Welcome to issue no. 9!

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

The next issue’s elements are: Measure, Cleave, and Sliver.

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Sincerely,
Mikaela Shea
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In the beginning, our species would walk sideways, leaning over.

We were being blown this way and that by the breath of God when he kept whispering, “Fall.”
We were crooked from the start, which is why the bent fetal position is the first we each hold
when we are dreamt-up from nonexistence. For a while there, we shambled around like we were each a Leaning Tower of Pisa.

We were walking so cockeyed that God tilted the world on its axis to straighten us out and give us some damn dignity. Then in our mania at being fully upright, we tore off our fig leaves and lay together, limbs all slippery knotted. Now, sometimes, the ground shakes beneath our feet. Orgasm. Earthquake. Shakespeare.

We can hardly walk after. We’re all crooked again. After exposure to these shifting tectonics in our loins, land, and language, we never feel secure on our two feet.

We know then that we’re supposed to lean. That the correct way to look at the world is sideways.
How could
his nimble fingers
that so delicately played
the tinkling lullabies,
resounding concertos
on the mahogany upright
not piece together
Mother’s shattered statuette,
a crumbled cherub?
A flaw to be hidden, buried
in the side yard
in a hole dug
by thin fingers.
Dirt under fingernails scratched out
with a peacock quill—get rid
of all evidence,
but he must ignore
the questions,
“Where is it?”
“Stolen and nothing else?”
And the mania:
even years from then, he asked
himself, how could Mother
entrust him with her piano
newly lacquered?

Before he played, he washed his hands,
polished the piano, and prayed
Mother would never plant
her white or yellow roses
in the side yard and he knew
when he grew older he would fill his house
with towers of golden cherubs,
lacquered pianos,
white and yellow roses and more—idyllic
paintings of country children in fields framed
in heavy oak dusted with
gold leaf, ornate gold chandeliers
with winking doodads reflecting rainbows
on white walls, massive furniture
to greet and engulf his guests.
“Marjoram,” Katie said. She didn’t really taste marjoram, but she knew that Chef loved the herb and suspected he had sprinkled it into this pâté, as he had with many others.

“Excellent.”

“And ... fennel?” Katie didn’t taste fennel either but had seen Chef grating a raw bulb of it earlier into a large stainless steel bowl as she walked through the kitchen, fastening her apron.

“Very good.” Chef Rodick narrowed his eyes, pulled at his chin, and looked up at the ceiling. “What else?”

“Jesus, Chef, how much shit did you put in there?” asked Diane. Katie sat behind her and noticed the peak of her butt crack rising above the waistline of her black cotton pants.

“A lot of shit. Here’s the specific shit you missed, Diane and everyone else: fresh-ground black pepper, Grana Padano, smoked sea salt, and a drizzle of truffle oil.”

At the peak of the night, when guests filled every available seat at Pop & Charc, Katie carefully loaded her arms with four plates at the expo station. She caught Chef Rodick watching her as he drizzled a pomegranate reduction on a bone of lamb, but he quickly looked down once she met his gaze.

Tonight, after the rush, she would ask again to fill the position of pastry chef—if only for a week. She would promise once more to maintain her server shifts and come in early to bake. She would work long hours without recording them so he didn’t even have to worry about overtime. She would do it all for free—at least until she proved herself—because she worked out her frustrations in rounds of dough, and loved the feel of butter and flour underneath her fingernails. Maybe she would leave that part out.

“TONIGHT our special pâté will be goose liver with balsamic vinegar pearls and chervil, served with crostini as usual,” Chef Rodick explained. Katie watched Chef’s hands as he spoke—his fingers in particular, thick like the andouille sausages he made in-house for charcuterie platters.

Chef passed around the pâté for all the servers and hosts to try, as they did every night before service at Pop & Charc began. “I want you to really taste the pâté, to know it.” Chef Rodick closed his eyes as he mouthed the words “taste” and “know.” “That is the only way you’ll be able to speak about it with any credibility to our guests.”

After the five servers and two hosts had all tried samples, Chef Rodick looked around. “Well? What do you taste?”

“Coriander,” said Tom, usually the first to answer. He smoothed the right handlebar of his mustache between his thumb and index finger.

“Good. What else?”
Next week she’d be 30, and she wanted to be able to call herself a pastry chef, not just a server. Or a pastry chef and a server—that would be fine, too. People would ask how her pastry chef aspirations were coming along, she suspected, at a birthday dinner she knew her friend and fellow Pop & Charc server Essie was secretly planning.

When service began to wind down for the night, Katie delivered chocolate-streaked dessert plates to the dishwasher station and found Chef there eating soup from a ramekin.

“You on dishes now?” Katie joked.

“Tom’s on a cig break out back.”

“Chef,” Katie began, stacking the plates in the stainless steel dish pit, “I know you’ve already told me ‘no,’ but I just can’t accept it and I really think I’ve got—”

“No. No. There. Now I’ve said it three times.”

“But I promise you—”

“Do you think you’re entitled to some sort of special treatment from me? What about me saying ‘no’ doesn’t register in that lovely little head of yours? I have an idea: how about I brand the word ‘no’ on your forehead with a scalding hot iron?” Chef brought the ceramic ramekin to his lips and drank the remaining soup, then threw it down by the other dishes. It split in two with a sharp clang, and Katie shuddered.

“Katie, you have no training. You have no experience. The position of pastry chef is not a joke.”

“I know it’s not a joke. That’s why I’m asking for just a trial period—one week. That’s all.”

“We already have four finalists. It’s going to delay the whole hiring process. I can’t do that.”

“But you said my petits fours were excellent, and—”

“The fact that you occasionally bring in petits fours and homemade doughnuts for the staff is not evidence of your ability to be a functioning pastry chef in a Michelin-starred, high-volume restaurant.”

In the bathroom, Katie bundled her hair into a knot high above her head and got in the shower. She considered staying in there all night, softening like a peach under the stream of hot water. But when she started to feel lightheaded from the post-shift whiskey shots, she lowered the temperature and knelt down on the shower floor.

In her bed, Chef Rodick lay reading M.F.K. Fisher’s How to Cook a Wolf.

“That was a long shower,” he said without looking up as she pulled on shorts and a tee shirt, and then, “Why are you putting that on?”

A better question, she wanted to say back, is what the fuck am I doing here with you? “It’s cold,” she said instead.

“Listen to this quote, Katie: ‘All men are hungry,’” he said in a tone higher and more exacting than usual. “‘They always have been. They must eat, and when they deny themselves the pleasures of carrying out that need, they are cutting off part of their possible fullness, their natural realization of life.’”

“Wow.” Katie rolled away from him in bed into fetal position and tucked plugs into her ears so she wouldn’t have to hear Chef Rodick read another quote, which he most certainly would.

But he settled in behind her, rolled her over to face him, and pressed his lips to hers. Then he did that thing she loved that
At her surprise birthday party, Katie still wasn’t a pastry chef. Essie had asked her to meet for dinner at Pomelo, and she had envisioned a long table filled with all her friends. Maybe an explosion of “surprise.” Maybe even small penis straws. Instead, she found only Essie and her friend Laura, a Pop & Charc host, sitting at a square table in a darkened corner of the restaurant.

“Surprise,” Essie said awkwardly.
“When’s everyone else getting here?” Katie asked.
“No, this is it,” said Essie. “People couldn’t get off work. I’m sorry. Were you thinking more people would come? It will be fun, just us three.”

Heat flooded Katie’s cheeks. A tug at the corners of her lips.
“No, this will be great. Thanks so much for organizing!”

“Happy birthday!” said Laura.

Later, as they argued over who should take the last bite of passionfruit panna cotta, Laura leaned in close to Katie. “So, I know this really isn’t my business, but are you and Chef sleeping together?”

“No, of course not.” She tucked her dyed blonde hair behind her ears. “He’s gross,” she added.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. People have just been talking, you know.”

“Well, even if I were, just so you know, he’s getting a divorce.

Or trying to anyway.”

“Really?” Essie cried. “Didn’t they just get married?”

Chef introduced the staff to Ben from Bend, the new tall, thin pastry chef. Ben made fists of his hands and showed Katie the tattoos on his fingers: “foie” on one hand, “gras” on the other.

“Sweet,” Katie said.

During each shift they had together, Ben showed her pictures on his phone of things he’d baked, and Katie knew she could do better. A pie with a lattice topping of uneven, scraggly strips. A cake so haphazardly frosted its chocolate crumbs peeked through the gaps. A tray of slightly flattened cookies.

“Rustic,” Katie said. Ben smiled and nodded.

“Check it out, Katie,” he said, leading her over to his workstation one day. He handed her a big bottle of vanilla extract.

“What do you want me to do with this?” she asked. She caught Chef Rodick peering at them, before quickly looking away.

“Drink,” said Ben.

Katie sniffed the bottle. She took a swig. “Kahlua?” she asked. Ben gave her a high five.

“The idiot you hired instead of me is getting drunk on the job,” she whispered to Chef after her shift that day on her way out the door.

At her apartment, she took out a ball of pizza dough she thought he might do only when he could sense her slipping away. He pressed his lips closer and, with them slightly parted, whispered the names of spices into her mouth: fenugreek, star anise, cassia...
She nodded and strolled away.

