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I pull you from the river
holding a fish in your hands,
scales accordioned, gray and
hazed, instrument inhaling
itself against the air. You
cling to its body, half-life
in the half-light, silvering
in the coming dusk. I watch
you become fused, gilled,
gasping, metaled, until
you are a distant scrape
against black water.

In the quiet, I unspool
myself on the
banks.
I hunt mosquitoes. I muck around the lakes, ponds, slow-moving streams, swamps, and creeks of Chicago’s western suburbs, collecting water samples and counting larvae for Brown Biological Services—a pesticide company. If there’s a good number in a body of water, I sprinkle scoopfuls of powder pesticide around the area. When larvae ingest the poison, their insides liquefy. If the area is seriously infested, I call in bug killers on ATVs with backpacks of higher-powered pesticide spray. If the team can’t clear the area, I can authorize an air strike—a Brown helicopter raining liquid death on the mosquito population.

Adult mosquitoes bite the hell out of me when I collect samples, like they’re trying to drain me. Like they know why I’ve come.

When I moved to the suburbs, I thought I’d gotten far enough away from the places and faces I couldn’t face back home. But the big-box stores and chain restaurants repeat themselves every few
miles on every four-lane highway. Everywhere is a place I know whether I’ve been there or not. Everyone I see looks like someone I used to know from somewhere. Gary, I haven’t seen.

I was in love with him. We sat next to each other in sixth grade. Our desks were in the same group. Our writing surfaces touched. Our seats touched. We didn’t touch.

During grammar, we’d turn sideways and practice our prepositions together. Memorize the little words that formed relationships between clauses. Now I only know the beginning ones and the end ones. Aboard, above, across. With, within, without.

The middle’s gone. I can’t bring them to the surface, hold them in my hands. Aboard, above, across. Then the other ones. Gary and I said them in unison. Sitting sideways in our seats. Looking into each other’s eyes until we’d get tickles deep down inside our sixth-grade bodies. We’d quick look away, like we hadn’t noticed.

Gary was a lefty with sweaty hands. When he wrote, his hands smeared his small, sloppy preposition copies. He’d always get black smudges on the side of his left palm.

Gary was sick a lot with mono. The Kissing Disease. But he always smiled. He told me the doctors were worried about his liver. It made me worry about his liver, too.

Sixth grade, scoliosis made my spine twist up. It didn’t want to grow straight anymore and gave sideways a go. It was an aggressive S curve. I got pins and wires and rods attached to my spine to make it behave. I grew four inches during the eight-hour surgery. I was out of school for a month, haunting my house as a suddenly tall, totally stiff ghost.

I worried about my pins and wires and rods. Sometimes, when I woke up, I thought they’d moved on me, tried to burrow out. Pins pushing away from bone through muscle and flesh to freedom. And my back would behave badly again.

But the surgery made me appreciate medical procedures. Thermometers under my tongue, flu shots in my arms, x-rays, physicals, visits to the dental hygienist. I enjoy the attention the technicians pay me, the nose-tingling disinfectant fumes, the hope that when things in my body go wrong, these people will be there to fix them.

Donating blood is my favorite. I don’t sell it or strain it or separate it into red blood cells, white blood cells, plasma, and platelets. I donate whole blood.

Iodine—brown and cold on the bend of my arm. I’m sensitive there. The needle sliding in, under my skin, through the vein. Then the blood flowing out through the needle, through the tube. I can feel warmth in the tube when the blood runs out of my body. And my mind drifts away away away.

When I came back to class after the surgery and surgical growth spurt, kids asked our teacher, “Who’s the new girl?” Not Gary. He’d been gone before, too. Been forgotten. He reached under his desk, under my desk, and rested his fingertips on my leg. “I know you,” he said. His fingers were warm and sweaty. There was ink on the side of his palm.

I’m eligible to give blood every 56 days. Red Cross sets up at high schools or church basements or VFW halls. My favorite spot is in Naperville, an upscale suburb with lots of neighborhoods that
have small ponds surrounded by big houses. Brown Biological is called there a lot. Rich people love living by water, but hate living by mosquitos.

Naperville has this rec center that smells like my high school field house, all rubber flooring, healthy-people sweat, and the hot exhalation of joggers. When the center hosts blood drives, they pull floor-to-ceiling, canvas-and-net curtains across the field house to partition donors off from work-out people. But I can still hear the rhythmic pounding of runners’ feet and the heartbeat percussion of bouncing basketballs.

I lie on the cot and I watch the blood flow from me. I’m happy where I am. It doesn’t happen often. Only once every 56 days.

When my blood bag is full, the phlebotomists unhook me and give me cookies and orange juice and a cool cloth. They remind me to drink extra fluids and mark my calendar for the next drive. I assure them I will.

Every 56 days the needle must go in; the blood must come out.

All of seventh grade I had a get-out-of-Gym-free pass. The doctors were worried about my back, about the pins and wires and rods shaking loose before they could fuse fully to my spine. It made me worry about my back, too.

I was careful about how I walked through crowded halls, how many books I carried to class. I missed out on dances and dancing close with boys in the dark gym and gossiping in the bathroom about who’d been kissing who with their mouths closed and who’d been kissing who with their mouths open.

I did get to swim at the YMCA, though. I couldn’t bend enough to dive into the pool, but I could swim like anything. And I was fast, cutting through the water, arms and legs pumping. The water stopped resisting and made me its own. I became liquid.

My back got me out of Gym, but not Health. I had my first kiss in the field house during first aid. Her name was Resuscitation Annie, but everyone called her Resurrection Annie. She was the head and blue T-shirted torso we learned CPR on.

Our health teacher said Annie’s face was based on the death mask of a girl who drowned herself in some river in Paris a hundred years ago. No one claimed the girl’s body, but poets immortalized her imagined heartache, artists captured the coy smile on her lovely dead face, and musicians celebrated her star-crossed love affair. Then in the 1950s, a toy-maker who had a great formula for flesh-like foam rubber—and a drowned daughter of his own—made the first Resuscitation Annie. People have been giving the kiss of life to the dead Parisian girl ever since.

When it was my turn with Annie, I was nervous. My hands were sweaty. I practiced yelling for a bystander to call 911, checked her pulse, looked for bloody wounds to staunch or tourniquet, swept her throat for obstructions. Then I leaned my lips down to hers, tilted her plastic chin up toward my face, and breathed into her.

I practiced breathing and pumping. My mouth on her rubber lips. My hands cupped over her heart. Beating it back to beating. I brought her back from the dead. But when I stopped breathing into Annie, she died again, and it was someone else’s turn to perform a miracle.

I haven’t saved anyone since.

Eighth grade math, Gary sat behind me. He slouched. I didn’t. He got bad grades because he couldn’t see—or didn’t care
about—the homework assignments on the board.

“You sit up too straight,” he told me.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I have to.” I cursed my spine for going crooked and being forced to go straight again and for having pins and wires and rods that wouldn’t let me slouch like other kids. Like Gary.

“It’s okay,” he said. And I almost believed him.

Anemia can keep me from draining myself. Sometimes the iron count in my blood dips below the acceptable level for the Red Cross. Times like that, I feel too thick, too full. I want to die.

The lady who tests the blood for iron pricks my finger, steals a drop, and drips it into a vile of blue liquid. Heavy, iron-strong blood sinks to the bottom. My blood sometimes bobs up to the surface. Not good enough.

“Do you drink ice tea?” the woman asks. “It depletes your iron.” She gives me the poor-dear look. I don’t drink iced tea, but I want her to think there’s some environmental factor to blame.

“I’m crazy about ice tea,” I say. But I’m the real problem. I promise the woman I’ll take more vitamins. More. The next time, I’ll be ready.

I kneel at the muddy shore of a man-made pond in the middle of the afternoon in the middle of a well-off Naperville neighborhood looking for larvae. Mosquitoes buzz around me. In spite of my bug spray, they land, feed, and buzz away again. These mosquitoes are brave. They usually wait till dusk. This is broad daylight.

I fill a vial with pond water, peer in. I’ve taken and retaken water samples. Too many larvae in one pond. The water’s thick with them, practically solid, but the ATV’s were here last week to liquify them. The mosquitoes are multiplying too fast. Making too many babies. I bag the samples and stomp through a well-manicured lawn to call in a pesticide air strike.

There’s a new phlebotomist who looks like Gary. I want him to be my phlebotomist. I want him to take my blood. I lie on his cot.

“Do you know your blood type?” he asks. I want to make him happy. To lie that I’m O-negative, that rare wonderful universal donor. But I’m not and he’d find out and the Red Cross would find out and I wouldn’t be able to get rid of all this blood that’s building up inside me.

“I’m just an A-positive,” I say.

“We always need A-positive,” he says. And I almost believe him.

He turns my arm and runs a latex-gloved finger along my vein. I sigh. I wonder if his palm is ink-stained under that glove.

He gives me an extra swab of iodine. He can tell I like it. He’s gentle when he slides the needle in, doesn’t jab around and rip up my vein. When he looks up from my arm, he notices I watched.

“Most people turn away,” he says.

“I look,” I say. “I can’t stop looking.”

He’s good. After, the needle mark heals quick and flat, no bruising, no pain. Fifty-six days till the next drive. Fifty-six days to wait and think about the phlebotomist with Gary-hair and Gary-eyes.

If I drink extra liquids I can see him sooner. Eat two one-a-day multi-vitamins. Red meat for iron. Liver, maybe. And then I’ll be ready in 40 days. Thirty. Then I’ll feel his warm fingers through his sterile gloves again.
I think about where my blood goes when it goes out of me. The teller at my bank who wears big beaded bracelets to hide her once-slit wrists. Is she A-positive? Did I bring her back from the dead? I watch her neck, the slight sparkle of her silver necklace as her jugular flutters beneath. Am I inside?

Or maybe my blood goes to emergency rooms to refill kids rushed in from crashes. I can help, but only if they’re A-positive, or AB-positive, the universal receiver. If not, my blood will stay in some refrigerator. Dying outside a body.

