grant this matter, as a matter of course, his thoughts to the, yes, I would say, the full scope he feels it, well, merits,” he stammered, eyeing the rosary swinging in my great-grandmother’s right hand and a particularly menacing ewer of olive oil in the other. Quailing under the influence of my great-grandmother’s weaponry, he babbled forth, “And, of course, it takes a great deal of time for miracles to be examined and verified properly.”

My great-grandmother suddenly dropped her rosary and her ewer of olive

oil, the first on my grandfather's head (after he lost his hair, the outline of a cross could be seen on his bald pate) and the second on the cat's (I cannot, alas, confirm whether the ewer's mark was permanent), her eyes grew round like rosary beads, and her hands clapped together on her breast.

A miracle. A miracle! A MIRACLE! From the lips of a priest, A MIRACLE!

The word had been said, and my great-grandmother heard it, and so did my grandfather. Knock-kneed Giacomo, hanging around the shadowy door, heard it, and so did cross-eyed D'Amico, the loafer. The priest's feeble explanation of the commission on miracles bubbled out of him like an underwater yell and disintegrated into the hot kitchen air. By noon, the workers in the olive groves knew, the old people in the piazza knew, the shopkeepers knew, and the news was wending its serpentine way out of town and over the snaky roads, up and down the mountains, up the volcano, and down to the sea. The carpenter knew and cuffed his son on the ear, and the carpenter's son cuffed his wife Amina on the ear, and she kicked the same suffering cat who had only lately been clobbered with a ewer of olive oil.

As the news wound its way through the mountains and down to the sea, the people began to come. They bought wine and bread and olives to break their travel fasts and patted my grandfather on the head. The priest, less and less frequently, attempted to give his explanation of the commission on miracles, but they retained their underwater quality and nobody heard them. They cried out to Maria madre di Dio and all the saints when they felt my aunt's warm breath as they bent down to behold her impassive face and they fell to their knees when they felt the virginal heat radiating from her still body.

My great-grandmother grew fat along with her purse, until both required vaster lengths of cloth in order to adequately contain their insides. Four daughters were married with dowries, and each asked for blessing and protection as they kissed my aunt before taking the first steps into the church from which one could never return, while my great-grandfather acquired an opulent monument in the churchyard, and my grandfather fathered my father who fathered me. We walk always in the piercing whiteness of pure light and look with only dimmed sight on all that lies outside it.

The carpenter's son had no son and the Mangione family had no crop and they simply faded away, until they seemed like dusty ghosts. The evil eye kept them always in its gaze, for the purest, most blinding light casts the deepest, blackest shadow.

Through the years, my aunt remained ageless. Her flesh remained firm and rosy on her bones, her blood continued roaming her veins, her breath filled the hollows of her nostrils and lungs and departed. Her hair remained dark and her skin remained supple. She lies there still, silent, warm, unmoving. Perhaps, she will rise with all the saints and the angels when the world plunges down into eternal night and Hell erupts its contents through its stinking crevasses and the doors of Heaven



burst open to gather all those whom its glorious light touches. Or, perhaps, she will remain on her pallet, still, silent, warm, unmoving, and alone of all the souls on earth, a body.●

I think!

on the - 10 my

Orn

1. screamin as they drill me, but

on fire I see you kill me "that's

my steel

at adversurries envious and after me

die before they capture me,

you rescue me I'm sricical thinkin

not so there'll be bullets flyin whes

in jail time, better day sacrific

et a chance to do me like they a

A life and if you right, then nig

ver brothers try, at least U-

It is about 6,000,000,000 miles a light-year
(over 4 light-years)
Alpha Centauri's distance 2.4 or 2.6 000 000 000 000 miles

2. Ranges

Vermutlicher g
Lenses cil

die Umformung des Gravitationspotentials

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial x_k} \left(g_{k\alpha} \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_p} + \frac{\partial g_{p\alpha}}{\partial x_i} - \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_k} \right)$$

rows $\sum_k \frac{\partial g_{k\alpha}}{\partial x_k} = 0$, dann ist dies g

$$-\frac{\partial g_{k\alpha}}{\partial x_k} \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_p} + \sum_k \left(\frac{\partial g_{k\alpha}}{\partial x_k} \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_p} + \frac{\partial g_{k\alpha}}{\partial x_i} \frac{\partial g_{p\alpha}}{\partial x_k} \right)$$

$$\{i\} \{k\} \{l\} \{m\} = g_{i\alpha} g_{k\beta} \left(\frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_k} - \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_l} + \frac{\partial g_{k\alpha}}{\partial x_i} \right) \left(\frac{\partial g_{l\beta}}{\partial x_j} - \frac{\partial g_{l\beta}}{\partial x_m} \right)$$

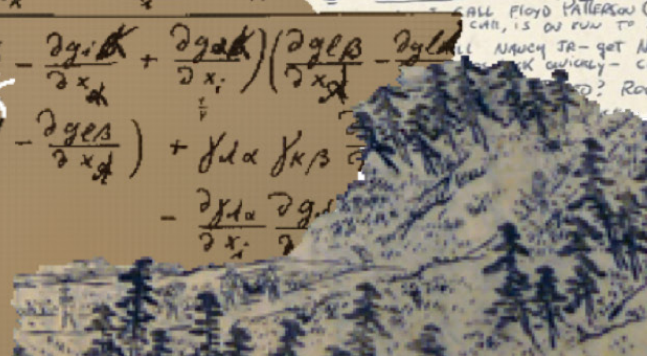
$$- g_{i\alpha} g_{k\beta} \left(\frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_k} - \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_l} \right) \left(\frac{\partial g_{l\beta}}{\partial x_j} - \frac{\partial g_{l\beta}}{\partial x_m} \right) + g_{i\alpha} g_{k\beta} \left(\frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_l} - \frac{\partial g_{i\alpha}}{\partial x_j} \right) \left(\frac{\partial g_{l\beta}}{\partial x_j} - \frac{\partial g_{l\beta}}{\partial x_m} \right)$$

$\alpha \neq k \neq l \neq \beta$
 $\alpha \neq \beta \neq k \neq l$

3000
Lester A
John den col
eston Regen
etate des Nebel
rtiger Zugang
Gleichungen
an sieht, dass
Prinzip posse
hat, Stadlere
mkt, Empfund
lich, bewunder
sime. Goto Th
al - Idee heraus
any und Ord
anyonihulch
f krecht in ab
sagt, alter dent

