

THE DANDELION REVIEW

Issue 2
2018

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Issue 2: 2018
The Dandelion Review
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The Dandelion Review seeks to publish women and writers on the lgbtqiaa+ spectrum. The magazine is published at least once a year. Submission requirements can be found on the website: www.thedandelionreview.com

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Dandelions,

I am, once again, happy to be writing to you. After a year of political upheaval, I am grateful to have art to heal our hearts. The Dandelion Review still seeks to provide space for the stories that don't seem to find homes in other publications, or stories that want to live with some other beautiful dandelions.

In this issue, there is poetry that explores the nuance of life and death, and there are essays that do this as well. I hope that these pieces speak to your soul as they did mine.

Upcoming, The Dandelion Review will publish a number of chapbooks, and has opened its call for submissions to women and any person who identifies on the lgbtqiaa spectrum. Please keep sending your work here, and let your fellow writers know about us too. We will keep carving out this space together.

Cheers to reading and writing!

-s-

Sarah Sandman
Founding Editor
The Dandelion Review

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POETRY

Write a Poem About TATTOO Without Using The Word Tattoo Or I
by LUIS LOPEZ-MALDONADO

Piñatas were evil before our time
in times when they were hung
like humans in celebration
to the Aztec God Huitzilopochtli,

stressed leather against bronze skin
gold and turquoise drowning
arms and legs and head,

secrets marked on faces
lines intersecting chiseled
jaw and bone, circles stamped
around nipples and bellybutton,

my people pushing heads
down pyramids
one thousand steps
going up toward heaven
toward the sun,

my patria hidden below
angel wings against
brown back,
hidden between heart
and ribs and blood:

growth death decay birth
the scripture of life
scratched into flesh,
the pain no where to be found
only the smell of fresh ink
and burning skin
only the smell of fresh ink
and burning skin.

WOMAN RAPED 43,200 TIMES SPEAKS ABOUT MEXICO'S
HUMAN TRAFFICKING RINGS

For Karla Jacinto

@ 12 I thought I found pimp prince charming
he bought me clothes, told me I was pretty,
but 30 men a day 7 days a week

& I cried & they laughed, fucked me
slapped me spit on me when they finished,
holidays disappeared, days off too
& nothing flew up in the blue, empty sky
no birds sung no bees buzzed nada in sight
& I gave birth to a little girl @ 15,

spread my legs in Guadalajara
spread my legs in Michoacán
spread my legs in places I don't remember,
but my heart grew cold my faith too
& @ 16 God heard me finally found me

bruised eyes vagina an inverted orchid
lips & mouth a tired old sad lady
but the dirt under my fingernails
will vanish & my frown will learn
how to smile once more, praying
to La Virgen De Guadalupe
asking to erase this tender tender hate
running through my veins, choking
me @ night when the birds cry.

HUNNY

Inspired by James Wright's, "Honey"

*

Fridays @ our place =
 staying up & looking
 into each other's eyes
 like frozen portraits hung
 from library's wall.
 Chocolate skin
 against Mexican skin
 blended into new color.
 In bed my head
 on his voluptuous chest tracing
 his mother's face
 with my index finger.
 We cuddled under white sheets
 open window, hearing
 traffic from the Hollywood freeway.
 He would ask if I wanted a smoke
 so we would share
 a Virginia Slim
 & sit outside
 on his balcony
 looking up to the hidden stars—
 smog hiding dead beams
 of illumination.

*

Crack addict. High-school dropout.
 Raped
 @ age 5 by his father—
 shadows from the past
 scars
 spilling when he drank
 too much,
 Scotch.
 Whiskey.
 Tequila.

Saturday mornings
our legs intertwined
like spaghetti,
I miss that.

*

Marcus. Gone
with the wave
of the incurable disease,
untamed monster.
All I have left now of him
are photographs
hidden in my room
of green & blue walls,
an occasional memory
when I sleep
in another black man's
bed,
or a blurred face
when I hear the term:
hunny.

AT THE DEAD OF NIGHT I SPEAK

God sees that I stand in the sun
 raspado half-eaten
 fingers beaten beaten beaten
 from Tindering too much
 from swiping left & right
 trying to find the next best thing
 but nothing, except the leafless
 trees around mí, the undergrads
 trying to get to class on skateboards
 & bikes, squirrels nibbling
 on whatever the fuck they find

Forgive me, God, but I want to piss on you
 goldenshower you make you see what I see:
 last night I went hunting for tall black men
 & I was wide & fat filled w/ his cum
 wethole throbbing with satisfaction,
 I made myself object, detodos modos
 I am a brownman w/ multiple degrees

Dios, porque corro de la muerte?
 & I pinch the sun between two fingers
 carveout the names of the dead
 whisper to the pregnant moon
 about you you you,
 & across the world our names are written
 inwater washed by the crashing waves @ sea:
 the sky the color of sky.

TWO WAYS TO DIE IN THESE WOODS
by BEVERLY ARMY WILLIAMS

Succumb.
Be overcome.

Take, for example, two birds: dead.

The first lies
perfect
on the bank of the beaver pond
as though it fell
from a curious hiker's pocket.

I see it
the moment
before I step onto the wobbly, six-inch wide foot bridge.

I wonder,
was it the sudden frost?
Can't bring myself to photograph
the dead bird to make identification easier, so I memorize
the curve of its barite white breast,
the burnt sienna wing
and tail tipped with rippled stripes
the prober beak, open
 as if to gasp
at the final effort of living.

The husky tugs
me to join him on the bridge, I turn
the bird over, look for a mark
for blood.

The bird, not yet stiff,
recently

succumbed.

Contrast
with the gray confetti
of feathers
scattered
on the upended red oak's tangled roots.
Some feathers small
like the ones that stuff my pillow,
some nearly as long as my ring finger.

No blood.
No body
to tell the tale
or at least confirm
whose feathers fluttered on this plucking log
as talons pierced organs.

A bigger bird—goshawk, barred owl, crow

feasted

on the little bird-
warbler
or phoebe.

