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Late November
Brent Fisk

We brace for winter, throw another blanket on the bed, curl childless together, nothing, nothing to break the desire for sleep. A few brown leaves cling to the ends of limbs, tattered, fluttering, fighting the certain fall.

This is the season of husks and echoes. The crows call to each other across the distant fields. Shotgun blasts fell deer, or miss as my wife hopes they do.

We have chosen this empty nest together. I have my doubts when I come into the room late after closing a book that can’t quite hold my interest. No toys to pick up from the floor. Only one forehead to kiss, untroubled. My dreams are thick as smoke that the coming winter won’t dispel.
And I watch her sleep and mourn the absence of her motherhood, my fatherhood. This is the season of fallowness and dormancy. Two plates at the table, the only other bed a spare. A house with a quietness I can’t quite quell. If I stood still long enough I would rattle.
Untitled
Nicholas Smith
And if I ever lost you,
how much would I cry?
How deep is the ocean?
How high is the sky?

- Billie Holiday

He didn’t hold their stillborn twins, and he lost sleep and Ella. Ella had bathed them, dressed them in matching pink pajamas, held their ink-covered hands and feet as they were pressed against the paper, sung “How Deep Is the Ocean” in a never-ending loop—and not once had he brushed against their still-soft skin.

In the mist of their backyard pond, he saw their intertwined form, their green eyes aglow with vigorous unrest. Was it a vision? Dream? Hallucination? To him, they were real—flesh and bone—come for the embrace he had denied them.

“Shock,” he said at home. As if that must explain it.

Ella looked like a woman deserted. Her eyes could not cling to the world, and the deep hollows threatened to overcome her
face, to plunge her in a perpetual darkness. “Shock,” she repeated without conviction.

He woke up from the sterile white of the hospital and into the glare of that too-dry, dead January, a world that hurt to look at. The shades and curtains stayed closed. A day. Another. Ella ripped down the wallpaper. Bunnies at a picnic. He disassembled cribs. Up and down the stairs. Phones rang, unanswered. “Empty,” Ella said in her still-pained voice. And then later, “I don’t understand, Jack. How could you not have held them— Couldn’t you—”

Could. Couldn’t. A few days later. “I don’t think I can ever—” All her statements hung suspended, cut-off and thus never-ending. Can never forgive him? He deserved that fate and more. No one ate. They barely breathed. Sometime in the night. “You might have to leave, Jack. For a while.”

“The support group,” he said. “The nurse mentioned—” In his grief, he had huddled against the nurse's boundless breasts and she had whispered this, seeing their future, this disconnect.

The next afternoon, they drove into Philadelphia, past the lifeless broken buildings on Lancaster Avenue, to Penn. The low winter sun blinded him and the slanted light hung frozen before him. He did not want to hear that they would be all right. He wanted truths, wanted to know how they would ascend from this blackness. If they would. He lost the right to ask Ella what she wanted; he lost the power to complete. She would remain unfinished, a deterioration he’d have to watch from afar.

The elevator lifted them into a collection of carpeted rooms. Ella hung back. He couldn’t remember the room number. They were late. He looked for couples congregated around a campfire. Campfire? Table. He meant table. He craned his neck down
corridors, into rooms. Ella padded behind him and there they were. He reached back and tugged her inside.

They slipped into the two empty chairs waiting for them near the door, next to the single woman. She smiled warmly. He looked around. The too-tall table cut off bodies, a circle of floating grins. Ella sighed. He wanted her hand. He wanted to say, “Save us.” He hadn’t removed his sunglasses. Fine. They could watch themselves in his blue reflective lenses and wonder what lurked beneath.

Ella kicked his shin. He hadn’t been listening. He focused. Ten couples. A red-headed couple—had he ever seen such a thing before—started, finished each other’s sentences. He caught snippets, a pregnancy, brown-bleeding, but their baby held on. Were they pregnant? Still? What the hell?

The next couple. Four miscarriages. But this one took. Were they allowed to hope for a baby, now? The baby kicked vigorously. They didn’t know what to think.

Oh, Jesus. The wrong support group. His fucking up never ended. They all had babies in their bellies, fighting for life. He saw the still forms of his twins. Their mouths peculiarly open. He thought the lips moved. “Did you see that?” he had called out. No one had heard him.

He couldn’t move. Ella made no movement to stand up either. The room spun up and up, pushed him toward the back of his seat, the wall. He’d talk. He’d say, “Sorry, sorry.”

But then Ella was speaking. “Our babies died,” she said. “And my husband wouldn’t hold them.” The pain had become matter-of-factness. Chilling. The couples shuddered.

“Oh my,” the single woman said, the leader. Monster, he caught, whispered from wife to husband. Monster.

“And now?” Ella continued. “I don’t know. So weak. I wonder
if the twins inherited his weakness. No. I know that’s insane. But still—”

They curled away from Ella, he understood their recoils. A curse that might be catching, a blight brought into an already anxious room. Their very worst fear. They came to convince themselves they had done what they must to avoid such a Fate. What delusion. Nothing you could do, he would tell them, if he had the strength.

“Well?” the single woman repeated. Silence. He realized then she’d been addressing him.

An answer. Is that what Ella, the world wanted? He didn’t know. He could make one up. What did they want to hear? But instead came this.

“It’s sick. To hold their dead bodies. They shouldn’t ask that of anyone.”

“I don’t think—” The single woman, angry.

“Your wife—” A chorus from the couples. “How could you—”

And Ella. “I did ask it, Jack. I asked it of you. Do you still see them, Jack?”

“Yes. In the morning. The pond.”

“And what are they like?

Such stillness in that room. Sacred. At its root, it meant “cut off.” Ella had entered that world, untouchable. He had fucked up and not entered it with her. He not only saw that now, but felt his betrayal deep in the marrow, how separate and inviolate she’d become. He hadn’t gone there. Why? Did the answer lie in his own nursery? Did he have to go back? No. Excuses lay there.

“Your wife asked you a question.”

He couldn’t look at Ella or the floating faces absorbed now in what he’d done and left undone. “What are they like? I don’t
know. I didn’t hold them. So I don’t know.”

“No. You do know. I don’t. I held them—and now they’re dead and you didn’t so you get them, you see. So I need you to tell me, Jack. What are they like?”

Their twins reached for him, not her. They floated up away from the bedroom and toward the deck where he bent toward them in his own mist, the steam of coffee. He sat wrapped in a blanket, waiting, but they held their distance, at the tree line, emanating from the ice and the birches, their eyes the color of the deep spring—green as the leaves and grass and flowers. They wanted him, and Ella was right, they were not dead yet.

“Well. Go after her.”

Ella had slipped out. He toppled the chair, nearly upset the table, stumbled down flights and flights of stairs. Outside, a warm front had moved in. A fifty degree difference the radio predicted. He drove around Penn and didn’t see her. When he got home, he found her behind the locked bedroom door. Maybe a cab drove her home. Maybe she floated.

He had only thoughts. She wanted them alive, perhaps had wanted him to intercede, to forbid her to hold these twins, feel their dead weight in her bones and know, with certainty, they were not ever coming back to her.

***

He descended the white stairs to the defrosted grass, sank into the dirt beneath it, walked down the slight hill, to the ring of birches around the pond. The bright moon lit his way.

He touched each birch. His grandfather had raised them, and now they lived on what was left of the estate and the money from a long-dead Philadelphia newspaper. As a kid, his sled charged down the hill toward their white trunks. He waited to the last
possible second before rolling onto his back, slamming into the packed snow. Invisible hands clapped among the birches. He had been so lonely.

He held an axe. He would hack at their trunks, he’d fell the whole grove, the verticality made horizontal. Perhaps he’d unleash his grandfather’s spirit upon the world; the spirit would stop the axe and tell him what to do. Or maybe the ghostly forms of the twins would not be able to hide here any longer and Ella would have to see them. He would destroy the birches for her, the place that held all his childhood yearnings for emptiness to be filled.

The first swing reverberated through his arms, barely made a mark. He bent the birch with his left hand, swung with the right. Chips flew. His grandfather hid silver dollars throughout the house as his grandson slept. In the morning, he’d blow on a silver dollar, hold out his hand. Gone. Look behind the Maker’s Mark bottle, the third one in, against the mirror. Always that specific. It didn’t matter that he silently followed his grandfather at night, watching him stand in the middle of the room, scan each spot, so delicately and silently he placed the silver dollar, as if nothing had been moved. And maybe his grandfather knew his grandson watched him and that was part of the show, too. His grandfather held him when no one would. His father, who knew? His mother abandoned him there, never to return.

