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My Heart Swims Under Peppermint Tears

Kenneth Susynski
Abdomen like a watermelon
moves on its own, semi-circles
out palm-to-palm.
He enjoys tadpole acrobatics.
My scale reflects repeated meals:
veal chops and steak-cut potatoes,
shrimp fettuccini with extra butter,
bags of candy bars—yet they fail
to induce him to the dinner table.

For one week, we rainbowed
peppermint oil belly to back
as I leaned forward, hoping
he’d swim for exit.
We debated whether the moving mass
was head or rear, but one firm press
and she knew for certain.

Our doctor, quick to cut,
breaches skin and soft tissue, splits
muscle, then pulls out ovaries.
She calls my husband over for a peek, says we can have more. The spinal, too high, stops my breath. Tell her to reverse the carnival side show, put it all back inside, close the incision, back away, turn off the spotlight.
An abandoned baby whale thought a yacht was its mother.

Alone, it tried to suckle the two pounds of food it required from the film and algae that forms on the underside of luxury boats.

Onlookers watched horrified as its immense body breached for breath.

Orphan on a scale too large for surrogacy, no modern ark big enough.
I imagine the polished white edges of the boat pitted like peppermint
when sucked smooth
as the unweaned whale
nuzzles the scum
for nourishment.
Lifeguard Chairs
Kelly DuMar
He squats on his haunches, intent on gaps within the bricks, prods a wood bug with one finger and calls me to share his wonder at its quick curl into an armored ball and cautious unfolding. He leaves it kicking at the air.

There is more of the garden wall to breach, each brick a doorway to an undiscovered world, perhaps this time a tomb, and snail shells to exhume, a trove of slugs, the silky egg sac of a spider, with luck the guardian mother.

Archaeology on a small scale: the wall is older than his three years, and I am Time, the builder (and rebuilder). Each day he visits, squats below the peppermint, and, brick by brick, unmasks the wonders of his world.
In the Shade of a Summer’s Day

KJ Bateman
To spilling a tall container
of grits, to the body able:
sweep, bend, curse, to today’s
newspaper—*Bird Sightings*
column: one Pacific loon
and the arrival of fifty-two
sooty shearwaters at Herring
Cove, to a son who’s filled
the fridge with eggs and
more eggs to be balanced
then broken for a science
experiment, to his peppermint
sweat smell, to witnessing
a sweet breach on the street
of the ordinary: an old man’s
lovers’ reach toward his wife,
tipping the scale of her body
into his and to hearing Mars
can be seen clearly with the
naked eye this week and to all
of us longing to be seen without lens, glass, prism, to pints of blue fruit that wear only dew, to ushering the berries home, to rinsing their bodies with attention.
Suture
Aadityakrishna Sathish
1. Do you prefer cooking from mixes or from scratch?
   A. Some nights, while the sky still glows a reverent purple, you find both the urge and the energy to concoct something wholly yours.
   B. Other nights, when you’re not so lucky and the shift at the hospital runs overtime, you pass the rest of the dusky evening with an empty stomach. The flickering streetlights gleam with melancholy as you scale your eyes over the sad little crumbs scattered across your plate.

2. When do you feel most inspired to cook: in the morning, afternoon, or evening?
   A. Some mornings, you wake up to find that you’re still at the hospital, huddled over your rickety desk, the paint peeling in pale patches. Your eyes are puffy, screwed shut with dust, and your hands dance along the table’s edge. If you’re lucky, you’ll forage some coins from the pocket of your starched white slacks and prod at the vending machine until it spits out your breakfast of a single packaged croissant or two Twinkies.
B. In the afternoon, you utilize your half hour break, sparing the few bills you have saved up from the day before. Fast food is the cheapest choice, and you often settle for nachos. They’ve started to taste like cardboard to you, but you grimace through the paper-like quality of the chips.

C. Evenings are the only time you truly find time to cook, unless the weight of exhaustion gets to you first. Once, you began to doze off while stirring a pan of vanilla cake batter, and awoke to find half your face covered with a congealed yellow mess.

3. Do you prefer sweet, spicy, or sour food?
   A. You’ve always had an inane taste for sweet food. Not too sweet, though, lest your teeth ache and stomach drop. Honey, shining amber with its own light, was your favourite, though you made do with the white powder that clung to your fingers after a particularly inexpensive, sickly dessert.
   B. You were never good with spicy food. It burned the roof of your mouth, coarsening it, and tears brimmed over your waterline.
   C. But, sometimes, you found yourself cherishing that dull ache, the red pain-like sensation. It allowed you to feel something, forget the feel of an icy, motionless hand—swathed in white—against yours.
   D. Sour food was another acquired taste. You remember the time your older brother dared you to place a lemon slice atop your tongue, and you obliged without hesitation, disregarding its near-bitter taste over the
sensation of victory. The feeling of winning, being the best, overpowered the curdling aftertaste. You haven’t changed much since then.

4. Do you like to cook alone or with a friend?
   A. Although you’re surrounded by people, you rarely feel as though you’ve got someone constant in your grasp.
   B. You can’t remember the last time you’ve had someone come over to your house. Even if you, by some miracle, did not lack closeness with your colleagues, you would still feel too ashamed to allow anyone to see the shabby demeanor of your apartment complex.
   C. Even the patchy wallpaper seems to frown at your disruptive thoughts.
   D. This is what you’ve come to believe: you’re irrevocably alone.
   E. Your mother, brother: three years have gone by, yet they haven’t called to see how you are, never wondered if you are still alive.

5. What do you enjoy cooking the most?
   A. Last week—a miraculous Sunday morning where you found yourself with an unprecedented day off—you attempted a chocolate soufflé. You didn’t know how else to spend such a huge stretch of time, how to utilize it properly. You felt strangely empty as the sunlight filtering through grimy kitchen windows lit over the deflating dessert, perched on cracked china.
   B. You settled the soufflé aside and stared out the window, at the unkempt streets and skeletal trees beyond.
C. The dishes in the discoloured sink accumulated, remained untouched.

