Dear readers,

Happy spring and welcome to issue six! Although we received many submissions, we’ve only chosen the very best. This issue, though compact, is a lovely one. Take it outside—bask in the sun and in the warmth of these luminous stories, poems, and art.

Submit to our summer issue by April 30th using these elements: Miasma, Simmer, and Whimsy.

Sincerely,
Mikaela Shea
Editor-in-chief
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Los Angeles Sunset
Allen Forrest
The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless is back in New York. This time, there is no other guy in the picture getting in the way. And this time, The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless is here for an entire week for the screening of his new film: The Film That Shall Also Remain Nameless. It is a week of film premieres, champagne receptions, and tiny creations of passed food, it is bright flashes from all the photographers, after-parties at unassuming bars, and abbreviated text messages sent in the middle of the night. It is mostly missed encounters and planned ones, too. The timing finally comes together at 10pm at a local dive bar in Alphabet City. It is a harsh and penetrating, wintry Saturday, even though it is still only late November.

I walk over to a table where The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless is sitting with about twelve other people. He gets up from a chair and tells me to have his seat while he checks on the rest of his friends who are playing pool. I thank him for the seat but point to my stool over at the bar and let him know that’s where I’ll be.

In the next ninety seconds, I text three different people for no apparent reason. Meaning: I don’t have anything to say and couldn’t care less about the responses that are about to come my way. I just can’t take the quiet sitting, the doing nothing, all the waiting.

Not long after, The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless comes over to the bar where I am sucking on a vodka soda and texting a friend. He plops on a stool next to me and says: “You can stop texting me, I’m right over here.” I giggle like a stupid schoolgirl, tell him who I am texting, and remind him that it’s my friend whom he’d met at the film premiere the other night. He looks at me as if he has no idea what the hell I’m talking about.

I am sitting at the bar with The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless for no more than five minutes when he asks if he can stay over because he’s been sleeping on a couch all week. I ask him why in the hell I would agree to have someone I only met just a few days earlier stay with me for the night. And before I know it, it is three am, we are in a taxi, and The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless is inside of my apartment.

I ask him if he wants a beer. He says no, but that he’ll take some ice, and he pulls out a fifth of whiskey from his backpack. He is probably on his tenth whiskey of the night but, instead, he looks as if he has been drinking gallons of espresso all day. Confident and alert and calculated. Like a pilot plunging into a giant, open sky for the millionth time.

We talk about books and we talk about films and we talk about music. But neither one of us seems to give a shit what the other thinks about these things. Then he cuts right to the point and says to me: “Come closer. Let’s kiss.”
Is that it? I wonder. As if I'm expecting something more. Like a little playing. Or a little teasing. Maybe a bit of seduction. I don't know, something of that sort.

He pulls me over to him and pushes his face into mine. At first, I tell myself that I like all the abrupt pushing, and that I like the fast kissing, and his hand-wringing around my neck, because I am sitting there on a couch with someone who has already coaxed me and massaged me and penetrated me with all of his words. But then it occurs to me for the first time that The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless is not at all—not one single bit—the voice, nor the narrator, nor the person in all of those sweet little stories. His stories that teem with utter tenderness, a naive curiosity, and endless warmth.

Here? Here seems to be a man who is keenly aware of the fact that he is no longer required to bother very much or make any sort of fuss over a person. The women—the ones who are already overfed, their bellies round and full on all of his sugary and delicious words—well, they will already come.

And suddenly this notion fills me with a sort of sadness. For him. And for all the others before him. Like for some reason, I find myself thinking about Marilyn Monroe, of all people, and what it must have felt like to be loved for your entire life as a mere character. And never as the person one really is. And then I start to wonder about some of my own stories. How much of them are really me, how I wish to be remembered or known, and how much of them are not.

We open up the couch and continue with all the clumsy kissing for what seems like awhile. And before you know it, a shirt comes off, the shirt is yours. A pair of jeans is rolled down, also yours, and gets caught at both ankles. You kick them off with your feet. The strap of a bra is pulled down, then another. You feel a mouth lock into one of your breasts, but there is neither pleasure nor pain nor any sensation at all, really. And, as is often the case when you are with somebody new, you cannot shake the last man's taste or scent or touch from your body. All his oddly charming habits that made you feel wildly strange and wonderful things. You want this moment to count, and you want it to feel good, and you want to be swept away like the heroine of a dramatic story who wins people's hearts, and makes them all want to take your side and cheer you on. But you are not anyone's hero, and this is not that kind of story.

You resign yourself to what happens next. A mouth finds its way over a man's body. It moves slowly, and it moves meticulously, and it moves with an eagerness over every part of his skin, as if all the delicate kisses that you lay along the rough surface of his body will make you know him more, will make this moment tender and warm. But you know better than that. So you stop whatever it is that your mouth wants to keep doing because all of this suddenly feels like a forced and ridiculous effort.

He doesn't seem to like all this abrupt stopping. And moves his face over your cotton panties. He presses his lips over the pink cotton fabric and has no idea that there is a tampon inside that part of you that seems to be beating like a worn out heart, ready to give in to everything that is no good for you, and to say to goddamned hell with it all. But you don't do any of that. Instead, you push his face away from that agonizing beast coming from the deep, hollow center inside of you.

The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless does not persuade, nor pressure, nor plead for you to do that which you do not wish to do. Rather, he smashes his naked body against yours,
thoughts, and your sleepless nights.

But this is the price you pay for refusing to allow any sort of real happiness in your life. Ever since the last, great, big THE END, of seven years gone to hell, of all that melancholy day after day, which turned into weeks, and then into months, of walking over to that goddamned East River every single night, for nearly an entire year, wondering if this is where you would surrender it all—this shell of a thing that had become your body—and finally lay it to rest.

But there you are. Cocked in that god-awful spooning position with The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless: his face and his nose, digging into the back of your neck, his arms clamped around your own. You have no idea how much time has passed. Your bones begin to feel sore, and your muscles start to ache, and your head is filled with an unbearable heaviness. You are desperate for any form of respite. You find yourself holding your breath and thinking that when you open your eyes, this will be somebody else's life, someone else's thoughts, another woman's bed.

It is now that hour in the morning in which the sun reminds you that it is a different day. The one before, like a terrible storm that had wreaked its havoc, already gone. There are the sounds of a brisk exit all around you. Pants being pulled up, sneakers squeaking across the hardwood floor, a backpack zipping closed. You allow yourself to think that The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless will leave quietly, without any of the awkwardness that comes at times like this. But no, this is a good and courteous man who does the right thing, he must be telling himself. The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless comes over to you and takes a few strands of your hair and pulls it along to the side. You pretend to be sleeping, and then you pretend to be waking up.

You hate that you close your eyes and think about the last guy you were with, so lovely and shiny, like a sleek new car that would take you to unknown places, or that would be going fast so fast, until you’d hit that formidable wall, and then everything would come to a crashing halt, but maybe he was the one—or, or, or, at least, one of the great ones—and, and you didn’t even know it, or fully grasp it at the time, all these moments of discovery mixed with regret, coursing through your thoughts like some sort of fever, or delirium...yes, all this...while you are being held by The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless. You hate that you and the last guy have not spoken in many weeks, and you hate, even more, that you are thinking about this while another man is naked beside you. You hate that, once again, you have allowed another loveless body into your life, and into your bed, into your waking
“I had such a wonderful time with you,” The Author Who Shall Remain Nameless says.

