Welcome to issue no. 8!

Thank you for taking the time to read our eighth issue! We sincerely believe that you are going to find some great material in this issue. This issue is packed with various writers, artists and poets whose material we truly enjoyed reading!

The next issue’s elements are: Mania, Tower, and Exposure.

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook for all of the latest updates!

Sincerely,
Mikaela Shea
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Oval Portrait
Mort Castle

A Brief Prologue

Edgar Allan Poe, born January 19, 1809, Boston, Massachusetts, died October 7, 1889, Giverny, France.
—Wikipedia

Genius is immediate, but talent takes time. Genius or talent or neither, the literary world remains divided about the efforts of Edgar Allan Poe III, but the reading public has rendered a verdict: Last year, Poe’s novel Eldorado outsold Sabatini’s Mistress Wilding, Zane Grey’s The Call of the Canyon, and Booth Tarkington’s The Midlander. Secretive about his work, Poe has revealed that his new novel is entitled The Oval Portrait; it will be published in March of next year by Grosset & Dunlap.

—“Letter from Paris”
—Genet
The New Yorker
April 11, 1925
It was the start of summer with weather more like spring and I was very poor and very happy because I was in Paris and had a woman who loved me, and many days the writing went well. The best work time was early morning when the shopkeepers were wetting down the streets and the smell of fresh bread was everywhere, but on this rare evening, I was writing with one of my stubby pencils at a small table outside the Lilas Cafe. I was writing well. Perhaps I did not yet have the one true sentence I needed that led to everything else, but I was stalking it, creeping up on that sentence.

Then I heard the cafe door behind me. I heard a huff and puff like a leaky steam engine and an unsteady shuffle and then I got the odor of him.

Ford Madox Ford, as he called himself then, greatly resembled Humpty-Dumpty prior to the great fall. He had a heavy, stained English mustache and wanted to be thought of as another G.K. Chesterton. Ford’s watery eyes made it seem as though his whole face were beginning to dissolve. And the aroma he radiated was not that of a British man of letters.

“Might I sit?” he asked, as he sat down at my table.

Thus endeth the writing, I thought, pues y nada.

A moment to repent and digress: I am a journalist and I need render a more objective opinion of Ford Madox Ford than has been the case so far. Let it be said that in The Good Soldier our Mr. Ford wrote a good book. In fairness, let it also be said, he wrote a large number of bad ones. Let is be said that with the literary magazine the transatlantic review he championed innovative 20th century writing and 20th century writers, myself, let it be said, among them. Let it be said that he did much to encourage the avant garde in all areas of the arts.

Let it also be said that he did so in order to have people to whom he might condescend.

No matter the Fordian virtues, he smelled. He smelled awfully bad.

And when he spoke to me over the small cafe tables you’d have thought his breath was the result of his kissing a goat.

“You were writing, Hem,” he said.

“Was,” I said.

He slapped my shoulder. “That’s the stuff.”

“I’m just full of the stuff,” I said.

“Let me buy you a drink,” he said.

“I will allow you to,” I said.

He waved over a waiter, a thin man with a frozen face. Ford Madox Ford did not condescend toward waiters. He was of that class of English society which did not notice servants at all. They were no more worthy of attention than a boot jack or a telephone.

Ford ordered a fine a l’eau. I had been drinking beer. I ordered a fine a l’eau.

“Hem, I have something for you, Hem.”

“That’s good, Ford Ford,” I said. He disliked my chiding him about his assumed name. “Everybody likes something.”

He gave me a queer look.

“You know Edgar Allan Poe,” he said.


And who did not know of Poe Three? His novels typically sold two million copies. In English. There were copies in other languages, perhaps even Urdu and Hottentot. There were motion
pictures.

Everyone who worked at the scrivener’s trade, Bartleby no doubt included, knew of Edgar Allan Poe III. We all applauded his success. Writers are a benevolent and big-hearted lot.

“You’ve read him, Hem?”

“A little,” I said. I stopped halfway through the first chapter of Eldorado. I feared contagion.

“I would like to publish a profile of Edgar Allan Poe III in the transatlantic review. I would like you to write it.”

I sighed.

“You know, Hem. Does he think of himself as American or French? How does he consider his literary heritage ...”

I said, “Does he drink? Does he use opium? Does he smoke Gitanes? Has he had an affair with Isadora Duncan or Josephine Baker or both? Can he play the ‘La Marseillaise’ on the jew’s harp?”

“You have a sense of humor, Hem.”

“It is a gift.”

“I liked that profile you did of Mussolini for the Toronto Daily Star. It had wit. ‘There is something wrong, even histrionically, with a man who wears white spats with a black shirt.’” Ford chuckled. He sounded tubercular.

“Mussolini is quite the comic, Ford Ford.”

Ford offered me one hundred and fifty dollars and I agreed to write a profile of Edgar Allan Poe III.

Then Ford left and I took my pencil and wrote a true sentence. Ford Madox Ford is an ass.

The weather remained beautiful as Scott Fitzgerald and I set out to motor to Giverny. The top was down but we had it if needed because Scott had replaced the top on the Renault KJ although Zelda had not wanted him to do so: Zelda thought a topless boat tailed Renault would add to the Fitzgerald image as American eccentrics. Zelda also thought herself a master chef because she could mix vinegar and oil in nearly the right proportions for salad. Zelda thought herself a writer and she thought herself a dancer. Zelda thought herself herself herself.

I liked Scott. Though I never said it to him, there are things you do not speak of, Scott was the least conceited, most talented writer I ever knew, which made him endearing and quite sad. Zelda used his humility to humiliate him and sucked away at his talent until he could only write bad stories for The Saturday Evening Post and worse movies for Hollywood.

Zelda did not like me. I did not like Zelda. Scott said she was “the first American flapper,” but Zelda belonged to another breed: Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald was a vampire, a vamp, a la Theda Bara, the femme fatale who drains her victim and leaves him either a shambling ruin or a corpse.

It was to give Scott respite from Zelda that I suggested he accompany me on my trip to profile Monsieur Poe. I drove. Scott did not like to drive drunk and he had begun to drink even before we left Paris. He had his engraved hip flask: To 1st Lt. F. Scott Fitzgerald. 65th Infantry. Camp Sheridan. Forget-me-not. Zelda. 9-13-18.

Zelda could work him even at a distance.

“Old Overholt,” Scott said, offering the whiskey. I took a small drink. The Renault was a pretty whore of a car. It looked beautiful but was no good inside. The three speed manual transmission was from the days before the war and the brakes worked only on the rear wheels. It was the kind of car you could drive more easily if
you were a little drunk.
   “Hem, you are my friend. You are my good friend.”
   “I am.”
   “Then may I ask you a question?”
There was whiskey in Scott’s words, each syllable a bit too
crisp so he would not sound like he was slurring. I feared what he
would ask.
   “Are you afraid to die, Hem?”
   “I have been,” I said.
   “I am,” Scott said.
   “At some times, more than other times. In the war, you know,
I was often afraid to die. Then came the time I was blown up and
felt my spirit leave me then snap back to me.” I held out my hand
for the flask. “Since then, I have not been so much afraid to die.”
   “Hem,” Scott said, “I saw him again yesterday.”
   “Oh,” I said.
When he said nothing more, I prompted: “And who might he
be, friend Scott?”
The very apparition of Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, Esquire.”
   “Someone who looks like you ...”
   “Exactly. I left the flat and there he was, across the way, by the
Tilsitt street sign. He was wearing my jacket, this jacket I have on
now, and he waved to me. And just before I fully recognized him,
he stepped round the corner and disappeared.”
   “So you saw someone who looked like you ...”
   “A doppelgänger, Hem.”
   “Doppelgänger. That sounds like some type of German
pervert. A man who does obscene things with sausages.”
   “It is not funny, Hem.”

His pain was not funny.
   “The doppelgänger is your exact double. And meeting him ...
It’s a harbinger of death. Hem, I am going to die. I don’t want to
die.”
   “Have you seen your doppelgänger before, Scott?”
   “This was the third time. Once, when I was young. At
Princeton. Then New York, the morning of my wedding. It was just
outside St. Patrick’s.”
   “Consider, Scott. You saw him twice previous. After each
occurrence, you evidently did not die.”
   “That is true,” Scott said. “It’s true.” He thought about that.
   “Drink more, Scott.”
   “That won’t help.”
   “It won’t hurt,” I said.
He drank more and it must have given him insight, because he
did not talk about death or doppelgängers the rest of the way to
Giverny.

from
“Poe III”
A Profile of the Artist
by
Ernest Hemingway

There are some secrets which do not permit
themselves to be told. —Edgar Allan Poe (I)

... gardens of Edgar Allan Poe’s home are neither as
ordered as those of his neighbor Renoir nor as natural
as Monet’s, but there is the feeling of exploding
wildness under stern control. There are beds of Hybrid
Tea roses and Mexican yucca, along with wild grasses
and cattails. And of course, as we stepped over the pond on the arched Japanese bridge, we observed the water lilies. In the summer bloom, the myriad scents invoke the strange lushness of prehistoric wood and swamp.

Scott and I were led by Poe and two quite attractive albeit exceedingly pale young women, identified only as, “my dear companions,” to an arbor, where we sat at a rustic table.

Poe’s smile surprises, in that he so strongly resembles his grandfather, someone thought of as “a man of sorrowful visage.” Poe has an expansive forehead and deep set eyes, and while his mustache is pencil thin in the manner of a cinema swashbuckler and his hair of moderate length, it is easy to imagine a daguerreotype of Grandfather Poe come to life.

The two young women left us, to return shortly with a bottle of Moët & Chandon and the proper service, along with an assortment of pastries: the upside down tart Tarte Tatin, petit fours, Angel wings, Bichon au citron, Gâteau la broche and Madeleines. They waited on us in silence.

Then Poe toasted: “To dreams within dreams.” There was something false and scornful that lay beneath his pleasant tone.

To begin, I inquired of his taste in literature. Of the moderns, he likes Edgar Rice Burroughs and Edna Ferber. Of the classics, he has a mild fondness for Hawthorne but finds him too moralistic. His late father, Poe the II, he praises for his boldness in exploring psychological manias and fears, and of course, his grandfather rests on his majestic throne atop literature’s Mt. Olympus. He did not say that in acquiring the themes and style of his forebear Mr. Poe has inherited a gold mine.

Hypothetical question: If Poe had not left the USA for France, might ...

Poe interrupted me. “But he did, my dear Mr. Hemingway.” He laughed the way Ford Madox Ford laughs.

“And doesn’t everyone know that story.”

Washington College Hospital
The Tower, Second Floor
Sunday, October 7, 1849
4:30 AM

Semi-conscious, he mutters and shrieks in anguished delirium. Does Edgar Allan Poe—Poe, Southern gentleman, critic, devoted husband, poet, drunkard, author, editor, and by his own admission, genius—call to friend, foe, or phantasm as he thrashes on what must surely be his deathbed? Following his simultaneous bouts of drinking and profound melancholia, Poe has been diagnosed as suffering from “brain fever,” perhaps exacerbated by a stout knock or two on the noggin.

Nobody quite knows what brain fever was, but it seems to have killed many people until early in the 20th century at which time the scientific community jettisoned the term as too vague to even aspire to meaninglessness. Delirium and hallucinations and, of course, high fevers, were symptomatic of brain fever and no
question, our Eddie is utterly deranged.
—Is that you, Doctor?
He sees someone at his bedside. Dr. Moran has been kind to him, admitted him to hospital, though Dr. Moran, like many of Poe’s acquaintance, knows he stands little chance of being paid. Alas, Poe is King Midas in reverse: All that he touches turns to shite.
—God have mercy on my poor soul, Poe says.
“Not all that likely, Edgar.” There is a laughing whisper.
—Moran?
“Not all that likely, Edgar.”
—Then who?
The voyeur at the bedside of the ill-favored and sore beset Edgar Allan Poe smiles.
—Ah, says Poe. Your smile—it is my smile!
“Oh, Eddie, Eddie, as now you stand before the veil, please acknowledge me at last, call me by name.”
—You are, Poe declares, William Wilson.
“Please, Mr. Poe, might you not leave off the fictions when you will soon know the eternities of Truth and the truth of Eternity?
“Edgar, once you wrote a story entitled ... Why, yes, you called that tale ‘William Wilson,’ and it is begun thusly:
‘Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation.’
“But that story was hardly a creation of your lauded Poetic Imagination but rather ... autobiography!”
The dying man thinks he is being punished as the doleful interrogation continues:
“Who am I, Mr. Edgar Allan Poe?”
—You are ... the man in the mirror. You are that spectre in my path. You are, oh, my double, my brother ... MYSELF!
“Though your brains have been slow cooked and your innards pickled in alcohol, you yet possess your ratiocinative ability, Mr. Poe. How many times throughout your four decades upon this mortal sphere have you seen me, your doppelgänger? I was the near perfect imitation of you, in words and actions: Oh, you must commend me for how admirably did I play my part. I followed your manner of dress: threadbare and fallen far from fashion, yet you had a certain style, particularly the cape. Your gait, the unbalanced drunkard’s lurch or the stride of an arrogant Southern gentleman, and your raving idiosyncrasies were, without difficulty, appropriated. Even your voice did not escape me. I can emote as well as you, Eddie, lad: ‘Once upon a midnight dreary. I speak blah-blah-blah and quoth the raven, Nevermore, blah-blah-blah and Nevermore ...’
“On so many occasions, Edgar, I have been mistaken for you. On so many occasions, my rudeness and lewdness and foolishness were accredited to you. When I doused myself with laudanum and spiritus frumenti and roared of angels crawling up my arse or bells that would not cease their dread tolling, or hearts that beat endlessly on though their—owners—had been hacked to bits, I was by many thought to be you. And you, at the time, more often than not, were snoring in foul slumber brought on by crude gin or opium.
“Edgar, I confess without apology: For much that you were blamed and disdained and stigmatized and even ostracized in this life, I am the one responsible. As your reputation declined, you sought solace in alcohol or drugs, further diminishing yourself, allowing me to drain from you all your qualities, such as they
were. And now you are so dissipated, so diminished, I will take what little remains.”