There was a big murder trial when we were in high school. One of those rich-guy-kills-his-beautiful-wife things. Gary followed the case like crazy. He’d whisper to me in study hall about the missing murder weapon, the incriminating blood droplets on the bathroom floor. “But everybody bleeds a little in their bathroom!” he’d yell.

He’d get riled, talk too loud, and I’d pretend to read so I wouldn’t get in trouble.

“If he’s innocent,” Gary said, “why did he try to fake his death in that boat crash?”

“Gary!” the study hall monitor would huff. Gary got a lot of detentions that way. I helped him get them, though. I hung on every whispered word.

His freckly cheeks blushed up when he got excited. He talked about things like they mattered. The jury, the victim’s family, the victim herself, bleeding till she ran out of blood. Till she was empty. Such a waste.

This wasn’t the usual study hall chatter about who was kissing who, who was having sex. This was current events. Gary risked his after-school afternoons to keep me informed.

Once the monitor made Gary stand up and apologize to me in front of everyone. His face was red; mine was redder.

“Sorry I bothered you,” he said. Kids snickered all across the room.

Gary sat down, deflated. I reached under my desk, under his desk, and rested my fingertips on his leg.

“You’re not bothering me,” I said. Gary smiled. Then I got a detention, too.

Twenty days since I gave blood. Three multi-vitamins a day. That’s 60 days’ worth in 20 days. Sixty’s more than 56, so I’m fine. I’ve been eating red meat. Drinking extra fluids. No iced tea. My body is mostly liquid.

When I have to pee, I hold it till I’ve gotten all there is to get out of my fluids.

There’s a blood drive at the rec center in Naperville. It smells like sweaty socks and sweaty bodies.

The Gary-guy’s here, but he’s with someone tall and straight-spined and pretty. He’s asking her blood type. I see her lips form a perfect O. She’s a universal donor. The Gary-guy high fives her with his gloved hand. They chat while he preps the needle. I can feel myself getting too full.

Other donors finish and other phlebotomists beckon to me, but I wait for the one I’ve been waiting for. I watch him coo and comfort the universal donor.

I wish I was the one he was whispering to. I’d hang on every whispered word. I pinch the skin at the bend of my arm and imagine this pain is the prick of his needle penetrating my vein.

After our murder-trial detentions, Gary asked me to go swimming at the lake with him. If my back was okay.

My back was amazing. My whole body was tickly. I couldn’t even think, like my heart stopped beating blood to my brain.

The lake was man-made, an ex-gravel pit that the city covered up with water and forgot about. That night, in the dark of the spring-cool water, I think Gary loved me too, but only for a couple minutes.

The rare and precious universal donor is finally done. The Gary
phlebotomist helps her to the refreshment table. I sit on his cot before anyone else gets the chance.

I’ve taken my vitamins, I’ve eaten red meat, I’ve drowned myself in fluids. I’m ready.

The Gary phlebotomist comes back and tells me to lie down, to relax. I do. I don’t.

I’m tickly all over. He examines my left arm. His glove brushes over the bend. I’m sensitive there.

“You have beautiful veins,” he says.

“I’ll bet you say that to all the donors,” I say. My cheeks get warm. Blood blushing up.

The night was warm. We’d gotten too hot in detention. We needed to swim. I met Gary under a full moon by the lake. The sky was cloudless, bugless. Rains had raised the water level, washing logs and leaves and trash in, but with the moonlight reflecting white on the black rippling surface, the lake looked lovely. We stripped down to our suits and stepped off the rocky shore into the rock-bottomed water.

“Can you swim okay?” Gary asked. “With your back?”

“Can you swim okay?” I asked. “With your liver?”

He smiled. “You remembered my mono.”

I looked across the lake. Gary reached his hand out of the water, up to my back, and ran his fingertips down the length of my scar. I shivered.

“Does it hurt?” he asked.

“It’s like the outer layer of my back is numb, and you’re touching a few layers in.” I wondered if the lake water had washed the ink off his writing hand. He pushed his fingers down a little harder and smiled. I sighed.

“What does it feel like now?” he asked.

“Like you’re reaching inside me,” I said.

There was a diving ledge across the lake. Gary said we should swim to it. He said he’d go slow for me. I said he couldn’t keep up.

The drop-off came fast. We were in up to our knees then we were in over our heads. We started to swim.

The Gary phlebotomist readies me. Iodine—cool and brown at the bend of my arm. He gets the bag I’m going to fill. He prepares the needle.

I swam fast, left Gary behind. My body became liquid. There were sticks and weeds in the water I couldn’t see till I’d scrape over them. I waited for Gary in the rocky shallows. The air was getting colder. My skin bumped up like I’d gotten mosquito bites. Gary caught up, waded in close and wrapped his arms around my shoulders. We kissed and kissed and kissed. He laid me down on the rocky shore. “Your back?” he asked before we started.

“Your liver?”

He laughed. Leaned into me. He was warm and real. So much better than Health class.

He slides the needle in my vein—a quick, hot prick, then pleasure. My warm blood flowing out through the needle, through the tube, away away away.

We were shivery out of the water. Gary led me up the hill to the diving ledge. I felt like I could see everything: the black water below, the white moon above, the future stretching out. I thought life would keep its promises.

“I can’t dive,” I said. “It’s my back,” I said.

“I’ll go first,” he said.

The Gary phlebotomist is frowning. Gary never frowned. My blood is trickling. I feel numb at the bend of my arm.

“You’re not filling the bag,” he says.

If you don’t fill your bag, the Red Cross can’t use it. They throw your blood away.
Gary was a good diver, I think. He wasn’t scared when he crept his toes up to the edge. He dove. But there were things in the water we couldn’t see. Things just below the surface.

The gym’s getting colder. I’m sweating. Fog’s rising around the edges of my eyes. I have to fill the bag. In still, shallow waters, mosquitoes are mating, larvae are hatching. Too many. The pretty couples in their fancy pond neighborhoods are being bitten and bled. Till they’re drained. Till they’re empty.

“If you can’t fill the bag, I’ll have to take out the needle,” the Gary phlebotomist says. “I’ll have to throw the blood away.”

Gary dove into a water-soaked log bobbing just below the surface. The dead branches cut him. The trunk cracked his skull. His spine accordioned up. I ran down the hill. The rocks sliced my feet. They were bleeding. Gary was somewhere in the water. He was bleeding and bleeding and bleeding. I sloshed in and tried to find him. My fingertips touched sticks and weeds, but not Gary. The water was copper in my mouth. I held my breath, plunged below the surface, and finally, finally, finally found him. I dragged him onto the rocky shore.

I held Gary close, wrapped my arms around him to keep him warm. Tried to yell to a bystander to call 911, but no one else was there. Tried to staunch, but the blood was coming from everywhere. Tried to tourniquet, but we didn’t have belts, only bloody swimsuits.

Gary’s blood wouldn’t stop coming out and I didn’t know how to put it back in. I tilted his chin. Kissed his cold lips. Tried to breathe into him. Tried to beat his heart back to beating. But he drifted away, away, away.

“The vein’s gone dry,” the phlebotomist says. The phlebotomist who’s not Gary pulls out the needle and throws the half-empty blood bag into a bio-hazard container. He gives me cookies and orange juice and a cool cloth anyway, and my mind drifts away away away. Such a waste.
Remember the searchlight
scanning the night,
a warning, it seemed,
to me, a five-year-old
afraid of
    ominous circles
    that scrape the sky,
anxious in
    the dark,
haunted by
    monsters under the Bible,
terrified to tempt
    god,
a white-hot vengeful god
eager to zap a chubby little sinner,
Dad knew which fuse box switch did what—in this way, he chose between light and dark. His hands blackened from cracking walnuts over the years, hammering husks in the night when the rest of us were sleeping, loud whacks startling us temporarily awake then to drift back into our own黑暗nesses beneath familiar stars. After his death, we found Dad’s walnuts in barrels in the corner of his workshop alongside spiders and memories we were not yet ready to scrape. My brother said, to honor him, we had to break and eat each one, despite the bulk. That Dad lived a rich life poor, and how the taste might play memory’s accordion, careening us in and out the past and present, turning life to death then life again, forlorn in its discordant loudness.
This morning fog settles in and I am late to rise. I slip between dreams and reality, try to ravel the frayed edge of the past.

I do not trust what I remember—root-heaved sidewalks disappear along with white whiskered grocers and the barbels of beheaded catfish. My grandfather filleted, dropped into the pop and hiss of hot grease. Who claims the heirloom roses along the cinder drive? All hips and soft perfume, are they more figment than filament, slight tether I finger feeling for the pulse of the past.

That morning Ms. Hinnegar sat rigid in front of the class, her hair severe and thin, the upside-down smiles of penciled-on eyebrows. She taught about the importance of elocution, told us Hoosier history: the Wabash Cannonball, William Henry Harrison, speculation about our state’s demonym. The room smelled of chalk dust and oil cloth. Melody Atwood’s pigtails swished just out of reach.

I stitch together what punctuated and pierced—the dog bite, the knee scrape embedded with macadam—weave in my father teetering with gin toward the porch swing, his awful renditions of folk songs on accordion drew neighbors to their windows. Mom whispering Once, he was good. He grew cross because we did not remember songs we never heard of.

Sometimes in sleep I will turn down the mouth of an alley, sure of where I’m headed, sure of where I’ve come, but always I come to a place where the world gives way, where memory fails and the landscape blinks out, a house darkened by a blown-out fuse.