As Katie was slicing lemons in the kitchen, Chef Rodick came up behind her and asked to see her in his office. She saw him look left and right to check for anyone in the hallway before shutting the door behind them.

“You’re so pretty, sometimes I want to eat you, simmer you down to a reduction, drizzle you on some sorbet,” he chuckled, rubbing the back of his sunburnt neck.

“Well that’s not creepy.”

“It’s not.” He tucked his index and middle fingers into her waist-drawn apron and pulled her close. A sad little swell—fed by duck fat and butter, Katie imagined—had begun to form just below his ribs and she could see it pushing out his chef jacket just so. “You can be pastry chef.”

“Really? Are you joking? What happened to Ben?” She ran her flat palms up and down his upper arms.

“He came in late for the third time. And then there was the drinking at work thing. I let him go.”

“That’s too bad.” Katie pursed her lips, trying to stifle her smile.

Chef shut his eyes and nodded. “So I just served Sue papers.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“You can’t tell anyone about us. She’ll take everything. The restaurant, the building, my sous-vide machine. At least not until all the legal shit is done with.”

“I won’t. I swear I won’t. So when do I start?”

“You won’t tell anyone?”
“But isn’t it good exposure for Pop & Charc?”
“Repeat after me, Katie,” he stood up, bolting her upper back to the chair with his warm palms. “Pastry should never outshine savory.”
Katie rolled her eyes. “Repeat,” he commanded.
“Pastry should never outshine savory,” she replied. He kissed her forehead—a big smacking kiss, like an Italian kissing his gathered fingers before fanning them out in a gesture of exaggerated extolment.

Years ago, on one of her first days at Pop & Charc, another server had told Katie that Chef had a restraining order filed against him in his early twenties. “Why?” she’d asked.
“For stalking some chick. I guess it all started when he was out with her and her mom, and he got wasted and said, ‘I don’t normally do mothers and daughters together, but I’m willing to make an exception.’”
Katie had gasped. She hadn’t believed it. Maybe that server had something against Chef. Maybe it was your typical restaurant gossip, or, at worst, it was a product of a brief spell of mania Chef had fallen into at the stressful beginning of his career. She pushed this new information to the back of her mind, and only on rare occasions—when he stared a bit too intently or fell into deep silences—did it reemerge.

After their shifts, Essie and Katie met for happy hour at a gastropub down the street. They sipped sour beers in tulip glasses
Chef gave Katie the look on a slow Monday night, and she went to his office and sat on her hands in the swivel chair. She swung around in it with her feet up like a child. He faced her with his hands clasped behind his back, his eyes looking just past her, just right of her. He looked taller than usual standing so upright, more handsome in his solemnity.

“Did someone die?” she joked.

“You will,” he said, towering over her. “Now that you’ve done the one fucking thing I ever-so-nicely asked that you not do.”

Katie felt the blood drain from her face. Essie must have told someone—or must have told Chef directly.

“Needless to say, you no longer have a job here. You can pack your things and get the fuck out of my restaurant.”

Katie threw her arms up in the air, and a puff of flour rose up from her chef’s jacket with the gesture. “I didn’t tell anyone! It’s Essie. I didn’t tell her—she saw us going into the office and—”

“Please don’t lie to me. This is my life, Katie. This is not some joke you tee-hee-hee about over fucking rosé and marcona almonds at happy hour. This is my life. And you very well may have just singlehandedly ruined it, so thank you.”

As Katie piped a chocolate buttercream “y” onto a Boston cream pie, she had to turn her face to the side so her tears wouldn’t wreck the frosting. She had been grieving on her sofa when she decided to do the only thing she could think to do: bake a cake—Chef’s favorite. She would show up at his new apartment and present it to him like some sort of offering in exchange for the reinstatement of her job.
“Did he ever even say he loved you?” her sister asked her over the phone.

He hadn’t, but she was certain he did—she’d felt it in the way he traced her jawline with his knuckles, or in his endearing preference for being the little spoon, pressing his back into her chest.

When she knocked on Chef’s door, he opened it and then shut it and then opened it again. He wore checkered chef’s pants and no shirt, and thin red lines webbed the whites of his eyes.

“Here,” she said, handing him the Boston cream pie, emblazoned with SORRY in chocolate buttercream a shade lighter than the cake’s dark frosting. She clenched her nostrils, hoping not to cry, but it proved a useless gesture against the force of her tears. She thought that maybe she saw him smile as he took the cake from her and let her in.

“Tonight we have a Padalino pâté,” Chef said to Essie and the other servers seated before him. “It’s going to be a blend of different meats, and we’ll be serving it with cacao nibs and candied ginger alongside the usual crostini.”

“Is this beef, Chef?” Tom asked, spreading a bit of it onto half a crostini.

“It’s a proprietary mix of meats.”

“I’ve never tried anything like this before,” said Tom, chewing. “It’s so … earthy?”

Chef smiled. “Thank you. Now, tell me what else you taste.”

“It’s almost sweet,” Essie said. “Like a dessert pâté.”

“Cassia?” the new girl said. “I think I taste cassia.”

“Very good.” Chef folded his hands behind his back.
Yet another car alarm squawking at 5 a.m., waking the entire apartment block. Probably set off by a leap of the tawny cat that probes our complex every dawn like a spy creeping behind enemy lines.

The owner emerges, embarrassed in patterned pajamas, and turns off the diabolic device. It’s not only slinking cats—exposure to thunder and passing trucks also set off these galling gadgets. Aliens listening on other planets must think we’re a demented species with a mania for cacophonous auto security.

But I’ve come up with the solution—Mozart, Handel, and Beethoven.

Let’s replace car alarm squalls with classical music. Now when the cat springs we might all begin our day with Handel’s *Messiah*.

Angels awakened high in Heaven’s towers will look down and thank us.
Wintering, this swamp
looks more like a moonscape,
half sunk in a lunar river
breeding mist upon mist.
Even the alligators are submerged
in temporary mud-tombs;
their bog breath rises up,
breaking to bubbles on the water’s surface
as if to say: we’re still here.

The beavers and nutrias must
have drained their mania
for building, now dozing farther inland;
the mist obscures their shacks.
Twig-built, packed with grasses,
walled by nothing so thin
as a window, the shacks
are one of the last holdouts
against a soluble world,
cozily warding off exposure.
Neither bald oak nor sweetgum have kept their tower silhouettes. Their boles barely poke up, dwindled nearly to spirit. The water (is it rising still higher up the boles?) is slick with duckweed, and has turned a dead color. This place reminds us of death, (our own) always encroaching, but not yet arriving—the hearts of fish ticking beneath the boat’s bottom.

The month before is past compulsion; it’s mania I measure by his kicks and turns, my belly a tower pushing the inside body out, preparing for exposure.

He’s stronger now, head down and knees exposed between my ribs. He’s learning—climbing towering bone-water—how amphibian flays into man,

how he too can harden, can use new limbs to tow both of our bodies, how protection is exposure turned outside itself and soundlessness goes manic.
I was at a backyard party. I’d been invited because, in some way, I was related to the people who were throwing the party.

Men were standing at the grill. Other men were in chairs facing out to the lawn, where the children of the men were playing games that made no sense. You could tell which of the children would grow up to have debilitating emotional complexities—it had to do with how they landed when they accidentally fell.

I was over in the corner, not quite near the grill, not quite among the men in the chairs. I knew my place. We were all a bunch of white people. Everyone in shirts and shorts. We were grilling meats to eat them off treated paper plates. The wives and women had segregated themselves from the men, as if it were the law. It seemed like such a waste of our pure American freedom. The women had their conversations. The children played together in the grass, because gender hadn’t yet become a reason to do something. All they had was mania. I was sitting in the corner. I was glad I knew my place.
I thought about how bland it all was. Everyone in shirts and shorts. I was in a shirt and shorts. I watched the men at the grill. Their conversation had tapered off, leaving them with nothing. They stood there at the grill. They were staring at the meats. One of them kept adjusting the heat of the grill at random intervals. The men were holding cold beers. Their beers were cold and bland. The men knew exactly how bland it all was. They knew as much as I did about the blandness, maybe even more. They knew their place was by the grill. We were all in shirts and shorts.

The bland had gotten so damned bland that pointing out the blandness had, itself, become dull. I saw this sentence, this thought, take shape behind my mind. I started crying. The sun was warm and holy. The air was cool and gentle. Children giggled in the grass. I wept behind my sunglasses.

I got up to go inside because my sunglasses weren’t strong enough to hide my tears from all these white people. My sunglasses could block the deadly UV rays of the sun, but could not hide my tears.

I went inside. The house was air-conditioned. There were people in the kitchen. Several plates of party food were on the kitchen counter. The people stood around the plates discussing what to do about the plates. When I entered the kitchen, the people looked up at me and smiled. I smiled back and said, “Hot out there.” I wiped my tears with my forearm, as if the rivulets were sweat—it was a covert operation.

The people in the kitchen probably said something else. I walked by the people and headed for the living room. I had to pass through the living room in order to reach the bathroom. More children were in the living room. Gathered in a semi-circle, the children sat before a massive flat-screen television. I thought about the apes in that Stanley Kubrick film. The children were watching something about a talking gay sponge. I hurried to the bathroom.