That is the word he uses. Wonderful. You ask yourself why a person who makes a living finding just the right words uses one like wonderful for a time like this. And you consider, for a brief moment, why we all prefer to tell each other these exquisite little lies. Like what would happen if he just said something like: “Goddamn. You sure seem like a perfectly nice person. And, really, I’m a pretty decent guy. Not at all the vulgar type. But how about we pretend I didn’t just make sweet, beautiful love to myself with my hand last night, whad’ya think, hmm?”

But, no, of course he doesn’t say anything like that. Just the wonderful time nonsense.

You tell him thanks anyway.

He kisses you on the lips a couple of times.

Says he will talk to you soon.

And before you know it, you hear the smack of a door close. The familiar sound of another ordinary man, another ordinary night.

Another little story.

Another: The End.

Two am, after my baby daughter bursts in for the sixth time, I tell my wife we need a respite, that I’m frightened of the stress, us living at the constant behest of our three-year-old girl. Unlike myself, Jennifer, my wife, fully comprehends the world. She teaches me when a smudge is not a stain. Long ago, I stayed up late nights on the phone speaking with a girlfriend who looked like lusty Marilyn but held too strong a belief in Christ. I pleaded for her affections, trailed her to many a locker chat. How many years before I gave up did her god allow me to do that? Now I’ve my own girl to look after. And I’m still trying to wring the truth like copper from the buried veins of this ancient earth. Patience is a female language. The interstices between birth, war, and death. Women are the woven interiors of the cosmic mean. I take my daughter into my arms; she squirms and screams.

“Time unravels all,” my wife assures. “You are a good father.” I poke my eyes with my fists, drink plenty of water.
Like easy thoughts our kites float
and it’s not a science experiment but still
lightning searches for the keys we hold
in our hands, flashing bright answers to the unasked
questions we’re afraid we’ll forget to hold onto.
Turning away from exposure we abandon
these kites in the wind, decoys for lightning, mine
with a loose and twisting tail lingering
around my wrist and in that moment, perilous
temptation, all I want is to conceal my key, my question
bronzed and burnished. So we tuck away these metal
catalysts beneath blue skies of calculated
mental respite where no storm can sharpen
the edges of their teeth. In triumph we face no answers
but keys are meant to expose, to wring painful
advancement from the shadows of our reluctance and soon
we can’t help but unlock boxes under beds,
filled with heavy things, left behind when floorboards
were ripped up. Propelled we dig deeper, darker,
beneath rot and roots until we end up back
with ourselves. A circular motion,
a mirror image, a funny way of moving
forward when all we’re doing is looking back. But
this gaze scorches, becomes difficult to hold when
lightning burns like an unwanted afterimage, a smudge
in the corner of my eye, waiting to illuminate
the next key I’ve found glinting in my hand.

Jennifer Weber
THE squad car drives up her mile-long dirt driveway and sends the cats scurrying. From the passenger side the young deputy can see her standing in the doorway of her farmhouse.

In this backwater town, she’s sunlight through a dusty window. She’s raw sex running across the serene surface like a skipping stone. She’s elegant draws on long cigarettes, stuck in a town like a spittoon full of chew. The widow.

“Don’t call her the widow,” the deputy scolds his lieutenant. “Widows have dead husbands. Hers is just missing.”

“Whatever you like, kid,” says the lieutenant, portly frame filling the driver’s seat. He sniffs and brushes his graying moustache. “You’re only a year out of academy.”

“At least I went.”

“Shut your mouth.”

The lieutenant cuts the ignition and tips his hat to the woman with a pleasant smile thrown in. She counters with a burning scowl and blocks the doorway, hands on hips.
“He thought your story didn’t add up,” the deputy says, pointing to his senior officer.

“He reads too many crime novels,” she responds to the lieutenant.

Which is true, in fact—the lieutenant does read too many crime novels—stacks of Hammetts and Spillanes and true-crime anthologies with garish covers full of silhouettes and Colt 45s afire, with hero cops ready to wring confessions from gangsters. The lieutenant joins book clubs and has paperbacks shipped in bulk to his office. He reads passages aloud and laughs and wishes someone in his jurisdiction would kindly murder someone.

“You said you were done,” the woman whispers in the deputy’s ear as he enters.

“Give him two weeks,” he whispers back. “He always loses interest. You’ll be fine.”

“Wouldn’t worry about me.”

The lieutenant starts scribbling, and the deputy scornfully imagines the grainy gears shifting in the old man’s head. Already, he’s likely taken note of the woman’s irritation—no doubt indicative of a guilty conscience, blaring like burglar alarms from cops coming too close to her crime. He’s building vague notions of wiretaps and search warrants. He’ll take great pains, the deputy knows, to appear knowledgeable.

The deputy rolls his eyes. What could he possibly write on his petty notepad? Nothing to build a case. They’ll leave for headquarters, book an audience with a judge, and watch the case hit a brick wall like all the lieutenant’s other fumbles.

Got any fingerprints? The judge would ask. DNA, perhaps? A smoking gun? Hell, even a non-smoking gun?

No sir, a stupid officer like the lieutenant would answer. But I got clutter.

From the kitchen comes a sizzling sound and a pungent smell, earthy and hot.

“Fried eggplant,” she explains. “Add onions and garlic.”

The lieutenant sniffs and snaps to life. He turns to her, drops the notepad on the dining room table. He plants his feet in position and crosses his arms. Off the record, it appears—a respite from hard interrogation. They tried this trick before.

“So where is he, really?” the lieutenant asks.

“Out of town. He said he was leaving. I thought he’d drive around to blow off steam, so I never asked any further.”

“That’s what you said.”

“It’s my story, and I will stick with it.”

“Then how come no one believes you?” the lieutenant drawls. Her laugh echoes off the bare walls and her voice returns with a scathing tone.

“All right. Fine. The body’s in the fridge. I murdered him with a leg of lamb and fed it to the first responders. But I needed something to replace the leg with, and the supermarket was far away, so…”

The deputy stifles a laugh. The lieutenant stands his ground.
with all the gravity he can gather.

“OK, then. Here’s my new story and I’m sticking to this one.” She inhales a mock-confessional breath. “I got him drunk and drowned him in the bathtub. Then I hauled the body to the lake out back where he liked to sit when he drank. They’ll find him floating with his lungs full of water and…” She snaps her fingers for exclamation.

“Just acting like a dumbass now,” the lieutenant says.

“Oooh… she coos, with pretend hurt. “So how’d I do it then? Candlestick in the study? I pushed him from the high window. I disguised his body in oversized clothes to disguise his identity. I disguised our Pomeranian as a hellhound and scared him to death. Oh! I rounded up a dozen of his enemies and murdered him on a train trip from Istanbul!”

The deputy covers his mouth, but a laugh slips through his fingers. The lieutenant casts his eyes to the frying pan and the smell from the kitchen. He turns outside and points to the garden where the eggplants grow. “I’m going outside to look,” he says.

The woman’s smile vanishes. So too does the deputy’s.

The deputy stays inside. He moves to the kitchen and from the window he watches the lieutenant kicking through the tall grass that the vanished man never mowed. Soon the old officer stands over the garden plot, freshly tilled and planted. Other eggplants bloom, and a thought suddenly sickens the deputy.

“You took care of everything?” the woman asks the deputy in a hissing voice, although the lieutenant is far from earshot. “You said no worries.”

“I meant it,” the deputy says.

“What if he checks the floor for blood stains?” the woman asks, her voice angrier still. “What if he digs in the garden?”

The deputy stays silent, his eyes locked outside on the lieutenant scratching at the soil around the eggplants. “I do this for a living,” the deputy says. “There is no trace.”

“Great job,” the woman scowls. “Criminal mastermind. A goddamned Professor Moriarty.”