D. Perhaps it would have fared better if you stuck with the eggs and bacon you had initially planned for.

6. Do you like to experiment with cuisine from different countries?

A. When you were six, young and unabashed, unafraid and untainted by all the horrors that were to come, your parents took you to a Thai restaurant. It was a pricey place, intimidatingly high class.

B. You wore a pale blue dress, the colour of an endless azure sky, reaching just above your pudgy knees. Before you left, your mother slipped a white flower above your ear, nestled between strands of curling black hair, as sweet as a lover’s kiss.

C. You could smell the faint musk of sugary sweet peppermint at the juncture of her neck and shoulder, beneath both ears.

D. If you were to go to that very same place today—try to sit on that plush velvet cushion, the low, golden light leaving patterns on tanned skin—you would get turned down at the door, your haggard appearance reason enough.

E. That cool summer night, your mother held your hand under the table, squeezing reassuringly even through the hints of sadness blossoming at the corners of her eyes.

F. Your father ordered for you, even though you didn’t tell him what it was that you wanted.

G. Maybe this was when everything began to go wrong.
In one hand Anubis holds a feather
In the other he holds my heart
He weighs the two upon a scale

And I remember my father
In the dim lighting, in the shadows
Pondering the map stretched upon the floor
The map of the Nile, sketched upon the wooden floor
Wondering and wandering down the hallway
Down the twisting riverbanks and cataracts
Down through temples, across silted shores
Spread down that hallway from door to door
Doorways to tombs, breached by raiders in their heyday
With his glasses held thoughtfully to his chest,
My father read the plaques by each exhibition, figurines
Carved with a religious precision
Standing in their small spotlights, and the mummies
Faces painted, stoic and regal, staring through their display
As I chewed on the peppermint I’d smuggled in my purse
Not eager to gaze on some hieroglyphic curse
Not expecting the petrified pictures to peel from their stones
And wrap, snake-like, around my feet
Slithering up my hands, my arms
Pressing serpent kisses into my neck
Hissing dead words into my ears
Until I could no longer resist their charms
Aranea Minima

Harshal Desai
Flies Aren’t Philosophers
Janette Gould Martin

In memory of R. Gould

Steam passes over silver surfaces,
creating a scale of shadows and flesh:
a human form, full of life, is painful.

Our faces slant to meet the eyes
we cannot ignore as we pass the mirrors
we cannot remove.

On the darkest nights
our youngest boy
studies himself in those reflections,
stretching his mouth, practicing shock and horror,
pressing a sticky baby finger against the glass,
smearing his own image with a peppermint streak,
evidence of the reality he found.

An orchestra of flies
breaches this reality: dissonant music
swings your bare heels, heels pushing the glider
to and fro, back and forth, there and here;
and we slide forward, return,
we still click to your last words.

You explain flies and death:
“Flies aren’t philosophers,” you say.
You say, “Let them die.”
Altoid dust on my gums,
I’m mint addicted.

After lunch, I rattle
my tin filled with discs that
breach imagined boundaries,
  muddling thoughts
  along the inside of my skull
  and numbing my tastebuds - peppermint sedative -
  yes, assuage the nausea.

Three stacked on my work surface in
scale-like fashion, weighing
options I haven’t been given.
  One beside two then one beside one
  and one

pressed between my tongue and roof,
closer than Michelangelo breaking his back
for Sistine and pristine legacy.
Nothing mythical or prayer-like,
simply agitated meditation.
Minting a mini reset to my day,

they fall to paste and
rejuvenate,
conjure false fronts and the illusion of chill,
tamper with my receptors
until cold water is
unbearable and you’re no longer
welcome here.
Nature Wins
Steve Zimmerman
Summer of Dentists
Kyle Siegel

Burning calcium, like
a clam shell on a bandsaw

extract the nerves

the throb/removed
the body/weakened
the suffering/breached

Nirvana laced with peppermint

the chasm/filled
the dread/scaled
the return/celebrated

porcelain-eating silver
overlaid, covering
the crumbling husk

I’ll be back soon enough
bones assimilated to plastic
(fragile mobile corpse of PVC)
neurons ransacked by tweezers
the humming of the drill as a mantra
sensation, decay, ingenuity, heartwork;

all must be chipped away
A Scale of Pinks

John Chavers
When you shower in your clothes, you feel the weight on your shoulders. And on your hips. And on your thighs. And on your ankles. When you shower in your clothes, you wonder why you never did it before. You wonder why you are doing it now. You think about where you are going to dry your heavy, wet, sinking clothing. You don’t want to flood the room, and you don’t have any hanging racks.

When you shower in your clothes, you do it because you are unprepared to greet your body after the inevitable betrayal. All the loofahs in the sea cannot slough off that which has been left on you like an oil slick—slowly killing everything in its wake.

Your oversized sweater and long Hawaiian-print skirt float on the surface of the water and yourself. When you vomit, it tastes like that battery you licked when you were ten. Even the word “battery” evokes metal and salt on your tongue.
When you shower in your clothes, you don’t turn on the light. By nightlight and moonlight through the window, you see all you need to. The nightlight was a gift from your mother after she moved to Fort Lauderdale. Its shiny seashell emits a pink light and looks not unlike like a woman’s private parts. You told your mother this when she gave it to you. She frowned and said good girls didn’t think like that. It was a tiger cowrie shell; you looked it up. They are native to the waters of Africa and Polynesia, not to south Florida.

Beneath the nightlight is the scale your mother also gave you when you moved into your apartment. *Happy 20s! Now go have fun!* the notecard read. You weighed yourself on it before you left tonight. You wonder if you weigh less or more now.

When you sit on the bathtub floor in your clothes that feel like quicksand, you hear your neighbors clanking dishes on the other side of the wall. You hear the baby crying. The baby always cries, but that means it’s alive, right?