After locking the bathroom door, I sat down on the edge of the bathtub. Aquatic toys were in the tub, and I thought that maybe I would buy some buoyant toys to play with in my own tub at home. I was no longer crying. I took off my sunglasses, blurred my eyes at the tiles of the bathroom floor until the swirls and dots took shape. The tiles mostly looked like faces that were laughing at me. I stayed there in the bathroom for as long as I could, until someone knocked on the door. The knock was hard, and came from high up on the door—the knock of an adult. “One sec,” I said. I waited a few more seconds, flushed, and washed my hands. I dried my hands on a yellow towel that was hanging from a ring.

“Enjoy,” I said to the adult, as I stepped out of the bathroom. “Yeah, okay,” said the adult, as he stepped into the bathroom. I smiled to myself because I liked my sense of humor best when it failed.

By the time I made it back outside, I forgot what it was that had made me cry. I frowned. I thought it was important to remember the things that make you cry. One of the men who had been standing at the grill was now sitting in my seat. My frown started scowling.

“You look like you could use one of these.”

I turned toward the voice that had come from somewhere to the east of me. The voice belonged to a woman. She was tall and clean. Her teeth were healthy. She smiled like a royal palace. She handed me a beer.

“Might as well.” I took the beer. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” she raised her bottle. I twisted off the cap
and then I clinked my beer to hers. We pulled restrainedly at the drinks. The beer was yellow, light, and crisp.

“‘I’m not much of a drinker,’” I told her, which was true. “Sometimes, I think that maybe I should be more of a drinker.”

“It helps,” she said. “I like to have a beer at night. Just one—always something light. Beer goes better with the stars than nothing. I have trouble with the stars at night.”

The statement struck me. I looked at her more closely. If I had to guess, she was in her early forties—a very clean and healthy white woman. Her skin was well-prepared for summer. She looked athletic, like someone who made her own fruit smoothies and practiced yoga in the afternoons. But there was also an earthiness to the way her weight rested in her shoes. She looked like someone who loved to play rigorously with a pair of big sloppy dogs.

“What do you mean you have trouble with the stars?”

“I don’t know—they give me trouble.” She sipped. “During the day, I’m just going through it. Clouds do what they do. The sky does what it does. Always different, unpredictable. I don’t pay attention. I just stick to the schedule.”

One of the kids fell down hard while he was running. Conversations stopped. We all looked at the kid. The kid looked up at all the hush and concern of the adults. He looked like he was on the fence about whether or not to cry. The adult who must’ve been the father did a beer-belly jog over to the crash site. After discussing the severity of the injury, they determined that the kid was fine. The kid got up. The children’s games resumed. The adults went back to their conversations.

“You were saying how the sky does what it does,” I prompted. “During the daytime,” she said pointedly. I nodded to show that I understood the importance of the detail. “But, at night, the stars come back. We have these French doors in our bedroom that lead out to a balcony. I can see right through those doors to the sky outside. Every night, there they are.”

“The stars.”

She nodded. “I’ll be about to go to bed. I’ll see the stars out there, and I won’t have a choice. I’ll have to go look out at them. There they are, I’ll think. It’s those stars again.”

After taking a moment to stare at the woman’s head with its long brown hair, I said, “That’s probably the most interesting thing anyone has ever told me.”

“You’re probably a nut,” she said. I laughed. We sipped our yellow beers. We watched the romping children in the grass. Neither of us seemed to mind standing there in silence for a while, but even the most comfortable silences have to end, eventually. I took it upon myself. “Which is yours?” I nodded at the children.

The woman nodded at one child in particular—a little girl who was yelling a lot and tackling all the boys. “That lovely obnoxious little creature right there. Her name is Iris.”

Iris was pointing and screaming at one of the other children. It looked like she was accusing the other kids of cheating. She was the tallest kid on the lawn. She towered with authority as
she pointed and accused. The other kids ignored her. They kept playing their lawless game. Pretty soon, Iris gave up on inventing broken rules. She got back to tackling.

“I’m Gabrielle,” the woman said. She held out her hand. The diamond on her wedding ring refracted in the summer sun. I shook her hand. Her fingers were much longer than my own. Our hands did not shake well together. I’m pretty sure we both noticed how our hands did not shake well together.

“I’m Billy,” I told her, which was true.

“Billy,” said Gabrielle. “Alright then, Billy. It’s been nice talking to you. I should check in on my husband.”

“Okay,” I said. Gabrielle walked toward the chairs where all the men were sitting. Playfully, I called out, “Watch out for those stars tonight!”

Gabrielle turned her head. She looked back at me. Something flashed in her eyes—an accusation of exposure. The flash passed very quickly before she remembered that she had to smile and treat life like it wasn’t such a big deal. She changed the flash into a laugh, as if I’d made a lazy pun. She walked over to her husband. Everyone in shirts and shorts. Gabrielle said something to the men that made all of them laugh except for one. I assumed that the man who wasn’t laughing was her husband.

I decided to leave the party before anything else could happen. I went home to my apartment, where I lived alone with a big sloppy dog. I played around for a while with my big sloppy dog. I kept an eye on the window. I didn’t have a pair of French doors, but I did have a pair of windows. I waited for the day to be done. After enough time had passed, the day decided to be done. I went over to the window, pulled the strings to get the blinds up as high as I could get them. I wrestled with the strings until the mechanism caught. My blinds were kind of lopsided, but had retracted well enough to not disturb my view.

I waited at the window for the stars. When the stars came, I went to the kitchen for a beer—a light yellow beer from the six-pack I’d purchased on the way home from the party. I sipped the yellow beer. “There they are,” I told the window. “It’s those stars again.”
Thoor Ballylee
William Aarnes

2006

"intellect its wandering
To this and that and t’other thing,"

W.B. Yeats

Our class failed to share
our professor’s mania
for Yeats’ Ballylee—

the assigned poems
seemed dated, dull
and there was this dead bat

we had to get past
on that winding stair.
And, besides, what kind
of tower is square, not round?
At least it didn’t rain the day we visited. So up on the battlements three of the boys, urging the rest of us to join in, pulled off their shirts to enjoy some exposure to the sun.

Honeymoon at the End of the Eighties
Jennifer Martelli

Three Martello towers stood round and abandoned on a dried field within the walls of Old Quebec City. There were no wars anymore, no need for garrisons, no need to hide men. My new name, Martelli, means hammer too, or little hammer. (His sister wanted me to share a surname with her, or she felt this was important after a night of cocaine, when everything was manic and important.) Later, at the Argentinian steakhouse below the sidewalk, where the walls were brick and cool, he and I ate raw meat and potato shoestrings. I wore chunky necklaces: fat, fake rubies, glass emeralds, and topaz. My poor body was sore. The clitoris, aroused and exposed, was described once as a tower or hill housing termites, made of red mud and spit. The cold ground seeped through my cracked Doc Martens, made my legs ache in tight jeans—you’d think we did it right there, on the field, on my military coat (the one with shoulder pads like a tin soldier’s.)
THE stairway is dark underfoot, and though she swears under her breath she can see fine, really, she is cursing herself for not bringing a flashlight.

Little skittering sounds come from the corners of the stairwell, which is disappointingly squared in the way of mid-nineteenth century factories—mice, she thinks, and then micemicemice, because if it isn’t one thing it’s a whole host of things—and squeak-crunching noises from her tennis shoes. She had to break a side window to get in, and there is broken glass embedded in the rubber soles of her shoes and in the bleeding scrapes on her knees.

Idiot, she thinks, should’ve worn jeans. Nevermind that they’d be all wrong for the occasion. Situations like this merit a certain amount of pomp and circumstance.

Her legs have begun to ache, a small dull twinging crawling up the backs of her calves that she knows will get worse soon. She is breathing heavy. The idea came, so quickly and unbidden,
that she didn’t have time to think of the practicality. As is how most things happen these days when she’s manic. She spends eighty dollars on oranges and eats them for a week, forgets about her friends and then sleeps with a guy she met on the Red Line coming home from Quincy after a binge. Sometimes these episodes of mania are preferable to the weeks where all she does is sleep, because at least she is out of the house more. But sometimes they’re not. Mania tears the skin off the world, makes every moment gritty and hard-edged and brilliant as diamonds shoved up into her eye sockets.

Outside the rain is heavy and still she climbs. She’s been driving past this factory for weeks without ever really seeing it, but once the switch flipped in her brain it became all she could think about: sixteen stories of red brick looming over the horizon at the top of Parrish Hill. Broken-down letters across the roof spell out something, but half of them are missing so that it only says D W CH MFTG CO. A long drive of asphalt so ruined it’s now practically closer to gravel, no tire tracks in sight. Beyond the road a stretch of unused railway, its slats splintered and choked with weeds, that shows how the long-ago workers once got to their jobs. Pausing, chest heaving beside a tiny round window so grimed with filth she has to wipe it away with the sleeve of her dress, she imagines she can almost see them, single-file and swinging lunch pails.

Inside past the broken window the place has been stripped bare, so there’s no chance of telling what might have once been made there. Cloth or machine parts, toothpaste tubes or ink. Only cement floors, pitted and cracked in all directions, here and there punctuated with a steel column or the evidence of an old hobo fire (and how neat they are, she thinks, they actually made a fire pit) and then, at the end of the cavernous space and glowing with a weird greenish light that seems to be of its own making, the entrance to the tower, the subject of her fascination now for nearly a week.