Dying, Poe asks:
—O my double, O my brother of unease, are you Death?
A laugh.
“Death is death. As for me, I do not know my origin. I live upon the energies of others, sapping their vital source, much like the Greek vampires feast upon blood. But I need nothing as coarse as bodily fluids to sustain me. I drain the very soul and the very self, at first little by little, and then ...

“I become what I behold.

“I am like unto you and now, now that you have weakened your will so that you can no longer hold steadfastly onto your essence, the uniqueness and singularity of Edgar Allan Poe, I will take all that you are and were and could have been and I shall become ... Edgar Allan Poe!”

—No, Poe says, a feeble protest. I do not wish to die.

“There we have a fitting inscription for every headstone since time began. But, if you will, Eddie, if you will grant the metaphysical truth of irony and metaphor, you will not die at all.

“You will live forever.

“I will see to that!”

—Please ...

And now with a bow all the more infuriating because of its delicately mannered courtesy, the spectre pulled forth an envelope from the interior of his jacket and took from it a thrice folded sheet of stationery. “This letter is addressed to you, Eddie, but I have the greater use for it.” He chuckled without mirth. “It is ... Ha! A purloined letter!” Then he began to read aloud, with perhaps just a hint of a sardonic French accent:

My Dear Monsieur Poe,

Please allow me to confess that upon first receiving copies of your work from the French publisher Poulet Malassis, who inquired as to the possibility of my translating your stories and poems into French, and my noting that you were both American born and for the most part American educated, I presumed I might find little to excite or even interest me: I expected gross sentiment and cliché and nothing that might be judged original. The weak twig that is America has not yet had a chance to grow far from the tree of Europe. But truth be told, the translation of genius or doggerel would yet produce for me a few francs by which I might sustain myself, and so I read your stories with growing wonder and astonishment.

Please accept my apology, my dear M.E.A. Poe, as I humbly bow before your genius.

I read “The Black Cat” and “Mesmeric Revelation,” and dashed the manuscripts to the floor, in awe and dismay, asking the walls, “How is it possible for this man to have written my stories before I’ve had the opportunity to do so?”

You left me dazed and weeping upon my chaise.

I will translate your work, and feel myself at a sacred task, honored with each word, each comma. This is what I told the publisher.

Mr. Poe, forgive my audacity, but I strongly sense a spiritual kinship with you. Mr. Poe, we are brothers. We understand whisperings at the edge of darkness and flowers of alluring evil. We know that the forlorn echo of a single word can ring throughout the ages and evoke the unspeakable even as it calls forth rare beauty.
But I do not flatter myself. I am the younger brother, a dullard and lackwit, who dares to hope I might know some small illumination from your brilliance. I beg for the chance to learn what my poor intellect might absorb from you. Mr. Poe, dare I hope you could teach me, become my Matre penser?

Moreover, Mr. Poe, I feel forced to speak of matters practical. I know you have endured sorrows and hardships in the United States. You have been cruelly used by critics and deceived by false friends. You have seldom enjoyed the popular success that ought to be afforded one of your rare gifts.

I am determined, my dear Monsieur Poe that you will become as renowned in France as you should be in the United States. With no chauvinism, I can state that my country will welcome and applaud you and award you the laurels to which you are entitled.

Thus, though I am hardly a man of means, I will arrange for your passage to France, and should you accede to this request to come here, I will do all that I might on your behalf.

Please do respond soon, my American brother, and trust that I am your dear friend and most fervent admirer,

Charles Baudelaire.

According to Dr. John Joseph Moran, Edgar Allan Poe died at 5 AM, October 8, 1949.

A funeral was conducted the next day at the Presbyterian cemetery at Fayette and Green Streets. The weather was cold and exceedingly damp and threatened to grow worse. Only eight people attended as Poe’s rude pine coffin, lacking handles or even a pillow for his head, went into the grave.

On the following Monday, October 16, at four in the afternoon, a disheveled man presented himself at Washington College Hospital and asked to see Dr. John Joseph Moran. When the Moran came forth, physician’s eyes grew large and his jaw dropped. To prevent himself from fainting, he dropped into a chair, murmuring, “As I live and breathe ...”

“As do I,” interrupted the visitor.

“Edgar Allan Poe!”

“I fear, Dr. Moran, your diagnosis of my death was inaccurate. And I fear my burial was all too premature.”

“I... I do not understand.”

“Nor need you. You have the evidence before you. If you visit the Presbyterian cemetery, you shall have the further corroboration of my empty grave.”

At this, Dr. Moran was afforded a courtly bow and his visitor departed.

Originally published in The Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper in 1944, Poe’s short story, “The Premature Burial” became wildly popular throughout the United States and was reprinted in dozens of newspapers and literary journals along with an account of how the author himself had suffered the fate of the title and survived.

In the first week of December, Mrs. Maria Clemm, Poe’s aunt who had also been his mother-in-law, received a letter:

My Dear Muddy,

It is with regret that I must bid you adieu, the woman who has so succored me and sought to support me in all my efforts.
For me, this country will always be a realm of torturing memories and dread, of limitless sorrow for which there is no balm in Gilead nor Baltimore nor Richmond.

I have been given another chance.

I have been born again.

I leave you with my eternal love as the new Edgar Allan Poe seeks to find fortune and himself in the Old World.

Farewell, my dearest Muddy and you will dwell forever in my heart.

Yours Most Sincerely,

Eddie

Mrs. Clemm never heard from him again.

Like his (wrongly) celebrated père and his even more (wrongly) celebrated grand-père, Edgar Allan Poe III has been (wrongly) praised for the musicality of his writing, and indeed, his novel The Oval Portrait is a song: An interminable lullaby. A soporific symphony. Poe has not met the adjective or adverb he did not like, nay, adore, nay VENERATE!!!—all of them employed in coma-causing fashion from which the reader can only be revivified, or at least brought back to eye open catatonia, by Poe’s frequent use of the exclamation point.

I have done Poe the service of stealing a number of his exclamation points, though I doubt he will notice. Take them, and use them sparingly, or better still, not at all.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!  !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Buried beneath awkward arabesque phrases and whirligigs of words, there is a plot which, on occasion, if you are quick enough, might be discerned in this alleged novel. It is a plot that plods plods é’er so pokily: An artist, Adolpho Maillard, paints portraits of lovely young women and men, all of whom die, as he drains their “life essence, spirit and soul . . .”

This is the premise of Grampy Poe’s short story, likewise entitled “The Oval Portrait,” a story which is a merciful two pages. Yes, III has exploited birthright rather than creativity.

In his “Oval Portrait,” Poe Number One writes: “Long, long I read—and devoutly, devotedly I gazed.”

And to close this review, I write: “Long, long I read -- and numbly and dumbly I glazed over by page 38.”

As will you, Dear Reader.

Delwyn Shay
The Farringford Review of Books
March, 1926

Universal Pictures has purchased the rights to The Oval Portrait by Edgar Allan Poe III for a reputed six figures. German Expressionist master Paul Leni is set to direct, with William Haines and Charles Farrell in contention for the starring role of Adolpho Maillard and the “Green-eyed Goddess of Hollywood” Jane Winton as leading lady.

—the Variety

... Poe became an icon of first French and then world literature. He died at his home in Giverny in 1889, lionized by artists of every medium.

—Wikipedia
A Brief Epilogue

F. Scott Fitzgerald born September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota, died, September, 20, 1970, Los Angeles, California, abandoned novel writing at the end of the 1930s to write popular short stories, screenplays, and TV scripts until his death. He was a contributor to Rod Serling’s influential Twilight Zone, nominated for an Emmy for his script, “The Doppelgänger,” and shared film credits with Jack Finney and Daniel Mainwaring for the 1956 film The Invasion of the Body Snatchers.

Summing up his career in an interview in Playboy in 1969, Fitzgerald said, “I’d say there are second acts in American lives.”

— Wikipedia
The oval portrait in the bar you manage is from the 1800s. You know because the grandson of the gentlemen who owns the bar slurs it between customers, contemporary rap music and suggesting you show more cleavage.

The woman in the portrait does not approve of anything—you, in particular, she hates. She rules upon a chair with flowers fashioned from iron refusing the release of leg—on a porch that does nothing less than sprawl atop a plantation that does nothing more than death, squints in recognition when you pour old lady Johansson's bloody Jemimah while calling her ma'am, counts your tips with you every evening.

"Isn't our gal lovely?" her grandson smears on freshly shined goblets. The portrait smirks, Mr. Thomas passes his bar information on a used napkin, a purloined letter, the grandson says, "No, you don't get to read it, you don't get to read, you're their gal."

You smash the goblets into premature burial. One morning she finally asked, "Who owned your great, great, great, grandmother, gal?" She is old enough to know the answer, if you guess a lie is likely. She expects you to lie, she does not expect you to run.

Follow her around the room with your eyes first. She does not expect this either. Check the exits to ensure they're unlocked periodically until afternoon is a burp of whiskey.
Gather anything you own in the establishment—
the pack of gum, the extra lip gloss, yourself, secure a pink slip.
Demand the grandson signs. Demand he signs her name also.
Completely cover your tits while doing this.
Receive restitution.
Leave, Leave, Leave,
before you do.
Point to the portrait arm outstretched sparking
like a wand, tell the grandson,
“Their gal is so lovely,”
but you would not hang so delicately,
but you are free, and she is not.

SHE kept her cock taped between her legs – the agony of the restrained appendage filling with blood woke her most nights. I would lie still, pretending not to hear the weeps from the bathroom as she prayed for it to fall off. She once told me that God had to exist, because only a man was dumb enough to put her in a man’s body. She made jokes – attempts to mask the sadness. It was this sadness that led me to constantly watch her, believing that if I turned for a second, when I’d go to speak again I’d only hear an echo – now lost in the dark of her emptiness. I believed her sorrow was this black hole that would eventually devour everything. It was a sorrow that I had yet to understand.

She’d sit for hours at her old vanity, staring into nothing – it was easy to mistake her still face within the circular mirror for a sun-damaged, oval portrait. She was a painting that was slowly fading. The chipped, cedar desk she sat at was cluttered with makeup and old postcards, letters and photographs with inscriptions on the backs: all of which belonged to strangers. She
spent hours scouring estate sales and thrift stores to find these artifacts – purloined letters, she called them; they sat in boxes, surrounded by mountains of tattered clothes in vintage shops. Most people wouldn’t so much as glance at them, but Sophia took these items that several decades earlier, probably meant quite a bit to who they were intended for but eventually were donated to these places by families who had no purpose for them. Sophia gave them a purpose again. Making up stories and scenarios for the man at war who sent postcards back home to his infant son and eagerly waiting wife. She would sit smoking through a long cigarette holder she claimed was the authentic prop Audrey used in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*. That was all a lie in the real world, but a legend in ours – Hollywood folklore that was spread out like the cocaine we were doing in the back booth of seedy Santa Monica gay bars. I now struggle in separating most of this folklore from fact. The few memories I possess that I know to be authentic – those not yet tainted from time or the drugs ingested while making them – are now broken glass shards from that old vanity mirror. The reflections show a sixteen-year-old runaway watching her blow kisses at Sophia Loren on the television. That’s how she picked her name, Sophia. She, too, was a Latina bombshell. She looked a lot like Sophia Loren, right down to the small of her back that swayed out like she was asking for it. That’s what the guys we’d walk by on La Cienega said at least. If we were far enough and had enough drinks in us, she’d hike her dress up and rear the ugly head at them, usually scaring them off… sometimes turning them on. Despite the humor, all I’d focus on was the sadness.

I never knew details about her past or even her present. I just knew I was in Los Angeles without a place to stay. She told me she took a chance on me because no one had taken one on her. Before Sophia I didn’t know Christian Dior from Christian Louboutin. I had Levi’s and a few Beatles shirts, with hair to match. Sophia showed me well-dressed, and showed me how to get the suitors that would keep me that way. Every sidewalk was a catwalk with her – in fact, she taught me to light a cigarette while keeping a fast pace. It was important to be poised. Ironically, she’s also the one that told me whenever I’m in a fit with someone much larger (this wasn’t rare as I stood 5’10, barely hitting 120lbs) to always punch them in the throat. I couldn’t even begin to guess how many people I have punched in the throat since that day.

I stayed with her for two months before burning out on heroin and coke. I just woke up one morning and decided to leave. I taped a note to Sophia’s mirror thanking her, and telling her that one day we would both find our place – I didn’t understand that for some, happiness is a pill that comes in extended release. Had my understanding of depression been accurate back then, I think I would have stayed, understanding now that the severity of one’s mental illness is often contributed to by the dismissal of their words and beliefs by those around them. I try and see clearly where the lines get blurry and figure out if she had tried to tell me, if she was talking that whole time and no one listened.

