3ELEMENTS
Literary Review
GLAZE
THREAD
MURMUR
Katerina P.
No. 13
WINTER 2017

3Elements Review

Issue No. 13

Winter 2017

3Elements Literary Review
Born in 2013

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Spring, summer, fall, and winter by *3Elements Review*

Phone: 847-920-7320

www.3ElementsReview.com

This issue ©2017 by 3Elements Literary Review

Typesetting Layout & Design
Marlon Fowler

Cover Photo
Reflection by Katerina Pravdivaia

Back Cover
Mercurial Perspective by Brian Alvarado

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Mikaela Shea

MANAGING EDITOR
Megan Collins

Senior Fiction Editor
Katherine Davis

Nonfiction Editor
Kelly Roberts

Fiction Editor
Jen Corrigan

Fiction Editor
Sarah Wylder Deshpande

Poetry Editor
Elizabeth O'Connell-Thompson

©2017 by *3Elements Literary Review*. All rights reserved by the respective authors in this publication. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of 3Elements Literary Review. The journal's name and logo and the various titles and headings herein are trademarks of 3Elements Literary Review. The short stories and poems in this publication are works of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the products of the authors' imaginations or used ficticiously. Any resemblance to actual events or people, living or dead, is coincidental.

Contents

Art

8	Black Boy Dreaming	Kiarra Lynn Smith
10	Thread, Glaze(d Doughnut), Murmur(ation of Swallows)	Nancy Hathaway
13	Thin Skinned	Anita Gangi Balkun
14	Commonplace Cupboard	Anita Gangi Balkun
29	#4	Ramsay Wise
30	#5	Ramsay Wise
34	Reflection	Katerina Pravdivaia
44	Migration	Brigitte Aflalo-Calderon
49	Daedalus	Susan Yount
52	Crazy Purple Bird	Chris Roberts
81	Spectator Sport	Karen Fitzgerald
100	Leftovers	Lindsay Mercer

Fiction

15	A Matter of Weight	Katie Dickson
86	The More You Know	Beth Sherman

Nonfiction

35	A Girlhood of Tin and Hunger	Amanda Brahlek
64	Death Before Dishonour	Deirdre Maultsaid
103	Conditions for Release	Matt Muilenburg

Photography

25	Mercurial Perspective	Brian Alvarado
54	Murmur	Lauren Suchenski
58	Beach Bubbles	Sandra Hosking
63	Whimsy	Connor Fenwick
76	Angles and Curves	Jayne Marek

Contents

Poetry

9	The Gauntlet	Devon Balwit
11	Rumor of Tornado	Susan Pittman
12	My Mountain	Laura Schaffer
24	The Hollowness of Breathing	Joyce Zhou
26	Transformation	Cristina Baptista
28	Awaiting the Miracle	Alison Dyer
31	Neighborhood Watch	Bryan Miller
32	Beta	Anna Lowe Weber
42	Nightwork	Judith H. Montgomery
45	Binding Threads	Marsha Mathews
47	Le Barre	Carol Barrett
50	The Warmth and Crackle of a Campfire	Jenny Wong
51	Physics	Christian Anton Gerard
53	Stung	Heidi Seaborn
55	Therapy	Emily Boshkoff
57	Spiderweb	Jennifer Davis Michael
59	Penelope on Loyalty	Monique Gagnon German
61	Using Things Up	Susan Kress
75	Sam, Third Period, Language Arts	Kit Zak
77	Quarry	Brent Fisk
79	Glean	Kelly Terwilliger
82	Learning Spanish	Sandhya Krishnakumar
84	The Girl Is From the Hood	Siaara Freeman
98	Cadaver Tooth: A Haunting	Arielle Hebert
101	Eavesdropping on Poets at the Coffee House	Allison Thorpe

Contributors

112	Bios

Black Boy Dreaming

Kiarra Lynn Smith

The Gauntlet

Devon Balwit

From the walls of Lascaux, Chauvet, Cueva de la Araña
a glaze of ochre threads us to the past, to human thinking

and doing. There, by candle flicker, artists set bison
to pound turf, released predatory cats, handed bow

to hunter, smoking torch to honey gatherer. They spread
their own hands against the dark wall of time and blew

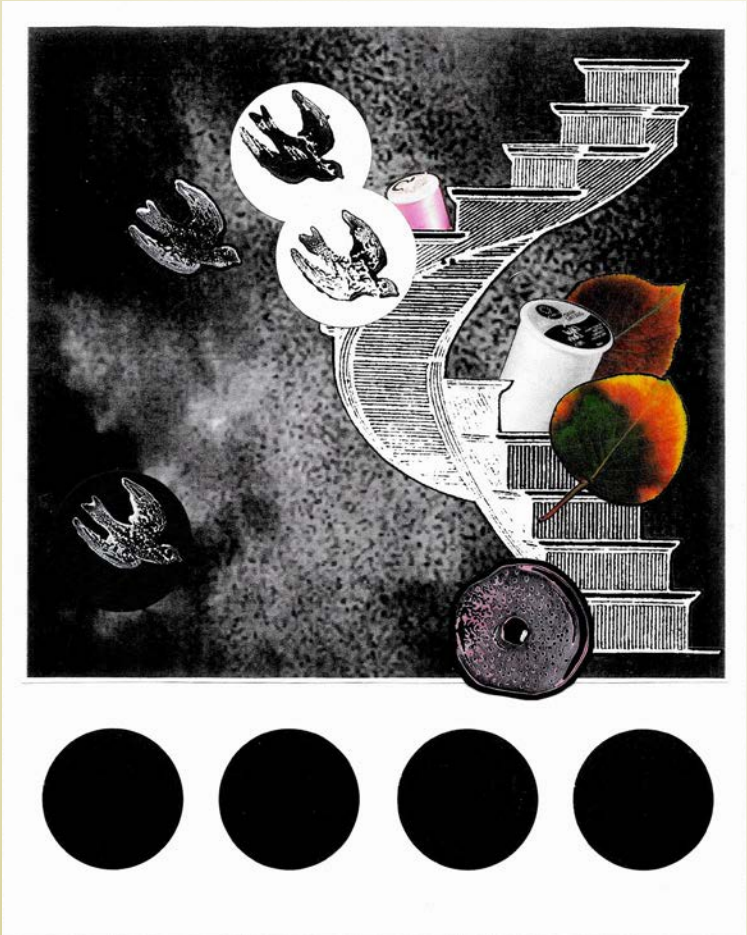
pigment, outlining deft fingers. They made worship
visible, the small yearning for great comfort. Eight, ten

thousand years later, their voices still murmur, still
speak of kinship. Their craft echoes a challenge,

and I wonder, millennia hence, if our pixels will answer.
Power out, what have we made that will last?

Thread, Glaze(d Doughnut), Murmur(ation of Swallows)

Nancy Hathaway



Rumor of Tornado

Susan Pittman

Lamps flash, then murmur low, in the writer's cafe.
A skirt of wind and rain slips in, new air;
we switch our eyes to meet a stranger's face
with the ease of old lovers who no longer care.

Last night a herald of doom marched past my bed,
a phantasm keening for fools to confess.
The morning lit October's bronzed laundry,
tossed down in piles of evident excess.

Fixed by bowls of thyme-threaded pumpkin soup
or sourdough toasted with local cheese,
we can't conceive alarm – we cozy few at tables
adorned with laptops and leather diaries.

We know our history, we hold our place,
we sip our minted tea and write or sketch.
Captivated by the pressured howls around us,
our glazed contentment perceives no threat.

My Mountain

Laura Schaffer

I came to the mountain
not to live deliberately
but to play with Gran Gran's toys
and to sit on the porch in the rough hum
of a light still threaded between screens
and blurred like a hummingbird.

The grown-ups talked always like the leaves falling,
but their conversations creak in my memory
among the rocking chairs, glazed fine with dust
and a slow, slow movement of origin.

Now, in another place,
I listen for the difficult rhythm
of words I used to hear
as promises already kept,

and when I murmur in my sleep tonight
that I pine to come home to the mountain,
it is not the mountain that I mean.

Thin Skinned

Anita Gangi Balkun

Commonplace Cupboard

Anita Gangi Balkun

A Matter of Weight

Katie Dickson

I stood stock-still in the backyard, in the particular way children do when they've been spotted but still hope they might be overlooked. My sister Amanda froze, too. She held a cereal bowl in each hand and a carton of milk in the crook of her elbow. Dappled leaf shadows flickered on her bare arms. The heat was already building, and we had slipped into that pocket of cool we knew lingered at the base of the walnut tree. Amanda's eyes darted to the back of the house where the red end of a cigarette winked behind the screen.

The back door squeaked open and slapped shut, and Donny stepped sideways onto the porch, flicking his cigarette over the railing. Donny was Mama's new boyfriend and had been oozing around our house like an oil slick since the beginning of summer. He made a big deal about being from The Glass City. It turned out this meant Toledo.

"Hey girls," he called.

Amanda set the milk carton down in the grass. I took the

cereal bowls from her, and although we turned our hips and shoulders away from him and tipped our heads to each other, Donny stepped off the porch and ambled toward us.

"I said hey girlie girls."

"Hey Donny," Amanda gave.

He reached our spot in the shade and sat down Indian-style in the patchy grass. Donny was no more than 20, so young Mama had to buy his beer for him, but at the time he seemed far on the other side of grown up. He could make Mama laugh, and he brought us fistfuls of gum wrapped in little comic strips from Clark's Super Gas where he worked, but that didn't change the way Amanda and I felt about him.

We had a father. Pretty much, anyway. He was killed in a car wreck ten summers before, when I was just a baby and Amanda was two. The specifics of his death were just a series of words strung together that didn't make sense until I was much older: big-rig, toll-road, eye 680, jack-knife. Amanda claimed she remembered him. I didn't believe her, but I didn't let on. I liked to hear the stories she told about him even if they were made up.

"You girls out here on a blackberry quest this morning?" Donny asked, jutting his chin at the tangle of bushes across the yard. He picked up the milk carton and began opening and closing its waxed cardboard mouth. Amanda flashed her eyes at me as she fastened her hair into a ponytail with a rubber band from around her wrist. She wore her nightgown, the one with the thin eyelet straps threaded with the pale blue ribbon. I had a matching one, lost somewhere in the jumble of the house. Mama had made our nightgowns herself. By hand. That was a few years back, before what our Aunt Norma called Mama's "downhill slide." Norma's puffy hand swooped down as she said it. To me a downhill slide sounded a lot more fun than the ride Mama was on.

"Bring me some?" Donny called out, but Amanda had picked her way past the roses and disappeared into the blackberry bushes. The bubble of anger I felt at his intrusion popped, and a prickling spread across the back of my neck. I was stuck, standing there holding the bowls, but Donny lay back in the grass, one arm flung across his eyes against the sun, and I could hope he would fall asleep. I shifted my weight from foot to foot. Two yards over, Mrs. Jensen's dog was barking. I could tell by the yelping that he was chained up. At last I saw Amanda through the bushes, walking flat-footed on the sharp gravel. Two spoons in the deep front pocket of her nightgown tinkled and clanked. Dead leaves stuck in her hair, and strands had pulled free from her ponytail. She had a purple berry streak across her cheek where she had pushed her hair back behind her ears, and a ribboned nightgown strap had slid off one shoulder. She grinned and held out her hands, cupped and full of blackberries.

Amanda dropped berries, and poured milk into our bowls, and handed me a spoon. The milk turned purple in pools around the berries. I put the first one in my mouth with my fingers, ignoring the spoon and the cereal. I crushed it against the roof of my mouth with my tongue, and it exploded sweet and warm. Donny stirred and propped himself up on his elbows. He didn't ask for anything but he was squinting at Amanda, bent over her bowl. The faintest sheen of sweat glazed her skin, and her brown shoulders shone like polished stones. Her fingers left a smudgy purple smear on her eyelet nightgown strap when she pulled it up.

In the bedroom we shared in that house, I slept above Amanda on a platform, a shelf really, built by the previous tenant. Attached to the wall by two-by-fours supporting a sheet of plywood, the

bed had a thin foam mattress.

"Will it hold?" Mama had asked the lady who showed us the house. She ran a pale hand along the wood.

"It's real secure. My husband was a carpenter. Just put the little one on top," the lady said, placing her hand on my head. "Tighten the screws once a year, and you're set. These here that fasten the frame." Amanda claimed it was unfair that I should get the top bunk since she was the older one by two years.

"It has nothing to do with fair," Mama said. "It's a matter of weight."

I didn't actually see Donny in our room that summer. One night I woke with a certainty that he was standing in the doorway. From my loft bed I couldn't see anything of the room other than the ceiling and the top half of the metal blinds covering the window on the opposite wall, but I smelled cigarette smoke mixed with bubble gum and beer. Amanda scooted up the ladder and slipped in beside me. We heard Donny step across the darkened room and rumple the covers on Amanda's bed below us.

"Hey. You can't sleep in here," I called down to him, and fear draped over me when he didn't answer. We all knew nothing would wake Mama until late morning when she would pull the shades and go back to bed. Amanda and I lay still. Amanda's back shuddered and she didn't push me away when I accidentally lay on her hair. From below, Donny's breathing finally became slow and steady. For a long time I watched the headlights of cars rounding the bend at the top of the road cast stripes that slid across the ceiling.

That summer in particular, I missed my father. This didn't

seem possible since I hadn't really known him. Aunt Norma had once told me my parents had met in Recovery, and for the longest time I thought that was a town, somewhere upstate I imagined. She also said he had been a good influence on her. Sometimes I thought I missed Mama, too. This also didn't seem possible since she was sitting right in the next room.

At night I dreamt of the platform, heavy with Amanda and me, shuddering and then falling, crushing Amanda's bed below. We crashed right through the floor and into the bedroom of another house. We landed with a thud and crashed through that floor and the ceiling of yet another bedroom below. We propped our heads on our arms and surveyed the room before the floor gave out and our weight pulled us on. We crashed through bedrooms with checkered curtains and shelves filled with dolls, bedrooms with desk sets and lace curtains with soft patterns of flowers and leaves shifting on the walls. Mothers in rocking chairs and at kitchen counters in adjacent rooms looked up startled from their sewing and packing of school lunches. Amanda raised an eyebrow at a bedroom with two pink curtained vanity tables with matching stools, but I shook my head and lay back down and closed my eyes and on we crashed. We crashed through so many lives and rooms, farther and farther from our own mother who lay on the floor in front of the TV in the living room with her dark hair covering her face. We crashed into a room far below, and I smelled new books and laundry soap and lamb chops with mint, and I knew that we had landed.

