

THE DANDELION REVIEW

Issue 3
2019

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Issue 3: 2019

The Dandelion Review

Fort Wayne, Indiana

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

Editor: Sarah Sandman

Reader: Erica Anderson-Senter

Dear Readers and Writers,

It is my privilege to once again get to write a note at the front of a *Dandelion Review* issue. This is our third issue, and since the press has begun, we have also published seven chapbooks! What fun it has been. We have more books on the docket so keep track of us.

Perhaps one of my favorite parts of the process is watching a magazine come together just as the spring buds begin to imagine popping in this Midwest landscape where I live. Soon, the first vestiges of new life will be blooming from the winter-beaten ground. I think we are always happy to see the little crocuses, the most hearty, and seemingly most delicate little flowers. The writing in this issue reminds me of those tender flowers—able to rise up after harshness, able to retain such beauty no matter the previous winter.

This issue is really special to me as well, because for the first time, the magazine will exist in a world without Mary Oliver. If you know Mary Oliver's work, then you likely have been deeply changed by it. When Erica, my dandelion-partner-in-crime and social media goddess, and I heard the news of Mary's passing (we feel we have known her even though we never met her in person), we knew we should have an event. And so, the *Dandelion* held a reading in honor of this wonderful writer. Each person read from Mary Oliver's work, and then also their own. Two different musicians played songs. The night was amazing and wonderful and sad and hopeful.

Mary Oliver has taught me so many things, and while they may or may not be noticeable in this issue or any other manuscript I have ever produced, know that she is there. She is there when I tell my students "Free verse is not, of course, free." Or when I'm noticing the dandelion, or the raven, or the blade of grass and I think, "To pay attention, this is our proper and endless work."

I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I have enjoyed living with all these pieces near me. I hope too, you'll go out and find some Mary Oliver poems just when you need them.

As always, thank you for supporting small presses with your work and your reading. Thank you for using your words to make our world a better place.

Let's keep being kind to one another, and keep writing!

Sarah
Founder and Editor

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POETRY

DARK THOMAS
by SHANAN BALLAM

Dark Thomas drank the days.
Artistic Thomas sang.
He hated Dad who broke
the toilet falling down.
Thomas broke the toilet falling down
and hated.

The sisters left vast holes
in the house never looking
back
 even though they knew
how drunk their parents' hands.
His head felt like a tether ball smacked
around, though all counts and evidence
said they loved him best,
the youngest & planned, named before
conception.

But Thomas was left behind and he was mad.
No one could ever guess the plans he had.

SPOILED THOMAS

Until he was twelve Thomas slept
between Mom & Dad in bed—

Thomas pressed his face against Mom's arm,
the plush fat, pressed his face against
her perfume satin neck—

he brushed his palm across Dad's shiny scalp—
heard the breath catch, surprised, in Dad's mouth,
and then Dad's deep sleep of whiskey back,
Thomas rolled in his fingers Dad's thin hair flap,
breathing musk.

He was the youngest,
The only one who ever got to sleep
with mom and dad. To him, they were
never cruel.

They slept sweet like this even after
they drank tequila & Mom screamed
I fucking hate you & Dad nearly snapped
mom's foot in two—
they slept like this even after
Dad got his ass tossed in jail & Mom refused
bail, but he somehow got out and walked home
thirteen miles in the rain
to stand seething
in the bedroom doorway—
they slept like this even after Mom guzzled
the box of wine
& pressed the knife to her wrist.
Even after Thomas heard Mom whisper
to Carol his sister
she was going to smother
Dad with a pillow in his sleep
& they'd never catch her—

Thomas stretched diagonal, shoving
them to the edges, leaving them
with only a sliver of the blanket, shivering,
their drunken snoring rasps.
Sometimes Thomas cupped
his hands across their mouths
just to hear them gasp.

WAKING UP ON THE FIFTH FLOOR
by EM BEARD

My own body leaning against cold wood,
I pace an old apartment window
to watch the dawn dripping crimson.

The houses below—dark still life
frame their Victorian shadows
over Pennsylvania Street.

An incandescent flicker
turns my head from the unwrapped sun
into a bedroom window.

Inside, both bodies are softly folded,
fused by their sternums—four areolas press together.

My thighs imagine their cleric hands
pulling me onto my knees, between both
openings—my fingers dipping into sticky pools.

Throats humming names
of gods—*do not stop*

moving those tongues—salve on my hot
labial burn. Our moans crisscross the street
in staccato pants. Each breath breaking pink

into the sun. Three open mouths give
praise to the light.

A DAY DISSECTED BY BREASTS

Taking pictures of my breasts:
My right nipple curves to the side
dangling,
I push the perky parts down.

Taking my breasts to work:
When I am bent over a Blendtec
shaking out the strawberry remains
of an over-thickened shake
into the 32oz Styrofoam cup,
I feel the unwanted bounce, the side
to side shimmy—the stare of a curious stranger.

Asking a lover to not touch my breasts:
I wouldn't want you without your breasts
she breathes in a binary pattern
and traces her chubby pale fingers
along my areola—I am betrayed
by a hardened nipple.

Listening to my breasts at three in the morning:
They are quiet. I am naked.
Stretched flat against my back
these breasts apologize—
shift under my chubby arms.
My right palm freely travels
the path of a flat chest
towards the damp curls.

YOU WERE TAUGHT TO BREATHE THROUGH YOUR TEETH

Inside the stale rental home you rub your tongue
along the slant edges of your teeth.
Your jaw is wire-tied, a tourniquet
clicking off your voice before you can speak.

You gather an armful of food to crunch-eat the words
out of your mind. You stretch out
your neck to loosen bones ticking against
shrieking teeth. You chew food
until it is hard to breathe or grieve

the aunt you buried last week.
All the ground was wet at the cemetery.
Headstones are skipping-stones across a stream.

Your family ripples through
an A Cappella hymn,
singing her sweet corpse to sleep.

You left the dead and went out to eat.

You stare at an old family
photograph, wince at the over-dyed green
carpet underneath five pairs of feet.

Three sisters sit posed against the pulpit.
You see your smiles crippled—
each girl already over-touched, obscene.

All of you were taught to breathe through your teeth.

Behind gapped smirks and Easter dresses,
you do not remember who stopped to take
the photograph. You know that afterwards,
all of you went home to eat.

ART CLASS
by CHARLIE BECKER

use your Kolinsky sable, dapple backgrounds yellow
watercolor clouds
puff them high from the pressed paper

farm an old house, vegetable its quiet side yard
flower everywhere
fence the edges to welcome all summer shadows

green growing trees, embark their solid trunks
invent cobblestones
shade layers for your under-painted dirt roads

hedge shrubbery round, hash tall grass and weeds
gnarl roots
turquoise tips of leaves swinging young spider webs

mix with conviction, draw upon the strength of your wrist
think archival
glaze warm what is rendered and complete

paint always like technique heals the unforgiving
brushstroke youthfully
want what you finish and someday you'll live there

FIRST KISS KNOWS

First kiss says it wants to be whole again
like the lifelong friendship
or a way polished stones
become dear
and move to enter strangers
on their empty page,

first kiss says it wants
to be an arching field
white sloping space
feeling what may come to pass.
We go inside my house
trees and bones
carried with us
as the quiet of early summer
or braided hair
waits for yellow dandelions
from a newly planted lawn.

Our boots do not touch
the freshly vacuumed carpet,
forsythia and orchids outline
a living room landscape
while we skim the air above
and around this immense home.
We share a room
first kiss and I
a double bed and blanket
matching cotton pajamas
giant fluffed pillows
head touching head
but we dream of different things,
me of clutching first kiss forever
and she of being free,
I cling because of fear
she twitches out of sorrow.

We stare at each other,
first kiss tells me
she longs for private space
time slowed until it rises,

selfishness
until she finds herself.
I close my eyes
and run curved fingers
through first kiss's bristled
butch hair
strong stance
one more time.
I hold first kiss's body
for a moment
then push it away,
feel the absence
of her voice
and let the empty
excitement
of separation
fill me.

LIKE A BAT

echo, echo, echolocation does not need light
to find its way into a dark winter hunger pang.
It only requires they know how to use bounced sound
bat by bat in the nearly whitened phosphorescence
of their wakefulness. Wings resemble spanned human hands,
elongated fingers hanging upside down in caves
take waves, incandescent waves, pitched high above the earth
and know where to go for cold food or natural mates,
create creative colonies or solitary
lives inside crevices, the deep cavities of trees.
Some hibernate while others migrate dusk until dawn,
a geographic sometimes works, whether microbat,
fruit bat, horseshoe or hog-nosed, they all stick together,

gay-dar, gay-dar, gay-dar like sonic, homo-beings
seeing each other for the first time, senses locate
in the dark, at the park, on the streets, between plaid sheets
to the beat, where we eat, at the bars, beneath spilled stars
in the clubs, among green shrubs, inside shade, twilight's fade
dancing disco, San Francisco, come play, find the way
to L.A., plan, scan, and stay, get that job, join the mob
scene, dream a clean sweep, take the leap and meet the person
you mean to be, become your own manly, womanly
self off of the shelf, you choose nothing to lose come cruise
take some time your climb is the sublime prime and then let
senses, senses, senses location: All creation
knows the heart from the start finally settles the search.

MY HERO

I wanted biceps
big like yours
with a hula girl
tattoo who danced
as I flexed,

and mighty forearms of steel
real threats
to the bullies
who chased and haunted me,

I wanted your strength
your rich green
spinach,
I'd watch you
squeeze open the can
with your bare, macho hands
swallow it all in one gulp
and then take Brutus down
without sweating a drop
or losing your gritty grin,
scratchy manly chuckle.
I wanted your punch, Popeye,
I needed you
to teach me
self-defense,
I longed to be
your forever buddy.

Puff, too, he lived by the sea
and did magic tricks
for little boys
the way dragons can,
we, fearless, frolicked
in the autumn mist
best friends
and sailed free on billowed boats
far from taunts or cuts
of mean kids who didn't care
for fantasy fun or innocence.
I needed you, Puff,
your spiked tail

your commanding roar
for myself
every time I left home
thinking I was all alone.

Sure, I lived the life of Superman
long before I knew Clark Kent,
me, growing into a secret,
not a bird
not a plane,
steeling my face
hiding
what no superpower
could fix or overcome.
I needed you, Superman,
your rock-square chin
your smiling sureness
each day as my world
where cowboys fell in love
with other cowboys
seemed in danger of being crushed.

In the end, I found you,
mortal Fred Rogers,
me, hopelessly fearful
like Daniel Striped Tiger
wondering where my next breath
would ever come from,
Mr. Rogers, you
welcomed us all into your neighborhood,
looked me in the eye
and said I made your day a special one
just by being me.
I put in your cardigan
wore your navy Keds
and took from you
a voice
softly sincere
for my own
use
the way a real hero
must
to soothe
the world.

THE SAME YEAR
by SHANNON BRYANT

When you are six when your mother dies, you keep living.
You don't have time to stop and mourn her loss. You are six.

You are entering first grade. You are on an escalator, in an airport, in Chicago. You are watching drops of blood slide down the hollow space your sister's tongue has made in her ice cream cone.

You are wondering where those drops came from.

You have no idea they are coming from your sister's forehead. You don't know that she fell on the escalator. You don't know that your father—a newly widowed man with three children—is trying to get you on a plane to make it home in time for the first day of school.

You don't know that they make him get off that plane.

You don't remember the phone calls, the request for a plastic surgeon, the arrangements made so the four of you would have a place to stay that night.

For you it is the night you had to sleep with your brother in a stranger's house. For you it is the time that you couldn't find your blankie, anywhere.

The year that you lost your blanket, is the year that you lost your mother. It is the blanket that you remember.

You were returning from her funeral. You had been at that funeral. You had watched her casket get lowered into the ground. You had been surrounded by aunts and cousins and solemn family members—all fully aware of this loss.