It fell without fanfare. One down, twenty or so to go.

“Jack?”


“I want you to see them, too,” he said.

“Chop them all down. The whole world. I can’t see them, Jack.”

He let the ax slip down. He sat on the too-skinny fallen trunk;

There was that empty loneliness and then Ella.

“I thought my grandfather’s face would appear in the constellations. He’d hold what I needed and with one puff, it would drop and I’d find it.”

“Very Disney.”

This hint of their past life crept in, like light through a cracked door. An uncanny ease with each other.

“If I’d held them—” He didn’t know. He searched for the end of that sentence. Was there a funeral? Where had he been? There but somewhere else. Done. Undone. Olivia and Elizabeth came out, undone. A double-depth grave. One atop the other. Did they reach for each other in the womb of earth? Or for him, their father, who had been both frozen and trembling as he took in their stillborn eyes and stillborn mouths partly open but never would—“I kept thinking ‘what if they refused to be held.’”

“They are more like stone than the sea would be if it stopped,” Ella said. The poem on his grandfather’s tombstone. He had tried to blow air into his dead grandfather, pounded his chest, but the puffs of air were too feeble. He was eighteen.

“Oh, God, Jack. I don’t want to have to leave you.”

He saw them then. He almost pointed but knew Ella would see only the black of nothingness. They had no substance and yet filled the air. Their limbs twisted around each other so they were really one body—and here, closer, he saw the accusing deadness of their glare that he mistook for a kind of life. The dead wanted emptiness and he had denied that to them.

Ella had left, back up the hill, soundlessly. One day he would
search the house, behind every door and every bottle, and not find anyone. Again.

***

The next night. Done. How did he do it? How did he slip through the crack between black iron fence? How did he end up with shovel and pick at their graves? But he did.

He first touched the stone, traced the etched letters. The date. As if his finger were a chisel. He still didn’t know the whole why of his failure. He couldn’t live with what he had done. That much he understood. He no longer knew how to live.

Seven feet he had to dig. The air didn’t move. The stars in the curves of space paused in their eternal vigilance across the dark sky. The moon lit the grave and none other. The still-loose dirt gave way too easily. The warm front held, even at midnight. The light sweat felt like a drizzle. He dug, wishing the hole could be bottomless and nothing lay awaiting him.

As he descended and the walls of dirt grew around him, the force of dirt, of the heavens pushing down, weighed upon his shoulders, but he kept up the torrid rate, as if afraid he’d lose nerve if he slackened at all. This suffering, confined to this act and bound to end, had little or nothing to do with the endlessness of that other pain, the pain of inadequacy.

The dust-covered bottles in his grandfather’s bar, never touched except to slip silver dollars under them. What thoughts arose as his grandfather approached the bar he had renounced with his grandson’s arrival. Sacrifice. Renunciation. Offerings to gods.

He hit white wood and everything stopped except his deep breaths. He’d imagined lifting them to the grass, but looking up, he saw the impossibility of such a thing. He wiped the dusty dirt
off the lid, lifted the top coffin and laid it next to the bottom one. And then he pushed himself against the earthen wall, the side-by-side coffins at his feet.

He didn’t want to open them. He wanted it to be more than fear, but he felt nothing more than a deep dread at confronting their dead faces and still husks. He feared their mouths opening, hands grasping around his neck. And what would they say?

“You never wanted us.” What? Did the disconnect run so deep? He couldn’t quell that deep doubt, that ghostlike echo of his own lack.

*Why did my mom leave me, Pap? What did I do? What did she want? Where did she go? I wouldn’t have been trouble. You know that. I’m not any trouble.* So still. So quiet. His grandfather promised him he’d understand when he was older. *When you’re older.* The answer to every question.

He pried open both lids, but didn’t remove them until both were freed of their nails. Then, with both hands, he flipped the lids up and behind the coffins. The rankness of their rotting smelled new, as if this past day’s warmth had just reached them. Their heads lay on white pillows. They were tucked into identical white pillow cases, covered with pink quilts that were covered in hearts. He kept them like that, folded into the white cases, cradled each infant in his arm, and picked up his daughters.

He leaned back, head against the wall of the grave, his daughters on his chest. The chill of winter returned, blew over the opening in the earth and then down, seeking them out.

*“Abandoned.* I memorized the dictionary definition. To give up completely. Or leave a place—typically a building—empty with no intention of returning. Unnerving, yes? The finality of it.”

And they grew even colder, with their hearts that didn’t beat,
eyes that didn’t open, hands that didn’t grasp their father.

“I didn’t matter enough, you see. For whatever reason. Some flaw in my mother? Who knows. But my mother knew. That always struck me. How she knew I didn’t matter, how she left me with no hope of return. As if I weren’t hers.”

He hadn’t realized he’d been caressing their covered heads. Would their hair grow long or did babies’ hair fall out?

“No. I wanted you. Your hands in my air, breaths against my ear. I wanted you. I did. I do.”

He returned them to their caskets and covered them again in the earth and slipped through the crack in the fence as the stars disappeared and the whipping wind followed him home.

Ella stood in the door. She looked like a mummy in her white robe and white towel. He stepped outside the car. He had left her and returned stained.

“You didn’t. Tell me you didn’t.”

She walked into the cold to meet him. He fell into her, a descent past skin, into heart, womb, bone.
I’m watching a strutting peacock
from my bedroom window,
his tail carpeting behind,
leaves flitting past his blue body
like sparks. Beautiful, I think.
The room answers,
So why is he here?
While dead grass plumes like smoke,
gold flickers in the storm
of the peacock’s eye. I know
what is coming, so I turn
on my old pink radio,
the one my father said
would sing me whatever I needed.
Static. My room, otherwise empty,
flaps with darkness. Somehow,
I am living here like I’m travelling
behind a fading cloud, its rain
cottoning the sky.
I never catch up with myself.
Never feel the cold sear
galloping into my skin.
Just wind abandoning echoes.
Static. I ask the room
about the bird, if his eyes shone
when the lightning sewed
my house with stitches of flames.
A little boy watching fireworks
for the first time. When danger
is allowed to feel beautiful.
The room answers in crackles,
melts into my melting pink radio,
cannot be quelled.
I wake because it’s so damn awful.
I sleep because I’m scared to know
if I ever see my son again
through the husk I carry
from my dreams.
Spectral

Connor Rice
Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.
- Matthew 13: 45-46

To find a pearl.

The mollusk’s afterlife glowing. A planet you might escape to, a place you could live. To see it in a jeweler’s shop behind glass, to note the marked price. Exchange value. To resolve that this jewel is worth it. To sell all you have, make the deposit, go off and work for five years, seven. Day and night, day and night. To see that pearl when you look up at the moon, call it, whispering, I need you, I love you, I’m coming for you soon. Finally, to hold it in your hands. To kiss it, knowing it is more than an oyster’s waste; it is an unbreakable husk that contains the sea’s motion, the coral’s pain, the starfish’s hunger, the earth’s determination to continue. It is the extinct ammonites and trilobites, barnacles, the watery world from which we have all come. It is our destiny, our darkness, our drowning. It is where the ship goes when it loses sight of the stars.
To hold that pearl, resolving to do so for as long as you can.

To be a pearl.

Swept up by strange nets, snatched from your mother’s red, life-giving warmth. To find yourself in a sterile, cold room where harsh lights reduce yours to the dullest glow, to realize you’re not the round life you thought you were. Here, you are placed among other gleaming lives and nonlives, new homes extracted from earth and sea. To be locked in a false, man-made mollusk, a strange glass husk that refuses to break. Until you see that every day, other eyes come to meet you – large, human eyes that remind you of the sun as it looked from beneath the sea. To trust those eyes, understanding they belong to a new mother, one who will lead you to a place of safety, a moment of union and melding, a new kind of sea. To quell your pain, find hope in your days. To grow larger and stronger under that welcome gaze. To look at your companions – amethysts, rubies – and notice their luster. To wonder where they came from, to imagine ideas of how you will get out, be touched again by the sun, fit your natural shape, shine as you know you were meant to.