With your numb fingers you pick at the sides of the mat that is suctioned to the bottom of the bathtub. You pull up a corner and hear the *pop pop suck* as it disengages from the porcelain tub. Underneath are circles of pink: mildew or mold. You are bathing in a petri dish. The mat is meant to keep you from slipping and still you are slipping anyway. You may fall and become so small you slide down the water trail into the drain and into the pipes and into the walls and then who would let you out and would you be trapped there? One of those haunted faces on the other side of the wall with no features, but familiar enough to still pass as somewhat human.
While you imagine drowning in the shower, you wince at the way the bar of soap abrades your skin. It hurts, this skin of yours. Torn and stretched and poisoned. Every drop of water a dagger, every lavender soap bubble noxious. You could spend hours at those bath and body places, where the walls are lined with multi-colored, multi-scented potions. Cherry Blossom Bouquet, Pineapple Breeze, Peppermint Punch: they all sound like cocktail names at a mock-Polynesian bar.

You don’t take off your clothes because underneath is your body and you cannot imagine looking at your body as you once did. As yours.

When the water cools, you think this is penance. The pores of your skin pucker to tiny sharp tips. Protection, but where was this armor when you needed it earlier? Earlier you were like bread, soft and easy to cut. No, not cut. Rip.

You shiver. You think: I will freeze it out and off of me. Your hair hangs limply and strands stick to your cheek and your forehead. The heat is completely gone now. You slam your fist against the knob. Instead of turning the water off, it switches to the lower faucet and the tub begins to fill. Your skirt drifts away from your body, creates a drain cover. You let this happen and feel the glacial waters seep over and through your clothes and your skin and your blood and your muscles. When the bathtub fills halfway, it submerges your knees and your hips and your ass that he said was nice before he came and before he pushed you aside and said all done. You turn the water off. Is this what a baptism feels like?

You lie down in the water. Push your body into the cold water,
your chest into the tub’s bottom. You put your head forward and down. Hold your breath. One. Two. Three. Four. Your hair floats in a halo. You are like Medusa. Five. Six. Seven. You get to thirty-four and come up for air, a whale breaching. You want to slap your own body down into the water and feel the pain, but you’re not as graceful as a whale.

When you shower in your clothes, you realize there are corners and crevices of your body that are inaccessible, for you alone to reach. You peel off your clothes. Survey your prickled skin.

You eventually throw your clothes directly in the trash. You put on new clothes, something never worn before. Drain the tub. Pull up the bathmat and scrub the tiny filthy suction cups. Inhale the cleansing bleach smell. See the stars, or pretend to, above the city’s own aurora. Open the window and leave the room.
Brayton Point
Timothy Waldron
Snap elastic marked wrists
breaking bands under pressure.
He explained my tendency
to crumble under conversation
like rusty bedsprings,
to unbraided and untie
as the microfiche unravels.
I pull, breathing in water
and howling out bubbles—
to find a birthday card,
gnarled with his handwriting
slanting letters in moth wings.
He showed his teeth as
he put on his mask,
ripping layers of scale
and I breach blue.
Enveloped in the scent
of peppermint gum,
I sleep with one eye open.
He pushed between me and
became my clockwork winter
desiccated in dust.

He scratched my white belly
pulling threads from my spine,
and I creased.
Anaemia

Aadityakrishna Sathish
Ariel trades her voice for limbs,
a second chance, washes to shore, & falls
into the dark-haired prince’s arms. Her eyes
are so big on-screen, they hold waves,
they could nearly drown him again.

Later, the sea-witch sings with her borrowed voice
& the man’s love is so un-constant & yes,
on-screen it’s a spell, he is caught
by the voice of his true beloved sucked
like a peppermint in the mouth of another. What can a mermaid do?

Even as children, stories tell us
all choices are trade-offs, scales & voice for skin
& gaping mouth, but still I wish
for another chance. I’d give anything,
breach my body—carve out my tail, my softest voice

—even if, like Ariel, the thing I gave up
could become my undoing, even if
after all that I still lost him, turned
to sea-foam, little mounds of it collecting on the shore.
Humpback cleaves cold Fundy, leaves saline womb lace-capped and roiling.

Sea water sluices her barnacled sheath, salt roses bloom ghost-like, translucent tattoos on flesh thick and worn as a brigantine’s hull. Such clarity of purpose. She need only discern the pitch of ascent and descent to scale two solitudes: the ocean, the sky. Her life distilled to a simple sequence:

Rise. Breach. Dive. It is a succession, a cycle that threads us all.

Her great bulk pivots beneath waves. Gathered breath searches for release.
It is the prayer, prayed alone, the task of the everyday, and it’s a slow waltz, measured.

She conjures the mystical, this whale. She blows and I pause as our labyrinths collide.

Magic shimmers, offers itself to the gossamer spin. Pin-wheeled clouds, pink and lilac, blush overhead as peppermints and petals foam on the krill tide, dissolve dream-like at the wrack line.
Calving
Kiara Miller
my contract—which I don’t remember signing, but my name’s on it, so there you go—I’m not allowed to cut my hair, or to weigh more than 118 pounds, or to get pregnant, or to marry without permission.

Originally they said I couldn’t marry at all, but my mother argued that wasn’t Christian, so they amended it.

Mr. Sternberg was adamant about the pregnancy clause, though. I know that because he paid for me to take that trip to Mexico, where they put me up in a nasty boarding house, not even a real hotel, and I’m sure the doctor they sent wasn’t a real doctor, or not one anymore. He didn’t wash his hands.

I lay in that sweaty, bloody mess of a bed for three days, puking into a bucket and shivering with fever, and the woman who ran the boarding house kept coming to my room to tell me not to make so much noise. She gave me peppermint pastilles to suck on and said they would stop the vomiting. They didn’t. And now I can’t smell peppermint without gagging.
But after that Mr. Sternberg left me alone, so that was one blessing.

In the dressing room I sit with my chin pushed against a block as they put on my headpiece, sticking in hairpins so it won’t slip. The wardrobe girls lace me into a corset and button me into the spangled leotard and over that, in layers, the breakaway dress. They’ve got fans but they have to keep them turned low, and only on my feet, because of the feathers. Gertie knows how bad it is and brings me ice for my neck.

It’s a circus picture. When we do the bareback scene Clayton complains again. He says I’ve gained at least five pounds, and I’ll kill the horse and him too.