But you were six. You had no loss.
You giggled at the funeral, confused by the serious looks on your otherwise silly uncles' faces.

Why was everyone so sad?

It isn't until years later, looking through a family photo album, that you realize.

You see the band-aid on your sister's forehead, in her school photograph. It is covering the stitches that she got in Chicago, when she fell on the escalator, returning home from her mother's funeral. It was that same year.

It was that same year that your mother said her goodbyes to everyone in Indiana—knew it was her last summer, returned to California, reluctantly succumbed to advanced stage breast cancer.

And it was that same year that your father, after reading the eulogy at your mother's funeral in California, flew you back to Indiana, witnessed her burial, then brought you home.

It was a simple stopover, a flight from South Bend to Chicago so that you could fly home to San Francisco.

But it wasn't. It was a twelve year old, sitting on the handrail. It was a business man rushing up the escalator. It was a fall and a piercing of skin and too much blood for admittance on an airplane.

And so it was a father, taking care of his twelve year old daughter, after taking care of his forty-one year old wife, and his nine and six year old son and daughter.

But for you it was none of that.

You never felt her loss, not even her absence on that trip.

Because you were six. You wanted an ice cream cone. You wanted your blanket. You wanted to be home.

It didn't haunt you, this loss. It didn't stay with you or gnaw at you but it didn't go away either. It was there, inside of you, this whole time.

And now it is here; the path to it open—painful, beautiful, real. You are feeling it as a forty-three year old woman; no more equipped now than you were then. Just as vulnerable and hurt, just as innocent and confused. And so maybe you are six, and maybe you are forty- three; it is here, where it has always been, patiently waiting, to be felt.

HELEN FRANKENTHALER WAS A FRIEND OF JAMES
SCHUYLER

by MICHAEL CARTER

Angles of paint expose
an elegy of blank;
a blue swatch the size
and shape of a blindfold
is where the eye lands,
fragment of thawing stream.
Lush Spring and the yellows've
turned true: curry, mustard,
legal-pad leavened back
to a primary hue. Sleight
of light or memory and
this work shifts in my mind;
strokes rough as a choppy
swimmer's. Now, was it
Frankenthaler who was Schuyler's
friend? I can't recall
but as we left the museum
the heat in the Valley of the Sun
burned the breath right out of me.
Lush Spring and a fine red dust
settled over everything while
orange trees blossomed
the air. Rumi's use
of the word perfume trumps—
even in translation—mine, I'm
embarrassed to use it. So I don't.
James, not Schuyler, stood next
to me when I first saw the painting—
Lush Spring—still angling reds
and blues, greens and the now perfected
yellow. Why can I see only color and strokes, no overall
form? James, not Schuyler,
is a sweet guy who lived in Tucson, killed
himself in Phoenix. What, you ask,
are the chances his cats—Girlie
and Lily—having the exact same names
of an another boyfriend's cats? Slim to none
but it happened, it's true. Which one?
Which one was the friend?

MEDITATIONS, NEW DOG

Tree stuttered headlights scattered
the wet night in silver splashes like a strobe

jittery as a silent movie. Norwegian fir,
paper birch, sugar maple. He kissed my neck

I kissed his, the inside fold of his wrist. Then
separation, time, weeks. The dog's spine knuckles

into my shin. His breath steady and deep
as his canine heart: my sentimental stand in,

a stunt double brought in to absorb my pratfalls,
love's sucker punch—even you! The dog and I are still

in bed, keeping close. Enough is always a feast.
Enough is always enough. He kissed my neck.

I kissed his. Rain motes fine as flour drifted
into my mouth, beaded my sweatshirt, his sweater

while cars careered around the corner, disappearing.

As if a measurement of time,
gravity shimmied a single leaf

from a high branch—thoughts
of mortality, the significance

of the individual—the path
was crayolaed pink leaves, yellows

and greens. I laid down in them—
insert wise ruminations, accurate
but received wisdom—Underneath
the ground was soft, damp. Nearby

a stream ran its wet rill: what does
one life matter? The wind picked up

scattering uncountable leaves, a school
of fish flashing all at once. One life,

a thousand. You and I. Autumn. A bed
of shed leaves. You and I scattered among them.

Papery sheets fretted twists
beneath us as we made out late night

when the heat snap cracked open revealing
a deeper throb, thrum pulse, heartbeat's

guitar solo. So much want, so close. Your hard-on
throbbed through your jeans. That's all memory;

in front of me now a pileated woodpecker leading me
mysteriously tree to tree up the road past the horse farm

near the bend next to the goats that fascinate the dog.
What happened to the woodpecker disappeared into the woods?

Gone and here like last night's dinner. Omar is shredding
thin tissue off bone, breaking it to fragments, single mindedly

doing whatever it takes to scrape at the marrow. Such desire,
using it all up until there's nothing left but stains

and the dog belly up like a ship in a storm. So, what do you see
if you don't see it all in beauty?

Last night driving home from class
it happened. Less than a moment, not
even a glimpse, timeless. Immeasurable.
Unknowable. Known. Rain swollen;
the ground is soft. Last night
it happened, everything
went dark: the headlights, no cars on the unlit back road.
That's when it happened. Last night driving home
it happened. It happened.

THE MARRIAGE
by CHELLA COURINGTON

She wakes to his erection
like a gun in her back.

It forces her to lie still
breathe shallow.

His arm over her shoulder
pins her to the mattress.

He's dead asleep.
Why doesn't she lift herself

off the bed, walk out
of his life into her own?

Sun slants through venetians
turns the blue comforter

into bars of shadow.
He rolls over, back to hers.

Still she lies.

THE DIVORCE

The wife got the house
two-story white Colonial

kids during the week
Land Rover & Shih Tzu.

The husband got the furniture
Early American

kids on the weekend
black Accord & timeshare

in Orlando.
Who were they 19 years ago?

She in lace & he in wool
repeated vows

snatched from movies.
Thereafter, they

moved imperceptibly
until countless turns

eclipsed the girl in white
the boy in blue.

WHEN BERRYMAN DIED

He left his shoes, scuffed loafers,
on the bridge. A cordovan pair
he could have shed
anywhere: at the university
beside his desk, under Tate's table,
at the foot of a lover's bed.

Every night he thought, tomorrow.
Mornings, he remembered
his suit at the cleaners, his essay
on Marlowe, students waiting
outside his office. January 7
reasons ran dry.

He bathed and trimmed his beard,
putting on a new white shirt.
In eight degrees he walked
to the bridge.

GNOSTICISM
by RICKI CUMMINGS

I like to pretend
that there's a clear blueprint

of my brain, that all these
somata and synapses

are by design. The truth
of it is that I make

most of my decisions
by rolling a die. I flip

cards for insight and hope
the right ones come up,

read for meaning
when they don't.

When my grandfather died
I did not cry for him, or me,

but for my mother's wails
during the Lord's Prayer.

Dear Erika,

Sometimes, usually, things will pour out symphonic. Lately, the music has come in gasps, all static and bone. We like to celebrate this as genius. Pretend none of it is luck, our crystal radio tuned between stations but still receiving. I think one of my migraine triggers is good news.

I believe the reference is a metaphor unto its own. It's 2017 and all the college boys are dressed like Blur, and all the girls are dressed like Blossom. Sometimes I think I love you, but it might just be your words, eyes, and hairpins. The way you drop the word "fuck" like an atom bomb. The way you use body parts as ribcage.

I have slowly become exactly like people I hate: analog glitch art stretched across the screen. A plane crash like a slow-motion goose landing with its cheeks on fire. I haven't finished a book in weeks. I haven't finished a poem. I form crushes on comic book characters. Not superheros but gods. Sometimes I think you are a feeling machine. A tempest run through cobalt steel: eyes, eyes, eyes.

It all feels slipshod, slapdash. I could be led straight to the gates of Hell by a fit young man in stockings, a halter corset, and an asymmetrical bob. Your anxiety is dripping water. You don't see your effortless innuendo. Your future is in elbows and quietly clutching air, like sheets hung from tree limbs. Communication through alliteration and internal rhyme and sensual rhythm. Sometimes we need sex to be explicit, but you refuse. This is formal. Functional.

We take turns driving the same car in different colors. Not synesthetically—we have the same car in different colors. You are yellow—young. I am orange, burnt and metallic and old. But not wise. We dream in vocabulary. We swim buoyed by assumptions like compression and rarefaction. Implicit is the assumption that scorpions have need to cross the street. Theft is craft, craftier in the open. I would like to give you lace, but I am on fire, and you are in the lake. I am always fourteen steps ahead and six steps behind.

I would kiss your wrist, your carpal tendons, your heartbeat, but we are both studying the walls.

Every thing is mistake and muse. All potential is paradox. All metaphors mixed. Bent rules broken, the scorpion leads. I have a need for witchcraft. You could burn me, rule me angelic with a sigh.

LIMINAL SPACE

She absorbed all her liminal space:
Her in highway, Her in airports, Her in hotel rooms,

Her house after moving out but before selling.
Consider the cars Cassidy stole, time

from wives and partners scorned.
It's the allure of ink and skin, hot springs

and freckles. She and Her again.
Moving through the American West,

She is statuesque—picturesque—
and composing behind the wheel.

She is unattainable obtained, not perfection
but precise. Her tongue is blackberry wine.

They make associative leaps,
get homesick for places they never lived.

They're not the first to feel this to each other:
She most commonly, Her most deeply. She reads

transcendent in bed, Her breathing deep and wet.
When they are out alone together, She is a swan

and Her a hummingbird: tiny heart beating
overtime and neck holding grace and noise.

They move in steady time across the pastures.
There is so much sky here, so much.

Every direction out of town is mountains.
She fills her heart with interminable white noise,

all frequencies intense. So much wandering,
exploring, finding, forgetting. Cartography.

Like Conor said once: there's only one map
you'll need. All roads lead to more roads lead

to dreams, dashed and unbroken, a single long
sheet of paper with pauses for ink. They read

each other's minds, but only the synapses.

BERLIN TRILOGY

I listen to the Berlin Trilogy
and realize that the closest we have
to exile in the Siberian tundra
is being shipped back to North Dakota.
We'd live in isolation
with the cricket menace.
A poet of the grasses, that's me,
containing no-ones. Terrified to inaction,
that's me. We
like to think technology will save us
but there it is: digital paranoia. Drinking
bytes and tasting orgasmic static.
Brackets and braces are for clauses
 that refuse to behave, that interject
 and reject orderly conversation.
I've started asking around for hookups,
fresh water and sanitary sewer.
Garbage in, garbage out; goes nowhere,
does nothing. Pipes running, pipes running
an internet café in Kyoto. Beds in closets,
millions of beds, millions of closets hiding
drunks and long nights of drunk lights.
How do you explain a song? Are there notes
for activating the adrenals? Norepinephrine
binds to every cell in its ways mysterious.
All we can imagine is the unreal city.
Glossolalia vision, vinyl life impervious to snow.

LITTLE WHORE
by JENIFER DEBELLIS

- I. Her lips, the color of spent rose petals,
were frozen in an O, like a fist
refusing to finish what it started.

If the mood was right, some days
she was goth before there was
such thing as goth. Others she was

punk. Or INXS rocker girl. Or
80's chick. Or her own created
mix of styles, but never the same

two days in a row—that's what common
girls did. She hadn't mastered her No
meaning No. So she became the Giver.

Better to give on your terms
than be taken on theirs.

- II. She knew he meant well when he
said she looked like a little whore
dressed like that. But the boys

didn't pay attention to her like
they did the other girls when she hid
beneath oversized sweaters.

- III. Putana means whore in Italian—
not a slutty type who gives it away,
but one who has sex for money.