To find a pearl.

To pass the jeweler’s window day after day and look at it. To admire its beauty and contemplate buying it. To walk the streets in frustration, desire for that white light that contains all colors. Exchange value. The price is too high. To imagine breaking into the
store at night and stealing it. Crazy thoughts. But purchase seems impossible. You’d have to sell everything just to make the deposit. Five, seven years you’d work. Early mornings, late nights. Living on little. To watch others marry, take out mortgages and buy cars while you throw your life away for a jewel. To hear their voices echoing in your ears: *It isn’t worth it.* To decide they must be right. To think tenderly from time to time, to wonder who claimed it in the end, then push that thought from your mind. To move on. Live your life.

To be a pearl.

To grow dependent on those twin suns that shine toward you each day. To yearn for them. To need them, call them. One day, to find them gone. To perk up, searching. Where are they? To realize they aren’t coming back. There is no way out for you. You are not as pure, as exquisite, as luminous as you wanted to be. You no longer gleam. You could be any material – plastic beneath artificial lights. Your price is lowered. Exchange value. Eventually someone buys you. You are stored away in the casket of a jewelry box. For years you imagine those eyes returning, seeking you. They don’t. You are moved from darkness to darkness. One day, months or centuries later, you find yourself surrounded by water. Dropped in a ditch, flushed down a toilet, transported by someone who does not know what you once were. Suddenly it is warm. You remember your mother, your grandmother, your sisters and brothers on the waves. They are near you. You see the sun, brighter than those two eyes ever could have been. You fall into the waves, the foam. You are radiant; you are radiance. You are light.
. . . Or take that doomed nymph, her giddy chatter rousing Zeus’s suspicious spouse—Hera never admiring blossom in earthly female form.

Poor Echo, her vocal cords now goddess-stopped, to limit utterance to mere reflection—only here, farewell, mirrored bits of syllables floating from the throat of that much-too-pretty youth who loves the stream’s silver mirror better than sightings of Echo’s fraught and glowing face, or murmur of her voice husked low by love. But he, alas, can’t pry his narrowed fancy back from self. Her quelled cords can only echo what Narcissus deigns to share.

Pity each their obsessions: she wandering stream-side, aspen-hidden, hoping to glimpse eyes or thigh, to be beckoned by his voice. And he: ego-addicted,
hunched above the stream as one day he will hang across the thwarts of Charon’s boat, lone and hoping for some final shimmer of his visage in black chill.

Sad unpaired pair, sentenced to constant reflection—mirror of water, mirror of speech—but also to inconstancy, a thwarted husk of love’s story, spelled

and suspended like a flower above a dwindled stream, or haunting, like some slim nymph, the dark woods of our dreams—isolate, infatuate. Ravaged by passion.
Cuchulainn Defeats Ferdiad at the Fjord

William Smythe

1
He lowers his spear
and looks to his feet.

"I know how this ends," he says,
"not beautifully."

When I sigh, I laugh
for no reason I can fathom.

Looking deep beyond the hills,
past all the bullrushes,

I watch the sun set
beyond an echoed ken.

"You," I falter,
"were my only lover."
2
Ferdiad.
My *gae bolga*
will explode inside you,
and I will hold you close
until the whole thing ends.

Ferdiad.
You died that night
in your own bed.
Your wife had told me that next day
over a cup of coffee.

“It was a heart attack,” she bemoaned.
“T’m sorry,” I said,
quelling my rage away,
walking, instead, away,
wiping my tears away.

That night
I dreamt that:

*I carried your body
across the river,*
*and placed a gravestone
in your honor.*
When someone says your name,  
  I bite my lip  
  and try not to cry.

But if a tear  
  should roll down my cheek,  
  I will complain  
  about how dusty the room is. I  
  cannot breathe correctly  
  since I heard the news.

  since I buried you.

Every time  
  I feel a beard on my chest,  
  I must lay your husk to rest  
  again.
Echo Peace

Sherri Harvey
Some days everything changes: the color of your eyes, temperature of ice, ocean tides. Even the way you grieve over a lost husk, or perhaps you don’t grieve. And it can hurt or not hurt. And it can cause your skin to burn or it can numb. Either way, your life will never be the same. You might understand this, but only when a crow builds a nest in your back yard then caws secret stories about fire-starters, renegade wind currents, and a rebellion quelled by a sparrow. Most of us don’t want to understand anything. We detour to avoid the changed shoreline, cover the scared face, pretend we will laugh with that old friend again in a house torn down because the foundation crumbled. Either way, we each sing alone; your voice echoes.
MY father is dying. Our living room is illuminated by a little blinking yellow light on an oxygen machine reminding us that it has replaced my father as the hero. He hasn’t said a word in weeks and we don’t know if it’s by choice. He communicates with his gaze. I’ve stopped making eye contact. I don’t know how to love him this way. They didn’t have enough time to teach me how to do that. My mother translates everything silently and acknowledges in nods and sympathetic pats on his arm, bruised by the IV and heart monitor cuffs, that she understands. He withers in his husk for months until I forget he is there. He is no longer a God. He is a little blinking yellow light.

I am lying on the grass in the backyard. My boyfriend tries to trace his finger against the black and labels the constellations. He’s older than I am. I tell him I think I’m dying. I hurt in places that have never been labeled. He tells me to shut up as he slides the tips of his fingers under the waistband of my jeans. I squint
my eyes at the sky and let the stars blur into nonsense. I tell him that if my father dies my mother will die and then I’ll be alone. His mouth is close to my ear, his lips so wet and he whispers in echo, “Shut up, shut up, shut up.”

The blanket comes to his armpits. He is wearing a white T-shirt. He always wore a white T-shirt. He has been dead an hour. My mother sent me to get his things. I shove his coat and two blankets into a trash bag. I lean my arms over the rail on the side of the bed and drop my head into the space between his chin and chest. I am five years old again. He is the only thing I know. Old Spice and cigarettes. I shut my eyes and imagine his heart beating against my face. As my fingers burrow into his T-shirt my thoughts are quelled. I inhale him in gasps and try to memorize it all.
Primal Truth

Jake Munoz
All night I walk
Karen L. George

*Found poem modified from words in* The Diary of Frida Kahlo

through a ship, rooms heaped:
dolls, shells, clocks, pencils

pass magnificent birds, small snails
pain arranged under glass

gaze into portholes
clouded eyes

touch the quelled motor
laced with dust

part hair wed with leaves
from shadowy steps

under a magenta sky  above deck
the water stings   dark wing
I paint the coarse husk
of an ancient skin

unveil my heart
brilliant echo

sing my cells
yellow
I don’t write poems in the morning
Robin Turner

I trace a mandala
its center an emptiness
(sometimes husk of a girl or flower)

I write down the dream
of the boy and the doorway

I write down the dream where I fly

I write down the dream
of the men I have lived with

they appear disappear reappear vanish
the dream’s house is a ruin of light

I listen to the beloved read the Google news headlines
I look up every synonym for silence

I walk outside through a flash mob of rain lilies
past the crow who knows me on McCosh
I take in the mail—
two books and a jury summons

I pull back the curtains wide

I consider the way of the ten-petal anemone
who opens obedient with yes to full sun

but I am no anemone
and I don’t write poems in the morning

from the kitchen the tea kettle whistles an echo
quells and calls me

to its low slow tune
Charles River Woods: Quell
Kelly DuMar
What is it
to stand beside the skin
you used to stand in?
To feel like a cicada
having emerged damp and raw

and to age into splitting
a seam along your own back.
What is it
to exit yourself, leaving
an exact hollow replica,

perfect in every detail.
The bulbous eyes, the spurred
foreclaws, are an amber husk,
the visual echo
of a time spent waiting

for wings. It must be like the August
you start your period, feel gravity pull,
and hear the vibrations of male desire
that can’t yet quell your grief
for a self left behind.
Granny Says Giving Birth

Brittany Rogers

is the closest
a woman comes
to death—
your body
turned
broken wire
hanger
digging into itself
the milk
and blood pouring
so fast your hands
cannot quell
the spill.