Has she been weighed today, the director says, but the wardrobe people say it’s too late, now I’ve got my costume on. Clayton makes huffing noises when he’s holding me over his head. The director yells cut and glares at him. Have you heard of a thing called talking pictures, Mr. Saunders? That’s a good one, because Clayton’s almost forty. His first screen kiss was Mabel Normand. She’s dead now, and who can blame her? He only has to lift me once, for the close-up—everything else is doubles—but he digs his thumb into my waist, pressing so hard on a rhinestone I feel its hard edge through the corset. Later, in the kissing scene, he breathes peppermint candies into my face and I retch and have to walk out.

They stop shooting. Now everyone’s mad. Clayton complains to Sternberg and I get called into his office. He’s got a scale next to his desk, the tall doctor kind.

Are you knocked up, Sternberg asks. I stare at him, don’t say a word. He hates that most.

You’re getting fat on purpose, he says. I don’t care if the guy’s
a sonofabitch. You give him a heart attack and I’m out three million.

His desk is the same desk. The same picture of his wife and son. Even the frame looks the same. He must have had his secretary replace it. I remember we knocked it over the first time he had me in this room, and the glass cracked. He smells like hair tonic and something else, minty. Mouthwash, I think. I push my chair back. There’s a Hershey bar in my purse. I open the clasp, wait for the chocolate scent to reach me.

Get on the scale, he tells me. If you’re a pound over 118 you’re in breach of contract.

What will you do? I ask. Send me to the fat farm again? I’ll fire you, you little bitch!

So I reach into my purse. I bring out the Hershey bar. I unwrap it slowly, in front of him. I can already taste how good it will be—that first bite.
His grandmother sits
cross-legged on the beach,
knees wide, flat-bottomed in the sand
like an old boat run aground,
rickety bones
anchored in shipwreck,
a forgotten breach
no longer worth
the trouble of a tide.

He fixes the sunglasses that slip
down the bones of her cheeks,
a pair of barracuda scales,
to keep the setting sun
from dying in her eyes,
while her poppy-mouth blooms,
red tongued, codeine slick,
hot curses skipping along
a breath of peppermint ash.
Will the Circle Be Unbroken

Bezalel-Levy
The suitcase retired,
then lao lao.

Every summer, the carry-on—
that bore of mortar dough and peppermints,
of gold scales cradled by collarbones
and red tart cows—
paled my grandmother.

Mornings, she would practice tai chi as I would watch her heart tick—
to imagine a bumh bumh over soft cotton.

Nights, she would sleep, accomplice to age,
and I would catalog her collected pills,

how I spent that dry summer.
laoyao doting over rest stops strewn on our way to the Mojave
in calligraphy strokes on sheets of shuan—

a satchel breached by jabbered Mandarin,
held in a mute case of English.
Her heart tick not the plitter of marbles dropping.
Nor the clink of glasses touching.
Perhaps of a stagnant pendulum—
but I would never confirm.

For a stalking silence pooled when
lao lao laid against the cot,
and the translator’s curt claim and sitcom smile

like graffiti on a tombstone
reminds me of red tart cows.
Believe me, every lover serves as a soldier.
—Ovid

The oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves.
—Frantz Fanon

WHEN he mentions his plans to vote for Donald Trump, curtains have already been drawn, lights flickered off. Bodies plunged headlong onto an unkempt bed like Napoleon into Russia. I finesse his belt through the final ring of designer jeans, unable to process my guest’s revelation. Nor is there any reason to, it seems, since Hillary’s sure to win the election. Tanned arms lock over my shoulders, fingers course through thinning brown hair a full two shades lighter than his gelled black. Our lips begin to mingle; our
tongues begin to waltz; our bodies lilt to the noble demands of a
three-eighths measure, before giving it all up and capitulating to
the carnal zags of jazz.

He’s my first one. At twenty-two, I’m astoundingly sheltered.
Together, we maneuver one of the great pivots in my life, this
friend with benefits and I. Though admittedly, the “benefits”
trumped in importance whatever friendship he offered. To this
day, I can’t remember his name, never knew it, never took the
time to learn it in the first place. And so I tried to sabotage the
euphoria of spending time between the sheets, enduring guilt that
couldn’t quite be ignored. Guilt that stung like lukewarm water
made frigid by the mental tricks of a simple peppermint.

Still, I appreciated how for the first time in my life I was getting
consistent “action.” Finally, I could divulge to brother-like figures
back home that I was seeing someone on a regular basis. You have
to understand: I wear hearing aids, glasses, I use a cane. I pull ten-
hour days in the library. I didn’t even drink alcohol until I turned
twenty-one, so believe me, this was a new development.

“You were the head of that judicial council last year, weren’t
you”—the first message my Grindr inbox ever received from him.
God help me. You don’t chair a committee that adjudicates drug
violations without stepping on a few toes. But with my tenure
over since last spring, the start of this school year seemed a
chance to reinvent myself, as I returned for one final semester
due to a spinal-cord injury several years ago. Those weeks after
a raspberry-red pickup truck careened into me on July 5, 2013,
made for scary, impotent times, considering that my lower half
lacked any sensation whatsoever. Even now things aren’t perfect.

The fact that someone was interested—that I was desirable
and at a point in my life when I felt comfortable engaging with
another individual in such an intimate, vulnerable way—was thus sensational. A real rags-to-riches story, if you will.

The gist of what I’m getting at, however, is that someone I was attracted to, a self-proclaimed “Latino jock” from Texas, told me that he was voting for Donald Trump, that he was sick of politically-correct “bullshit,” that he respected this professor of his who made the lone black student in the class stand up and explain why people should care about Black Lives Matter.

When I ask what he thinks about the instructor, whether he likes the man, my friend explains that “Prof. Jones [let’s say] is a little racist—and doesn’t hold back. Thank God.” Here’s a nineteen-year-old man whose member I’m tenderly sliding through the sleeve in his boxers meant typically for urination. Meanwhile, our limbs interconnect in a bedroom lit only by the faint glow of moonlight, subtly illuminating the contours of a body that’s hairy but neither fit nor fat and perfect for someone who isn’t confident about his own. I gaze upon the distending cock of this self-proclaimed bisexual I have no intentions of dating. Nevertheless, I feel that he’s betrayed me.