She wasn't fooling around with boys
for denaro, nor did she consider it
a job. Though boys did buy her

cigs & wine coolers, & sometimes
asked her to dress nice for dinner
or a quick trip to the dance club.

- IV. She'd never had moonshine. *Never
heard of it*, she said when they
pulled it out for a party after a varsity

football game. *Tastes like nail polish*

remover, she said between shots &
she kept accepting shots as long

as the boys were downing them too.
She doesn't remember going down
into the basement. She doesn't remember

the boy pulling down his pants
or kneeling over her. All she remembers
is opening her eyes and recalling

what her friends told her to do
with the erection he shoved
between her partially opened lips.

- V. He said she was the best, a real pro.
& that put her on the map for business.
- VI. The wall in the stall read:
For a good time, call _____.
- VII. The message was clear: the day
she saw *H O R E* written on her locker
was the day she guessed her best
friend was no longer an ally.
- VIII. Yet, the message she remembered—
that replayed in her head often—was:

Don't come home knocked-up.
- IX. Maybe she survived those years
without coming home knocked-up.
- X. Maybe someday she'll be able
to tell these stories in first-person.

NIGHT BEFORE THE HOMECOMING DANCE

The first thing I saw the next morning was
a crow perched on a branch of the elm

just outside the bedroom window. The bird—
hearing others nearing—fluffed its feathers

& took flight. Its tail fanned out from its stout
body & in a murder of crow caws, I remembered

his eyes, remembered his feathered eyelashes,
remembered how it felt to lie in his shadow.

We had a lot to drink last night, then smoked
something that slit a dark hole in our thinking.

It started with a kiss—a kiss that burned magenta
behind my closed eyes. I followed that kiss

up the stairs, my stuttering steps the only sound
till we were behind a closed door & our hands

were wild with exploring each other. We settled
onto the floor. His lips near my ear, his tongue

turned the coals beneath my skin. Flames raced
down my neck. *Yes*, I was into that kiss.

Moonlight streamed through the open blinds, cast
a silver haze over us & everything in the room.

Mid kiss, he pulled away. His expression turned
cryptic. He pressed my wrists above my head &

everything about being in that room felt wrong.
No, I said. But he bunched my skirt at my waist,

his free hand guiding as I shook my head
from side to side. *No. No.* I said it louder this time

but he kept thrusting, his eyes fixed on mine.
After, he pulled up his pants & left me in that room,
refusing to look back at me as he shut the door.

NICE GUY

Problem was, everyone knew
what a nice guy he was. He was

the guy who called your Mom ma'am
& your Pops sir. Had a firm hand shake.
A clean-cut crew cut.
A boy next door name.
Puppy dog eyes that said safe.

Problem was, everyone liked him.

Teachers stayed after to help him pass.
Coaches were lax about things
that happened off the field.
His peers voted him
Best Sense of Humor
Best Smile.
Even the lunch ladies slipped him
a free cookie when he passed by.

Problem was, he was a nice guy

when you said you'd be his date
for the dance. He was exactly the guy
you saw yourself dating when
you followed him upstairs to make out
after the homecoming game.

Problem was, he was a nice kisser
& while you imagined his kisses

stretching through this night that you
always wanted to remember this way,
a storm rolled into that room
you were ill-prepared to weather.

Problem was, your friend said *No way. Didn't happen that way,*
when you told her. *Don't mess this up for us. The dance is tomorrow.*
Well, she said Don't fuck

it up but decades later you still find
yourself censoring that night's details.

Problem was, everyone—including Mom—noted
the glow you wore to the dance,
celebrated the magic that one night
with the right guy could have on a girl.
& the nice guy that he was, he squeezed
your hand & nodded his thanks each time—
the smile always reaching his eyes.

Problem was, this nice guy visited your dreams
each night & passed you in the halls
at school each day. Years later you'll run
into him at parties. His smile will still play
from his eyes when he says *Hi*.

your friends, seeing your flushed cheeks,
will tease you for letting a good one
get away.

ERIN
by MORROW DOWDLE

Dressed in a see-through shirt
of white linen, only one button fastened,
a black bra underneath more for legality
than leverage. I should have known
she had something to hide.
Exotic as a giraffe in a backyard zoo,
a bright gold coin landing in my cup.
My Ariadne, tree-woman growing
from the soil of everything-gone-wrong.
I climbed her trunk with a rope,
hanged myself from her limbs.
More myth than reality,
but what did the lies matter,
when the flesh was so real?
To her, I was a random sample.
To me, she was four courses
after an epoch of starvation.
Redefining: lover.
Redefining: pleasure.
That night, after the kisses,
our faces smeared with each other's lipstick,
I don't know why I cleaned mine off
but let her walk around like that, oblivious
to the stares at her clown's mouth,
incongruous with her slinky dress.
It was as if I hoped to convince myself,
and everyone else,
of her imperfection.

ORIGINAL

I felt it, long before adolescence
and its bewitching hormonal stew.
It was even before kindergarten
when it first appeared,
that warm jellyfish trapped
and squirming between my legs,
tentacles reaching out, searching
for release. How did I think
to straddle my pillow, to rock
back and forth until the reaching
stopped with a jolt, the coming
to the end of a rollercoaster ride?
I hadn't even ridden a rollercoaster yet,
no words to describe it, no idea
what it was, what I was doing,
just that it felt good
and I could have it almost anytime
I wanted, even during dinner
if the urge called, jeans chafing
the white linoleum of the bathroom floor
while forks clinked in ignorance.
So when my daughter runs off
to her room, closes the door,
there's no point in denying it.
Later, I'll pick up the crumpled blanket,
the stuffed toy with a wry expression,
tuck them back into her chest of drawers.
They're a secret message no one needs
to read or burn. It's her turn.

CORPUS

I don't believe that two could be as one
until I feel us dying. The sense of something
not quite right, the corpus matrimonium
out of homeostasis. A fatigue that makes
us want to take to separate beds.
Nothing to give, not even to the child,
who loses her bladder on the floor
like a spiteful little dog. Our genes
mutate, grow slow tumors in the lungs.
Nostrils tingle with distant decay, wafts
from what rots deep in the woods.
We start to notice difficulty breathing,
the trace of blood when we cough.
Sarcomas sprout on skin, an ugly
show-and-tell. The fighting, a foreign
bolus lodged in the throat.
The body battling its own broken
immune system. So much anger
stored up in this limited flesh.
Marital turns martial in a quick switch,
turns neutral ground into a minefield.
We lose digits, limbs, an eye. Coup
and contrecoup of heart. The body
fighting for its life, rallying energy
the way it can before the end.
Hoping wildly for a miracle cure.
Hoping a little more time
and a few kind words might delay
the corpse matrimonium. The body
stripped and burned down
for anyone who loved it to pick through,
see what bit of precious bone or tooth
might shine from the char.

SHE IS NOT FOR YOU
by MINNA DUBIN

1. My son and I pass a group of construction workers standing around. My son, a couple yards ahead of me, is busy in his own play. “I’m sorry,” one of the guys says to me, “I just gotta say, you’re gorgeous.”

I put my hands up, like, “Really?”

“I’m with my son,” I say, which feels weak, as if I’m saying, “You broke the rule, man! You can only objectify me when I’m alone!”

“I know,” he replies, “That’s why I was trying not to be rude.”

(‘Cause shit woulda gotten nasty if my son hadn’t been there?!) I don’t think my son catches any of this. But he will. He is my child but he is also a child of this culture. He will learn that women’s bodies are for public comment, for consumption, for him.

2. When I was ten years old, walking down my street to catch the bus to Hebrew school, I noticed a taxi parked near the end of my block. I could tell the driver was sitting in the car. Our eyes connected through his side mirror. My paced slowed. I hoped he’d take off, but the car didn’t move. As I passed the car, I turned to look at the man’s face. I wanted to see what he looked like, so I could remember just in case. We smiled at each other. I didn’t want to be rude. After I passed, the car pulled into the street. I turned left. So did he. He drove as slow as I walked. Every time I looked over my right shoulder, he smiled and waved. I smiled and waved back as my heart pounded. Eventually I turned again and ran as fast as I could down the longest block in the world with him still driving right next to me. I made it safely into my neighborhood pizza shop, and he zoomed away. At ten years old I already knew how to survive as a woman—get a look at his face, smile and wave, run.

3. “She’s becoming very good looking!” bellows her Saba as he picks up his only granddaughter and swings her around. Almost every time my in-laws see my 16-month-old daughter, they comment on how pretty she is. It bugs me, but...it’s complicated. I mean, they’re not wrong—she’s gorgeous. So what’s the problem? Maybe it’s the saying it always. Maybe it’s the saying it first thing. Maybe it’s the saying it to her and not to me about her. Maybe it’s that my daughter recently made the shift from baby to little girl, and it has become clear she

understands most, if not all, of what the people around her are saying. I'm afraid the repetition of "You're so pretty!" in the highly approving voices of her very favorite people will instill in her the dangerous idea that pretty is paramount. The culture at large will already teach her this every day. It will teach her to smile and wave, to keep quiet, to stay in line, to wait her turn. It is up to us, her family, to disrupt the message that her important parts are her prettiness, her hair, her body. She is not for public comment. She is not for consumption. She is not for you, or you, or you.

HAIR

by SARA EDDY

When my hair comes back,
it will be silver and grey and black,
both curly and straight,
the hair of a witch,
a madwoman, an artist.
It will be unruly.
It will float out behind me
and grab songbirds from the air
and hold them until they
give up their songs.
It will have its own agenda.
I will wrap it around
my breasts and belly
like a prayer shawl for a mad god
and my prayer will be *fuck you*.
But my hair will keep its own counsel.
It will dig its way into the earth,
between my toes tickling,
and commune with the worms.
It will visit with the dead
and bring back their stories;
it will teach me the slang they
use to mock the living.
My hair will know things,
and it will have no truck with anything.
It will send out a tendril to brush
the cheeks of so many men,
and a few women,
who will feel jittery and drunk
like two espressos
and four tequila shots
and I'll finally remember that
a woman of my stature
should wear the clouds as a hat
and stride up the hills
with strong long legs
and her hips in full swing.

A MEASURE

I'd like to cradle my thumb
against the plastic nub
holding back the metal coil
of these past few months,
slide it firmly down
and release this tension
so the coil shoots back inside,
winding itself up tight
to the final snap of the tab,
a tight inner spiral, complete again.
I'll gather up all the pieces
and put them back
exactly where they were
and none's the wiser.
There's nothing I would lose
by doing this. There's nothing
I have learned
that I needed to know:
we are all going to die,
yes, I knew this,
and I want it all back
all the ignorance
all the undoing.

HERON POND

Why shouldn't I stand like the blue heron,
intent at the edge of the pond
my toes deep in the muck,
my eyes meant for one thing;
Why shouldn't the swallows describe
a new geometry in my periphery
while they dive and dance
for scuttling surface bugs?
And why not feel in my bones
the gentle clatter of turtles
knocking into each other
as they play or fight or flirt—
who knows their inscrutable design?—
Why not focus my brain
down to one sliver of meaning
and stretch forward toward that thought,
my long neck extended
my body bent forward, then
my whole self whiplashing at that goal;
the fish in my throat
would be like silver, like truth,
like an answer.

DANDELIONS
by LINDA FREEMAN

How they seeped yellow into our Bronx neighborhood
through the cracks in the sidewalk,

from the dirt patches around the scrawny trees posted
between concrete and asphalt. Tiny suns I could hold

and bring inside.

I tied white ribbons around their stems, a nickel a bunch,
filled Ragu jars with water. And waited. The McCarthy

girls with their lemonade walked by, worried. Two old
ladies stopped and laughed,

You're selling weeds, honey!

My husband tries to kill the dandelions around our house.
They keep coming back. *I don't mind*, I tell him. *The yellow*

perks up the lawn. If they're not yellow,
they're white for wishing.