I stood small against the doorjamb and watched Donny hang a medicine cabinet over the bathroom sink. He had found it by the dumpster at the gas station over the 4th of July weekend. Donny

laid the cabinet across the sink and wiped its mirrored doors with the edge of his t-shirt. He whistled through his teeth and asked me where Amanda had got off to. My sister's name in his mouth turned my stomach. He clanked around in his toolbox, came up with several screws and clamped them between his lips. The back of the cabinet had brackets, which he screwed right into the wall. The muscles in his forearms coiled as he fit the screwdriver and turned the screws. I studied how he propped his elbows for leverage and used his body weight. Looking pleased with himself, he scraped his thumbnail at some white spots on the mirror, splatters of toothpaste from somebody else's mouth.

"Crazy what people will throw away," he said. Later, I took the screwdriver from his toolbox and hid it under my mattress.

At first I was clumsy and slow. I stood on Amanda's bed on tiptoe and could just reach the screws that held my bed to the wall. I worked until my arms burned, unscrewing and then re-screwing, resting for a count of ten between screws. I practiced for several days until I could do all eight screws without tiring. I practiced with my eyes closed. I moved weightlessly along the edge of Amanda's bed frame as I worked.

The next time Amanda came up to my bed, I petted her hair until she fell asleep. Then I went down the ladder. Donny was asleep in her bed. I went to work, and one by one, the eight long screws dropped silently to the carpet. I dropped the screwdriver, scrambled up the ladder, then crouched on the mattress, jiggling and bouncing. The bed didn't tip or slide but fell with a loud crack. Donny let out a muffled moan and was quiet. Amanda and I lay side by side on our stomachs, the mattress tipped slightly toward Amanda. We lay there for a good while. Finally we slid off the bed and Amanda helped me feel around on the floor for the

screwdriver. I dropped it back in Donny's toolbox before we went to try to roust Mama.

After that, Amanda and I slept with Mama in her double bed, us on one side under the sheet and blanket and Mama stretched out on top. Her weight pulled the covers taut and pinched us in so we couldn't put our knees up or pull the sheet up over our shoulders. Aunt Norma came to the house, her stout body filling up the kitchen as she made us tomato sandwiches. She and Mama discussed Donny's concussion and hairline fracture. Norma muttered, "Lucky bastard. Hard-headed asshole." I had pictured Donny's head splitting open like a melon, a papaya maybe with greasy black seeds inside, and found I was relieved he wasn't dead.

Amanda and I stepped out on the front porch as Aunt Norma pulled up in her truck with two grumpy teenage boys from up the street. She paid them five dollars to carry out the lumber and plywood from the platform bed. The boys leaned Amanda's mattress against the wall outside the front door and I looked away from Donny's stain, his blood more black than red. Then Norma stepped onto the front porch, her hands cupped around the eight screws she would have found on the floor of our room. She lumbered across the lawn to where Mama stood smoking by the truck. They murmured together, Mama twisting a long rope of her hair and pressing it against her mouth. Norma squinted back at the house, raised a beefy arm and threw the eight screws with a clatter into the bed of the truck with the rest of the garbage.

By the time Donny was out of Logan County Hospital, Mama had moved us into Norma's place. Those first few months living with Norma were slow and dream-like. Each hour stretched itself out like one of Norma's cats sunbathing on the windowsill. School

started up, and as summer softened, a golden light flushed the afternoons. In the mornings, Amanda and I picked mint leaves from Norma's herb pots on the narrow fire escape, and Norma made mint tea and fried strips of bacon. She was kind, in a bustling, no-nonsense sort of way. After school we rode along in the truck with Norma on her rounds, delivering firewood for Do It Best Hardware, and when we let ourselves in Norma's front door at the end of the day, the house still smelled of bacon and mint. Amanda and I drifted through those months, prodded here and there by Norma. I floated close to Amanda when I could, so that we would gently bump up against each other. We didn't talk much, neither of us wanting to break the spell.

One Sunday afternoon in December, I sat in Norma's window and watched my mother clomp up the stairs with a paper bag balanced on top of a pink bakery box. She wore a new short black wool coat. Her shoulders and collar were flecked with snow. She hadn't visited in a week, but I let her struggle to push the bell before I went to the door.

"More leftovers from The Meeting. Santa Claus cookies this week," she said, handing me the pink box. "If we didn't all smoke like chimneys we might actually eat some of the food we all bring." Her face was flushed from the cold. She had a few strands of dark hair caught in the corner of her mouth, and when she pulled them out with a gloved finger I looked away. "Presents in here for later for you and your sister, and I brought over some clothes you left behind." She reached in the bag and pulled out my nightgown, the one with the thin eyelet straps threaded with the pale blue ribbon. "Been lost a while. Do you remember when I made these for you and your sister?" I did remember. By hand. She smiled and held the nightgown out to me.

I didn't answer. I took the nightgown by the straps and carried it down the hall to hold it up in front of the mirror on Norma's bathroom door. I didn't have to try it on to see that it was too small for me. I rolled it up and buried it under balls of Kleenex in Norma's plastic wastebasket, the one with the big red fish eating the small blue fish eating the tiny yellow fish. Handmade or not, it wouldn't fit me anymore.

The Hollowness of Breathing

Joyce Zhou

That autumn, my mother pressed flowers
To translate eulogies, dried petals under

The plastic of cracked voices, the murmur
Of persimmons to a finger's transparence.

Books' spines gave away like orange peels
As brittle as mistakes and memories.

We steamed our hands with breaths
Threaded in the cavity of our palms.

The dripping tap of our lungs on the
Cusp of smoke. Brown engulfed the

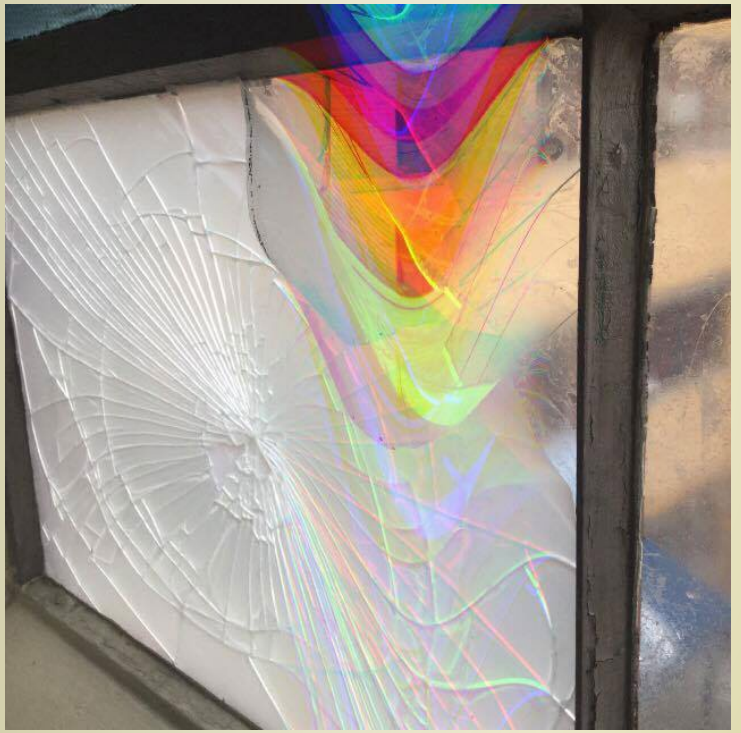
Red leaves like a checkers game lost, it
Came too quickly, that car. 20 miles over,

A blur of pigeons flew away for winter;
The sky trembled with the weight of bodies.

Occasionally, I stood unwatching at the glazed
Clouds and wondered if the traffic was crying too.

Mercurial Perspective

Brian Alvarado



Transformation

Cristina Baptista

The breath gave all away, a breeze
at the back of the neck

when she pulled him in, her welcome hug
the same tenderness of hands still grimed

from that morning's weeding. To give the body away,
the earth leaves its trappings: a reminder of where one's been

and where one's from. Her throat reached for apologies,
which he could have told himself, he'd heard them

all before. Instead, he cut the air with a tongue
of broken sentences, uncertain how to tell

a news still strange to himself—a creeping vine.
She saw his body now as a haunted house,

his heart murmur a restless whisper of ghosts,
gathering as thirsty birds around a puddle

made by a large man's boot print,
as she remembered once, after the longest drought.

She had never seen such starved creatures before,
sickening themselves; how they tore the worms with a brutality

no one ever claims of sparrows.
His was the type of body you want

to protect the timing of
all the time. Eyes the color of voyages, and sunsets

that never come. But now—each a glazed window with thread-
bare curtains pulled taut to the sides.

A nest of wrinkles had been built
overnight, skin a fabric

of finest twigs,
which scared her most—this

transformation without permission,
possession of a body still familiar

but, burrowing deep, a betrayal.
How to explain this broken love,

a faded tune
leaky in its silences.

Awaiting the Miracle

Alison Dyer

The vacuum roars on the rug setting, sucking up yesterdays,
exhaling a foul breath. She's looking for god

beneath the sofa cushions—crumbs, dust, an errant thread
disappearing in good orderly direction. Outside, a murmur

from a maple, its winged charges sing to a light rain. Glazed
tulips, slacked-lipped and tired, supplicate. A late spring

baptism. A lone starling builds hope in the neighbor's
rotting clapboard. Seconds later out in search

of promises. Her cat pilgrims to the birdbath, laps
at the rainwater, leaving imprints of its holy

tongue. In a nearby puddle, halos expand, coalesce,
then vanish like angels silently popping bubble gum.

#4

Ramsay Wise

#5

Ramsay Wise

Neighborhood Watch

Bryan Miller

The jaundiced sky like a bruise over-worried by finger
held the dirty birch against its purpled yellow,

a mother pinning a sick child against her sweatered
waist, waiting to hear what the doctors would say. We knew,

sitting there in lawn chairs beneath the covered porch as we
eavesdropped on the murmurs of autumn's coming winds--

our frosted glasses emptied of Kentucky bourbon--
that the diagnosis would be rains, heavy sobs of it, and that

the basement would take on more water in the coming week.
Election postcards glutted the mailbox. Browned leaves

scuttled over eaves, cluttered gutters. The mums held sway.
It was too early for jack-o-lanterns. Soon, those threads of

rain, metallic, thin, would delineate the air, glazing it
with a cool that would push our hair out of place, move trees.

It was against this that we sat and gave watch, mining clouds
for clues and the prognostications of seasonal disorders.

Beta

Anna Lowe Weber

I do not wish to make light of your death:
blue body drifting in the murmured churn
of the tank's filter system—a forty dollar
guarantee, we thought, of life, along with
the freezer packs of red thread bloodworms,
the heater, the plastic leaf suctioned to the glass—
it's basically a hammock that he can rest on,
the pimpled Pet Smart worker told us, and we,
so desperate to secure a rope tightly around
your existence—we believed him. We bought
it all, swept the shelves. And true, I spotted you
reposed on the third morning, nestled
in the leaf's laurel fold, and I found it
endearing—a fish in a hammock! But
two days later you were dead, sunk, and we
were left to wonder where it all went wrong—
overfeeding? The slow crawl of a fungus, glazing
through the body's cells? Perhaps you were just
old, which is the story we fed our daughter:
Max was a grandpa. And soon we will try again,
slip another fish under the surface, watch
as he explores the tank: the upgrade to a live plant;

the jolly plastic shark, stretched long on a bed of coral;
the tiny stone arch we hope he will find a suitable hiding spot
when our gaze, near-constant and neurotic,
becomes too much for one fish alone to bear.

Reflection

Katerina Pravdivaia

A Girlhood of Tin and Hunger

Amanda Brahlek

DESPITE its name, “Sand and Sea,” there was neither “sand” nor “sea” in the inland trailer park where my father decided we should live. There was dirt, and a canal that separated our neighborhood from the Boynton Beach Mall parking lot, there was a swimming pool with plaster cracking off the bottom, but we all knew the ocean and smell of sunbaked seaweed was at least a fifteen-minute drive from the entrance of the park.

~

Our first night there we slept in the front room. I had a comforter to pull over my head. To keep them comfortable, my brothers had a set of sheets (one fitted, one flat) and the shag carpet that reminded me of dog food. The ceiling fan wobbled in even shrieks, and I dreamt of a dog, wet and dripping, trotting over the sugar sands of Jonathan Dickinson State Park. I woke up panting and sweating, and wanting to smell the night-blooming jasmine. I

wanted to kiss its petals, but I did not wake my brothers. I did not wake my dad.

~

There was less fruit in the park than where we lived before, but we ate what we found. In the shade, our teeth tore through star fruit. We peeled the shirts off tangelos. Our faces streaked with dirt that clung to where the juices dripped from the corners of our mouths. The filth was our war paint and we were a tribe of our own. We ate as if jackets of fat were an option.

~

When a tomato has a soft spot, you must press the point of the blade through the skin and turn until the spot is severed. To free the bad from a melon, use a spoon. Scrape hard at the seeds to break the threads that cling. For potatoes, you must blind them with swift precision. If any of their green eyes remain, your stomach will force them out.

~

The bus slid around the corner like a stick of margarine in a frying pan, bubbling with the chirps of children. Once, some kids hid in the bushes armed with eggs. They ambushed the bus, punishing it with egg-drool. I mourned for breakfast.

~

A trailer was no place for a woman, so my mother rarely visited. She lived 45 minutes south and called once a week or so to tell my dad he'd made a mistake moving us there. To ask for money or say she couldn't make it. She'd say she'd bring mangos soon and we could eat them on the beach. She'd say we could let our bodies bob in the surf and drink 48-ounce fountain sodas on the sand.

~

We had five cats. They tunneled through the system of floor vents; used it like a highway to escape. Outside, they'd hunt curly tail lizards or mice. Like groundhogs they popped back up in the middle of the living room. My dad was constantly working to patch this network of tunnels. One day, a stranger-stray popped up, delighted and frightened as it ran for the food bowl. It was a glorious day for that vagabond.

~

Jenny Loggins was my only friend. She was on the heavy side of heavy-set. Her mother was too large to leave the couch. She looked like a potato half-buried between cushions, always smoking. Jenny had beautiful blue-green eyes like oxidized pennies at the bottom of a fountain. How rich she seemed leaning her plump body against the couch as her mother scraped a comb of perm-chemicals over her scalp, how fun the little loops of her hair were as they shimmied in the Florida heat, and Jenny tried to catch her breath.

~

Sometimes, I imagined the trailer was a woman. I imagined she undressed in the heat of summer, she shed her metal skirting and fluttered her shutters like eyelids. When my father wriggled under the trailer, he'd arm himself with duct tape and a flashlight. He grunted his way, shirtless, over the dirt and mildew. He bandaged her ducts and returned flocked in fiberglass, glazed in mud, his skin lit up by the crawl of invisible wounds.

~

Jenny's mom cooked everything from the couch. Every pot was wired, every skillet, electric. She'd make steak and latkes, and drown them in thick sour cream. They drank milk with their dinner and scooped heaps of ice cream for dessert. Theirs was a place of cream, thick and pale as Jenny's thighs.