Strange, the way we are most often so certain of ourselves, loose assemblage of receipts, bad haircuts, and pink slips, the occasional buck from a horse. I cannot tell you what I ate a mere week ago, or give the middle names of my grandparents. I have never asked my mother the hour of my birth. Lightning flash, and again we are plunged into darkness, glass trembling in windows. This is memory: a seashell, pristine and whole, glimpsed in the wash of aggregate and tumble, initials gouged in the bark of a tree forever growing out of sight.
We fuse together things that should not be:
Ms. Hinnegar spoke of Benjamin,
not William Henry. My father didn’t sing the songs
he played, but simply hummed along.
My mother used the word persistent, never good.
The past is often made of hope, ash
sprinkled on infested rose buds, report cards
still sealed in manila envelopes, the first page of a book.
We scrape its guts out like a pumpkin, carve
a kind mouth and round, astonished eyes.
We put it in yard sales like inherited accordions.
We shove it in the attic where mice chew it into homes.
We throw it in basements to nourish the dark.
YEARS ago we lived in a brownstone building on Grand Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. Across the street sat the famous Tavern on Grand, its interior painted to resemble a wood cabin. They served walleye sandwiches and Grain Belt beer. A liquor store rested on the corner as well, and I sometimes hauled up beer to the third floor and stood looking out our bay window. I drank hard in the winters there. I drank because I felt like a failure.

From the window I could see quite a ways down Grand, unless the heat from the old-fashioned radiator steamed up the windows. Whenever I had a headache, I would place my forehead against the frozen windowpanes, and I would think about the beautiful patterns made by the kaleidoscope of tail lights moving down the street. I would think about how to do things differently.

I thought about our wedding and honeymoon and what happened when we came back. On someone’s recommendation, I had carried you over the threshold. It was dramatic and joyful. A few minutes later, though, we found out that our car had been impounded. We had been gone so long that the impound lot had auctioned it off to the public. I had stashed a bottle of vodka above the refrigerator, and I drank several long swigs before deciding what to do. You put your face in your hands and cried.

We lived close to a very steep hill in St. Paul. In fact, it was once the neighborhood of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. One time, when we were dressed up for a party, someone said we were “like the Fitzgeralds or something, look at you!” It’s another interesting fact that I’m saying “we” now, for I have not spoken to you in several years. The last time we were happy was when we lived in St. Paul. It was after we left that things really fell apart for us.

The steep hill had an east-facing road that proved treacherous on icy days. One morning I was trying to drive as the sun was rising and I couldn’t see and couldn’t control the car. It was also very cold. Ice was actually forming—accumulating even—on the inside of the windshield. I had one hand on the steering wheel and one hand holding the scraper. No matter how I squinted I couldn’t see… but anyway, we’re still alive.

In the spring—whenever that finally came—flowerbeds jutted from the great windows of the brownstones and Victorian houses along Grand. People whistled and sometimes lingered in front of the shops, the many storefronts with colorful displays, mannequins wearing top hats at jaunty angles. People talking and laughing, telling stories or predicting the baseball season. We would walk down Grand, holding hands, thinking which house we
would someday buy.

From our window, very early one morning, I saw a man standing alone and waiting for the bus. The rest of the street was empty. Slowly, he unfolded a roundhouse kick at a sign with some parking information on it. He looked around, seeing no one. Satisfied, he did it again. And again. The kick was not powerful. It was slow-mo. He was a fervent apprentice, careful with his form. I asked you to hurry to see the would-be sensei. I spent the day mocking him by roundhousing our bookshelves.

Next to the window we had put a small table. I remember we tried out a recipe and served it in decorative bowls we’d received as a wedding gift. Playing adults, we opened a bottle of wine and turned on some music without lyrics. We opened the bay window. We lit a candle for ambiance. Taking a bite—it was pasta and I can see the steam rising from it—we felt that we had done something successfully. I had tears in my eyes as we danced around the room. You were crying too.

The summer was so hot, somehow. We could hardly bear to be in the apartment. We were told that these apartments could not handle air conditioning units. The old building still had a fuse box, and we were taught how to replace the fuses when, inevitably, too many things had been plugged in at the same time. We got a couple of tiny air conditioners anyway, and they dripped down the sides of our brick building. From the street, the air conditioners were like sugar cubes stuck to the gingerbread buildings of Grand.

It could get so hot. Put out, I stomped a couple blocks to Ace

Hardware and spent a fortune on a huge air conditioner and lugged it down the street, up the three floors, and into our apartment only to discover it was a lemon. I forced it back into its box and lugged the son of a bitch back to the store. Then, I stomped back to the apartment with another one, even bigger, and it immediately blew the fuse. You weren’t home. I sat with my back against an inner wall of the apartment and cried. I cried for the life I thought we were getting there.

Each year, in June, the town held a celebration for Grand Old Day. In the morning a parade would pass by our apartment. They had a megaphone and would tell us to vote for Amy Klobuchar, or whoever the Democrat was that year. Someone else would grab the megaphone and tell us who was conducting the marching band. Hungover from the previous night, I’d walk to the window and look below. Excited, I would run to the bedroom and wake you up.

Today is Grand Old Day! Look at this, a huge float! And there, that woman is playing the accordion! I’d hop over to the fridge and pull out a cold beer. Oh, I know I shouldn’t drink so early, but honey, it’s Grand Old Day! Let’s call so-and-so and have them over. And so we would. We would call everyone. We would dance around the table. We would dance there by the window.
Young Twins Watch an Accordion

Bryn Homuth

For R and N

seated arm’s length from the keyboard
a girl and boy, patient faces
alike and different
jaws unhinged in transfixed

the player’s fingers traverse
among sharp, flat,
natural; theirs twitch,
imagine a grown dexterity
in bow-scrape or valve-press
or a reach to walk up keys
like stairs
a tireless climb of wonder

bellows’ breath in squeeze and stretch
like a muscle flexed and released
their mother’s lungs
swelled from inside the womb
a piece of their beginning

fused with the wood, the reeds,
the lacquered shell,
one instrument, two hands,
symbiosis in duet.
Men swaying to the cantor’s version of torah
fuse into a singular sermon.
They remind me of beasts on the savannah:
Manischewitz wine watering holes
turned sweet by Moses.

From the safety of the above, I spy black and white backs
draped in teffilin, facing east, swaying in the heat,
lips breathing in the words of god.

Doily curtains, embroidered perfection,
accordion mounds of lace, separate me from the men.
I hide below the Candy Man’s coat, draped over three chairs,
with various other outerwear, and I hold tight to my father’s fedora.

It smells of My Father: cholent, horseradish, sweat.
My fingers trace Hebrew letters: alef, base, alef.
Suede changes under my fingernail;
scrape the material, then erase his name.
THERE was a fire in the neighborhood today. You can see the smoke from the windows of my office. Someone’s house burnt down today. I think I was there. But I wasn’t. There. I was.

I’m not sure where I was.

I had thought I heard a baby crying. I had thought I heard my daughter Susan crying.

But it was just the fire trucks caterwauling past

sirens making a long blue line.

I am writing in my office at my desk in a journal

I am writing how

I am writing how my daughter thinks.

The verb to be—is—expresses most simply how my daughter thinks.

My daughter is not stupid or crazy.

My daughter is ugly.

I am sitting at my desk.

My desk inside my office.

My office inside my house.

My house in a neighborhood.
My neighborhood outside a city.

There was a fire today.

I believed no one was hurt.

I was not there.
I was.

My ugly daughter.

When Susan was five years old she fell into a campfire. She burnt her hands in the flames.

I sat by watching Susan’s hands burn in the fire while Tre—my husband Tre—ran to save her.

He wrapped her in a sleeping bag. Our sleeping bag.

He carried her to the car.

We drove in silence.

Every few minutes Susan would mewl, not having the strength to scream.

I am writing in my office.

The carpet is gray Berber. The walls adobe striped vanilla.

We painted them as a family one day.

We dressed in white overalls and painter’s caps and emptied the bookshelves and stacked the furniture in the hall and Susan sat atop a plastic sheet in the middle of the room pointing out all the spots we missed—there, Mommy! There—and there and there and there escape.

I see smoke outside my office—a fire dissipating behind tall, red maples.

My daughter Susan is playing on the carpeted floor of my office making piles of brightly colored wax wrappers red, yellow, pink, green

Green is the flavor of soap.

When she was four she ate soap.

Its color was green.
Hence, soap tastes green.

Susan is walking toward me as I write

Susan is walking toward me in my office as I write; she has
a pink Starburst and a green Starburst in her hands

she asks me

if I would

like a Starburst

“yes.”

which one?

I drank wine for three weeks before finding out I was pregnant
with Susan;

my ugly daughter Susan was born with Down syndrome.

I recognize my drinking did not cause my ugly daughter to be born
with Down syndrome but after Susan was diagnosed I wanted to
drink for three more weeks.

I could not as it was Eleni, not Susan, who was living in my belly.

I should explain, Eleni is Greek for Helen.

Before she was ugly, my daughter’s name was Eleni

What I carried in my body was the idea of Eleni not Susan.

I wore her like a gun belt—low and around my hips.

I remember crying the first time I saw an ultrasound of Eleni.

Someone said: “This is your baby.”

They pointed at a blip on the screen.

They said: This is your baby.

strangle.

Susan’s umbilical cord wriggled in the doctor’s hand.
Her skin glowed—this is an adjective people use when they want
to make something more special than it is.
Her skin glowed.
Her teeth glowed.
Her ugly face screamed with uterine slime.

I have never screamed at Susan but sometimes wish that I could. I’m not sure at the moment of writing this line what it is I would scream at Susan. If I could scream at Susan, I think I would put my hands on the sides of her face and ask her to please listen to me.

I would scream: Eleni lives in the bones of your face—
the lines
of your pasty white ness
trapped
in lines.
a growth and a growth

The oncology of violence—the violence of lines—stem from the act of one next to another another logical growth which begins and ends where I stand beside myself a line I cannot think my way out of perhaps one should scream perhaps one should scream maybe my body is a lovely temple Perhaps if one screams one will find it more bearable to carry on in lines.