I hold one in my hand, a transparent puff
of a planet, a long-stemmed world.

I blow on it, hard. Watch one stubborn piece cling.

LOOK

Look, I told him I didn't want
to look while he undressed but he
made me look anyway, held my head
straight up so, *Look*, he said standing
so naked I couldn't look but he yanked my hair
back with his hands, said, *Look at me* but I
shut my eyes so I couldn't look and he said
Girl, jammed his fingers into my eyes, *Look*.

THE PHOTO

Taken on the gangplank of a restored paddleboat
on that trip down south. One of those photos
vendors take without asking, then charge you to keep.

My mother's hair, golden where the sun has caught it,
her mouth wide, smiling.
My father is next to her, not touching, holding her
jacket in front of him.

My father has the photo, framed and on his dresser.
I study it closely, see the jagged cut between them,
realize he'd sliced me out of the picture
to bring the two of them together.

THE PITY KISS

by KARA GOUGHNOUR

Jon came to school cloaked in black—black sweatpants and a black hoodie with strings that he pulled tight before laying his head down. Mrs. Clark walked slowly around the room, collecting and sliding our worksheets into a manila folder. When she reached Jon, she cracked him on the back of the head with a textbook—its bright orange cover from the eighties with a shining blue globe on the front, the word “geology” encircling it in bold, capital letters.

“Where’s your homework?” she shrieked, looking over a downturned, pelican nose at the indiscernible glob of black fabric puddled on the desk below her.

“I didn’t do it,” he said, his mouth muffled. This scene was cyclic. On a bad day, she would drag him by the ear into the book closet beside our classroom, blonde curls bouncing and dangling seashell earrings swaying. A string of *youwontpassthisclassyoustum* and *you’reasbadasyourbrother* and *whydoyoubothertoshowyourfacehere* shot through the walls. The book closet was less of a concealment and more of a formality.

I wasn’t friends with Jon. I was silent, large-limbed and clumsy, with oval glasses and oddly layered clothing—tank tops over t-shirts and skirts over jeans. I hit a growth spurt in sixth grade, one of two rapid evolutions my body would go through before I stopped growing altogether and let everyone else pass me by. I wore a silver chain with a lock on the front. I sucked on the lock while I took notes in class until the shining, silver coating chipped to reveal dull bronze.

Mrs. Clark marched back into the room. She sat at her desk, licked miniature envelopes individually, and placed them into a large bowl while Bill Nye appeared on the boxy television set to give a lesson on sea level. I thought that Bill Nye was cool. I liked the way he dressed, in crisp bow ties and suit coats, much unlike the grey, concrete-covered hoodies that my grandfather wore. Large red letters on the back read the slogan for his concrete business, “Do it in concrete; it stays harder longer.” He would walk into the living room without removing his work boots, grinding mud into the cream-colored carpet with each step of his dragging, end-of-work-day shuffle. “This is what hard work looks like,” he would say through a mouthful of cookies, a glass of milk sloshing in one hand and the five o’clock news on the television.

We each pulled an envelope from the bowl. Inside it on a piece of paper was a state we were to write an essay on and build a model of. I unenveloped Iowa. Jon wasn't allowed to pick until last.

"Screw this," he muttered under his breath, leading to another trip to the book closet. When he returned, I ripped a strip of notebook paper and passed it to him.

"Why don't you just do your homework?" it read. He looked at me, paused, and shrugged.

We passed notes like this from then on. In study hall, in homeroom, in between the slits in each other's lockers, and down the long lunch tables to one another as "Free Bird" blasted on our cafeteria jukebox.

Jon's house hunkered in the corner of two streets, a block away from school. It was a squat, dark brown building with a large, slanting back porch held up by two-by-fours. Sometimes, on after-school walks to the horse stable or trips on allowance day to buy two-dollar slices of pizza, we could hear his dad's slurred shouts leaking through the thin walls out onto the cobblestone street.

Jon's father was an alcoholic. He didn't buy groceries that Jon or his older brother needed and didn't buy any school supplies either. Jon's brother had a job, but he spent the money on weed and Sheetz food to share with high school girls with tongue piercings and hair dip-dyed with Kool Aid.

"They make out in our bedroom, so I have to sit on the porch," Jon explained one day while I walked home from school alone and found him there.

"What's making out?" I asked.

"It's like kissing, but more adult."

I blushed at the thought and shifted uncomfortably.

"There's nothing cool about Iowa," I complained.

"They have cow-patty throwing competitions," he said, prompting me to stick out my tongue and fake a gag.

"Do you want to trade states?" he asked.

"No. Mrs. Clark would know."

Jon laughed, uncomfortable, maybe, with the thought of what trading states might get him, and in a rush of pity and appreciation, I kissed him—a quick, childlike peck on his smiling mouth that sent me running, embarrassed, past Italian Village Pizza and Everyday Gourmet Café.

My essay on Iowa was four pages long. My grandmother took me to Michael's to pick out stickers and paint; glossy cartoon farm animals and paints in deep reds, oranges, yellows, greens, and blues to mark the sea levels of my sculpted mountains. I made my Iowa with my grandfather in the backyard. We used the state maps in my textbook as a reference and crafted land out of concrete on a thick slab of drywall, molding it like animal fat or new spring mud pulled from slick roots. I pushed the cement down hard with my bare thumb, making lakes, and traced rivers with my pinky finger. I watched the cement dry over my skin, and slapped off the flaking bits against the house's brick side.

"Stop that. Wash ya hands off, now," my grandfather said sternly, unraveling the garden hose.

That Friday night, there was a dance in the cafeteria. My grandfather took my grandmother and me to The Cottage first, our once-monthly dining out for Friday night all-you-can-eat shrimp. The Cottage was a run-down bar connecting to a bed and breakfast filled with shag carpet rooms of every shade. The windows were stained glass and had missing pieces, and large, tarp-like beer advertisements covered the walls and ceiling. My grandfather ate shrimp at a rapid rate, pinching tails and sucking the pink meat through his buttery lips.

"Eat more shrimp. We get what we pay for," he would say.

The dance was held in the school cafeteria, the jukebox pushed aside to make room for the DJ, a high schooler who happened to own a lot of mp3s and a good set of speakers. I put on glitter eyeshadow – stolen by a classmate from her big sister's purse – in the bathroom with the other girls. The cafeteria line was still open, selling bottles of Sprite, nachos, and non-alcoholic Jell-O shots. On the first slow dance, a classmate of ours from homeroom, Kyle, came up to us. He looked confidently at me and asked me to slow dance, to the astonishment of the other sixth graders behind me who gasped and giggled. I said yes, and we moved onto the floor, elbow muscles taut as we held our arms as outstretched as possible and placed them on shoulders and hips.

By the first chorus, Kyle was ripped away from me by his right shoulder. Jon grabbed his neck and sent a punch straight into his diaphragm. It reverberated through his gut like an echo, making Kyle's eyes bulge. I stood in shock, my arms still outstretched, as Mrs. Clark shouted at the boys and a male, eighth-grade teacher ripped them apart. I opened my mouth to speak, but the music changed to a fast-paced beat that blared over everything else. Mrs. Clark gave me a look of disappointment. A look that said, "You could do better."

The Iowa was heavy. I lugged it to school, balancing my flute case on my pinky as I struggled with both arms to hold my cement masterpiece. Jon wasn't at school that day, but I imagine he didn't have a model or an essay to turn in regardless. He was suspended for two weeks, and when he returned he ignored me in person. Notes built up in my locker, but I was scared of the version of Jon I saw filled with anger. I felt as though he'd betrayed me by punching Kyle, let loose a secret and unspoken pact we'd made that day on the uneven curbside, so I let the notes pile up until the end of the school year when I shoved them deep into a trash bag held out at arm's length by the student council president.

Mrs. Clark went easier on Jon when he came back. Maybe she knew that his two weeks at home must have been worse than any trip to the book closet. Or maybe she thought that I'd still be there for him—a good influence, full of pity, or guilt, with another secret kiss, and with outstretched arms.

EAR-DRUMMING
by MEGAN HINES

The second sentence you'll ever say to me
will sound like are you deaf or somethin'?
or how'd you get dead turtles from when I said ten hurdles?
I'll lie and say my doctor diagnosed me deaf in my right ear.
I don't know how to explain it except that my mom says to me,
"you have selective hearing just like most uncaring,
egocentric
adolescents your age." I found other ways to pretend
I'm like others my age by wearing earbuds and my
head turned
toward the bus window like the singled-outsider on TV.
The music comes as my incognito hearing aids
to listen to the soft, steady bunny-thumps springing from the
chest
of the pretty girl, Janelle, sitting next to me,
talking about things I don't understand
like soccer, people, and broken bones.
I pretend I understand since my dream is to listen
with my trench-coated ears full of pockets and secrets
and stethoscopes and stuff them all into my dust-filled mouth,
so that when the day comes that the pretty girl talks to me
I will know how to take her heart into my ears
and whisper smooth-strumming sounds into hers.

UNSENT LETTERS: FROM ME, ALMOST TO YOU

Letter One

Twenty years. It has taken twenty years until i could write my last name without thinking of you. *Don't think, don't think.* Twenty years until i could write my last name and not feel blooded with shame. *Your blood.* My whole body shakes and spasms with your blood. My veins are replaced with lightning. *The lightning you struck.* Every time i take a wrong step, i see you among the doomsday clouds with your sizzling finger, fresh from the microwave, to strike me down. *Strike: 959,082.* You are my Zeus, and i am your dimwitted daughter. i can smell the crackling of your temples more than the hairs on your arms. *Smell your temples.* Do you see what you did to me? You're the reason i don't see what you did to me. *What did you do to me?* As far as you're concerned, all of my flaws are mine, and mine alone. My flaws are mine. *Not mine alone.*

Letter Two

My high school archery bow is still clothed with dust under my bed. *Dust that fell from my fingertips.* i accidentally looked at it when making my bed and felt ill at the sight of your face. *At the sight of your face, its use was over.* Don't think i didn't hear you telling someone in the crowd: *My daughter has a talent now.* Slowly, i steadied my bow, breathed in your poison, and released the arrow. *Your poison is still clothed with my body.* i never made a bullseye again. Never again did i make my bed with my eyes open.