At first the climb was easy. She’s been a city girl for months, she walks everywhere, more so in the weeks when the mania sings in her bloodstream and walking everywhere seems to be the only way to get it out. The rain started somewhere around the fourth floor, and came on sudden. One of those late-summer storms that billows in and bashes the untrimmed leaves of the elms against the windows like dry fingers, sending drivers pulling over to the side of the road with their windshields full of rain. Fifteen steps later the thunder, and now, as she crests the fourteenth floor, a terrible burning pain in the backs of her thighs, lighting forks across the sky from somewhere above—an opening! The roof.

Lungs aching, blood running down her legs from the glass, she redoubles her efforts. Thunder crashes, enclosing her in a crush of sound as thick as a cotton ball. She moves to take another step and realizes there isn’t one. She has finally reached the top. There was a door here, once, but it’s long-gone, stolen or rusted away to scraps. The roof is clean and surprisingly wide, a moonscape of cement and battered shingles. The rain falls in heavy sheets so that within seconds of exiting the tower’s protective overhang she is soaked to the skin. Lightning flashes overhead on the luminescent whiteness of her skin, and she peels off first one tennis shoe, then the other. It takes slightly longer with the dress, which has gotten tangled around her and saturated with rain. She claws at the white lace sleeves, shredding them, until at last the neck comes free sending buttons popping down to bounce in the puddles, and she stands on the roof, naked and in
glorious exposure.

The rain on her skin should be cold but it’s as sweet and warm as a kiss. She revels in it. She could dance. She walks to the edge of the roof, barely feeling the pebbles dig into her bare feet, and gazes out at the hill below. From here the town seems quiet, locked inside the storm. She almost thinks she can see the workers again, single-filing from their car. The air is heavy with the scent of blood and stone. At the edge of the tower, in a way she almost remembers, is a ladder gone nearly to rust.

She climbs to the edge and stands on the parapet, lifting her naked arms above her head and offering a wild, triumphant yell to the world. Dizzily the town spins below her, but the storm is too loud now and the rain too heavy to care.

**Snapshots**

Ellen Roberts Young

We planned a trip to give our sons some exposure to Europe. They remembered the pizza at Pisa. My photo of the tower was crooked.

Boys are all motion: they race up stairs to St. Peter’s dome, climb down into a catacomb, explore old trains whose rush and shake my camera could not catch.

I focus now closer to home, mimic my mother’s mania for garden photos. Documenting forsythia’s short season, her lettuce seedlings before the rabbits found them, she stopped travelling and used more film.
First you must point, first you must wrap your ankles, twist your every mind-warped thought that made it to a photographer’s film, ready for exposure; first you must bend yourself so much you cease to be bending.

Instead, you must be a tower of the body; you must wrap your emotions into your belly, you must wipe a fury across the brow, you must break a sweat inside your marvelous mania, you must swallow the idea this is wrong, you must use your inner rejection to project a subject to shoot at, first you must make yourself so sharp.
I already knew I was getting a swingset for my sixth birthday. It would be impossible to hide such a large box from a snoopy child, or surprise me with it, suddenly erected with a big red bow in the backyard where I constantly tripped around, wrestling the dogs or plucking honeysuckle blooms to sip with my neighbor Colleen, our always-bare feet hardened to hide.

So my father invited me to help him install it. He thought I would enjoy this because I was (happily for him, sire only of girls) drawn to the workings of mechanical things, eschewing dolls to tug and tap at the innards of fishing reels, tape recorders, his anvil-heavy typewriter at the police department. But it was really the time he spent with me I wanted most.

I churned at a bucket of cement with skinny wrists as I watched him dig four deep, perfect circles in the foamy green March grass with a post-drill. He filled each hole from the bucket I could barely drag, then hoisted the entire clanging swingset assembly above his 6’3” frame in one smooth motion and settled each leg into its home to dry, tightening screws and ensuring angles.

Handyman, hunter, homicide detective.
Was there anything my Daddy couldn’t do?
Actually, to call it a “swingset” was an insult to that sparkling edifice of entertainment. Over the years it became so much more to my friends and me—pirate ship, princess tower, the Millennium Falcon, reading nook, pouting haven. The patches of worn turf beneath it didn’t grow back until I was in high school.

It was also massive, like an elephant suddenly burst into the yard. When I asked for a swingset, I expected the standard lineup of a plastic swing, a teeter-totter and midget metal slide that would burn your backside in the summer.

Instead, Daddy backed the truck into the driveway that weekend bearing the Aston Martin of jungle gyms. “Beep beep beep,” he called, his neck straining through the driver side window. “Delivery for the most beautiful girl in the world!” When he hit the brakes, the heavy box—which he, normally so methodical, hadn’t bothered to secure—slid off the tailgate into the rosebush with a terrible clank.

Behind me, my mother sighed and went back into the house. I didn’t understand Daddy’s bipolar disorder then, or why my mother seemed put off. His mania was what made him fun! Involved! Exciting! I much preferred it to the other times.

Once completed, the gym’s steel frame arched above our roof eaves, with glossy red and blue stripes spiraling down poles that supported a spine of monkey bars I would race across, hand over hand, back and forth, or stop and dangle from for minutes at a time just because I could.

At each end, sturdy silver bars extended in bright T’s,
supporting swings, a trapeze, a thick, knotted rope, and a set of black rubber rings on chains. Flinging my way from one station to another, I grew thick calluses across my palms that would eventually crack and tear off, leaving raw pink divots. But I didn’t care—I raced to the gym set every day after school, wheeling, swinging, twisting, spinning, because it simply felt so good to move, to be dizzy and dirty and alive.

On his good days, Daddy might join me on the gym, doing pull-ups from the monkey bars or pushing me on the swings as our rabble of Labradors leaped over my ankles. I ate his attention; I never knew when the next dark days, the whiskey, the tears were coming.

I especially loved showing off my rings skills. These were my favorite piece of equipment, as I fancied myself an Olympian someday. (Rings are only a boys’ event, my Older and Therefore All-Knowing neighbor Kim imparted, but I didn’t care—she couldn’t get her fat ass on them anyway.)

I would lock my arms and hold my sweaty legs outstretched, then whip them under and up again, the momentum whirling me into a flip, from which I would stick the landing on an old dog bed as Daddy whooped his approval.

I felt so strong and sure, my kinesthesis so certain, I was dumbfounded the day I lost control rolling through space and crashed into a nearby stump. The bark ripped my shin to the bone, the torrent of blood so orange and fierce it didn’t look real.

My mother had to lie down when she saw me, but Daddy, home just in time from work, wasn’t fazed at all. In fact he seemed eager. An adventure! He didn’t care if my blood got on his suit. He wrapped a beach towel around my leg, set me in the truck, and rumbled us off to the emergency room.

He chattered away the whole time, punched at the radio buttons, cracked jokes, and even stopped at 7-11 for Slurpees along the way. He assured me I would be back on the gym set that very day, and he’d rip up that nasty, old stump with his bare hands!

By the time the nurse called us back I was almost looking forward to getting stitches. Daddy distracted me with armpit farts and teased the still-pimply intern assigned to my care. Do you have a girlfriend? This gal here’s available! What time are you off work? As the doctor cleaned out my wound, he seemed nervous about something (perhaps the armed and agitated man hulking over his shoulder). Daddy sensed his unease and went for the superfecta, explaining how those little bits of raw pink flesh, flicked onto the blue paper sheet, resembled the evidence he’d recently found in a car trunk that had transported a murder victim’s battered body.

The doctor raised an eyebrow. I smiled. I was nine. And I was fascinated.

What I didn’t see was the toll such exposure extracted from my father’s soul. I thought he had the most exciting job in the world, and that he shared it with me because he saw me as mature, a peer. But really, I was the only friend he had who wouldn’t judge his moods, or punish his worsening drinking bouts. When he looked into my eyes, the reflection he saw was still that of hero.

When drinking finally did take him a few years later, the gym set lost its allure. Not because I was sad, although I was, but I was 13 now. I was too tall for it, and frankly I’d rather go to the mall than swing on dirty metal bars. And I wanted soft palms to couple-skate with, not that it happened often.
Eventually the gym set’s rusted husk collapsed, and my mother had it hauled away to the junkyard. I grew up and learned that, unlike the freedom I felt flying and flipping, real life had mortgages and migraines, consequences, shitty people, and too often, the very worries and depression my own father had experienced.

But I had help available. And I had our memories of the gym set, that magnificent monument to movement, swinging for my father on the rings where I learned to stick the landing. Even when he could not.
A Tadpole with Legs
Hannah Kuster

The fear of naked bodies is birthed in the bathroom, upon the discovery of russet syrup coating your thighs.

With only a thin towel to harbor fledgling breasts and the mysterious leaking delta on the brief journey to your room, there is a sudden horror that a brother whom you bathed with not too long ago might come waltzing by. Some impenetrable barrier has arisen between your bodies, mounds and towers erupting from the earth of skin against your will, the outlined evidence of man and womanhood poking against clothes. How careful you now are at the bathroom door.

There is a new mania to avoid any exposure, for accidentally stepping in to see your father slick and soapy in the shower would be witnessing the cradle of your existence, the needle that wrought your fabric, as wrong as laying eyes on God.