I have just screamed.
I have just screamed again.
I have just screamed again and made it a smaller sound I have made the sound of my screaming into a small noise, like a frightened dog or injured rabbit.
I have just screamed like a frightened dog or injured rabbit and my daughter Susan, thinking it a game, has begun to scream with me.

We are howling like mad dogs.

I was suddenly

am

afflicted by linearity

a

surface of
to be
was is
pointed
pinholes.
Was
camping
lines
Was
in mid-flight
at the top and bottom of stairs.
bruised and bruising and unbruised.

I fell down a flight of stairs some years ago playing hide-and-seek with Susan

We were playing hide-and-seek and I tripped down a flight of stairs just after she turned 4.

I fell down

When I fell

I was

fainted

or suffered some convenient break

my instant of recall—was become would be

collapse—points in medias res—

Was

never a beautiful daughter.

Was

always had a beautiful daughter.
When I fell I was at the top and the bottom of the stairs
I was experiencing a
feeling for broken bones
calling out for
a watching of Tre in the kitchen
smelling detergent and linseed and mildew and cherry oil
a telling me he was going shopping—Do you need anything, Bev?

all
all at once
the faces asking wanting stopping

a cosmologist’s cosmology
the consistency of abased electrons
circuits of round smashed
quarks
the graded steeples of cognac dry heaves

written
line
time was

when Susan fell into the fire I watched her burn in proxy,
My Daughter Susan burnt in effigy.
—I visualized her falling into the fire—I closed my eyes—
My daughter Susan fell into the fire—I closed my eyes—
Eleni lives behind a torn wall of muscle—Susan emerges like a drowning, gaping fish—I try moving my fingers to touch her—stop! Stop! It’s okay to stop—to fishhook her mouth—Stop stop—to scrape her all the way out

The fire today started three blocks over.

outside a silver-haired man in a track suit talks loudly to a woman across the street dressed in soiled gardening clothes—fish and pets and baby-sized dogs but no people—thank God!—no people were hurt

My mother had a hysterectomy in her 50s. She claimed she could see her uterus poking out her vagina. They put her under for the operation. She dreamt she was a tree and the three earth mothers came to her with a warning
  the first warning
  the second warning
  the third warning

I don’t remember the three warnings the three earth mothers gave my mother.

My husband Tre gently held me down when I tried to fishhook my daughter Susan’s mouth. My belly still has scars.

When my mother woke from her operation she asked to hold her uterus. I remember. I was there in the recovery room. Susan was seven months old and I held her, letting her nurse, too nervous to sit, wanting to smoke a cigarette despite never having smoked a cigarette. I sat patting Susan on the back compulsively trying to get her to burp.

My mother asked for her hysterectomy, her womb, and I found myself pinching Susan flat in my arms asking Tre to take the baby home with him, to cook dinner, change the sheets, while picturing a whole case of hysterics sealed in bright orange barrels waiting to be shipped away and destroyed in the fire.

I’m afraid I have slipped out of my constraints. To write as my ugly daughter Susan thinks: in simple words.

Before he was a cultural anthropologist, Tre used to work on a cattle ranch
  One of his jobs was to help wrangle steers.
  My husband Tre was a wrangler of young steers. My husband Tre would help brand young steers by tying the animals legs together and lying across their middles.

My husband Tre recalls it was work that became ordinary. The lowing cattle, the burning hair, the smell of beef and urine and sweat.

Beef urine has a tang to it, he’d say.
  Bev, you wouldn’t believe the tang of it.

Tre tackled Susan as if she were a steer when she fell in the fire

we sat on
the floor crying, Tre and I, after the news that Eleni was Susan and Susan was what was coming out of me—they started at my navel and rode the blade down past my worries—opening me like an accordion—and I was screaming songs and I screamed many songs: how we smoked pot, that trip to Brazil, those microwave ovens, something about cell phone towers—stupid, electric things radiating off that transformer in my belly, extra chromosomes and birth defects nearby—I fixated on a lot and screamed until all that was left was Susan and a line called Eleni whose terminus came along

that
that
body of a line

that lip of my belly
that junk

Am I shouting?
Susan stomping around outside my office door, crying and upset.
I recall I shouted at her when she touched my papers just now. Just some few minutes before now. My ugly daughter Susan touched my papers and I yelled something at her.
Did I call her ugly?
When I told her to leave my office, did I call my daughter ugly?
Susan’s fingerprint on the page is an ocher colored stain.
We paused to eat lunch before these lines.
We ate roast beef with mustard and white cheese and butter and plain rye bread. I did not call attention to this in writing. Merely took a break to eat then picked it back up.
The mustard we used on our sandwiches was stone ground and spicy.
egg
red
fist
fist of foot
—I saw her squealing face from behind blue surgical curtains and screamed I screamed put it back in me put it back inside of me put her away
in
smoky mountain genesis—a trip up Appalachia
the smell of pine sap and spruce
the cold ground
and
thin cotton bag we shared,
Tre and I,
stacking rugs atop us making love—fucking away the chill that kept us awake all night laughing and fucking until we drove into town at 7 am to wait an hour for the stores to open and we could buy new bags—the same, shiny, expensive bags Tre used to put out the fire, to knock Susan down and put out the fire
Susan who is crying
Susan who is outside
Susan, my daughter, whose simple logic circuit I’m attempting to stack in towers of squat buttressed lines—the outline of shapes I embrace in minute totality of already passing—I am standing at the door of my office screaming into the wooden texture of my own ugly face—the square knots of tense muscle—I am screaming “shut-up, shut-up, shut-up, shut-up” into my own flat mouth while I explain calmly to Susan that Mommy needs to think.

I have let my daughter Susan back into my office.

My daughter Susan is holding me around the waist, sniffing into my shirt how she’s sorry she got my papers dirty.

I am patting my daughter Susan’s head telling her she is my good girl and I love her and I am sorry for shouting at her.

My daughter Susan’s ugly face smiles.

I hold my daughter Susan close before setting her back down on the floor to play with her candy wrappers. My line is that which defines an ever expanding set of points—I try to refrain from violence. I try to remain within lines. I am returning after some time to a more staid or regular approach to the line. I am composing my thoughts in simple lines. I am condensing my thoughts into immediate lines. I wonder how many bytes of data comprise the average line. This is not a question. This is? Chunky Sandwiches. I have just answered my daughter’s question: what is for dinner? Strawberries. What is for dessert? There are a number of indistinct features on my body: a rash just above my left ankle; a puckered scar, one-half inch long, on the left side of my right knee; three large moles on my chest; the C-section scar; a skin tab under my left armpit; a numb spot on my shin; a swelling on my left toe; crooked ribs, bony spine, a coat rack of vertebrae, a black compression bandage on my wrist, six-and-a-half inches of missing intestine, two-and-three quarters of a full tank of gas, $3.75 in parking meter fees, $2.25 for ice cream, 8.7 oz. of chocolate chip mint, indeterminate amount of change moving from hand to another hand wide face beaming thank you white teeth smile, garage, office chair

This morning I woke up alone in my own bed. I ate breakfast in the kitchen. I went to school. I taught until noon. I did not see the fire.

Lasso. Ligature. Rope.

—I think of Susan lapping milk from a cereal bowl, savoring the flavor of Froot Loops—we’ll make butter—ice cream—a cake—from it—her milk

This morning I woke up. I went to my daughter’s room. I stood over her as she slept. Thinking of the fire.

If I try to express what I find most ugly about my daughter Susan I could say it is the fact that she is not Eleni for whom I have much love—ugly, Eleni, Susan—I inscribe the words on her body-form. What I feel is most ugly about Susan is how she snuggles in my lap when I brush her hair or purrs when I massage her scalp or falls asleep wrapped around me like kudzu or sumac.

Pine sap between fingers.
Honey suffocating skin.

This image—this anecdote—made entirely about me—My issue.
My me.
My ugliness.
The aporia remains though.
My daughter Susan, is this: ugly.
The reason for this simply is this:
My ugly daughter is ugly.

I have moved to the floor to sit with Susan and help clean up the candy wrappers and green Starbursts she hates.

Hands make fists of wax papers bouquets
we shower each other
with color become
flavor sound type font
passionate laughter giggles
Mommy, I love you.
Baby, me too.

I want to squeeze her until she can’t breathe.
I want to rub her on the carpet until she’s bleached white—a hole in the fabric that can’t mend itself—that can’t be its self.

I want to destroy
my ugly daughter Susan.

But can’t.
Ow.
This morning.
Ow.
I have just pinched her arm.
Mommy.
Again.

Mommy, stop.
Again.
Stop-stop-stop.
I can’t.

I chase her from the room, downstairs to the kitchen, outdoors, and three blocks over to the fire still burning earlier on this morning—linearity, temporality—this me as has happened—I run her up to where the fish and hamsters and small dogs are just beginning to burn. I chase her up stairs, up to the front door of a forest green ranch house with chipped wooden shutters where the electric fire that started it all is starting.

A blown fuse.
A spark.
Bad wiring.
Old clothes.
Christmas tinsel, Xmas tinder, that catches and burns and spreads to the composite wood paneling of a nearby wall and climbs up a number of building code violations to spread like a bear skin rug in the living room, family room, dining room

Why Susan ran here is semi-clear. Her babysitter, a Carol Ann Hedgwig, used to live here with her boyfriend Paul but that was two years ago and the house now belongs to a middle-aged salesman who works out of a suitcase peddling insurance or some such-

Or maybe I was leading her here/there goading her here/there like a trace animal hitched to the sharp spurs of my fingers—there, that way, no, further—she had screamed loudly at first, inside of our house but was breathless by the time we got to the fire, her face, neck and arms welted red and white—what people made of the scene I can only assume. Those who
saw probably called the police or considered seriously running outside to intervene—but none did. Maybe it was the early hour or morning fog—not so thick you’d think it dangerous to take a walk or morning drive if that were your habit, but hazy enough to confuse or allow oneself to be confused, to mistake a grown woman torturing a small girl as something other than—How? I don’t know. Still it remains that no one stopped us as we stood at the threshold of this burning ranch house bearing witness to the death of the salesman’s calico cat—Cherokee—who kept flinging himself against the windows clawing and biting and jumping at the glass until his teeth cracked and claws broke and he bled and caught fire and screamed such an awful scream that it woke me to what I was doing

I had pressed Susan’s ugly face to the hot front door and held her there while I watched the cat die. I pressed her to the door as it started to smoke and the paint began to peel and her flapping hands on my thighs crescendoed to a shout.