Letter Three

Please ignore my first two letters. i swear i love you. *i love you, Dad.* My flaws are mine. *Mine alone.*

SMILE

TRANSLATIONS by MATTHEW LANDRUM and SÁMAL SOLL

what hides behind the smile
a stupid question
the fucking thoughts
Thoughtless

don't let them find you out

pretty thoughts
hard thoughts
cold thoughts
thoughts
thoughts that are so noisy
when silence is playing dumb

god damn it
who let them out
did you die from them
why didn't you just bring them with you

did they escape through the cracks in your ugly skull
in order to torment everyone around you
allowing you to start your endless empty headed voyage
all the way out there where everything begins
and tell yourself
that you are one of the born-again

have a great time, man

oh just stop

SMÍL

By KATRIN OTTARSDÓTTIR

hvat krógvar seg aftan fyri smílið
spyr býtt
tankarnir for fanin
Tankatómir

ikki lata teir uppdaga teg

penir tankar
harðir tankar
kaldir tankar
tankar
tankar larma so illa
tá tøgnin spælir býtt

halt kjaft ikki
hvør slepti teimum út
doyði tú frá teimum
hví tókst tú teir ikki bara við tær

sluppu teir út gjøgnum sprungurnar í tínum mishátta skølti
fyri at plága øll rundan um teg
so tú í frið og náðum kundi byrja tína óendaliga tankatómu ferð
heilt út hagar sum alt byrjar
og billa tær sjálvum inn
at tú ert ein av teimum endurføddu

gott fornøylsi tú

á lat bara vera

THE DEAD

do not fear the dead before you die
they are only dead
you are only living

maybe it's written in secret annals
the book of the dead who look forward to your arrival
you
only you
everyone that you touched along the way through the
unforgettable drama
that became yours

verily, so it is written
all these who carry grudge against you
the ones you didn't want to dance with
the ones whose feet you somehow stepped on with your
truculent steel heels
mostly accidentally
sometimes on purpose

maybe they are just waiting for a chance to tell you
what a fucker you are
how fucking useless you've always been

perhaps they are only waiting to taste sweet revenge
and make eternity intolerable for you
you were always so peculiar
so fucking within yourself
reserved like the plague itself
never needing anyone else

verily it is written in invisible books
that all the dead are there
the sense of them is all-consuming
when you step across that threshold of thresholds
many of them will not be kind
particularly mothers and fathers who stand ready with
unforgotten accusations
that only you know by heart

but this time there's no way out
you can't just run away

get the hell out of here
as a migrating bird with one-way ticket to no-where

here await the accusations and anger of eternity
and denial

for you
just for you

TEY DEYÐU

ikki ræðast tey deyðu áðrenn tú doyrst
tey eru bara deyð
tú ert bara á lívi

kanska stendur skrivað í loyniligum bókum
um øll hesi deyðu sum gleða seg til tú kemur
tú
bara tú
øll hesi tú nam á vegnum gjøgnum ógloymandi leikin
ið gjørdist tín

ja so er skrivað
øll hesi sum bera agg til tín
tey sum tú ikki tímdi at dansa við
tey tú onkursvegna traðkaði á tærnar við tínum balstýrigu
stálhælum
sum oftast av óvart
og við vilja

kanska bíða tey bara eftir einum kjansi at siga tær
hvussu øgiliga beistaktig tú ert
hvussu fanansliga dugnaleys tú altíð hevur verið

kanska bíða tey bara eftir at sleppa at smakka søtu hevndina
gera tær ævinleikan ótolandi
tú vart jú altíð so egin
so helvitisliga inni í tær sjálvari
afturhaldandi sum sjálv pestin
hevði ikki brúk fyri øðrum

sanniliga stendur skrivað í ósjónligum bókum
at øll tey deyðu eru har
kenslan av teimum er altuppetandi
tá tú traðkar um gátt gáttanna
nógv teirra eru ikki blíð
serliga mammur og pápar standa klár við ógloymdum ákærum
sum bara tú dugir innanat og uttanat

men hesaferð er ongin undanvegur
tú kanst ikki bara rýma
sleppa tær av fananum til
sum flytifuglur við einvegisbillett út í tóman heim

her bíðar ævinleikans brigsli og vreiði
og avnoktan

eftir tær
bara tær

RADIO

the radio besieges heart and home
always nauseatingly loud
everywhere
every single day

children have their food stuffed into them
because children in biafra are starving
terrified they chew and swallow themselves stick thin
while the radio is babbling about
atombomdhydrogennucleardanger
and worse than that

news and death reports
canned music and trash fish
dying voices
that announce dances and funerals
bingo nights and obituaries
are vomited back up their gullets with rotten food
which never amounts to more than regurgitation
of mothers who don't know how to cook
and father who don't have the energy
to chew children up before the radio fritzes out again

ÚTVARP

útvarpið kringsetur heimini og heilarnar
altíð spýggjandi hart frá
allastaðni
hvønn tann einasta dag

børnini fáa matin kroystan í seg
tí børnini svøлта í biafra
hjártkipt tyggja og svølgja tey seg diddarak
meðan útvarpið meylar um atombumbubrintatomvandan
og tað sum verri er

tíðindi og andlát
tónleikur uttan vit og skittfisk
doyggjandi røddir
siga frá dansi og jarðarferðum
og dunnuspæli og andláti
syftast gjøgnum vælindini saman við rotna matinum
sum aldrin verður til meiri enn eina klíggjan
hjá mammum sum ikki duga at gera mat
og pápum sum ikki orka longur
at tyggja børnini til útvarpið aftur slóknar

THE SUICIDE

the suicide that never is
but is nevertheless everpresent
as a too real letter
on the coarse carpet outside a door

as a bodily threat
on the top of a thirteen step staircase
as a howl out a window
that won't open

as naked horror
which fills the emptiness in a house
as breathless joy
that can only bleed internally
until the heart bursts with happy fatigue

SJÁLVMORDIÐ

sjálmorðið ið aldrin er
men allatíðina er har álíkavæl
sum eitt alt ov veruligt bræv
á hvössum teppi uttan fyri eina hurð

sum ein kropslig hóttan
ovast á eini trappu við 13 trinum
sum eitt geyl út gjögnum eitt vindeyga
ið ikki vil latast upp

sum nakin ræðsla
ið fyllir tómrúmið í einum húsum
sum andaleys gleði
ið bara kann bløða inneftir
líka til hjartað brestur
av eydnuríkari møði

SUN

the sun is banned from some houses
blackout curtains and blinds do their duty
like small angry servants of our lord
lay dark everything and everyone pretending to live a normal
life
in houses without rays of sun
NASA couldn't do better in its attempts
to keep away damaging rays from the heavens

in some houses they stuff themselves with vitamins instead
listening to the news from dawn to dusk
from sun up to sun down when the spirit is upon them
hearing about famine
drought
bombs
war
every imaginable catastrophe
and counting their blessings to live in a country
too out of the way to merit such misfortunes

it's so much easier
to bear one's own little misfortune
in darkened houses
even though the child is afraid of the dark
and does not understand it's the world
that's to blame

SÓL

sólin er bannað í summum húsum
svartar rullugardinur og persiennur gera sína skyldu
sum smáir illsintir tænastrumenn fyrir várharra
myrkaleggja allt og öll sum látast að lifa eitt vanligt líf
í húsum við öngum sólargeislum
NASA kundi ekki gjört það betur í sínum royndum
að halda skaðiligar geislar burtu frá himmalhválvinum

í summum húsum fylla þey seg við vitaminum í staðin
lurta eftir pressunni frá morgni til myrkurs
allan sólarhringinn á þá andin er yfir teimum
hoyra um hungursneyð
turk
bumbumenn
bardagar
allar hugsandi vanlukkur
þrýsa seg lúkkulig yfir að lifa í einum landi
ið ekki hefur uppiborið slíkar vanlagnur
þá er það so nógv lættari
að finna seg í síni heilt egnu lítlu vanlagnu

í myrkalögðum húsum
sjálfvtt um barnið ræðist myrkrið
og ekki skilur að það er verðin
sum hefur alla skyldina

MISS SCARLET
by AMY LAUREN

In morning's lavender, we'll sip
Earl Grays at our kitchen table
while the tea kettle whistles
to chirping goldfinches.
When she stands to slice raisin toast,
sunlight catches glitter on
her cheeks, the teacup's rims glowing
red from leftover lipstick.
We'll gossip or talk theology
in raspy waking voices.

For now, full moon softens
the reverent frame of our hands,
guiding our wide-eyed stroll
through Natchez's nativities.
We lean closer when the evening cools,
arms prickling, both breathless
with laughter. Cinnamon and steaming
chocolate trail crowded streets with us.
Underneath an oak, her lips paint mine
in holy scarlet.

GROWING UP

As sun peeks through violet
curtains my wife bought me,
our orchids spring new flowers,

a first in twenty-one years.
Those epiphytes grasp water
not from spindly soil roots, but air.

My ex-boyfriend overwatered
pleats that drooped, shriveled
bulbs swelling as roots rotted

when he finally returned it to me,
my hands barely daring touch
crumpled leaves, worms

chewing thick scraps of leaves.
But my wife has a knack for life,
teaches me to brush petals

like her own soft hands,
taught me photosynthesis
from sky and light,

so spikes bloom from buds.
New roots brim promising wet
shine, wrapping one another

like my lovers' pink lips.

JESU, MEINE FREUNDIN

i.

My god, She's dahlia sprigs for hands & aster seeds for teeth. When She weeps, trees spring into autumn's spectrum to comfort Her, clapping when She sings. Wherever She steps surges in newfound yield: crisp blackberries, stout crimson apples, sweet golden peaches, my hands happily heavier. I wipe specks of my god's rosy eyeshadow from our bathroom mirror. Forever I hum, pouring lavender salts into the bath for Her. Every season is flannel season, fashioning the word woman into something larger than even god with Her sweet-potato-shaping hands foresaw. She planted seeds, but girls in love ushered this harvest.

ii.

She carries ripened cherries' heaviness within sapling hands. Honey-skinned angels bloom from glens to follow Her, quilting landscapes with hallowed copper lanterns. Warm season slumbering in your chest awakens as black-capped chickadees migrate to thawing homes and a refrain of Her angels chorus: you are a whole solstice. Knit yourself within these dawns sprinkled with nutmeg and tiptoe with Her to perennial shrubs, untwining plump blackberries from thorny crowns. Sweat shimmers in Her shaved hair. Even as Her hands redden with barbed bruises, She hums psalms that blanket flowerbeds so elder daylilies open tired bodies with faith enough to reflower. Strolling with full baskets after sunset, She imagines the pie She'll bake after supper. Home's windows glisten candles in starling-colored air, Her kitchen table teems with dried rosemary sprigs and pamphlets for free HIV tests, and rain-stained music for Her antique pump organ rests on hand-stitched scarves. Elsewhere, She hears a grandmother in another hemisphere breathes her last in her husband's arms; elsewhere, two boys kiss for the first time in a park. She hopes they know She picked each blackberry for them.

TALK AGAINST MYSELF
by LISA MASÉ

Clock Tower, turn me back to Kansas City
when I lived in the cradle of jazz
and rolled free to Memphis, San Francisco,
Austin or Chicago.

You never told me that I would lay sick
these five years while you traveled on.

Never mind sleepless nights
on Grand Canyon's floor
or cop's barking nag
to fix that dented van door.
I want to wake before it all began,
live without worry again.

You never told me that I would lay low,
spend five years a recluse while you traveled on,

so sick that I raised a wall
of spruce, pine and hemlock,
strong as my rage for the house he built
when I thought I might die before dawn.

He could not see
through those splintery boards,
couldn't hear me as they cracked and cured.
I pulled the covers over,
waiting for change to wake me.

You never told me that I would leave him,
get up just like that, get dressed

and go back to Kansas City
to bury my grandmother,
the one who started it all.

HEADLINES FROM THE SIOUX CITY JOURNAL: MAY 26TH, 2018

“The Tulip Festival is a celebration
of all things Dutch in Sioux City, Iowa”
where the ferris wheel spins
sunscreen-scented teenagers.

Women in bespoke white bonnets
ride by in bicycles
with rainbow ribbons
woven between the spokes
like beaded ribbon shirts
Sioux warriors wore
into battle at Little Bighorn.

Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Crazy Horse,
Rain in the Face, Kicking Bear
walked the Great Plains
with buffalo prayers, stopping
to harvest bloodroot and hepatica,
cures for infection.

Their great grandchildren
still roam, infected by white
food and drink, looking
for home in the East, West,
North and South.

“At Blackbird Bend Casino
earn three times the points
when you play the slots
on Memorial Day.”

GROWING PAINS

by EMILY MILLER

When I was twelve years old I was in a tomboy phase, during which I wanted to do everything my male friends did, including dress like them, talk like them, and play with them. Some subconscious part of me was probably trying to impress the girls in my fifth-grade class, but that's beside the point.

My brother, at nine years old, participated in our local YMCA's flag football league. My dad, in an attempt to bond with his son, coached it. Wanting to explore my interests (and definitely not to impress the girls on the cheer league) I joined the elementary grade flag football team.

For weeks I attended practices in the hot, bug-infested field behind the YMCA. My dad would coach my brother's and my teams together; the twelve-year-olds towered over our nine-year-old counterparts. A month after beginning practices, we had our first game.