~

When my mother came, she'd destroy what she could: kick in the leg of the press-board desk, spike a gallon of 2 percent in the middle of the kitchen, tear away paneling, shatter a lamp with a smile. It didn't matter much, the floor was covered in trash and the furniture was too cheap to last long, anyway.

~

The trailer taught me how cans gasp for air as you puncture their metal. I learned the salty tooth of tuna and the subtle flake of cylindrical chicken. We'd drain the juices over white rice and mix the rest into macaroni. I learned how beautiful yellow and white

could be.

~

All of her insides were wood. She was particle board with a hint of glue. Panel with no drywall beneath. As far as I could tell, she was held together with staples and dust. When Jenny came over, she'd give a little in the floor, but spring back at lifted foot.

My dad pulled up her carpet and left her bare, left her unprotected from water that seeped and loosened her adhesive. The floors swelled and began to disintegrate, disintegrate, and eventually I fell through.

~

My father never had a cell phone so when Matt stepped on a piergaff and the barb did not budge, we tried to cut it out. I crushed aspirin and put it in the wound. The barb was too deep. The gaff did its job and held its grip. A neighbor took him to the hospital as I waited with the neighbor's wife. A cockroach, big enough to hear, skittered up the wall. I pretended not to notice. Matt did not cry when they pricked his ass with a tetanus shot, and they gave him the barb in a baggie. He keeps it on his desk. He says he doesn't recall the pain, just the throb in his stomach from Oxycodone and emptiness.

~

Creatures began to find ways in. They'd freeze in place from the

shock of light and when cornered they'd hiss, but never put up a real fight. We learned the whiteness of the belly of a snake, we learned the bloodless crawl of a snake speared through by a Hawaiian sling.

~

My mother was afraid of snakes, and continued to be disgusted by the trailer. She hated the way the trailer slowly let herself go. She hated how her floors began to sag and her skirting was torn. She hated the hollow thud of my brother's limp as he crossed from bedroom to kitchen to make a burger. He'd scrape the black meat away to reveal the pale pink. She hated how he'd press the patty in his palm, turning it round, flattening it into a disk as the meat warmed to his touch.

~

One day, Jenny's family moved to Oregon. I didn't see them leave. But I imagined they found themselves another trailer out there. I imagined they hired a moving crew, or maybe two, to heft Jenny's mom, still attached to the couch, into the back of a U-Haul. I imagined Jenny's curls free to bounce weightlessly out of the heat, and I wanted so badly for her to look out her dining room window and smile as she swallowed gobs of steak and cool, thick milk.

~

It may have been the stink of meat that kept my mother away or the way my father began to collect things, I don't know. There

were times I would fill the tub and press myself to the bottom, hold my breath, and let the water fill my ears, let the press of heat hold me to myself. I'd imagine I was at the bottom of a great wave of salt and sun, and my stomach was sick with its fill of mangos. It may have been the way my skin hugged my cheekbones that kept her away or the way the walls began to look like the crumpled edges of a photograph held in a sweaty palm, I don't know.

~

I'd like to say we only lived there for a few years, that we left like Jenny's family, but this isn't true. We stayed despite missing door handles and light switches that dangled like innards in the hall. We stayed long enough for the greasy smell of cockroach shit to lacquer the cabinets. I stayed until I was old enough to leave:,old enough to feel the sting when others murmured trailer trash. Soon after I left, my father, brother, and two of the cats moved into a Motel 6.

We stayed until she could not hold us anymore. We stayed the way milk clings and hardens to the lip of a jug. We stayed until our bodies soured with the scent of hollow craving.

Night Work

Judith H. Montgomery

The machines that run your body keep on murmuring,
echo a kind of counterpoint to the murmur of the night

shift as nurses rustle into place beyond the door. I eye
the monitors. They scribble on dark screens the green

pulse of beat and breath, your vitals swimming deep
within the poppy drift they slip into your veins.

My needle falters, my handiwork falls slack in my lap.
I'd threaded the eye with bright silks, cottons twisted

to stitch warp and weft of linen. But your abdomen—
stitched shut as well, but not by serviceable thread—

metal-punched into place. I try to imagine your
surgeon's sure hands as he wielded his shining stapler,

cross-hatching gaping flesh, and dappling antibiotic's
orange glaze against infection. But my mind keeps

side-sliding to prospects for mistake, some crucial
severed nerve, anesthesia that deepens you past sleep.

I pick up my work, hoop that holds the linen tight.
There's comfort here—I can pierce and knot cross-stitch

to pattern. Stitches can be picked. Any fault corrected.

Back to TOC

Migration

Brigitte Aflalo-Calderon

Binding Threads

Marsha Mathews

Yunnan, China, 1650

On their wedding night, no removal of clothing
held the exquisite tension
as when a groom removed his bride's three-inch scarlet shoes.

Fingers trembling, he lifted one
of her threaded feet, the shape of a delicate lotus bud,
whiffed a scent of boiled egg. Resisting his urge
to press it to his lips, he fumbled
for the red silk sleeping slipper
Zi's mother spent years sewing for this night. He
opened it to slide onto her tiny foot, neither of them imagining,

never before had they. Never.
Her mother's embroidery – green, gold, crimson –
exquisite artistry, but the glaze, the *pictures.*
Zi shifted her eyes away.
Ru couldn't.
Exposed

to the lantern, soft twine shimmered.
Naked
couples of thread, extraordinary stitches,
displayed every position,
bending
with every bend of shoe.

Zi murmured, blew out the lamp.
Ru slid his palm across
her instep,
igniting.

Le Barre

Carol Barrett

She wanted to open with flutes,
dance the ballet, float lighter than notes.
Mozart trilled; she spun into trance.

At seven, her hips locked. Ribboned
feet, now bare, refused to move.
We are led or we are called—

tremble at the expanse of leaps.
Inhale the mountain's view,
gasp as the slightest *tendu* dips

into a lunge so low the lean back
must depend on wings. Revelations
rise; the frenzied whirring stops.

So much to rehearse
on the knees, dancing what the body
knows of sacrifice and healing:

the alchemy of air, St. John's wort
blooming gold on the lake's shoreline,
bees weighted with pollen, saturating

even their pointed toes,
her scarves of yaks wool from Tibet,
totems and blue-throated masks.

Kwakiutl, Kalispel and Umatilla:
music of cedar threading among fern
and fungi, the relentless, prying wind—

how it knows each crevice the way
a cliff knows the murmur of night.
She names the elements, pours balms

from open palms: glazed Himalayan rock
salt, rose water, oil of lavender,
hyacinth. She trusts the axis of balance,

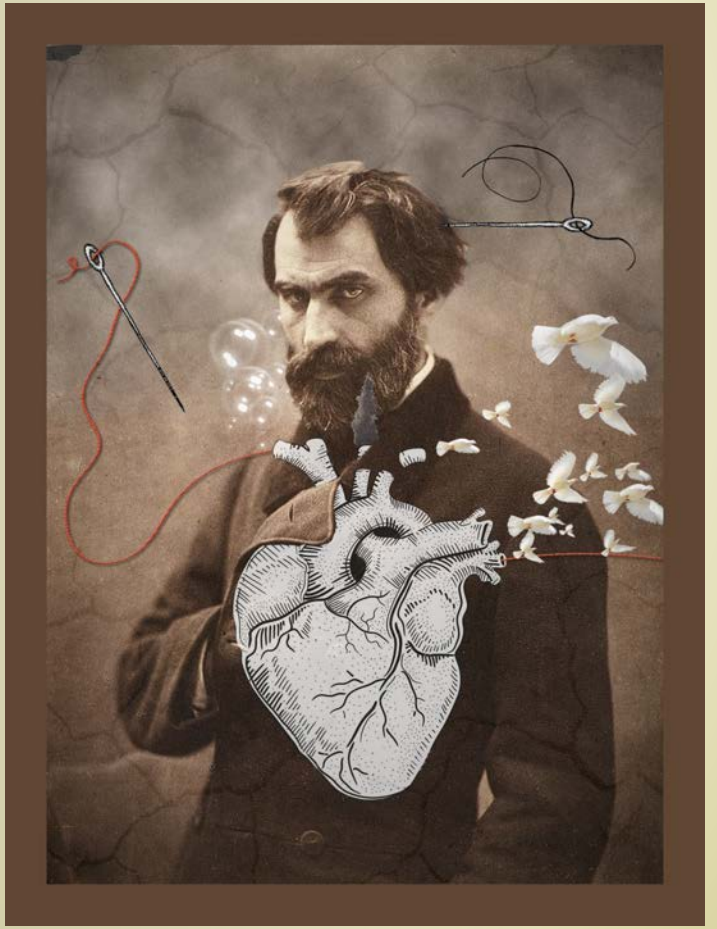
first impulse of the torso,
neck elongated to ride the pain,
genuflects to the green

flash, horizon rimming Mt. St. Helen's,
her memory of forest, rivers
of fire. She spins ahead of her body,

leaving a litany of instructions
beaded like a rosary, a bone mala:
breath, burial wreath, breath.

Daedalus

Susan Yount



The Warmth and Crackle of a Campfire

Jenny Wong

It's what he promised you.

But now, infinite fields
beyond city lights, you watch
as an army of tree tops stab out the stars,
and shift through the black glaze
of a night-drugged sky.

There is no spark. Not one.

Broken pieces pile beneath him,
fresh and pale against the ground.
Gotta last the night, he says.
His back bends with inertia.
Axe blunts against pine.

Hours.

Wind slips between seams in the tent,
nips at the pulsing thread in your throat,
leaving a cold damp space to murmur
between the sleeping bags,
a remnant of man before fire.

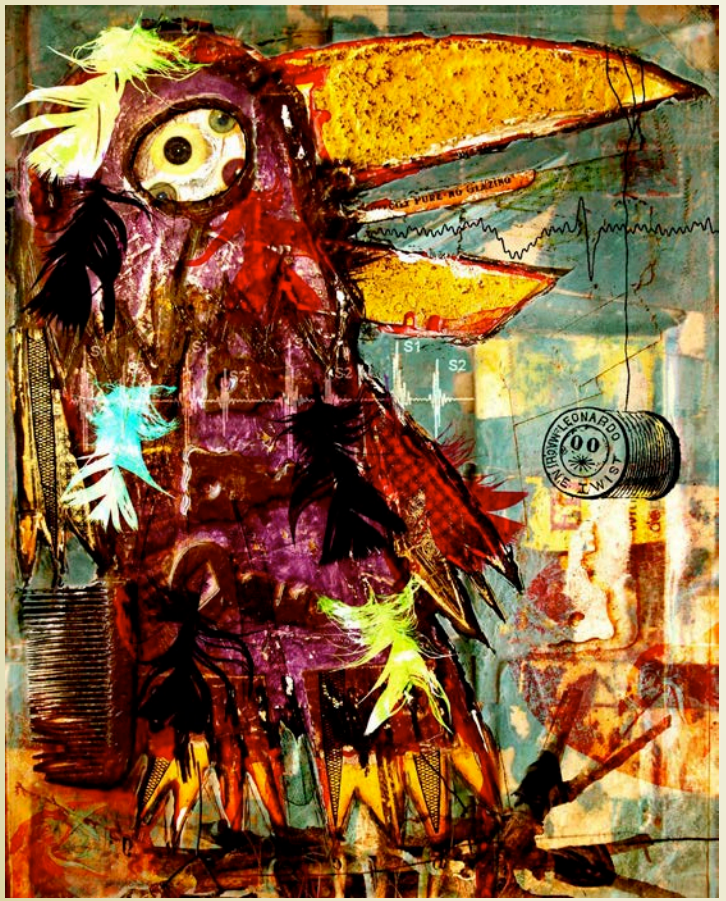
Physics

Christian Anton Gerard

Each time your hand. Each
time a thread around the sun.
If I could stop counting each monument
I know or should know, think more
about my thinking about you, then
maybe I could better murmur *you* and know *now*.
No. I can. I do. How *we* is both each and not.
You say I was persistent, that I wrote
you unabashed—a tulip taking water
from the ground into its petals. Each
time I write you now, as then, I'm a man—
gravity and friction and glaze—skiing on ice blocks
behind an automobile old in a country older
than time. Two things occupy the same
place, the same mind-time. How I knew
you. How I know you. *Imagine that,*
I say, when our friends ask how
we got together. The heart's pressure is
sustaining. I've stopped counting my pulse.
This *we* is less a story and more
the measure of elements, like wind in a wine glass.
How crystal sings if touched and touched right.

Crazy Purple Bird

Chris Roberts



Stung

Heidi Seaborn

I stirred up a hornets nest,
shears jabbing into the brush.

Disturbing the murmur of their day,
I stand still; wait out their frantic flight.

Like when I told my then husband
I didn't love him, maybe never had

over a birthday dinner. Sunset's glaze
reflected off the gold earrings

I'd bought in Cairo. I too must have glowed.
Could see it in his eyes before

I spoke those words that buzzed
around his head. Before I pulled

at the loose thread of our marriage,
pruned the underbrush to plant anew.

Murmur

Lauren Suchenski

Therapy

Emily Boshkoff

Why I'm really here: the last fight I had
with my mother, misappropriation of sex, forgetting
to be an adult. I try
to coax them out, these tired circus performers. I try to tease
them out, drag them out, murmur soft encouragements—nothing.
Instead, evasively, I talk about everything else. I spend forty-five
minutes and one hundred and fifty dollars on a story about attempting
to rescue a barred owl who had a seizure
on my front lawn. His glistening globes of eyes glazed over, delicate
feathered body quivering and twitching.

My therapist perches, silent and still, waiting. In the last moments
of our hour, he reaches up
and plucks a string out of the air, tugging
on it, and my words orient to their magnetic north,
lining up single file, fibers and filaments zipping together
into a unified thread of meaning. I hate when he does it,
    practically
showing off. He holds the string he's pulled,
the line he's drawn. It is draped and dangling limply across his
    outstretched palms—

a gift, an offering. I can do what I want
with it now. Stitch a monogram, tug an end
and watch it unravel, gently
loop it into a noose.

Spiderweb

Jennifer Davis Michael

All nature seemed benevolent that night.
We lingered on the porch long after dark,
as bats flapped softly far above our heads,
cicadas swelled their rasping symphony,
and fireflies punctuated evening's fall.

Silhouetted by the kitchen's glazed light,
a spider hung between the house and railing
amid the tattered remnants of a web.
We watched as she consumed the broken silk,
erasing her old handiwork, until
only a single, anchor thread remained.
She then began to chart a pattern known
to her alone: concentric octagons.
"How does she know . . ." I murmured,
and left the question dangling.

We quietly cheered when she completed it,
as proud as if she'd been our child—
not thinking of the flies or moths
who'd also be enthralled by her dark art.
Conspirators, we tiptoed in the house,
walking on sticky lines spun long ago.