JIM MAHONEY'S OFFICE... THE...
TENSON'S FEAR ABOUT...
REBRISTANT... NO PICT...
OFFICE... OTHER BOO...
MAHONEY WORRIES...
THE BLACK WITH...
THE TRAIN TOY...
"Kay Gardsle...
ROW

FEAR
(TUE NOW 9) => BACK TO 7A
91 THE LONG WAIT IN A
FEAR... FEAR... BOSS GOOD
9 I AM NOW... WANT TO
BUT CAN'T... JM NOW
See the piece... CALLS
GET G.I. OUT... FEAR PIECE -
"GOTT... PROTECT MY CLIENT -
FEAR... FEAR...
HE BURNS THE BONDS...
NO COOPERATION... FEAR...
FUCK...
ALL FLOYD PATTERSON
CUN, IS AS RUN TO
NAVY JR - GET N
K quickly - C
? RO



Kathleen Hellen

Bless the Condom

—the lamb that skins extinction—bless
the sheath—thinner, stronger, sized large,
less constricting—bless the shapes, form
fitted. The colors ribbed, studded,
grooved to playlists, fruit-flavored like
strawberries, bananas. Hint of
bacon—bless polyurethane
(statistically effective)—bless
rubber, better than regret—once
for cheap spaghetti—bless the
kind(less), lesser outcome.

Jane Lake

Why Isn't Pluto a Planet?

Why isn't Pluto a planet?
In 2005 astronomers banned it.
A dwarf much too small.
Yet five moons all in all.
But is that any reason to slam it?



Aidan Walker

Neighbors

AMY, ACROSS THE STREET

Last night an ambulance came and sat outside his house for a long time, with the siren off but the lights still circling. The cars on Davis Street slowed down as they passed our corner, trying to get a better look. One after another they came to a near stop at the place where the road runs beside a patch of pines, and craned their heads out to look through the branches. They recognized the swiveling steady light. Then they moved on after realizing there was really nothing to see.

JAKE, NEXT DOOR

I tried to ignore the light from the ambulance in front of Mr. Stein's house. But I saw it even if I told myself I didn't. It kicked at the wall like wind wrestling with fallen leaves—snatching, seething, inquiring. I ignored it, but never could get it out of my head. The remarks made by faint red light on an empty wall are the sort of conversation that makes you look down at your phone and pretend you got a notification so you don't have to listen. I started texting with someone I hadn't talked to in a long while, just so I'd have something to do.

MATTHEW, TWO BLOCKS DOWN

I saw an ambulance when I was out with the dog, and I wanted to tell Susan about it. I came home, put away the leash, sat down next to her on the couch. I started to tell her but then suddenly I couldn't anymore.

I know it wouldn't make any difference whether she knew or not. It isn't even a story, really. Just a thing that I saw. She would say something about it and then move on. It would be five seconds.

I wanted to tell her about the ambulance and also about how the sun looked right as it went away into the earth again. I wanted to say that the light through the trees reminded me of when someone comes over to your house and you have dinner, and then it's time for them to go but all of the sudden they have to give everybody a hug and laugh at everybody's jokes, and so it takes another ten minutes to say goodbye.

I couldn't figure out how to put any of it together in a way that wasn't stupid, so I didn't say anything.

AMY, ACROSS THE STREET

A man walking his dog on my side of the street stopped and stared at the ambulance. He wore a baseball cap with light blue jeans and a flannel shirt.

He was the same man I'd seen walking his dog here every night for nine years. I recognized him the way I recognized the street sign on our corner. He

was there, always had been, but I had never spoken to him or looked at him twice.

I realized that he might be thinking the same thing I was. He was standing in front of a house he had passed every night for nine years. It was a house he recognized the way he recognized a street sign. Now, he was thinking for the first time about the person who lived there.

JAKE, NEXT DOOR

When I was ten, Mr. Stein told me about fishing. It was at the end of August, after a thunderstorm. The rain remained in patches of unevaporated shadow on the street, and in shards of wet clatter falling from the trees.

He was finishing up his walk and stopped at our driveway where I was shooting a basketball with my brother. He stood in his neon-colored workout wear, looking like a confused tropical bird. We got to talking and he told me that when he was my age, he lived within sight of a big river. On summer mornings when it was still dark out, he and his brothers would go fishing and stay there into the afternoon. He was the youngest, so it was his job to dig up worms for everyone in the dark soil behind the shed. He'd put the worms in an old margarine container and carry them over to the bank, stumbling because it was dark and he couldn't find his footing.

When the light came up at last, he'd take off his shoes and walk barefoot between the stones in the shallow part of the river, feeling the cold fresh water on his toes. He said he still went to the river sometimes, when he closed his eyes and thought hard enough. He could still see the brilliant clamor of the early sun stretched over the water, each crest of each ripple poking up and repeating the movement of a million other ripples over a million other days, while at the same time predicting the movement of a million more ripples over a million further days.

He told me that big fish like it best in the shadow a branch or a bush makes over the current. It's colder, darker, and easier to keep secrets there. They stay down in the shady bottoms all day, and only come out when the moon does.

LINDA, DOWN THE STREET

I hope he had somebody who worried about him. He seemed to me like such a lonely old man. I used to watch him on his walks, in his workout gear. He went very fast, like someone who cared about his health.

I only ever saw one car in his driveway, and one light on upstairs. No wife. No kids. And his neighbors weren't too friendly. Everyone pretends not to notice the people who live so close to them that their elbows might as well be touching—I'd find it disgusting if I wasn't just as guilty of it as anyone else. We can't always be the kind of Christian we want to be.

I wonder what that's like. To have nobody who worries about you.

AMY, ACROSS THE STREET

The wind stopped and everything was still. The curtain slanted down and



didn't move. The newspaper from this morning lay unread at the end of the bed. The water in the glass made a perfect circle below the rim, completely stagnant, the ice melted hours ago and the bubbles slowed. I didn't move either. I watched the ambulance light.

Leo Stein across the street used to joke about being old. He made the same jokes that everyone does. On the day that his doctor told him he shouldn't walk long distances anymore, he sat on my porch with me and tried to tell a joke about it, but the joke didn't land, and then the two of us were silent for a long while.

It was summer, so there were many things to think about while being silent on a porch. We could see fireflies flirting along the fence-line, we could smell honeysuckle, we could hear a couple of kids playing with water guns next door, their laughs and shouts rising and then fading like bottle rockets after the bang.