I was excited. With my hair up in a bun, my team's t-shirt and brand-new basketball shorts on, and pink football cleats adorning my scrawny form, I felt cooler than ever. A line of cheerleaders stood awkwardly to the side of the field, readying themselves for a cheer. I, in my snazzy new clothes, chanced a smile at them, though none paid me any attention.

For the first play of the game, my dad told us to run a route in which I would dash to the of the field and our quarterback would throw me the ball, allowing me the chance to go for a touchdown. Quickly we got into formation, and on the blow of the referee's whistle I ran down the field. I saw the ball spiraling towards me and I reached out and caught it before turning on my heel and running towards the end-zone. Just before I reached the painted white line, a boy from the opposing team's foot caught undermine and I tripped and fell.

It was like it happened in slow motion. I saw what seemed like the ground hurtling towards my face, though I knew it was the other way around. I felt my grip on the football tighten so as not to fumble (a lesson my dad had been sure to teach us in practice,) and I felt pain shoot up my arm as my other hand reached out to brace my fall. I heard a snap. After pushing myself back up to standing, I wavered on my feet. Pain throbbled from my wrist, but my dad and the rest of the team were praising me for holding onto the ball and running it so far and I, not wanting to seem "girly" (read: weak) swallowed the pain and kept playing.

I played the whole game with only one functioning arm. It was only after the clock ran out and the referee announced that we had won that I swallowed my pride and told my mom what was wrong. She drove me to the urgent care clinic where they told us my wrist was broken and put it in a cast, yet even then I wasn't able to properly tell the nurses what was wrong. I remember them pointing to a pain scale and asking me to rate how I felt. I stared at the pictures underneath each number for a solid minute before shrugging my shoulders.

Even with a diagram, I could not convey what I needed to.

I am bad at communicating. In the most basic of situations, I cannot express what I need without great inner turmoil that comes leaking out of my lungs in the form of increasingly frustrated sighs. And for the times when it is truly serious, I shut down, unable to convey anything but stoic numbness.

I cannot say what I do not know, and apparently that is a lot.

One thing I always knew, however, was that I wasn't straight. For years the disconnect in my mind was that I wasn't gay... I couldn't be gay. I was a good Christian girl. But then... if not straight or gay, what was I?

That was one of many questions for which young, sheltered, teenage Emily did not have an answer.

It was around the fourteenth year of my life when I finally admitted to my family that I needed help, that I knew something was not right with my mind. Mental illness runs in my family, but it wasn't something that was talked about as I was growing up. I was nervous to tell them how I felt—anxious to talk about my anxiety. Even then, the irony was not lost on me.

But I let slip the plea for help one night as my mom drove us back from the grocery store, and her response was an underwhelming “okay.” So, we went to the doctor, the doctor referred us to a psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist put me on Prozac and signed me up for weekly therapy sessions to help combat the depression and anxiety that plagued my brain.

This was my Hell. Picture a scrawny young girl with her hair cut messily above her neck, in a room in a children's psychiatrist office with toys covering the floor and pictures of trucks on the white walls, her hands wringing in her lap as the doctor asks questions she does not know how to answer.

When did you start feeling like this? Why did you drop out of public high school? What does your depression feel like to you? How many hours a night do you sleep? I did not know, but I had to give answers. Dr. Kirby was, after all, watching me expectantly and jotting down notes on her purple laptop, psychoanalyzing my every glance. I always said the wrong thing.

For years reading had been my escape. In books I could lose myself, in books I could adventure right alongside the protagonist, hear her relay her problems and feel, if only for the duration of the story, that I was able to effectively communicate my own. It only occurred to me that I could write my problems and project them onto my favorite characters myself after watching *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, the third and last movie of that trilogy, and falling head-over-heels for the characters therein.

Maybe I saw myself in Bilbo's flustered bravery, in his love for home and hearth. Or maybe I connected with Thorin and his own inability to express himself through the dragon sickness that could easily be interpreted to represent a mental illness, or perhaps the youth and optimism of Fili and Kili was what drew me in.

But, more than any of that, I saw a passion between the characters of Bilbo and Thorin that I had never seen on screen before, especially not in a fantasy film. For hours on end I would analyze Thorin and Bilbo's lingering gazes, their hug on the carrock, Thorin's motive for gifting Bilbo the shirt of mithril and not one of his own nephews. I would watch the acorn scene in *Battle of the Five Armies* over and over again, taking in the homosexual subtext and letting my imagination run wild. What if Thorin had survived the Battle of the Five Armies? Would he ask Bilbo to rule Erebor by his side? Or would they move to the Shire together and live in Bag End, raising Frodo as their own? The possibilities were endless, and I was enthralled by Bilbo and Thorin's passionate love that I had conjured in my mind. If, even in my own imagination and stories, they could be gay and still live happily ever after, maybe so could I.

I wrote words upon words of them meeting, falling in love, grieving one another, raising a family, you name it, all in hundreds of different ways. I projected myself onto a Dwarf, a Hobbit, and three movies worth of homosexual subtext. It felt good to finally have an outlet to express my thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Writing allowed me time to think and process; it helped me to know that I could communicate, even if it was in a different way than others might.

A year before, when I was still unsure of myself and of my own thoughts, I remember riding in the back of my family's truck on our way to Applebee's for dinner when my mom asked a question that would kickstart my exploration of self.

"Emily, what do you picture your life looking like in twenty years?"

At the time I was fifteen—the age when I should have noticed boys for several years now, should have imagined my dream wedding and had an unattainable celebrity crush, likely on an actor named Chris. But if I was being honest with myself (and at this point I was), my attention had never been grabbed by a boy or a shirtless celebrity, nor had I ever pictured myself with a guy.

So, like a good daughter, I answered my mother's question, carefully skirting around the topic of a partner. It was only once I had finished detailing the apartment I planned to own, and the cats I would have, that she confronted the topic head-on.

"What about a husband? What if he doesn't like cats?"

In my mind, there was something horribly wrong with each of those questions. With the self-righteous anger every fifteen-year-old possesses, I snapped that whoever I spent the rest of my life with "*would like cats, dangit.*" Then, softer, more hesitant, "I don't really want a husband anyway. I think . . . I think I don't feel attraction to guys. I'd rather just live with someone as a friend forever."

With a frantically beating heart, I explained the way this faceless man and I could share a mortgage, an apartment, custody of the cats, everything. We'd just sleep in different rooms and act like friends act. "*It's not weird, Mom, it's progressive.*"

Her next question came after a bout of awkward silence from the passenger seat, worried glances traded with my dad as he drove. "Do you like girls?"

For some reason the question set my face ablaze and I stuttered out a "no!" as if it were the most idiotic thing I'd ever heard. "I told you, I just don't like guys."

At the time, that was God's honest truth as far as I was concerned. Yet somehow the inquiry rattled around incessantly in my brain and followed me like a shadow for nearly two years. Two years of warring with myself, and my beliefs, and the truths I knew to be alive within Me.

It all came to a head when, in June of 2015, six months after the release of *The Battle of the Five Armies*, six months of thinking and writing and projecting and desperately trying to

communicate what I could not to my loved ones, or in my therapy sessions, my mom once again brought up how I kept trying to explain to friends and family members who asked about my boyfriend (or lack-thereof) that I just didn't want one.

"People will think you're gay if you keep saying that," she said.

I felt white-hot anger bubble up within me without really understanding why. "So what if I am?" I asked testily. My mother stared at me with narrowed eyes.

"Are you?"

I felt my world grind to a halt as every memory of every moment which pointed to one undoubtable truth flashed through my mind, and suddenly, without a doubt, I knew: I'm gay.

Before me my mother stood, expectant. Within me was a tornado wreaking havoc, setting the tone for the next battle in my mind between my beliefs and my own truth. I had hoped to say something brave, with a confident tone and a steely look. Even a meaningfully choked up "yes" would have sufficed. But I said nothing at all. Instead, I began to bawl my eyes out.

Even though this was not an easy realization for anyone involved, I am blessed to have a family who, ultimately, loves me for me. Although they accept my queerness now, and allow me to embrace it, this was not always the case. The journey to this point was one of growing pains, and the need to communicate feelings from all sides of the issue. But what is growth without discomfort, and what is learning without communication?

MEMORIAM

—first printed in *Burning House Press*

by JULIA BARCLAY-MORTON

When I first visited my father J in Berkeley in the 70s, Jerry Brown was governor, and he gave a state address, in which he said “I was thinking about the problems we are facing so I decided to listen to whale sounds, which I will play you now.” I laughed with J and his second wife, but was uneasy. A Northeastern teenager surrounded by palm trees and a whale-sound-playing governor.

On January 7, 2010, having flown in late the night before from New York to Sacramento, outrunning a blizzard via the last flight out of O’Hare, because J was in the ICU, I was dropped off at a new Catholic hospital in God-knows-where-suburban Sacramento that looked like a combination concrete church, mall and Disney ride called Hospital World. I asked two older female volunteers where the ICU was and found it in a maze of identical corridors and sanitary gel dispensers even though I couldn’t remember the directions. A friendly nurse appeared and brought me to my father’s bed where I saw a body being kept alive by machines. Perhaps his spirit was trapped in there, but he was gone, his face contorted, mouth forced around an oxygen tube and body stuck with needles and monitors.

Not knowing what else to do, I sat next to him for hours. Stared at the 72-year-old body of the father I barely knew, his only living relative and only child.

Another nurse brought me coffee and comfort when he could. The nurses I began to sense were nuns; they radiated a compassionate, competent calm. They also argued with my father’s Godforsaken insurance company, explaining that no they could not move him from their ICU to Kaiser’s ICU just because it was costing extra money.

As I sat next to his body, which jerked upward every time he took another involuntary breath, I prayed. Though not a Catholic, a miracle had happened when I walked into his room. All my resentments, which I had tried for years to let go of, vanished. I forgave him the abandonment, the non-existent boundaries, his inability to support me as a child or see me as an adult until the very end, the whole thing. And I knew I had to let him go this one last time.

The doctors told me that he would not wake up this time, but I checked with J by asking him to move his foot if he wanted to go.

Even though it had moved involuntarily before, now it twitched violently and repeatedly, which confirmed what was obvious from the moment I saw him.

I figured his partner C (like my mother he had re-married many times but had not married C) would not show up for a while as she had been staying with him late at the ICU. She asked me to come because she did not want to make the decision by herself and because she had lost her health care proxy, the one my father's third ex-wife had paid a lawyer to sort out for her. I found the proxy the next day in their dark condo in the midst of relentlessly sunny suburban Sacramento after crawling over and under papers, clothes, pot pipes, dirty dishes, inscrutable stains, old food, cat litter and Buddhas. The detritus of disability, delusion, drugs and denial.

When C arrived in the late afternoon, we talked while she cried and freaked and agreed that we should let him go. The nurse explained to us that when they removed all the plugs and lines it could be minutes or hours before he died. I had a feeling it would be quick.

The nurse gave us lavender aromatherapy cream, then offered a choice of pillowcases that volunteers had made. She asked if we wanted a cast of his hand, which she then prepared, and I noticed as she did this she was crying.

After they took everything off and out of him, C disappeared. I was alone with my father, rubbing his head with the cream. I said 'You are loved,' and he took his last labored Breath.

An administrator barged in asking me to sign a form so I could change my scheduled flight home to London. I asked her to leave but she insisted as her shift was ending, so I shared my father's death with Virgin Airlines.

His pacemaker did not stop, so his heart monitor kept beeping. They tried to stop it with a magnet so they could declare him dead but it was relentless. I knew this would cheer him up no end.

C reappeared and was frantic that she had missed his death. I did not ask where she had been. One learns. But I held her when she cried, and she held me when I cried. As we sat with his dead body, we started laughing when I noticed that if you looked at J's face at a certain angle, you could see his wry smile.

My mother called and talked to us. Many lovely text messages arrived as I had asked for friends to send prayers or whatever they believed in when the machines were being taken away and they did.