My granny stopped
having kids
when the fifth one
tore through her with
a sickle.
She tells me to stop
at my two
if I want to
be more than
an echo of her name

a husk of ashes
or a broken
handled faucet
or a never emptying
bottle of spirits
in a full bar
of patrons
wasting away
from thirst.
Song of the Lady-Axe
Megan Merchant

Where are your cavils about the Soul now?— Walt Whitman.

There is no shame in asking for the lady axe/ because you can’t arc the heft of his

over your head without it slamming blade-tip/ bloodying into your thigh.

It’s ok to want things lighter/—the woodpecker’s hollow hammering pulling day

from its husk, the kale leaf— moon-large/ in its bed. Winter is just down the road

with its single bulb and bent light. And this year/ your son is singing where last he clamped.
It’s ok to ask the man at the hardware store/ for the lightest blade. You woke this morning

in a world where a five-year-old girl was beaten/ with a closed fist until green dripped

from her nose and her father tried to clean her/ stilled breath with his own.

When the man doesn’t want to sell you the axe/ tell him you have spent nights studying

each split where the wood is ready to break/ by running your un-gloved hand

along its grooved wounds, that you will stow/ your weight in softwood and that living

tucked in these trees means you have learned to quell/ the echo and sway, to read the tracks

and recognize that there is a soul in things, but also/ there is what we prescribe to be the soul,

in that the grackle’s call is the same timbre/ as the cringe of the rusted gate.
Every time your words are recorded & played back, they sound thinner & higher than you’d swear they were when you spoke.

When you shout them from a precipice, their echo returns from the abyss as deep & strong as the voice of God. The birds around you start & take flight at the sound.

The recorder’s voice is closer to your own, but you blame its tinny warbles on the paper-thin speaker cone, the skinny blackened copper wire.

When you scream, the screams have no depth. You scream at City Hall, on Fifth Avenue — until they quell you with tear gas or a straightjacket & sedatives. There isn’t enough space; the screams have no depth.

You want to reach inside yourself, pluck out the husk of your voice like a glob of blood or bile & shape it as a sculptor would, make it as strong as your echo.

* * *

Lower your body, your face to the earth. Speak into the sleeping anthills, the puddles made by snow melting in animal tracks, the cracks in chipped sidewalks through which weeds poke their heads. Or take up a spade to dig your own hole & speak into that.
Cover your words with earth. If there is no earth, there will be manure & Southern Baptist flyers & spent shells. Wait for spring.

If there is not enough rain, trudge back to this spot every day & pour water over it.

When the sun has risen hot & hazy, when the grass has turned green then back to dirty gray again, when the sweat has started raining down from your scalp to pool at the base of your spine, the words in the dirt might grow.

Watch for them to split the topsoil. Listen for them growing rounder & deeper & larger than the echo ever was.

If they burst out, your voice is a beanstalk, and you are a giant-killer.

If they don’t, try again. Try as long as there is dirt or shit to plant them in.
ANOTHER chunk of debris crashes into the cornfields behind my parents’ house, burying itself in a mound of stalks and dirt. The impact rattle the plates on the table and the spoons in our coffee. Dad's wheelchair rolls back a few feet. My breakfast jumps into my stomach.

“I’ll get the dishes,” Mama says to me. “You get the shovel.”

The first time this happened, Mama thought we were getting bombed. She heard the scream of hot metal through the air and dove under the table like she’d learned in the drills. Dad assumed the thud was Mama falling and didn’t bother to turn off the TV. I half-hoped it was aliens, coming to abduct me, but the Interior people said otherwise when they came around to collect the scraps.

We thought this was a one-in-a-million kind of thing, but we were wrong. Satellites crash so often now that "raining metal" should be a permanent fixture of our regional forecast—along with tornados, heat lightning, and drought. Like all those other
things, we got used to it.

We keep the shovel by the back porch, next to the fire extinguisher and the wheelbarrow. Smoke rises up from the spot, and the air smells like a mix of popcorn and fireplace. I grab the shovel in one hand and the extinguisher in the other, and head toward the plume.

The crater is maybe ten feet across, the center deep as a grave. I have to fight for a few minutes to quell the flames, which spread along the edges and turn the snapped stalks brown, then black. I spray the embers with the extinguisher before burying them with the shovel, just to be sure. A couple of stray flames wink atop nearby stalks like candles watching me work.

I sidestep into the hole to inspect the scene. Some sprigs of metal shine in the dirt, like the satellite’s a seed that’s begun to sprout. The debris is still hot, so working in the crater is a little like shoveling in a sauna. You sweat double. I pull most of the stray leaves and roots out of the way, flip some big rocks off the top and toss them over the crater’s lip.

I’m just starting on the sides when I hear rustling in the stalks. I wonder if this visitor is wild or welcome. Turns out Mama’s rolled Dad down the back ramp and pushed him through the crash site to survey the damage. His oxygen tank is tucked between what’s left of his legs, and for a second I picture it blowing up.

“How’s it going?” Mama asks. She has her hair up in a high bun, and still has on her apron from breakfast. It’s beige with yellow flowers that blend in with the stains.

“Fine,” I say.
“You need anything?”
“No, Mama, I’m fine.”
“I swear if this keeps happening, we’re going to have to move,”
Mama says. “It’s like these things just keep giving up.”

“Sounds familiar,” my father snarls through his oxygen mask, watching me shovel and sweat.

“Would you like to try?” I ask, pointing the handle of the shovel in his direction, somewhere between his thighs and his chest. It’s something he used to do to me when I was a kid and would interrupt his chores.

He laughs through a cough, or coughs up a laugh, and stares down the handle at me. Bits of dirt run slowly down the blade and bounce off my jeans.

“‘Try’ is an interesting word for somebody who doesn’t have a job,” he says.

I shove the blade back into the dirt, and stomp on it with my foot. Dust flies up into my face, and I push it out of my eyes. When I look over my shoulder, Dad takes a big pull of air and, without turning his head, talks to my mother. “I don’t understand why we’re even wasting our time on this one.”

Mama gives me a look like she wants to say, *He means the satellite.* But she doesn’t say it. It’s no secret that “this one” could mean me.

* 

Mama rolls Dad back inside, and I start chucking rocks with the shovel like it’s a lacrosse stick. Occasionally some birds fly up, startled by yet another morning impact. Some part of me imagines getting one high enough it goes into orbit, evens the score. But my meteorites don’t have the escape velocity to leave.

Ever since the first few crashes, I’ve been reading about satellites, the sheer amount of junk we’ve put up there. Even
before commercial space flight became a thing, there were hundreds of thousands of pieces of debris zooming around, ready to take a bite out of any passing craft. Now—between the number of missions and the number of accidents—we’re well over a million.

Somebody tried to model all the stuff we’re tracking, the dangerous junk that’s big enough to see. The picture looks like ants swarming a scoop of ice cream.

Now there’s a law that says satellites of a certain age need to clean out their orbits and make their way back home before they add to the mess. Most of them crash into the ocean, and I imagine their plunking like skipping stones. But more often the valuable ones—the kinds Interior and Defense and private collectors come out to find—are directed towards certain “uninhabited” tracts of land. Apparently, our part of Iowa counts as uninhabited. Even the news channels have started calling us “fly-into” country.

I guess it’s better than the alternative. I read about this thing called Kessler Syndrome. The idea is that when we’ve got so much stuff in space, some of it’s going to collide; when things collide, they’re going to break into a lot of pieces. More pieces means more stuff means more collisions means more pieces—until we’ve got a cloud of garbage circling the earth that grounds us for life. Somebody decided it was time to clean that shit up, because Lord knows we don’t want to get stuck here.

Cleanup isn’t easy. Even the smallest piece of space junk can ruin your vacation if it clips your window at 17,500 miles per hour, or punctures your suit when you’re out on a walk. Not that it’s better when it lands. I once saw pictures of a barn whose roof was taken out by a few inches of solar array. Even a single screw can do a lot of damage at terminal velocity.
I’ve spent weeks of my life fastening sheets of metal onto our roof. From above, our house must look like the hull of a capsized ship. Dad’s the captain, ready to go down with it.

*

After a few hours my hands hurt from choking the shovel, and my palms burn hot like the sides of the craft. As I straighten up, I feel my shirt cling to my lower back. The sun surprises my eyes.