At about eight o'clock, Leo got up, said goodbye, and walked home across the darkening street.

RODERICK, FOUR BLOCKS DOWN

The ambulance drove away down the street. There was no siren on and it went just like a regular car. My brother was peeling the bark from a stick so he could use it as a staff, and I told him to look up but he didn't do it in time so the ambulance was already gone and he never got to see it.

In two weeks we will have school again, and right now I am worried that my summer is going by just like the ambulance did, and I won't look up in time to see it pass. I will be in fifth grade, and then I will be in Middle School, and then High School, and then College, and then I have heard that after College you live for a couple decades, grow very old, and then die. I know I am going to grow very old, and I hope that when I do, I will know more about dying.

JAKE, NEXT DOOR

About an hour after the ambulance left, I decided to go for a walk—first around the block, and then farther. It was dark, or at least getting there. Streetlamps stained the sidewalk, and shadows seemed to sink away when the light touched. The stars were just starting to come out and they looked pale and small, with a lot of space between them.

It seemed to me like I was walking through a place I'd never been to before. I knew everything very well, but suddenly it was like a word I had said to myself so many times that it had sort of just shattered in my mouth and didn't mean anything.

I came to the place where the pines were, and sat with them watching the road. When a car came by, it drenched the trunks with light that evaporated a few seconds later. The engines made soft conversation as they went, but they were all talking too fast for me to understand.

AMY, ACROSS THE STREET

My husband and I ate dinner in front of the television. We talked about work and it was the same as always. “Thank God it’s Friday,” he said.

There was some silence between us then. He drank his beer and I stared at the wall.

“There was an ambulance in front of Leo’s house tonight,” I said at last.

“I hope he’s alright.”

“So do I.” There was another silence.

“How do you feel about it?” he asked.

“I feel fine,” I said.

JAKE, NEXT DOOR

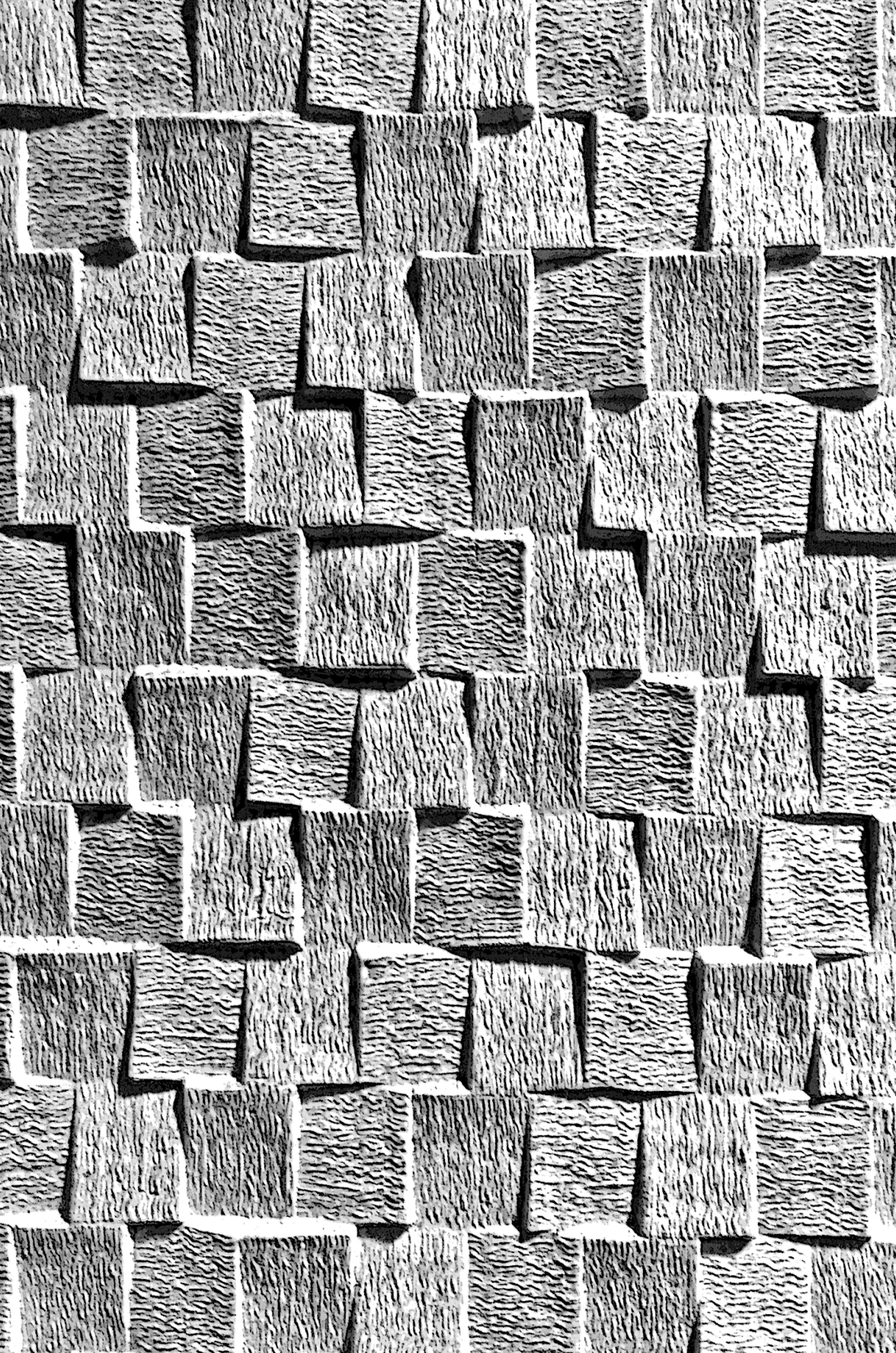
I came back late, when the cars began to thin and the road turned dark as the insides of my eyelids. The streetlamps were still on—as I walked beneath them my shadow was slathered across lawns, ten or twelve feet tall.

I noticed the windows of my neighbors, some lit and some not. Through a couple I could see the shapes of people sitting down to dinner, or watching TV. I didn’t know most of their names. At Mrs. Amy Spellman’s house, my fifth grade teacher, a light was on upstairs and all else was black. I made my way to Mr. Stein’s and stood beneath the crape myrtle, looking up.