Overcome.

The dead deserve
the living to recognize their own.

LONG BEFORE

I learned to swim
 to hold my breath, blow bubbles
 paddle or crawl.
 Long before I found ease in the ocean
 craved the pulse of cold brook water releasing energy
 from stones and earth

long, long before
 my sleep drew me to deserts
 to cliffs that tumbled
 one
 upon
 the other.
 Expanses of garnet gneiss rippled
 golden,
 dangerous to the me that was not me
 the me afraid,
 petrified.
 Impossible leap the only escape
 from unseen dream assailants.

At once lapis water
 clear as air
 the morning after a midnight thunderstorm
 offered refuge.

Creatures that were not mermaids, not men
 not Ophelias or Idas, Virginias, or martyrs of Solway,
 not Ashrays, for the sun burned
 and they did not melt,
 lithe like seaweed, beckoned me
 underwater

to join hands as they lay

below the surface.

STATE OF RED

by SHANLEY WELLS-RAU

At the barbed wire down the road, I see an Angus bull
facing sunset. In a moment of fence line quiet, he is apart
from his pasture grazing herd, nostrils open, watching.
I, too, turn west and face pale orange layers
atop deep-rage umber. Switchgrass tints purple.
The dirt's on fire. This land, where several greats
of grandparents disembarked to swelter,
unlike the cool northern prairies
of their heritage—genetic memories of removal
to No Man's Land before it became Free Land
for the taking. Rounded up and herded
into the modern world, for their own good, and now,
my sunset reverie is split by gun fire. My neighbors
walk through these days with an anger to the heel,
a scrim of fear so densely woven, they can't see past
their own fury. To assuage, they load up on firearms
and drive pickup trucks to the sandy river bank,
where they shoot nine millimeters at a future already here.
I turn back to the road and cross onto my own land, pulling
the drooped metal gate closed, wrapping the rusted chain,
I wiggle the corroded padlock into place.
It locks with a click.

WALKING THE RIVER BLUFF

Coyotes chatter along the waterless river—
sandy bottoms now on top. Dam controls,
drought, dry summers, dry winters, dry
springs leave us fish ribs, broken glass,
turkey vultures, maybe a mirage of water
down the way, if the sun's willing
to cook up visions. A brown lake somewhere
needs height for sailboats, speedboats,
marinas—so our stretch of river beaches itself.
Bankside willows lean in, shoulders hunched.
Water moccasins aren't so scary dewatered
in the dust. Coyotes yip, their gossip echoes
the tree line. My old dog doesn't even look up
from snuffling the ground. She's not thirsty.

I KEEP LOOKING FOR THE BLACK LAB WHO'S BEEN DEAD
SINCE JUNE

Facebook forces a photo my way:
a discarded German Shepherd,
elegant nose dark in the kennel's corner,
back turned from a bone-shaped treat.
Dear Liz laughs over a full-bodied red
that time in Chicago, none of us knew
cancer was already killing her. Losses dislodge
from my gut for a howling ride north, clutching
my throat. Mom says, "It's okay, kiddo,"
but even her departure was unplanned.
One week she walked cobblestones in Rome,
by Saturday, dead. My grandmother
rolls by, smiling from her wheelchair.
She's the one who died
the same day as Columbine, when
we learned children could kill
classmates and teachers.
Each stacks one upon the other
like the turtle who balances
the world on her helmet of a shell
standing on the shell of a turtle
who stands on the shell
of a turtle. It's turtles
all the way down.

HEAVINESS, SCYTHER, AND BLACKBERRY

I'm the villain of this story
sneaking in with clippers
to whack hooked brambles
stuck to my history like a Saturday
afternoon movie plotline where
someone's wrapped in sham,
All the better to eat you with, my dear.
There must be something in my eye
not a tear, just a sickle blade jutting
from my duct. As I speak ill of the dead,
let them seethe afterwards. I'll be
the heavy. I'll show my teeth widely,
peppered with berry seeds stuck between
molars like the wolf with a paw thorn.
I'll grind and clench those blackberries
bitter in my mouth until I am cloaked
from the stain of it. Are you hungry?
Do you want a bite? My cobbler cools
on the windowsill.

DENT ISLAND

by NANCY HUXTABLE MOHR

People are moving quietly before dawn,
pulling on their gear. Still sleepy.
A pulse comes from tethered boats under
September's slate fog at the high tide-
pummeled shore. Guides wait with their burly
smell of bacon and coffee, kick cracks in the dock
caulked with seed pods and fish scales.

At seven, the grid of boats leaves the dock
and piney shadows while a wet hazy moon-skin
still sticks to the sky. Everyone drops lines.
Silvery chinooks wait for the ebb tide to grab
the florescent hootchies while eagles swoop
from bristled pines to feed from the salty inlets.
People shout when anyone brings in a fish.

One couple drifts in their boat apart from others,
almost in a spell, hunched over their lines.
Their boat hugs the folds of the shore. Silent.
Fishless. Finally back to the dock. Content?
The guide is quiet too. Not wanting to divulge
a secret? Ashamed of no fish? Or like them,
certain of the evidence of things unseen.

THE MOWER

Starting in May, my sister spends a day each week mowing the graveyard. Fiddleheads coil while grass, yellowed with dandelions, yields to her mower blades as her machine swerves around friends and relatives in welcomed rest. Their soul's destinations of heaven or hell still unknown. Perhaps they still lie astonished in their chambers, while she moves among the ancestors and newly buried. She leaves fresh flowers for a forgotten one and blows a kiss to grandmothers whose stories we learned around our table. Lengthy conversations with our parents under their lids of earth mix with a sweetness of cut grass and lilac. She reads what's written—wars fought, a child's life shortened, biblical quotes, marriages. For a few hours, she listens as they gather weightless—no longer waiting, muddled and unheard.

MAKING LOVE WITH DUCT TAPE

The way he asked me to bed. Sweet Jesus,
he could make me forget day from night,
syringes and children

I duct-taped my pantyhose to hold
them up in the heat. No matter.
Nothing was ruined. We drank more bourbon.