I walk around the side of the house so I can stretch my legs. Dad’s been rolled in front of the TV, like always, the news turned up so he can hear it over his tank. The words that float out the window make the hairs on my neck bristle. Terrorist. Liberal. Default. Coup.

When I come into the kitchen, Mama’s shucking corn for dinner. She rips them open quickly, revealing the rows of bright yellow kernels. The husks pile up next to the sink like green napkins. A few stray hairs stick to the front of her apron, like wispy spaghetti. I count the ears. There’s probably a dozen more than we can eat.

“He doesn’t mean it,” she says. “We both want you here.”

I can’t help but snort a little, shake my head. I take water out of the refrigerator, and pour myself a drink. The glass feels cold on the pads of my fingers, and the liquid fills my chest with winter. A little goes down the wrong pipe—I’m drinking too fast—and I start to cough. I hear Dad coughing from the other room.

“He doesn’t know what he wants,” I say.

The TV blares a commercial for one of the junk rigs that roll down the interstate, mobile shops where you can sell your suborbital wares for cash. They’re like storm chasers for satellites,
connoisseurs of debris. I’ve got to have that satellite cleaned up by the time they pass through next. If the bills I’ve seen are any indication, we could really use the money.

“Do you know what you want, Sam?” There’s a pleading quality to her voice, like a child asking for cake. She’s been asking me that question ever since I’ve moved back, and six years later I still don’t think I care.

* 

When I get back to the crater, I assess the craft. Now that most of the dirt’s been hauled away, the satellite looks mostly intact. It’s big and boxy, like an oven, but should fit in the wheelbarrow just fine. How I’m going to lift it is another story.

I get started on the excavation. When you get a full sat like this one, you don’t want to damage it. If the government or the company that owns it wants it back, they’ll try to blame the nicks on the poor souls who found it. For a lot of the older stuff, the artifacts, law is if it lands on your property it’s yours to sell. But the collectors are pickier than the government, docking dollars off the asking price for every “manmade” imperfection. You’ve got to know what you have is valuable, otherwise they’ll talk you down.

I run back to the house to grab the firm-bristled broom Mama uses to sweep the porch. I push the dirt off the top gently, like I’m a paleontologist with the weirdest dinosaur you ever saw. There’s the rounded surface of a dish. A few antennae stick out like the remains of wings. A couple more rounds with the broom, and I see the ID panel. It reads *ECHO-V.*
It takes another hour to wrestle the ECHO onto its side, heave it into the wheelbarrow, and roll it back to the shed. The loose dirt shifts under my feet, and it’s hard to get leverage. Reminds me of pushing Dad down the beach. The satellite is heavier than Dad, but just as grateful. I get it over the lip of the crater and the corn seems to part for us like the sea for Moses.

When I get to the shed, I look up “echo satellite” on my phone to see if it’s valuable.

Turns out, the ECHO Program was launched after the cloud of space debris started interfering with satellite transmissions. Like the earlier programs named from myth, the NASA people thought they were clever. ECHO satellites were designed to amplify communication signals from Earth and act like relay stations to transmit through the clutter. *Enhancing Communications through Hazardous Orbits.* According to my phone, they launched nine.

Wikipedia claims that opponents argued the program only added to amount of stuff in space, that it avoided dealing with the actual problem. But isn’t that what we’ve always done? Keep going rather than deal with the mess we’ve made?

Internet says the asking price for one of these is in the thousands, but there’s a range. ECHO-I went for $60,000 at auction. But someone pawned off a fake ECHO-III a few years ago, and now the collectors are stingier than ever.

Either way, it’d be enough to help out or get out.

Dad rolls by the shed as I’m wiping down the ECHO, getting his exercise by doing a few laps around the house. I bet Mama needed a break.

I remember coming back the summer diabetes took his legs. The whole drive home from the hospital, he wouldn’t stop
criticizing my driving, my car, my haircut, my ex-girlfriend, my major. Pretty much every choice I ever made. Only time he shut up was when I had to lift him out of the back seat and put him in the chair. I don’t think he ever felt so vulnerable as when his son held him like a baby, or when the feet he thought were there were not, and couldn’t touch the ground. It took a few more minutes of that silence to realize the dampness near my shirt collar was tears.

He was both heavier and lighter than I imagined. I had to wrap my arms around him like a hug, the way I hugged the satellite to get it out of the dirt.

I sit and watch him for a minute, wheels spinning, arms pumping, sweat running down his forehead. The tank rattles a little bit, but he keeps going, gulping in air. He doesn’t look in my direction.

When I came back a few years later, he looked at me and I couldn’t tell if he was sad or angry, but every day since, we’ve gotten a little more of both.

* 

Mama calls us in for dinner, which consists of the usual fare—corn, instant mashed potatoes, some mac and cheese, everything about the same color.

Dad rolls to the fridge to grab the ketchup, and when Mama sees him take it, she says, “Your blood sugar.”

“It’s a vegetable,” he snaps. He grins as the red liquid spurts over his plate. Mama takes the salt and puts it on top of the fridge.

We normally eat in silence or let my Dad try to tell us about the news. Today he seems like he’s in a different mood, and before
we even say grace he says, “I think it’s time you move out.”

We’ve been here before. Since the day I moved back, he’s been dropping hints, making suggestions. Last time the collectors came through and I was showing them what I thought was part of a 1960s space artifact (it wasn’t), Dad was talking up the driver, asking how much he’s paid and how I could get a job. That was a few months ago now, but it feels like he brings it up once a day.

“What is it this time?” I say. “You hear somebody’s hiring? Some new training program? Want me to call that truck driver?”

“I didn’t pay for that degree just so you can shit around my house.”

“Look who’s talking,” I say.

“Sam, stop,” Mama starts.

“Why are you talking to me? Tell him to stop. He’s the one who does nothing but sit around all day while I screw metal on the roof or put out fires or rebuild the fucking ramp. You guys shouldn’t even be in this house, not while the sky is falling and definitely not while he’s in that chair.”

I look down at my potatoes. There’s a clear puddle that shines where the butter used to be. I imagine pulling my fork through, like I’m aerating soil in neat rows, and watching the butter flow down the canyons and escape onto the plate. I wait for Dad to make one of his usual cracks, like Maybe you should have studied drama. I feel empty and full all at once.

“Get out,” he says.

Mama tries to talk him down, but I don’t. I push in my chair and go back out to the shed.

*
The only way to know if this ECHO is authentic is to open her up and find the serial number, and I’ve got nothing but time. There’s a panel that, if the picture’s right, used to be covered by a heat shield. Most of it’s soldered together, but I find a four-by-six panel held in by recognizable screws.

I shake out the toolbox on the floor of the shed. Hammers knock the hardwood while the wrenches clank on top of each other. No screwdriver. I check by the tractor, look around the porch. It’s getting dark, and I worry this will have to wait.

I come back into the house to look for a flashlight, or a screwdriver, whichever comes first. In the kitchen drawer there are receipts and stray buttons, rubber bands and prescription bottles. Crumpled near the back, I find several neon orange fliers. I pull out one that reads Final Notice: Evacuate.

For a second I wonder how I could have missed this. How I could have missed the impacts getting bigger and more frequent, the visits fewer and less frequent. How everything changed and we pretended like it didn’t.

I start yelling for Mama. Dad yells, “Keep it down,” but the TV is so loud I yell back, “Turn off that crap.” Suddenly we’re shouting about the news he watches and my education, rehashing every fight we ever had. Our own Kessler Syndrome in the living room.

Mama bounds downstairs, pounding each stair as she goes, like she’s got to put out a fire. She’s wrapped in her bathrobe, her hair still dripping wet. “Sam can stay,” she yells. “We can be a family.”

Her voice pierces all the noise. Then she looks at both of us, breathing heavily, before saying again, “We can go back to the way things used to be.”

But we can’t. I lift up the flyer dated a few months back. “Did
you know about this?”

I can see the moment she realizes we’re not just having the same old fight, that this one’s bigger now, and her face goes white, then red. She starts weeping the way I did when I got caught in a lie—about a book report, or my grades at college—and felt like the world could end.

Dad wheels over to her and pats her on her lower back, offering whatever comfort he can without rolling over her toes. Without looking at me, he says, “You need to get out.”

And all I can think is, *So do you.*

*

I never find the screwdriver. I never open up the satellite to see what’s inside, peer into its dark cavity to understand what it has that lets it cut through space so easily, communicate so clearly.