I think about my dance with mental illness now, and try to pinpoint where it starts and where it ends. It always starts with Sophia – a friend who had been burned by the disease. I went back to L.A. a few years ago and discovered that Sophia’s tragedy, like most of her life, has become Hollywood folklore. Legend has it she’d gone to Venice Beach and gathered an audience as she took off her clothes, letting the flaccid, phallic object she’d kept hidden since diapers unravel – as if coming to terms with it finally. She stood at the edge of the waves, gas-can in hand and placed
Audrey’s cigarette holder in her mouth one last time. Scorned for so long, she’d finally decided to extinguish the fire that had been burning her – a premature burial for a girl who will one day just be an inscription on the back of my old, tattered letters.

Khia
Gaby Deimeke
We all dressed in black, except for the Marines and you, who wore dress blues, gold medallions, and the initials they stitched, which felt like purloined letters, etched afterthoughts for the afterlife.

Stars and stripes wrapped around your casket like a blanket statement. How many times did the priest rehearse that exhaustive speech? Welcoming us to this “premature burial” felt insincere postmortem. Saying you “will be missed” made me wonder why the bullet hadn’t. You were “a good man” doesn’t describe how you taught me to wash windows or flashed your .44 caliber anytime a boy went near me, nor did it conjure the O rings you created with Flor Domicanas like tiny floating clouds from the heaven where he’s saying you now reside.

I imagined you sitting in the pews, saying, “Who the fuck invited him?” Which forced me to smile for the first time since seeing that serious oval portrait the photographer tried to upsell me on, like the florist who told me for “only extra 9.99,” I could get “mo’ roses” in red, white, and blue; I swear how she said it, in her Asian accent, it sounded like “morose.”

I felt like we’d already paid enough for that.

I know it was worth it to you, Keith, but wonder if you witnessed the scene: The men in blue carrying you through this mass of black, watching you being lowered into U.S. land and encasing you, a misshapen bruise staring into a six-foot hole, rubbing dirt into a wound that will never heal.
AVERY gave Rudolph the Goldfish a premature burial. It was raining hard, and I tilted my head up, thinking it was the clouds’ gift to Rudolph. The sky was chlorine blue, and the sun slit our skin with strips of bright light – the clouds had no business ringing out onto our small ceremony, but still they did, surely a tribute.

I thought maybe I might share this suspicion with Avery, this suspicion that the puffs of white had some semblance of awareness that Rudolph’s gills were still lightly flapping in muted desperation for the water that used to come in excess. But then I remembered I was angry with Avery for killing Rudolph before his time in this unnecessary manner, so I kept looking at the sky, casting my silent thanks upwards, not to any possible Godlike form but to these massive giants of cotton candy condensation.

“Cam, you got anything to say?” Avery’s question came through the rain, syllables sneaking in between drops of water that looked more like invisible threads stretching from ground to sky.

I glanced at my neighbor and forgot to glare. “Does it even matter?” I asked, looking toward his palm, but instead of open and cupping a quivering fish, it was closed and tucked into his front pocket.

The small pile of muddied grass at his feet caught my attention next, and I stared as if powers of X-ray vision would occur to me simply by means of intent concentration.

“Guess not. Fish don’t have ears anyway,” Avery said, and I peeked back up at him quick enough to catch his grin.

Joking at a funeral. I wasn’t surprised, and hardly disgusted by him anymore. My exposure to Avery, after fourteen years of growing up beside him, had muted my sense of disgust, like one’s contempt for broccoli dampens over years of consumption until, as an adult, the food becomes cherished.

I didn’t quite cherish Avery. Sometimes, but not at that moment, at the site of Rudolph’s murder.

“I’m a bystander,” I said, accidentally.

“To what? Murder? It’s a fish. Chill out, Cam.” Avery was snickering.

Behind him was a rainbow, stretching out a little higher than his left shoulder, sort of protruding from his neck. The bits of sun that managed to reach us from between the clouds got caught amongst the freckles on his arms and the derisive amusement between the gaps of his teeth.

I wanted to hit the sneer from his lips, to cut my knuckles on his scorn, to bleed from his jeers, but the moment passed, and then I smiled back warily.

Avery was an adventurer, the only one I’d ever found in the stale suburbs we’d both been trapped in for fourteen years. I needed him for the life he breathed in me, and if the cost of
feeling alive was the life of my goldfish, I thought perhaps Rudolph wouldn’t mind so much.

“So what now, Cam?”

Burying my fish alive only took up ten minutes. There was the rest of the day to fill. No moment could be spared on a pulse that was not racing, a heart that was not thumping. It was a waste of our circulatory system, Avery said. Our bodies were meant to be strained.

I did not know what activity should follow Rudolph’s murder. I shrugged, and Avery was beside me, hitting my shoulder.

“Just a fish, Cam,” he said, like my lack of ideas came from prolonged grief over the scaled organism whose gills were probably filled with dirt and had stopped flapping.

“Yeah,” I agreed.

“Good. Let’s sneak into the Delgados’ again. I wanna see if they’ve got anything better in their fridge than last time.”

I followed Avery to the house across the street. The rain had soaked the shoulders of our t-shirts. I wished the Delgados’ had carpeting for our sneakers to leave prints on, but they’d ripped out the carpets that came with every house in the development and had wooden floors put in. Any traces Avery and I left could be wiped away completely, but even knowing this, my heart thumped in my ears from the moment I slipped into their open guest room window to the moment I climbed back out.

I didn’t know what I was more desperate for—Avery and I to be caught and everything to finally stop, or for our minute crimes to continue and for my heart to race on and on and on and never, ever slow.

*

The anniversary of Rudolph’s murder was announced with pebbles on my window.

I sat up and slid out of bed, fingering the crumbles at the corners of my eyes and limping, as one leg—the left—had gone numb from my sleeping position.

The pins and needles were coursing with vigor as I opened the window to my bright-eyed neighbor, waiting for me below.

He chucked another pebble upon seeing me, and I dodged just in time, cursing silently at the freshly invigorated wave of pain that the sudden movement coursed through my leg.

Avery’s laughter snuck through the tendrils of dawn and pulled me back to the window.

“Get down here, we’ve got a house call!” Avery whispered-shouted.

I glanced at my clock, noted that both my parents would be in transit to work. I had no excuse.

“Give me a second,” I called down, voice rasping from the sleep that had been stolen from me so that I could steal from someone else—theft, after all, was what Avery’s house calls always meant.

I brushed my teeth without looking in the mirror and dressed in the clothes I’d worn the day before, just a black t-shirt and jeans even though it was the centerfold of summer. I never wore shorts. Something about exposing more skin than necessary around Avery never really appealed to me.

In my backyard, Avery was standing against the back of my house and chucking pebbles at the rosebushes I’d helped my mother plant earlier that month.

“What’s up?” I asked, staring at the roses that had only just begun to bloom. My mom had pointed the buds out to me at dinner a week before, and I’d been amazed at how easily she
smiled. I wish I found it so easy to be happy. There’d be no need for Avery, then.
“A rabbit ran in there,” Avery said, and I realized he meant the rosebushes.
“Leave it. What do you want?”
“Visit to the Delgados’,” Avery said, stooping to pick up more pebbles.
I tasted toothpaste on my tongue and spat at the grass. Avery and I had stopped sneaking into the Delgados’ months before. It’d become too easy, hardly sport. They left all their windows open and never hid their valuables—even when they started disappearing.
In December, Avery had said he had enough pearl necklaces, fine china, and glossy cat figurines to satisfy him, and the Delgado’s was no longer a target spot.
“Why? I thought you were done with them. All they’ve got is cat statues anyway,” I reminded, choosing my words carefully.
On my fifteenth birthday in March, the Delgados’, an elderly couple who always seemed to need to lean on each other when standing still for brief moments, came over. I’d opened the door and felt my heart leap up to my throat, my skin heat quicker than dry leaves in the dead of summer.
Fifteen, they’d said while I tried to hear them over my heartbeat and the rush of my blood, was a big year in their country. I didn’t really know what country they came from—Mexico or some other place they spoke Spanish—but I just nodded like I knew.
They gave me a watch. A nice one. I didn’t wear it because I didn’t want Avery to know. He’d either break it or steal it or chuck it through one of their windows.

“I’m feeling nostalgic. What does it matter to you?” Avery asked, throwing his last pebble and slapping his hands together. “Let’s go.”
He didn’t ask me if I wanted to. He never did, and I never wanted him to.
We snuck through dawn, freshly laid eggs of dew flicking off my sneakers until we crossed the street, then flicking again as we crossed the Delgados’ lawn.
The guest room window was at the back of the house, and I followed Avery like I always did. He was first to enter and first to leave. Nothing had changed since our last visit to the Delgados’. Nothing would ever change—I knew this then, a sudden realization that stopped me in the middle of the Delgados’ guest room.
Avery had already left the room to scour the rest of the house, but I stood still on their wooden floor. My heart was not thumping. My pulse was not racing. I felt the opposite of alive. I was simply still, calm, not quite peaceful, but not far from it.
Across from me, my reflection stood equally still, an oval portrait in the mirror it was trapped in. I lifted a hand to break the stillness and waved at myself.
I looked miserable. Ashen. Listless.
I was suddenly fascinated by myself. I hadn’t looked at myself, at least not properly, in as long as I could remember. There was nothing in the mirror that could excite me, after all. I was too familiar with myself. Hated myself, on some level, for itching to get out of my own skin.
What right did I have to deny my own body? I didn’t know. I had no one to ask. Avery was not a person I could talk to. Sometimes I wondered if he was a person at all, not some
separate species from *homo sapiens* altogether, not a regression or an evolution, just a separate branch from our ancestors, one that existed only in him.

I wanted to be the creature he was. To let go of my *homo sapiens* tendencies towards right and wrong, morality, ethics, any thoughts at all, to only respond to the call of my heartbeat.

It was freedom that Avery hoarded in his greedy eyes and cocked smiles, and I hovered in his orbit in hopes that I might catch a strip of it.

The thoughts were hardly known, merely buried, unearthed slowly by each moment beside my neighbor—no, not beside, behind.

I followed. I preferred to follow. I was always the accomplice, never the thief; always the bystander, never the murderer.

“Io! Where you at?”

I stepped forward at the impatient call, wandered out of the guest room to the familiar landing where I found Avery stepping out of the Delgados’ family room, holding a calico cat statue in his left hand and a bottle of alcohol in his right.

“What is that?”

“Barcardi. Jackpot, baby.”

“You really want that cat?” I asked, discomfort prickling up my arms.

The watch had been a Rolex. Maybe the Delgados’ were well off, but it was still a freaking Rolex. I unearthed it from my sock drawer every night just to put it on for a few seconds before replacing it gingerly in the same box they’d given it to me, wrapped in green and yellow paper.

The least I could do was make Avery leave their damn cats alone.

“Yeah, it’s got weird devil eyes. I love it,” Avery said, lifting the cat and turning it toward him. He grinned at it fondly, but I knew he’d just end up smashing it against the side of the road later that day.

“Come on, leave the cat,” I said. I almost coughed on the words.

Avery laughed. It was a joke anyway. I didn’t care about the cat. I didn’t care about the Delgados. They were strangers, and Avery was my friend. Best friend. Partner in crime.

“Come grab one for yourself, then let’s get out. I’ll wipe the floors.”

I glanced down, observed that my shoes had trickled prints of dew onto their wooden floors. I wished Avery had forgotten to wipe them, but he never forgot. He was impeccable.

The cat I selected from their mantelpiece was all grey with one white spot on its back. I liked how cool it felt in my palm, and kept my hand tight around it as I followed Avery out of the house.

In my backyard—we never hung outside Avery’s house—I demanded I show him my selection, so I unfurled my fingers gently, keeping my palm slightly cupped as though I held a pool of water.

“Ha, looks like that fish you had,” Avery said, and I recurled my fingers.

“I guess,” I mumbled, but he wasn’t paying attention.

He was hurling his cat against the side of my house. It hit the stucco with a snapping sound, then bounced back a few feet away from where we stood, and Avery lunged at it.

“Damn thing’s tough,” he said gleefully, and threw it again.

The cat could have been real, and I doubted Avery would have acted any differently. Neither would I, standing beside him,
watching as this time, the figurine exploded in white, black, and brown shards that fell like rain and buried themselves in the dewy blades of grass.

“We should pick those up,” I said, pointing, while Avery whooped and jumped.

My mom loved to garden. She said she wanted to be as close to the earth as possible. She dug into the soil on her hands and knees, always ending up with grass stains on her jeans and sun stains across her cheeks.

“Nah, let’s grow some cat trees. What do you say, Cam, you want a cat tree in your backyard?”

I didn’t, but Avery didn’t ask questions to be answered.

“What next?” I asked, to distract Avery before he demanded I throw my own cat against the stucco.

“Your room.” Avery was walking towards my house before the words were even out of his lips. I’d left the backdoor open, and he let himself in, leading me to my own room and sitting on my bed while I stood against my dresser, slipping my cat into a drawer while Avery inspected the contents of my nightstand: my alarm clock, an empty cup, a can of fish food I kept forgetting to throw out, and my phone, still connected to its charger.

Avery picked up the cup and held the Bacardi between his thighs as he unscrewed the top and poured an inch-full.

“Want?” he asked, offering the bottle to me, and I shook my head while Avery slugged the cup dry.