When C's two sons and a girlfriend appeared, they stood as far away as possible from J's body. I remembered dead bodies are supposed to be scary. I had been terrified walking into that hospital, but now felt at peace and deeply held.

Brown was recently re-elected governor of California, and I am sorry J did not live to see this after suffering through Schwarzenegger's victory in 2003 able only to mutely point in horror after his first stroke. However, he did live to see his beloved Red Sox beat the Yankees in the World Series. Who says nothing changes?

Good-bye, J. I never did call you Daddy, but I know you're my father. Thanks for the ride, even if you could not afford to buy me the ticket.

7 CONVERSATIONS THAT BUILD INTIMACY
by CLAIRE NELSON

1. Talk about the pimple in the corner of your mouth
and the pain it is causing you
2. Say, *do you really want to talk about this*
softy, straighten your back against the headboard
3. Ask how to remove tear stains
from a silk pillowcase
4. Relive your dream about the apocalypse
in an empty parking lot
5. Discuss take-out leftovers, the sadness of them
in styrofoam, the ache
6. Admit you're heartbroken as they
pull you in for a dance
7. Cut open your thigh saying
I know it's in here somewhere.

HOMECOMING

He wants to know am I wet

I wretch bran then bile

not lie: I hunger too

I scratch lottery tickets.

How wet talks about taste

says *that's my good girl*

I win a few dollars

sleep giftwrapped

in dirty sheets

Tonight I dream apocalyptic

carry steak knife inside

old underwear.

IN DOG YEARS I'M ALREADY DEAD

At the half empty poetry reading
the brunette leans back in his seat, testing
the give of the chair, a slow pulse
and I find myself rocking in rhythm.

He's wearing a khaki cap backwards,
and I can't hear the poet over the embroidered
phrase bobbing in my face,
"In dog years I'm already dead."

I think about what an idiot this kid is,
dumb like a young dog before his bones
solidify, when he's still all growth plates and jelly
How stupid teenagers are, how lucky

any of us are to survive beyond those years,
snapping at tires out of love and anger,
the evenings my brother and I spent in the parking lot
running alongside our old Volvo in neutral,

the sky a beauty queen in a two piece suit
moving across a small stage. How easily a foot
could have caught under a wheel.

The boy who died in August at the carwash
by my house was 81 in dog years, but no one
said that at his funeral, no one claimed his life was full,
his death timely like my pug's, who lived fewer years

than the boy, but died old eating cinnamon pinwheels and ice cream
the way everyone should die.
The brunette looks like him from behind, who saw his
girlfriend washing her car with someone else and crawled

on the hood out of love and anger, how hard it is
to tell the difference between those two,
and she put her foot on the gas out of fear
or love, and he could have rolled off the back of the car,
fallen and bruised his shoulder

He could have fallen and gotten up, chased after her
and maybe that's how they saw it play out if they could
have seen in front of feeling, but it didn't and they couldn't,
who can when you're that age, when feeling is first, wholly to be a fool.

Not even the poets can fix it. How easily Jack broke his crown.

A HANDFUL OF RAIN
by SHEILA PACKA

It was late. In the mirror, rows of liquor bottles stood straight, and in front, a hand wiped the bar with a white cloth. At the table in the back of the tavern, Estelle looked away from Rose and around the room. Shadows filled the corners, making it impossible to see. The heavy bowls of soup were empty. The glasses contained only traces. Rose's beer, and her own, scotch.

One last time that afternoon they had made love. Estelle's skin still felt Rose's urgent search for something she did not find. They had laid in bed afterward, staring at the electronic digits of the clock.

"Stell," Rose said, the tattooed birds across her forearm reached out across the scarred table.

"Yesterday, I had a lover," Estelle said, pulling her hand away. "You're going to Tucson, I don't want to delay you."

It wasn't just yesterday. They had been together for a year. Clearly, there were things she had misconstrued because she had thought Rose might settle in. She was younger and still believed in her dreams. An itinerate musician's life was an uncertain living. A Dylan song played on the jukebox. The balls on the pool table broke and scattered. The players were nothing but silhouettes. Rose leaned against the booth. There was a note of sorrow in Rose's voice.

"We were making a song without rhyme. We were breaking ourselves in two. I don't want you to be bitter."

"You're going to enjoy the heat after Minnesota." What had once attracted Estelle now made her impatient.

The neon sign went from open to closed.

"You'll make a great attorney." Rose put on her jacket. She picked up her violin case from the bench beside her and put it under her arm. She hadn't performed that night, but Rose would never leave her violin in her truck or anywhere. Her foot, clad in a cowboy boot, pointed toward the door.

"That's my problem," Estelle said. Ahead of her, everything that she had worked toward, her corporate job, the repayment of her school loans, her new life. She had thought they could travel the same road, even if they were going in opposite directions.

"I suppose," said Rose. People sitting at tables nearby, oblivious to the two women, broke out laughing.

Estelle took out a credit card and laid it down. "It's May but winter just won't let go," she said. "Even the branches hold back their leaves. No blooms, not anything."

The bartender took the card, and came back with a slip and Estelle signed it with a flourish.

“Thanks for everything,” Rose said. Her eyes were dark.

They both went out the door. In the raw wind and rain, Rose pressed her cheek against Estelle, and the strands of her dark hair tangled with Estelle’s short hair, silvering.

“Come back,” Estelle said despite herself.

“We’ll see. The band...you know. It all depends.”

“This is when you get in your truck and wave, and I’ll wave at you. And I’ll be free to find the woman I lost.” This was a joke they had, a bit of song lyric, and Rose smiled but did not furnish the punchline: or find another.

In the reflection, Estelle could see herself as she leaned into the truck window to give her one last kiss and then she drew back. She felt her back ache as if she were bent like a tree without the one it entwined. In the distance, she thought she heard the sound of frozen rivers, broken, and the ground going with them, but it must have been the roar of traffic on the freeway.

The tail-lights were bright red in the night, and Estelle watched them merge and then disappear. The lights of the tavern went out. The dark of the highway was limitless.

TO A PULASKI COUNTY JAIL GUARD
by STACY PENDERGRAST

I tore up the first letter I wrote that said *I hope you relished every last bite of that hamburger I sent to Inmate 185360*. Can't blame you. We all grew up with grown-ups saying *Excuse me* — when they really meant *You dumb-ass kid — you do as I say*. Isn't this why you wanted a job with cell keys? The chance to slide your hurt through the bars. Slip it under the sheet-less mats. Plunge it down the lid-less toilets. You'd worked a long shift and hadn't eaten breakfast. The beef dripped its juice. You didn't think someone who ordered from I-care.com would care. That I'd actually want to see our boy's scrawled signature on the receipt. Maybe you gave him the voucher. Told him you enjoyed his meat. Maybe he shredded the receipt into long strips, braided these with bits of cellophane cigarette wrappers, a tiny, red pull-tab placed dead center shining like a ruby.

LUNALA

I keep hearing the doctor *tsk-tsk-ing* as
she shakes her head and tells me the half-
moons on my fingernails have disappeared
now I've peeled back my gummy cuticles
only to reveal one pale, rising
lunala on my thumb
a hazy little mound in an
otherwise barren, brittle field
all this time I thought nailbeds, earlobes,
and dimples could be counted on as
bit parts safe from a doctor's dim predictions

my great aunt Nan kept her hair dyed
chalkboard black even after her husband
left her by way of one last heart attack
she finally got her driver's license and
learned to navigate a Cadillac through
the streets of Memphis by rolling through
stop signs, making only right-hand turns
she said you could get anywhere
without crossing left against traffic and
in her city all roads lead to Graceland anyway

my grandmother Francie once won a
beauty pageant but when I knew her she was
so fat she would cry she had no lap
as a girl whenever I wished for different hair
Francie would say if my grandmother
had wheels she would have been a wagon
sometime before I was grown she stopped singing
here she comes Miss America at the sight of me
I went to the nail shop where the girl
cut my cuticles to the quick before
she wrapped silk gauze over my last lunala
this is all to say a wishing moon means the sun
shines brightest on the side we cannot see

YOU SHOULD NEVER REGRET

by JC REILLY

saying *I love you*—love, once given,
may be blotted out by the fierce crows
of discontent that fly overhead, driven
mad through offhand talk and the throes
of neglect, till you're laid out, bones
picked bare—all that's left (memory) is refuse
rotting under summer's rays—those hormones
that brought you together repel—and a bruise
on your ego means you got off easy.
So be glad—but don't regret the *saying* of it:
you meant it once, when your heart blew breezy
and thoughts of her were soft and moonlit—
you meant *I love you*. There's no shame
in loving, even as its remnants limp off, lame.

APRIL SHOWERS

Something about today's rainy skies
makes the leaves on the oak tree
outside—or maybe my eyes?—disguise
its green, shade it towards dark-sea-
slate-blue on the underneath—
an unexpected shift, the way your shadow side
like sudden narcissus will unsheathe
itself, those moments you decide
that the world abuts you with spears,
that too soon will you be sliced
and slivered—those ultramarine fears
that do not cease. And what is sacrificed:
my joy. Even in this poem about spring rain,
how my thoughts color with your pain.

DISLOCATION
by SHERRY RIND

The crows speak a different language here
and bees sound a newly piercing note, mean
as the blackberry thorns they hunt among.

The crows confer among themselves. Maybe
ants take the food I offer
or the armies of insects that surround our lives.

Draped in brambles, the skinny plum trees
bordering my piece of the world
dangle sparse, hard fruit out of reach.

Aphids frost the leaves of plum and blackberry alike,
suck out the life. Where there's injury,
rot threads to the heartwood.

What is this place
that the animals expect nothing,
that our lives do not intersect,

that the bees will not give me safe passage
as I water the rosemary I've planted
to make myself a home?

LINNAEUS NAMES ANDROMEDA

Andromeda polifolia

By the time he reached her
he thought the mud was talking

He couldn't remember warmth
and here was this pale pink flower

Gazing downwards, belled petals the blush he fancied
on a virgin of most exquisite and unrivalled charms

In loneliness, illusions
bog plants anchored but floating

Water licking at Andromeda's feet
and the dragon a salamander sullyng her pristine skirts with mud

All preparation and waiting, all uncertainty, her pulse of color
growing paler and paler till it withers away

SNAPDRAGONS
by FELICIA ROSE

It's a dewy morning.
Evie tells me she's going to the garden
to pick apples for brunch.

Some time later I glimpse her kneeling
on the sodden earth
beside her basket of fruit.
An apple core lies by her side.

"Look at this, Lil," she says, her voice
the cadence of rapture.

A honey bee needles its way
into the inner petals
of a soft pink-ed snapdragon
savors its nectar, flutters
and calms.

In the meantime, Emily dreams of Sue
girdles the marsh
and lifts the hem
of her pure white dress.

ARRANGEMENTS

Vase in hand, she slinks
into the dark misty morning
beneath a canopy
of gnarly vines.

Even with the aid
of a porch light, I fail
to see further or conceive
of why she might choose
to pick berries into a vessel
with so tiny a mouth.

For long spans, we trudged
through understories
of unbearable mire,
snared ourselves in ganglionic branches
of discord.

Last night, we lay
among a welter
of quilts and I asked
if she loved me.

Now the first ribbons
of daylight appear, and she enters
our home with a bouquet
of elderberry blossoms
forget-me-nots
and splendid horseradish leaves.