The creaks of my jostled bed suddenly sound anew, arresting, startling—one layer of a cacophonous concerto coalescing from the clack of a headboard against the wall, labored, anxious breathing, fear and desperation and anger. Because I had assumed that regarding the question of who would make the better president, we agreed. As we’re writhing one against the other, right in the middle of everything: “Um, what about how the GOP says that the only natural kind of...”

Fuck it. I’m not going to say this. I don’t want to. What I want is three inches in front of me.

“You’re gonna talk now?” he jeers, and immediately I
remember that I’ve been talking all day, that at last I can ease into some peaceful, enjoyable, even pleasurable mode of being. I never imagined any of this happening in the first place—him being here, me performing as I am—but now it is, and uncharacteristically, I’m forsaking the allure of control, utterly and abjectly unconcerned with the world around me. Only we two exist on this earth. I can’t help but be giddy.

“What are these awards over here?” he asks when it’s all said and done, when the lights sputter back to iridescent life, and this friend of mine can finally make out laurels for leader of the year, student of the month, a critical writing prize. He murmurs, “This is really impressive,” staring through a threshold that separates my bedroom from everything else, the only other room in this two-room apartment, all to see a couple plaques my father took the time to mount on the wall. “Sometime, when my dick isn’t in your mouth, I’d like to sit down to talk to you about all of this.” He actually says it. But still I can’t extricate myself from the confidence that comes with being wanted for your accomplishments, desired for your body, a levity new and alien, unexpected and unwarranted, which makes it all the more sensational.

“One last thing,” I mumble as he’s about to slip out the door.
“What?”
And then it’s my turn again. Silence.
“I’ve just got to know because it matters a lot to me: how can you support Trump after he mocked that disabled...” But I trail off. Again. Which isn’t like me. My tongue doesn’t even reach the roof of my mouth. I just stand there bewildered, and satisfied for the first time in a very long while. “You know what, it doesn’t matter.”
“Would a kiss help? Just one, now.” He’s a “dom.” I knew that
going into it.

“Yes.”

But he grabs my crotch instead, squeezes, and gives me a peck on the cheek. One final melancholic note in the minor scale of our evening.

“Congratulations on being named a Rhodes Scholar,” he whispers the next time I let him in at 1:00 a.m., a filled-out body shivering underneath his navy-blue sweater in the middle of a Virginia December which can get surprisingly cold. It seems Texans aren’t so tough after all.

And then the next time, exam week: “I think I’m Fulbright material, maybe even Rhodes if I keep at it. Like you did. My roommates and I are working together to motivate each other—do you know Thompson Bryce?” No, I can’t say that I do. “He’s pretty hot, tell you the truth…but yeah, he’s my roommate. Us, and the two people next door, we’re going to get a Confederate flag.”

Wait a second. Hold on. Please let me be hearing this wrong.

“We want to reconnect with our heritage.”

He’s only a freshman. That’s it. Four years ago, I was still listening to family members aver there’s no evidence for global warming. Hardly pausing, I continue with the business at hand.

Then the next time, the next year. We’ve settled into a routine, and he comes over on Friday evenings. “You know Daniel, right, in your German class? You thought he was hot. Remember, he’s the one that lives next door? I saw him in his underwear the other day—it was fucking awesome.”

“Was he embarrassed?”

“No, we talked for about fifteen minutes. And then, just
yesterday he walked in on me as I was getting out of the shower. We talked then, too.”

“Really?” Is this something people do, gaze upon their naked roommates and take some kind of pleasure in it without caring about whether their living companions realize what’s going on—though even as these musings trickle down the front of my mind, into my mouth, about to be ground by teeth that gnash together into dentals and palatals and labials that have nothing to do with the labia (none for me, thank you), I remember how lucky I am to have someone, a naked man no less, cocooned beside me within the shell of a black and white comforter whose design dashes hither and thither with crisscrossed frenzy. For some reason, I ask, “Were you hard?” and then quickly realize I could’ve lived without hearing his staccato response.

“Of course. Daniel knew it too.”

Interesting.

“Oh—we went ahead and put up the Confederate flag in our room. State’s rights, you know.” This time, I communicate my horror, or at least try to.

“Don’t you realize the hatred associated with that banner?” is all I manage.

“And do you not realize that the Constitution protects states’ rights? The federal government has done nothing but trample on them ever since, and now the states are all supposed to just bow to the altar of political correctness? It’s all just words. People need to man up.”

“What people need to bow to is the altar of decency, unlike your president.” I remind him about the Hispanic judge Trump lambasted, John McCain, the “grabbing pussy” comment.

“You’re just a sore loser”—because by now, he’s actually won
the election, which is to say that by now I’ve cried and grieved and only recently surfaced from the tides of nearly-insuperable disappointment. “Excuse me?” I reply. “Is that the best you can come up with?”

“Yeah, in a two-party system someone wins, someone loses. That’s what makes America great.” He pauses expectantly. “Can’t you take my pants off already?”

The truth of the matter is that I want to.

“Let me just ask you this, because I wanna find some common ground: you at least agree that we need someone who appreciates LGBTQ rights on the bench, right?”

“The gay marriage issue is settled, dude. What we need is someone to stick to what the Constitution says—like Scalia—who’s committed to our nation’s moral compass.” And while I’ve respected Justice Scalia in the past, I cringe in the present. Because the art of hermeneutics has been lost on this friend of mine, who short-circuits the process of reading texts, of understanding them, by taking every word as the word of God.

Given everything, however, I want there to be a next time—I know that I’ll need there to be a next time. People who need people are the luckiest people, or so the song goes.

“You know what, I’m exhausted for the night,” I admit.

“Yeah, I’m about to fall asleep too.” He collects his clothes, protrudes his neck through a raggedy shirt from the fraternity he’s pledging, walks past one bookcase, stops to stare at the thirty-six-inch TV in the living area, a beige couch across from it, and wonders at this apartment of a successful upperclassman.