He grinned at me; I hugged my arms around my waist.

“Got something special,” he said, placing the Bacardi and empty cup on my nightstand. The bottle was precariously close to the edge, but I stayed silent. Let the bottle fall. Let the carpet my parents hadn’t replaced with wood soak the alcohol into its worn fibers. Let the smell of liquor permeate throughout the house and force my parents to stop my affiliations with this boy, to stop his grins from ever reaching my eyes in their shamelessly gleeful way.

“Yeah?” I goaded, like he wanted me to.

“Purloined letter.”

“What?”

“Read something, will you? I swiped this, asshole,” Avery said, shaking his head and pulling an envelope from his back pocket.

I knew Avery didn’t read. He would never stand for sitting still long enough to let his eyes absorb anything from a paper. I didn’t know where he was getting this vocabulary from. Maybe his family. I knew nothing about them, other than that every day, his father parked so close to their house that the nose of his car kissed their garage door.

“What is it?” I asked, not moving from my perch against the desk.

My window was still open. Outside looked clogged with smoke, like there was a fire or a bunch of people smoking outside my window.

I breathed in deep, trying to fill my lungs with ashen fog.

“I just told you, Cam. A purloined letter.”

“I have no idea what purloined even is.”

“Yeah, use context clues or something. It’s stolen, idiot.”

“You stole that?”

“Purloined it,” Avery replied, smile stretching to distort his freckles into convoluted constellations.

I didn’t know if he was messing with me, but the vocab no longer held my attention. I drifted a step forward, toward the envelope he waved back and forth.

“It’s probably just a bill,” I said, still stepping forward.
“Nah, check it out.”
He offered the envelope to me, and I took it. The paper made a whispery sound against my skin, and it was soothing, the brief moment of it.
The outside of the envelope had no stamp or return address. In place of the Delgados’ address were the messily scrawled words, To Angela, incase of my untimely death.
“Who’s Angela?”
“Lady of the house, probably.” Avery snatched back the envelope and proceeded to rip it open, so violently I reached out to stop him. The moment our skin touched, I felt shocked and retracted.
His skin was candlewick hot. Inhuman.
“I’ll get a letter opener.”
“Are you joking?” Avery asked, glancing up at me like I’d said something crazy.
I silenced and watched him rip open the envelope, tearing the –th from the end of the scrawl across the front.
Something about Avery’s clawlike tearing seemed indecent. I looked down at the floor instead. Avery’s sneakers had tracked mud onto my carpet, too smudged to make coherent footprints. They would be untraceable. Could have been my muddy footprints, even though I’d left my sneakers at the back door.
“Holy shit.”
Avery’s nose was an inch from the letter, grasped tight in bitten fingernails. I’d never actually seen Avery biting his fingernails, but they were always ragged and torn, sharp against the skin if he ever grabbed me.
“What does it say?”
“It’s a confession,” Avery said slowly, eyes dragging up from the paper to my own face.
“Of what?”
I hated that Avery was making me ask questions, making me play into his stupid game. Detested him for it. Felt hot with my hatred, burned with it down deep past my skin and through my muscle so that I was sure my bones glowed white-hot.
Avery owed me this. He owed me this damn letter, should have let me open it the way I pleased, carefully and slowly and deliberately. He should have let me read it first, and I would have read it out loud, I would have shared this with him the very moment I could, I would never have strung him along with questions.
I’d never despised him so much as in that moment. It was irrational, but it was there, as present in that room as the bottle of Bacardi balanced precariously on my nightstand and the cat figurine I’d hid in my desk drawer so Avery wouldn’t shatter it against the side of my house.
“Of a secret,” Avery was continuing, and I knew my line, felt it like bile on my tongue but spoke it carefully without any venom.
“What secret?” I asked, pleaded, begged. That was how Avery would see it no matter how nonchalant I forced my voice to be. I knew, I knew.
Avery looked at me for another moment, then tossed the letter at me, so suddenly I didn’t manage to catch it and flailed with grasping hands for a moment as it fluttered to the floor, escaping my every attempt.
I snatched it up from the floor, then held it gently, hardly curling my fingers around the unfolded paper.
My breaths were quick and short. I had to blink several times before I could see the words.
You’re a fucking idiot Cam.

I read it twice before I heard the laughter. Coming from Avery, presumably, as were the words, “I got you—Your face! Complete dumbass, you thought it was a murder or some shit. Jeez, Cam, you’re a joke!”

My hands were shaking. I folded the letter back along the seams; it had been folded twice.

I swallowed my anger. Once, twice, almost choked, recovered.

Cam was grinning when I offered him the letter he’d obviously written himself, but he just brushed it aside, hitting it so that it fell from my limp fingers and fluttered back onto my mud-printed carpet.

“Keep it, idiot. You shoulda seen your face.”

I offered a wane smile, and Avery stood up from my bed, stretched and yawned before glancing at me with bright eyes.

“What next?”
A man a woman & fog disappearing
Lynne Knight

She walked through fog, actual fog rushing the eucalyptus trees that weren’t native, either, then brain fog that had set in with winter, with loss, & when she saw the Steller’s jay bossing the others away, she remembered a painful scene with him, so she stopped & shook herself like a dog out of water, shook & shook to slide the memories into the fog rushing past.

◊

She dreamed too much. Always the charge brought against her—mother, teachers, lovers: You dream too much. So when she read “Dreams are stronger than experience,” she copied it out into her notebook, made a sign for the kitchen wall in case her mother could read in her invisible form, or her lover in his less invisible form, meaning if he had a change of heart & returned to stand beside her, to connect the words with his rebukes of her, not always gentle, as he thought, as he swore he intended.

◊

She walked an hour every day. Rushing into the hills with the morning fog that often seemed a kind of mourning, wreathing houses gray, as if all life had gone out of them. Or as if the last heavy smoke of a conflagration rose from the ashes. Alchemists, who thought fire was a living thing that ate, that licked, regarded ashes as a form of excrement. She should burn his letters, the old blue shirt he’d given her to sleep in. Give him a premature burial.

◊

Her preoccupation with fire was preoccupation with sex: Everyone knew fire meant sex, he told her. Women who cleaned their houses, who rubbed & rubbed, were cleaning the impurities of desire away, or what they perceived as impurities. Yes, she said, but in the end we all die one way or another. He looked away, meaning once again she had missed his point. I’m not as blind as you think, she began, then heard herself talking to the window: he’d been gone a year by then.

◊

Some days she made herself remember what she thought of as the untoward moments. The unseemly moments, the moments of his going away from her. Him telling her, You’re trying to be sexy, but it’s not working in so many words. Turning away. Turning away. Him sitting at the table, eating food she had prepared for him, not saying a word about the care taken, the sacrifice, grace. Him sleeping afterwards, brutal sleep of the primitive, grunts & sighs beside her yet thousands of miles away. She lay considering him as if he had meaning like a dream. Useless activity: the meaning disappearing from her grasp like a purloined letter, snatched away in a moment of lost concentration.
In the dream he stood naked in the room while she pitied his shoulders, his knees she could see would not hold out much longer. The whiteness of his flesh revolted her & yet, she thought, I have moved my tongue all over it. It was a moment like waking inside the dream, knowing she was still dreaming: nowhere else to go but deeper into the oval portrait of him she’d turned to face the wall.

Our dreams are months ahead of us. Had she dreamed him? Oh, he’d been there, in her bed, at her table, but had she dreamed him first? Was he all the ones she felt the slight revulsion toward even as she was drawn to them? Ineluctably drawn: word she woke more than once longing to use in a sentence she could utter with such unanswerable emphasis he would disappear like a fire before her, be reduced to nothing but the lightest ash: gray, easily swept up, no trace of him left.

She had said it to everyone she knew: I’m so in love. Fool. Dreamer. You dream too much. His resentment, that she was making too much of it. Because they weren’t young. They knew about heat & ardor, ardor & love. I’m ardent, she thought, as if it were a material—flint, useful. But in the back of her mind, wherever that really was—the storehouse of dreams? another oval portrait reversed?—she knew he was an ordinary man, & she an ordinary woman. The story of their passion would be nothing but ash in a month. A lunar cycle. Why not drag in the moon, she thought, for measure. For coldness & perspicacity (word like ineluctable she’d been longing to use). She heard herself at the window: Too much transparency: a lack of depth, of perspicacity. Such a relief, to have turned the oval portrait to the wall.

So she walked every morning into fog. Real fog, brain fog. He was like a rebound lover, a friend said. After your mother died, you needed something warm; one body is as good as another. Sometimes he stood at the window beside her, regarding the poverty of what they had come to, been reduced to. A man a woman & fog disappearing. You figure out what the lack of commas means, she said aloud to the back of the oval portrait, as if she were watching them disappear from a letter as it burned.
ON the corner of Clements Street and 6th Avenue, just south of the Golden Gate Bridge, there is a vintage bookshop called Blue Monarch Books. The shelves are filled with authors with names like Atticus Lish and Benjamin Naki and Ottessa Moshfegh. Any mention of Nicholas Sparks will earn one the unspoken disdain of the underground literary community.

Inside Blue Monarch Books, the air is thick with the smell of mildew and dry paper. Motes of dust glitter in the sunlight. A potted plant wilts on the windowsill. Books, curling newspapers, and dusty vinyl records are heaped on overflowing counters and lined in sagging shelves, stored underneath the one fat sofa and stacked in precarious piles on the carpet. There is an oval portrait of Virginia Woolf hanging on the wall, her timeless face frozen in melancholy pensiveness. Someone’s finger has traced a false smile on the grimy glass.

A little bell tingles cheerfully upon one’s entrance. A green awning stretches over the front door and the large display window. There is a pleasant view of Clements Street, the overpass of Highway 1, and the greenery of Golden Gate Park. Seagulls glide overhead. Briny air blows off the bay. Above, the sky is an immodest blue. Below, tufts of grass push through the tarmac with a sort of blissful, ignorant optimism.

Outside of Blue Monarch Books, someone has dropped their books in the middle of the road.

“Taxi! Taxi!”
It passes the man, disappearing around the next corner.
Perhaps the man will get a trolley instead.
Or perhaps the man will walk. The sky is blue, and the world is beautiful.

They are called Kikokiko in Aotearoa, the Land of the Long White Cloud. Pōua told me that Kikokiko live in the spaces behind mirrors. They are lost souls who have become trapped between the worlds of light and shadow. Their spirits never left the earth after their premature burials; Paikea, the First Father, recognized the evil in the Kikokiko, and cursed them to live forever behind the reflections of the living. Pōua told me that our mirrors lie to us because the Kikokiko do not love the Māori. They mock us with our faces. When we look at ourselves, dark shadows daub our cheekbones, like the Tā moko tattoo worn by my ancestors. Our eyes are white, the color of fly eggs, and our lips are thin and sneering. The Kikokiko want our wairua, our souls, to forget our bodies. If our wairua cannot recognize our faces, Pōua warned me, then we will become as lost as the Kikokiko. We will wander forever between the world of light and the world of shadow, our souls drifting between mirrors like butterflies between flowers.
“That doesn’t seem so bad,” I said to Pōua.

Pōua looked sad. “But Ben,” he told me, “all the flowers are dead.”

My Pōua is full of stories. But I do not think he fears the Kikokiko. I think he fears the lost souls behind our own faces. We do not know who we are, or why we are here, and why all the flowers are dying.

“According to chaos theory, which was derived from Henri Poincaré’s three-body problem, the butterfly effect occurs when a small change in an initial state of a deterministic nonlinear system can result in large differences in a later state. In other words, a beat of a butterfly’s wings can change the course of the future.”

“A question, Professor.”

“Yes, Ottessa?”

“Why butterflies?”

Paper kites soar above the woman’s head. A dragon with scales of Purloined Letters (Edgar Allan Poe-themed) and Tell-Tale Hearts, now pulpy folds of paper-mâché, roars as he swoops by. He snaps at passing butterflies, their gossamer wings passing unharmed between his jaws of old book bindings and glue.

Tiny white clouds pepper the firmament – holes in the roof of the world. The blue butterflies are the same color as the sky, pirouetting on the wind like wafers of plaster.

As she watches the butterflies dart amongst the kites, as she traces the mosaic of color fractured across the sky, the woman doesn’t realize she is smiling. She doesn’t see the taxi. And she doesn’t hear the screams.

Many entomologists fill the syringe with a full milliliter of water. Atticus does not. He has no intention of blowing up his specimens. They are what they are, however small, however fragile. He injects a Karner Blue (Lycaeides melissa samuelis) with half a milliliter of warm water. The needle goes into the abdomen, and the dehydrated husk swells. Atticus lifts the Karner Blue with a pair of his wife’s eyebrow tweezers and rests it on a wire rack.

Hours pass. A day. Several days. The Karner Blue is soft and pliable after a week. Atticus prefers Ento-Sphinx pins for his balsa boards. He grasps the Karner Blue between his thumb and forefinger. With the other hand, he pushes the pin gently but firmly through the exoskeleton. He is careful not to spear too many holes, but he manages to prick a finger. A tiny teardrop of red spatters the countertop, but does not stain the pristine Karner Blue. Atticus presses the pin into the balsa. By the late evening, the display in on the wall, next to the Painted Lady and the Viceroy. Viceroy are Batesian mimics of the poisonous Monarchs. Painted Ladies are just beautiful to look at.