Dark Room Development
Erin Aslami

Who knew such mania could have festered inside a photo fermenting within a darkroom? It develops, void of exposure to light, sequestered from warmth. There is only darkness inside this womb.

If you plant a picture to grow there unchecked, one that captures nothing, that bears no image, no drive, no effect, will it breathe in that air, that mania, that lack of light, lack of love, and thrive on it the way it would a demon’s milk? The way a person would be set back if isolated from infancy at the top of a tower, his bud bilked?

Would the impressionable print produce, when it finally began to bloom, an ill image which one could deduce is mania itself—grown and grasped in a dark room?
**Segmented**
Sam Corea

**A Little Fun with a Woman**
Nathan Gehoski

**THIS** Stalin is our Stalin.
Our good friend Joe.
In his brown shoes and pressed uniforms.
His bushy eyebrows and thick mustache.
He became my thesis in ’02, his experience of World War II a point of contact and departure for the work as a whole: “Man of Steel: A complication of the history and character of I. Stalin.”
I opened with an anecdote.
When Stalin found out about Operation Barbarossa, Germany’s planned invasion of Russia, months in advance of the actual event, he wrote on the report informing him of his mismanagement and judgment of his ally, Nazi Germany: “You can tell your ‘source’ from the German Air Headquarters that he can go and fuck his mother. This is not a ‘source’, but a disinformant.”
I felt it made the gravity of my project more severe. More tangible. “To understand war,” I wrote, “one must understand ‘fuck’ and Stalin and everything in between.”

The emotional explicative. The frank candor of Marshal Stalin. Sharing a history I was trying to pin down.

-Or maybe you just liked the word. “Fuck.”

-You could be right.

I started writing it the day Sara and I got married. It was Good Friday, the venue the cheapest we could find. We drove there with our bridal party, smoking cigarettes and pot, drinking MGD and Pabst and Arrogant Bastard and growlers of microbrewed stouts. We sat on the steps of the wedding hall, hours early, watching the skies, wondering if it would snow.

Joe was an ugly man, barely five feet tall with terrible acne scars and webbed feet. He had the same actor play him in every movie, Aleksei Dikiy, and confided that the actor’s portrayal was everything Stalin himself wished to be.

Stalin the brave.
Stalin the hero.
Stalin the friend of children.

There is a famous picture of the marshal posed with a small girl, Gelia Markizova, who is handing him flowers while he gives her chocolates and puts an arm around her. Both are smiling.

This picture became a painting, then sculpture, and finally history.

Gelia’s father died in Siberia. He was arrested and shot on the orders of Stalin, who kept meticulous lists of all those he wanted killed.

I decided to keep my own list of undesirables—all the things I would have changed if I were Stalin:

1. The forward mobilization of Red Army units just prior to Barbarossa (allowing the Nazis to encircle and destroy over half the Russian army formations).
2. The suicidal purging of over three quarters of the officer corp in the ‘20s and ‘30s (resulting in a crippling deficit in trained personal at the outset of WWII).
3. The presence of non-combatants in warzones (contributing to the horrific civilian death toll.)

-Oh, no.

-What?

Sara gesturing, blouse lifting, tips of thong peeking out from skirt, cayenne heat of skin a few inches away from hand or touch. A pinch, a nibble. Slipping up against me, painted nails on shoulders, lips on neck, breath in ear asking:

-Should we say something?

-To who?
Andy and Beth.
They’re fighting again.

-Do you think we should?
-No.

-Let’s not then.

-I love you.
-I love you too.

4. Ugly suits. Cheap brown shoes. (The sort of “cheap democracy” Stalin himself accused Churchill of after Molotov’s visit in 1943.)

I was going to write about Stalin’s shoes, I decided, because of how absurd it was to picture terror in brown loafers. To imagine his generals and political opponents looking down at his feet, afraid to lift their heads, sure of what they’d find, reading the Gulag in Siberian scuffed leather.

(During the Siege of Moscow, when the air raid sirens sounded, Joe would descend by lift to the Kurov underground station, which might explain his order of Oct. 16th, 1941, to reduce traffic on the metro “not to prevent travel, but reduce it by say half.”)

Another anecdote with vodka and juice.

We invited forty people to the ceremony, family and friends who arrived in good order to lean against walls, on tables, over credenzas covered with thick vines, drinking Bud Light and Labatt from cheap plastic cups, waiting for the show to start. Sipping wine. Pounding shots. Signing our registry, talking about how good we looked together. How happy we were.

It made Sara’s parents mad, our choice of date. They were devout Catholics and I could hear them grumbling over all the meat people brought: roast beef with scallions, fried chicken with chickpeas, herb roasted pork loin, bacon wrapped scallops, slices of ham, honey roasted pecans with buttered potatoes and tossed salad mixed with venison and bear fat, some concoction of Uncle Tom’s—that fucking protestant!—that left a taste in your mouth that watered for days. Or Aunt Paula who brought a vegan casserole you just knew was a lie—nothing vegan smelled that good!—you could taste it, the bacon bits and beef stock and again some herbivore; some leaf-schlepping schmuck; some bush-eating, scat-mincing animal you hunched over, snarling to tear a hole in its chest and take its still bleeding heart into your mouth.
-Don’t be so dramatic.

-I’m not.

-You are.

Okay.


-I never want you to leave this day

She said.

-I do.

-I do.

9. Yalta, 1945 (*an alliance of sorts*).

Stalin in his bunker. Sleeping under subways. Writing orders. Not thinking, how many millions? How many miles? Just yesterday it was summer and the Germans were killing brown coats by the thousands, clearing twenty miles a day, giddy with success. Unbeatable, indefatigable, the Wehrmacht’s victories another sign of Aryan supremacy. (*The Mongol horde, Mother Russia,*) the endless steppe (*where they grow men like wheat,* where rivers stretch for miles (*feeding into swamps the size of Tennessee.*)) Where one day is summer and grass and marching and nothing but the same and the next is rains, the Russian monsoons. (*All
October, day and night for weeks.) The Wehrmacht a gray soaked thing clogged with mud and rust. (Unable to move. Incapable of advance.) Spinning wheels. Broken axles. Exhausted legs and calves and thighs pushing timber slats under chassis. Backs sore. Feet stinking. Endless digging. Trenches. Latrines. Shoulders cramped and splintered. (Waiting for the earth to freeze.) The cold. The winter nights. Carts and horses and tanks (frozen over with ice), waking to find toes numb in boots. Stepping over naked friends huddled together under blankets (dying of exposure.) Pissing off the edge of the front, (endlessly deferred), always ahead, never behind, Mother Russia (starting to) p(u)sh(ing) ba(ck). Friction, the culminating point at which an army’s reach exceeds its logistic means and everything begins to collapse.

Sara and I taking the dance floor. (Drinking champagne, stepping on toes.)

-Ow.
-Sorry

Disco globes like sparkled visual migraines spinning across freshly waxed floors. Sometimes in eyes, others in ears. Migratory apocalypi advancing East.

-Are you glad we got married?

-Are you?

Joe, impeccably Slavic, shrugging and pulling his boots back on, reaching for a can of chicken soup to heat over a fire. (The weather so cold outside that diesel is freezing in the tanks.) The marshal, taking time to explain: It was a human reaction, this “fuck.” Perfectly natural in the course of war. (“Fighting the whites,” he says. “I did much worse.”)

He once came upon a goat stranded on the Volga. The river was flooded. The animal was trapped on an island. Stalin swam to it. It had rained. The current was strong. The beast could not get away. There were onlookers. Local farm women. Some fellow revolutionaries. One woman had plump calves. She gasped when he went under. She cheered when he made it safe. (“I believe it was hers. I had thought to rescue it for her, to see if she would give me a kiss.” It was young and soaked and frightened. It bit his fingers, nipped his ears, and when he touched it, it began to scream. “I was scared, you understand. It made me angry—to feel this way.”)

Fingers numb. Face red. Skin clammy with exertion. Standing outside in the new falling snow, catching a breath, Sara waving from inside, moving table to table, more champagne, another vodka, smiling, nodding, hello. “I’m not sure why I did what I did,” Stalin tells me. “I had thought to put it over my shoulders and swim back to shore.”

Sara smiles. “It bit me.”

She waves.
“It bit me on the face.”
Cheers.
“It bit me on the face and made me very angry.”
And he was so tired and so frightened and so scared of the water and this animal was frail and small and weaker than him and it looked up at him and he knew he could do it and he wanted to do it and so he did it and did it and didn’t stop doing it until after he had snapped one leg and it started screaming for real and kicking and bleating and he laid himself across its middle pinning it to the grass and he broke the next leg at the knee and it was pissed and shitting and he laughed and broke its ribs and picked it up so he could do the rest in the air, swinging it around by the hind legs until they snapped and he fell panting to the grass laughing and cheering for that crippled and broken thing to try to stand. To try and get away.
“It could not run. It had nowhere to go.”
It lay on its side while the farm girl shouted and cursed him from shore, the animal trying to follow her voice—that made him laugh harder—trying to crawl on bloody, busted knees, while she hollered he was no good. A dirty-bird. A rascal. A fuck. Crying while the other girls took her away.
What did I do?
He didn’t understand.
10. Something screaming across the sky. (A helicopter or plane.)
Lights on its underbelly. Thunder in its wings. A black tower of smoke and snow glaring down at me.
11. Sara asking me to come inside and say “hello.” (To come and sit. Hold her hand. Feel her voice expand in that little paunch of gut. Phonemes of satin tracing invisible panty lines of breath.)