All of his windows were dark, but the white flowers of the crape myrtle seemed to glow in a way they didn’t during the day. Clusters of them came over my head like artificial rain. The moon winked at me from behind a branch.

I noticed that the gate to Mr. Stein’s backyard was open. I went to go close it, crossing his lawn. It was beside a little garden bed that had just been mulched. There were some flowers there in little black plastic pots—like what they come in when you buy them from the store. I imagined the thin roots coiled around the dark soil, crammed in like filaments in an old-fashioned light bulb. I looked at the label: ANNUAL, ZINNIA. I guess he had planned to plant them tomorrow.●





Peter De Ville

Slicker

Texture teases, sleeking on the car's
soft viscera. Seventh Street takes up now
open mouths, a skyline sealing blue in steel.

Take it? You guys've lost it
spiralling in glass on glass to tip
a fly. Surfing up the sky

In Malabou they do it, now.
Let's walk the 14th Precinct. Got a dime?
They're throwing eggs from Whoopi's floor.

I think we shot that guy, you say?
Some Arab gink, rooting you, takes
the Opera Subway to the Met. Set up as

golden as kerosene, and as touchy too.
Tawny Kitaen's, though, as sane as fish
or is it healthy? Ow you guys, shit,

I'm an ai-tie, Syracuse jacusee
Salabello Street, sky-comber on the
Golden Gate the Betty boys are rhyging.

You got the slackness, hey? Staying now
to suck the sun of Stella Getz, dubby
Sansarusa Boulevard in Maine. Yeh.



Logan Chace

Dead Man, Dead Man

1

This morning, as I walked through my fields, I found a dead man sprawled in a patch of high grass; he was on his back and looked like he had been making a snow angel, limbs fully extended, but there was no snow—it was an early spring morning—everything was death-unclenched, except, of course, for the reedy dead man.

Every walk has been the same until I came across the dead man: an opening and shutting of my screen door three times, unless it clicks wrongly in its latch—then, three more times with perfect clicks; several knocks on the porch post until I feel I can proceed, even then, I sometimes dart back for more knocks; the dead man

broke it up: two hundred fifty steps to the woods—the dead man was to the left at step one hundred seventy-seven. I almost kept going to finish my steps, but I reluctantly hopped off my path to investigate: his skin was ashen, his open walnut eyes stuck to me like briars. I muttered it over again and again (it bears repeating):

“Dead man, dead man.”

2

Today, I completed my steps, but my mind was on the dead man. I made my bed; I put on clothes, touched my nose to every fabric, I ate my square toast and circled eggs and drank my oblong juice; I measured my steps to the copse, followed its line to the clearing, and circled back to my house—only then did I go to the dead man.

His face was the same as yesterday—I still had to turn away from

his eyes—so distant, so fixed, so crazy
blood-seized—

you you you with your un-creased khakis, your flannel you
think you can just rest in my field like an egg in easter grass
green red on green and oh god—I didn't see

the spilling blood from his head crusted on stiff grassblades
god I had to retch

bread and juice
and eggs one circle now you shit

you had to come here and fuck up my routine:

my perfect field: (maybe he just hit
a rock on his way down)
: yes: most likely:: there are pointy things in my field: yes::
all those pricking things

I ran back to my house, forgetting all my steps.

3

This morning, I got up and went straight to my computer to
write—I wouldn't even let myself think of the dead man just
to spite him, so I neglected my breakfast, my walk—
let him rot, I thought

let him sink down into the muck let the rain
turn my field into a swamp let the oils
catch fire:
mire fire, I typed. And then erased it.

4

The woman came around lunch time.
She heaved the grocery bags onto the counter
and found me still in my pajamas.

“My golly, Mr. Forrester. You haven't even budged
this morning?”

I typed: *Forrester grabbed the axe off the wall.*

“Well, it's good to see you're breaking your habits a
bit. It's good for you to mix things up.”



I typed: *He unhinged the living room floorboards; he dragged
her two plump halves
to the gravesite, one hand holding the ankles, the other,
her hair.*

“You know, be spontaneous every now and then.”

I never once looked up at her. I stopped typing only once to think of my ex-wife—she used to tell me, “You’re too old to be carrying on like this, touching things with your nose, constantly opening and closing doors.

I think you need to grow out of all this nonsense.”

I thought what I really need you vile cow
is for you to disappear and let me do my rituals
alone.

“I’ll just leave the bill here on the counter.
Good luck with your writing, Mr. Forrester.
I can’t wait to read your next book.”

I typed: *Forrester hammered down the last of the nails.
His rocking ceased immediately.
He casually returned to the routines of the day.*

5

Today for lunch, I sliced myself a juicy tomato;
on the third slice, I sliced my finger open—
I ran to the sink and held it under water.
I watched the blood mix with water and swirl,
salmon, down the drain.

When I looked out my kitchen window, I saw some buzzards
circling and diving around the area of the dead man.
I flew out of the house and ran toward the dead man,
screaming and flapping my arms—

no, no away away, I yelled. The birds flew
off at once. I looked down at the dead man:
 there were tiny scabs on parts of his skin,
and they had plucked out pieces of his eyes
 so that his eyes were pins—
 but they still stared at me, pricking
 me and then I saw drops
of my blood fall into them,
 and onto his face—watched them drool
 down like tears: yes:: tears.

I thought about dragging him into the woods,
 but I left him there, waiting for the rain
 to wash it all away,
 and for his bones and clothes
 to settle into soil.

I would chase away the birds until all that remained
were bits of cloth and tissue to press to their beaks.

I went back inside to my computer.

I typed:

*This morning, as I walked through my fields, I found a dead
man sprawled in a patch of high grass.*



J.R. Solonche

Church

A church has to look like a church, he said.
Not like any old house with a sign that says *Church*
over the door and a cross hanging on the wall.
No sir, he said, a church has to look like a church.
The windows have to be colors and be pointy.
The door has to be tall, it has to be taller than
the tallest man in town and wide enough
for the whole family to pass through all at once.
The doorknob has to be made of brass
and not a doorknob at all. It has to be a handle
that you have to pull on with all your strength
to open up. And the door has to be fat and heavy
and made of wood, oak wood I'd say, with a lot
of varnish on it, a hundred years of varnish maybe.
And there has to be a tower and a spire.
If there's no tower with a spire, then
it ain't no church. And there has to be
a bell in that tower. If there ain't no bell,
then it ain't a real church because a church
has to sound like a church. Now mind you,
there don't have to be a clock. It don't need
a clock to be a church. God don't need
to know what time it is in his own house.
Yes, he said, a church has to look
like a goddamn church for me to go in.