Sweat soaked the mattress. God, we were hot.
Like now, hot prison bars, curdled cement.
He was a poet in a way too. Confused.

Soft and hard. Hot and cold.
Let me put it this way. I wanted cars
to run me over when he was done with me.

THE EAST END

Far east end of the house, next to the attic
and its trunks of treasure, long hall to our parents,
three siblings and two hired men in between.

Light and dark entered our room first.
Spring rains through cracks in windows,
snow inside sills in winter. Legions of wasps.

We quarreled over quilts in a heatless room,
curled like kittens for warmth, heard secrets
and worries of adults through a stove vent.

We shared measles, chicken pox, mumps.
We locked arms on Christmas morning
and bolted down the stairs together.

Sometimes we strung a barrier between teenage
territories, fought over the only white blouse,
screamed over starched skirt crinolines.

And nothing, no manner of out-flung hopes in years
ahead, or deep hurts hurled over the wires, nothing
perished the tremendous hold of that room's clarity.

GOODBYE
by SERGIO A. ORTIZ

1. Of Illusion

You wrote: *D e s i r e*
in the tablet of my heart
I walked
for days and days
crazy aromatized and sad.

2. Of Night

In the loving night, I grieve.
I pity his secret, my secret,
I interrogate him in my blood for a long, long time.
He doesn't answer
and does like my mother, who closes her eyes without listening to me.

3. Of Goodbyes

It's not to be said.
It comes to our eyes,
to our hands. Trembles, resists.
You say you'll wait—you wait—from then until
And know goodbyes are useless and sad.

THE SQUARE ROOT OF LOVE

If I'm told
you're on the other side
of a bridge,
strange as it may seem,
please, what is the bridge that separates
your life from mine.

In what black hour, what rainy city,
what world without light, is that bridge
and I will cross it.

No matter the goal or the course,
or the sun, which was light and whip
of that day's journey.
No matter the sweat, the thirst,
the clumsy tired steps.
The round trip.

Even the landscape is not important,
nor the orange earth, the green of alpines,
the turquoise sea, the gray stones
of borders and millennial defenses.

When I go to love
I have poppies on my lips
and a spark of fire in my gaze.
I wire and garner red roses.
Red, the mirror of my darkened bedroom.

When I return from love, withered,
rejected, guilty, or simply absurd,
I arrive pale, and very cold.
Pupils rolled over the top of my eyes,
white blood cells in the clouds,
a skeleton and its defeat.

But I keep coming back.

LISTEN WITHOUT PREJUDICE

It's December and it snows
with the voice of George Michael.
The apartment is a giant bed
where the hard parts of love are covered.

The mattress in my bedroom is gutted.
There are nights overflowing in the ashtrays.

He clasps his hands and a bird appears on the wall.
Look at this elephant walk, she laughs, and repeats.
He rolls another cigarette and changes channels.

God is spoken. Death.
Beneath the sheets there are attentive knees.
He reads stories with his blood on fire.
She falls asleep just before she cries.
It's the voice of George Michael snowing.
Clothes hang in the soul of the two.
They look at each other
as if they've just returned from a party.

Time does not understand these things.
For him they're all animals.
They all have lessons to learn.
On a Friday, there's a crack in the air.
The back door is wide open.

George Michael lies silent in a drawer.
That's how it had to be. He wonders why
he no longer frequents certain places.
And he's suddenly still, especially when
he hears tiny steps in the ceiling.
He recalls the rushed tone of his words:
Winter is December and it snows like his voice.

A HAIL MARY

We buried you yesterday.
 We threw dirt on you yesterday.
 You were placed in the ground
 surrounded by earth yesterday.

*Generous Mother of the dead,
 mother earth, mother vagina of frost,
 arms of weather, lap of wind,
 nest of night, mother of death,
 pick him up, strip him, take him,
 save him, finish him.*

I've been watching you at night
 above the marble, inside your little house.
 One day with no eyes, no nose, no ears,
 another day without a throat,
 the skin on your forehead cracking, sinking,
 obscuring the wheat field of your reeds.
 All of you submerged in moisture and gases,
 making your waste, (your disorder, your soul).

Your flesh more wood than your bones
 more bones than anything else.
 Wet land where your mouth was,
 rotten air, annihilated light.
 Bubbles under the leaves of water.
 Sunday flowers two meters' above,
 they want to kiss you, but nothing happens.

NARCISSUS'S DEATH

Narcissus, Narcissus,
 the antlers of the murdered deer,
 fish, flames, flutes, are nibbled fingers.
 Lips are paths, sad flames, waves biting hips.

Cold fish of the green, air in the mirrors
 without stretch marks, flocks of pigeons
 hidden in the dead throat, daughter
 of the arrow and the swan,
 seashell in the wave, uninterested cloud,
 foam hangs from the eyes,
 not offered marmoreal drop,
 a heron needs to wander!

You hear fruit like screams in the snow,
 the secret in converted geraniums.
 Silk whiteness ascending spilled lips,
 open oblivion to the islands. Swords and
 eyelashes surrender to the dream,
 render the mirror on an impure seashore.
 Moist lips not on the seashell search
 for the straight thread. They are slaves
 of dry contours. The air bites the litmus
 that changes its sound
 into blond litmus of salt lime.

If he goes through the mirror,
 the waters that stir the ears boil.
 If he leans on its edge or on his forehead
 the centurion gouges his side.
 If he recites, bees penetrate his gaze
 and the letters inside the dream frown.

Airwaves wrap the albino secret,
 the harpooned skin coloring mirrors
 of memory, the minute of silence.
 It transverses endless whiteness

in the dry flames and drizzled leaves.
Uncreated bees bite the wake of his ship,
demand they be given the gunwale.
This is how the mirror found out
Narcissus took to the sky in the middle
of high water without wings.

MILL RACE, RIVER GOYT
for L.
by ANNE BRITTING OLESON

The gorge is alive and roaring
with the April violence of water
frothing against the stonework.
Weak sun, cold air,
your chin tucked into your scarf,
the breeze tangling your hair
glinting in the silver strands.