His thumb unbuttons his holster of his sidearm. A small noise like the button of a jacket, but the sound overpowers them both. Man, woman and now the gun—a new accomplice whose potential terrifies them both. He licks his lips. She counts her breaths until her heart resumes its usual tempo.

The lieutenant returns to the house. He kicks dirt off his shoes and smiles. And he tells her the same thing as before, that something—something he can’t classify—isn’t right.

“Frying pan,” she responds nonchalantly. “Right on the back of his head. An object that isn’t meant for killing. That way I could wash it and put it back in the kitchen. No one would ever know.”

“Be serious,” the lieutenant says. The deputy takes a seat behind him, his face turning white.

“I hated him,” she says with a wicked half-smirk. “Maybe I still use that frying pan, to cheer me up every morning when I cook breakfast. For someone else. A secret lover, perhaps?”

The deputy slowly reaches for his holster. He instinctively glances outside to the garden where the lieutenant just stood, where the roots crawl deeper into the soil, slow and persistent like men digging catacombs. And what fertilizer lies below? Soil, nitrates, minerals, water... what happens if the roots tickle something else? Do they grow around a solid object, or work their way through meat with the root tips like needlepoints?

And what of plants grown from such nourishment? Suddenly the frying smell makes him gag.
“I know why you’re here,” she says to the lieutenant. “You just have to maintain appearances. What would people think? What if the cops don’t grill the widow? Why not search the likeliest suspect?”

“Not a widow,” the deputy says weakly. His eyes zoom to the back of the lieutenant’s head. “He’s just missing.”

“Except it is kind of strange,” the lieutenant says. He takes a seat in the kitchen, still facing the woman. “You say you’d bickered, same as every other night. Then you say he peeled out with the tires screeching. But here’s the thing, ma’am. No one heard anything that night.”

The widow’s eyes flash to the deputy, still standing behind the lieutenant. The deputy nods his head, white-knuckled hand on the grip of his gun.

“Every night the two of you argued,” the lieutenant says. “The neighbors always heard. Three times a week he’d peel out and wake them. But that night he left for good...that was the only quiet night you’ve given this neighborhood.”

The deputy lifts his gun from the holster in painful inches. He can’t do it here, he thinks. He’ll lead the lieutenant to the cellar to muffle the sound and shoot him there. A fast kill—before the victim can turn and beg and make the murder all the more cold-blooded.

This moment isn’t happening, he thinks. Anything but a deputy, a low-paid desk jockey who takes shit and a triple workload in a town several steps lower than “one horse.” He dreams of his missed chances—a life somewhere in the city with the prestige and a bank statement six miles long, gone into law like his father demanded.

“No, I didn’t kill him,” the woman says. “I think in clichés. You’d catch me immediately.”

“Oh?” the lieutenant says with a satisfied smile.

“Everything from crime novels and detective stories I joked about...they don’t work,” she says. “All of those Agatha Christie stories and Sherlock Holmes shorts...in real life, a cop like you could solve it immediately.”

She looks up while her fingers trace half-circles on the kitchen counter.

“The old mystery writers don’t think like you. Something like a fingerprint or a button would give me away. Like a tiny smudge of blood, or a stray hair in the Cadillac. You can match my footprints. You can test for traces of a rotting body. I’d have to move fast.”

Her voice grows animated. “You could check my financial records, you have experts for that. Your people could grill me—my story wouldn’t hold up.

“I’d be sitting in the living room, holding my laughter. I’d have it all—my alibi iron-clad, all the blood and fingerprints scrubbed away, nothing betraying the perfect crime. I’d be singing to myself as you’d leave. And then you’d find the one piece of evidence in plain sight that I’d forgotten to cover up.

“Ironic twist. End of story.”

“You’ve read more of those bullshit books than even I have,” the lieutenant says at last.
The deputy lets out a breath and his bloodless fingers relax on the grip, slowly slipping the gun back to its holster. His arm starts shaking and from over his veteran officer’s shoulder he catches a look of amusement in the woman’s eyes. At the lieutenant’s expense, he assures himself. *Two weeks*, he mouths to her. Two weeks and he’ll have her at last.

Every day is a steady step closer to death.
We walk in one direction.
Singular; true north.
We play among these wooded paths and in illusory mazes but they are all eventual parallel lines leading to respite, closed eyes, the eternal.
I panic at the thought, wring my hands, dig my heels into the ground.
Death just looks on and smirks at the deepening hole this makes in the dirt.
Digging rather than dancing on what will be my grave either way.

*Memento Mori*
Chelsey Burden
One day, during one of the
twelve months that once felt so familiar,
the darkness will tap me on the shoulder
and whisper,
Get your suitcase.
Say good bye
to the birds, to the trees, to all you will leave
behind.
“One more sunset, one more dance, one more hug!” I will plead.
Too late.
“Oh, what can I keep?” I will beg.
“Was the suitcase thing just a figure of speech?”
Before my eyes (weren’t those amazing?) the world
will blur, smudge, fade.
Death will take my hand, struck stiff
by rigor mortis, and say,
The best sandcastles are built
on the edge of a wave.

As night falls and crickets
grind their tune, I find myself
captive to this steady beat,
a sound I can’t ignore, striking
like the ticking of a clock.
Give me some respite from
this noise. Wring out quiet,
but leave room for my
lover’s rhythmic breathing,
a sound of a different color.
Neither blare, nor chirp,
just the blissful stirring of his life.

In the Smudge of Darkness
Miriam Bassuk
(DETROIT, 2012)

1

What the eye has to say for itself:

– Perspective shrinks and grows. It dances, worried as Alice. Things that are near become far without warning and vice versa.

– Tendons of the superstructure seem to become unglued from their proper runners and free-float towards indiscernible attractors (architectures, people, rivers, small mammals).

– Distance defines itself in obverse; a concavity. Vanishing points press up close to you. The horizon line becomes claustrophobic. I reach up to smudge it away. Small worlds are scalloped out of a broad-shouldered hillside. It is covered in grass. Shoulders. Blades of grass. It pulls distance out of your wide-open lid like salt water taffy or candy floss. Inside-out now, forming a convexity. A candy hat made with a pattern
on both sides. Good in any weather. Your eye slouches atop
the pyramid point, moody with the wealth of sugared light.

— Directing self-questions to others: What am I looking for?
(Unironically). The others shrug. They don’t know, either.

2

Black sun opens the sky with a can-opener. Twist. Twist.
Threads of something sharp: a shooting, depersonalized blank
space. Bullets. Then nothing. Thick as molasses on the suffering
radio zizz.
To pursue, to argue, to age and fight aging, to froth, to wipe
froth away, to grate, to make upon the machinery of knuckles, to
fuck with the glutton’s eye peeled open, to rinse off and button
up, to swab, to get hyped, to get swole, to get juiced and preened
and plumped and finally to repeat again. To let the glands do our
thinking for us. Since 36 hours of no sleep has slept in us.
The brown earth is sticky behind the blowjob bandstand.
My sneakers leave iridescent footprints across the flagstones.
My sneakerprints give unto the earth a really spoiled child.
An enfant terrible. Later, I see the fashion models vomiting their
pearly pink cocktails. They vomit vodka and shrimp. One of them
vomits what looks like a seahorse. They pinch their noses with
practice. Birds land to get drunk from the worms here. Here, even
the mud is intoxicated.
Then later, the weeping of a group of younger brothers who
have all forgotten their names.
Where is our father, they wail.