Beach Bubbles

Sandra Hosking

Penelope on Loyalty

Monique Gagnon German

I escaped once
when no one was looking,
while the suitors slept
in the mess hall
like glazed ceramic ornaments.
I journeyed like you
over vast seas, past destruction
and the place where the world drops off
into nothing. I was, for a moment,
just like you, free of castles, expectations,
chessboards, and monotonies.

I posed as a siren
on the third abandoned island
so you could hear me sing.
Now more than a decade wiser,
I've woven a shroud of sharps & flats
from desires, leftovers, needs:
an embroidered symphony
thrown out like a sail
over tearing winds,
a net to reel you back in.

But then I glimpsed your ship
barreling forward on knots of speed,
and I evaluated your plight simply
for what it was then:
your struggle to land, to be drawn in,
thwarted by your bootstraps,
the way they clung to the masthead.
The way you'd anchored them.

So I went home alone,
unbeknownst to you,
on a crosswind of defeat.
I set about unraveling
the fabric of us, each gesture,
each murmur, each connective thread,
and when the suitors crawled
like hermit crabs away from
the table towards our bed,
I thought I got away with it,
I was sure there was nothing left.

Using Things Up

Susan Kress

We did not waste
things. Grandma
ran her finger round
the empty peanut
butter jar to swab
up every tiny
trace.

Old towels came
back as face cloths,
pants as shorts. We
wore our pencils
down to
stubs.

We saved brown
paper, envelopes,
shoe laces, every-
thing once used
to wrap things
up, or tie them
with a
bow.

Turning yet
another decade,
I have passed
grandmothers,
mother, father,
aunts.

Dead too soon,
they left the glass
of lemon tea half
full, the birthday
cake half glazed,
the cushion half
embroidered,
with its scarlet
thread still
hanging from
an interrupted
rose.

Last one left, I
hear the murmur
of my heart, fear
that I will use
things up before
I'm done: wear out
my knees, burn up
my memory, sap
my patience stored
always in its air
tight box, and, before
I am done speaking,
use up all my words –
like an actor left on
a deserted stage,
before the crew
folds up
the empty
seats.

Whimsy

Connor Fenwick

Death Before Dishonour

Deirdre Maultsaid

DOES any parent want to be in a hospital hallway, after a long afternoon of decisions, staring at her uneaten dinner, waiting for her son to come out of emergency surgery? Maybe some parents are relieved at this offer of exorcism—the ritual of surgery—with its opening and closing together again into a bold pink scar. Yes, maybe some parents hope for the ragged mark of wisdom that is engraved onto their own chests. A Purple Heart. A story told at the Legion Hall.

Don't tell our children about the waiting room. Don't tell them that we will never finish with the unpacked luggage, the splintered bones, and the dying sun of our uncontrollable tears.

Kyle's teacher had telephoned about the pain surging through Kyle's groin, and so I rushed in the fall rain to the school to fetch him. Later in the afternoon, at the only free appointment at the clinic, Kyle's brother waited and did his puzzle book while Kyle writhed, and the doctor examined Kyle's swollen testicle. Although there had been no sharp blow—*Had he been roughhousing?*—Kyle had suddenly developed Testicular Torsion (a twisted spermatic cord). Kyle's testicle could die, become gangrenous, and even cause blood poisoning, if the cord wasn't untwisted at Emergency right now. In the car, ever-observant Kyle asked in a high voice, "Why are you crying, Mommy?" I cheerfully said, "Oh, the hospital will fix you right up."

Lies told to protect.

Bob Dylan sings:

"May you stay forever young,

Forever young."

Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster is a blocky brown factory of a building, a hospital started in 1862. Back then, you could get off a tugboat with a leg crushed by a log boom and be in the waiting room in five minutes. You could crawl, with your leg twisted and deformed, from the Fraser River, across the railroad tracks, avoiding the shunting boxcars, and up the steep hill. In those days, men were men, work was work, and the gold dust of the Gold Rush was worth something. Maybe some men had too much pride (or grit) to get their cords untwisted and would suffer the gangrene instead. Maybe they would have had surgery after downing an entire bottle of Scotch whiskey, the gold still in their pockets, their pack mule at the door, their paddle-wheeler ticket damp with sweat.

In the emergency room parking lot, I waited for someone to first exit a stall (and I had no change for the meter).

This parking lot too full of cars, this silvery air, this rain, this empty wallet, this pale frightened boy, all details of this detail-ridden, unhallowed story.

After I waited at Royal Columbian for 45 minutes, the receptionist told me that there were no "surgical beds available."

Through a jumble of phone calls, interrupted conversations, and ambulance driver road maps held open to me, I was told to go to Burnaby General, no, wait, straight to Children's Hospital, in Vancouver. In the car, we shunted slowly along Columbia Street past the sad restored facades of the nineteenth-century buildings. At the end of Columbia, we were trapped behind a convoy of dark traffic going onto the Queensborough Bridge, although if I peered ahead, I could see a sliver of brighter light down river, past Richmond and Delta, out to the Strait of Georgia.

Find the boat that's lost at sea.

There was no way up and out, nothing to do but idle and jerk along behind *(empty)* delivery trucks and *(worn)* commuters *(on a bridge to nowhere)*. Brake lights flashed. Stoplights turned red like personal curses against me. The windshield wipers struggled against the fat, greasy drops of rain. I kept my hands on the wheel and called back, "After this is over, you can have a hamster. What would you call it?" Maybe he said "Hammy" or "Sammy" from the back seat. I asked, "Kyle, if you could have an ice cream sundae, what flavor would it be?" "A giant strawberry and raspberry and chocolate sundae!"

All day with his blood cut off? Merciful Virgin, get these people out of my way. Jesus Christ, bring me a Scotch.

Children's Hospital is part of the Children's & Women's Health Centre, where they treat patients, do research, and teach new medical personnel. They are always restoring and reconstructing some part of the health centre complex. I knew this because Kyle was born in some now defunct wing. As I turned off the car engine in the muddy, temporary parking lot outside the plywood Emergency Room entrance, I answered Kyle's "What's going to happen?" with, "You might have an operation, darling, but it won't be a big deal." In the book *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, William Pollack, a psychologist, has researched boys' issues. Pollack says that boys have all the same feelings as girls, but they are always expected to be tough. There is a powerful myth that a mother will turn her son into a momma's boy if she acknowledges his feelings, whereas Pollack says that a close maternal-son bond helps a boy with his adult relationships.

Kyle can wail. He can scream. He can let his curiosity carry him through. May you stay forever young.

As we stepped into the emergency room lobby, the purple-haired, singing-voiced, well-organized desk nurse approached us. Yes, they were expecting us, and yes, we would have a bed in less than 10 minutes. Distracting cartoons blared from a TV. The waiting room walls were covered in children's graffiti: *Michael!*, *Sarah!*, *I was here!* In the waiting room, a teenaged girl with a leaking tumor in the back of her head wandered around while her grandmother told her friends, in a loud voice, over the payphone, "You know, my granddaughter…I'm with her..."

Guys? Remember all the trips where you wouldn't wait for Mommy and Daddy? "I'm gonna get ya!" Remember the pirate ships, the boats, the trains, the cars, the miniature worlds of Playmobil, the rockets that you made? "Watch me! I can do it!"

The urologist had been phoned and decided to stay late, and although his bag swung from his arm, we had his undivided attention. The doctor looked directly into my son's haggard face. Then, making sure that the curtain was fully secured, he gently pulled down the sheet to look. Outside the curtain, the urologist and the resident called me "Mom" and patted my arm, and it was true: I could have been their own crying mother, what with their tousled hair and the unstudied concern in their faces. One

drew a diagram of the surgery on his scrub pants. *They could make a space ship; they knew how.* The anesthesiologist, my main connection, popped into Kyle's curtained room, grinning from under his green surgery bonnet. "How much does Kyle weigh?" *More than a gold nugget.* The doctor wouldn't use unreliable ether, like that first experiment in 1846 at Massachusetts General. No, he would use his own death-defying recipe of 15 different drugs: muscle relaxants, painkillers, and the drugs that cause unconsciousness. I was asked to make a decision—consent to surgery now, or risk permanent damage.

What is the moral significance of "consent"? Kahil Gibran said, "Your children are not your children; they are the sons and the daughters of life's longing for itself. They come through you, but they are not from you and though they are with you, they belong not to you." Yeah, yeah, say it. But, what do I do right now?

Blood poisoning.

A Purple Heart.

The doctors are in charge.

Would any parent allow "death before dishonour?" Is this a gang initiation—with its tragic grandiosity, its belligerence, its triumphalism—and I do not even know it? Maybe I hear a battle hymn. Am I being excluded? Big Circle Boys, Montreal Mafia, Outlaws. No, you can't have my son.

We went behind the curtain to Kyle's bed and out again, behind the curtain and out again. I could hear other distracting sounds: mewling voices (babies), a laughing voice (a drugged-up teenager trying to come down), a defiant voice, saying, "It's okay, Granny" (the girl whose brain tumor was leaking), and calm murmurs (nurses at their station). The industrial hum of the institution worked its way into me; the lights were sharp and white enough to cut my skin.

Three men behind a curtain. Abracadabra! Make him well! The doctors are boys, playing with machines that whiz and go bang if they're lucky. They are a group of toweled men in a locker room, making jokes about "hot rocks," ready to demonstrate bravado. They say: never cry. I will not forgive them if they cannot, will not say, "Sh, sh, everything is okay, little darling" to my son. What is with their drug plying, their unfettered access to the unconscious, their "gangrene" threats? I indict the whole medical profession for their battle hymns, their trick knives, their restored facades. What an ingrate am I.

We are all in on the conspiracy, except Kyle's brother who keeps his psychic distance with his puzzle book and Kyle himself who cries openly in pain and is not ashamed. Somehow, the desk-nurse is let off in my moral ledger of checks and balances because of her happy purple hair and her bright voice. The grandmother who telephones a friend, from the emergency room payphone to talk about her granddaughter's leaking tumor? I indict her. The parents of the teenager coming down off a high who have left the curtain open to his bed? I accuse them. Why is everyone consenting to this illness, this trouble, this…this…what? Hospitalization. No one is safe from my gaze and rage, including me. I am ashamed of my slavish obedience: Do it. Drug Kyle into oblivion! Cut him open! What choice do I have? My consent is not real; I have nothing with which to bargain. Nothing but a parent, I have no clean scalpels, I have no death-defying recipes.

I sat on a steel chair, alone, in the hallway, while hospital staff passed back and forth. I could hear voices, but I could not listen. In my lap, the lettuce in the take-out salad glistened with old grease. I could not eat. The urologist had promised to meet

me (immediately after the surgery) in that hallway. Since many children at Children's Hospital can have surgeries without even staying overnight, I wasn't sure if Kyle would be one of the lucky kids who could go home. If the testicle were removed, Kyle would have to stay for observation.

If the testicle…if the testicle…By the garbage can, I see the black rinds of old fear from other parents. My mouth is open and I pant through the acid in my throat. Please, oh, please, oh, please. Are we there yet? Somewhere upstairs in this same complex, a friend's little sister died, in an isolation room, of cancer. There were too many blood splatters on her sheets. I said goodbye to her amidst the choked praying of her family and even the pink-bloused young nurse cried and called the girl "a fighter to the end."

I didn't think to ask about Kyle's scars. What about this "necrotic" testicle? I could almost hear my son's voice, saying, "Mom, here's ___" as he holds out the wrapped, powdered bundle of his own child. So there. This is what I wish for my son—love, children. Do I want to be a conservative mother influencing his staid life? Do I want to judge the doting girls and boys who will fawn over him until he is all bravado and hollow in the middle? Think of Kyle in high school, running down the hall, late for a test to which he knows the answers, late for a drama rehearsal (the comic lead). Imagine him as a young man: funny, gifted, his brawn, his dimple, the thickness of his hair, him there. Could I take any credit, I ask myself. (Close maternal-son bond.) "I'm going out!" "Where?" "Out!"

When Kyle was born, bright-eyed, somewhere on this parcel of land, there were 15 people in the room for the Caesarean, including a perinatologist who had met me in my darkened room earlier and explained that he had to operate on another woman first as her situation was more life-threatening and I consented to this and he patted me in a loving, grandfatherly, unconditional way, and I felt brave and dignified and resolved. There are gifts offered to me, and I should take them. Apart from the pathologizing and the knives and the ether and the hum of the hospital, there are people here who offer a human connection.

When the doctor came out, after operating on Kyle, to the hallway where I waited, he stamped out a flamenco dance. *(Saved! Olé!)* I thanked him and shook his hand. For the moment, I let him off, hero that he was.

Kyle has made the journey. Kyle is Robin Hood, stealing from the rich. He is Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods to give to human beings.

Myths and unhallowed stories.

Heroes.

I think of a boy that I knew when I was ten and how it must have taken him an hour to bicycle to my house, balancing the flowers under his arm. Javier was panting. His white shirt stuck to his back with sweat. The whiteness of his shirt surged like froth on a wave, a signal of something to come. The part of Javier's hair divided into two equal black, glossy sections, each springing back to life already, each telling its own tale of effort and longing. Javier gave me a bouquet of yellow Easter flowers, Easter morning, in the sunshine, in the schoolyard beside my house. My hair hung in straggly threads around my face and I didn't say thank you. I was with my wild friends. My surprise at the flowers must have hurt him. Javier silently cycled away again, a long way, over the bridge, across the river. It must have taken him hours to get home, broken-hearted and exhausted, where his mother may have waited for the news of his first selfless act as a man.

My son woke up from the surgery stunned and exhausted. He did not move. I had never seen such yellow pallor since the day he was born with jaundice, the perinatologist there, holding him. I wanted to pull my son up by the front of his surgical gown and carry him through the ceiling, up into the night sky, the Archangel Gabriel with Glad Tidings. I wanted to cleanse Kyle under a waterfall. Soon, the nurse pulled down his bed rail, and I helped slip on his pants. Kyle insisted on wheeling himself to the car (the event that he would boast about to his brother the next morning). My brother carried Kyle into the house while I bustled over a pot of chicken soup, but Kyle threw up (a ferocious *[thank goodness]* purge of the fifteen anaesthetic drugs), lay down in my bed under a thick stack of blankets, and slept. With the lamp casting a yellow circle around my face, I slept fitfully beside him. I could feel Kyle's tension, and so I patted his hair, sobbed, and soothed him. "Sh, sh, it's okay, little darling." *Unpacked luggage. Bold pink scars.*

How can we tell our children that we have deceived them with calm voices, or that we have tricked them into thinking that we aren't in on the adult conspiracy? We are all in on it. We can't pretend that we don't know the worn leather of an empty wallet, that we haven't felt political rage, or bowed our heads under our burdens. We have learned—we cannot take away our children's pain with the sheer force of our love. We are being engraved with parental wisdom, with its cloud-laden, blood-splattered decisions, and its life cycle ceremonies: the rinsing of the dropped soother, the grabbing of the hand at the curb, the pacing in hospitals, the counting of fresh stitches. Although we are still holding our breath, we become the first to write on the plaster casts. We allow wheelchair racing. Claim the power to say, "Little darling." Raise our heads and walk on.