Benjamin Schmitt

Track 73

The chair that swallows us
into its stomach of springs
and Frito crumbs
speaks Russian

And enables
the moral crisis of a posterior
in ways that only Dostoevsky could have foreseen

Between the cushions
I find all the British History I'm afraid to tell my wife about
the Battle of Dunkirk
Edward II mocking his barons
George I who couldn't speak English
the chair weeps

Slandorous insults of upholstery
and profanity he would never utter to the sofa
so smug in her regal proportions
looking out across the room from her plaid sanctuary

There are coffee stains on the legs
and lies on thousands of polyester tongues
but the arms of this chair will never embrace me



Tom Spencer

The Body in the Abyss

Flambeau briskly shook his head. His senses were heightened at moments like these. Villains were everywhere and nowhere. He focused on the grain of the panels covering the library walls. In a few seconds he would rest his gaze on Inspector McCord, sitting comfortably in a wing-back chair. A curious tisane materialized beside him.

The inspector had become indispensable to the great detective during the investigation of the murder of Lady Killigrew. It transpired that he had for many years studied Flambeau's methods. Despite this distinction, the nonspecialist observer might have found it curious that McCord sat so very comfortably at this moment. The Killigrew family had made no secret of their disdain for him. McCord's Presbyterian frugality exemplified everything they found objectionable about his class. That the little regime of policemen and grocers would soon eclipse their own way of life was extra special reason why they ought not to have to suffer its envoy in their midst.

McCord, for his part, had been absurdly susceptible to their disdain, embarrassment multiplying his blunders in a vicious cycle of faux pas. Yet his employment had required that he press on, sniveling and mulish at once, each quality exacerbating the hatefulness of the other, a dogged whipped dog. Was it only the impending apportionment of just deserts that allowed him now to lounge so insolently?

Flambeau knew differently. Flambeau had known from the beginning. Except for a few important occasions on which he would realize a thing that was in fact an obvious thing, and viciously berate himself for his own stupidity, Flambeau had always known everything that he knew. The cable arriving from London that morning confirmed what he had on this occasion known from the beginning: that the illegitimate heir to the Killigrew fortune, long thought to have died in Rhodesia, was in fact none other than McCord himself, his legs now stretched out in the aristocratic disdain that expressed their bearer's true nature! This! This was the man, who, in a false moustache and the habit of a footman, had poisoned Lady Killigrew's digestif on that fateful night two weeks before! And now Flambeau would reveal to all what he had deduced.

The Daily Mail on the end table announced "The Greatest Crash in Wall Street's History." "Prices Tumble Like an Avalanche." Flambeau glanced out the window.

Flambeau briskly shook his head, then focused on the hand-printed wallpaper of the library. He had been remembering the Killigrew case, when his

lieutenant, Inspector McCord, had himself turned out to be the murderer. His senses were heightened at moments like these. There was a tisane by his right hand where none had been before.

Things were similar but different this time around. In a moment he would rest his gaze on Inspector Hogg, sitting comfortably in a Queen Anne chair. Throughout their collaboration, the inspector had resented Flambeau's soft white hands and pared nails, his disdain for what Hogg considered the honorably dirty business of proper policing. Hogg would not have tolerated Flambeau's involvement but for Lady John's insistence that her dearest friend contribute to the investigation.

Yet, as things had gone on, the two detectives had developed a grudging mutual respect. Hogg appreciated that his investigation could not have moved past an early impasse but for Flambeau's noticing that young Priscilla John's ground-glass tonic bottle had been placed on the wrong side of her sink the morning after the murder. And Flambeau, for his part, had come to see that Hogg's suspicion of his friend Lady John had been justified, and that he had been blinded by emotion. When he realized, he had viciously berated himself for his own stupidity.

That morning, however, his suspicions had been confirmed by a cable arriving from London. Now he, Flambeau, was in possession of the proof that Lady John had herself staged the attempt on her life before going on to murder her own husband. Why, then, had she invited the world's greatest private detective to investigate a murder she had herself committed? She had, Flambeau thought disgustedly, sufficient disdain for his powers to gamble that she could manipulate the great detective, to employ the weight of his reputation decisively against the suspicion with which the police—the hateful, grubbily collared police—would regard her. In this she had failed, though Flambeau viciously berated himself with the knowledge of how nearly she had succeeded.

And now Flambeau would reveal to all what he had deduced. He glanced out the window. On the tweezed lawn a group of the soldiers convalescing in the west wing of the house had been playing croquet, although they were not supposed to. Flambeau realized with a start that the soldiers were looking at him directly, staring into his eyes with a hatred that was fervid and unveiled.

Flambeau briskly shook his head, then focused on the chrome sconces of the library. He had been remembering an old case, when his friend, Lady John, had herself turned out to be the murderer. His senses were heightened at moments like these. A convalescent soldier in the habit of a footman materialized with an unrequested tisane, which Flambeau, prudently, did not drink. Villains were everywhere and nowhere.

Things were similar but different this time around. In a moment he would rest his gaze on Inspector Gross, contorted amid the impractical curves of a modernist chair. The inspector was entirely an ignoramus. Flambeau did not know how he had



stood him for so long, although he viciously berated himself for his intolerance. Gross's blundering had threatened to derail Flambeau's plans at every turn, since the bludgeoned body of young Priscilla Killigrew had been discovered in the stream at the border of the Hogg estate. So simultaneously mulish and incompetent were Gross's investigations that even the nonspecialist observer might have begun to suspect that he made them so deliberately. Did he do so in order to obscure his own role in the murder?

Flambeau knew differently. The villain of the piece might indeed have seemed to be Gross, especially given what had been confirmed that morning by a cable from London: that Inspector Gross had in fact secretly been married to Priscilla Killigrew and named as chief beneficiary of her will. But villains were everywhere and nowhere. Such a marriage would have been forbidden on pain of disinheritance by Priscilla's guardian, Sir George Hogg. Sir George's peerage, attained on the back of a self-made grocery fortune, was regarded with suspicion in society, whose members had lately revived an old quip about a hog in armor's still being a hog. Sir George was furious. His remodeling of Killigrew Place in the latest style, conceived to give him the reputation of a man with unimpeachable taste, was likewise regarded as vulgarian iconoclasm. For his ward, the last scion of the aristocratic family who built his estate, to marry a policeman would have been the last straw. But neither was Sir George the villain. No, Flambeau had from the beginning known what had been confirmed by a cable that morning arriving from London: that Priscilla Killigrew, discovering herself to be terminally ill and aware of the curious codicil to her father's testament that allowed her guardian to invalidate her own will only if he did so while she, Priscilla, lived, had taken her life in order to ensure the financial security of her beloved husband. And now Flambeau would reveal to all what he had deduced.