At least, this is what I imagine I did, I did.

The other me, the me here, in my house, standing over her as she sleeps thinking of many things—some quite pleasant, crushing apples, making cider, visiting the zoo—is only just aware—both together, here, at home, and there at the burning house—still in bed, still pressed to the door—cross stitching loose, a strange duplicitous thread.

I was myself and a mother.
She was ugly and a daughter.
We stood and we slept dreaming of Cherokee the cat in those pink flamingo flames—
She rolled over in bed to ask me for water.
She peeled her face off the front door.

She asked for breakfast.
She cried, Sorry, mama, sorry.
She asked for a hug.
She coughed.
Sorry, Mama. Sorry.
I pinched her until she shut up.
I got her water and told her we’d eat in a while.
Rice Krispies with sugar.
Eggo with syrup.
Froot Loops and whole milk.
Cherokee the screaming cat.
The sirens make a long blue line of light and sound we follow watching a distance burning out of place—the smoke and lonely jogging friend, the silver fox, who keeps looking up and back at our house, who keeps looking and scratching at the back of his head—did he see us? Was he there to see too?
A woman bustling a crying child
or
a strange neighbor in the window
it happened
all the same
at once and

it did not exclude itself

Letting a cat die.

Spreading butter on her toast.

Stopping on the way home to get down on my knees—please, Susan, listen to me, please.

Telling her Daddy is gone but will be home soon.

Listen. Listen to me.

Hungry nod and happy silence.
The slap of muscle on bone—Listen! Listen to me!
0 and 1 simultaneous. The product, no. The product of both is 0
the addition is 1. The subtraction 1 or -1. The division.
The division of 0/1 is 0.
The division of 1/0.
1/0.
1/0.
1/0.
Its self.
This line eats and eats itself.
I have an ugly daughter.
I have said this
out loud
staring down at
Susan

who looking back
tilts her head
and says

who tilts her head
and says

who
hands aflutter
numb
stiff
clubs
reach to take my face

and says:
Mommy, you’re ugly too.
It was so quiet crouched low beneath the bed
I could feel my heart vibrating against my chest
a fast one/two/one/two/one/two and sister’s
breathing came out shallow and quick on the off-beat.
I never cried out even though the air was thick
with Mama’s fear and it was contagious.

*Daddy has a short fuse,* Mama whispered,
*he might come back.* In her hands she
held a heavy black wrench taken from Daddy’s
workbench after he left slamming shut the door
while Mama yelled ugly words at his leaving back.
*For our defense,* she said. Sister whimpered—*it bleeds*—
and pointed to a scrape upon her knee.
Mama didn’t notice, she was too busy locking things tight
so when Daddy and his key did come back the door was bolted shut.
Lights out in the dark Mama led us to her room and hid us
beneath her bed—*Be still!*—

We were so quiet I could smell dust upon the floor and the silence
hummed a strange sad ballad all its own. Aching legs folded like an
accordion beneath me and I held sister’s unmoving hand in mine,
our two heads bent low, cheek touching cheek, her baby-skin cool and wet.
Heavy endless minutes beneath the bed we waited for Daddy’s return and when he did return we listened to the rhythm of his pounding fists. We stayed—like statues!—just the way that Mama said until the house stopped shaking. The quiet then was like the pause between a baby’s wild sobs—a quiet intake of dying breath.

You’re my little man, Mama breathed in my ear. Laying down the wrench she hugged us to her saying, It’s okay. I think he’s gone.

But in the dark, beneath the bed, it was Mama I feared the most.

My daughter plays Rock-a-Bye Baby, sings along sweet and slow, each note deliberate, each word a small flickering flame. Then I say play whatever you like and she presses the air button, the pull of the bellows like the scrape of a match. Her raised eyebrow, a warning: the fuse will be lit, and the accordion will explode with the chaos of her own creation.
MY grandfather gave me my first accordion. Black with iridescent accents on the sides, a kind of silver that rainbowed in certain lights, like abalone. It was bulky and shiny and beautiful and the most uncool instrument a girl could possibly play, an instrument that carried an almost palpable air of eternal virginity, as if wearing a retainer at age nine and bifocals at age ten were not enough to keep the boys away.

I hated the retainer and the glasses and I should have hated the accordion (sometimes pretended I did), but it fell into that category of things I cherished in secret, like when Mrs. Wishniak told us to move all the desks aside and stand for a spelling bee; everyone groaned, so I groaned too, but inside I would be dancing, ready to win. I liked the look in my grandfather’s eyes when he watched me play his accordion. I liked having a skill that was arcane and probably useless in the real world—because how many professional girl accordion players could there be?—but still made me feel accomplished when I pressed my arms together and
music came out.

My shoulders ached from the thick black strap that anchored it across my back, and over the years I saw my muscles pop and define themselves there, and in my forearms, and even in my thighs as my feet pumped and kept time.

I took accordion lessons with two other kids from my school, all of us outcasts. Scrawny Albert, Fat Jane, and Brace-Face Me. Our parents carpooled us to a music store, where a cotton-haired old man who chewed Starlight Mints counseled us, “ONE-two-three! PUSH-pull-push!” We were the accordion nerds, all of us with hidden and surprising muscles on our otherwise non-athletic bodies.

In sixth grade, one of our teachers invited kids to bring instruments in for “Music Day.” Jane and I refused. We’d learned our lesson during Show & Tell in third grade. Albert brought his accordion in, but his nervous, wheezy playing drew audible laughs and only the feeblest teacher-driven applause. Then there was David Langfield, whose long, sandy-blond hair fell in his face as he bent over his guitar and faked his way through a Bon Jovi song while girls sighed.

You couldn’t find many Bon Jovi songs arranged for accordion. There are very few songs arranged for accordion at all, and “Lady of Spain” is always one of them.

There was a song about an accordion, an old song by The Who, and some of the tough boys liked to tease us with it. Mama’s got a squeeze box, Daddy never sleeps at night! “Squeeze me,” Jeremy King sang as he pushed his hands together and apart—in the wrong position, but I didn’t tell him that. Albert said Jeremy beat him up at recess every year on his birthday, and Jane said he smoked and snapped girls’ bras. I ignored him, the method recommended by my mother as foolproof, though it hadn’t worked yet.

“Can I squeeze your box?” Jeremy called on the way to the bus. Ignoring Jeremy, I walked through the schoolyard with my head down, scrawny, bifocaled, and goose-pimpled from the Arctic wind that swirled my woolen uniform skirt around my knees. I dreamed of dragons, lions, bloody revenge that would surprise them all. I festered under maroon plaid like a fuse waiting to be lit.

Spring brought Confirmation classes, long hours after school in the church basement that smelled of coffee-stained rugs and books left too long in the damp. We sat in metal folding chairs, chewing gum discreetly because popping it meant having it confiscated (“We are young ladies and gentlemen, not a herd of heifers!”).

Father Jeff was talking to us about the Sacrament of Marriage. “In all likelihood, most of you will be married in fifteen or twenty years,” he said.

“Not Victoria!” Jeremy King said out loud. All his friends laughed.

“Not to you, jerk!” I snapped, for once forgetting to ignore him, and Father Jeff smiled an indulgent smile, as though Jeremy were the lovable bad boy dipping my braids in the inkwell, but later we would walk home holding hands.

“Studies do show that most of us will marry someone who grew up within fifty miles of us,” Father Jeff said. “People who share our frame of reference, who share the same values. So let’s talk about values. Can anyone name some values they have?”
“Being kind to animals?” said Jenn Tomasi, in her *Whales Are People Too* t-shirt.

“Yes, that would be compassion. Like St. Francis of Assisi. What’s another?”

“Not killing babies!” yelled Mercy Kaczynski—which of course she would; everyone knew her parents were the people that marched around the Planned Parenthood building holding bloody fetus pictures.

“Not doing something isn’t a value,” I said. Mercy narrowed her eyes at me.

“Well, we could put that under the value of having respect for life,” Father Jeff said.

“Bitch,” Mercy mouthed, too quiet for him to hear. Now I’d be in for it after class; we rode the same bus home.

Sure enough, Mercy sat behind me, hunched forward, snapping her fingers against my neck, calling me Accordion Slut and hissing that I was ugly and a baby-killer. I felt my heart race, my cheeks burn. I practiced breathing in and out like a bellows—ONE-two-three, PUSH-pull-push—until she grabbed my ponytail and yanked so hard I actually felt hairs ripping out of my scalp. I yelped out loud and the bus driver, not turning his head, yelled “You kids quiet down back there!” Mercy shoved me forward and then Jeremy King was pulling Mercy out of her seat, and he sat behind me instead.

“She’s a whacko,” he said. I didn’t answer. Jeremy followed me off the bus, then kept walking behind me even though it wasn’t his stop and his house was the other way.

“I told Mercy to leave you alone or I’d beat her up at recess tomorrow,” he told me.

“Thanks,” I mumbled. I wasn’t sure this was an honor. I imagined Jeremy King’s entire life of recesses had been spent beating up one kid or another. I kept walking, trying to stay far enough ahead of him that he couldn’t snap my bra.

“So, you really want to thank me?” he asked.

“I just did.”

He grabbed my shoulders, turned me around. We were on my dead-end street, next to an overgrown maple tree. He backed me up to its trunk and kissed me, his tongue pushing against my closed mouth. I could even feel his big teeth, which should have had braces but didn’t, scraping against my lip.

Five minutes later I was at my front door, hair messy, socks falling, blouse twisted out of my skirt.