For days, Kyle stayed home, immobilized. The teacher telephoned and said, "I'm so glad we didn't force him to tough it out. I'm so glad we had it checked." I agreed. "You did the right thing. Thank you."

Gang initiation. Death before dishonour. No, no.

With time differences and frustrating international telephone networks, I finally found Kyle's father, in a conference room. Kyle insisted that I tell his daddy about his wheelchair ride, but I forgot the instant I heard the puzzled rise in Kyle's father's voice. I told him, "Kyle is walking like a cowboy." This was parental code: "He is on his feet and moving. I was scared, but now I am laughing." Whenever anyone telephoned, I reassured them that Kyle was obnoxious. "It's good to hear that he is returning to the boy we know and love," they said. Did I invent his rude demands of me as a sign that he was a resilient boy with a life force no hospital could steal, a signal that he was a real tough wrangler? *My wrangler. Hot rocks. Life's longing for itself.* Did I create a hoax? In protecting his privacy, I had taken away the idea that Kyle had been badly frightened and had shown bravery.

This is his story, not mine. This is also my story. Do I want to be the myth-disputing heroine? I am nothing but a Muse, handmaiden in the creation of a heraldic song to the Gods. I am only Maid Marian, the adolescent love interest in a larger political drama. I am only the mother, with my 11 [one wrecked] humble Halloween cupcakes and my [rumoured] ability to cross a glacier, barefoot, to save my young.

We turned on rerun daytime TV so that Kyle could rest on the couch, watching *The Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley*: "The Case of the Logical I Ranch" and "The Case of the Sea World Adventure." The shows are complete with twin singing

and jokes. “How can you hear a tree bark?” “How many cans in a cantaloupe?” Mary Kate and Ashley were perfect, with their bubblegum pop prettiness, their rose-hued blossoming, and their Florida grapefruit optimism. What a gift of innocence—the clean puzzles solved with the girls’ light detective skills, puzzles solved with no body count, no bloody sheets, no shame. The twins reassured my son. In the clear voice of the already-healing child, Kyle said, “Let me watch them again.” *Drugs that cause unconsciousness. Lies that protect.*

I allow him to watch TV. The unconditional giggling of these show kids? Something I lack now in my gloomy heart. I am a stitch-assessing, over-adrenalized, blanket-covering, adult-conspiring parent. As Kyle lies on the couch, glazed-eyed and tired from his first event of real fear and bravery, the twins restore my son. They offer him a connection. He should take it. I envy the twins their generative power. How I want to sanction their nursing skills. Healing happens, somewhere near me, around me, in spite of me. In my living room, on my couch, from deep within my son, signs emerge that Kyle is being restored. Know these signs.

Ignore the jaundice of the dying sun.
Keep the secrets of our hoaxes.
Pan for gold.
Accept Easter bouquets, their yellow opening here.

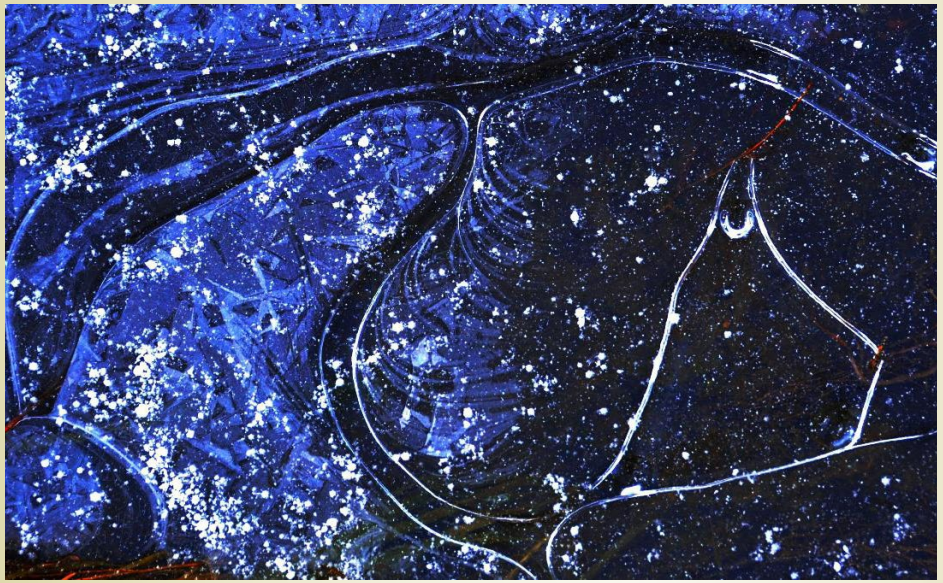
Sam, Third Period, Language Arts

Kit Zak

Forty years later
I still see daily doubt
cloud your gray eyes,
your hand inching up,
nails bitten, grimy
eyes pleading, needing
to have me call your name,
longing for ten seconds of junior-high limelight,
arm flailing, urgent,
despite stuttering, lip-quiver
answers, mostly wrong, met by a classmate’s
scoffing murmur as your eyes glaze over and you shrug back into yourself,
into your thread-bare plaid shirt
your brother’s hand-me-down jeans.

Angles and Curves

Jayne Marek



Quarry

Brent Fisk

For years our fathers took stone,
came home with ears blasted deaf,
denim shirts and dungarees caked with dust and sweat,
before their bodies gave up and lay down
with marble over their heads.

We swam in the wake of grief
when they were gone, water deep
enough it shaded black, just as we once
pretended we were darker versions of ourselves—
curses and cigarettes, hidden flasks, our bodies
leaning into a desire we didn't have words for.
We swam the flooded quarries our fathers cut,
diving from jagged rock face, some fearful, some unafraid,
severing our mothers' careful threads midair.
Sometimes a murmur in the cedars
whispered ancient hymns, a chorus
of locusts and loss. Smoke snaked
from small fires we built on the cliffs,
pine cones and pallet wood, dry grass,
wisps that tendriled up toward clouds
like an offering to Gods

whose gaze was somewhere else.
The old snags of fallen hickory and cedar
waited for a broken bone, an abdomen impaled.

We waited, quarry ourselves, oblivious
as stone. We rubbed the twitch from muscled
arms that never knew our fathers' brand of work.
We watched the girls' bare skin
go pink, cutoffs and bikini tops, lean bellies
shining with a glaze of tanning oil,
mirrored sunglasses reflecting back
a sky so blue our fathers barely dreamed of it,
while in the quarry, we, their sons,
were haunted by more worldly things,
girls with bodies like nothing
our fathers ever touched,
nothing like the stone our fathers shaped
into lives we called our own.

Glean

Kelly Terwilliger

If I had wanted apples, would I have chosen you?
Scattered on a sheet of newsprint
like six lost horsemen
fallen from their steeds and rolled senseless
to the edge of a wind-shredded field. Wind-
falls—you can see where they hit, the soft sour browning

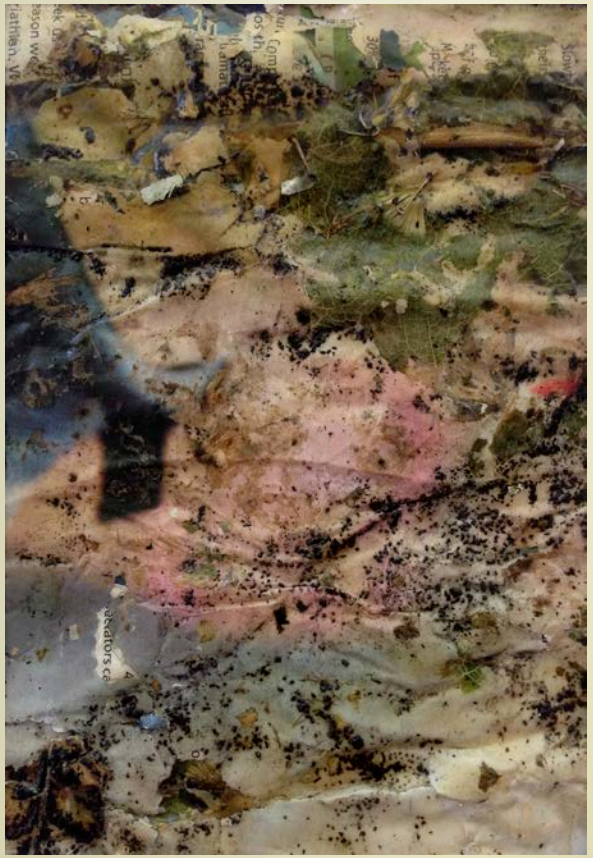
of delicate flesh, a translucence easily marred
like the face of the woman who tried to describe
fate: her Russian grandfather, coming back from a war,
falls into a bog and sinks to his neck.
And this is the end, except for the thread
of a voice of someone he never saw.
Pulling him out. Sending him home.

Something that thin, that unlikely! The murmur
it takes to bring one back
into the smudged world
beneath those apples, a newsprint sky behind a scrim of cloud.
Something—a man, a hand—rises from
behind a fence: there, diamonds of chain
linked, and there, two curves of barbed wire.
A bristled shadow.

If I had wanted story, would I have chosen this?
Who chooses? At the crossroads of darkness and light
a woman gathers fallen fruits, round like baby bellies—
small sunken stems and withered blossom ends
like belly buttons diving backward into the glaze
of what was, or might have been.
They are juicy, a taste of dim
brightness and another tincture, almost mineral, almost blood—
the earthen sour-sweetness of damage she takes
gently, between her teeth, and chews.

Spectator Sport

Karen Fitzgerald



Learning Spanish

Sandhya Krishnakumar

The flowers murmur.
Las flores murmuran.
The sentence was unacceptable
to my Spanish teacher.
This makes no sense,
she yelled and struck out the line
with a violence that made me tremble
though I was no child.
The page bled.

I sat through the rest of the class
like a statue, a glaze over my eyes,
but the mind abuzz with fury.
I never went back.

I could not use language like numbers,
assigning a single value to each word.
I pressed on alone,
filling my pages with singing tulips,
laughing waves, howling corridors,
despondent yachts, quarreling terns,
departing ferns.
Everything in my world could sing
and bleed and murmur.

Today I study under Allende and Marquez,
a willing prisoner of their word-webs.
If each day a flower
climbs up to your lips to seek me, says Neruda.
I hear the flower murmur as it climbs up.
It makes sense to me.

Don't we all need a silk thread
to weave into the fabric of our thoughts?
Can you teach a language
without exploring the nooks and corners
a tongue can reach into?

The Girl Is From the Hood

Siaara Freeman

This makes her a low
murmur no matter where she goes. She thinks

about where she grew up and how easy it was
before the threads were cut slowly into thinner

threads, until everything could fit right through
her. She was a shiny pointed needle in a stack
of pointier needles. There is no hay

in her story, hay is for girls who land softly.
For distraught corn silk maidens and their glazed sky
blue checkered dresses and their tiny dogs bred for

their baskets and their heartless/brainless/spineless
companions, certainly not for the girl from the hood
the talking pin

cushion and her large heart bred for
their baskets and her breathless/ breathless/ breathless
companions.

The girl is from the hood and this makes her
ruby slippers mean something else, makes her
watching the melt a painful thing. Where is the triumph
in watching the dead

die? Who is a man who grants wishes but a man
who hides behind praise?

The girl is from the hood. We all heard about it
the rumor that someone is hanging, life heavy

from a thin thread in her background but who
really paused long enough
to check?

The More You Know

Beth Sherman

THE day her fiancé left, Rebecca booked a tour of Scandinavia. She'd never been to Europe and the idea of traveling to a place that had daylight 20 hours out of the day appealed to her. This happened in late July. The air conditioning on the subway had stopped working and she pictured herself in a northern climate, taking long walks by picturesque canals. Or were canals in Holland? For their honeymoon, they were supposed to go to Aruba. Luckily, Rebecca had insisted on travel insurance. She was a planner. Diligent, persevering. She kept thinking, what if one of them got sick and they had to cancel? Rob would thank her for getting their money back.

She realized after he moved out that she often anticipated what he would do and say. It was a secret test she liked to give herself. If she wore the floral maxi skirt instead of the white eyelet dress, would he be more inclined to notice? (No). If she made *osso bucco* and the meat was too tough would he spit it into his napkin or gamely keep chewing (the latter). She predicted correctly

about 80 percent of the time, which was a good thing. Their rabbi, who also did premarital counseling on request, had cautioned them against surprises. "The more you know about each other, the happier you'll be," he said, as they sat holding hands in his study. Rob's hand was sweaty. She liked that he wasn't perfect. He burped after meals, forgot important dates. Sometimes, when they watched TV at night, he would fall asleep leaning against her shoulder and start to snore intermittently, like a car engine that had trouble starting. Perfect was boring. Perfect would mean she'd have to match his exemplary behavior. Her teeth would need to be whiter, her job more fulfilling, her outlook sunnier.

"What about sex?" he'd said after the session, when they were back out on the sweltering streets of Queens, deciding where to go for lunch.

She'd taken out her phone and was looking up directions to Cantina Cha Cha, a new Peruvian restaurant she'd read about in one of the online foodie groups she belonged to.

"What?" she said, not sure she'd heard him correctly.

"We didn't talk about sex."

"That's not the sort of thing you discuss with a rabbi."

"Why not?" Rob said. "It's marriage counseling. Everything should be on the table. Besides, he does brises. He knows where babies come from."

Rebecca smoothed her skirt, wishing she hadn't worn cotton. It was wrinkling in the heat. Her dry cleaning bill was already too high.

"The restaurant is on Kissena," she said. "If we take the Q64 bus, it'll be faster than the subway."

"Rebecca," said Rob, sounding exasperated.

She'd already planned the names of their children – Alexis,

Jordan and Kylie – none of them started with an R.

As if reading her mind, he said, "You need to have sex before you have kids."

Technically, this wasn't true. Two women she knew had experienced fertility problems and were adopting from overseas – one from China, the other from Russia. People hired surrogates. Or they got impregnated from test tubes. An egg and a sperm murmuring sweet nothings in a lab before coming together to form a zygote. Sex was overrated. And messy. She didn't understand why people made such a big deal about it.

An hour later, over the best *arroz con leche* Rebecca had ever tasted, Rob said he couldn't marry her. It wasn't just her lack of interest in sex. Apparently, there were several other things wrong with her. He'd made a list.

*

Number 8: She didn't like trying new things. That one was patently false. She loved new things – especially new restaurants and foods she'd never tasted before. But it seemed ridiculous to argue with him when he'd bothered to type up her faults, in Times New Roman, 12 point font, double spaced. Besides, he was a lawyer. He argued with people for a living.