3

It looks like a person I used to sleep next to but not with (the
human) and afterwards I would sit on her fire escape and smoke
cigarettes and wonder about her body. I would think about her
pain. So much. Is it better to live after or before the moment of a
certain and world-smashing tragedy? If you know the tragedy is
coming? After, right? It is one of the few cases where something
bad is something good. Because dealing with is better than
waiting for. Really what I think about when I think about her body
is the word “shelter.” Her shelter lacks the lucidity of my storms
and for that I am grateful. What am I to her? Warmth. Someone
to ask what time it is shortly after each dawn. Her eyes pressed
shut. Someone to call on the bus on the way home from work and
describe the carpenter’s union striking outside the skeletons of
high-rises. Someone where respite is found in small moments. I
am. She once said she was afraid to sleep alone.

4

Socks feel fire-covered. Ants, there must be ants at this party!
Well, you know what they say... Wincing. Tiny concentric circles of
rough blue fire.
I take off the socks and go into the water. It feels cool and wet,
but I do not like that it shows my reflection from below because
there is a hole in the crotch of my pants and using the reflection of
the water I can see my penis.
I do not like strangers observing my penis when it is flaccid.
I decide that I must either leave the water or achieve an
errection.
I try to achieve an erection by picturing the rings of Saturn.
I try to achieve an erection by picturing a Chinese woman in a
purple, close-fitting turtleneck and pointy boobs who is eating a Belgian waffle smothered in frills of whipped cream.

I try to achieve an erection by asking my friend who is a girl with a feather in her hair to come over and stand by me in the water and when she does we hold hands and don’t say anything to each other. In my mind I tell her that I am praying. She rubs her breasts on me because she is experiencing the type of high where that feels good to her. She tries not to look at me while she is doing this, in case that makes it awkward. If she is a cat then I am a scratching post. There is music playing. She rubs her ass on my crotch in time to the rhythm. Then her boyfriend comes up to me wearing a shirt that says SUICIDE RHYTHM. I am overwhelmed by the force of this encounter and leave the water. My socks are nowhere to be found. I am sockless and go looking for America.

Where have you gone, my homeland? She is sitting on a small knoll in the back of the public park. She is tiny and her hands cover the meadow, cup the still waters where I stood and lied to a girl in my head about praying. You shouldn’t lie about praying, I think. Not in your head. It’s uncalled for.

5

Windows do not make any sense where mescaline is concerned. Because they claim to separate inside and outside, but they do not. They are in violation of what they claim. What glass in general claims. I am in the company of Germans. They are also in violation. The German language sounds like warthogs snuffling around an asteroid crater. It makes me listen to how it sounds, like someone who really wants to watch before they even know what the movie’s about. The German boys here have stacked muscles that everyone approves of. They flex and we burst into applause.

They don’t wear shirts because it is tattoo weather. Two people are having very clumsy sex by the chain-link fence outside the warehouse. They both have tattoos of Disney characters on their arms and from afar it seems that the Disney characters are also having sex. Minnie and Donald. My knuckles are teardrops that wring slowly out through my fingertips and drop upon the dance floor.

They make the sound of pennies.
They bounce.
They make the sound of hexes.
They fall silent.

The edge of me is a happy clementine, peeled and juicy. It waits with a citrus ripeness for someone to pluck at it, to learn its chords and play its music. Outside the aluminum warehouse, large black storks peck at the road. I worry that one stork has mistaken a tiny skittle of gravel for a food-bug. I can still see the iridescent footprints I left. Damn them, those storks are trying to swallow our seeds, to grow us inside them until they become us. Until they take our place. Storks are craftier than we know, I think.

6

America lost her job, which she says makes her giddy. Her laughter is honking and crazed. I sell this stuff to pay my mother’s medical bills, she croaks. Her skin is the color of liquefied cinnamon. Ten Italian women plant wet kisses on America’s cheek. They buy more. The tallest Italian lady asks me if she can lean on my shoulders for a moment while she nudges a pebble from her strappy sandals. I pretend to eat a sandwich made of air with very slow, direct bites. The afternoon feels made up of television color. Its timeline includes a number of sloppy edits, jumpcuts and
Nights when the walk signals beep out of sync, I stare at the window, study each smudge passing insects leave. There is no regression line to draw, no respite from disorder. Sometimes in the momentary silence of that flashing orange hand, I follow those insects beyond the city limits, where patterns abound. They land on sunflowers, seeds spiraling in Fibonacci numbers. Their eyes are compound; they tessellate like ceramic mosaics. Every step in their dance is measured, cadenced. If I could wring the secret of sequence from their wings, I’d bring it to my intersection. I’d let the repetition pull me back to sleep.

Michael Mingo

Insomnia

Even the smell of wet paper is something to notice. For the first time since arriving in Detroit nearly ¾ years ago, I don’t finish a beer that I have purchased. This is in violation of a rule that I was taught by men with faces of badly dried cement. Every stripe is a concavity. I try to recite a Coleridge poem I have known, I feel, since birth and it comes out moth-eaten. The wallpaper of the warehouse sticks to my eyes. I only want for my jaw to be removed. There are too many Germans near me. I sit down, wring the water off my eyebrows. It’s still not too early. Light fades to an overlaundered lavender. What succor the hamsters must take from their little wheels. I grimace and in the distance: laughter.
We interrogated the thing’s stomach contents and left the movie.

On the street above
we freeze our way
into a new year.
Off the train to visit your patchwork monk—
the one under deep renovation—
we pass the Hacker’s Embassy.
I would wring the magnets
from last season’s words
to bypass security and, inside,
build out a sovereign respite
for faceless polar grasses
like you and you and you and I.
We would irradiate everyone
accumulated in the coded morning’s
ocular smudge and that of
our reader’s reader’s reader.
IT was perfect. Absolutely gorgeous. And the instant I saw it, I knew it was going to be mine. I just had to figure out a way to get it. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

It was Saturday night; I was at a party. I really hate parties, any kind, but my boss made it clear that it was not an option to skip the evening. “Detrimental to your future,” is how she worded it to me Friday afternoon as I was leaving my office. “Eight o’clock, be on time. Wear a tie.” She gave my bolo a tug as she walked past me.

I understand where she was coming from on the issue. It is difficult for a museum director to balance the books every year, to end most years with a little money in the bank. Members come and go; grants only last for a short time. So you need donors, lots of them, with buckets of money. Donors have pet projects. If you play them right, the money flows. A donor who fancies himself an ornithologist was giving a party on Saturday night. My presence was requested; my boss assured my attendance.
I’m an ornithologist, a real one. It’s been my career for nearly thirty years. I started out at universities. But I tired of the grind of publish or perish. After a few unfortunate incidents, I made the transition from academics to curator at our museum. The prestige is less, the pay is not superior, but the jockeying for power is nonexistent. I create exhibits, develop interpretive materials, walk kids through workshops, and escort white-haired old ladies through “behind the scenes” tours. Some nights I drink room-temperature champagne during after-hours events for the members as we hit them up for money.

I arrived at the party on time wearing a slightly worn tie that I had picked up at a thrift store earlier in the day. Wife number two always said I was the most fervent recycler she’d met. If I strained my imagination, the print pattern was of the phalanges of the male Canadian warbler (*Cardellina canadensis*). I thought I could wring a few conversations out of it. I hate small talk; I’ve never been good at it. Ex-wives one and three told me so more than once. “We were at the party for three hours and you never spoke to our host once.” It was clear from my boss’ comments that not only would I attend the party (with a tie), but I would also be charming, witty, and chatty with the host, hostess, other guests, and the two trustees in attendance. My performance evaluation is due in two weeks, so I had spent all afternoon rehearsing opening lines. I had practiced feigning interest in imaginary conversations with people at the party.