You grasp the rail like a
lifeline, and below: a torrent,
the river shouting the curses
I feel welling in my own chest.
Committing you to memory
is the only commitment left:
I study the curve of your jaw,
the flat gray of your eyes,
lifting now to the arched bridge
over which the evening train
will carry you away.

MOM

by AMANDA STEELE

You are the lime green color that we painted the upstairs bathroom.
The smell of Coco Chanel that dad bought at Christmas,
A purple Adidas shirt from Target.
You are the “you look just like her.” I resent this
as a I want to own myself, want to be the
dark, heavy rebel to your light, bright good girl.

But I press my fingers, pulling the skin on my face,
staring in the mirror. The same oval face,
soft jawline. A gold ring, an explosion of marigold
in both of our eyes.

You are the martyr. The widowed mother.
The voice in the back of my head that
I should be more responsible. I can't be
Honest, chaste, benevolent at all times
and in all things and in all places
like you. I must taste forbidden fruits.
Drink macchiato and margaritas
and go way past second base with people
I never intend to marry.
You are the “I never went to grad school because
I knew I should marry your dad.”
Am I to bear the weight? Am I
the reason for so much lost potential?

GREEDY

I want to drink from warm, never-ending fountains
at the center of it all.

Sweet nectar of pomegranate and peach
dripping from the corners of my mouth until
I lick every drop with my long, forked tongue.

I want to feast on overflowing flesh, a waterfall of
lust and desire swallowed whole and taken
deeper and deeper into my sorcery. My nails leaving hidden,
scarlet trails for him to journey into when I am gone.

I am insatiable.
Give them all to me.
Separately and together. A tangle of limbs,
A baobab tree, bodies melded into one,
Let me taste, taste, touch.
I need to drown in the beauty of them all.

I SHOULD HAVE SAID
by COURTNEY LEBLANC

When you flipped
on the light, blanketed
our bedroom with brightness
after you'd read the emails
between him and me.

When I baked
a cake and texted another and you
played video games till 3am.

When you shoved
the coffee table, sent my collection
of sea glass swimming, bits of blue and green,
a tsunami swirling around us.

When you read my diary,
learned the names of every boy
and every girl I'd ever kissed—
sometimes more than one
in a single day—but assured me
you still loved me anyway.

When you asked if I'd get rid
of the dog when you moved out.
As if she were as easy to replace
as you.

I should have said no
when you asked.

HOW HARD IS IT TO WRITE A LOVE POEM?
after Sholeh Wolpe

I ask for another pain pill and you get out of bed
to fetch it. It's 2am, the world asleep while my pain

marches on. I want to write a love poem.
The next morning dawns bright,

the sun unaware of my midnight
battles and you deliver coffee

with a concerned smile. I assure you
I'm better though better has become a degree

above pain so intense a railroad
spike competes for its name.

I listen to my newest doctor's explanation – never
a real diagnosis, never an end to the chain gang

that works overtime in my head.
Just a new prescription, more pills to pop.

We drudge through this existence till finally,
relief. I try to thank you and you look at me bewildered.

What else could I do? you ask. In that moment
I know I love you more

than I love the medicine that keeps the screaming
at bay. In that moment I think

of headaches as trials and relief as gratitude
and your support as your love poem to me.

I HAVEN'T BLED

in months—a mix
of medicine and years
of manic running.

When we lost the election
I yearned
for blood to rush from me
and purge
the seed of hope that had grown
inside. Instead
the only thing that flowed
were tears.

I went to work the next
day, eyes swollen,
tampons in my purse
for anyone who might
need them.

IT'S MIDNIGHT

You're sitting on my couch and I'm walking my dog. It's midnight and you're inside looking at the pictures that hang on my walls and the rugs on my floor. It's midnight on a Thursday and I'm walking my dog and you're waiting inside for me to return. Maybe I shouldn't have brought you home. Maybe I shouldn't have kissed you in the back of a cab. It's midnight and I'm wondering if it was fate or serendipity or tequila that brought us together. I wonder if you'll be asleep on my couch when I return. I wonder if I want you to be asleep. It's midnight and I'm walking up my front steps and opening the door. You stand and kiss me. It's midnight.

MORNING EVASION
by SUZANNE COTTRELL

Partially clothed
Seemingly lost in thought
Like her cream ruffled blouse
Hidden in her cluttered closet
Staring out her bedroom window

The sunlight warming her skin
Imagining herself lying on
An exotic, tropical beach
Stalled in her morning preparation
Challenged by dwindling minutes
And her state of mind

A momentary lapse of focus
Or an attempt to avoid
The daily, office pandemonium
Startled by her phone's ring tone
Then a voice inquiring,
"Where are you?"
But she's not quite sure

TOWARDS TAO
by CHANGMING YUAN

With a storm
With a gull
With your breath

Goes the thought
With a vague vision
Beyond the bogland

With your heart
Hawking aloud in the wild
With dripping blood

An unformed concept
A shoal of consciousness
Bubbling with feeling

With a photon
With a quantum
With your mind concentrated
On a twisted other

SHARK WEATHER
by FRANCES BADGETT

Crush me sideways, break the birdsong
from the beak of the morning, quiet now.
Palms slap each other, curtains float.

We heard secrets in the soft waves,
in the tiny pebbles that fill the sand.
A wedding bower dug deep
blows over. Bamboo and peach
ribbon away. Feet pressmelt here.
The last gull pecks a shell apart.

The sky chars. The flash against it
clear streaks. And now, yes, the
quiet release of the hurricane howl.
Everything is legs up, everything
is over. It's all sigh and crackle now.
Water surge and bent against it all,
a bride's bouquet in the Royal Palm

china cracks. Breakfast scatters.
Sharks wait for their chance
to swim our street, tireless
even after all that wind.