Instead, I take a few pictures on my phone and send them to that collector Dad made me talk to all those months ago. We schedule a pick up for early tomorrow, and they’ll appraise it then. Either way, I don’t know how else to help. Then I leave the shed, get into my car, and wonder if I should sleep or drive.
Sing and split open, repeated under my breath
as if to hurry it along; like a cicada, I told my sister,
I’ll split my husk and leave this tiny hick town, a splotch
on the side of the road in the shadow of the Uintahs.

I put that line in a poem the year Ginny found our dad
dead in his study. She hated the cicadas all crunchy underfoot,
kept a broom out front so she could sweep her way to the door.
Miss Belsen asked me to read my poem at graduation.

But I already knew I wasn’t going to go. Had to earn money enough
to get us both away from Mom’s vodka-laced notion of grieving.
Left school in March to clean rooms at a motel near Starvation State Park.
It really is called that. I kept on meeting up with the birding club.

It was kind of my lifeline. Mr. Skinner said it was OK. Settled
by five, coffee in thermoses, we knew all the spots: the cliffs
at Echo Junction, Chalk Creek, the treatment ponds over to Henefer.
Violet-green Swallows are my favorite. A song to match their swoop.

Lazuli Buntings are pretty but have a buzzier sound. I can spot a kestrel
far off, any raptor, really. “What passion cannot music raise and quell?”
I had that running in my head from English class. I figure the celestial sound
had to include bird song. Quelling suited me best, that summer.
I finally saved enough for first and last, was ready to head for the coast. Ginny wouldn’t come. She was still a junior – thought she’d help Mom turn the corner. I told her I needed to shed my shell, like a cicada, and she said “well your eyes are about as red.”

I’m learning to recognize the sea birds, but in the shrubby verges of the park I hear the buntings. The familiar rasp makes me glad; I imagine their song is “Cheep, cheep, cheep, here’s your ticket,” but if I dwell on it too long I start to tear up for Violet-green Swallows.
Charles River Woods: Husk

Kelly DuMar
She pulled away corn husks, 
the fine silk piling on her feet 
and masking 
cracked linoleum 
until the floor shone 
golden strands. 
Her father’s hands hulled 
speckled peas and wrapped 
around the slender neck 
of his eighth bottle 
—quelling sounds 
but quickening 
the blood rush in her ears. 
When she was alone, 
she’d cut herself in half 
and count the rings. 
She often found locusts nested 
within her, their hollow thrums 
echoing in her chest 
and whispering 
that a seventeen-year-old 
body is not a fragile thing.
torrin a. greathouse

an essay on the weight of a body

i.
i stand in the morning / stretch body from sheets / spun sugar
in the air / pulls like molasses / or blood / or the hollow wept
from dandelion crowns / soft foam that stings the skin / & marks us red.

ii.
i saw a goat once hang itself / wind-chime its limbs against the breeze
remember how its neck creaked / echo of fallen tree / as we tried to pull it loose
remember pushing its body upward / surprised at its weight / maybe a ghost
is whatever weight remains / the husk left when the body becomes
a vacancy.

iii.
my palms still know the shape / the weight / of every part of the gun
how it seemed to tumble apart in my hands / each bullet tear-shaped
& deadly / how my father mistook them for pills / to quell his hunger
for sleep / i remember them / so much heavier than i could carry.

iv.
i stand each morning / spine wire-bent / ribs coat-hangered with memory
i sleep each night & wake / heavier than i remembered.
Lauren Harr
Serotiny
Gatlinburg, January 2017

“What is to give light must endure burning.”—Viktor Frankl

MANY species more than endure burning, they yearn for it. If trees pray, the Table Mountain pine prays for the fire that will release its seeds and devour the heath, red oak, and other impediments that keep its offspring from finding purchase, light, and water. Once the fire has raged across the hillsides and screamed over the gorges, its smoky voice reverberating through the air, the conditions are right. “Now,” the Earth calls to the seeds, and it echoes across the blackened forest floor, begs any remaining husks to give up their treasures and let them, now, have time in the ash and sun.

The dark of the trees, sometimes only partial trunks and broken
limbs, is the shadow where the fire echoed through the hills on hot breath. Where the elements conspired for a crown fire, just the tops of the trees are blackened. Where the wind paused and the lower limbs caught, the ground is char, the crown still winter-gray in places. All the leaf litter is gone, consumed by the heat if not the fire itself. A nest here or there may survive, its smoke-soaked twigs and lichens aired by the breeze. Soon, it will smell like pine and freedom again. Rhododendron leaves, evergreen and tough as leather, are crisp and furrowed. Small, delicate sculptures curled by change.

A different kind of predator might fly to a branch burned and broken, searching the black ground below for a cone, a husk, a sign that prey is in supply. The tender, roasted seeds that hide in the ash are a rare treat—for a chickadee or a titmouse, it might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the pleasure of their taste. The Red Crossbill, with his coppery chest, is less impressed. His specialized beak, scissored and sharp, can crack the code of pinecone evolution, prying out seeds from the serotinous husk. For him, pine seeds are life. He cannot wait for the fires, for the trees’ prayers to be answered.

Nearby, nests more complicated and less intricate than those of the Red Crossbill have been destroyed. Cinder block and bathtub, twisted metal pipe, the shadow of a stove. These are the remnants of life for those not lucky enough to be jumped over or ignored by the fire. The lines the fire draws, never straight but rather voluptuous with their contempt for order, traverse lawns and forest floors. They mark territory—what will continue in the old way, closed to the changes around it, and what will have to grow
anew. Whatever treasure is here, it surely hasn’t been discovered yet. There is nothing for a human to eat in the shadows cast by the fire. Nothing to quell the hunger for a life that was or to feed the dream of the life that will be.

Seeds must successfully resist destruction to rise, phoenixlike, from the flames. Their hearts must be hardened, or so protected by the moist need to fulfill their destiny, so the fire cannot break them down. They will not be ash, but they will be fed by it. The nutrient-rich remains of devastation will create conditions suitable for germination. Calcium, potassium, and others will leech into the soil, and the plants whose roots carry the ability for reinvention will grow healthy next to the new, tiny branches burst from seed and reaching up toward the sky.

Ecosystems continue because they can use catastrophe to their advantage. Individual species are not always that lucky, though most continue on in another way or another place. When the forest floor explodes with a new spring, the sun hits every leaf and is reflected back from its nascent green surface. That is the old light, the new light, the light that has no end. Its glow reaches out to all species of bird and beast, whispering that there is life within. Many come at that call’s echo, though some are better prepared to weather the dark as well as the light. For a pine, or a Crossbill, or a human, the urge to try cannot be quelled.
After Diagnosis

Madison London

There is, first,
the porcupining
of day into night.

Bats beat a harried
leathery smacking;
their bister-brown bodies,
fleeing in fast retreat,
bruise the chromatic pallet
of morning.

The night is missing
pieces—

so am I.

The suede scarf
from a passerby,
a cloud, has been
misplaced
upon the kitchen window.

Already,
the sill is stippled
by dew.
The keys are not on the hook
where they’re meant to be kept.

Outside,
the wingtips of a dozen
quelled willows
list earthward, teasing
turtle
stones arching from
the sleeping water
of the lake.

Pink mists
up in spurts
as thumbs are jammed
through calloused skin,
one sharp tug, and,
like rubies pebbling
the smooth face of a plate,
the seeds plop free
from my pomegranate.

Mistake
the shrill insistence of
the espresso machine for
a passing
locomotive.

My mother and her
mother before her
and I:
our heads cracked open
on a cool steel table—

the landscape within
riddled with holes; it is a
pocked pomegranate
after
my scissoring nails
have scraped its bitter flesh
dry: whole lobes excised,
beads settling
into a smattered
archipelago
by the hollowed
husk.

There is no recipe
for how to put it
back
together.

I could reach
my fingers
through
those holes
to find answers
if there are any left
to find.

Draw my name,
with one trembling finger,
onto the kitchen window.
Breathe onto it, until, for a moment, it is real.