12. Mounds of expressive farce, a wondercidal religo of Love, Our State of Love. The State of Being as We have Become. Something lacking in the way we fuck today. (A face working labia, clit, labia again, “fuck.” Hands punching, legs tensed, kicking pillows and blankets away with a throaty growling, gravely, “Fuck ... fuck ... fuck.”)
The word itself overused, fatigued, running to an ache of an overlong stay, a too long fuck, past that point of pleasure to unlubricated pain like everything I read into “fuck,” pages and pages, reports and reports, an entire chapter of research missing.
-I lov-e you.
-I love y-o u too.

Rubbing hips (thinking of Stalin) working hand between cupped halves of ass.
-Stop it!
-What?
-There are people.

-There are always people.

(“Fuck.” It occurred. Some time in ’45. Not an overused thing. Merely “blowing off steam.”)
Sara pushing me away, changing topic, asking about work.
About writing.


-Are you glad we got married?

-Are you?

(Stalin in a leather suit, nipples pink raised lumps in teeth biting down, cutting skin, snorting poppers, rubbing thumbs across eyelids, pushing down—ow ow that hurts—his poverty in war an ugly history of running numerals. So many dead, so many wounded, so many rations of Russian vodka appropriated on the march, 100 kilos of 100 proof, missing in action, strapped to our waists and camps and tanks. Plenty to go around.)

Beth pulling us away. Back to dance floor. Back to people. Arrangements of bodies, like Stalin’s lists, realized in their execution, their recall: Uncle Carlyle (conservative Republican, seat with Tom), Aunt Jeany (Celiac disease: NO GLUTEN), Cousin Jon (Loud), Roommate Tia (Single), Best friend Bob (Divorced), Single Kimmy (Seat with Bob). Drinking. Dancing. Toasting until 5 a.m. when we receive orders to stand down, the groundskeepers and buildings managers telling us to leave. Pointing to snowy roads, saying:

“Drive safe.”

-I don’t want to go.

-I know, Si.

-I said, I don’t want to go.

-What about War?

(Another screaming across the sky. Katyusha rocket fire digging holes in the earth. Filling pits with shrapnel. Shoes and coats. The cadavers of men.)

Stumbling outside. Leaning into cold.

“We will not advance today.”

“Or yesterday. Or the day before.”

(Historians tell a story about the siege of Moscow. How one day, during a blizzard, a German soldier rode his motorbike from the front lines almost to the very heart of the city. There is no official record of this. No reports logged. The Russians who shot him have no names and there is no explanation for his flight.)

-What about War?

-You were saying about War?

-No, I wasn’t.

-I heard you.

-No, I wasn’t.
-I heard you.

(A car backfire in the parking lot. People jumping.)
Always attack!
The party is strong!
(Running for Moscow. Shouting something at headlights.)

-Silas!

(Storm troopers in rented tuxedoes and wingtips rushing past.)

-Come back here!

(Mouths flapping. Faces red.)

-Where's he goin-

(Sprinting across)

-I don’t know.

(huddled, heaving explosive earth.)

-I’ll get him.

(Scratching on arms.)

-No, I’ll go.

(Screaming of rockets.)

-Silas?

(Unbuckling pants. Taking off shoes.)

-We need to go.

(Digging for cover. Snow angels curling wisped soaked fumes of metal heating.)

-Do you hear me, Si?

(Dig.)

-What are you doing?

(Digging.)

-Si.

(Dug.)
18. Pits, like spent teeth, empty fillings, Nazi Jew gold dug out of the mouths of screaming wrenched cadavers.

- Silas.


(Someone broke her legs.)
Fly tricky with frost. Pants stiff with blood.
(More words on ass.)
Backs of thighs. Across shins. Infected stumps of knees bleeding ink.

(Silas stop!)

Stalin, that old philanderer observing love making attempts of struggling fever hemorrhagic madness—Stop! No! Help! We’re here! Here! Come help—laughing but can’t tell for sure. Jamming an entire fist in nose, trying to find hidden text, apocrypha of Steel (A Woman or a Goat?). A collection of untitled works penned along the anterior lobe of neocortex, pointing north outside the shelling to confused lights of cars scanning blanketed snow white verge—My God, what happened?—running for Moscow—What happened?—before the world wakes to find—Sara, what happened?—bubbling camp fires.—Sara?—Oil. Bubbling oil.—What happened?—Running for walls past tank traps and troop bivouacs and sleepy-eyed Russians (bleeding nose, screaming goat), smiling away sudden shocked looks and reaching hands to run over fields of white snow that part to reveal freezing ponds of minnow—What happened?—and fish, following burnt out villages and towns arranged in dizzying collectives of agricultural famine and failure. A mania of signs all pointing the way to Joe, that great leader of men, that Old Bear in his cave, under subways, licking soup from the floor, defecating where he sleeps. Asking about the color of blood. Is it red? Is it the color of those pencils he used?
-What happened?

“fuck”
Running past brown blurs on walls. Neon swirls of action. Pits of motion like gravities in space collapsing into one perfect moment of impact when an alert sentry spots me and shouts—There he is! There he is!—and I turn my head, stub my toe, trip and fall, pain bayoneting consciousness. What is observable. What is real. That moment of hypothetical death made sudden, synapse firing, dendrons electric going down but not into sets of rounds of lives arranged within impossible folds of singularity. Sara, Andy, Beth—There HE is!—Ineffability of death a flush or adjustment of air pressure in lungs, stiffening of hair, a relaxation of tremors, the imposition of grace on the moment when inertia separates foot from ground, tumbling into soft iron teeth welded into cross beams along the side of the road, breaking forward momentum, potentially cracking ribs, fusing vertebra, falling into a ditch. Hundreds and thousands of Soviet writers lining up in cramped rooms to pour over texts redacting “fuck” coming up with a new lexicon of “fuck”; the writer, as Joe says, the true engineer of the human soul, “fuck” becoming

-Just a little fun with a woman.

Hitting head, last kicking breath an indication of perverse terror. Wondering if they’ll “fuck” me once I’m dead. If the shadowy figure of the guard approaching will fall on me and begin licking the blood from my lips, making erotic Slavic sounds while I bleat and whimper and try to crawl on busted, bloody knees.

Sara instead. Appearing. Covered in scrapes. Nose bleeding. Holding a shoulder strap in one shaking, cold reddened hand. Staring at some incredibly fragile, malleable space between us. Laughing until it hurts. Until it bleeds. Until all the colors are gray and white and red and everything sounds like screaming

-I want to go.

-I never want to leave. Rolling over to puke frenzied pink slurpies on ground, asking if she noticed? When she looked around? Did she happen to see? The shoes. Was anyone wearing loafers?
A sea of humanity washed up the Virgin River in Zion National Park today, pilgrim-aging against the current; a tidal bore, thrill-seeking, not speaking until we disembarked the bus and merged with smiles and chatter; an expectant mania, interacting with our kind and the sheer cliffs, towering. On either side and all together we formed the “Narrows.” Nearer the Narrows and our narratives we walked, as clouds gathered above the crack of skylight that lit our cool, ankle-deep path, and darkened. Did I see “possible flash flooding” posted at the ranger’s kiosk, a warning to tourists in the narrow stream course banked by un-scalable walls? A cloud could open and turn ankle depth
to ten-foot torrent in five short minutes.
Our hapless exposure disclaimed,
a Darwinian percentage comes tumbling,
limp in washed boulders,
lost and grieved the world around.
With luckless luck,
one’s backpack strap catches
the crown of a cottonwood.
She lives, a celebrated survivor,
until, years hence, the walls narrow again,
this time in a urine-perfumed, “deep-pend”
saturated old folks’ home,
where a wad of stagnant blood
log-jams in a passage too narrow
to a part too vital
to be continued.

Nest
Terri Berry
The Birds at White Rock
Abigail Taylor

There are white egrets with fine sloping necks.
The three of them arrive in the spring,
stay until autumn exposes
the iron-surfed water,
the bald trees, where wild
parrots talked 'til June.
Winter. Only
the geese stay,
gulp bread.
Honk.
Until
the cool winds
bring with it buds,
the mania of
blue jays, robins, parrots
again. And the egrets, like
seraphim over brick towers
of the mill, tipping down to the lake,
breaking the surface. Mute while others sing.

Perishables
Nika Cavat

Ring the bell that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
“Anthem”, Leonard Cohen

MIDWAY between Venice Beach and Santa Barbara, where I grew up, I drive past Point Mugu where the naval base orchestrates the Blue Angels fleet of stunt planes – I track them from a mile away, arching and looping in tight formation, their contrails creating knots that vaporize inside one another magically. It is all I can do to keep my soul from escaping through the open window and leaping skyward with them. I’ve made it through an hour of beach traffic, which along the Malibu coastline
ranges from weekend bikers to hard-core surfers to a five-mile long marathon to raise money for cancer research. Enthusiasts, including an enormous man in a wheelchair, clap, throw water, and cheer the runners on. There is a woman who regularly jogs in tight pink shorts and bra along Zuma Beach, her enormous breasts causing a bit of a stir amongst drivers. Her blindingly blonde hair whips at her back as she lopes along like a runaway extra from *Baywatch*. I want to say to her, “Quick, jump in! We’ll escape together – you don’t have to do this.” Such early morning exposure of bodies, from the benevolent marathon runners, to the corpulent invalid in the wheelchair, to *Miss Malibu In Pink*, makes something in me ache, but I speed past them all, my little car pulled by a maternal string, onward.