Indeed, there’s more—I message him a week later, I want him to come over. I’m lonely and pitying myself again, sullen after concluding a phone conversation with a friend who’s just
confessed he’s “head-over-heels” in love. Damn those infantile clichés. What do I have? I have what I can give.

My friend walks past the dormitory where he lives, beyond the sidewalk that cuts into our campus—one which overlooks the Shenandoah Valley, the Blue Ridge Mountains—an arrangement of red bricks and white pillars that slopes toward the town of Lexington, sleepy and Southern, silenced still by grand stories of soldiers in the Civil War. He’s climbed the rickety stairs of my apartment building, which once housed an inn, and I imagine what those boarders would say to all of this now, the two of us about to be subsumed by darkness and desire.

He makes conversation to catch his breath before stripping down. For some reason this is the best he manages: “My roommate and I showed each other our dicks the other day, since he wanted to see what an uncircumcised one looked like.”

This isn’t normal—not for two roommates. Then again, what does normal or abnormal signify anyway?

The next time I make a meager attempt to broach anything political, to breach the fortifications of opinions I haven’t yet dared to besiege, the conversation ends with him, the “dom,” hissing “Safe spaces are bullshit” while gripping my hair to direct a so-far willing face. This is all basic training, he tells me, for what’s yet to come. That’s when Frantz Fanon arrives at the forefront of my mind—those moments of self-loathing in Paris, as the Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist realized he couldn’t escape discrimination and derogation even within his own mind. He writes of psychological colonization and the insidious ramifications that societal norms exact upon how “othered” individuals perceive themselves. One such person stands before me, and I can’t help but believe his vision of the world is tinted by long-inculcated
patriarchal anxieties.

It’s the only way I can make sense of it all.

Still, I don’t dwell too much on this Fanon parallel at the time, as visions of the rainbow-colored “safe space” placard that adorned my advisor’s office window crystallize into coherence, the burgeoning confidence required to come clean to that first adult because I knew I wouldn’t be judged. I had chosen her, as some recourse against the knifing sense of perversion I couldn’t fend off, the endless fidgeting which overtook me junior year, and the fear that I’d be found out as someone who’s attracted to men—betrayed by my unwieldy body—not to mention, of course, the inability to read texts like Rankine’s *Citizen* for homework, the impossibility of writing essays in which I once could lose myself, without relentless distraction. These became side-effects of rejecting thoughts antithetical to the heterosexual way, while acceptance was the antidote I couldn’t manage to prescribe to myself. Then, finally, I heard those essential words of affirmation: “It’s great that you’ve realized you’re gay.” We embraced after our conversation; I puffed away a strand of strawberry-blonde hair that had plastered itself across my lips; she handed me a Kleenex to absorb wayward tears; and I opened the door to a world in which horniness doesn’t have to go unrequited and finding a true lover is at last possible.

Now, for a split-second, I’m back to where I started: “What the hell are you talking about?”

“People are going to be judgmental either way, so you might as well cut the bullshit. My roommate and I’re a little racist after all.”

Nothing.

Startled, stupefied.
Floored and infuriated.

Staring, silent, ashamed of everything I’ve done for this man who waits for me to shimmy down his trousers.

In other words, the emotional tempo of my body undergoes an accelerando, which doesn’t make for an unfamiliar sensation. About the third time this mate of mine came over, the two of us were trudging up the stairs to my apartment when we passed a neighbor—staring. Gawking. Judging. She knew before I did that we weren’t truly friends.

Ruddy humiliation blossomed across my face, blood threatened to break through that final line of defense known as skin. I didn’t say hello. I didn’t say anything, and would’ve skulked away into some alcove, a cave, to don my mental hair shirt had we not been cornered in this stairwell, walls on either side that pitched us one against the other. She passed, we passed; it was over. But I can’t forget my reaction—that for a fleeting moment, I hated myself for wanting to do what I was about to do. I felt abandoned, naked, like the world could see me for who I truly was.

I told myself then I wouldn’t descend to that underworld again. But now here I am.

Some perspectives are wrong. And to debate them is to admit there’s something worth discussing, that two viable perspectives must be sorted out. Or at least that’s what I can’t help but believe, as emotions ignite with the intensity of ancient torches caked in Sulphur—however ineffective this approach proves to be. I realize it’s feckless. Somehow, without even deciding to become one, I’ve metamorphosed into the kind of “smug” liberal everyone talks about, refusing even to engage with the other side. I can’t do it. Not now. Not in response to an opinion that aims to efface who I
am, what gives me joy, the pride I thought we shared. Words are never just words. They’re often mightier than sticks and far more jagged than stones. I gape at two heads, because it’s out now, and ready. Bullets of perspiration trickle down the fault lines of my palm, callused fingertips exhibit the oily grime of skin that’s barraged with Clearasil daily, my mouth begins to shape into an oval to take on not the barrel of a shotgun but another discharging protrusion, before shifting, closing, reforming into a sound rather than receptacle. This will be my song. Impotent to muster the strength from barely-innervated legs, I grip onto the wooden frame of the bed before which I’m kneeling and hoist myself up. The taller man, he smirks down at me, boxers crumpled in a heap around his feet.

I barely murmur it at first: “Get out.” He doesn’t hear. Do I undertake this next turning point then? Yes: “Get the fuck out.”

His wry smile, the centerfold of a “foreign-looking” face—what irony!—wrenches apart into a snarl as he hisses, “Fuck you,” whips the door closed, and rockets out of my life.
Already a hooligan practicing kicks,
she tunneled feet-first. Against her breach
of birth etiquette, I was defenseless.

Clenched by forceps, she screamed
a prophesy that we would always be
at loggerheads. Gas sharp as peppermint
couldn’t mask my pain. Placed on the scale,
the cold of its metal,
like a slap, took her breath away.
Contributors

**Shadiyat Ajao** is the founder and sole contributor to the food-poetry blog *Off The Bitten Path*. Her work primarily focuses on the ways in which food has the power to absorb our sentiments and serve as a reflection of ourselves. Based in New York City, she spends much of her free time reading and visiting bakeries at a rate some may refer to as “alarming.”