It and I:

side by side:

distorted echoes,

in a plate-glass window.
I am here with you,  
your hands light and still in mine,  
your voice  
all hollow and husk,  
a thin yellow echo  
of what I remember—you are  
like the brittle shell  
left by the seventeen-year locust  
at the end of its long climb  
up out of the earth,  
re-forged, re-embodied,  
breaking out of the thin chitin,  
mirror and husk and crucible  
of transformation,  
a relic left in the garden  
for me to find—  
a reminder  

to quell my foolish sorrow  
and know that you are but in flux,  
caught in the act  
of re-invention—where  
god still watches with eternal thrift  
so nothing will be wasted,  
nothing lost.
Psalm for a Son’s Burial

Deborah Kahan Kolb

Hush now, it must be written somewhere that death is the domain of men.

The father, spent, eulogizes the son — or the brother, the husband — and he knows his time for sleep is done. They grab the shovels and empty the last of the balm of hurt minds into the void, then they cover your heartbeat in a silence broken by a rustle and chuff, the men.

And somewhere, too, it must be written that birth is the domain of women. The mother who conceived and carried and birthed you in blood shakes; the vessel whose cracks have yawned into fissures splits wide open — her center cannot hold,
her head shakes no and again no no
again, and the women, they crush in closer,
to enfold the mother who lost you last night,
to press her brittleness back,
the women.

Hush now, but you were supposed to stay alive.
Your mother’s loved Kaddish’l, you were meant
to be the one to stand in the pelting rain
skirring across the graveyard’s sheeted ice,
and recite the way it should always have been:
when the mother goes, the son stands and recites.

Hush now, your mother hides a husk for a heart
and a stone sits deep where her soul once pulsed.

Listen now to the silence, so loud and hard
- no echo struggles up through the snowy loam
that blankets your body so finally. No harm
any longer, finally. No harm no breath no laugh
no life. What version of sanity brings you so soon
to this quell of quiet, to this farewell place,
to the end of the world on a stillborn afternoon
in a whiteout blizzard as white as the shroud,
as numbing and raw as the spotless *tallis*
embracing now your earthly remains?

Today they put you in the frozen ground,
a frigid trifecta for the meteorologists.

Snow. Sleet. Hail the almighty
storming spirit. We can hear heaven

*pinging pinging* ice pellets of shock
onto the wooden board that separates

your earthly remains, so recently quick,
from us who remain, stunned, on the earth.

We the women who remain on the earth
remain standing, shuttered and stooped

around your huddled mother, double-bent,
fending off the great wingèd capes

of the vulture umbrellas clustered like shadow
angels of death gently nudging our shoulders,

reminder of how feeble is the attempt
to hope and hide and shelter in place.

A mother of five is always counting heads.
Leaving your grave, counting heads. One
gone missing. She worries you’ll be cold,
you’re way too skinny, she never liked the sound
of that cough and you, you refused to eat
the healthy stuff. So hush now, hush.

Your mother will survive you, bleeding inside,
by counting heads. Four remain.
Spectral II
Connor Rice

Anxiety and Memed, or The Invention of Evil / Collude with Dark / Unemployed Friday / My Brother’s Cat Mia / The Obdurate Tense / A Place Called Pins and
Elements / Mess / Reading Nathaniel Mackey After Election Day /
I’m a useful bursting rainbow joy explosion” (U.B.R.J.E.) / Sophie / 241
Suburb / Apartment for Lease / Navy Blue Jacket / 19 / A Sad Story
Things We Are Doing That We Need to Keep Doing /
Body of Water) / Highway 194 North, NC / On the Spot /
Yearning Parasite / Letter to Room / Souvenirs / Why Love
Angry (A Love Song) / When Everything Is Everything It’s Hard to Feel
Alone Unique / I’m Filling a Mayonnaise Jar with Golf Balls, Pebbles, Sand,
Vacancies / The Oxidation of Iron, a Diagram / Heyday of the
World Piece / flit / Quietly Enough / Complete Ebullitions of Tiny Vibrating
the drifting cloudless “drifting” / Center /
New York Grows a Second
Weeping, Taken
On the Phone
It’s Been Here / An
Rescues / The Terrorist /
An Exchange
Learned That the Word
Answers to the Question,
Holding / The Poet,
Unable, Beings Possible, Takes
Moment / You’re Pretty
Dancers in Our Sleep? / Talking /
Harass / Tell Me the
Sort of
Spectral III
Connor Rice

Poem / 4 Objects, After Gertrude Stein / Orange Cat / “Gets so quiet an echo sounds new” / The Honey Tree Fragments / Making a Man of Misters / On My End / Chromatography / Cupidity / Mindflowers / Un-Local / Signs in Humidity / the Timbre of Our Laughter / Cassiopeia / Poem in the Midst of the Sea / Hello Goodbye / Snails / Eavesdropping Over Lunch / Return to Fire / the Meantime / Be-ness / At the Library of Congress / Across the Street / Botany Quiz / Meteors / Again and Not Yet / That Can Be Lengthened or Shortened but the Links Are a Fixed Distance/ Been Optimized to Boost Audience Engagement / In Case You Were in There / Left / Future Tech / Product No. 57 / Product No. 99 / School or Heat Wave / Altruism / Evolutions / Internecine Bliss (a collage of words) / Day / They Happened in Rooms / Our House Is My House Amane / Dirge for the Millennial Ego / Looks West / The Crater and Firmament / Image I hear from Primitive Anxiety and Memed, or The Invention of Evil / Collude with Myrka / Unemployed Monday (feat. My Brother’s Cat Mia) / The Obdurate Tense / A Place Called Pins and Needles / Pigments / M                                                                                     EN(RYPTEL) / “I’m a useful bacterium” / “Was / Eat / Cat N
Jane Andrews has published poetry in *The Main Street Rag, Verdad Magazine, Vapid Kitten, Pembroke Magazine, The Dead Mule School of Literature*, and other journals. Additionally, she has published memoir, creative nonfiction, and short stories. She is the nonfiction editor for *Glint Literary Journal*, as well as a freelance writing workshop leader and editor.

Randall Brown is the author of the award-winning collection *Mad to Live*, his essay on (very) short fiction appears in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction*, and he appears in *Best Small Fictions 2015* and *The Norton Anthology of Hint Fiction*. He blogs regularly at FlashFiction.Net and has been published and anthologized widely, both online and in print. He is also the founder and managing editor of Matter Press and its *Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*. He received his MFA in Fiction from Vermont College and is on the faculty of Rosemont College’s MFA in Creative Writing Program.
Kelly DuMar is a Boston-based poet, playwright, and workshop facilitator. Her newest chapbook, *Tree of the Apple*, was published in February 2017 by Two of Cups Press. She lives on the rural Charles River where she walks, takes nature photographs, and writes poetry and prose from her photos.

Brent Fisk is a writer from Bowling Green, Kentucky with over 300 poems, essays, and short stories published so far, including work in *Rattle, Prairie Schooner, Cincinnati Review*, and *Southeast Review*. He has an B.A. in English Literature, and an M.A. in Creative Writing from Western Kentucky University.

Christopher Fox graduated from Hunter College with an MFA in Creative Writing, where he was privileged enough to study with fiction writers like Peter Carey, Colum McCann, and Claire Messud. When not working on his own stories, he is helping clients tell theirs, as a speechwriter at West Wing Writers. He grew up on Long Island, and now lives and works in New York City.

Bayleigh Fraser is an American poet currently writing and residing in Canada, where she hopes to continue her education in poetry. She previously studied at Stetson University in Deland, Florida. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *A Bad Penny Review, The Brooklyn Quarterly, Forage Poetry, One, Qu, Rattle*, and other publications.
Karen George is author of the poetry collection *Swim Your Way Back* (Dos Madres Press, 2014) and four chapbooks, most recently *The Fire Circle* (Blue Lyra Press, 2016). Her work has appeared in *America, Adirondack Review, Naugatuck River Review, Louisville Review,* and *Still.* She reviews poetry and interviews poets at Poetry Matters, and is co-founder and fiction editor of *Waypoints.*

torrin a. greathouse is a genderqueer, schizophrenic, cripple-punk from Southern California. They are the editor and co-founder of Black Napkin Press. Their work has been published or is forthcoming in *Assaracus, Heavy Feather Review, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Polychrome Ink, Rabbit Catastrophe Review, Calamus Journal, Emerge Literary Journal,* and *The Feminist Wire.* torrin’s work was nominated for the Pushcart Prize by *Rust + Moth.* When they are not writing or editing poetry, they are trying to survive in America long enough to earn a degree.