I’ve made it a ritual the past twenty years to stop in the strawberry fields in Oxnard at a fruit and vegetable stand to buy flowers and berries. The same Mexican woman has worked there for years, and yet her face remains implacable and without a trace of recognizing me. The floor is uneven and always damp, like an earthy cave. On special occasions, there are roses of the most astonishing colors: pale coral, buttercup yellow, white tinged with green. I buy two or three bouquets and pass the time up the coast imagining how to escape a life split by conflict, inventing a new one where magically there is none. I’ve decided not to return to the lives at either end of this trip; I will remain in the strawberry fields, become a migrant worker, wear a green bandana and then a straw hat on my head and spend my days prying the soft, sweet berries from their stems. They cannot be picked by automation. They are too delicate, so migrant workers come here, bent over for hours in the hot sun to harvest them. The evenings I would spend trying to rid my hands of the faint red stain and smell of strawberries. It would not be an ideal life; simply one that is not this one, where misgivings circle like vultures in the dusk.

A stretch just past Ventura, called the Rincon, cups the ocean close enough to almost feel the sea spray traveling southbound. Train tracks run close by. It is along here that I can go at top speed, windows down, as I eat strawberries and toss the hulls through the window. The Pacific, ever present, glitters and undulates at my elbow, and if I would allow it just once, I would stop here, park my car, and make my way along the jagged rocks to the seashore. I would throw off shoes, peel off sweaty shirt and shorts, and throw myself under the waves and there I would live like the silkes of Ireland and Scotland did a millennium ago. I’ve been fascinated by these mythological creatures ever since I lived in Dublin as a younger woman, in love with an Irishman almost twice my age. It is here along the Rincon that I most strongly feel the presence of my grandmother, Silvia, dead now thirty years, because just after she died, I was driving back to Los Angeles, a train came around a corner, blasting its horn and letting forth a full head of steam, as if to shout to the world, *Though my body is gone, my spirit lives on!* I have since then associated the lifting of Silvia’s spirit with that runaway train on the Rincon. And what would the police think if they found my car by the roadside, my clothes twisting and turning in the surf? With no body washed up like a rag doll on shore (because I’d have turned into a seal by then) I would simply become a missing person. Sadly, I cannot live in the ocean because my mother is expecting me and I have a trunk full of strawberries and strangely colored roses to deliver and a week-end of cleaning and shopping to do.

I have come to delay my actual arrival upstairs by hours because the moment I step across that threshold, my heart...
becomes heavy with the anticipation of her old age and all that it brings with it. So I stop at Super Rica, the best place in Southern California for authentic Mexican food where the corn tortillas are as soft as pillows, served hot and chewy. I’ve been coming here since high school and it seems the same staff has worked there all these years. The kind-eyed Mexican man who owns the place still takes orders with a radiant smile. It is more a large shack than a restaurant and there is always a line of tired, hungry people around the corner. Middle-aged bikers, their greased hair in ponytails, young couples, families, and Aussie tourists who have heard of its reputation – they all come here, melting in an unforgiving sun awaiting the food because it’s just that good. One man who towers behind his wife (she is diminutive, he is NBA tall) regards the menu on the window as though he is in a holy place. He is so tall that he rests his chin on her head, but his expression of anticipatory bliss is almost child-like. I eat my lunch thoughtfully and slowly, even though the gnawing in my stomach has plagued me since I left home. Now, the guacamole, now the chorizo with melted cheese. In this way, ritual files away the sharp edges of sorrow.

Next, I stop at Suzanne’s house. She and I have been friends since our early teens. She is a tall blonde woman with the most astonishing grey blue eyes. She is an interior designer, the daughter of a German professor, fluent in seven languages, who died while she was still in high school. Suzanne is also a breast cancer survivor, as well as that of a very serious car accident that left her with a slight limp and an aversion to the news. We speak easily, though decades passed since we were in touch. There are things I half knew about her while we were growing up: that her father kept an intercom in her bedroom to monitor whether she slipped out at night, that her mother held teas and socials almost every week-end where she had Suzanne and her sister prepare the most sumptuous foods (served with white gloves) for the guests while they choked on meat and potatoes in the kitchen. Children in her family were struck with rulers, but also took European vacations. My envy of her extended to the assumption that she had an orderly family, a complete family where people spoke to one another in civilized tones and had orderly meals together and there was never any question about unconditional love or lack of trust between parent and child. Her father, a linguist, never really learned the language of love.

I always envied Suzanne her poise and beauty. Compared to my own shorter, dark-haired presence, she was an ethereal light that beckoned to men wherever she went. I tried to emulate how she walked (regal, as though balancing a book on her head), how she spoke (with a charming, breathy hesitation), but within minutes gave up. Now, we sip herbal tea and nibble on dark chocolate concoctions she’s made as we talk about our daughters and mothers and the time passes and the black bird outside in her palm tree hops about; I could stay longer, but I’ve yet to reach my own home and it is getting later.

During the summer, the berries and flowers bake in the trunk of my car so that when I open it, the smell and the heat waft lazily out. The flowers droop a bit, as though about to faint. The air here is vibrantly fresh, carrying the sound of neighbors’ horses whinnying at the bottom of our orchard. Coyotes howl nearby and hoot owls visit in the fall. At night, because there are no street lights and we are far from the city, the sky is just awash with stars, sharply punctuated points of light that seem to flutter and waver in the sky. I have seen satellites, the occasional plane. They are
distant intrusions outside the glass globe of this home. It is almost mid-afternoon. Cradling the bouquets in one arm, the bag of strawberries in the other I lean against the oak tree whose mighty trunk thrusts up through the deck and spreads across the roof in an imperious gesture of authority. It is her tree.

If I could linger here a minute, an hour, a day longer, I would. This suspension between the life I have made for myself down south and the life here, where secrets still swell in the shadows and my mother, now 89, her mind swept away by dementia and demons, keeps tragedy at bay.

I am in the dark wings of the theatre now, the audience mute and anonymous, just moments before the curtains part, the lights go up, and I step onto the stage where the drama of my life with her unfolds, scene after scene. The intention is to care for her in her last days, no matter what. It will take me half the day to coax her out of bed, where she has been sleeping, curled up with her dog, Ollie. Her expression is manic sometimes; she startles easily, as if I have intruded on a distant dream state she's fallen into. Her mania runs counter to the woman I know, but one I must accept now. I will sing, “If Mama got married I’d jump in the air/ and give all my toe shoes to you/I’d get all those hair ribbons out of my hair/and once and for all I’d get Mama out too/If mama got married” from Gypsy and throw back the curtains and let the light and mountains and fresh air in. I will tell her, “Mama, you have to bathe. You smell,” and she will pretend to cry and call me cruel, bossy, and domineering (I am all these things and worse). When I finally get her into the shower, she will lean against the wall, the water cascading all around her like a wedding veil and weep for real.

“I’m all wet, all wet!” Ollie will look at me with his big brown eyes as though I am torturing my mother. I will try to give her some privacy, although I’m worried about her slipping and falling. This is how Silvia died, hitting her head on the shower door. She wasn’t discovered until two days later when the newspapers piled up outside her door and friends missed her at meals. The abandonment of advanced age after a lifetime of camaraderie and friendship seems a cruel joke. I will wrap my mother in the biggest towel I can find, coax her back into clean clothes, dry her hair, and let her slip back into the nest of her bedclothes, where she will sleep again.

Lights dim.

Curtain draws to a close, except where they meet in the middle.

The crack, then, is where the light still gets in.
I am the straight lens tucked in blankets, my ears ringing from five years back when Mother tells a bedtime story sewn from dynamite, sharp fuse-lit words not inviting argument. Now my limbs shake to mirror those manic sound waves, but the volume refuses to leave my marrow.

I am ungainly as the black body on the tripod, because the photos never belong to me. She can angle me, pry apart the shutter, hold me open and over-expose my world, microphone blown out, sealed horror on stained paper.

She wakes me up in the morning, towering over the mattress. Our eyes meet, bloodshot on gunshot.
Desarmate
Nadia Bercovich
Contributors

William Aarnes has published two collections with Ninety-Six Press—Learning to Dance (1991) and Predicaments (2001). A third collection—Do in Dour—is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. His work has appeared in such magazines as Poetry, The Seneca Review, and Red Savina Review. Recent poems have appeared in Main Street Rag, Shark Reef, and Empty Sink.

Erin Aslami is a junior at Tenafly High School. In addition to radiating sentiments through dance, she has recently discovered writing as a way to express more specific thoughts.

Nadia Bercovich is a 25-year-old creative woman from Argentina. She recently survived a crazy car accident, and after multiple hip and ankle surgeries and trying to staple and glue her life back together, she is painting and sculpting again. She has never pursued art seriously, probably out of fear of failure, but she has nothing left to fear.