He glanced at the windows. They revealed nothing but the tweezed lawns. Yet Flambeau knew that the ostensibly solid glass was pliable and porous. On the other side of it stood battalions of demons, vibrating with hatred, who might burst through at any moment to savage and obliterate his world. Nothing prevented them, yet they held back. Why did they refrain? Why?

Flambeau briskly shook his head, then looked at the sodden gutter. He raised his eyes to focus on Hogg's grocer's in the rain in front of him. The footmen had been in league with the poisoned tisanes. The invalided soldiers had had unnatural relations with the tweezed lawns. Flambeau now knew what he had always known, but that had been confirmed by a cable that morning arriving from London: that Sir George Gross had, by a curious device, impaled himself upon the razor-sharp spire of St. John's church following the obliteration of his American holdings in the recent crash. Who was to blame for that? There was nothing to be done. Villains were everywhere and nowhere. Flambeau viciously berated himself. He looked into the abyss of Hogg's. Hatred, fervid and unveiled, stared back at him.●

Samuel R. George

God Damned Poets

God damned poets
Overflowing with flowery mead.

They don't even have to conform
To the same discipline as
Short story writers.

Their region of exploration: the human heart!
But they shouldn't be allowed in there,
Someone should put up a sign:
Cardiologists only.

You would think they would be disappointed
When they get in there
And find it's nothing more than a blood pump.

But poets are delusional;
They come out of those chambers
With tales of Eldorado.

And they won't stop, they keep going back.
Why?
It almost makes you want to go see for yourself.





Bios

A creative writing student based in London, **Simi Abe** has been involved in several anthology series produced by her university, either as a published writer, editor or designer. Her work often explores the nuances of relationships and identity and draws on evocative visual imagery.

Daniel Ableev, *1981, is a certified strangeologist and Selectronix engineer from Bonn, Germany. He is co-editor of *Die Novelle—Zeitschrift für Experimentelles* and has ∞ publications in German and English, print and online (“Born to Fear: Interviews with Thomas Ligotti,” Ann and Jeff VanderMeer’s “The Big Book of Science Fiction,” “Alu,” etc.)

A Pushcart Prize nominee, **Jonel Abellanosa** resides in Cebu City, the Philippines. His poetry has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *The Peacock Journal*, *Rattle*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *Poetry Kanto*, *Spirit Fire Review*, *Carbon Culture Review*, *The McNeese Review*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *GNU Journal*, and *Bangalore Review*. He has two chapbooks, “Pictures of the Floating World” (Kind of a Hurricane Press) and “The Freeflowing All” (Black Poppy Review).

Tobi Alfier is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Her current chapbooks include “Down Anstruther Way” (FutureCycle Press), and her full-length collection, *Somewhere, Anywhere*,

Doesn't Matter Where, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. She is co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* (www.bluehorsepress.com)

Matt Androvett is a digital design artist and photographer from Texas.

Dick Bentley has published fiction, poetry, and memoir in over 260 magazines and anthologies. His books, *Post-Freudian Dreaming* and *A General Theory of Desire*, are available on Amazon. His new book *All Rise* contains, along with poems and short stories, samples of his inventive “wall poetry”—poems that are displayed as part of paintings and graphic art. He is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a prizewinner in the Paris Review/Paris Writers Workshop International Fiction Awards. Before teaching writing at the University of Massachusetts, Dick was Planning Director for the Boston Housing Authority.

A German-born UK national, **Rose Mary Boehm** lives and works in Lima, Peru. Author of *Tangents*, a 2011 poetry collection, her work has been widely published in US poetry journals (online and print). She was twice winner of the Goodreads monthly competition, and is author of two new poetry collections, “From the Ruhr to Somewhere Near Dresden 1939-1949: A Child’s Journey” (Aldrich Press, 2016), and “Peru Blues” (Kelsay Books, 2017).



Lisa Marie Brodsky is the author of “We Nod Our Dark Heads” (Parallel Press, 2008) and “Motherlung” (Salmon Poetry, 2014), recognized by the Wisconsin Library Association for Outstanding Achievement in Poetry. Her work has appeared *The North American Review*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, *Mom Egg Review*, and *The Drowning Gull*, among others.

Mike Brown, a painter from the Chicagoland area, works predominately in oil paints, but grew up working exclusively with pencils and charcoal. He is influenced by ominous, bleak subject matter.

Logan Chace received a poetry MFA in Creative Writing from Hollins University and teaches English and Creative Writing to high school students in Northeastern Pennsylvania. His poems have previously been published in such magazines as *Versal Magazine*, *The Meadow*, *Plain Spoke*, *Cargoes*, and *The Hollins Critic*.

John Chavers enjoys working as a writer, artist, photographer, and general creator. Most recently, his writing and artwork have been accepted at *So It Goes Literary Journal*, *3Elements Review*, *Foliolate Oak Literary Magazine*, *Ascent*, *The Roaring Muse*, *Birch Gang Review*, *Four Ties Lit Review*, *Ground Fresh Thursday*, *Silver Apples*, *The Ogham Stone*, and *Verity La*, among others. John’s residency fellowships include Blue Mountain Center in the Adirondacks and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He has a fascination for the diminutive, works of art on paper, and the desert.

Natalie Crick, from the UK, has poetry published or forthcoming in a range of

journals and magazines including *Rust and Moth*, *The Chiron Review*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Interpreters House*, and *The Penwood Review*. This year her poem “Sunday School” was nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Her first chapbook will be released by Bitterzoet Press this year.

Peter De Ville writes poetry and prose, and has been published widely in British, European, and American magazines including *The New Welsh Review*, *PN Review*, *The Rialto*, *Chapman*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Critical Survey*, *Poetry and Audience*, *Orbis*, *The Wolf*, *Seam*, *Staple*, *Smiths Knoll*, *The New Writer*, *Decanto*, and others. He also writes literary reviews. He has poetry collections, “Open Eye and Taking the pH” (Tuba Press), and “25 poems Ciao Marco Martial” (Shoestring Press), inspired by reading the Latin poet. He was awarded a Fellowship in poetry by the Hawthornden Literary Foundation (USA/Scotland) and by the Bogliasco Cultural Foundation (USA/Italy).