Lauren Harr graduated from the University of New Mexico and Spalding University’s Low Residency MFA Program, worked at literary nonprofits and publishers, and spent many happy years as an independent bookseller. She lives in Western North Carolina with her husband and daughter, surrounded by books and mountains. Harr’s essay that appears in this issue was inspired by her residency at the Arrowmont School of Arts & Crafts in Gatlinburg.
**Sherri Harvey** teaches English at Foothill College and San Jose State University. She has written articles for *Eventing Nation*, takes pictures with her Nikon D90, and is CEO of a dog adventure company called dirtydogs-k9adventures.com. She loves pouring over words, galloping her horses, hiking with her dog, and drinking vodka. She holds an MA from CSU East Bay and is also pursuing an MFA in Creative Nonfiction at San Jose State University.

**Jacqueline Kirkpatrick** has been published in *Creative Nonfiction, The Rumpus, and Thought Catalog*. She is a graduate of the MFA creative writing program at The College of Saint Rose in Albany, NY.

**Deborah Kahan Kolb** was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY and currently lives in the Bronx. Much of her poetry reflects the unique experiences and challenges of growing up in, and ultimately leaving, the insular world of Hasidic Judaism. Her work has appeared in *Poetica, Voices Israel, Veils, Halos & Shackles, The New Verse News, Tuck, Literary Mama, Rise Up Review, and Poets Reading the News*. She was an Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Award finalist and her debut collection, *Windows and a Looking Glass*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2017 and was a finalist for their 2016 New Women’s Voices Chapbook Competition.

**C. Labairon** is a poet and a mixed media artist. Her second chapbook, *And the Road Will Take You There*, published by Spoon River Poetry Press, was written in conjunction with a mixed media series. Her poems were included in the anthology *Farming Word*, edited by Bill Holm. Her work has also appeared in numerous literary magazines. She is an English instructor at South Central College.
**Madison London** is twenty-three years old. She graduated from the University of San Diego, CA, with a degree in English and an emphasis in Creative Writing. This is her first publication.

**Mary McCarthy** has always been a writer, but spent most of her working life as a Registered Nurse. She has had work included in many online and print journals, including *Gnarled Oak, Third Wednesday, Silver Birch Press*, and *Expound*. Her digital chapbook, *Things I Was Told Not to Think About*, was published by Praxis last year.

**Megan Merchant** is mostly forthcoming. She is the author of two full-length poetry collections: *Gravel Ghosts* (Glass Lyre Press, 2016 Book of the Year) and *The Dark’s Humming* (2015 Lyrebird Prize, Glass Lyre Press, forthcoming 2017). She also has published four chapbooks, and a children’s book with Philomel Books.

**Judith H. Montgomery** lives in Bend, Oregon. Her poems appear in *Ars Medica, Cimarron Review, Hunger Mountain, So to Speak* (forthcoming), and *Prairie Schooner*, among other journals, as well as in a number of anthologies. Her chapbook, *Passion*, received the 2000 Oregon Book Award for poetry. Her second collection, *Red Jess*, was published in February 2006 from Cherry Grove Collections; her second chapbook, *Pulse & Constellation*, was a finalist for the Finishing Line Press Competition and was published in 2007. She is working on two new manuscripts, *Litany for Bloom and Wound* and *Mutable Flame*. 
Eric Morris-Pusey is a poet and freelance writer residing in Greensboro, North Carolina. A current MFA candidate at Vermont College of Fine Arts, his poetry has previously appeared in *Driftwood Press, See Spot Run*, and *Forty Eighty-Five*. He occasionally blogs about writing at ericmorrispusey.com.

Jake Munoz comes from a Kundalini Yoga and Shamanic background, and is a firm believer in the spiritual realm and the powers we can all access. He combines those intelligences with his artistic process to help heal. Although he is a young man, he has an old soul.

Jeannine Pitas is a teacher, writer, and Spanish-English literary translator currently living in Iowa, where she teaches at the University of Dubuque.

Connor Rice is an emerging poet and artist whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *DUM DUM Zine, Weirderary, and The Kudzu Review*.

Brittany Rogers is trying to survive being a mother/high school teacher/poet/Hufflepuff with her glitter and inner church girl intact. She is an editor for *Wusgood.black*, a literary magazine which creates a safe space for urban writers. She has work published or forthcoming in *Mothers Always Write Journal, undr_scr review, Eunoia Review, Vinyl, Gramma*, and *Freezeray*.

Nicholas J.J. Smith grew up in Sydney, Australia. After studying in the U.S. for five years and working in New Zealand for four years, he returned to Sydney, where he now lives and works. Nick has a B.A. in philosophy and history from the University of Sydney and a Ph.D. in logic and philosophy from Princeton University. Recent photography publications and exhibitions include *The Adirondack Review, Lenscratch, L.A. Photo Curator, and Darkroom Gallery.*
William Smythe graduated from the University of Montana English program in 2015. He studied Creative Writing (Fiction) and Literature, with a minor in Irish Studies. When not writing, William makes music and co-hosts a poetry collective in his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee.

Robin Turner brings poetry and creative writing to youth shelters, arts camps, and community centers in Dallas, Texas, and serves as an online writing guide to homeschooled teens. A Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee, her work has appeared in numerous journals, anthologies, and public poetry projects. Her chapbook, *bindweed & crow poison: small poems of stray girls, fierce women*, is available from Porkbelly Press.

Hannah Warren is an MFA candidate at the University of Kansas, and her works have appeared recently in *Soundings East*, *The Nottingham Review*, and *Jet Fuel Review*. She often writes about death but hopes never to experience it.

Amelia L. Williams, PhD is a writer/editor who lives in the rural Rockfish River Valley of Central Virginia. She is the author of *Walking Wildwood Trail: Poems and Photographs*, which features a three-mile trail of eco-poetry art installations. The trail celebrates the landscapes that the proposed fracked-gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline threatens. She received her doctorate in English Literature at the University of Virginia. Her work has appeared in *Centrifugal Eye*, *Sow’s Ear Poetry Review*, *The Piedmont Virginian*, and elsewhere. A portion of her poetry exchange about the growing season appeared on the *Orion Magazine* Tumblr blog on May 15, 2014. She is a fellow of the Hambidge Center for the Creative Arts & Sciences.
Submission due dates are **October 31, January 31, April 30,** and **July 31,** for issues forthcoming January 1, April 1, July 1, and **October 1,** respectively, unless otherwise noted on our website.

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

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

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

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

Katherine Davis earned an MFA in fiction from the University of Maryland and a PhD from the University of Tennessee. Her most recent work appears in *Gravel* and in *Broad River Review*, and she won Gigantic Sequins’ 2014 Flash Fiction Contest. Currently, she is living in Wisconsin with a small flock of cockatiels and is completing her first novel.
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*.

Sarah Wylder Deshpande has published fiction and poetry in The Dunes Review, Tammy Journal, 3Elements Review, Gravel Magazine, and Fire Tetrahedron. She holds an MFA from the University of Maryland. She lives in Oregon with her husband, son, and border collie.

Jen Corrigan A nominee for the 2017 Pushcart Prize, Jen Corrigan has worked as an editorial intern at the North American Review and served as a jury member for Mash Stories. Her prose has appeared or is forthcoming in Apocrypha and Abstractions; The Gambler; Change Seven Magazine; Hypertext Magazine; The Tishman Review; Pithead Chapel; Cease, Cows; and elsewhere. Visit her at jencorrigan.wordpress.com.
Hannah Carr-Murphy

Hannah Carr-Murphy is a poet and musician from Black Hawk County, Iowa. She resides in Ireland. Recent poetry has appeared in *Presence: A Journal of Catholic Poetry* and the collection *Exs* (Final Thursday Press, 2016).

Marlon Fowler

Marlon Fowler is a Des Moines–based designer and web developer for 3Elements Review, as well as a web developer for a Fortune 100 company. Marlon received his bachelor’s degree in Journalism with a major in Advertising from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Marlon enjoys all things technology, making websites “do things,” running, reading, YouTube, sports, movies & TV shows, video games, and Chicago food. Marlon would really like to learn more about PHP, and see more of the world.
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