I learned all I could about my host. He had a file at the museum after trying to be on the Board of Directors. His resume listed his hobbies, although he called birdwatching his passion. He’d itemized both his list of life birds, seven hundred eighty-seven (mine is eight hundred twenty-three as of last week) and his yearly totals for the past five years. After two hours of reviewing his application to the board, reading about him online, and background checks on the rest of the family, I knew more about them than I knew about my third wife when we got married.

His wife Bianca greeted me at the door. She started flirting, or at least it seemed like she was flirting, before the door was closed. I had broken up with wife number four two years ago. I haven’t dated, so maybe it was just the fact that a woman was paying attention to me. Bianca seemed to be much younger than her husband. She clipped my agitation about having to be at the party. “I just love your tie,” she said. Sliding her finger down my tie she paused, resting her hand against my chest, pinching the tie between her fingers. “My husband used to have one just like it.”

We talked for a few minutes; she introduced me to a flock of people in her living room. She flew off to the next guest when the doorbell rang. I stared at her ass through her just-tight-enough skirt as she walked away from me.

My encounter with Bianca was the high point of the evening. For the next two hours, I spent my time drifting from one small conversation group to another, doing my best to be personable, garrulous, and informative. The advantage to the rehearsed lines from the afternoon was that I got to recycle them with each flock of guests. My boss smiled at me when she heard me talking about the impact of climate change on the reproductive cycle of blue jays. She nodded her head while I told my latest group of friends about the museum’s research on the subject.

After replaying the loop of canned conversation several times, I needed a respite. In the bathroom I straightened my tie. It really wasn’t bad as ties go, with a light green and brown background complimented by the warbler pattern in a blue-black ink. As I left
the room I lost my bearings, turning left instead of right in the hall. When I landed in the library, I thought I had been transported to another place and time.

I had seen book-lined libraries in British movies. Wife number one had dragged me through one at a showcase house early in that marriage. It was nothing like this honest-to-God library lined with books from floor to ceiling, corner to corner.

I was overwhelmed by the multitude of books. My OCD flared up; I started calculating the average number of books per linear foot, estimated the amount of shelf space. I rubbed my fingers down the spine of a leather-bound Steinbeck, savoring the roughness of the hide against my fingertips. I walked around the room looking at the titles; there were over four thousand books to my quick calculations. Millard Wilson Brown Hornaday liked birds, but it appeared that he, or someone in the family, worshipped books. A book with green leather binding caught my eye. Steinbeck. East of Eden. I stepped back to the book I had touched. Steinbeck. East of Eden. I pulled on the book; it was glued to its neighbors. The whole shelf was staged to create the British country house library. The books were props, probably collected by a decorator at yard sales throughout the city then arranged to look impressive. I felt my shoulders slump, my head drop and, deflated, I started to leave the room.

That is when I saw it, perched on the shelf between “Uncle Vanya” and “War and Peace.” It was perfect. Absolutely gorgeous. I recognized it immediately because as a graduate student, I had spent days searching for it only to return to the United States defeated.

It was the nest of the nearly extinct Siberian Ruff. How do you describe architectural perfection blended with classic design and earnest workmanship? It was the handiwork of two birds, which mated for life, constructed from reed and grass and melded together with the mud from the bottom of the Barents Sea. It was the melding of the Holy Grail of nature and the Meaning of Life held together with mucky organic material. As I reached for it, my hand trembled, my heart fluttered, and I felt perspiration on my forehead. Stopping, I took a breath. I gently, very gently, touched the rim with my fingertips. A vibrating jolt of warmth shot through my body. I stood there for several minutes, my fingers touching the nest. For the first time in days—no months—I felt alive.

“It’s a beauty, isn’t it?” The sudden sound in the otherwise still room made me jump. I turned to see my host standing behind me. “What do you think?” He beamed as he stared at it, just as if he were showing off his new lawnmower or a back yard tomato to a neighbor.

“Yes it is. A beauty that is. It’s gorgeous.” My mouth was dry. It’s one thing to yearn for an object. It’s another when you are discovered coveting it.

“I’m certain that I looked just like you when I first saw it. I couldn’t believe it either.”

He picked it up with his thick, gnarled hands, which looked to be better suited to setting bricks than to picking up one of the rarest bird nests in the world. “Here,” he said, dropping it into my outstretched hands.

The sudden weight in my hands surprised me. I swear I almost let it slip through my fingers. I would have killed myself there, in that room, if I had dropped what has been described in the definitive article in The Ornithologist as the most exquisite animal-made structure in the world. I recovered, cradling it in my hands.
“Just look at the interwoven fiber right there. It’s damn near perfect.” His finger moved back and forth in the air.

I placed my nose near the top of the nest, closed my eyes, inhaled. I declare I could smell the sea air imbued into the grass and mire. The unmistakable heaviness of ocean air rolling off the surf filled my nose immediately transporting me ten thousand miles from the fake library with the prop books to the marshy natural habitat of the coveted Siberian Ruff.

I stood there holding the nest in my outstretched hands as Hornaday revealed the story of how he got the nest. It involved private planes, personal guides, and an army of support people to get him to the remote area where the bird lived. His initial goal was another live bird; the trophy for the expedition was cradled in my hands. I stared at the nest, examining every reed and twig, marveling at the intricate design while Hornaday went off on a tangent about the expedition. I nodded my head at the appropriate times, feigned interest, while plotting how to get the nest out of the house. It was wrong for a marvel of the world to be sequestered in a fake library stuck between two dead Russian authors.

He tenderly removed the nest from my hands, placing it between the two books. He slapped me on the back then gave my shoulder a hard squeeze. We walked to the ballroom; he yelled to Bianca that I had seen “Kremlin,” clearly their nickname for the nest. With a fresh drink in my hand, I blended in with the guests again. Although I repeated my rehearsed lines, my thoughts were drawn to the nest.

I’m not sure how long I had stayed in the library with the nest, but when I glanced at my watch I realized that the party was ending; guests started to leave. I was without a plan. I walked around the house then into the kitchen with the wait staff hired for the night. It was there that I found my answer. I returned to the library, placed the nest into the small box that had contained hors d’oeuvres. I packed paper around the nest and touched it before sealing the box. I put the box under my coat.

I walked down the hall toward the clamor of voices. Four people were leaving; I knew I could just add to their group. I tilted my head down, soaring toward the door.

“Just where do you think you’re going?” Bianca called out to me. I froze in my steps as a sharp chill ran down my spine. I stopped but did not turn. “You’ve ignored me all night.” She had a pouty expression on her face as she hooked her arm into mine diverting me from my flight path out of the house. “It’s not nice to ignore your hostess, you naughty boy.” She slurred the word naughty as she dropped her left hand, giving my ass a hard squeeze. I noticed that the house was empty except for the last of the wait staff.

“Where is Mr. Hornaday?”

“Upstairs. Entertaining the intern from the museum. He won’t bother us.”

Bianca leaned her body into mine, I was not sure if it was for support or comfort. I felt the warmth of her breath on my neck. In spite of the fact that she was married and her husband was upstairs with an almost minor, I was turned on. But then again, I have poor judgment in women. I had the nest under my arm. Holding my shoulder up and out made my left hand numb.

“Why don’t we sit and talk for a while,” she said.

She dimmed the lights in her den to a warm glow. Bianca threw herself onto the couch; I’m not sure that she could have gracefully lowered herself onto it. Her brown eyes were glazed as
she patted the section next to her. She called me over with her finger, as if she wanted to whisper something to me. I leaned in close. She grabbed my head with both hands and explored my mouth better than my dentist had on my last visit.