**Hugh Anderson** is a Vancouver Islander, long enough removed from the prairies to loathe the cold. His many incarnations have ranged from bus driver to actor to teacher. His poems have appeared most recently in *Columbia Journal Online, Ottawa Arts Review, Right Hand Pointing*, and *The Quilliad*.

**KJ Bateman** started out in Washington, D.C. After stops in Colorado, Germany, Pennsylvania, and California, she ended up in Washington State. She holds a B.F.A from the University of Southern California and an M.F.A from the University of Washington where she studied under Jacob Lawrence. She has exhibited widely in the Pacific Northwest. Using oils, acrylic, and photography, she explores the details of life in her quirky, expressionistic style.

**Noor-E-Nawaal Bhuiyan** is a sophomore at Cairo American College. She has one brother, three years younger than herself. In her spare time, Nawaal enjoys playing a variety of sports, such as basketball, volleyball, and softball, as well as reading and writing.
Virginia Boudreau is a recently retired teacher. She can often be found in her garden or enjoying one of the beautiful beaches near her home in Nova Scotia, Canada. Her work has appeared in a wide variety of international literary journals and anthologies and will be upcoming in *Fiction Southeast*, *Cricket (Children’s) Magazine*, and *The Scrivener Review*.

John Chavers enjoys working as an artist and photographer. His work has been accepted at *Cream City Review, JuxtaProse Literary Magazine, Camas Magazine, Stonecoast Review, Blueline Magazine*, and *The William and Mary Review*, among others. Four of his photographs are currently on display at the Biennial 600: Architecture exhibit at AMoA.

Harshal Desai is an artist, entrepreneur, and writer that loathes the typical 9-5 existence. After quitting his business to hone the world of entrepreneurship and design solutions, he documents his thoughts through writing and photography as he takes on society’s norms armed with nothing more than his cheeky wit and undeniable charm. His work is published in *Verbal Art, Phenomenal Literature, Cha: An Asian Literary Journal, National Geographic, FineFlu, The Type Image, 805Lit, Door is a Jar, Asian Signature, Spark*, and *SickLit Magazine*.

Franklin DiSalvo just graduated from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. Four years ago, he suffered a spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed below the waist, but with physical and occupational therapy, he slowly relearned to walk. The experience inspired him to start writing more seriously. Last year, he was awarded the Beinecke Scholarship to pursue a Ph.D. in English with a focus on disability studies, which will follow two years of graduate school at the University of Oxford as part of the Rhodes Scholarship program. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times, Breath & Shadow*, and *The Deaf Poets Society*. 
Kelly DuMar is a poet, playwright and workshop facilitator from Boston. She’s the author of two poetry chapbooks, *All These Cures* (Lit House Press) and *Tree of the Apple* (Two of Cups Press). Kelly founded and produces the Our Voices Festival of Women Playwrights at Wellesley College, now in its 11th year. She’s on the board & faculty of The International Women’s Writing Guild. You can follow her daily nature photo and creative writing blog “#NewThisDay Writing From My Photo Stream.”

Jennifer Fliss is a Seattle-based fiction and essay writer. Her work has appeared in *PANK, The Rumpus, Necessary Fiction, Hippocampus*, and elsewhere.

Jackie Jiang is interested in portraying the unspeakable and intangible feelings she experiences in her daily life through the language of art, mainly painting and drawing. Inspired by the traditional Chinese calligraphy style, Jackie Jiang’s work, with their abstract scribble and expressive brushstrokes, often leaves a false impression of carefree. In creating her pieces, Jackie Jiang always looks for connections between modern art and traditional Chinese calligraphy, and the possibilities of combining them, which result in the bright colors, simple compositions, and intuitive forms in her work.

Tim Johnson is a writer and artist living in the Pioneer Valley in Western Massachusetts. A graduate of Emerson College, his work in printmaking has been featured in *The Adirondack Review, The Tishman Review*, and in small shows around New England.

Kathryn Kulpa is the author of the flash fiction chapbook *Girls on Film*, which was a winner of the Paper Nautilus Vella Chapbook Contest. She is also the author of the short story collection *Pleasant Drugs* (Mid-List Press) and a flash fiction editor at *Cleaver Magazine*. Her stories can be found in *Jellyfish Review, R.KV.R.Y. Literary Quarterly, and Saranac Review.*
**Amy LeBlanc** has recently completed an Honors BA in English Literature and creative writing at the University of Calgary where she is Editor-in-Chief of *NōD Magazine* and was co-coordinator of the SU Campus Food Bank. Her work has appeared in magazines such as *Parenthetical*, *Untethered*, and *Petal Journal*, and she received second place in the 2016 Blodwyn Memorial Prize for fiction. She hopes to pursue a career in fiction and poetry, and has recently completed her first novella. She will begin a Bachelor of Education in the fall and plans to complete her MA in English Literature.

**Bezalel-Levy** studied film at Northwestern University and is involved with mixed and multi-media, including photography, ceramics, painting, and music. They live near Seattle half the year and in Ashkelon, Israel the other half.

**Michelle Liu** is an author from New Jersey. Her book, *Navigating Transitions*, will be published this November. As a reporter for the *Hamilton Post*, she writes both nonfiction and poetry. In her free time, she plays tennis and volunteers.

**Hannah Marier** has been published in by *PearTree Press*. Her work has also been accepted by the Pen 2 Paper competition, which tries to bring awareness for those with physical disabilities. She has a huge passion for writing, literature, and social justice and equality, and she endeavors to illuminate this passion within her writing. Growing up in Georgia, Hannah is a huge fan of curling up in a small corner with a book of poetry and enjoying the playful heat of the sun.

**Janette Gould Martin** is a teacher and poet. She has just returned from four years in China where she spent part of her time teaching for UC Denver at its Beijing campus and the other years teaching for the Asia campus for her school.
**Jane Miller** has poetry which has appeared in the *Iron Horse Literary Review, Summerset Review, cahoodaloodaling, Watershed Review, Mojave River Review, Pittsburgh Poetry Review, and Broadkill Review* among others. A finalist in the 2016 IHLR chapbook contest, she has been nominated for Best News Poets and Best of the Net. She received a 2014 Individual Artist Fellowship in poetry from the Delaware Division of the Arts. She lives in Wilmington, Delaware.