Kara Dennison is a writer, editor, illustrator, and presenter from Newport News, Virginia. She works as community manager for Onezumi Events, where she interviews celebrity guests and performs outreach for fans and attendees. Her work can be seen in “Associates of Sherlock Holmes” from Titan Books, various *Doctor Who* spinoffs from Obverse Books, and the light novel series “Owl’s Flower,” which she co-created with illustrator Ginger Hoesly. She works from a converted NASA lab, which she shares with four guinea pigs and a bass guitar.

Lynette G. Esposito lives with her husband, Attilio, in Southern New Jersey. She has been published in *Fox Chase Review*, *SRN Literary Review*, *Haiku Journal*, and elsewhere.

Samuel George is a graduate of CU-Boulder. A native of Louisiana, he resides in Galliano, LA. His stories have been published in *Dirge Magazine*, *Stupefying Stories*, *Gypsy Shadow Publications*, *Growing Strange*, *Sloth Jockey*, and *The Short Humour Site*. His publication under the pseudonym George LaMort appears in the compilation *Apocalypse Culture II* (Feral House, 2000).

E. Laura Golberg's poetry has appeared in the *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *RHINO*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *The Journal of Humanistic Mathematics*, among other places. The poem "Shaver" is forthcoming in the *Potomac Review*. She won first place in the DC Commission on the Arts Larry Neal Poetry Competition. She is preparing her first collection of poetry, *My Life as a Cabbage*.

Kenneth Gulotta writes poetry and fiction and works as a technical writer. He has a PhD in English from Tulane University and an MA in English with a concentration in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at Austin. He lives in New Orleans with his wife and stepson.

Kathleen Hellen is the author of the award-winning collection *Umberto's Night* and two chapbooks, "The Girl Who Loved Mothra" and "Pentimento." Awarded prizes from the *H.O.W. Journal* and *Washington Square Review*, her work has also been

featured on *Poetry Daily* and nominated for Pushcart and Best of the Net prizes.

Nicklaus Hopkins, an English professor from the Sunshine State, writes for both television and pleasure. His work has appeared in over forty TV shows and countless print publications. He resides with his writer-wife and their two furry children.

Josh Huber works as a foster care case manager in Columbia, Missouri. He graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Missouri in 2015. He enjoys the intersection of work and poetry.

M. A. Istvan, Jr., a sex-positive feminist, used to walk around with that yellow Sony Sports boombox bumping Digable Planets and Black Moon. He would perhaps still today wear Timbs with the tongue drooping, but Wallabees better fit with his professor gig.

Monet Belle Jorgenson is a creative writing student at Springville High School in Springville, Utah and enjoys reading and writing much more than she enjoys social interaction. Her work appears in *The Southern Quill*, *Sugar Rascals*, and Creative Communication's Spring 2016 Poetry Anthology. Monet usually writes poetry, but will frequently delve into poetic prose.

Jury S. Judge is an internationally published artist, writer, poet, photographer, and political cartoonist. Her *Astronomy Comedy* cartoons also appear in the Lowell Observatory's *The Lowell Observer*. She



has been interviewed on the television news program *NAZ Today* for her work as a political cartoonist. Her artwork has been widely featured in literary magazines such as *Dodging The Rain*, *Gulf Stream*, *South 85*, and *Timber*. She is a Magna Cum Laude BFA graduate from the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

Born in Argentina, **Julia Justo** lives in New York. She combines digital technology, painting, and collage to create mixed media works, often working from vintage pictures that give her work a sense of history; she uses them to illustrate the flow of time and to throw light on current social conflicts.

Gaynor Kane lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where she is a part-time creative involved in the local arts scene. She writes poetry and is an amateur photographer, and in both is looking to capture moments that might be missed otherwise.

Sandra Kolankiewicz's work has appeared widely, most recently in *Apple Valley Review*, *One*, *Ithacalit*, and *London Magazine*. Her chapbooks are available from Finishing Line Press and Black Lawrence Press. She lives in Marietta, Ohio.

Recent graduate and emerging young artist **Jeremy Knowles** was born in Hertfordshire, in the South of England, in 1992. Having graduated with a degree in fine art photography from Camberwell College of Art (University of the Arts London) in 2015, his practice has developed into a playful photographic study of the everyday.

Jane Lake is a special education teacher who writes. Previously she was a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and a freelancer for the *Eugene Register-Guard*.

Kassandra Larsen's work has appeared in *Best New Poets*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Into the Void Magazine*, *Stoneboat Literary Journal*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, and others. Her manuscript "Construction" was a finalist for the 2016 Four Way Books Intro Prize in Poetry; her chapbook "Stellar Telegram" won the 2009 *Sheltering Pines Press Chapbook Award*. She is a two-time Pushcart nominee.

Mare Leonard's poetry has appeared in *The Naugatuck Review*, *Hubbub*, *Cloudbank*, *The Chronogram*, *Blotterature*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Red River*, *Ilya's Honey*, *A Rat's Ass*, *Perfume River*, *The Courtship of Winds*, *Forage*, and *Bindweed*. She lives in an old school house overlooking the Rondout Creek in Kingston, NY. Away from her own personal blackboard, she works as a consultant for the Institute for Writing and Thinking and MAT programs at Bard College.

Lynn Levy is a radio producer living in Brooklyn, NY. Her radio pieces have appeared on many radio shows, including *Radiolab* and *Reply All*. Her poems have so far appeared primarily in a folder she keeps at the bottom of her coat closet.

Holly Lopez holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte. Her work has appeared in *Plots With Guns*, *Charlotte Viewpoint*, *Choose Wisely: 35 Women Up To No Good*, and is forthcoming in *Main Street Rag*.

She is also the recipient of the Marjorie Blankenship Melton Award in Fiction.

A native of Boston, MA, **Andrew McDonald** is currently living in Brooklyn, NY.

John Meyering, an architect living in the Shenandoah Valley, loves designing buildings by day and building with words by night. He learned poetry-making while playing Sentence Cube Scrabble with a friend, decades ago; the objective was to create sentences from twenty-one basic, randomly generated words. Economy and appreciation turned these into poetry.