SHE REACHES FOR THE T-REX

What fragile beauty of scattered bone and lost flesh, how poised
your spine by rod and screw. Too young to say your name,
she reaches for your jaw, longing to touch the sharp point
of your bottom tooth. Designed for ripping meat,
the glued-in replicas gnash air. Her fingertip falls short,
but she can still conjure the tooth's smooth point by touching
her own. She feels the possibility of the incisor.
Suspended, frozen, you have no wary eye to roll toward her.
She senses one anyway, jumps back.
Let's go, she whispers, as if you might hear.

ABSOLUTE ZERO

The morning was cold enough to shatter. Zero. Shocked in the huddle of breath.
They ventured toward you, all of them, the lives
you cupped and held, the lost causes, the suicides, the pangs of hunger,
lined up, mouths open with song, and watched you sail,
smooth casket catching the light.

Trembled lip-faltering priest, start and stop of halting encomium
his education made incomplete by your quick exit. We are all left
with sentences on our breath for you. Gratitude weeping through skin.
The birds shivered on the branch, the holy water froze. The grave
took you in, our hearts with you, sunk into concrete
and buried in the frost.

That a day would pass without you, that the buds would spring on the vines,
that spring would persist at all without your pause on the porch
to inventory the nests, the roll call of the thawing world. I can hear you now
speak the names of the loved and welcomed home, the impossible return of it.

TAKE ME TO THE HOSPITAL
by KRISTA SPEICHER SARRAF

I.

The next day, I begged my sister:
take me to the hospital.
Fill my head with images I never saw,
broken bottles, red plastic bladders

II.

my sister replied to me: *there's a sadness in your eyes.*
as she grabbed my eyelashes
they fell to the ground like nails

Later, she asks: *What's wrong? Not still thinking about him, are you?*

III.

I close my eyes, feel his white knuckles on my throat.
Maybe blood needs to pour from my eyes for her to see.

IV.

Now she holds my eyeballs in her palm, says nothing
she's faceless

V.

put back my eyes, I say, or replace them with sewn buttons
strung
like hammers

VI.

my vagina hurts

VII.

I close my eyes, feel his belt buckle on my chest

VIII.

I'm still thinking *take me to the hospital*

Fill my chest with cotton balls

Wrap my mute throat in plastic

I REMEMBER

vodka-pumped Snapple bottles
the dump
where campers deposit
McDonald's wrappers and Bud cans

his name?
TJ. Or:
Bobby. Troy Emerick.
TJ. Troy Smith.
Laurel Highlands Campland.

did my sister call my name?

his belt buckle
unbuttoned
finish it
wet grass, white grass
"mudsliding"
white noise
choked neck
does he remember?

SISTERS

After he unstrapped his belt
unable to speak with my thin voice
I sunk into the grass—
 but when his hand found my throat,
 who could I call
but my sister
 who never heard a word?

TWO DEATHS, TWO LEFT
by LUCY M. LOGSDON

After my mother died, my father & I stared
at each other, ate in silence, turned on the news.
Which hurt like when a knife sears through wet,
slick skin. My sister, already dead.

Next, us, and so much stuff—baskets, quilts,
gold, ruby, emerald, turquoise rings. I had
my husband, & step-daughters, but still.
Dad knocked around the too big brick house.

We made a shrine to love.
We don't talk about that.
Each time, there were so many fluids;
they kept going everywhere.

My mother, one eye unfocused, "let's
get this over with." The heave & grunt
of departure. He will die; I will die.
No bets on who's next.

I did crosswords, more crosswords;
he watched tv. I held his hand. First:
one, then two, then three, then four.
Now we are two again.

The night after my sister died, I drove
until I came to a pasture, stopped.
I got out, crawled between cows, rested
my head against their breathing.

Dad didn't sleep well after either death.
The night after mom's, he sat
upright in her chair until morning.
Her book, unfinished, in his hands.

I am tethered to life through my husband, my father
hitched through me. This dogged bond drains,
but we each refuse to leave the other
with that last buried bone.

ADVICE FROM MY BODY

by SAGE CURTIS

I am not a face, not eyes, or ears, or cheek
not 'This is my favorite Beatles song'
not a raised eyebrow or a pause for effect.

I am the curve of my hipbone on your hipbone,
one drop of sweat down a straight spine,
calf muscle carved out of granite.

Pink bra under a black t-shirt, I swear
I have no pulse underneath.
Stop breathing, I say, it's a rush.

I tell you to go out and look for cockroaches
hunting under streetlights
in summer heat waves.

Tell you about buying swishers from the lady
at the corner store, her drawn
face behind glass.

I say, this world, is a chipping mural
of some old battle scene, painted
in the side parking lot of a club.

You can't help me see it more beautiful,
put images of tulips and fireworks
in the places I see grit.

I say, just let it all go, your shoulders
don't have to carry the stardust
we're all made from. Light up with a Zippo.

THE FIRST TWELVE STEPS OF A CHILD

This is lonely business.
I didn't aspire to be a big-shot
in cheap barrooms. I tried

to ignore the blood
pushing and pulsing irregularly
through to my toes. I said,

“the road bumps launched
me here. It was the only place
to stop, pee and eat.” I drank,

different. I drank beer,
not vodka. I drank red wine
in big goblets. But I knew,

I'd soon be hiding
bottles in dress bags, I'd lie
when I say I'd stopped.

People will stop calling
after eight at night. I wouldn't
remember talking anyway. I say,

“It is in my body.” Vodka weakens
the heart muscle until
it droops and stretches,

thins. The boy
who loved me once stopped
trying to put me back together.

I sent postcards
from Colorado, Minneapolis, Maine
to my mother. I signed,

I understand, it helps.

CREATIVE NONFICTION

HER NAME WAS DORIS
by JUNE HUWA WHITING

Her name was Doris, and I loved her. I was a therapist in a psychiatric hospital, and she was my patient. I first encountered her when she was admitted for treatment of chemical dependency and depression. She was what we called a frequent flyer at the hospital. She would do well for a few months only to resurface again. Each time, her addiction had progressed, for addiction never moves backward, only forward.