I stood to adjust myself and the nest. There was a smudge of pink lipstick on her left cheek. “Let me freshen up first,” I said. I gave her a conspiratorial smile. She patted me on the inside thigh.

“I’ll be waiting right here,” she said. She smiled, leaning back on the taupe couch. I walked out of the room. “Don’t be long,” she said blowing me a kiss.

I did not stop until I got to my car; then I continued to the museum and finally into my lab. I locked the door. I turned on all of the lights. After unpacking the nest, I placed it on an examination pedestal. Despite being carried in a used sandwich box in my armpit, it was in perfect condition. With my magnifying glasses I admired the handiwork under high power. I studied it until dawn, photographing it from all angles. I got online, posting the pictures on my favorite website. It took me an hour to write an exhaustive narrative about the bird and nest. The early morning sunlight filtered through the windows as I watched the counter record the number of page views. Within an hour, there were over a thousand hits. For the first time in years, I was invigorated. I emptied our most prominent display case and positioned the nest in the center. I ran my fingers along the upper rim one last time and then shut the door. I soldered the lock permanently closed. I sealed the glass with epoxy.

I stepped back, and admired it as you, the police, arrived.
profits from their lazy ways. My father’s son. Once a prude of a man, the ump of our moral binds, a relic, a walrus, a vast woolly spider,

the prism which unknits me. There’s no respite from the diminishing caricature of a man, germ of vestigial fears, nursery rhyme of ignorance,

deep indent of a paraffin lash. Purge carefully all other possibilities. Let the well-worn rime on this linen sink in. Excepting him, long dead and longer forgotten, no nerd on earth stripped of his vices is as well-suited for this execution as I, his accident, tied up in this necktie guise.
I am a veiled one. They say that we are cursed.

My father was the man who ran mad down Mills Avenue, smashing flocks of angels with an old baseball bat. They crumbled into clouds of ash that flew for miles. Some of it still covers the eastern suburbs outside Orlando. Some of it settled down out of the sky and circled around my father that day. He swatted and swung in his horror of that ashen veil, but it wouldn’t leave him. My father ran from the swirling ribbons of black and gray, ran until his heart couldn’t run anymore. And then he died, and then he burned, and then he rose. Now all that’s left of my father is an angel. Someday he will fade into ash. I don’t want him to follow me too.

The first angel my father smashed into dust was so desiccated, so fragile, I couldn’t say if it used to be a man or a woman. It was the suggestion of form, burned to gray, pale and fluttering in the light breeze, losing itself to the wind in little slips of tissue-thin flesh like the newsprint paper I used for sketching before people didn’t die anymore. I could see the crackle of electricity, translucent blue, moving the body.

I was sure that when it turned to face me I would see that energy glow from eyes burned hollow, eggshell-thin. But my father struck it before it could turn. I still dream about the glow I would’ve seen.

Maybe it’s true. Maybe I am cursed.

My grandmother, my father’s mother, was the first in our family to change. Before the day she died it was a story, an urban legend, about places in Argentina, in Bangkok and Mumbai, where the dead wouldn’t rest. There were dozens of different versions of the tale. People talked about hordes of desiccated monsters, hungering for flesh. They talked about rabies mutations and government conspiracies. Some people talked about angels walking the earth and the second coming of Christ. Here is the truth:

On the 2nd of August my abuela sat down at the dinner table and sighed. It was long, rattling and deep, too gravelly for mere weariness. My grandmother didn’t answer when my mother asked if she was all right. Abuela’s eyes were open, but they didn’t blink. I could see a thin line of spittle between her upper and lower lips where her mouth was parted. She turned her head and watched my mother walk to her, even turned her chin to give easier access to her throat. There was no pulse, no breath, but not true death either.

We called an ambulance and followed it to the hospital. Within hours her skin was cracked, dry, and there was an almost static charge around her, a hum of energy. The doctors didn’t know what to tell my parents. I saw half the nurses make the sign of the cross when they passed by my grandmother’s room, the other half would stare, wring their hands as if in prayer, and then walk away. By the next morning she drifted off the ground, withered, and her gray eyes were a clouded, milky blue. When the doctors said that
we had to leave her there I was ashamed by my relief. A week later we were told her body had been turned over to the CDC. There never was a funeral.

My grandmother’s favorite verse in the bible was Ecclesiastes 12:7—Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it. Not any more. So much for the Wisdom of Solomon.

I don’t know who had the first veil. There were weeks of grief, confusion, and panic. I remember whispers and a prohibition on television, the Internet. At some point the government gave up trying to hide the angels away, and so the streets and parks were filled with gray figures, slowly drifting apart to leave moving ash. And some of us left living began to be followed, trailed by that ash like a bride going down the aisle. Veils.

Every day, 153,425 people stop living. Even when we bury them, within a few months, with a crackle of electric blue, the earth opens. Cast into the ocean they wash onto the shore, precipitate, pour onto us in the rain. Do you remember the old children’s song? We’ve changed it now, of course.

*Abuelita’s glowing*  
*Cracks and flakes are showing*  
*Ashes, ashes*  
*They won’t fall down.*

The angels are an echo, a whisper, silent observers, reproachful followers. I’ve lost count of the number of murderers who have confessed to their crimes because of their veils. I heard that one man had a veil that stretched three miles behind him, and every inch of it the ashes of children. At his trial they had to run a dozen HEPA fans to keep the courtroom clear of it. And the moment he was pronounced guilty, his veil vanished, floating off to who knows where. Maybe the ash clouds over Bangladesh.

Imagine never seeing the sun until after the monsoons roll through. Watching the sludge of undying ash roll and slide over the ground until the sun bakes it dry, and it flies again, blocking the light.

They gave the serial killer a life sentence, of course. And when he dies they’ll bury him in a steel and concrete box and drop it into the Mariana Trench. And he’ll rise, never an angel, only ash, like all the undying ones they took to the sea. But it’ll be decades before he rises, maybe a century. There will be no one left living from his trial to haunt.

They said the dead would hunger. It would be easier if they were hungry. Then they would be a threat worthy of destruction.

The day my father ran mad, one of the angels he smashed was a tiny, desiccated girl. She exploded like a flurry of snow, and then moved to him, the first piece of his own veil. Maybe that was his crime, destroying the echo of innocence.

I must’ve committed a terrible sin, even if I don’t remember doing any such thing. My veil is so heavy, hangs so close, that I have worn a breathing mask every hour of every day for three years. There is no respite. I go out at night so that I don’t bother the unveiled going about their lives during the day. My cousin Solana shops for me and brings me books from the library. She even lets me live in the playhouse that used to be hers when she was a girl. It’s wired for lights, and I have a good sleeping bag. Solana says it’s what family is for, but her husband isn’t happy. He never speaks to me, but I see the glares, hear the arguments when I turn off the lights in my playhouse, when I should be sleeping. If I didn’t give them the meager disability funds I receive for my veiled
status, he wouldn’t let me stay.

Some people want the veil.

Solana’s best friend was a woman named Melisenda. She was curvy with dark hair she wore close-cropped. Melisenda had one child, a fat and happy boy named Samuel—Sammy. I babysat him a few times before the angels came.

One morning, a few months after my father went mad, Melisenda called and asked Solana to come and help her with the baby. She said he was listless, that he didn’t want to eat or play, that he didn’t cry. Solana took me with her, and when we walked into the house and I saw Melisenda holding Sammy, Sammy with his crackled skin and his electric-milk eyes, I turned around and walked right back out the door. But I heard Solana and her husband talking that night when they thought we’d all gone to sleep.