“Look what the cat dragged in!” my mother said. “What happened to you?”

“Nothing,” I said. “I fell.”

“Well, you need to wash that hand. And put a Band-Aid on,” my mother said. “It’s bleeding.”

I looked at my hand. The knuckles were red. But the blood wasn’t mine.

“It’s just a scrape,” I said.
Sophie fuses a batch of gingerbread people together by their hands.
The icing holds strong as any love.

She lays the line of cookies across the countertop like a stretched-out accordion then crushes half of them into dust.
She tells her sister, “That’ll be us someday.”

Her sister licks the last of the batter from the spatula, licks the sweetly silty remains from the counter, then runs to ask their mother what happens when somebody eats a body and how exactly do people become dust?

Sophie scrapes the rest of the crumbs into the garbage can and gently places the uncrushed cookies in a jar.
She guzzles the tube of red icing: smiles all sugar-bloodied gums at her mother when she walks into the kitchen.

I’m the third generation to live in this house.
When my grandmother, my mother and her sisters died, one by one their spirits returned.

Early mornings in the kitchen, I read from my journal, the part about the accordion player I watched on the corner of 10th Avenue and West Burnside last weekend. Aunt Ida says an accordion is a perfect metaphor for love because you’re always opening and closing, shifting and getting air, that’s how the music happens.

In the basement I hear jazz tunes like Body and Soul or On the Sunny Side of the Street coming from their soft mouths when I do the laundry. They touch one another without thought, tucking in tags on shirts. Their sentences overlap as they talk about the day ahead. While I’m at the office, they plan to lounge about reading Tropic of Cancer, Lady Chatterley’s Lover.
and other favorites from the Banned Book list. They smile and lick fire-engine-red lips. When cocktail hour rolls around,

they scrape back chairs, join me at the dining room table and sip a Gin and Sin or a Sidecar with a twist of lemon.

Aunt Ida says, Lay it down darlin, light my fuse. I pour a generous glass of Merlot and share all the juicy gossip from work.
Feeling justified she wrapped her hair in a silk scarf and cleaned her face with cold cream. She had warned her husband about bringing that Jezebel into her house. Was he trying to end their marriage—because her patience was wearing thin. She grabbed her Bible and sat on the bed. She was tracing a familiar passage with her fingertip when she fell asleep.

**THEY** were in the dark when she got home. Even the children, up past their bedtime. Everybody standing around a tall, candlelit cake in the kitchen. The cake was covered in orange butter cream, her favorite. The smell of butter fat and sugar had met her at the door. For a minute she’d thought they had blown a fuse. She hesitated. No one had had time for the revival that week, yet somehow they’d planned a surprise birthday party. Brushing past her husband she flipped on the light switch and went to her bedroom. Only the kids kept on singing along with that silly accordion, “Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you, happy birthday, dear Mom...ma!” Her heart softened, but she wouldn’t give in. *Little dumb-dumbs. May she live long enough to see them saved.* From behind the bedroom door, she could hear everybody moving about in a heavy way, like people at a wake. A chair scuffed the floor, somebody cleared their throat, forks scraped plates clean, comforting words were whispered to the children. Then the front door groaned as everybody trailed away home.
I stopped locking the front door at night
less afraid of what would come in
than of what would stay in
like that night
he rode his bicycle home
in a haze of whiskey and beer
elbow and hip scraped in the driveway
accordioned skin
blood smeared
on fine white sheets.

I woke
half his body pinning me
to the mattress
thinking the blood mine.
I ran out to the car
the “fun-top” convertible
we scored for a nominal sum
but I couldn’t get the key
in the ignition.
Where would I go anyway
in this country that’s not mine?
Fused locks
a cold backseat bed.

At dawn I crept back into the house
though no noise can wake the dead
ran a full tub of water
sunk into the warmth.
Water cradled this body
as it slipped beneath the surface.
Expressway Mindfulness
Kate Hutchinson

Tuesday. Not even mid-week
and already I’m spent, suffering
the accordion stop-go of rush hour,
needing to scrape from my skin
the film of ill-will settled over this
gray-black sea of commuters who
all see each other as equals in villainy –
keeping them from that glass of wine
waiting on the counter at home.

What’s to savor in these non-moment
moments we are supposed to live fully in?
How deep into this compost heap
must I dig to find the fuse, then focus
and re-light it? In my bubble of steel
and polyurethane, I make a desperate
plea to Siri: Play me the music of waterfalls,
of meadowlarks, of Aeolian harps.
Find – somewhere – the sound of bliss.
We were all part of a flash mob that went wildly unsuccessful, and we can only guess most of the toothpick-chewing pricks at the mall were thrilled about this.

The violence started before the routine even began. All the dancers were jockeying for starting positions near the mall fountain, some of us adjusting to the stubborn, feeble-minded mall-goers standing in our way. Then the introductory music started—the first few bars of an instrumental Duran Duran song (from that album that was panned by critics), and, for the one and only time that night, a timid hush settled over the crowd, sounding like the exhausted breath from a broken accordion.

That quiet moment didn’t last. By the time the introductory music segued into our chosen mix of Justin Timberlake tracks, you could sense the birth of unrest.

To be fair, the frenzy of the crowd was probably already there, lurking, dormant, thirsty for an opportunity, but we simply hadn’t noticed because we were so amped to perform. The action kicked in to gear when Christopher whirled and stepped on an older lady’s foot. An accident, to be sure, but Christopher must’ve caught a corn because this high-yellow lady with her frayed, worn overcoat yelped and dropped her shopping bag full of wine glasses, the muffled ‘pops’ of the glasses sounding like a box of light bulbs dropped onto a warehouse floor.

They were Christmas gifts! She screeched, bent to gather the receipt, careful to avoid the sharp curls of glass in her bag. No one helped her. No one cared. It wasn’t even Thanksgiving yet. This was early November. This was the local mall.

Despite the rocky start, despite the sway of the crowd, we tried to keep momentum. This proved difficult. Some of us sensed your embarrassment for us, and we rejected it outright—we continued our routine: the kicks, the slides, the twirls we practiced for months, our gnarled feet tired, our calves seized with spasms. But the older lady with that disgusting, grotty overcoat continued to squawk about her broken wine glasses, and the crowd turned on us. The jostling and heaving amongst the mall-crawlers became infectious. One of these raging assholes shoved Ronnie, playground bully style, and called her a ‘dykey cunt-licking faggot.’ It didn’t make sense. Ronnie’s not a lesbian. She’s FTM transgendered!

The crowd swelled, seethed. Those of us trying to continue knocked into each other with our leg warmers, our spandex hugging tight, the synthetic fibers almost fused to our bottoms. The routine degenerated into an act of imbalance, misplaced equilibrium, and missteps. We lost our place, our groove, our rhythm. We lost everything we worked for—those endless weeks of honing the routine, ignoring the calluses that thrived. You could smell the stale popcorn, the burnt sodium of the pretzel dogs,
the chlorine burbling from the fountain. You could feel the mall-
people banding together against us. We knew we’d be blamed for
this mini-mall riot. The people decreed it so.

More mall-walkers gathered around to glimpse the ruckus,
others to spew hatred and puke up their frustrations. We were
 taunted and/or threatened with bodily harm. Jamie was kicked
by a wannabe ninja boy, spraining his knee. Cassie had her pussy
punched by an overzealous tweaker with vacant teeth, scabrous
shingles working over his face. Leah’s PA was knocked over during
the meatiest part of the melee, about three minutes in, and when
the music stopped in the middle of Justin Timberlake’s heartfelt
timbre, you could hear the anger, the hostility, you could hear that
dreadful fucking water fountain in the middle of the mall, filled
with loose change and bacteria and abandoned hope.

You mall-crawlers—for reasons mall-crawlers are too stupid
to understand—turned on each other. Fist fights erupted, bodies
spun about in breezy circles. Some of us wanted to slog through
the routine. We urged each other on with hurried flaps of the
hands. But those instincts were soon thwarted by our hard-won
desire to not get smashed in the face or be taken down to the
linoleum and stamped underfoot with fresh-bought Keds from
Payless.

Three mall cops eventually attempted to gain control of the
crowd. Two of them cornered Adrian and berated him while
fingering their pepper spray, begging, deep in their hearts, for
a moment of defiance. Adrian was our leader. We loved him
because he was so incredibly gay and so admirably carried the
face of Don Johnson’s ghost. Adrian conceived the entire routine,
choreographed it, coordinated it, mapped out the event so
perfectly. He made this flash mob his life, even after his long-time

partner, Stephen, stormed off in a huff after a disagreement in
music, though many of us believed Stephen left for more domestic
reasons—I mean, who bails on his boyfriend in the middle of
dance practice to defend a Sly & the Family Stone song? A coward
like Stephen does, that’s who, with his moisture-wicking alpaca
socks and tinted contacts and lobe gauging piercings gone to sag.

The mall pigs restored some semblance of order, but it didn’t
last. They radioed for backup and then closed down the mall,
ordering everyone to abandon their registers and stores, tapping
their nightsticks into their palms, yanking down the rolling security
grilles, every vendor from Yogurt World to the Magnet Bazaar to
the food court to the lingerie shop only fat girls ignore.

Still, there were lingering fights, and the scene became
sloppy and slow-mo, like a bunch of suburban moms spending
the night out on horse tranquilizers. The mostly-amenable
crowd murmured, marched on, and then clambered through the
darkened mall like injured, pale tree sloths, squeezing through the
doors with their feckless bags of merchandise.

Outside on the pedestrian-choked streets, the buses wouldn’t
stop, so the old fogies had to trundle home with their walkers.
Traffic flooded the parking lot, creating a symphony of car horns.
People drove over concrete abutments and skidded through
the mall landscape to escape, every lug-headed loon taking any
opportunity to use their precious off-road vehicles. Some swore
gunshots were fired, but none of us in the dance troupe heard
them.