Many years have passed, but I have never forgotten her. She was a bright young woman who attended community college when she was doing well. When she wasn't doing well, she would get depressed and relapse on alcohol and drugs.

Within a few days of being hospitalized, she reverted to the whimsical sprite she was when she was sober. She liked to tell people her birthday was today or tomorrow and received more than one birthday cake from fellow patients and staff who adored her but did not realize they had been hoodwinked.

One of her favorite responses to direction was "alrighty then," a phrase that still bring tears to my eyes when I hear it. She was not afraid to show her vulnerable side and had a deep well of compassion for her peers.

Doris worked very hard in treatment and was not afraid to face her demons. The landscape of recovery is strewn with landmines, and she stepped on her fair share. When she was going to twelve-step meetings, talking with her sponsor, and attending counseling, she avoided the landmines. However, the moment she lowered her guard, she was in trouble. Sobriety is hard work and requires daily commitment, but like any of us, sometimes she just wanted to take things easier.

Unfortunately, addiction never sleeps and, at best, merely lurks in the shadows waiting for an opportunity to strike. It whispers to its victims, *you can have just one...you're strong...you can stop whenever you want...*

When she was stable enough, she would be transitioned from the inpatient program to the day program where she lived at home and spent six hours a day in treatment. One day, she didn't show up for morning group. Her peers were worried about her, and so was I. Another therapist and I went to her apartment and found her at home.

She wasn't drinking—yet—and after a stern talking to, she said, "alrighty then," and was back in group that afternoon.

No treatment program lasts forever. Eventually, people have to be discharged. Only the very wealthy can remain in a sheltered environment for life. Each time, I hated to let her go and prayed this time would be the time she stayed the course. The time came when we had to discharge Doris.

I worried because she had been in and out of treatment so many times before. Her history of suicide attempts showed a progressively increasing risk of lethality. Her history of alcohol and drug relapses showed an ever-deepening addiction.

She had many friends who loved her, but I question whether her family loved her. Her sisters had names that reflected their treasured status, but her name did not follow suit. In Greek mythology, Doris was a sea nymph. Nymphs, according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, are an "inferior" female deity. Her parents may not have known the origin of the name, but I wonder if they considered her inferior in some way.

Two months had passed since her last discharge when she called me one day and told me she loved me and was grateful for all I had done for her. An icy knot of fear gripped me as I sensed she was saying a final goodbye. I asked if she was thinking about killing herself, which she denied. I asked several probing questions, but she had played this game too many times to give me any reason to call the police. I offered her an individual session; she refused. My shoulders sagged as I blew out a breath. The next night, my phone woke me. Somehow, I knew it was about Doris. Paralyzed by a sense of foreboding, I took a deep breath before my trembling hand picked up the phone. My heart ricocheted against my ribs. The caller was a nurse from the hospital who said, "June there's no easy way to tell you this. Doris is dead." Awash in dismay, I listened to the rest of the message. Doris had hung herself in her apartment and was found by friends. Weeks later, I heard she had a needle in her arm when they found her. She had been determined to die.

I dragged myself through my shift the next day much as if I were slogging through thick, sticky mud. Numbness gripped me, and my eyes felt like they had been rubbed with sandpaper. We had an impromptu grief support group for her 12 Step friends. Although she had been my patient, I was too numb to facilitate the group and asked

one of the other therapists to lead. Some of the people in the group heard a rumor that we blamed them for her death, but the decision to take her life was solely Doris's decision. Sometimes all we can do is accept that decision and treasure the memory of the person who died. That is what I had to do.

Many years have passed, and she has, for the most part, been forgotten. I have not forgotten. I still miss her and think of her often. She impacted my life and left me with feelings of sadness and joy, sadness for having lost her, and joy for having known her.

Her name was Doris, and I loved her.

CARDINAL RULES: NECESSITY OF THE BODY
by JOYCE HAYDEN

The morning after the news arrived, I sat in bed, after having made a cup of coffee and having pulled an animal card for guidance. I looked down at the picture of the swan. It's message spoke of trust and surrender, and the ability to experience altered states of awareness. But instead of being about a foot below me, I realized I was observing the swan card from a distance. I was on the ceiling. Out of body. I chuckled at first. Thinking: *Wow, that's odd.* Then I got scared.

In many cultures, the appearance of a cardinal represents a visit from a loved one that has passed.

I thought being out of body was old behavior. Past behavior. Behavior I was over. I stared down at me in my white and red pajamas, with the antique quilt pulled up to my waist. I saw my coffee cup, my journal and pen, a curling line of smoke from burning frankincense. I saw my hands in my lap, pink phone at my side. I wasn't ready to speak. All I recall thinking was: How sad it is that I don't want to be in that body, because that body is brimming with loss. And that body is alone with it all.

I've always been a hermit by nature, but in winter I become a true hibernator. Cardinals band in groups for the winter, that include other species of birds.

The previous morning I'd sat at my desk, ready to execute my new revision plan for my book. I was filled with excitement, the promise of completion. When it rang, I answered the phone to hear my sister say, "*Mom passed away this morning.*" I was beside myself with shock and grief. Yes, she was 93. But she wasn't ill. I'd spoken with her three times on the phone that week. She was fine. She'd celebrated her birthday five days earlier. She'd had her hair done the previous evening. She and my sister had eaten pizza and watched *Love Actually*. They'd had a fun night. All I could do after I said goodbye to my sister was wail on all fours on my bed. Walk from window to window. Stare at the two white buffalo, the black stallion, the snow covered mountains outside my window. I was on a self-

imposed writing retreat in Northern New Mexico to finish my memoir, *The Out of Body Girl*, but the last thing I expected was to be out of body.

That winter I'd begun a morning chanting practice that ended in prayer: I am safe; I am happy; I am well; I am at ease. I said this prayer substituting the names of family members and friends. The morning before I realized my mother was dead, I said my prayer: Mom is happy; Mom is safe; Mom is well; Mom is at ease. But something in me felt off. Something wasn't right; Mom needed more prayers. She wasn't at ease; she wasn't well. So I chanted my prayer to her over and over. Then I sat down to write. Then my sister called.