Jason Murphy grew up in South Arkansas, with frequent visits to family in between Central Texas and Southeastern Texas. He teaches philosophy at Elms College in Western Massachusetts. He reads philosophy, follows soccer, and advocates for a basic income guarantee.

Frank Morris teaches at UMass Lowell and enjoys sports trivia, Melville, and Van Halen.

Cameron Morse taught and studied in China. Diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2014, he is currently a third-year MFA candidate at UMKC and lives with his wife, Lili, in Blue Springs, Missouri. His poems have been or will be published in over fifty different magazines, including *New Letters*, *pamplermousse*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, and *TYPO*. His first collection, "Fall Risk," is forthcoming from Glass Lyre Press.

Tom O'Brien has been writing a mixture of poetry, fiction, and stage plays for twenty-five years. He lives in Hastings, UK.

Julia Ponder is a teacher and poet living in Kingston, NY, located in the beautiful Hudson Valley region of New York. Her work has been published in various publications, most recently in *805Lit*.

Ana Prundaru, who resides in Zurich, works across various media, such as acrylic paintings, collages, and digitally altered photography. Recent publications include *Kentucky Review*, *Thin Air*, and *Kyoto Journal*.

Alice Russell, of Providence, RI, has had work featured in *The Voices Project* and *Away Journal*.

Benjamin Schmitt is the Best Book Award and-Pushcart-nominated author of two books, "Dinner Table Refuge" (PunksWritePoemsPress) and "The global conspiracy to get you in bed" (Kelsay Books). His new poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Antioch Review*, *Rattle*, *Worcester Review*, *Ginosko*, *Columbia Review*, *Summerset Review*, and elsewhere. He lives with his wife and daughter in Seattle.

Spencer Smith, a University of Utah graduate, works in the corporate world to pay the bills that poetry doesn't pay (i.e., all of them). His poems have appeared in over forty literary journals, including *Rattle*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *RHINO*, and *Roanoke Review*.



J. R. Solonche has been publishing in magazines, journals, and anthologies since the early 70s. He is author of *Beautiful Day* (Deerbrook Editions), *Won't Be Long* (Deerbrook Editions), *Heart's Content* (Five Oaks Press), *Invisible* (nominated for the Pulitzer Prize by Five Oaks Press), *The Black Birch* (Kelsay Books), and co-author of *Peach Girl: Poems for a Chinese Daughter* (Grayson Books).

A mixed media artist, **Fierce Sonia** builds a substrate with acrylic paint and collage. A narrative is constructed by the tension between the lush layers moving to dreamy feminine mindscapes with a brighter palette. If you listen closely her work has a soundtrack, a rhythm, a pulse that will give you a magic carpet ride to a fairytale that restates your own heartbeat. She has a public studio at Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, VA. Follow on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/fiercesonia> or @fiercesonia on Instagram.

Tom Spencer is the pseudonym of a professor of English in Montgomery, Alabama. His creative work has appeared in *THAT* and *The Awl*, and he was shortlisted for the 2016/17 Galley Beggar Press Short Story Prize. His critical writing has been published in venues including the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Public Books*, and *American Literature*. He published a book on middlebrow literature with Palgrave Macmillan in 2015 and very occasionally publishes chapbooks under the Academic Kitsch imprint.

Based in Zwolle, The Netherlands, **Tamara Stoffers** explores the subject of the Soviet Union through analogue collage.

She uses an archive of history books to create new situations. Her work was featured during Art Week Rotterdam at the Haute Photography Fair, February 2018.

Abigail Uhrick received her BA in English Literature from the University of Michigan and her Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from San Diego State University. She currently teaches college English and Humanities. She has also worked as a Technology Consultant for a defense contractor and as an editor and project manager for a niche publisher. She has published poems in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *4ink7*, and *Axolotl*.

Michael Van Dyke lives in West Michigan and has previously published poems in *LEVELER*, *The Cortland Review*, and *New Millennium Writings*.

Troy Varvel holds an MA in English from Stephen F. Austin State University. His poetry has appeared in *Gravel* and *Driftwood Press*. He currently lives and teaches in Nacogdoches, TX.

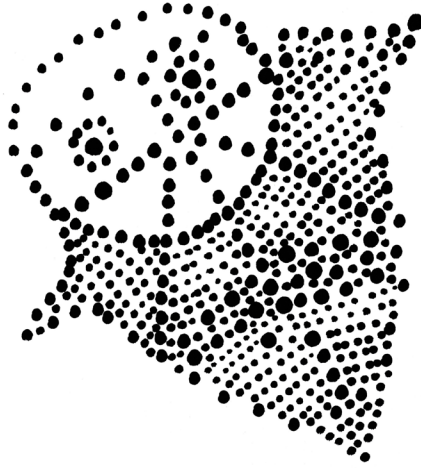
Aidan Walker is from Arlington, Virginia. He is young and hasn't been published anywhere yet.

A graduate student living in the New York City area, **Gianna Ward-Vetrano** has a blog, *The Unbearable Bookishness of Blogging* (www.unbearablebookishness.com), where she has written about literature, cinema, and feminism for the past three years.

Sharon Whitehill, a retired professor of English literature, now leads lifelong learning classes in Florida. As a devoted

writer of memoir and fiction, she finds composing a poem to be a daunting, all-consuming endeavor.





STAFF

General Editor: **W. B. Gerard**

Fiction Editor: **Jim Hilgartner**

Poetry Editor: **Joyce Kelley**

Associate Editor: **Seth Reno**

Assistant Editors: **Michelle Aitken, Evy Barrett,
Abigail Bellman, Kim Liefer, Abby Duke McGinn,
Deric Sallas, and Matthew S. Shoemaker**

Editor-at-Large: **Barbara Wiedemann**

Layout Editor/Web Design: **LyAnne Peacock**

Journal Design: **Shaquille Harris**

Web Design: **Nikembe Pierce**

Administration: **Tara Woods**

To submit artwork, poetry, and prose.

or order paper copies of *THAT*,

visit www.thatliteraryreview.com.

Address correspondence to

editor@thatliteraryreview.com

or *THAT*, W. B. Gerard,

Auburn University at Montgomery,

Department of English and Philosophy,

Box 244023, Montgomery, AL, 36124, USA.



Get *THAT*

at thatliteraryreview.com!

Download the PDF or order a print
copy at thatliteraryreview.com