Later, a TV chopper swooped overhead. Channel 7 News. We
hoped for glimpses of a level-headed reporter—pulchritudinous
and symmetrical in dress—to jump out and come to our rescue
and interview us, comment on our bravery. When that didn’t
happen, we tucked tail for home, soaked our heads, iced our injuries, salved our scrapes, nursed our failures. Everyone in the dance troupe lost contact after the incident. Margaret. Sasha. Gregory. No one called or texted. No one showed up at Mindy’s Bar afterwards to celebrate as planned.

The video went viral. We were embarrassed to be part of the spectacle. Some of us were afraid to dance afterwards. Maybe the violence made us gun-shy, or maybe it was the kind of fatigue that sprouts from the belief that there’s no ‘good’ left in the human race. We lost our mojo, sexually speaking and otherwise. We lost our confidence, our religion. We lost our belief in Michael Stipe. We lost our rental space at the dance center—we’d planned more flash mobs! A TV reporter said we were ‘traumatized.’ That’s not the right word. This wasn’t Iraq. No one died, not physically. We just lost something we thought might make people happy. That was our aim: to entertain you. But we entertained you for all the wrong reasons. Once you’re part of that, it’s hard to face the community again. Confidence slips. Hamstrings go tight. Dancing shoes grow sour. Your agent never returns calls. You avoid mirrors. Months whipped by or stalled. Some began chatting again in small catty circles. Some took tropical vacations, drank daiquiris, sought palm readers. Some shacked up in their parents’ basements and smoked rat weed, re-read racks of old magazines, the perfumed pages now faint, stilted, moldy. The more resilient ones went back to work. Some of us never left that fucking mall. Life doesn’t wait. You’re late to work. You’re listless. You pop more pills than usual. Your dick goes soft. Your vagina stinks. Showers don’t do the trick. Acne forms. You cheat on loved ones. Yealn for a reliable dance partner. You curse your mentor. Martin stopped eating. Lost so much weight he had to be hospitalized. Joyce, the twit, believed she was destined to be discovered through this mishap—she’d had the most face time in the video they aired on the news ad nauseam.

Some mall stores banded together and tried to sue Adrian for inciting the incident. They made a claim for lost income and property damage, for which they demanded reparations. One of our most talented dancers—the suave, high-kicking Maurice—tried to sue the mall, claiming a security chimp manhandled him, strained his back. Maurice couldn’t dance for months. Who knows what’s to become of Maurice, or of us, or the mall-people—the fucking mall-crawlers—or the goddamned news anchors who made such a mockery of something as enjoyable as a flash mob?

One thing we can tell you is this: No one in Dance Troupe ‘Justified Jumpers’ will ever step into that mall again without some trepidation. Most of us will never again enjoy the bleats of any Justin Timberlake song, or throw change into that fucking mall fountain without, at least briefly, for one crashing second, reliving that moment when our moment, a moment we created for you, was destroyed.
For all the tenderness replacing fuses, pouring oil in a thirsty mouth how little it protected when the lights arrived parallel and bloodshot two engines leaving the train station at eleven cargo unmentioned cloaked in the nighttime they did not pass each other with silent shoulders they angled into it like an unwanted kiss the body crumpled like an accordion sending music to the soft black air a choir of choking in time to keep the beat
In a Scrape
Jennie MacDonald

Chubby baby died
on stage and kicked

the karaoke box
bucket-like out out

across the floor,
spilling Toto and tonic

and a heavy sack purse— all to
fuse in foam on the shine-white linoleum.

No air, not in those paper lungs,
no wheeze, and nothing to

press the song
from her accordion belly,

just a dead tired heart, a broken heart,
(oh spare me romance) blood

like puzzle glue and food dye, Red #40.
Someone was praying,
someone was calling an ambulance, 
and someone was singing Rosanna.

The layers un-fused in this scene, 
water top-wise and the liquor hanging low
in its own density, 
club soda fizzing on the rim of the glass.

The ambulance came, 
but she was too heavy.

An old man swore (God damn!) 
when she rolled off the gurney, so

two drunks helped them hoist her, 
and when her body finally left

the bar was silent 
except for my scrape-tooth sucking.

I read her last words, 
projected as they were

like ghosts through cigarette smoke: 
I can see your face still shining through the window

on the other side—
Rosanna, yeah.

---

A scrape bites worse in the cold. That’s what I tell myself as I get up from the pavement, inspecting the wound on my elbow. *It hurts more when it’s cold.* My skateboard lies a few feet away on its back: a pup with paws in the air. I should go inside for a bandage, but I don’t. I let blood drip from my elbow to the ground. I let myself breathe and frown and stand—my lungs an accordion, my face raw with chill, my bones narrow and milky and exhausted from the weight of ten years of falls. I wear overalls without a jacket. I don’t have a helmet. No one can make me save myself from anything. No one can run their fingers through my hair to reassure—it’s too tangled. The pain in my elbow is something like a song. Something like a prayer. Today at Mass my mother squeezed my hand twice at the end of *Our Father*—once for *I’m*, once for *here*. I wanted to fuse our hands together so she’d never leave me, never, not even once. When we sang the hymns her voice rang out and mine never left my throat. When we got Communion I let the priest put the wafer onto my dirty,
upturned palm, dirty from the days behind me, and put it in my mouth as easy as popcorn. It’s all I’ve eaten today. When we got home I took my skateboard and went out in the cold and let myself roll and glide until I fell and bled. There’s something sharp inside me that can’t be dulled, a jagged other that knows my secrets. I don’t know how to feed it. I don’t know how to leave a scab alone, and when my elbow crusts over, I’ll pick at it with the patience of a thousand saints. The patience of Mary, hands folded over her belly, waiting for her halo.

After he died I did not have his body to love and so I chose something else. I haunted his house, sometimes ugly in anguish, sometimes expressionless, the sound of my calloused feet scraping on the polished wooden floorboards.

In the living room I find I am not the only ghost. Furniture, uncharacteristically scattered around the room, covered by off-white canvas sheets. I pull them off, leaving a carpet of dust behind me.
His accordion desk crouches in the corner, and I next to it. Pushing back the oaken shield, I reveal to myself the fragility of the neatly placed memories. A photograph on the desktop, some old research notes, and a dollop of spilt ink. A mistake immortalized, a relic of humanity fused to the wood, which once dripped from the hand of a living man.
Rain or shine, Anton sent out billows of sentimental songs into the dandelion-dotted fields of Suzdal, a village 60 miles east of Moscow, where 40 years after the siege of Stalingrad, everyone remembered the starvation, the slaughter, and the less-than-score-settling imprisonment of General Von Paulus in their monastery. Some men spit on the steps, but never spoke of more sadistic retaliations, needing to work from dawn until dusk to scrape by, to haul in truckloads of potatoes to feed their families.

Children in babushkas, old women in polyester dresses, men in stained overalls cried when Anton played “Katusha” on his accordion every hour, reminding the villagers of the never-to-be-forgotten war. Everyone bowed to Anton with respect but knew of his defect, knew that at birth his brain did not fuse, understood the word fuse because of the electrical systems in their tractors, understood the intricacies of machinery, accepted their need to plow and plant onions and beets to meet their quota for the five-year plan. They understood the beauty of onion-domed spires and came to believe Anton possessed a hidden power because they could read the hour by the moment Anton scraped his clogs along the cobblestones in the morning and the night.

Every day, he greeted them all with the only words he knew, Do svidaniya, goodbye, and they replied Do svidanya, Anton.
He tried to remember her face in the clot of clouds.
Lull & inhalation on a shoreline in Maine.

Buoys honked, a reef-bell clattered warning—
an empty business in safe clarity of pewter light.

He did remember, not her face but his hand on her breast,
& he heard her voice in the ocean song,
her intonation in the grinding of waves,
in deep, dark scrape over granite & sand.

Her voice repeated, unrelenting,
more than that, it came from a distance

over accordion waves, with shadows heaped
then plunged, of sky & sea, indifferent to him.

As if it were a voice of elemental cause,
or the far-echoing chaos of some forgotten star.

He remembered that time on Puako Bay,
where ocean sluiced through scrap & folded cinders

so vengefully he could not hear her voice,
but watched her lips (that heart of her face)

& nodded, as if it were all clear to him,
ignoring her eyes’ fuse.

Above, on the lava plate where they had sat—
where she had cried—the petroglyph stick men
lay under saffron leaves. His ancient brothers.
Hossein Abbaszadeh was born in Mashhad, Iran. He has been writing fiction since 2005 and has three books published in Iran. His photos have also been published in Blue Mesa Review. He’s a member of Paradise Ocean Artistic Team with management by Seyed Morteza Hamidzadeh.

Heather Bobeck is a freelance photographer and operatic soprano currently surviving the jungle that is New York.

Deyonne Bryant teaches creative writing at Wheaton College in Massachusetts. She has had fiction and essays published in Callaloo Literary Journal, Meridians–feminism, race, transnationalism, Postcard Shorts, and collected in A Narrative Compass--Stories that Guide Women’s Lives.

Roger Camp is the author of three photography books, including the award-winning Butterflies in Flight (Thames & Hudson, 2002) and Heat (Charta, Milano, 2008). His work has appeared in over 100 magazines including The New York Quarterly, New England Review, and Witness.

Genavieve Coleman is a professional communicator, living and working in Shanghai. She has lived in many places and always seems to find herself studying people and learning languages, even in random public bathrooms in the dead of winter. She was raised all over the Eastern U.S. and continually makes a point to keep up with key people in life. She has been writing stories, envisioning poems, and turning over backwards to take that “perfect” picture since she can remember. Genavieve also eats copious amounts of marvelous food and her brain often battles over whether to dream in words or dream in food. Both turn out well.

Cecilia Devine is a young aspiring writer who has been published in a few of her local magazines, such as Between Ranges. She currently lives in Vermont and participates in activities in her community such as a writer’s forum, theatre, and art.