On the corner of Clements Street and 6th Avenue, just south of the Golden Gate Bridge, there is a vintage bookshop called Blue Monarch Books. It is the sort of place filled with authors with names like Atticus Lish and Benjamin Naki and Ottessa Moshfegh. There are kiddy hours on weekends and novel readings on
weekdays. Open mic night is Thursday at seven. Recite us a poem. Tell us a story. Tell us why the silence of our lives can be broken by a butterfly wing, but rarely invaded by screams of terror or shouts of anger. Why are our echoes so much louder than our voices? How can the pages we rip out of old books fly again? If we fold our own wings, can we fly, too? Why is there more meaning in a million broken things than in the wholeness of our lives?

On the corner of Clements Street and 6th Avenue, just south of the Golden Gate Bridge, beyond the shade of a green awning and in view of large storefront window, a woman has dropped her books in the middle of the road. Something is wrong with the curve of her back. Something is wrong with the curve of the yellow car hood. The large storefront window is paneled with glass. The windshield of the taxi is not.

On the corner of Clements Street and 6th Avenue, sunlight glitters over books and broken things. Pages flap open to pictures of Karner Blues and Painted Ladies and Viceroy, or Monarchs, or perhaps both. The butterflies gaze out from our old books, stare at us with Kikokiko eyes, and remind us that we are not all that we seem.

“I should’ve grabbed that taxi. It’s too hot out here.”
Blurry Season
Rachel Mayes

The dishes are mountains, a moat of knives in the sink. I know my house is a mess. Overdue and purloined letters of eviction pushed aside, cheap beer and Edwardian oval portraits underneath my bed. I never claimed to be Houdini, escaping his premature burial without a head, a heart.
“I’M full,” Eric said.

“That kind of attitude makes me sick,” Vicky said. She licked her lips with her forked tongue. She ordered cherry pie, and Eric ordered crème brûlée, and that was the beginning of the end.

When cherry pie exploded in Vicky’s mouth and ran down her anemic cheeks, her eyes rolled back. As she choked, Eric’s first thought wasn’t to save her. He wondered what her gaping mouth was going to say next. Everyone in the restaurant turned and looked at them with startled eyes atop mouths that went back to grazing and grinning after just a half-second of Vicky’s retching.

She went on and on. Eric believed she was faking. She did a lot of that. When it appeared that most of the pie had regurgitated upon her skinniness, she started taking normal breaths again, and without skipping a beat she went back to talking about her last boyfriend.

“He had a great, adventurous spirit and creative drive,” she said, “and he was hungry all the time, hungry for more, but he had the kindest eyes.”

Eric watched what was left of the pie travel down her bulging throat. Her eyes were little oval portraits of greed. They settled back on Eric. “Todd made more money than you or anyone else I’ve dated,” Vicky said, for the hundredth time.

Eric just shrugged.


Eric was about to stand up and leave, but after that last comment he decided to stay, accepting the idea of premature burial, hers or his, either way. Vicky reached for a chicken leg that Eric left untouched on his dinner plate, which she and commanded the waiter not to remove from the table. She ate the skin before the meat. She grazed then devoured. She sent the stripped bone down her throat, then she scanned the table for any other items that might belong inside her. She didn’t look at Eric, though. He was no final power, in her eyes. She had stopped wanting his flesh, as Eric had stopped wanting hers. Vicky talked about her old boyfriend so often that Eric knew more about him than about Vicky. Eric knew Todd had married another woman and had kids that were running amok all over Vicky’s neighborhood. Vicky wanted to punish them. She said this tight lipped-tight lipped. It was the only time Eric ever saw Vicky so tight-lipped. She shimmered in the bloody light of the restaurant. She shimmered as if far away in a truer light, in a place where she belonged.

“Why don’t you like spicy things?” Vicky asked. “If you search more for spice, then spice might reach back to find you.” Her eyes turned blue then brown. She took the pepper shaker and unscrewed the lid and poured a little pepper onto her tongue. Then she tilted the shaker and poured it all in her mouth. Black
bits stuck in the cherry pie filling that was smeared all over her. She started coughing again but kept going. Eric took out a pen and piece of paper and wrote a note to himself. Vicky grabbed the note and read it aloud: “Prayer list...,” she sneered. “Is this about me? How rude. There you go again. You can’t tell me to my face, but you can tell God.” She left the note on the table.

Eric and Vicky were supposed to meet her parents after dinner. “My parents may not like you,” Vicky said, “but they never like anyone, except they loved Todd.” She wiped her face with the tablecloth. Her dress got caught beneath the leg of her chair and ripped, exposing more of her wet flesh. She started gnawing on the table. Eric did not connect with her fugitive hungers and never could. She ate wood and white cloth, as if it was her favorite snack. Eric stayed calm. He ate his crème brûlée.

Eric hoped Vicky actually believed in God. He started praying for her soul, but not for her salvation. She started choking again. She lasted in this turmoil a while, so Eric supposed she was God-fearing and that this was keeping her afloat, second-by-second. Yet she kept talking about her old boyfriend: “Todd is a real man who can kill any enemy if he wants to, because he is focused and confident. He is a man who is not afraid of time’s dangers.”

Vicky’s eyes went beetle-black and started bleeding. She continued eating the table. Eric looked at the last two bites of his dessert.

“Why don’t you just stand up and leave me if you don’t like my company?” Eric asked.

“Maybe sometimes I like feeling full, too,” Vicky said. “I want to settle down and stop moving all the time. Perhaps our whole affair is temporary, but we’ll see what time offers.”

While Vicky was busy eating the table, Eric swapped the note he had written with a blank piece of paper, in sort of a purloined letter (Edgar Allan Poe-themed) move. Vicky ate that, too. Eric looked at the last two bites of his dessert.

“What do you really know about Todd?” Vicky asked.

Eric told her the truth. “I know everything, thanks to you. Now I’m really starting to feel full.”

Vicky dismissed Eric with a wave of her hand. She didn’t stop at the table. She started gnawing on the candle. God. She isn’t afraid of fire. Vicky glowed and laughed. She started talking about the taste and texture of the candle, about its length and girth. She kept eyeing Eric’s dessert. Eric pulled it further from her reach.

“Say, Vicky, perhaps you could repeat that story you told the other day...the one your cosmetologist told you. The story about what happened in the hair salon.” Eric wasn’t listening the second time she told the story. He wanted her to repeat it in full while he finished his crème brûlée, but that was a mistake. It was that recollection that diverted Vicky’s attention to her own hair. Eric couldn’t compete with such durable passions.

“Look how long my hair is,” Vicky said. “It is like spaghetti, one of my favorite dishes. I suck it. There is so much of it. I will never be full of it. It is so long and soft.” She continued describing what she was doing as if Eric wasn’t witnessing the moment. She ripped her hair from its roots. Her breasts swelled. “I hope it will be sunny in Miami.”
Their trip was still weeks away. “My mother’s birthday is that week,” Eric said, “so I’m not sure if I’ll be going with you.”

“You don’t have a choice,” Vicky said. “We’ll have our own cake. She can be there in spirit.” Vicky laughed, which made her choke more.

Why Eric had stayed with this woman for so long was becoming clearer to him: it was the outline of her in his life. An outline without substance, and at that moment she was all hair, and she was devouring it with demonic ambition. She winked at Eric, but he felt nothing. He touched himself and felt nothing. Every facet of her affection ended in death, and if that was the way it was going to be, then Eric was going to have to choose his own terms, and in choosing his own terms he chose the perfect crime: neglect of the already-neglected.

The waiter returned with the check, but Eric waved him away. He didn’t want any distraction from the last bit of Vicky’s feasting. Eric muttered words. Vicky snarled them. When she couldn’t swallow any more hair, she started gagging. Eric waved to the waiter to return. Eric ordered two shots of tequila. He drank his right away.

Eric rehearsed Vicky’s death in his mind. In that moment, she went back and forth. She kept stuffing her mouth and talking, such a spinster in showing Eric and the whole world what her death might look like. Eric was ashamed. Vicky was dying. Eric could see where she was going to end. He had no idea where she started. That part was all a blur. Nor could he remember where they started as a couple, and as his thoughts drifted back in time, Vicky stopped talking. Eric was a little afraid of her silence. He was no longer sober, but he was composed, and as Vicky’s hair disappeared into her mouth, Eric knew what she was getting herself into, and he knew that she knew that he knew. They competed for space on a high-wire high wire, a last slice of space. They both froze. Eric kicked around their future. Their future was a tiny ball in a tiny field of play. She was no longer his. She was only passing through, as they all do. He didn’t neglect her. She neglected him. She dumped him in a jungle, and then she left. Eric drank her tequila.

Vicky let out a ragged wheeze. Eric envisioned her as an old rag, swollen but still crafty. God, have mercy. Vicky wiggled her wretched butt. She wanted Eric to follow, but he paid the check instead. Vicky started talking again.

“You’re thinking in a very geometric way,” she said, “just like a man.” Vicky spoke of shadows. She was herself a world of shadows. Eric tried to block her voice, but she sounded like far away music. Eric had to strain to hear her.

Eric could feel himself growing. He started feeling less like a maggot, and a world he’d been missing manifested before him. Millions of patterns. He was already an exhausted soul. He was exhausted just thinking of the new possibilities and how refreshing it was going to be to be ruled by what was invisible but true.

After the last lick of his dessert, Eric tossed the spoon to his left and the bowl to his right, and in the middle of his field of vision was a creature already rotted and gutted. Todd was there, too, a seed-like pod. Eric tossed them both out. Even as Vicky choked on her hair, she kept trying to play kissy-kiss with Eric, but all he saw was flesh and blood. Everything bubbled forth, but Eric wasn’t going to fall for anything false ever again.

The table was half gone, and Vicky was more than half gone, but she didn’t give up. She managed to gurgle some facts about Todd that were new to Eric. “He is starting to go bald,” she said.
“You look sad, what’s wrong?”

Eric ran his fingers through his own thinning hair. “Nothing,” Eric said.

“Turn away if you don’t want to watch this,” Vicky said.

Eric closed his eyes, but not because she suggested it. He had to picture Todd one last time. Eric wanted Vicky and Todd to leave his life at the same time.

“You could at least pretend to grieve, for once,” Vicky said. “Todd didn’t show any signs of grief when his mother died. You two are the same, in that respect.” Vicky regurgitated wood and wax onto the floor.

Eric kicked it away. He sprang from his chair and retrieved the spoon he had tossed. The spoon had a tiny bit of cream on it, and he attempted to feed that to Vicky. “You need more,” Eric said. “You need to try this. It is so sweet. Lick it and see for yourself.”

Instead, Vicky fed Eric some more information about Todd. How he was in the Navy for a short time. How he was an artist. How his paintings were bright and sexy. Death-bound, she did not cease talking and eating the table and choking on it. Too bad. It was a nice table.

Eric stretched his arms wide. The room went quiet again, just for a half-second, as before, but no one interfered. Eric could feel wind in his hair. On her knees, Vicky was a vile hole, all smoke and shadows. “Don’t be afraid,” she said. “Play the fool and you’ll be cool.” That smile again. That icy slit. “Tomorrow, when this is all over, I have to go shopping for a new dress.”

Eric left the spoon on the floor before her and stepped back. He was hungry, again. Hungry enough for a second dessert. There was an ice cream shop around the corner. That was Eric’s immediate goal, and he took small, slow steps toward it. When Eric looked back at Vicky, he had to squint to find her. She blended into everything. Eric looked at the floor. There was stain upon stain. It looked like someone just gave up and smudged smut everywhere, trying to cover every square inch of what was there before. Trying to cover up for things gone bad. Eric smiled and breathed a sigh of relief. Brown was his new favorite color.
Please tell me I’m not the only one bothered by the Hadron Super Collider—
the seventeen-mile tunnel shaped like
Rembrandt’s oval portrait “Bearded Man in a Wide-Brimmed Hat”—
and in which European physicists,
with beer breath, plan to generate collisions of protons at the speed of light.
This will either prove the existence of leftover dark matter from the Big Bang
or wipe out the earth. Keep in mind, most of these physicists are guys who got D’s
on their seventh-grade science projects and now would like nothing more than to zap the earth just to get back at their teachers.

At full power, the collider will surely plunge the planet into a Black Hole.
Our atomized bodies will scatter
to premature burials in far-flung heavens. Physicists claim this will be less painful than an “atomic wedgie” which some of us suffered in high school—those halcyon days when we sat at our desks with innocent smirks whenever English Lit teachers made mention of the purloined love letters from King Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn.

I spent my nineteenth summer daydreaming about air conditioning. I was obsessed with it. Bridget would follow behind me as I limped through the heat from store to store, meandering strip malls and touring every fast food restaurant in town just to get a taste of that cold, filtered air. We were asked to leave Staples more than once after spending all afternoon sitting in the demo office chairs and talking about death. We were hated by the baristas and waitresses at every coffee shop and diner where we’d order one cup of coffee and cash in on free refills until closing time. The manager at Wendy’s waited expectantly for our visits and told us each day that we looked underfed, suggesting we purchase more than our usual small fry to share. Finally, we’d slog through the mid-afternoon humidity back to Bridget’s home in the trailer park, where we’d sit in front of the fan and play Super Mario until we either fell asleep or passed out from heat exhaustion—whichever came first.