The DSM describes Dissociative Disorder as “involuntary escape from reality” and “lack of sense of self-identity.” Definition 1 fits; definition 2, not so much. The last time I recall going out of body was 20 years before my mom died. I was in a car at midnight with two of my brothers and the oldest was recounting a story I'd forgotten about for decades. It was the time when my sister, four years old, and I, two, were sent to live with an aunt because my mother was experiencing a difficult pregnancy with my brother Stephen. There's some discrepancy as to whether we were gone six weeks or six months, but when Ron told the story, I found myself on the roof of the Buick. The information hit me with such force, I couldn't stay in my body to process it. But up on the car ceiling, I remembered those weeks. I had come to enjoy my time at my aunt's house. My sister wasn't the princess at my aunt's house. We were equals. When we returned to my parents' house, I walked in circles of confusion. The time away from what I had known as “home” caused me to question at that young age: Who is my mother? Where is my home? I felt uneasy for months after that. I constantly wondered if I was really where I belonged, or if my aunt was my mother. I started carrying the sense that I didn't fit in anywhere. That I wasn't wanted anywhere. That I might, at any time, be plucked from one spot and dropped in another.

Cardinals can have up to three clutches, with two to five eggs per clutch. The hatchlings fledge in nine to eleven days.

I'd been out of body many times during my twenties and early thirties while living with an abusive man. However, the coping mechanism began when I was five or six and had been sexually abused. That lasted until I was twelve. But the first time I ever understood that my going out of body was a medical/mental issue was a handful of years ago when I was in a day long fiction writing workshop, in which the facilitator, in an attempt to help us create more complex characters, handed out lists of personality traits. The paper I picked up said: Anxiety, Depression, and Dissociative Disorder. A reading of the handout informed me that my behavior all these years, all my life, was a documented psychiatric illness.

But even in that moment, I couldn't help but identify myself as a very creative being. Going out of body was never a choice for me; it was involuntary. But I never felt that the behavior limited me in any way. Far from it: none of my therapists over the years felt the need to label me that way. We certainly discussed my separation from the body, but the title, the word *dissociation*, was never used. I did call myself, to myself, the out of body girl, for years. It was a self-identity I found handy, even appropriate. It wasn't for me a limiting "diagnosis." It showed me the power of the human spirit. The power of perseverance my bones held.

Female cardinals are one of the few songbirds that actually sing; usually it's just the males. They sing to defend territory.

When I hovered on ceilings, during the years my Uncle abused me and during the nights of fists and fighting in my twenties, there were times when I didn't necessarily identify with the girl "down there." The girl or the woman paralyzed or cowering. At times I saw her as a separate being even though it was obvious we wore the same clothes. But I sure knew who the girl on the ceiling was! She was the witness, the observer, the one who knew the truth.

I received Google Hang Out calls from both Annie and Jessie nearly every day after the news about my Mom. I knew I was alive, I wasn't alone, when I heard their words, saw their faces on the small screen of my Nook.

In the days after my mother died, when I would find myself on the ceiling in Questa, I made myself take physical action. It was clear to me that the woman on the bed with the coffee cup, the woman “down there” was me. The thought of hanging out on the ceiling all day was a bit terrifying. So I got up, warmed my bones in a hot shower, and then took a drive. Driving grounded me. My hands on the steering wheel, one foot on the accelerator, the other glued to the floor, I wandered the roads of the Enchanted Circle. I looked for eagles and hawks. I was gifted with the sighting of a snowy owl. I stopped at pullovers to gaze at distant valleys and cloud covered mountain tops. By the time I returned home each day, I was in body, able to read, to eat, and on some days even write a little.

A year has passed and I'm renting a friend's house in rural West Virginia. First morning here I awoke to a pair of cardinals singing on the porch railing.

So you can say I suffer from mental illness, but I see my out of body ability as a gift. As an effective coping mechanism. As a form of mental health. It's kept me alive. Kept me well. Kept me safe until I've been ready to re-enter, to feel, to do the necessary work of grief, of the body. To become fully present in the flesh.

Turns out the cardinal is the state bird of West Virginia. Turns out the name comes from Latin for cardo: a hinge or axis. Like the cardinal, my mother is a hinge to another world. She comes back to me in a red and gray body of feathers and beak: but a body nonetheless.

BACK TO THE NEST
by CHRISTINE STODDARD

You wore no makeup and had the most luminous golden skin. Your eyes were those kind of dark, soul-searching eyes my mother taught me were ugly, too much like lumps of coal. You had two kinds of laughs: one was almost a chaste chuckle and the other was full-bellied and wild. Both enchanted me. Everything from your less than perfectly ironed hair to your clean Keds in a collection of colors enchanted me. You were hipster perfection and confirmed my stubborn belief that “acting white” wasn’t a betrayal to my brown half. I was confused because I thought I loved you.

Ever since my boyfriend’s mother was diagnosed with cancer, I wasn’t sure if I still loved him or only loved the person he had been. I met you the year before she died, back when his suffering was already a couple of years stale. He knew she would die soon; it was simply a question of when—*before or after graduation?* But you and I didn’t become friends for months after we made each other’s acquaintance. I admired you from a distance in the classroom.

Usually I sat in the front of the room, intent on making the professor take me seriously. Whenever you spoke in that tiny lecture, I turned around to watch you. You never had much to say, but your responses were always lyrical, the kind of succinct observations that art school professors adore. Sometimes you made eye contact with me, but you never stopped me after class. I longed for an invitation to the dining hall or your dorm. I knew that you were biracial and I wondered if you knew I was. With my lightened hair and skin, often I successfully passed—at least to the white people. *Do I pass to you?* Yet I doubted that you noticed me the same way I noticed you.