Robert Eastwood has work that has appeared widely, most recently in Bird’s Thumb, Up the Staircase Quarterly, and other journals. His chapbooks are The Welkin Gate, Over Plainsong, and Night of the Moth. His book Snare was published in 2016 by Broadstone Books. His second book, Romer, is forthcoming from Etruscan Press.

Mariel Fechik is a musician and writer from Chicago. She sings in the band Fay Ray and is a music writer for Atwood Magazine and Third Coast Review. She was recently chosen as a finalist for the 2017 Real Good Poem Prize from Rabbit Catastrophe Review. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Crab Fat Magazine, Noble / Gas Qrtly, Sundog Lit, Glass, and others.

Bev Fesharaki is a member of Inscape Poets in Tacoma, Washington and Sunday’s with Van Goth in Seattle. Her work has been published in journals, on the Mona Website, and in the anthology Women Writing: On the Edge of Dark and Light. She lives in Mukilteo, Washington.
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 BA in English Literature, and an MA in Creative Writing from WKU.

Nathan Gehoski is a PhD student at UGA and graduate of Eastern Michigan University’s Creative Writing MA program. He pursues an experimental approach to trauma and its effect across a variety of genres. Heavily influenced by the work of theorists like Michel Foucault and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, he struggles with ways to pressure or escape the confines of prescriptive or normalizing representations within fiction in an attempt to embody the abject as a lived experience of historical/personal rupture. Inspired in part by Leonardo da Vinci’s collection of drawings known as the “grotesque heads,” 1/0 is the first in a series of pieces exploring beauty and its construction in society.

Karl Thomas Hakmiller is a student writer at Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama, where he studies English with a concentration in Creative Writing.

Kate Hutchinson has taught high school English for over half her life and still thrills when one of her students catches the poetry spark. Her latest collection is *Map Making: Poems of Land and Identity*. She muses at PoetKateHutchinson.wordpress.com.

Bryn Homuth has recent poems published or forthcoming in *The Maine Review*, *The Tishman Review*, and *The Turnip Truck(s)*, among others. His work has also been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and for the Best of the Net Anthology. Bryn currently lives in Minnesota and teaches English courses for Crown College.

James Croal Jackson is the author of *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017). His poetry has appeared in *Hobart*, *FLAPPERHOUSE*, *Yes Poetry*, and elsewhere. He edits *The Mantle*, a poetry journal. Find him in Columbus, Ohio or at jimjakk.com.

Gillian King-Cargile is the author of several weird stories for adults and children. She earned her BA in Film Production and MFA in Creative Writing at Southern Illinois University. Gillian lives with her family in DeKalb, Illinois, where barbed wire and Cindy Crawford were created.

Isaac Knapp recently completed his MA in English Literature at Wright State University. A Columbus native, he now calls Dayton his home. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Nexus Literary Journal* and *Mad River Review*. You can find him online @ ijknap.

Kathryn Kulpa has had work published recently in *Pinball*, *Citron Review*, and *Jellyfish Review*, and forthcoming from *Evansville Review*.

Mare Leonard lives in an old school house overlooking The Rondout Creek. Away from her own personal blackboard, she teaches through the Institute for Writing and Thinking and the MAT program at Bard College. She has published four chapbooks of poetry and was a finalist in last year’s New York State Di Biase contest. Some of her latest publications appear in *Perfume River*, *Rats Ass Review*, *Figroot*, *Sweet Tree*, *Eunoia*, *New Verse News*, and in the British publication *Journal of Arts&Letters*. She is most excited about her poem “Terrone,” an immigration poem, which will be published in the spring at *Chiron*.
Mary E. Lide is currently working on a collection of essays. She is a 2015 graduate of Fairfield University’s MFA program. Her writing has appeared in Tinge Magazine, Welter, Hippocampus Magazine, Spry Literary Magazine, and others.

Jennie MacDonald is a prizewinning writer and photographer. Her images titled “Inspire” and “Madea” appeared in the recent Mythos Issue of Obra/Artifact. She received her PhD in Literary Studies at the University of Denver and publishes on 18th and 19th century literature, theatre, and visual culture.

Robin Michel is a San Francisco writer and poet whose first exposure to poetry was through the songs and nursery rhymes her mother sang to her when she was a young child. Her poetry and fiction has appeared in The Midwest Poetry Review, The New Guard, Pittsburgh Quarterly, Star 82 Review, and other print and online media.


Gregg Murray is assistant professor of English at Georgia State University, the editor of Muse/A Journal, and the managing editor of Real Pants. He writes regularly for The Huffington Post and The Fanzine. He also writes poetry.

Farima Qolami was born in Qazvin, Iran and has a BA in Graphics from Technica University of Val’Asr. She’s a member of the Paradise Ocean Artistic Team with management by Seyed Morteza Hamidzadeh.

Jade Riordan is from northern Canada, and she’s currently attending university further south. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in The Dalhousie Review, The Fib Review, Half Mystic Journal, the MicroText 3 anthology (Medusa’s Laugh Press), NōD, Right Hand Pointing, and elsewhere. She is a member of Bywords’ selection committee.

Bryan Robertson is a visual artist based in Saint Louis, Missouri. Robertson holds an MFA in painting and drawing from the University of Washington, Seattle. His recent solo exhibitions are Superpower (2017), Parish Gallery, Saint Louis, Missouri; Altar of Commerce (2017), Cathy Gregory Studio Gallery, Saint Louis, Missouri; Inverted Utopia (2016), the Parc Condominiums, Seattle, Washington. Robertson will present his work as a poster session at the 2018 College Art Association Conference in Los Angeles. While at the University of Washington Robertson won the Parnassus Graduating with Excellence Award and the Jacob Lawrence Graduate Recognition Award (2016). Recent other awards include the Puget Sound Group Artists’ Scholarship Grant (2016), and the Vermont Studio Center Artists Grant (2016). Robertson is currently an Adjunct Professor of art and design at Jefferson College in Hillsboro, Missouri.
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, Kelp Queen Press, PS Publishing, and ChiZine Publications; for authors Will Elliott, Andy Duncan, Tobias Seamon, Shimon Adaf, Seb Doubinsky, Ray Bradbury, Kaaron Warren, Ellen Klages, Claire North, and Helen Marshall. He was nominated for a 2013 World Fantasy Award in the Artist category.

Mahsa Sadeqi was born in Ahvaz, Iran and has a BA in Graphics from Technical University of Vali‘asr. Mahsa is a member of the Paradise Ocean Artistic Team with management by Seyed Morteza Hamidzadeh.

Lisa Stice is a poet/mother/military spouse, the author of Uniform (Aldrich Press, 2016), and a Pushcart Prize nominee. While it is difficult to say where home is, she currently lives in North Carolina with her husband, daughter, and dog. You can learn more about her and her publications at lisastice.wordpress.com and at facebook.com/LisaSticePoet.

Shoshana Surek has a short story “Masking Tape Over My Fortunate One,” published in 2017, and nominated for a 2017 Pushcart Prize, and one of her stories, “Branching from the Willow,” was named Story of the Week at Vestal Review Magazine. Other stories and poems have appeared in or are forthcoming in 2(e), University Press, and f(r)iction Magazine. She earned her MA and her MFA in Creative Writing in Denver.

Christine Taylor identifies as multiracial and resides in her hometown Plainfield, New Jersey. She is an English teacher and wannabe librarian at a local independent school and the mother of several poorly behaved cats. Her work appears in Modern Haiku, Presence, apt, Burningword Literary Journal, Menacing Hedge, and The Paterson Literary Review, among others.

Pat Phillips West is a poet living and writing in Olympia, Washington. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. Her poems appear in various anthologies and journals, including Haunted Waters Press, WA129+, San Pedro River Review, Slipstream, and Gold Man Review.
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*. @mikelaashea.

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. A Pushcart Prize and two-time Best of the Net nominee, her work has appeared in many journals, including *Compose*, *Linebreak*, *Off the Coast*, *Spillway*, and *Rattle*. Her debut novel, *Persephone’s Sister*, will be published in Spring 2019 by Touchstone. Check out Megan’s work on her website, megan-collins.com.

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

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

Jane Andrews has a BA in Creative Writing and a minor in Attic Greek from NC State University. Andrews teaches writing and poetry courses through Duke Continuing Education, and is currently Head Writing Coach at Central Carolina Community College. She is Nonfiction Editor at *The Main Street Rag* and *Glint Literary Journal*. In January of 2017, Andrews joined the editorial staff of *3Elements Literary Review*. She has earned awards in memoir, personal essay and poetry. Andrews’ fiction, essays, memoir and poetry have appeared in *Prime Number Magazine*, *Lunch Ticket*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Verdad Magazine*, *Kindred*, *The News and Observer*, and other publications. She is a past board member of Carolina Wren Press and the NC Poetry Society. Andrews is a freelance writing instructor, workshop facilitator, and book editor. Jane Andrews lives in Raleigh, North Carolina with her husband, four cats, a dog, and a special needs turtle named Jim. Her adult children live nearby. She enjoys striking up conversations with strangers and watching British mysteries.
Justin Rogers is a poet, educator, coach, and venue-owner from the city of Detroit, Michigan. Rogers is an advocate for literacy among inner-city youth, and the amplification of Black voices. Still performing around the Mid-West and teaching poetry with InsideOut Literary Arts, Rogers actively shares poems surrounding living and growing as a Black man in America. He also acts as an editor with Wusgood.black magazine – a magazine specifically for urban artists of color. Rogers most recently has work published or forthcoming in GRAMMA Poetry, Mobius Magazine, Radius Poetry, and Tinderbox Poetry Journal.

Matthew Jankiewicz holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Columbia College Chicago. His fiction has appeared in several literary publications including The Alembic, Toasted Cheese, Scarlet Leaf Review, 3Elements Review, and After Effects: A Zimbell House Anthology. He is currently seeking a home for his first novel, The Darkroom.

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.