We weren’t the only degenerates loitering for survival that...
summer. Almost everyone in town was stealing relief one way or another—we just stuck out like sore thumbs. After a lifetime of snide comments and outright bullying, there wasn’t a temperature high enough to make me wear shorts in public, so the owners and employees of every sweetly refrigerated shop in town came to know me as “that crazy girl wearing Tripp pants in July.” Meanwhile, Bridget’s wheelchair was old enough to have bought us beer, and its electric motor made a frantic humming sound as she used it to cut in line at cash registers. Seeing as how we looked like a skit from a Comedy Central show, we had trouble blending into the endless crowds migrating from vent to vent as the sun turned pavement into putty outside.

On one particularly nasty afternoon, we made the treacherous journey to the grocery store, where we returned all of Bridget’s father’s empty beer bottles for their five-cent deposit. This involved the precarious act of hanging garbage bags full of glass from every protruding hook on her chair, which not only endangered her and our precious income source, but made us look twice as hilarious as we panted audibly in the shoulder of a busy road.

“Remind me that it’s worth it, Carrie,” Bridget begged. “There’s at least twelve bucks here, Bridge,” I groaned, feeling sweat marks form on my shoulders, over which I had slung two additional garbage bags. The bag on Bridget’s lap clanged noisily as she tried automatically to verify my estimation. “That’s an iced latte each today, and hopefully coffee at the diner tomorrow as well.” “You’re an optimistic girl.” “Tell that to my shrink.” We both laughed, slowing a little to catch our breaths.

“I don’t know what you’re complaining about, anyway. You’re lounging in that genuine pleather chair.” Bridget sucked her teeth. “You’re going to need to get me the number for that shrink.”

We took several ecstatic deep breaths as we crossed the threshold to the grocery store, ambling over to the bottle return machine and opening the first two bags. Bridget sighed. “What I wouldn’t give to be one of those cucumbers,” she said. “Curled up in a refrigerated bed all day.” “What I wouldn’t give for a premature burial,” I replied dryly. “Great band name, Premature Burial,” Bridget said. I pulled my phone out of my pocket and entered this into my ongoing list of great band names, leaving sticky fingerprints on the screen from the beer residue. “I wish your dad would at least have the decency to finish these things,” I said. “The dregs are making my hands sticky.” “Maybe we could collect the dregs and get like three or four full beers for ourselves,” Bridget said thoughtfully, her eyes still on the empties going into the machine. I laughed a little too hard at this and ended up snorting uncontrollably, which of course coincided perfectly with Brian’s arrival. He wore a store uniform and one of those big reflective vests over it, and he was pushing five carriages in front of him, and yet somehow I couldn’t see a bead of sweat on him. My face turned bright red and I looked back toward my machine, but just as he passed behind us, he whimpered, “Hello.” I whipped around to reciprocate, accidentally puncturing a hole in one of the garbage bags hanging from Bridget’s chair with my ornate pants. Beer bottles crashed and clinked all across the floor, and Brian was nowhere to be seen. Now it was Bridget’s turn to laugh until she snorted.
“You sound like an animal,” I said vindictively as I stooped to pick up bottles.

“At least I have my dignity,” she responded, sucking beer residue off of her fingers.

An hour later, the barista at Starbucks handed us our lattes. The store was completely full, but that didn’t scare Bridget and me into leaving. With every seat and table in the place taken, she wedged herself into a corner between the counter and the window, and I leaned inconveniently beside her. The air conditioner hummed at full blast to keep everyone inside alive, but still we all wore scowls on our faces except Bridget, who had learned through her long tenure in that chair to find a certain perverse pleasure in being in someone’s way, especially when that someone couldn’t bring themselves to ask her to move. The baristas sighed audibly as they reached over and around her for cinnamon shakers and iced tea mix, but she smiled contentedly and sipped her frothy drink, saying nothing.

“So are you gonna make a move on that boy or what?” she asked. I rolled my eyes as far back into my head as I could, then regretted it as I went temporarily light-headed.

“Not. Interested.”

“No, of course not. Just disinterested enough to throw five dollars worth of beer bottles across the floor at him.” I scoffed at this.

“I dropped those bottles because of my supreme dedication to high fashion,” I said, pointedly jingling the many spikes and rings hanging from my pants. “Not because of any smelly boy.”

“He smelled fine to me,” Bridget said, pursing her lips over her frayed plastic straw.

“Good, then you ask him out,” I said. “I’ll be your wingman. I’ll help you.” Bridget laughed.

“Sure, you’ll be extremely helpful if I want to assault him with refuse. Or maybe write him a gothical poem or something.”

“Gothical is not a word, Bridget.”

“Well, you would know.” We both laughed and began pitching lines for this romantic poem. “I yearn for you, as the day yearns for the night,” I recited dramatically.

“We shall never meet face to face, for my face is usually three feet below your face.” Bridget held the back of her hand to her forehead.

“That’s fucked up,” I laughed. An old man at the next table grunted in surprise. I went on as though I hadn’t heard him. “My black heart beats for your embrace, but like, it’s totally casual.”

“That’s why I’ve sent you this purloined letter,” Bridget finished. I tilted my head.

“Purloined?”

“Yeah, remember? That word for English class, we spent a whole day on it. Poe or something.”

“Yeah, but I don’t think it fits there. It doesn’t mean what you think it means.”

“Then what does it mean?”

“I don’t know, but definitely not anything you’re trying to get across in this letter. It doesn’t mean ‘I wanna rip all your clothes off with my teeth—’”

“Can I get anything else for you two?” A barista cut into our conversation loudly. I looked around to find everyone in the coffee shop silently staring at their phones, many with bright red faces.

“No. We’re all set.” Bridget said, shoving me out of the way with her chair and heading for the door. I took a deep breath of
cold air before setting foot in the summer heat and beginning the long walk back to Bridget’s place.

Not long after that, the sun finally disappeared for the day, though you could still feel its heat in the air. We were both lying on the floor of Bridget’s cramped living room with a fan oscillating between us. We were playing *Super Mario World*, and I was just finishing explaining to Bridget how I’d be able to program an even better game once I saved up for my own computer.

“With the software they have available over the counter these days, I could easily make this level twice as long,” I said. “They have the stuff out front at the computer store we were at on Tuesday. Anybody could do it.”

“Maybe they’re afraid if the level was any longer, it would be monotonous instead of fun,” Bridget said faintly.

“My game would not be for such weak-hearted posers,” I said. Bridget walked through the same false door for the second time.

“Go through the oval portrait,” I said.

“Huh?”

“The oval portrait, to your left. Go through there.”

“Oh,” Bridget handed the controller to me. “You take over, I need a break.” She rubbed her eyes and cracked her neck a few times.

“You all right?” I asked.

“Yeah. Just the heat, as usual.”

“Look at it this way, Bridge—better that we boil in our skin than summer break be over.” She said nothing. “Right?” I asked uncomfortably.

“It’s not summer break if you’re not doing anything in the fall, Carrie,” she said, trying to attach a joking lilt to an obvious jab.

“It’s just, like, summer.”

“Ouch,” I murmured. She watched me play in silence for a long while.

“Listen, seriously, just sign up for one class with me. Financial Aid will pay for it.”

“I don’t want to go to college, Bridge.”

“Trust me, MCC is not college. It’s just something to do, you know? While you figure out what you wanna do.”

“I don’t need any help with that,” I said. “I’ve got plenty of ideas.”

“And you’re gonna fund them by returning my dad’s empties?” She pantomimed holding a calculator. “A twelve pack a day, minus your expenses for coffee… Wow, you’ll have your dream computer in a hundred years!”

“All right,” I said. “Forget it. Don’t worry about me.” Another long silence fell between us. Longer this time.

“Carrie, I just don’t want to feel guilty, as though I left you behind.”

“Do not worry about me, Bridge,” I said in a measured tone, and we both felt the striking of an actual nerve this time. No more pep talks disguised in jokes. I fixed my gaze on the screen and Bridget, in typical Bridget fashion, scrambled for something witty to say.

“You could take Lit 203 with me. Brian is in it, I think.” Calmly, I went to the pause menu in the game and saved my progress. I turned off the console and got up, pulling on my shoes. “What are you doing?” Bridget asked. I didn’t answer. Frantically, she began pulling herself towards her chair. She struggled to get herself up into it, accidentally hooking a belt loop on one of the foot rests. I knew her well enough not to help her.
“I gotta head home,” I said at last. “See you, Bridge.” I let myself out before she could follow me. I heard her chair whizzing to life and bumping into all the furniture cluttered into the tiny trailer as she tried to catch up. She cursed through her teeth a few times. Her father didn’t look up from his magazine in the kitchen as I slipped out the front door and made my way along the dirt path between all the trailers in the park. Just for a second, before I rounded the corner and lost sight of her home, I felt a twinge of guilt for disappearing on Bridget. But that kind of conversation is like extreme heat to me, and I react with survival instincts. My only thought is escape and relief. After a while, I arrived at my own trailer and made the split second decision to walk past it, back into town, wondering if there might be somewhere still open with air-conditioning.
The Garden
Julie Lunde

We would whisper it to each other in the dark: *colorless green ideas sleep furiously*. The idea of it would light up the room, too bright for sleep.

In the morning, we would sneak into the potato pantry and gouge out their eyes with carving knives. We’d tuck them into pockets like gumballs, extra change; they would roll at my puns.

That would be the start of our plot. We would buy other seeds, later—carrots, heirloom tomatoes, jalapeño peppers—packets etched with their oval portraits, promises of green.

The ground would swallow them all whole. You would take this as a model and swallow up my vowels, purloined letters you hacked out to make me a nickname.

Then we would chew our lips and wait for them to rear their heads like mermaids out of a dirt ocean.

Summer would wear through and paint our mouths wound red. Our baskets would stay empty. We would start to worry over the weather with something less than love.

I’d cut your hair at the end of each month, and you’d still bring my water to bed. We wouldn’t talk about things not growing, or the watered earth that stayed too dry.

One night I would bring the glass to my mouth and choke on the dull soil. You would look away, consoling yourself with leftover letters, begging the I’s to flower again.

They wouldn’t. This is a premature burial for the unsown. I plant my seeds in cemeteries to practice the art of grief. When you left, I would not miss you.
When it All Falls Down
Liv Radue

THE first spike of concern is for gas. Without this precious commodity, how will they get to where they need to be? There is work to be done yet, errands to run, trips to be taken. The playgrounds and the beaches still have visitors, even as the store lines lengthen, the shelves growing bare. It isn’t long before they complain that the rush on bread and milk extends to the unlikeliest targets. Even the lima beans are gone. The plastic cups are also ransacked. Who has time for dishes in the midst of crisis? What strikes as extravagance seems an example of foresight once the water runs brown.

The grid holds longer than expected, though it is said that any day, they will have to walk out their front doors to discover the temperature, actually speak to one another to find out the news, and go to bed with the sun. It is the last that causes the biggest uproar. Observing them from above, we thought losing their access to information would be the biggest defeat, but their thirst for illumination is stronger than they can collectively remember.

We felt the moment the lines went dead beneath our feet, the hum long silent. They continue to keep their lamps in place, their laptops plugged in, the furniture all pointed toward a blank and pointless television; to move these relics would be a premature burial of everything they thought they held dear—everything they hope will return.

The days are still warm, and in some respects, their hardships can yet be viewed as an adventure. They live in a storybook of their own making, not knowing how many pages they get to turn before the last chapter closes. They craft tales for the young, invoking long ago times, tamping down the rising fear.

Around the time the power leaves, other conveniences fall like dominoes. One of the first is the trash collection. Forlorn barrels and sacks sit on the sidewalk, waiting weeks for trucks that do not come. Soon, they move them farther away from the houses, filling the unused streets, the horrid stench too much for them. The smell has never bothered us, and we enjoy the bright and shining sight spread on the ground below. Even as they have less to throw away, the piles mount, creating walls between the street sides. I have heard those in the country have an easier time, only their ravines and distant fields subtly filling. I am glad to be where all the action is.

These smells and manmade mountains introduce new noises. Raccoons and nature’s other scavengers are the first to wake them with their loud rustling. We have always been silent in our explorations. Then, as things grow leaner, humans aren’t too far behind. This is a new type of competition. If there is evidence of empty cans and packages of food, looters will perhaps think more is to be found in the houses themselves. Shifts are named and family members placed on guard, their faces peering out dark
windows like oval portraits of suspicion. They never look up. If they did, what would they think of our black faces staring down, heads cocked and eyes unblinking? Would they envy us, as our lives have barely changed? After all, we can still fly away.

The onset of the cold diminishes some of the noise, but it awakens a new paranoia, especially in the cities. Parks are ravaged of any trees small enough to carry home. Too few know green wood isn’t what they need. We hear them through their closed windows, debating and quarrelling amongst themselves. They say they will burn their dining sets, forsake all their books. Too many emotions lay tied to those items, so the suitable first sacrifices are the tax forms of years past and the instruction manuals for devices nevermore to be used. Then come the faded drawings and purloined letters from childhood hope chests, even before the chests themselves. Perhaps they cannot bear to look at the empty space it would leave on the floor, the faded paint it may reveal on the wall. Finally, when looking at the solid tables gracing their homes, the question of “Where will our children eat?” no longer matters, as there is nothing left to feed them.

Pages of fairytales join the smashed legs of chairs and occasional tables. Stories are no longer worth telling; “happily ever after” is a phrase they can no longer bring themselves to breathe. Novels and encyclopedias are consumed by the armload, knowledge and the words of others only warming their hands for minutes before the search for more must begin. Yearbooks come before the stacks of photos, but still, there is no need for remembering. “It is too dark to see them anyway,” they tell themselves.