**Kiara Miller** is a 22-year-old, mostly self-taught artist currently living in Alaska. She works primarily with digital mediums such as Adobe Photoshop, FireAlpaca, and occasionally Adobe Illustrator, but is also re-exploring the craft of traditional media forms.

**Valerio Orlandini** is a writer and photographer from Italy who likes to move across different expressive media, often blending them into a single piece of work. In recent years, Valerio took part in several readings and photo exhibits.

**Liz Purvis** completed her MFA in Poetry at NC State University. Her work has been published in *The Collagist*, *Day One*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, and others. In 2015, her poem “Before the Movie” was nominated for Independent Best American Poetry by cahoodaloodaling.

**Aaditya Sathish** is a student at College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, ME pursuing a Bachelor of Human Ecology. Human Ecology is an inter-disciplinary, self-designed major. His studies are located in the intersections of anthropology, philosophy, theatre, and literature. He has grown up in Hong Kong and India, spending time equally between the two places. He likes to spend time writing, reading, and taking pictures.
Kyle Siegel has presented his creative and critical works at national conferences, helped lead the creative writing community at his undergraduate alma mater (The College of New Jersey), and has been featured in *The Lion’s Eye Review*. He is currently a pre-doctoral student in biochemistry at Northwestern University.

Pamela Sinicrope has poetry that has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Appalachian Journal, Oakwood Literary Journal, The Furious Gazelle, Vox Poetica*, and *Watermelon Isotope*. She is an editor and poet with the self-publishing group Poets Unite Worldwide, and shares her own work and the work of others on her Facebook blog I Need Coffee, Poetry You Can Drink. Pamela lives and works as a behavioral scientist in Rochester, Minnesota with her husband, three teenage sons, two dogs, and the two peregrine falcons roosting in the Elm tree in the backyard.

Kenneth Susynski derives inspiration from personal, cultural experiences built into narrative, as well as theatrical compositions that have inherent ties to known tales of love and love lost yet are presented in new, adaptive interpretations depicted by actors in his style of figurative expression. He has had numerous solo and group shows both nationally and internationally, including the 2015 Palermo International Biennale, Art Caroussel-Louvre, Seattle Art Museum Gallery, and the Sundance Group.

Marjorie Thomsen has a poetry collection entitled: *Pretty Things Please* (Turning Point, 2016) gets its title from asking Pretty Things Beer and Ale Project to name all that she cannot since they come up with great names for their beers. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her poems have been widely published and have received first-place awards from the New England Poetry Club and The University of Iowa School of Social Work. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Ashley Underwood studied Creative Writing at Missouri State University and earned an MA in Education. She teaches English in Springfield, Missouri. Her work has previously appeared in Elder Mountain: A Journal of Ozarks Studies, Crack the Spine, and The Cave Region Review.

Jenny Wong, when not attempting to put her computer science degree to good use, can be found travelling the world with her husband or stuck in her loft coaxing out the next story with hot tea and strong language. Her work can be glimpsed in The Quilliad and 3Elements Review.

Steve Zimmerman is a graduate of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, with majors in Anthropology and Creative Writing. He has been trying to find balance in the science of the world and the fragile psyche for the past couple decades. The photographic image has provided a means to bridge the chasm and, due to its universal language, pull the two together.
Submission due dates are October 31, January 31, April 30, and July 31, for issues forthcoming January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1, respectively, unless otherwise noted on our website.

There is no minimum word count, but please keep your fiction and nonfiction submissions under 3,500 words. Poems must be under two typed pages.

It is equally important that all three elements given for the specific submission period be included within your story or poem. Artists and photographers are only required to represent one out of the three elements.

For multiple submissions, fiction is capped at no more than two stories per submission period. Poems are limited to five per submission period. In the event your material is accepted in another publication, we request that you withdraw your submission from 3Elements Review should you decide to publish your piece elsewhere.
Mikaela Shea is in her thesis hours of her MFA at Columbia College Chicago and was recently a writer-in-residence at Ragdale Foundation. She has published stories in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Copperfield Review*, *Waypoints Magazine*, *Foliate Oak*, *Hypertext Magazine*, *Paragraph Planet*, *Vagina: The Zine*, Columbia College's annual *Story Week Reader*, as well as a children’s book at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Mikaela is currently writing a novel and is Editor-in-Chief of *3Elements Review*. @mikaelashea.

Megan Collins received an MFA in Creative Writing from Boston University. She teaches creative writing at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, as well as literature at Central Connecticut State University. Her work has appeared in many literary journals, including *Compose*, *Linebreak*, *Off the Coast*, and *Rattle*. When not writing or teaching, Megan enjoys reading, watching The Ellen DeGeneres Show, collecting miniature items, eating cupcakes, going on Netflix binges, and spending time with her husband, Marc, and her golden retriever, Maisy. Check out Megan’s work on her website, megan-collins.com.

Katherine Davis earned an MFA in fiction from the University of Maryland and a PhD from the University of Tennessee. Her most recent work appears in *Gravel* and in *Broad River Review*, and she won Gigantic Sequins’ 2014 Flash Fiction Contest. Currently, she is living in Wisconsin with a small flock of cockatiels and is completing her first novel.
Sarah Wylder Deshpande has published fiction and poetry in The Dunes Review, Tammy Journal, 3Elements Review, Gravel Magazine, and Fire Tetrahedron. She holds an MFA from the University of Maryland. She lives in Oregon with her husband, son, and border collie.
Marlon Fowler is a Des Moines–based designer and web developer for 3Elements Review, as well as a web developer for a Fortune 100 company. Marlon received his bachelor’s degree in Journalism with a major in Advertising from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Marlon enjoys all things technology, making websites “do things,” running, reading, YouTube, sports, movies & TV shows, video games, and Chicago food. Marlon would really like to learn more about PHP, and see more of the world.