Finally, I asked for your help on a project. I don’t remember what project or exactly how I asked you, only that I sensed the pulse of a million butterflies trying to tear out from my stomach when I did and that you immediately looked flattered. Naturally, I was flattered that you were flattered. From there, it was free-fall: a spontaneous road trip to Blacksburg, late night drives through parts of Richmond most

college students never ventured, even partnering as clowns for children's birthday parties all across Central Virginia on weekends.

One of our classmates said that you and I spoke our own language. Most times, all we had to do to communicate was exchange glances. When we spoke, we'd make casual remarks loaded with irreverence only we could detect. People wondered if we were high when we giggled furiously at something they didn't see as funny. We weren't, though it was a good question to ask of two art students. My boyfriend was too preoccupied to be jealous. He and I had our own language, too. It was just on hiatus.

But for all the highs we experienced as two never-competing female leads, I mostly remember the beginning of the end, one of our last weekends as friends. That was the weekend you took me to your parents' house, your less than humble abode. It wasn't where you grew up because you had lived all over the country as a child, but it was where your family had lived since you started high school. It was the place that made you.

We began the rainy day with a visit to a nearby renaissance festival in Stafford. Located an hour or so from our college, it wasn't far from your folks, so we hit the long, winding country roads until we reached the end of a subdivision road. I was already dizzy from the loops and repetitive architecture. The planned community was a pattern of McMansions and empty meadows whose golden grasses glistened as the sky cleared up.

"It's huge," I said as we pulled up to your house. I wasn't sure I had ever seen a house so big, at least not one that wasn't officially a palace.

"Yeah," you muttered, as you turned crimson. "That's why I never bring anybody back here."

We got out of the car and trawled through the mud to the front of the house. You fumbled with your keys until you found the right one. You had a mass of them because of your apartment in the Fan, a desirable neighborhood close to campus. You lived in a unit at the top

of a sprawling Victorian so you could gaze upon the little city that felt so far from home for both of us. It was a haven of thrift shop finds, but there were just enough touches of luxury that I had a sense of your background. After all, the only job you had was with me, painting tiny faces and making balloon animals. Yet you worked half as many birthday parties as I did. Your parents had to have paid for the bulk of what stocked your place—the American Apparel wardrobe, the sleek cookware, the unicorn décor. That was on top of your college tuition and fees, on top of the therapy, on top of the designer groceries and meals out on the town. Somehow I still fancied you a bohemian.

Your mother, a chubby white lady, immediately greeted us, but quickly retreated back to the kitchen where she was fixing dinner. Later on in the day, I met your taciturn black father, a military man, but it was still the massive house that left the deepest imprint in my mind. After your mother fled, you gave me the grand tour.

There were almost more rooms than I could fathom. Your normally vivacious tone fell to something more subdued as you guided me from immaculate room to immaculate room. In particular, there was a wealth of various living rooms and dens. Each one was themed, per your mother's insistence. She was a bored housewife in exurbia—that was really all the explanation needed.

It's almost comical recalling the rooms' themes now. There was the woodland room, which had the ambiance of a lodge, except for its bright white walls. There were black bear figurines and "gone fishing" signs, even a fake log or two. There was the movie theatre room with cushy cinema-style seats, a screen the size of a wall, and a popcorn machine that looked exactly like the kind you find in commercial movie theaters. But my favorite was the George Washington room, which at least in name, wasn't too odd for a formal entertaining space in a show-stopping Virginia home. The Old Dominion has an ongoing love affair with its dead presidents. It was the level of detail—almost opulence—that was shocking. There were George Washington magnets, Christmas ornaments, picture frames, even a presumably life-size cardboard cutout. It wasn't crowded, but it was a large room, so there was plenty of space for the obsession to flourish. I didn't mean to make a face when I stepped into the room,

but I must've because you said, "I know" somewhat sourly and didn't even snicker.

By the time you showed me the teddy bear room—a guest room full of teddy bears—where we would be sleeping, I didn't even bat an eyelash. Of course, by then I had already seen the clock room, which was exactly what it sounds like: a room decked out with clocks of seemingly every size and aesthetic.

Dinner with your parents felt so quiet. I kept trying to catch your eye whenever your father referenced "good Christian values," but you wouldn't have it. You had divulged one of your darkest secrets and you were too emotionally spent even to smirk. Being the 22-year-old asshole I was then, I didn't have the compassion to realize that. I only realized that I was not, in fact, in love with you.

You were no longer the archetypical Tragic Mulatto of my fucked up mixed-race fantasies. You had no fall from grace, no fall from fortune, no material struggles of any kind. Your demons were invisible and I wanted something tangible. I wanted pain that I could see and smell and touch, despite knowing full well that psychological anguish has no physical presence. It's all mental. That's why it too often goes ignored.

Instead of bonding over the pure confusion that comes with being biracial, I focused on your wealth. *What does a rich kid know about anything?* All I could think was that your mom never clipped coupons or that you'd never spent a winter day without heat. Not that I was by any means poor, but my parents had been and that's a mentality that gets passed on.

As we fell asleep among the teddy bears, I tried to ignore the beady eyes of all the collectibles. I had to seal my eyes shut to escape their stares. By morning, my empathy and infatuation for you had dissipated. When you woke up a few minutes after I did, you bashfully patted down the parts of your ironed hair that were regressing to your natural curly texture. Refusing to acknowledge our parallels, I felt nothing for the biracial girl and her performed

whiteness. *She was too rich to hurt*, I thought as we packed our bags and left her big, big house.

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ANNE BRITTING OLESON has been published widely on four continents. She earned her MFA at the Stonecoast program of USM. She has published a novel, *The Book of the Mandolin Player* (B Ink Publishing, 2016), and two poetry chapbooks, *The Church of St. Materiana* (2007) and *The Beauty of It* (2010). A third chapbook, *Counting the Days*, is forthcoming from Pink Girl Ink, and a second novel, *Dovecote*, which made its appearance from B Ink in September of 2017.

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JOYCE HAYDEN recently left her position as a university professor to pursue her own writing and art projects. Her memoir *The Out of Body Girl* is currently seeking representation. She works as an editor and writing coach. For more information, visit her website at joycehayden.com

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