She'd never thought of Rob as cruel, though why go to marriage counseling only to rip their relationship to shreds? And what did it say about her that she hadn't seen how dissatisfied he'd been, that she'd been planning their new life together, happily meeting his friends, secure in the knowledge that she was making the right decision. She'd congratulated herself that she was mature enough to accept him for who he was (because no one's perfect), when all along he'd been cataloging her shortcomings, studying her too, only not in a good way.

In the restaurant, she watched his lips move and tried not to listen, knowing she'd never be able to eat Peruvian food again. She'd always associate it with sadness and loss and the sick feeling that he was right – she was a deeply flawed person who'd never find love. The worst part was he hadn't intended to be unkind; the list was meant to be helpful. So she could improve herself and do better next time. When they got back to the apartment, she watched him pack up his things in silence. Number 6: She talked too much. She stared at a water stain above the TV from where the people upstairs had a leak the previous summer. She didn't know what to do with her hands.

"Do you want this or should I take it?" he said, pointing to a hardcover copy of *Planet News* by Allen Ginsburg.

They'd bought the book together at the Strand two months earlier. It had started pouring unexpectedly and they'd ducked into the store to avoid getting soaked. Rob had found the volume of poems in a bin by the cashier. He'd read some of them aloud to her, when the sun re-emerged and they were sitting on the grass in Central Park, eating meatless tacos and sipping candy-sweet tamarind-flavored Mexican soda from a truck. It was the kind of romantic gesture that Rebecca appreciated. The cherry trees were in bloom, pink blossoms drifting on the wind and settling in their hair.

"You can keep it."

She put her engagement ring on the coffee table, along with a stuffed parrot he'd won for her at Coney Island and all his CDs and DVDs. She'd grown to like jazz because of him: Coltrane, Ellington, Hines. Music she never knew existed before. All tainted now.

It was hard not to beg him to change his mind, to promise she'd change if he'd give her a second chance. She waited until

he left to react, until she heard the elevator doors clang shut and then she couldn't stop sobbing, her breath leaving her body in rasping dry heaves, which frightened her cat, Cucina, so much, he cowered under the bed and refused to come out for hours.

*

The Scandinavian trip wasn't until the following April. That was when she was supposed to be on her honeymoon, one of the two weeks a year she got off from work. In the meantime, she woke up every day and went to her job in the accounting department of a large fabric supply company and tried not to think about him, which turned out to be impossible. The city had turned into a landmine of places they'd been together: Restaurants, parks, coffee shops, concerts. She'd met him her second week after moving to New York at a party she hadn't planned on attending. They'd moved in together shortly after that. They were in love and rents were so high; it seemed silly to live apart.

She told everyone the breakup was mutual. Her mother sounded skeptical on the phone, sitting at the kitchen table in Pittsburgh, wondering aloud what Rebecca had done wrong, how long it would take to pay back the money they'd lost on the catering hall deposit. The thread between them so frayed Rebecca was barely aware it existed anymore until times like this, when her mother still had the power to make every bad situation worse.

She placed the list in the kitchen sink and set it on fire, singeing the Formica countertop in the process. A useless ritual. Somehow the words had lodged in her memory, like an endless jazz riff.

*

Weekends, she stayed in her pajamas and binge watched episodes of *Gilmore Girls* on Hulu. The rent was overdue. She slept

during the day and prowled the apartment at night, peering out the window onto a series of other windows, faceless, nameless boxes that punctuated the city streets. A fly had died on the windowsill and she spent hours studying it – the fragility of its tiny black legs, its bulging eyes. She named it Malevolent, realizing she had no friends.

*

She sent dozens of texts to Rob, each one carefully crafted. It made her feel connected to him, even though he never replied. Or she would send a picture without any message. A shot of water towers before dawn. Skyscrapers reflected in a side view mirror or a car parked illegally. He appreciated quirky things. She used to think it was why he was drawn to her.

*

She liked everything he posted on Facebook and kept track of his activities. She wasn't about to stalk him, but who could fault her for continuing a weekly ritual she'd once enjoyed so much she'd seriously considered keeping Kosher and visiting a *mikveh*. On Friday nights, she took a shower and dragged herself to temple. While everyone else chanted and sang, she scanned the sanctuary for Rob. It reminded her of the way she'd looked for God as a child, searching in vain between the pages of a prayer book, the words dark and mysterious, promising salvation. Afterwards, the Rabbi came up to her, his face drawn and serious.

"I heard," he said. "I'm sorry it didn't work out. But sometimes it's for the best."

She forced a smile.

The temple was next door to the YMCA. There were orange flyers posted on telephone poles and bus shelters advertising various classes. Number 8 nagged at her. Here were promising

new things to try. She could learn something new, become someone better. All she had to do was choose.

*

Food molded in the refrigerator and she didn't bother buying replacements. Food seemed irrelevant, the language used to describe it vaguely pornographic, the attention paid unseemly. She unsubscribed to the restaurant reviews she'd signed up for, barely remembered to eat. All that time and effort spent on a substance that changed from wondrous to shameful, expelled from the body in secret.

*

Introduction to Pottery was held in a large gray studio on the third floor of the Y. The last thing she'd made out of clay was an ashtray at Camp Timber Pines, the summer before her mother stopped smoking. There were six other people in the class, all women, all over the age of 65.

The instructor's name was Jaskaran. He had thin tapered fingers and a voice like wood smoke. He gave each of them a block of brown clay, taught them how to throw it on the wheel. Rebecca hunched over, resting her elbows on her knees. With the thumb of her left hand pressed against her right fist, she tried centering the clay on the wheel. Her fingers felt thick as sausages. Classical music played in the background. Soft violins and oboes. At least it wasn't jazz.

"Close your eyes," Jaskaran told them. "Feel the material. Pull it up and push it back down. Don't be afraid of it."

The clay felt smooth and slippery. She smelled wet ash. It was vaguely pleasant and she could sense her body relax as she tried to establish a rhythm with her hands. When she opened her eyes, she saw that clay had puddled in a heap at the bottom of the

wheel and Jaskaran told her to start over.

*

She left messages on Rob's phone. Friendly, informative messages, commenting on the Yankees' latest win or the election news. She didn't tell him about the eviction notice the landlord had slid under her door because she'd stopped paying rent or the fact that sometimes she went days without talking to anyone besides him and the cat.

*

She kept re-making her pot, trying to get it right. If she pulled up on the clay too quickly, the top would rip. If she applied too much pressure, the sides caved in. It was hard to get her hands to work in unison, which was weird, since they both belonged to her.

"It's like a couple dancing," Jaskaran said. "There needs to be balance."

She took a knife and began shaping the pot, removing excess material. She liked this part best, finding what she didn't need, cutting it away.

*

She draped a sheet over the bathroom mirror so she wouldn't have to see the gaunt stranger staring back at her. There was a Jewish tradition of covering mirrors after someone dies. That way, the person's soul couldn't reach through the glass and pull the living into the afterworld. Rebecca thought they had it backwards. She'd become the ghost. A hollow-eyed wraith floating through the apartment at night, displaced and alone.

*

One night at 2 a.m., he picked up.

"Rebecca,'' he said, and the sound of her name on his lips made her eyelids twitch.

"I think we should give us another shot," she said, hoping she didn't sound pathetic.

"I can't. I've moved on."

He wasn't seeing anyone else – at least no one she knew about. "What if we meet for coffee?"

The silence on the other end hurt her ears.

"I've been really busy at work. I mean, I don't have time for a relationship right now. I just . . . can't."

"That's okay," she said quickly. "We could still hang out."

"It just wasn't right between us. You'll meet someone. I know you will."

He hung up before she could tell him she had no interest in dating.

*

At her six-month review, her boss said they were letting her go. It wasn't just her inattention, her frequent accounting mistakes and increasingly sloppy work habits. There were cuts being made in all departments. She shouldn't take it personally. Rebecca nodded, thinking about her lost Scandinavian trip. The fire-scorched ruins of medieval castles she would never get to visit. The fjords she would never see. Cliffs rising up on either side of her boat as it sailed between narrow inlets, invisible glaciers eroding.

*

She slept till 3 p.m. each day, putting out plenty of food for the cat. Her hair was so tangled, she couldn't get a comb through it and one day she took a scissor and chopped most of it off. She was tired all the time. Outside, traffic rumbled and shrieked. When it rained, she stuck her head out the window and let the water hit her face, pinging against her tongue.

*

She'd paid for the pottery class on the last credit card she had that hadn't been cancelled. Using a wire tool, she wet her fingers, using her thumbs to slide the pot off the wheel. It had a jagged looking collar on top where her fingers had kept slipping.

"What is this music?" she asked Jaskaran.

"Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. Do you like it?"

"Yes."

It soothed her somehow. Listening to the concerto, molding the clay, she could get outside herself. She wet her sponge, dabbed the pot all over, touching it rhythmically, keeping time to the violins. Her head drooped. She felt tension seep from her shoulders. The other women in the class had gathered in the far corner of the room. They were whispering together. She could tell they were talking about her.

"It's relaxing, isn't it?" said Jaskaran.

"The pottery or the music?"

"Both."

*

She chose a pale blue glaze. It reminded her of the view outside her bedroom in the apartment when she first woke up. There was a clean, pure look to the sky some mornings and just for a moment, before she thought about everything slipping away, she felt happy. When the pot came out of the kiln, she set it on a table and examined it with a critical eye. It was lumpy and misshapen, tilting noticeably to one side. There were tiny bubbles on the surface where she hadn't applied the glaze evenly. But it was unmistakably a pot, with a bottom and a rim. When she filled it with rusty tap water from the sink in the corner, not one drop leaked out.

"Next time, you will make a vase," Jaskaran told her.

Rebecca nodded, knowing there wouldn't be a next time.

*

She got Rob's new address from his cousin's friend's sister-in-law. He was living in Astoria with three roommates. He'd grown a beard and had on new glasses with dark oval frames. When he saw her at the door, he looked vaguely alarmed.

"Here," she said, holding out the pot. "I made this for you."

He took it uncertainly, holding it at arm's length as if it were dangerous. "How've you been?"

She smiled, knowing the last thing both of them wanted was for her to tell him how she'd been doing the last couple of months. She wasn't sure how she'd react when she saw him again. She'd thought about it on the R train on the way over, holding the pot gingerly between her knees. What if she wrapped herself around him and refused to let go? If she started crying hysterically and wouldn't stop until one of his roommates had to call for medical assistance and they took her someplace and gave her pills in a white paper cup? If she punched him in the stomach as payback for hurting her? It all sounded entirely possible.

"It's not what you think," she said. "I don't want to get back together."

She realized as soon as the words were out that it was true. She didn't want him back. What she wanted was bigger than that – something she couldn't name or even visualize because it didn't exist yet. Buried inside her like a tiny ball of fresh clay that she'd have to mold over the years, pushing it into new shapes, resisting and judging and starting over until she didn't care so much about the breakage.

"I took a pottery class. At the Y. It was interesting. And a little frustrating at times. Anyway, I made this. I wanted you to have it."

"Oh."

"It holds up to eight flowers. Or kitchen utensils, like a spatula. Or you could just throw it away. You won't hurt my feelings. I mean, I won't even know about it."

She shifted her weight from one foot to the other. From deep inside the apartment, she heard sounds of cooking – pots rattling, laughter, the sizzling of meat.

"Well," he said. "Thanks, I guess."

"Goodbye," Rebecca said, grateful that she meant it, that she was the one who got to say it this time.

Outside, the wind had picked up. It was late November and the weather had turned cold without her noticing. She wrapped her coat tightly around her and headed back toward the subway. It was easier to walk without the pot. She shoved both hands in her pockets, picked up her pace. Soon it would be dark. She would need to find a new place to live. Overhead, a flock of sparrows flew over the telephone wires and she watched them wheel and dive, circling madly until they disappeared from sight.

Cadaver Tooth: A Haunting

Arielle Hebert

My dentist says in six months
the cadaver bone will fuse with
my jaw to support a crown.

It's the hottest night of summer,
a waxing crescent moon. At the bar,

I tilt back well whiskey.
A woman murmurs in my ear,
calls me by name.

Order another round, she says
& when I see I am alone, I do.

That night, I dream she serves me
mint tea from an ox horn.

In the morning, I sage
my house, my herb garden,
swirl my wrists & ankles in smoke;

I thread a live dragonfly
from the ceiling for protection.

Still, each evening she sings
Edelweiss, edelweiss.

The tune gets stuck in my head,
plays back her soft vibrato
for weeks at a time.

For winter solstice, she bakes
black forest cake. I smell the cocoa
from her palm. We eat

a slice, then another, the richness
on my tongue when I wake.

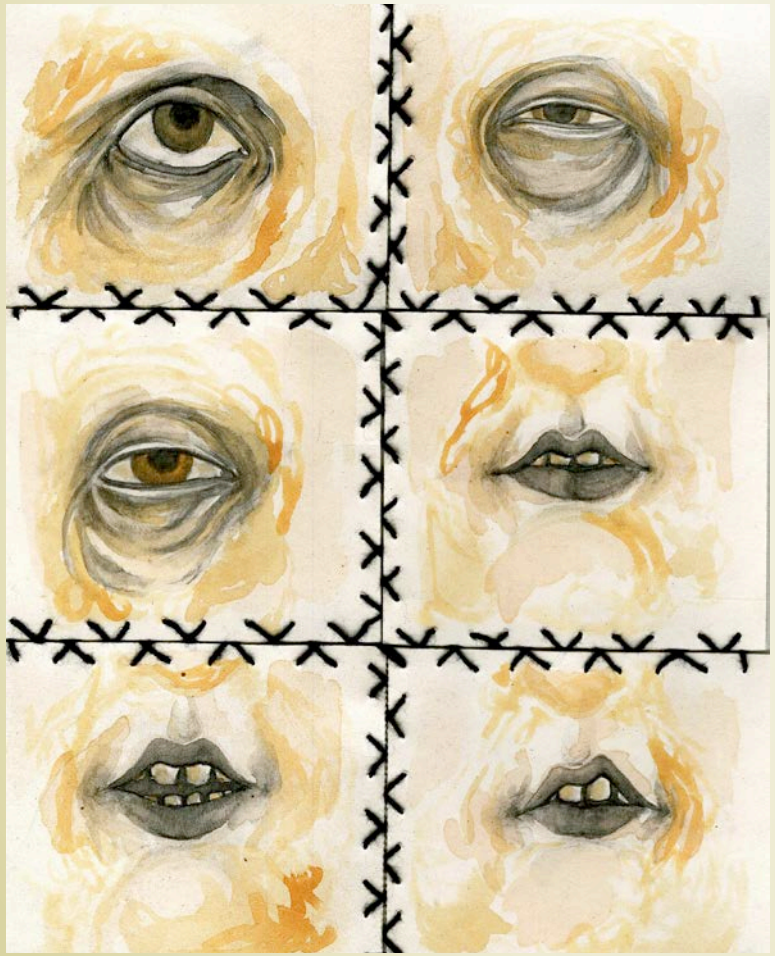
Cherries & whipped cream
as I lay back, eyes glazed
in the reclined dentist's chair.