It is in this cold night that they look out their windows once more, no longer in such a state of panic and fear, though the feelings still exist. They look up into the night sky, finally seeing the stars in the darkness. As the last ember dims, they long for the lights of their neighbors’ homes. If only they had flocked together... If only they hadn’t been so suspicious, so selfish in caring only for themselves, they think perhaps one fire could have warmed them all.

With nothing left to watch, we leave our perch to find greener pastures, a few fallen black feathers the only trace we were ever here.
At Lizzie’s Grave
Lindsay Miyamoto

As dull earth rains over her coffin cold,
I smooth my skirt, my hair, uneasy the wait.
Her husband must soon leave the morning’s hold
To me and this premature burial’s preying fate.

No oval portrait, no keepsake to prize
From the wreck of times past, spent with my sole desire.
We whored ourselves, thinking it lies:
Romances are raised by others’ sanction or ire.

I remember yet that purloined letter,
Whose comments hinted at womanly rights disgraced.
Baring herself, “Death to me seems better,
If staying left your affections to be erased.”

If staying left yore affections to be erased
Bearing herself death to me seems better.
Whose comments hinted at womanly rites disgraced?
Aye, remember yet that purloined letter.
Romances are razed by others’ sanction or ire.
We hoard ourselves, thinking it lies.
From the wreck of times past, spent with my soul desire,
No oval portrait, no keepsake to prize.

To me and this premature burial’s praying fate,
Her husband must soon leave the mourning’s hold.
I smooth my skirt, my hair, uneasy the weight,
As dull earth reigns over her coffin cold.
MY arm grows weary as I pull on this string, hoping against hope that it’s connected to a bell and, more critically, that whatever poor soul working the graveyard shift happens to hear its ringing. While the futility of the effort dawned on me quite some time ago, it’s the only thing I have that even bears the hallmark of recreation and hope. As I lay here in this wooden box—something sub-pine, the final indignity of an otherwise unglamorous life—all I can do is settle in and consider the circumstances that lead to my premature burial.

But first, some background. My name is Tristram Ellsworth, a member of the G---------- family. A disgustingly traditional example of British aristocracy, the type of family whose biggest concern in life is deciding at which villa to spend their summers. They first earned their wealth as ivory merchants, before diversifying into less reputable practices such as banking and law.

I could bore you with details of the lineage, but suffice it to say, there is nary an interesting one in the entire lot, save yours truly. However, for sake of clarity and ease, let me introduce the essential players. There once was a man named Emerson—long deceased—who had three children: George, Agatha, and Teresa. George himself had three children: Clarence, Byron, and Edna. Edna, my mother, died and left me under the care of Teresa, who herself died several years prior. Byron had a daughter, Lucy, and adopted a puberty-cusped boy—though God knows if he was blood-related, a family friend, or some street urchin they picked up just because. They named him (or he was named) Willie, and if there’s anything more distasteful than a child with a childish name, it’s a man who has carried that moniker into adulthood. And there’s Clarence, who has a wife named Tuppence, who has a nephew in his mid-twenties named Cecil.

As for me—well, I am the “black sheep” of this clan. Though, admittedly, mostly because of my own doing. At the tender age of twenty, whilst studying classics (a term lacking any meaning) at University, I walked out of my classes and, for all intents and purposes, “disappeared.” Not in a literal sense, of course, but I abandoned the safety and security of the pastoral collegiate setting and set off for London’s glorious underbelly. My clothes became rags due to a combination of soot and starvation, but my experiences—illicit and licit alike—were worth the pain and suffering.

I spent seven years experiencing countless events, some which continue to haunt and delight me to this day, when I was summoned back to our estate. Well, one of them anyway. The one in Something-Or-Other-Shire. Anyway, George the Patriarch was dying so they wanted the entire family around to pilfer whatever nonsense they could from his home...and hypothetically offer last wishes, condolences, and whatnot. Which brings us to three days
ago, when our story truly begins. Three days. Centuries of history boiled down to a long weekend.

DAY I

After a long, long, drunken journey, I finally reached the estate. Just in time, too, since my collection of flasks was just about empty. I had forgotten about this place, if I had ever visited it before. The home itself was the size of at least four city blocks, not to mention the ocean of land isolating the property on all sides.

By the time I got there, everyone else had already arrived, which allowed me to slip in easily and quietly. Clans had formed with everyone murmuring to one another with passive-aggressive snootiness while staring lustfully at the various trinkets and trifles adorning the mansion. I, too, was guilty of this, as I made a beeline for the liquor collection before the reality of my situation could set.

And what George had was expensive. I had grown accustomed to a vast array of different elixirs. Cocktails of mystery liquids where quantity is all that matters. Where you rediscover your faith in a higher power after passing out in the middle of the street and waking up to find your life and your organs intact. But this was nice, classy, smooth, and easy to drink. It was almost disgusting.

At dinner later that evening, I maintained my hungover silence as I observed the people with whom I was going to spend the next several weeks. Nobody from the older generation seemed all the different from the last time I saw them, just older and even more self-absorbed. None of the newer generation sparked my interest that much either. Cecil continuously stopped at every mirror to ensure that each hair remained in its proper “noble” place on his perfectly coiffed head—a breathing painting. He also took it upon himself to teach Willie the finer points of obscure etiquette. Thanks to Willie’s distant stare, I could not tell if that shy, quiet boy (who could be a mute; did someone say he was a mute?) was listening to him with rapt attention or not paying him a single piece of mind at all. However, the big topic of conversation was the brilliant, stunning, and studious Lucy, who had recently been introduced to decent society. (Though apparently no one is aware that she and that blue-blooded twit Cecil are an item. Whether it’s their inability to read body language or their pathological self-centeredness or simply the fact that they don’t interact with anyone outside their tiny radius and thus lack any understanding of human affairs, who knows?)

“I’m sorry,” Lucy said to the table, while covertly rubbing Cecil’s knee. “I prefer Yeats to Keats.”

Everyone gasped. Some forks even dropped to the plates. “I don’t even know why we bothered to send you to school in the first place!”

I kept watching them, hoping for some indication of irony or humour, but no. These people were utterly shocked and dismayed by her choice of favorite poet. This made them question her suitability to carry on the great G-------- legacy. A wild child. A true threat to their honor.

During my years in Whitechapel (which occurred long before all the unpleasantness, lest you devise any naughty theories), I had, shall we say, made the acquaintance of a lady of the evening. Our relationship was initially financial, as they all are, but we transitioned into something greater. She had grown up in the gutters and the workhouses before making a lateral move...
to whore. She birthed three children, all of whom died before the age of five, and had so many miscarriages (and intentional miscarriages) that her tree could no longer bear fruit. Not that she’d want it to, not in this world. She could drink as well as any man, and, despite being utterly illiterate, could talk on any topic from philosophy to politics. That which she did not know, she could imperceptibly fake. Who’s to say you don’t gain a remarkable skill set in that vocation? She is the most remarkable specimen that I have ever met, and I held her as she took her last breaths, felled by some unknown ailment.

I am remarkably lucky at being protected against the multitude of diseases that plague that fair city.

“Lucy,” I called out in a drunken slur. “What are your thoughts on Plato’s cave?”

I decided to be easy on the poor girl. After all, she prefers Yeats.

“I’ve never been.”

At that moment, I decided to bed Lucy.

DAY II

I woke up the next morning bearing all the markings of excessive drinking. The day after imbibing copious amounts of fancy liquor is subtly, but markedly, different from ingesting the swill to which I had grown accustomed. The urge to vomit is less, but noises are far more potent.

The first thing I noticed last night was the utter absence of sound. After spending so many years in a city, you become used to the deluge of noises bombarding you every hour of the day or night. Even during the wee-est hours, you’re sure to hear something. A scuffle down the way. A far-off boat horn. Horses trotting down the cobblestone streets. Here, you’re lucky to get a cricket as company.

The room was the most uncomfortable I had ever been in, by which I mean it was the most comfortable I had ever been in. It’s one thing to live in luxury or semi-luxury, but after spending years in some of London’s more squalid filth holes, where the most relaxing mattresses your skin touches are in opium dens, this made my bones ache. So I slept on the floor, which was still almost too nice. But the drink helped. It always does.

As I stumbled out of the room, I quickly realized that everyone had been summoned to George’s dying bed for the reading of the will, which seems strange to do before one’s passing, but the rich can set their own rules. I entered just for the tail end, so I have no idea what I was given/not given. Not that it matters.

“If there is anything else,” said the attorney, “this reading is now complete.”

“What about the Oval Portrait?” called out one.

“Yes, the Oval Portrait,” cried out another.

“It is not in the document,” the attorney nervously responded.

“Oval Portrait! Oval Portrait!” everyone in the room, save yours truly, screamed.

The Oval Portrait in question referred to a painting of THE GREAT PATRIARCH. The man who slew his first elephant on the Dark Continent so many moons ago that allowed us to become shining beacons of society. An Oval Portrait. An oval portrait is what these people hold in highest regard. Even Willie appeared enamored by its mediocre brushstrokes and unremarkable color palette.
I’ve seen more than fifteen children—not toddlers, that’s a whole other accounting—dead. From disease, from hazardous working conditions, from murder. I watched helplessly as a ten-year-old stabbed a twelve-year-old in the throat for a broken pocket watch. I saw the power of drink alone drive a man to beat his son’s head into a crescent. I volunteered at hospitals and asylums. I’ve looked into the eyes of the incurably insane and felt the purest fear wondering what it is they see. Wanting a glimpse, but knowing there could be no return. Spending nights weeping for the souls of those who are departed and of those who are still alive and taking solace that my tears proved that I had some humanity left.

And these people. These right bastards. All they cared about was who would take ownership of an oval portrait...and in which villa to spend the summer. It was that moment that I decided that my one goal in life (at least for the foreseeable future) would be to destroy this family from the inside out. And to fornicate with Lucy. And to do something genuinely horrible to Cecil, other than bedding his betrothed. I really have nothing personal against the chap, but anyone who holds one’s class status (regardless of which class the person falls into) in such high regard deserves to be taken down at least some pegs.

After another cry of “WHO GETS THE OVAL PORTRAIT!” I left the room to take a nap on the lawn.

Lying on the grass several hours later, I began to feel sorry for the old codger. Or I felt like I should feel sorry for the old codger. This was a man who had lived for over a century. His uncles had fought against the Colonists and brought shame to this entire great nation. But did he deserve this? His family was fighting over a picture while he waited patiently and anxiously to depart from this mortal coil.

A scrunching of grass summoned me into action, so I lazily rolled to my side to see Cecil stroll up beside me.

“This entire thing is quite a lark, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Quite.”

“After all, it’s clear that the Oval Portrait should go to my family. My aunt and her husband have clearly done the greatest with the family name. And they have the nicer house. It’s such a shame to see people refuse to acknowledge that.”

“Quite.”

“So I am told you attend university,” Cecil tried to fill the silence.

“Attended,” I corrected him.

“I am continuing my studies myself,” he proudly proclaimed.

“What did you study?”

I stared at him and said “medicine,” hazarding a guess that an imbecile such as he would not pick up the fine art of quackery. It was a gamble to be sure, but I am no stranger to games of chance. Alas, my time is growing short, so suffice it to say that some of the scars adorning my body are from cheating and some are from luck.

“That sounds interesting. I’m studying classics.”

“Oh course you are.”

He began speaking about something or other, so I decided to go back in the house for a refill.

“Mr. Tristram,” the attorney summoned me.


“George wishes to see you.”

“Probably because I’m the only one who hasn’t pestered him about anything.”

“Lead the way.”
For the first time since I’d been here, I got to witness George. Laid out on his lavish bed, even surrounded by gold and other fineries, he was just like any other man at the end of a life long lived. More bone than skin. More beard than face. Fingernails already getting a head start on their coffin growth. Milky eyes anxious to shut for the last time. It was not a new image for me, but one I was not used to without the accompaniment of screams from rooms and wards nearby.

As I approached, he shakily pointed to a letter on his nightstand. “Tristram,” he squeaked out. “This letter explains my wishes. I spend my last moments in this bed listening to the squabbling and fighting. And I want everyone to know that I want the portrait to go to...” He coughed, and I half hoped that he died before finishing his final thoughts. “...No one. Leave it here. Or in one of our villas. Or donate it to a museum. But I need them to know that object is nothing but an object. It’s family that’s important. After all, what is a portrait but just a painting of a person? Share this letter to all of them. It will explain my wishes and hopefully unite them all again.”

I walked out with the letter, “Fate of the Oval Portrait” marked clearly on the envelope. I twirled it in my hands, knowing that I held the key to everything. I could put an end to this madness or exacerbate it. For a brief period, I even contemplated settling the dispute amicably.

“Tristram,” Agatha called out. I pocketed the letter.

“Please tell Mildred and Frederick that the frame is a crucial part of the portrait. That frame was donated to our family from King Louis XIV himself.” (It wasn’t, but it’s part of lore that has persisted for generations.)

“Who are Mildred and Frederick?”

“Oh, Tristram, you’re so droll!”

A crash in the kitchen thankfully sent Agatha away, but I still didn’t know to whom she was referring.

That brief conversation decided it for me. I slyly opened the letter and tossed it into the fire, then took the envelope and placed it in Cecil’s satchel.