Melisenda wouldn’t listen to anyone who tried to tell her that the baby was gone. She dressed him, tried to feed him, and held him close while the crackle of electricity burned his eyes, left him lighter than air—her little angel. When the baby went to ash, Melisenda put it in a jar. I found her once, chest bared, holding the mouth of that jar pressed right against her naked breast. She was humming, rocking—still trying to feed the baby. But the jar got broken, and the baby didn’t stay. The ash flew up, up, up in a spiral, like a broken shell I found when I was small at the beach with my father. The shell was all grays, an echo of ocean-bleached color, curved, empty. The ash flew up while Melisenda beat her hands bloody on the glass and the pavement, screaming for her child.

Melisenda hanged herself, and after she burned she went up, up, up, like she was following after her baby. I wonder sometimes if she came back, if she’s a part of my veil. That would make sense if I broke the jar, but it was Solana. Maybe she was trying to help. Maybe she couldn’t stand seeing her friend walk up and down the street every day, singing to herself, pushing a stroller that carried a jar of ashes. And so she snatched that jar up and smashed it, with her eyes gone wild and her cheeks flushed red. The glass sparkled against the deep black asphalt beneath her feet.

One of the angels my father broke that day used to be a man. Even burning as he was, he was tall, broad, with a chiseled chin. He was stronger than the rest, more substantial. My father had to hit him a half-dozen times before he began to fall apart. The angel held out its arms to him as if to ask my father for mercy, but my father cracked them off with the bat: right, left. When it shook its head, my father knocked that off too.

I believe that the angel was trying to speak to my father, because my veil speaks to me. Not with words. There is a hum, the energy that moves them. It changes, that sound, with the seasons, the phases of the moon. It changes when I eat or drink. The way it moves shifts. Sometimes there’s a wall of gray around me so thick that I can’t see more than an inch in front of my face. Other times my veil is a thin mist, swirling around me, clockwise, counterclockwise, like motes of dust in a sunbeam. Sometimes there are tendrils, deep-sea creatures floating around me, pointing in one direction or another. When I don’t follow it, the ash thickens till I stop or risk falling. It sets me wandering for hours at night, for miles and miles until I am exhausted. Once I fell asleep looking up at the stars through a thin haze of ash, asleep right on my feet. I didn’t wake up until I tripped over a park bench.

Three days ago I found the one place in the world where my
I found it on one of those walks. There used to be a school, a college, closed now. They must’ve had a film program because the backs of the buildings were designed to look like different places from all around the world. In the moonlight through the haze of my veil, I could pretend that the faded paintings, the rusted furniture, were vibrant, were fresh and real. Behind the back-lot, across a bridge with wrought-iron railings spanning a slow-moving brook, there was a summer-burnt meadow and a thick strip of trees. My veil stretched and spun toward the trees, and so I moved there, scaling a chain-link fence to drop down into tall, dry grass.

I walked, letting my hands trail above the brittle blades, tickling my palms, and listening to my veil hum and sing. When I got closer to the trees, I could see that one large one, a live oak, had a wooden platform spanning three of its thickest branches. The tree was all deep cracked bark with little leaves burned silver by the moonlight. The platform it cradled was half-obscured by vines. There were no walls, no bits of debris, to give any suggestion that it had once been a tree house, a place of dreams and imagination. It was simply a floor, open to the air, under the sky.

My home in the playhouse was miles away. My feet and knees ached from walking in worn tennis shoes. I decided I would climb up and rest in the tree, wait for dawn to make my way. The hum of my veil was a vibration in my bones as I found finger and footholds in the rough bark of the oak, tugged myself up into the branches of the tree.

The wood of the platform was lined with ridges and grooves, speaking to the years of exposure to wind and rain and heat. I left the weight of my body on my knees as I reached forward, pressing down to check for give, for weakness. I slid an inch forward, slid, tested, and again. When I straightened, stood, there was silence so profound I thought I’d gone deaf. And the moonlight was too bright because my veil was gone.

Not distant, hovering an arms-length away or above my head. Not dust-mote thin but humming in my ears. Really and truly gone. I stood there, shivering, while I waited for the sun to come up, and it was still gone. I took the mask off my face and watched the sun rise over the trees for the first time since the day my father died, with a dark smudge of ash trailing down his cheek. The gray faded to lavender, to rose, and orange, until the sun was up and left the sky a brilliant, deep blue. Light filtered down through the leaves, turning them buttery and translucent, dappling my skin with a thousand flecks of shadow.

When my legs finally grew tired again, I settled down onto the planks. I sat on the platform, weeping at the way the light made the leaves on the trees seem to shimmer when the wind gusted through. The movement and the cry of birds, so filled with grace, brought more tears. The slow passage of a turtle winding through the tall grass, sliding down the bank of the ravine, became a saga that ended with the sound of rustling grass and moving water. I watched the colors of the world fade into twilight and the sky give over to moonlight and stars.

The last angel my father smashed the day he ran mad was with his own body as he fell. That angel was a woman before death and the burning. A few inches taller than me, narrower in the shoulders and broader in the hip, the angel wore the faded remains of a midnight blue silk dress, simple and modest, hanging just below the knee with an empire waist and butterfly sleeves.
The dress fluttered, it billowed and danced in the light breeze that moved around the flock that day. When he broke her, those ashes came to me. That was the beginning of my veil, singing in my ear, as I tried to beat life back into my father’s chest. Maybe she followed me because I couldn’t save him.

I was there when my mother bought a silk dress for a dinner party being held at my father’s office. The silk was velvety, the deep blue of a sky filled with stars and softer than a newborn’s cheek. When it snagged on the rough skin of my fingertips, my mother didn’t chastise; she turned my hand, and the silk slid over my knuckles like warm water.

I was there when the policeman came to the door and said my mother was dead. My father insisted it was an accident. He said that no good Catholic woman would take her own life, but the police couldn’t find any reason why the car ran off the road into the retention pond. None of the tires were blown, and the brakes were fine. There were no witnesses to tell us that she was driving too fast or that she swerved to avoid an animal—a cat, a dog, a possum (she was so tenderhearted) that had run into the street.

I was there when we were advised the police couldn’t prove intent, so her death was ruled an accident. Written there in black and white on the reports, flowing over and over, black and white, no grays, from my father’s lips. Written on his heart.

But before my mother’s death, her sorrow was so heavy I could feel its weight. It left me wondering if we would both become angels, cracked and dry, because I cried every time my mother wept.

There were tears when she wouldn’t leave her bed for days, when she promised to take me to the museum we both loved and then went right back into the house because there were angels flocking across the street. I thought she would stop crying when I agreed to be homeschooled, but then there were guilty tears because I’d lost my friends. The night she went out to get groceries, she hadn’t left the house for twenty-seven days. She wasn’t crying.

I was there at the funeral home, fourteen, speaking for the family while my father wept and murmured. I told them to bury my mother in her blue silk dress, soft as a sky full of stars.

When I tried climbing down the next morning, the hum and fog of my veil returned as soon as my hands left the platform, scrabbling for a handhold on the oak trunk. So I climbed back up, watched the world become clear again. I wonder if the police will tell Solana that my death by dehydration was an accident. Not that my stomach agrees that lack of water will kill me first, not with its burning and its rumblings from hunger. I’ll wait. I’ll feed myself on the call of birds, on clouds and starlight. And when I burn, then it will all be quiet, silence and ash.

Maybe then I will understand.
It begins with sand beneath your feet and stone circling your back. A crowd you can feel in the thrum of your bones.