Terri Watrous Berry is a writer whose work has appeared in several anthologies and journals. Other photos of hers have recently appeared in Front Porch Review and The Best of Vine Leaves Literary Journal 2014.

Laura Boswell lives in Arlington, Virginia where she works in marketing communications. Her essays and reporting have appeared in The Washington Post, The Washington Post Magazine, and USA Today, and on ESPN.com, Travelchannel.com, and Sirius XM Radio’s The Bob Edwards Show. She is an alumna of the 2015 Yale Writers’ Conference. She writes a sports blog, The Ladies Room (ladiesroomsports.com), and recently played a Secret Service agent on House of Cards (and desperately hopes they don’t cut her scenes because she hasn’t shut up about it).

Nika Cavat is a Roman-born teacher and writer. A former English department Chair, Cavat teaches English at Crossroads School in Santa Monica, CA where she founded the Creative Writing program. Her poetry, short fiction, critical essays, and articles have been published in Oberon Review, Kenyon Review, Independent School Magazine, Pakistani Link, Columbia Review, and Onthebus, to name a few. She has taught creative writing to incarcerated minors and currently teaches writing to homeless youth in Venice, CA. She has a BA in Literature from SUNY Purchase College, and an MFA from Columbia University.

Michael J. Coene lives with his blind dog above a duckpin bowling alley in Baltimore. He has written four novels that nobody wants to publish. His work has appeared in The Canary Press. He is thirty.

Sam Corea graduated from the University of Denver this past June with a B.A. in Studio Art and English. She predominately works within the mediums of analogue photography and painting. Her work has been featured within groups shows held at the Colorado Photographic Arts Center and the Victoria H. Myhren Gallery in Denver. She now resides in Vancouver, B.C.
Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach emigrated as a Jewish refugee from Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine in 1993. She holds an MFA in Poetry from the University of Oregon and is a Ph.D. student in the University of Pennsylvania’s Comparative Literature program. Her poetry has appeared in *Missouri Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *TriQuarterly*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. She has received fellowships from the Bread Loaf and TENT Writers’ Conferences as well as the Auschwitz Jewish Center. Julia is the author of *The Bear Who Ate the Stars*, winner of *Split Lip Magazine’s* 2014 Uppercut Chapbook Award. She is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Construction Magazine*. Learn more by visiting her website: www.juliakolchinskydasbach.com.

Paula Friedman has poems that have appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Columbia Journal of Art and Literature*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review*, and others. She also reviews books for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The New Criterion* and other publications.

Nathan Gehoski is a recent graduate of Eastern Michigan University’s creative writing MA program. 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 normalized representations within moments of trauma. His thesis, a draft of a novel entitled *On War*, deals in part with a moment of historical rupture during World War II when the Red Army invaded East Germany and the value of human life seemed to almost inescapably collapse.

Christopher Grosso is the author of the horror/suspense novels, *Mouth the God’s Ear* (Bucks County Publishing), and *Mauled* (Damnation Press), along with a chapbook of poetry, *My Bedpan Tribal Drum* (Godfare Press). He earned an MFA in poetry from Brooklyn College. He lives outside of Philadelphia.

Van Hong is an illustrator and printmaker based in New York. Her work focuses on storytelling and finding narrative drama in moments of stillness, at times resulting in images that coexist as sequential art. She currently creates soccer illustrations in conjunction with Wundergol Art, an artist collective and exhibition for which she also curates.

Hannah Kuster is both a sandwich artist and an actual artist, enthusiastic about writing, painting, sketching, photography, and film. Having grown up for ten years in a coastal city near Beijing, China, she enjoys traveling and learning new languages. Her work has been featured in *Inwood Indiana* and *Neutrons Protons*.

Jennifer Martelli’s chapbook, *Apostrophe*, was published in 2011 by Big Table Publishing Company. She’s taught high school English and women’s literature at Emerson College. Most recently, her work has appeared in *Wherewithal*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, and *Rogue Agent*. A recipient of the Massachusetts Cultural Council Grant in Poetry, a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee, she works as an associate editor for The Compassion Project: An Anthology and lives in Marblehead, Massachusetts.
Melissa Parietti is a writer from Long Island, New York who enjoys writing. Her work has appeared in a number of online journals, and tentatively pending publications in several print journals. She attended SUNY Geneseo where she obtained a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and participated in writing workshops.

Sultana Raza is an awarded artist and has participated in exhibitions in many countries in Europe and the USA.

Chris Roberts is Dead Clown Art. He is a full-time freelance artist, using mixed media and found objects to create his visual nonsense. Chris has made art for Another Sky Press, Orange Alert Press, Dog Horn Publishing, Black Coffee Press, Kelp Queen Press, PS Publishing and ChiZine Publications; for authors Will Elliott, Andy Duncan, Tobias Seamon, Shimon Adaf, Seb Doubinsky, Ray Bradbury, Kaaron Warren and Helen Marshall. He was nominated for a 2013 World Fantasy Award in the Artist category. You can watch Chris misbehave at deadclownart dot com, or on Twitter @deadclownart.

Mafe Romero is an amateur photographer + rock climber + adventure lover + altruistic + environmental activist.

Barbara Ruth is a photographer, poet, essayist and fiction writer and memoirist. Her work appears in the following 2015 anthologies: Lunessence: A Devotional For Selene; QDA: Queer Disability Anthology; Tales Of Our Lives: Women and Health; and Slim Volume: This Body I Live In. A vegetarian for 40 years; an eco-anarcha-feminist; a Silicon Valley housing justice activist, and an out lesbian everywhere she goes.

Jim Sanders is a retired radiation therapist, avocational songwriter, beekeeper and poet, living with his wife and son in Carrboro, North Carolina. His other viewable works include The Braille World Atlas, and twelve songs performed by Joplin James and Quail on Youtube.

Eric Schoolcraft is an artist and freelance creative professional who lives with his awesome husband in St. Louis, Missouri. You can find a too-busy-to-update-this-stuff-as-often-as-I-should selection of his work at http://schoolcraftdesign.com.

Elisabeth Siegel is a senior at the Harker School in San Jose, California. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Textploit, VerbalEyze, and Glass Kite Anthology, and has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She is the editor-in-chief of her school’s print newspaper, the Winged Post.

Maya Silver is a writer based in Golden, Colorado and an editor at DiningOut Magazines. She is the author of My Parent Has Cancer and it Really Sucks and has published work in NPR’s The Salt, Cure, Civil Eats, and many more publications. She is currently working on her first novel.

Simi Snider is a college student living in San Diego who has dabbled in photography since she was very young. Inspired by the beauty of her state, she attempts to capture its vast beauty and the feeling of home it gives her.
Lisa Stice is a native of Colorado, and received a BA in English literature from Mesa State College (now Colorado Mesa University) and completed her thesis year of an MFA in creative writing and literary arts from the University of Alaska Anchorage. She taught high school for ten years and is now a military wife who lives in North Carolina with her husband, daughter and dog. You can find some of her poems in 300 Days of Sun and On the Rusk.

Abigail F. Taylor is a North Texas poet with works in Illya’s Honey, Red River Review, and Sixfold Magazine.

Amber E. Testa received her BFA in Creative Writing from Roger Williams University. Her work has most recently appeared in Chatsworth Press’s Lonely Whale Memoir. A native of Massachusetts, she resides in Boston, where she is usually seen wandering around the Back Bay sporting a thoroughly ostentatious pirate coat. She enjoys craft beer, ice hockey, linguistics, and really terrible puns.

Dennis Trujillo from Pueblo, Colorado, is a former US Army soldier and middle/high school math teacher who happens to love poetry. Most recent selections are forthcoming or already published with Atlanta Review, Ascent, Agave, THEMA, 3Elements Review, Your Daily Poem, Kind of a Hurricane Press, Silver Birch Press, and Fat Damsel. He runs and does yoga each morning for grounding, focus, and for the sheer joy of it.

Ellen Roberts Young is a member of the writing community in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Her first full-length book of poetry is Made and Remade, (WordTech Editions, 2014). She is co-editor of Sin Fronteras/Writers Without Borders Journal and blogs at www.freethoughtandmetaphor.com.
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*, *Foliage Oak*, *Hypertext Magazine*, *Paragraph Planet*, *Vagina: The Zine*, Columbia College’s annual *Story Week Reader*, as well as a children’s book at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Mikaela is currently writing a novel and is Editor-in-Chief of *3Elements Review*. @mikaelashea.

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

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

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

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

Megan Collins received an MFA in Creative Writing from Boston University. She teaches creative writing at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts, as well as literature at Central Connecticut State University. Her work has appeared in many literary journals, including *Compose, Linebreak, Off the Coast*, and *Rattle*. When not writing or teaching, Megan enjoys reading, watching The Ellen DeGeneres Show, collecting miniature items, eating cupcakes, going on Netflix binges, and spending time with her husband, Marc, and her golden retriever, Maisy. Check out Megan’s work on her website, megan-collins.com.
James A. H. White is an emerging writer completing his MFA in Poetry at Florida Atlantic University. He is a winner of the 2014 AWP Intro Journals Project award in Poetry and 2016 Pushcart Prize nominee. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review, Gertrude, Hermeneutic Chaos, Tahoma Literary Review*, and *DIAGRAM*, among others. His chapbook *hiku [pull]* is forthcoming from Porkbelly Press.

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.

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