Upon Agatha’s return, I walked with her towards Cecil’s belongings and “accidentally” knocked over the chair with his bag on it. As if on cue, the envelope flew out across the floor.

“Look!” Agatha screamed, bringing everyone over. She opened the envelope hastily and her eyes grew wide as she noticed the notable absence.

“J’accuse!” I cried out. “He has the purloined letter!” Why not have some fun with the proceedings before everyone else takes control?

Almost immediately, the rivalries flared up again. Some accused Cecil of stealing the letter. Some accused Agatha of it. Some accused Cecil of planting the envelope on himself so that he could negotiate on behalf of Tuppence and her husband. Like the Clockmaker theory of the Almighty, now that the plans were in motion, I found the most reasonable course of action was to stand back and let the happenings transpire on their own. There is quite a joy watching the hands spin around the dial.

“AND GET OUT!” Lucy screamed at Cecil, her face a mask of tears.

Cecil, also in tears, proclaimed, “But it wasn’t me!”

“NOW!” she ordered.

With almost military precision, the entire family literally turned their backs on him, though both Willie and Lucy twisted their heads slightly to catch a glimpse of what he did next. Hat in
his hands, Cecil slowly, sadly, walked out the door.  
“Oh, Tristram!” Lucy cried, right after the slam completed its echo, and rushed to me.  
I put my arms around her and invited her to watch the sunset.  
For as much as I loathed this place, I did have to admit, the sunset was a thing of beauty.  
We made love under the stars. A virgin through and through.

DAY III

Morning: George died. Not much else to say about that.  
Afternoon: Cecil sent over a charming messenger who begged for forgiveness on his behalf. It was promptly ignored. Even Lucy declined his pleas, believing it was her sacred duty to dedicate herself to her family in this time of strife. Stupid trollop. That being said, she would be a nice comfort for as many nights as I was going to spend here. After all, I had already given her every thing I had, and any sins we had or would commit had already been broken; what’s another go? More fuel for the eternal fire?

Night: Still a dinner. They claimed that this meal was to honor the memory of the departed George. A knowing lie or delusional belief? Despite the tension emanating from every family member (save yours truly), they never stopped standing on ceremony. Not two hours prior, they were all ready to slice one another’s throats over a picture. Then, they were sitting in their best, stewing over... stew. All this because servants were in the parlor. I wondered if a single one among them noticed that one of the females was missing a finger and one of the males had a game leg.  
Following such a stressful day, it surprised no one that everyone (except for the adolescent Willie) took a drink from the carafe of wine being passed around. Not five minutes later, the first of us (Lucy) began to fall. Like a series of dominoes, the faces of all my relatives plastered into their plates. Obviously, ‘twas the wine. For a brief period, I felt that my years of alcoholism and hard living had saved me from the poison lying within the tannins. Until I stood up and fell right back down.

I woke up in this casket, body paralyzed with drug. Not an unfamiliar feeling. Actually somewhat comforting. Staring down at me was that damned teetotaler, Willie. I looked into the cold, dead eyes sunken into his fresh, clean, adolescent face and felt no anger or resentment or even betrayal. He had bested me, and as an all-around cad, I appreciate a win by any means necessary.  
“One last request,” I asked, before beginning the laughter of madness. “Burn down the estate. Burn down the whole bloody house. And at least one of the villas! And if nothing else, burn that damned oval portrait!”  
The lid closed, and all I saw was darkness.

Which brings us to where we are now. I pull the string one more time before it goes slack in my hand. Was it ever attached to anything? Who knows? It was quite possibly the last sadistic joke of a mere child.  
But not so mere a child was Willie. A bloody adolescent! And he was smart, smarter than even me! He actually had an end game! His plan was to be the only surviving heir of G------- ---. Rather than chaos or spite, he did it for money! That most admirable of goals! I love that little shite!
Premature Burial
Ali Sohail
3Elements Contributors

Mort Castle is a former stage hypnotist, folksinger, and high school teacher. Mort Castle has been a publishing writer since 1967, with hundreds of stories, articles, comics and books published in a dozen languages. With Ray Bradbury’s biographer Sam Weller, Castle edited the award-winning anthology Shadow Show: All New Stories in Celebration of Ray Bradbury (2012, William Morrow) and also with Weller, Carlos Guzman, and Chris Ryall, the graphic novel anthology Shadow Show: Stories in Celebration of Ray Bradbury (IDW, 2015). Castle has won two Bram Stoker Awards®, two Black Quill awards, the Golden Bot (Wired Magazine), and has been nominated for The Audie, The Shirley Jackson award, the International Horror Guild award and the Pushcart Prize. He teaches in the creative writing program at Columbia College Chicago and at writing conferences and seminars throughout the country. Castle and Jane, his wife of 44 years, live in Crete, Illinois.

Trevor Church is a nonfiction writer in the Pacific Northwest, living a nomadic lifestyle. He also practices photography and painting. In his art he tries to capture the human experience, every human experience. His work could be called a yearbook of his life. He includes a class picture of his characters, and stores them alongside a memory.

Hannah Cohen currently lives in Virginia, but would like to live somewhere else. Her poems have been published in december magazine and Blue Bonnet Review. She is pursuing her MFA at Queens University of Charlotte.

Harris Daver is an aspiring freelance writer who currently resides in Illinois. He is primarily interested in developing works of fiction (short and long), but also comments on film and television. He also assists with researching myriad topics.

Gabby Deimeke is a photography major, studio art minor at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri, who specializes in portraits, weddings, and editorial photography.

Danielle Dyal studies English Writing and Communications at the University of Pittsburgh, where she writes and reads too much while drinking tea. She is also a Junior Assistant Editor at Bartleby Snopes Literary Magazine. She has been published in Collision Literary Magazine and The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts, and aspires to write novels that can one day be the basis of theme parks in Disney World.

Siara Freeman's work is a genuine attempt to approach her encounters, thoughts, and experiences of growing up in what is often referred to as “urban culture,” a culture so closely intertwined with black culture that it is often confused. Her poems try to define the line between urban and black experience while still showcasing where intersectionality blurs their individuality and creates art that deserves to represent itself honestly and blamelessly. Her work is who she is at twenty-five, black, urban, lesbian, young but steadily reaching towards progress, unashamed of her mistakes, proud of what it took to get her here.
**Gabrielle Heard** is a studio art major at Hollins University. Her main medium is photography with a focus in realistic fiction narratives. She has a passion for telling the story of those who are considered outliers in society. She hopes to later to create films for nonprofit organizations.

**Michael Hein** is a writing student from eastern Connecticut. He spent four years in the creative writing program at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, publishing his own independent literary zine for three of those years. He went on to major in creative writing for two years at SUNY Purchase College before returning home to be closer to his family. He now majors in English at Eastern Connecticut State University.

**Lynne Knight** has published four poetry chapbooks and four full-length poetry collections, the most recent of which, *Again*, appeared from Sixteen Rivers Press. Her work has appeared in a number of journals, including *Kenyon Review, Poetry*, and *Southern Review*. Her awards and honors include publication in *Best American Poetry*, the Prix de l’Alliance Française 2006, a PSA Lucille Medwick Memorial Award, the 2009 RATTLE Poetry Prize, and an NEA grant. I Know (Je sais), her translation with the author Ito Naga of his Je sais, appeared in 2013. (www.lynneknight.com)

**Julie Lunde** is a recent graduate of Northwestern University. In June, she was named the recipient of the 2015 Arch Street Prize; her winning essay is available on Amazon and iTunes. Her poetry and prose have also been published in *The Allegheny Review* and Northwestern’s *Prompt Magazine*.

**Rachel Mayes** comes from a long lineage of dentists (on her father’s side), so that explains some things. Growing up in Pennsylvania, her mother kept her house full of fake palm trees, and that explains some other things.

**Lindsay Miyamoto** is a 24 year old Minnesota native. Her obsession with the province of paper and ink is so complete that she hasn’t figured out how to decorate an apartment if it doesn’t include stacks of books and origami made from old dictionaries. Writing seemed a natural extension of her fascination with words and she has been experimenting with poetry since grade school.

**Kaitlin Moore** is an undergraduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, where she serves as blog editor and photographer for *Penn Symbiosis* magazine. She has written a collection of poems, several short stories, and three novels. Her creative nonfiction work has been published by *Penn Symbiosis* and *Penn Filament*.

**Scott Petty** lives in Houston, Texas. He has published poetry, short fiction, and music reviews in *Space City Rock, Noize Makes Enemies*, and *War Writers’ Campaign*. Scott is a lawyer and an officer in the US Army. He served in Afghanistan and is working on a project inspired by that experience.

**Liv Radue** is a Midwestern transplant who moved to Massachusetts nine years ago to earn an MA in writing, literature, and publishing at Emerson College. Having fallen in love with the sea and the kitschy, historical town of Salem, she never left. She is the founder of *Quick Brown Fox Editorial* and when not editing, writing, or reading Walt Whitman, can be found spending time with her husband and three young children.
Chris Roberts is Dead Clown Art. He is a full-time freelance artist, using mixed media and found objects to create his visual nonsense. Chris has made art for Another Sky Press, Orange Alert Press, Dog Horn Publishing, Black Coffee Press, Kelp Queen Press, PS Publishing and ChiZine Publications; for authors Will Elliott, Andy Duncan, Tobias Seamon, Shimon Adaf, Seb Doubinsky, Ray Bradbury, Kaaron Warren and Helen Marshall. He was nominated for a 2013 World Fantasy Award in the Artist category. You can watch Chris misbehave at deadclownart dot com, or on Twitter @deadclownart.

Barbara Ruth is a published poet, essayist, fiction writer and memoirist as well as photographer. She was a featured writer-activist for the 2014 National Gathering of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change. She lives in San Diego, CA.

Ali Sohail is a budding Pakistani-Canadian poet/photographer and undergraduate at the University of Toronto. Some of his recent work has appeared in The Malahat Review, CV2, Freezeray Magazine, and The Cadaverine.

Dennis Trujillo is from Pueblo, Colorado, is a former US Army soldier and middle/high school math teacher who happens to love poetry. Most recent selections are forthcoming or already published with Atlanta Review, Ascent, Agave, THEMA, Your Daily Poem, Snapdragon: A Journal of Art and Healing, Kind of a Hurricane Press, Silver Birch Press, Spank the Carp, and Fat Damsel. He runs and does yoga each morning for grounding, focus, and for the sheer joy of it.

Julia Weiss received her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. She is the 2014 recipient of the Academy of American Poet’s John B. Santoianni Award for Excellence in Poetry. Julia has been published in Image Curve, The Australian Women’s Weekly, Thought Catalog, Old Red Kimono, and The Santa Monica Star. She proudly lives in Brooklyn, New York.
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Visit www.3ElementsReview.com for more info.
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*. @mikelashea.

C.J. Matthews is a writing teacher from Des Moines, Iowa. She adores traveling, elegant food, bold red wine, and her two little dogs, Hercules and Hucklebee. Her recent work can be read in *Spoilage Magazine*, *Cahoodalooodaling*, and the *Kind of a Hurricane Press* anthology *In Gilded Frame*.

Parker Stockman is a writer, college writing instructor, and storyteller. He tells personal narratives with 2nd Story in Chicago, a monthly live literature event, and is featured on their website. Currently finishing his thesis for his MFA in Creative Writing—Fiction at Columbia College Chicago, he is at work on a novel. He writes a blog for his school’s program and works as a writing tutor. Parker plays rugby with and is the Vice President of Recruiting for the Chicago Dragons Rugby Football Club. He is excited to be part of the 3Elements family and hopes you enjoy the journal as much as he enjoys working on it.

Marlon Fowler is a Des Moines–based designer and web developer for *3Elements Review*. He 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 nonfiction, sports, movies, video games, and Chicago food. He would really like to learn PHP and get back to Paris. You can check out Marlon’s portfolio at www.marlonfowler.com.

Kelly Roberts received a BA in English from the University of Iowa. After years of writing creative nonfiction, she decided to give fiction a go. Kelly lives in Iowa with her adoring husband, clever daughter and rescued wire fox terrier. By day she works in Human Resources, which provides her with more writing material than she could ever hope for. Cooking, reading and popping bubble wrap— one bubble, one row at a time—are her passions. Her work has appeared in *Lunch Ticket*.

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.
James A. H. White is an emerging writer completing his MFA in Poetry at Florida Atlantic University. He is a winner of the 2014 AWP Intro Journals Project award in Poetry and 2016 Pushcart Prize nominee. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review, Gertrude, Hermeneutic Chaos, Tahoma Literary Review*, and *DIAGRAM*, among others. His chapbook *hiku* is forthcoming from Porkbelly Press.

Carol Roh Spaulding is co–author, with Kay Fenton Smith, of *Zakery’s Bridge: Children’s Journeys From Around the World to Iowa* (2011). A Professor of English at Drake University, Spaulding teaches courses in writing and American literature. She is the author of several award–winning short stories, including a Pushcart Prize, best story of the year in *Ploughshares*, the Glimmer Train Fiction Open, and the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction. Her new novel, *Helen Button*, tells the story of avant–garde writer Gertrude Stein and her life in Central France during World War II. Spaulding is also director of the newly–established Drake University Community Press. The Press produces attractive full–color, illustrated editions serving a community readership while providing students with practical knowledge of book editing and production using a cross–disciplinary and collaborative focus. She lives in Des Moines, IA with her husband, Tim, and son Jonah.