I stretch my jaws open to be crowned,
dream we're playing rummy

with our dead, & for the first time
I am dealing the cards.

Leftovers

Lindsay Mercer



Eavesdropping on Poets at the Coffee House

Allison Thorpe

Each week the faithful:
tattoos and yoga pants,
thick dark-rimmed lenses,
rainbow hair that glazes
faces already hard to read,
piercings like freckles,
voices flinging *fuck*
and *vagina* and *mollie*
with superficial rage.

I write the murmurs
of moon lilies,
hill threaded horizons,
tomatoes embarrassed
on the vine,
lace collars
and looking both ways.

I am no one to them,
could be Anne Bradstreet
in my quaintness, rustling
my yellow-lined papers
while electronic devices
hum like a holy choir
in a room that has nothing
to do with song
or God.

Far from home,
I reach for my cup,
coffee grown cold,
settle quiet in my chair
by the open window
in case a whippoorwill—
something wild
and familiar—
chants my name.

Conditions for Release

Matt Muilenburg

THE nuns called in our D.A.R.E. officer to teach us about our testicles. Our scrotums, too, and all the squidgy tubing that zig-zagged inside, the rollercoaster that the little specks of ourselves would one day tadpole through on their egg hunt benders.

The nuns knew nothing of the gizmos, having neither possession of the equipment nor an overwhelming desire to meet-and-greet such mortal tools of production and repercussion. So they summoned reinforcements to pontificate in the name of sexual education. The officer who'd tsk-tsk'ed marijuana and Miller Lite earlier that year returned, laser-pointing fleshy diagrams, avoiding eye-contact, taking few questions, and preaching to the choir: by then, most of our curiosities had been assuaged by film, TV, and the nudie magazines with their endless snapshots of glory-glory-hallelujah that we hustled out of hock (our fathers' dresser drawers) in our backpacks, sandwiched between study guides, word problems, and religion homework. We worshipped that which lay between the magazines' covers,

yet were still embarrassed by that which they were intended to arouse—our penises.

Hallowed be thy shame, dick.

*

Like Mass, school days were regimented. Religion, math, English, all of them had their obstinate place in the Catholic curriculum. This regimentation extended to bathroom breaks, our No. 1 and No. 2 routine as gospel as 1 and 2 Corinthians. When it came time for my class's designated turn, our teacher marched us to the little boys' room in the basement and detached us from her school day umbilicus, warning us to behave. That was an easy enough order to follow: for the first minute or so, we stood motionless, our backs against the wall opposite the porcelain, losing our staring contests with the urinals. Each of us waited for someone else to commence the evacuation of bladder and bowel (the latter, of course, a nuclear option only). Nature eventually won out, as it so often does, and someone broke, starting a procession of exposure and draining.

Though there were five urinals in that bathroom, only three were ever used. This was our Gap Rule: *Each boy, without exception, must maintain, at minimum, a urinal-length vacancy betwixt their gherkin and that of their peer while pickling the drains.* When we finally did unleash the dribbles, we kept our eyes high, chins raised, hands doing nothing but steering for fear of being labeled jerkers long before the D.A.R.E. officer told us the truth about masturbation. If one, three, and five were all in use and the situation became untenable, the perpetrator bypassed two and four and splashed toilet water in the stall next door. During the school day, we never wanted to get back to two-times-two as badly as when we were blasting urinal cakes.

We were a generation of bashful bladders, of shy zippers.

We were the Wang Shun.

Now, the Gap Rule wasn't a written or spoken rule. Despite our delinquency in acknowledging its presence, the Gap Rule was canon nevertheless, one of the few rules in our lives to which we stringently adhered whether at school, the movie theater, the mall, the Y, the arcade, or the bowling alley. I knew it. My friends, my antagonists, the kids I didn't even know, all of them knew it. It was instinctual, primal, akin to the inherent knowledge that fire can burn.

But the Gap Rule, I learned one afternoon, wasn't universally acknowledged.

*

Nothing Lombardis a coach's whistle like talent. I had enough of it on the baseball field to get a couple years of college paid for, but my real talent has always lain in the bowling alley, my average resting comfortably over two hundred for a while now. I took an interest in the game at a young age, coming upon my grandfather's bowling ball while searching for whatever treasure six-year-olds are in search of. The bowling ball bag was unzipped, the stained glass lamp my grandpa had made illuminating the words chiseled just above the finger holes: *Oh shit!,* a delicious and naughty coupling of syllables that I didn't realize my grandfather even knew how to put in succession. That night, he took me bowling for the first time, and later that fall I joined my first league. I quickly fell in love with the game, my fervor monetized by the quarters that rained from my aunt's pockets and into my coffers every time I spared or struck. I earned scholarships through bowling, won money through bowling, filled a trophy case, built friendships, and defended the game as sport to those

who categorized it as hobby.

The league coach recognized my passion early and took an interest in my progress. My coach, Jim, was kind and supportive, as knowledgeable about bowling as the D.A.R.E officer was about guns, literal and, as we learned, figurative. Jim, who owned the alley with his brother, was an optimist, quick to help, slow to criticize, and could bowl exceptionally well with either hand, an ambidextrous wonder that was as close to Barnum and Bailey as anything most of us had ever seen in person. He typically wore a polo, as most bowling coaches do, and pleated khakis, a pair of bowling shoes on his feet. Jim often had to squint down the lane to see what terror we laid upon the pins.

After league ended one Saturday, Jim asked me to join him in the banquet room. I followed without a murmur, unaware as to why I'd been summoned. Jim turned off the TV that had been tuned to the PBA and grabbed a whiteboard with a bowling lane on the surface. He plopped onto the end of the table, set the whiteboard across his lap, and asked me if I was serious about bowling, if I truly believed that I had a future in the game.

I believed I did and told him so.

"I do, too," he'd said.

Jim had taught us all a few things here and there, taking his time and judging which of us not only possessed talent, but desire. The advice he'd given previously was elementary, easy to digest in the moment—take a step to the right, hold the ball higher, slow down. In the banquet room, I quickly realized how much knowledge he'd been holding back. For thirty minutes, the terminology and strategies that flew out of his mouth like a Brunswick rolling seventeen MPH was vaguely familiar, but alien enough to show me I didn't know half of what I thought I did.

Rev rate. *Pushaway*. *Brooklyn. Carrydown*. *Urethane* (this one sounding like the *urethra* the D.A.R.E officer shot our way). Jim's mouth and eyes danced as he drew ball paths and diagrammed split angles and oil patterns. He spared nary a superlative. I'd never heard anyone speak so passionately about bowling, about much of anything really. He told tales with protagonists named Amleto Monacelli and Mika Koivuniemi, names that sounded more like Shakespearean antagonists than professional athletes. Instead of Michael Jordan, he spoke of Parker Bohn.

But at that moment, I cared little for Parker, Walter Ray, or the Dicks Ritger and Weber, nor did I conjure up much interest in their buckets, their boomers, or their beaks. All I cared about was getting out of the banquet room and into the bathroom. I had been on my way there when Jim stopped me and immediately regretted chugging Suicides for the previous two hours (the Suicide: a smorgasbord of cola, lemon-lime, root beer, and grapefruit sodas—along with their diet counterparts—squirted from the plastic udders of the soda gun into one glass devoid of ice). The bathroom was located just outside the banquet room, and I could hear its door opening and shutting and taunting as Jim waxed poetic, each second leaking off the clock and into my bladder. I nodded vigorously at everything he said, knowing that unfettered acceptance would allow the lesson to end more quickly than if I mixed in questions.

Finally: "Let's try some of these things next week."

"Definitely," I said and hurried from the banquet room. I took a sharp right and burst into the bathroom. My teammates and competitors had mostly departed by then; for this I was grateful, the Gap Rule null and void, the urinals and toilets unburdened with wang.

I hurried to the nearest of the two urinals, flipped down the elastic waistband of my sweatpants and unfurled. The urine boiled and singed my elimination system's final bend. I was moments from release when the bathroom door opened and Jim walked in.

I seized up.

Jim was near my father's age and raised during a time of less modesty. Back then, if I'm to believe my father and uncles and their friends, nudity ran roughshod in locker rooms, shyness living by a different moniker in the '60s and '70s. In the early '90s, a few inches worth of exposure had become taboo, the Gap Rule a byproduct of the negligence of modesty installed by our predecessors. My coach, a product of my father's generation, knew nothing of the Gap Rule, and so, with two open toilet stalls, he chose the vacancy to my right, saying nothing as he unbuckled. Unzipped. Unleashed.

There I stood, exposed physically, exposed emotionally, the two disparate halves of myself working in conjunction to dam up that which I yearned to send forth. My coach must have felt the awkwardness, too—from the sounds of things, he was also unable to go. Silently, we stood together, incontinent twins, eyes and chins as high as they could go, the two of us engaged in an impotent high noon showdown. Neither of was able to pull our trigger and neither wanted to yellow belly ourselves into zipping just yet.

And then—release.

But not from me. Jim was the lucky one and I could only partake in the relief vicariously, my mushroom cloud unwilling to explode within the proximity of another of its species. I thought about waiting Jim out, but could take it no longer.

"Thought I had to go," I mumbled and tucked myself back into my boxers, cinching the elastic of my sweatpants as tight as I could. "Guess not." I ran out of the bathroom as fast as I'd ran in. I was quickly out of the bowling alley, across the road, and inside the Wendy's down the block. I called my parents to pick me up there, went into the bathroom, locked the door behind me, and flushed. My dad went inside the bowling alley to pick up my bowling bag. I was too embarrassed to go.

*

Later that year, I had another issue releasing.

One week, I acquired the bowling equivalent of Steve Sax Syndrome. Sax was a major league second baseman in the '80s who suddenly became unable to make the routine throw to first base. He had the yips, and they became so prevalent that fans who sat behind first base began wearing helmets to the games to mock him.

My version of Steve Sax went like this: I could no longer make my approach. I would stand at the back of the lane, take a single step, and stop. It was like I was at school and the first one to enter the boys' room during bathroom breaks, freezing up because of my innate inability to perform in front of others. The *Oh shit!* above my grandfather's finger holes became my motto.

At first, my teammates mocked me, laughing and jeering and allowing me to join in on the tease, a masochistic brouhaha I happily employed to glaze over my embarrassment. Eventually, my inability to go became so prevalent that they stopped laughing, arriving at empathy. They diverted their eyes or went to get more Suicide every time the arrows pointed toward my name. Parents, who sat behind us each week like prison guards monitoring for good behavior, blushed and sighed and emitted just enough sympathy to jelly-leg my last bit of strength.

It all came to this: me standing at the back of the lane, ashamed, close to tears, waiting for the bowlers on either side of me to roll. I wanted to follow them, but my feet would not move. My knees shook plenty, however, and the sixteen-pound ball I palmed felt half the size of the lump in my throat. I prayed and begged, but still could not move.

And then—a savior.

For the first time since the awkwardness in the bathroom, Jim arrived by my side. Again, he stood to my right, placed his hands on his hips, and squinted down the alley to the pins that stood like upside-down exclamation points. He nodded, then put a hand on my shoulder and told me that he once had the same problem.

"Kept me out of the game for four years," he said. "I nearly gave up bowling."

This—this did not help. Around me, balls cracked pins, gutters swallowed the wayward, the jukebox bled out the last of its quarters. Suicides were swallowed. Hot dogs were destroyed. The arcade jangled with a thousand janky sound effects: *splatter-patter-pew-pew-pew; hut-hut, swish-swish, kaboom*. And my coach was telling me to quit.

I thought.

"But I got through it," Jim said, and I realized he was trying to help. "This problem you're having—it's fixable."

Jim told me to look at my feet. I did, past the ball in my hand, past my elastic waistband. "You're starting with your right, getting off balance, and taking too many steps. Start with your left and go."

"Just go?"

"Left first."

"Left?" I repeated.

"Yes. And then go."

So I did.

Jim went with me, a gap no wider than a thread between us, the two of us taking five steps as one.

And then, finally, I released.

Contributors

Brigitte Aflalo-Calderon is a self-taught artist who began painting two years ago. Her art is about shape and colors, and she usually starts her paintings with loose brush strokes of vivid colors that crisscross one another, diverge, and meet again. Her work finds its inspiration in her Moroccan roots. She has participated in juried exhibits and is due to participate in art shows scheduled for 2017. When she isn't painting, she writes and teaches painting classes in Montessori schools.

Brian Alvarado is a sonnet, opera, and craft beer enthusiast born and raised in the Bronx, New York. He has contributed poetry to Susquehanna University's *Rivercraft*, along with the literary journals *Contraposition*, *The Insomniac Propagandist*, and *DenimSkin*.

Anita Gangi Balkun received her M.F.A. from the University of Hartford in 2009, under the mentorship of Stephen Brown. Balkun participated in a mentorship critique with Barbara Grossman and completed a studio residency at the Farmington Valley Arts Center in 2012. She was also commissioned to create installations for City Wide Open Studios 2012 (ArtSpace New Haven) and for PARK(ing) Day Hartford 2013, 2014 & 2015 (Greater Hartford Arts Council and the Knox Parks Foundation). Balkun teaches at the Greater Hartford Academy of Art, and has her studio and home in West Hartford, Connecticut.

Devon Balwit is a poet and educator who lives in Portland, Oregon. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Birds Piled Loosely*, *drylandlit*, *Dying Dahlia Review*, *Ink Salt & Tears*, *Lalitamba*, *Leveler, Of(f) Course*, *Red Fez*, *The Cape Rock*, *The Fem*, *The Fog Machine*, *The New Verse News*, *The Prick of the Spindle*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *The Yellow Chair*, *Timberline Review*, *txt objx*, *vox poetica*, and *Vanilla Sex Magazine*.

Cristina J. Baptista is a Portuguese-American writer, educator, and bibliophile. Her work has appeared in *Adanna*, *Structo Magazine*, *DASH*, *The Cortland Review*, *CURA*, and elsewhere. Her full-length poetry collection *The Drowning Book* is forthcoming (Finishing Line Press, 2017). Recently, Cristina's poem "Kestrels" won Structo's Psalm Contest. She is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets award (2012) and winner of *The Baltimore Review*'s 2008 Poetry Contest. She holds a Ph.D. in English from Fordham University. Cristina currently teaches American Literature at a private school in Connecticut and, in 2014-15, created a collection of poetry about her experience as a 38th Voyager—one of 85 people in the world selected to travel on the 38th Voyage of the Charles W. Morgan, an 1841 wooden whale ship that is the last remaining one in the world. During this voyage, she served as a documenter of the Portuguese immigrant experience aboard whale ships.