A shield because you got lucky but there is no respite from imperial whim, a scorching Roman sun.

Blood spills and affirms this arena filling the heart of the city where you fight well or die well or else finish forgotten.

If you win, you will step over his limbs to walk away with your victory.

If you win they’ll praise gods and goddesses and coin. They will drink wine the color of new blood you will wring from your tunic.

They’ll disdain your company but champion your body.

If you win the people will inlay your likeness in mosaics across public walls. Your eyes will be a smudge of deep royal purple.

If you win the crowds will hold your sword in their gaze and demand to see you do it again.
The old man makes himself an archway in the middle of the field. Crumbling brick, opening upward, it is ancient, the sun passing on and through. The field is hot, sho’nuff hot, and dry, dry dirt and hot muggy-breath air. He wipes his brow slow with a Kleenex-box-blue handkerchief. Old man don’t use Kleenex, he uses this handkerchief, handkerchief he was given, long time ago now, Kleenex-box-blue. He looks down to the hoe and the dry dirt mouthing it, heatwaves like some new kinda worm. Some kinda memory pulling at the edge of his sweat-stained work shirt. A memory from way back, back way back in the back-then times. And he can’t see what it wants so clear, or even its face really, or if it has one... He wrings the browjuice out the Kleenex-box-blue handkerchief, lets the droplets fall to the dry, cracked-lip earth, watches intently as they disappear.

The bell rings out across the factory and the young deep-skinned man raises up from his hammer, wipes oil, grime, and a thick-breathing fatigue across his sweating face with the back of a leather work glove. Lunch.

As he makes his way toward the parking lot and the food truck there, he spots his boss on the second tier above the door, looking over his workers. Mr. Bossman all anyone call him. Mr. Bossman...
Mama. Aww shucks, Mama, leave me ‘lone why don’t you? I ain’t went nowheres....” Ellipses and all. She reaches at his face and he pulls away.

“Boy, come here and stop playing!”

She pulls a light, cloudy-blue kerchief out the tight hug of her apron string. She sucks at the kerchief a good ten seconds, just enough time for him to realize the kerchief is the same color as a Kleenex-box and wonder if there is some kind of connection there. Then she wipes at the wet-black soil smeared all on her beanstalk boy’s hot-heat face. He frowns a frown that is mostly only a frown, but with a little eentsy bit a smile in there too. She stands back and admires this new smudge-work she has made. He is so beautiful, she thinks, his beautiful is almost, just almost, too much to bear.
Miriam Bassuk has been living in the Northwest for the last eighteen years. It is here that she discovered her calling to be a poet. She has been published in *The Journal of Sacred Feminine Wisdom*, *Writers’ Wings*, *Papier-Mache Press*, *PoetsWest Literary Journal*, and *Oasis Journal*. She continues an active practice as a journal writer, and is always looking for the next great book to read.

Chelsey Burden is currently earning her MFA in Creative Writing at Northern Arizona University. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Women’s and Gender Studies and in Sociology. She works at the Flagstaff City Library, as well as on the *Thin Air* literary magazine.

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Kelsey Dean spends most of her time dreaming about mermaids and training her hands to draw the pictures in her head. Some of her writing and/or artwork can be found in *Glint Literary Journal*, *Neutrons Protons*, *Haibun Today*, and *Arsenic Lobster*, among others.

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Allen Forrest was born in Canada and bred in the U.S., he works in many mediums: oil painting, computer graphics, theater, digital music, film, and video. Allen studied acting at Columbia Pictures in Los Angeles, digital media in art and design at Bellevue College, receiving degrees in Web Multimedia Authoring and Digital Video Production. Forrest has created cover art and illustrations for literary publications: *New Plains Review*, *Pilgrimage Press*, *The MacGuffin*, *Blotterature*, *Under The Gum Tree*, his paintings have been commissioned and are on display in the Bellevue College Foundation’s permanent art collection.

Gail Goepfert’s poetry has appeared in anthologies, print and online journals including *Avocet*, *After Hours*, *Caesura*, *Florida English*, *Uproot Magazine*, *Homeopathy Today*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Examined Life Journal*, and *Ardor* among others. Photographs have appeared at *Olentangy Review*, *Blue Hour*, and *YourDailyPoem*. Currently, she serves as associate editor for *RHINO magazine* out of Evanston, Illinois. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2013.
Y.J. Howler is an Oakland born, Atlanta residing, poet-emcee who does not believe in time. He spends most of this not-believed-in concept scribbling things into notebooks. His voice and work have been featured in several documentaries, including Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequality, which explores race and restorative justice in the United States. Y.J.’s previous and forthcoming publications include Eleven Eleven, Drunk in a Midnight Choir, as well as numerous here and theress.

Thom Ingram is a poet, essayist, contemplative, and teacher living in Boulder, Colorado. He has an MFA in creative writing from Queens University in Charlotte, North Carolina. His poems have been published by Elysian Fields Quarterly, The Good Men Project, Random House, and several local and regional journals. His essays and other poems can be seen online at www.poetguru.com.

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Marco Maisto’s poetry, comics and collaborations appear or are forthcoming in Drunken Boat, RHINO, Small Po[r]tions, and Heavy Feather Review. He attended the Iowa Writer's Workshop MFA program. He lives in NYC with his lady, the painter Margaret Galey. Find out more at marcomaisto.com

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Chris Roberts is Dead Clown Art. He is a full-time freelance artist, using mixed media and found objects to create his visual nonsense. Chris has made art for Another Sky Press, Orange Alert Press, Dog Horn Publishing, Black Coffee Press, Kelp Queen Press, PS Publishing and ChiZine Publications; for authors Will Elliott, Andy Duncan, Tobias Seamon, Shimon Adaf, Seb Doubinsky, Ray Bradbury, Kaaron Warren and Helen Marshall. He made the list of recommendations (“long list”) for the 2012 British Fantasy Awards, and was nominated for a 2013 World Fantasy Award in the Artist category. Follow Chris on Twitter @deadclownart.

Marie Sabatino has been writing stories since she was a little girl. She has been telling stories all over New York City for the last ten years at venues like the Lit Crawl in Brooklyn and Manhattan, The National Arts Club, Galapagos Art Space, KGB Bar, Happy Ending Lounge and the Brooklyn Book Festival. You can find her work in publications like Mr. Beller’s Neighborhood, Word Riot, The Liars’ League, Fluence, Freerange Nonfiction and in the Akashic Books “Mondays are Murder” series.
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NEXT UP
Issue No. 7
Summer 2015

3Elements:
Miasma
Simmer
Whimsy

Due April 30, 2015

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.

Visit www.3ElementsReview.com for more info.
**Staff - 3Elements Review**

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**Marlon Fowler** is a Des Moines–based designer and web developer for *3Elements Review*. He received his bachelor’s degree in Journalism with a major in Advertising from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Marlon enjoys all things technology, making websites “do things,” running, reading nonfiction, sports, movies, video games, and Chicago food. He would really like to learn PHP and get back to Paris. You can check out Marlon’s portfolio at [www.marlonfowler.com](http://www.marlonfowler.com).

**Carol Roh Spaulding** is co–author, with Kay Fenton Smith, of *Zakery’s Bridge: Children’s Journeys From Around the World to Iowa* (2011). A Professor of English at Drake University, Spaulding teaches courses in writing and American literature. She is the author of several award–winning short stories, including a Pushcart Prize, best story of the year in *Ploughshares*, the Glimmer Train Fiction Open, and the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction. She lives in Des Moines, IA with her husband, Tim, and son Jonah.

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