Carol Barrett holds doctorates in both clinical psychology and creative writing. She coordinates the Creative Writing Certificate Program at Union Institute & University. Her books include *Calling in the Bones*, which won the Snyder Prize from Ashland Poetry Press. Her poems have appeared in many magazines and anthologies including *JAMA*, *Poetry International*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *The Women's Review of Books*. A former NEA Fellow in Poetry, she lives in Bend, Oregon.

Emily Boshkoff is a child psychologist currently living in Indianapolis, Indiana. She draws her inspiration from her patients, her personal life, and from the world at large (and what a large world it is). Her creative work has been featured in *Etchings*, *Edgz*, and *Hippocampus Magazine*.

Amanda S. Brahlek is currently an MFA candidate in poetry at McNeese State University. Her work has appeared in *Vector Press*, *Middle Gray*, and *Coastlines Literary Magazine* and is forthcoming in *Crab Orchard Review* and *Cossack Review*. She is the winner of the 2016 Allison Joseph Poetry Award through *Crab Orchard Review*.

Jennifer Davis Michael is Professor and Chair of English at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. Her poems have appeared in *Mezzo Cammin*, *The Unprecedented Review*, and the *Silver Birch Press New Voices Series*.

Alison Dyer has poetry and short stories published, or forthcoming, in *The Fiddlehead*, *Riddle Fence*, *Grain*, *The Newfoundland Quarterly*, *Rhythm Poetry Magazine*, *The Feathertale Review*, *The Nashwaak Review*, *Grimm Magazine*, *The Cuffer Anthology* and WDRC's *Phoenix Anthology*. Her debut poetry collection, *I'd Write the Sea like a Parlour Game* (Killick Press, Creative Book Publishing), will be released Spring 2017. Born in England, she now lives in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Connor Fenwick wants to celebrate the diversity of humanity and aid humanity by creating safe spaces in which people are comfortable, candid, and spontaneous with their interactions. He is a member of the National Art Honor Society, a Scholastic Art Awards gold key recipient, and his portfolio "Lifescapes of Identity" received an AP Studio Art score of 5. He currently studies photography, writing, and performance art at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Brent Fisk is a writer from Bowling Green, Kentucky with over 300 poems, essays, and short stories published so far. He has a B.A. in English Literature, and an M.A. in Creative Writing from WKU.

Karen Fitzgerald wanted to be a physics professor and then a writer, someone who had the correct formulas and knew the workings of things. It took her over thirty years to figure out her passion involves playing with bits of things normal people throw away and making art that asks more questions than it answers.

Siaara Freeman is the Lake Erie Siren. She is growing her afro so tall God mistakes it for a microphone and speaks into her. She is the founder of *Wusgood.black Magazine* and an editor at *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*. She is also a three-time nominee for Best of the Net, as well as a 2016 Best New Poets nominee.

Christian Anton Gerard's first book of poems is *Wilmot Here, Collect For Stella* (WordTech, CW Books imprint, 2014). He's received Pushcart Prize nominations, scholarships from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and an Academy of American Poets Prize. Some of Gerard's recent poems appear or are forthcoming in *storySouth*, *Post Road*, *Diode*, *Orion*, *The Collagist*, and *Thrush*. Gerard is an Assistant Professor of English, Rhetoric, and Writing at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith.

Monique Gagnon German has poems that have appeared in over 25 journals and anthologies, including *Rosebud*, *California Quarterly*, *The Ledge*, *The Sierra Nevada Review*, *Ragazine*, *Xenith*, *Atticus Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Off the Coast*, *Occupoetry*, and *Gingerbread House*. Her book, *Despite the Bars*, was selected as a finalist for the 2015 *Quercus Review* Book Prize. She currently volunteers in elementary school classes, helping foster a love of reading and writing when she can.

Arielle Hebert is seeking an MFA in poetry at North Carolina State University. She was a semi-finalist for the 2016 Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry hosted by *Nimrod International Journal of Poetry and Prose*.

Sandra Hosking is a playwright whose works have been performed across the U.S. and internationally. She served as a resident playwright at Stage Left Theatre and Spokane Civic Theatre. A member of the Dramatists Guild of America, she holds an M.F.A. in theatre from the University of Idaho and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Eastern Washington University. Hosking is a former journalist and photographer, and she currently is an editor for a global corporation based in Spokane, Washington.

Susan Kress has published a book with the University of Virginia Press (hardback and paperback) as well as essays in such magazines as *Salmagundi*, *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, and *Studies in Jewish American Literature and Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. She is now devoting all her time to writing poetry and is beginning to be published. Born in England, she has her Ph.D. from Cambridge University and taught for many years in the English Department of Skidmore College.

Sandhya Krishnakumar lives in Amsterdam with her husband. A teacher of French for many years at various Alliance Française centres in India, she currently spends her time reading, writing, learning languages, and looking for excuses to give shape to the things that touch her, which is invariably everything around her.

Jayne Marek earned her MFA from The University of Notre Dame, has received two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and two Pushcart Prize nominations. She lives in Washington, near the wild and beautiful coast. Her poetry and art photos appear in publications such as *Spillway*, *Camas*, *New Mexico Review*, *Blast Furnace*, *Gravel*, *Gyroscope*, *Panoply*, *Flying Island*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Lantern Journal*, and *Siren*. She is author of the chapbook *Imposition of Form on the Natural World* (Finishing Line Press, 2013) and co-author of *Company of Women: New and Selected Poems* (Chatter House, 2013). Her first full-length book of poems, *In and Out of Rough Water*, will appear in December 2016.

Marsha Mathews is an American writer and a Professor of English at Dalton State College, in Dalton, Georgia. Her fourth book, *Growing Up with Pigtails*, has just been released by Aldrich Press. Marsha's writing appears in literary journals such as *Fourth River*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Pembroke*, *Raleigh Review*, *Sukoon*, and in numerous anthologies. Marsha received the Orlando Prize for Flash Fiction in 2013 and is working on a collection called *Beauty Bound* that explores the human desire for and entrapment of beauty.

Deirdre Maultsaid has been published in *The Barcelona Review*, *Canadian Women's Studies*, *The Danforth Review*, *Other Voices*, *Pif*, *Prairie Fire*, *The Puritan*, *The Southern Cross Review*, and anthologies by Ripple Effect Press and others. Her essay "The sun knows what it does" appeared in the well-reviewed anthology *Double Lives* (McGill-Queens University Press).

Lindsay Mercer has studied chemistry, art, and philosophy in formal institutions, and countless other fields in informal conversations and meetings. She has apprenticed under a natural dyer, printed some chapbooks on her idol, Phil Ochs, and enjoys sewing leaves into hymnals.

Bryan Miller is the Upper School English teacher at Village Academy, a small college preparatory school in Ohio. On the side, he tutors and freelance edits and loves the twin crafts of poetry and creative nonfiction. He earned his MA in Literature from the University of Kentucky in 2002 and a BA in Creative Writing and Poetry from Murray State University in 1995.

Judith H. Montgomery lives in Bend, Oregon. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *Ars Medica*, *Cimarron Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *So to Speak*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among other journals, as well as in a number of anthologies. Her chapbook, *Passion*, received the 2000 Oregon Book Award for poetry. Her second collection, *Red Jess*, appeared in February 2006 from Cherry Grove Collections; her second chapbook, *Pulse & Constellation*, was a finalist for the Finishing Line Press Competition and appeared in 2007 from the Press. She is working on two new manuscripts, *Litany for Bloom and Wound* and *Mutable Flame*.

Matt Muilenburg teaches at the University of Dubuque. His prose has been featured in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Storm Cellar*, *Superstition Review*, *New Plains Review*, *South85 Journal*, and others. A graduate of the Wichita State University MFA program, Matt lives in Iowa near the Field of Dreams movie site.

Susan Pittman is now working on her own poetry and fiction, after full-time careers in journalism and education. She has read poetry at open mics in Boston and New York, and published in *Chronogram*. She holds a BFA from Emerson College and has studied at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown.

Katerina Pravdivaia is a Toronto-based visual artist working in mixed media. She is fascinated by the intrinsic workings of the human mind and spirit, and explores these themes through portraiture. Katerina is also deeply passionate about animal conservation and creates artwork uniting human and non-human animals to encourage endangered species conservation. In 2015, Pravdivaia received the honor of the Murray Jacob Clerkson Award for her outstanding merit as an emerging artist and proven contribution to the arts community. It is through her art and compassionate lifestyle that Pravdivaia is determined to become a powerful voice for those that are in dire need of one. Her artwork has been featured in many solo and group shows, with several new series currently coming to life, including a large body of work to be revealed in her third solo show Dancing Your Animal in 2017.

Laura Schaffer is currently pursuing a master's degree at Appalachian State University. After earning her B.A. in Liberal Studies at the University of Notre Dame, she worked for four years as a high school English Teacher and English Department Chair at Saint Joseph Academy in San Marcos, California. A native east-coaster, she is eager to continue her vocation as a writer, educator, and lifelong learner in the beautiful North Carolina mountains.

Heidi Seaborn was an accomplished poet in her youth before she took a very long break. After three decades, three kids, four marriages, 27 moves and a business career, she started writing again with the advantage of all that experience. Living in Seattle, she currently benefits from David Wagoner's mentorship. Her poetry has or will appear in *Gold Man Review*, *Flying South 2016 Anthology*, *Windfall*, *Fredericksburg Literary and Art Review*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *The Voices Project*, *The Ice Dream Anthology* and elsewhere.

Beth Sherman received an MFA in creative writing from Queens College, where she teaches in the English department. Her fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *The Portland Review*, *KYSO*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *Sandy River Review*, *Blue Lyra Review*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Panoplyzine*, *Delmarva Review*, and *Rappahannock Review*. Her poetry has been published in *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Hartskill Review*, *Lime Hawk*, *Synecdoche*, *Gyroscope*, and *The Evansville Review*, which nominated her poem "Minor Planets" for a Pushcart Prize this year. She has also written five mystery novels.

Kiarra Lynn Smith is a visual and literary artist. Her artwork has been exhibited in multiple venues and her poems have been published in various journals. Smith was commissioned to create a mural for First Student Bus Company in 2004, a year which marked her beginning of independently illustrating books. She was a featured artist at the 20th "Meet the Artists" exhibition in Indianapolis and began studying at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 2008. She graduated from Culver-Stockton College with a degree in English and Art in 2013. Smith wrote, illustrated, and published *Collective Face: a Series of Quatrains on Community Building*, as well as the co-written book *Looking for an Angel: the Story of Christian Taylor Ferguson*. Smith plans to continue her career as an illustrator and to use her projects to invigorate the minds of children and young adults.

Kelly Terwilliger's chapbook, *A Glimpse of Oranges*, was published by Finishing Line Press. A full-length collection is forthcoming in 2017 with Airlie Press. Kelly divides her time between the Willamette Valley and the Oregon coast.

Allison Thorpe is a writer from Lexington, Kentucky. Her latest chapbook is *Dorothy's Glasses* (Finishing Line Press). Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *So to Speak*, *Crab Fat*, *The Corvus Review*, *Dead Mule School of Literature*, *Bop Dead City*, *Grasslimb Literary Journal*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and *Forgotten Women* (a Grayson Books anthology).

Anna Lowe Weber is from Louisiana but currently lives in Huntsville, Alabama, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. She holds an MFA from Purdue University, and previous work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Iowa Review*, *Florida Review*, *Rattle*, *Ascent*, *Ninth Letter*, and others. Her chapbook, *Blessing For the Unborn*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Ramsay Wise is motivated by an empty canvas, broad archetypal subjects, and unconventional application techniques. His paintings have shown at Sager/Braudis Gallery and Dog Master Distillery in Columbia, Missouri, at the Frank and Billie Railton Gallery in The Etta and Joseph Miller Performing Arts Center in Jefferson City, Missouri, and at Fayetteville Underground in Fayetteville, Arkansas. His paintings can also be seen in recent issues of *Mud Season Review*, *The Sonder Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, and *Columbia Journal*. Wise teaches film studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia and English at Missouri University of Science and Technology.

Jenny Wong spends 40 hours a week in a downtown high-rise attempting to put her computer science degree to good use. The gaps in between are filled with a love of words, video games, and travel.

Susan Yount is the Editor and Publisher of Arsenic Lobster, works fulltime at the Associated Press, teaches online poetry workshops at The Poetry Barn, and is the founder of Misty Publications. In her spare time she moonlights as madam for the Chicago Poetry Bordello. She has two poetry chapbooks, *House on Fire* (Blood Pudding Press, 2014) and *Catastrophe Theory* (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2012). She is a self-taught artist, book designer, and publisher. Her collage work has been published or is forthcoming at *Glint Literary Journal*, *Escape Into Life*, *Leopards and Limes*, *Masque and Spectacle*, and elsewhere.

Kit Zak and her husband moved to Lewes, Delaware following her teaching career. To her utter delight, she found herself in a writing community. In 2015 Kit was published in five anthologies, as well as *The Lyric*, *California Quarterly*, *Portage*, *New Verse News*, *Your Daily Poem*. She also has poems forthcoming in *Albatross* and *Earth's Daughters*. She has been chosen three times to work with the poet laureate of Delaware.

Joyce Zhou attends Neuqua Valley High School in Illinois. She has been recognized by the Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards and serves as a national editor for Polyphony HS.

NEXT UP

Issue No. 14
Spring 2017

3Elements:
Husk, Echo, Quell

Due January 31, 2017

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.

Staff - 3Elements Review

Mikaela Shea is in her thesis hours of her MFA at Columbia College Chicago and was recently a writer-in-residence at Ragdale Foundation. She has published stories in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Copperfield Review*, *Waypoints Magazine*, *Foliate Oak*, *Hypertext Magazine*, *Paragraph Planet*, *Vagina: The Zine*, Columbia College's annual *Story Week Reader*, as well as a children's book at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Mikaela is currently writing a novel and is Editor-in-Chief of *3Elements Review*. @mikaelashea.

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

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

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

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

Jen Corrigan is an editorial intern at the North American Review. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Heather*; *Apocrypha and Abstractions*; *Yellow Chair Review*; *The Gambler*; *Change Seven Magazine*; *Hypertext Magazine*; *Cease, Cows*; and elsewhere. She has been shortlisted for the Mash Stories quarterly flash fiction competition. Visit her at jencorrigan.wordpress.com.

Elizabeth O'Connell-Thompson is a Chicago-based poet and artist. As the Literary Coordinator for the CHIPRC she leads the Wasted Pages Writers' Workshop. Her photography has been published in or is forthcoming from *The Fourth River*, *Persephone's Daughters*, and *The Histories & Humanities Journal*, among others. Please send your thoughts and spooky chainmail to EOTwrites.com

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

End

© 2017 3Elements Literary Review

Back to TOC