DANDELIONS
by MANDY SHUNNARAH

stepping off the front porch
letting my bare feet
be pricked by the gravel driveway
my teddy bear nightgown flapping about my calves
i grasp the flashlight so tight
the grooved "on" button
leaves its indentation

the moon bulges like a monocled eye
wide open in surprise on the face of the universe
i reach the yard and shine
the yellow beam into the dandelions
remembering the papery vegetables of my tv dinner,
the shouts from the kitchen, shouts from the bedroom
words i'm not supposed to say

i fall to my knees among the weeds
biting at the stems and plucking
their golden heads into my mouth
their thready petals itching my tongue

to the sound of dogs howling
i bang my fists into the earth
screaming with a mouth full of dandelions

i hold them with clenched teeth
hold them until they turn to fuzz
in my cheeks
choking and asking their prolific feathers
to fill me up
let me leave here
on the breeze

CHARIOT
by LINDA SIMONE

They say your legs rebel,
refuse to stand erect.
In constant falls, acknowledging no breaks,
you kiss the ground.

Of late, you get around
in four-wheeled chariot—
not wild-eyed, reckless Ben Hur,
more wide-eyed, your daughter says,

and somewhat wrecked.
To hug you, I
must push my creaking knees
spread arms

to fly
an endless fifteen hundred miles.
I will, I say, to taste your smile.
Sister, ride on!

CONFLUENCE

Wind picks up,
storm set to hit.
In its path, we scuttle
for shelter, find none.

Hail-stung
crossed arms
overhead,
we try to ignore
cold, soaked feet,
Armageddon lightening,
thunder like avalanche of rocks.
We give in to the day.

Then small azure lakes
break clouds
slow as a morning glory
waking,
and takes
our breath away.

[HAIKU FOR MIDNIGHT]

Floating in night sky
endless dandelion-white spores
blown loose by the moon

EXPOSED BY SOUND
by ELLEN McGRATH SMITH

And what if poetry
 is nothing more
than being inside someone else's head?

What could be better than that?

When I was small,
 growing into my head,
 an enormous head
impossible to carry for long
without drooping

I believed all the world was in it.

What might be considered imperious
 on my part
was really impatience at how
people wanted to separate, even
 the parts of themselves
that together
engendered a fine
human
 action or thought \

or consider this: there are people
 who wake up and think
of the others they'll try to love more
 this new day.

 Don't you want
to live inside a head like that?
 We're talking warm springs,
a tingle that radiates
 outward / who

can put a price on it?
Centuries of
 see-through planets
to live in, exposed as a fetus by sound.

CANCER LYRIC J
by BEKAH STEIMEL

I'm learning the tricky maneuver of forgiving myself, a move you taught me simply by dying. Dying is simple. Natural and organic. The complications arise afterwards, like an infection post-surgery. You slipped out of your cuffs and left me chained to a carousel of memory. It spins without mercy. I caught and cradled you, clutched you tightly to my chest...and still, on occasion, I fumbled your heart. I always recovered it, but the drops haunt me. You accepted each and every shameful apology with grace and understanding. I am tortured by the words I should have spoken. I punish myself for the fact that they needed to be said in the first place. I have no grace and understanding to apply to my guilt. But, I do have that carousel of memory. It spins without refrain. It reminds me that you love me as I love you. You would not want me to ruminate and retaliate against myself. You can only break in so many places. You would not want my shards smashed into dust. So, I'm learning to forgive myself, and enjoy the rest of the recollection that colorful carousel has to offer. To remember the touchdowns and forget the fumbles. The last lesson you taught me, as simple as death.

YOUR SPIDER WEB TOUCH

—silky and strong
has handcuffed my entire body to itself
—to your will
I move when you move me
through collision and command
a circle of responses
to whispers
to wishes disguised as decree
there are shades of addiction
—color me black
and there is a hierarchy of lovers
and I crown you Queen.

BECAUSE MY NEW DOCTOR IS THE FIRST MAN I'VE TRUSTED
IN YEARS

by OLIVIA TORRES

I don't flinch when he touches me.
he hesitates, hovering, holy
in the way that he holds himself
apart from me, lifting his hands
into the air, simple, gloved, wingless
birds. they are a latex covering
of weaponry and my mouth is a trigger.
aim, squeeze, fire. okay. then I am
pressed upon as he considers
the helicopter humdrum of my heart. next,
lungs, and I can feel his warmth through
the gloves and it is better. better than skin,
than human, i have enough of it on me as
it is. but it's his eyes that I trust the most—
I have never believed blue eyes before
and they are beautiful in the way that unfamiliar
things are. he is a collage of alien tenderness
and i can't think, i can't think, i cannot think
except what it would be like to be with him
and still, I am so young inside.

I wonder
if he can hear that my favorite color
is brown by listening to the sound of
my organs inside me.

A LOVE LETTER TO DAPHNE

my love,
spear-minted with

ivy flowers that bud
on the swell of your throat—

your words are made
of mountain water.

freckles of gold-pan
sand tickle my lips

when I peck at your cheeks
like a hummingbird

desperate for nectar
but moving too fast to catch any.

crusted capillaries
of mica coat

your flesh and when i touch
you I draw back gleaming.

I will wait for you,
and if you need time

please count the fingers
of each purple sunset

that die over mt. olympus.
I am there—in the third

knuckle of each palm,

I will wait for you.

LUST

by JUANITA TOVAR

The memory of her is slowly starting to fade. I want it to be. I need it to be. I need to learn how to patiently wait until it's completely gone: quickly, right now.

If I know that this is all wrong, that I'm married to a man, that I have no future with her, that she's crazy, a threat to my stability and mental health, why do I want her so desperately, why do I hurt myself by thinking about her, why did I let it get so far in the first place?

Perhaps, I am trying to punish myself.

Self-flagellating might be a way to wash my mind clean from betraying Karl's trust, from taking advantage of it, from breaking the pact that allowed me to see women at the beginning of last year but then asked me to bring it to a pause just before the summer ended.

I might be playing a sadistic game with myself. One that uses her pulsating, piercing memory to corrode me from within: to remind me of the things that Karl, in all of his youth and vigor, cannot provide me with.

In those quiet moments before my consciousness is lost to the realm of dreams, I allow her memory to pierce my mind.

Her blue eyes, full lips, and the way her soft hands would firmly press my arms to bring me closer to her embrace, enter my mind as I lay in bed, helpless, powerless to her.

My fists close up, teeth begin to clench. I know I should not go there, but fuck it, I'm already there.

I'm angry. Angry at my weakness. My inability to control my mind, to stop myself from thinking about her. I hate myself.

Snapshots of her continue to flood my mind. How her voice would change from a high-pitch to a raspy tone when she would whisper in my ear, the mischievous grin she would throw my way whenever she got a chance to tease me, her scent of wild berries and desire.

I can't seem to stop. I don't think that I want to stop. I want a shadow of those moments we shared together to torture me for a few more moments. It's getting hard to breath; I feel an increasing weight on my chest.

I think of the way my shoulders would descend, my arms would open to welcome her touch, my tongue would roll along her skin to taste the salty, intoxicating flavour of her.

I want to not remember how it felt to have her hands on my hips, closing on any space still separating our bodies. How my desire for her

would make it impossible for me to think or talk about anything if my lips could be consumed by hers instead. How my body would forget about hunger or thirst on the extended hours we spent together.

I know I broke it off for a reason. I'm married. She's volatile, emotional, crazy, she snaps, she's impulsive. I'm aware of the fact that I'm not meant to be seeing her.

I could feel that she wanted something more than whatever casual dating meant to both of us before we met. I knew I wanted that too. I yearned for hours, days, weeks with her. My desire for her was only going to increase, cause problems in my relationship, make me more stressed that I could bare to be.

I said goodbye. We both did. I pressed my lips against hers one last time under the fluorescent lights that read in thick purple letters Double Down Saloon. I put my arms around her, letting out the air of her puffy jacket, trapping her in my embrace.

All of the following week she texted. I did not reply. She persisted. The last time she did, I was sitting on the subway, head resting up against the window, arms open, legs relaxed. The moment I saw her number light up on my phone, a feeling of emptiness filled my stomach. I could once more feel a pressure rising in my chest.

And just like that It was back.

A stranger's voice came into focus, too loudly, too quickly. My breathing was speeding up. I looked down, scared to see people's faces. I was afraid that the moment I locked eyes with someone else, I was going to start feeling as if they were examining me too closely. As if their faces were going to look odd somehow, their expressions were not going to mirror the ones that I knew.

My feet started to move, at the same pace, restless, up and down, tapping on the ground, filling up the already overly-saturated background noise. My fingers came together to grab onto the skin on either side of my nails. I told myself *"Do not look up. Try to take in air slowly. You can calm yourself down."*

But deeply I didn't know if this was true. I was anxious about the possibility of becoming more anxious.

Karl blows thick rings of smoke into the dark air. His face, illuminated by street lights and moving cars, avoids my sight.

He lays still, vertical, tense on the soft couch, erect, except for his left hand which moves back and forth, and with that motion continues to fill up the air with his dense breath.

“Hmmm, can we talk about the thing,” I pause to clear my throat, “I sort of just want to get it over wi—”

“Ok, what do you want to talk about?” He immediately interrupts and raises his eyebrow as if he was annoyed by this statement.

“Well the dating women thing, you know,” I can start to feel the pulse in my throat. But I leave my body as is, arms resting on either side of my uncrossed legs, chin up, face uncovering a fake smile. I can’t look tense. I need this to go well.

He meets my gaze for a second, looks away, and responds drily “Well, be more specific.” Now his fingers move up and down the top of his leg, restless, quickly matching the rhythm of *Dazed and Confused*, which is playing in the background.

I think carefully of the words I had prepared in moments passed. I adjust my tone to stay neutral as if I didn’t care what his next words were going to be. “I sort of just wanted to see if in the long term, you know . . . if you will be okay with me dating women again. I know that last year the whole thing caused tension in our relationship, and I don’t want that to happen again, but . . . *ahem* . . . perhaps . . . we can try it out one last time?”

His fingers stop moving to grab onto the couch’s pillow. Momentum intensifies. He exhales, fills up the air with the strong scent of vanilla, passes on the hookah pipe into my right hand, keeps staring at the wall, does not say a thing.

“I mean, I really don’t care about the short term and I sort of want this to be a chill talk—” *Stress the word CHILL, Chill* “—and is not like we’re going to discuss timelines or anything or have to make any specific decision right now, but I just want to know if in the long term —” *KEY WORD: Key word* “—you would be open to me dating women.” I refuse to look at him, I don’t want my eyes to reveal how nervous I am about what he’s thinking.

“This is something I’ve been thinking about and yeah I reckon that would be ok, I think I would be ok with that.”

We look at each other for a brief second. He coughs, “This shit is making me dizzy. I gotta stop.”

I let go of a quiet giggle and look at him. I close my mouth, lower my eyebrows, blink slowly, attempting to look composed, forcing myself to appear relaxed. My body turns to face him, but my eyes can’t find his.

His back meets the wall, it curves, mouth opens to empty out his lungs, slowly. His hand grazes my open palm. The music has stopped—I can only hear his breathing.

People slowly come and go. They sit down and talk quietly. They pass back and forth dragging their bodies, their feet, their thoughts. Coffee is a necessity, a craving. It keeps the line flowing, moving, changing.

Monday haze. Monday blues. Monday blur.

Natalie, my best friend, a fellow twenty-something-year-old. The one I can be raw, naked with. The only person I have shown the sins engraved on my body to—pushes the heavy door that separates us. Her face reveals a smile the moment our eyes lock in recognition. Her arms up in the air, moving, welcoming me to come closer. “I’m so happy to see you cutie pieeeee.” I meet her embrace.

Our lips move quickly. We talk, talk, talk. Can’t seem to stop. Fast. Quickly. So as not to catch too much breath. She finally says “Enough about me, tell me what’s happening with you.”

I touch her hand. Move my chair in her direction to close the gap between my lips and her left ear, to bring her inner world closer to my secrets. “Hmmm, not much . . . crazy girl hasn’t texted me in over two weeks, I think that she finally let go of me.” I look into the corner as to focus on my next series of thoughts, she does not say a thing, “I also talked to Karl about the dating thing.”

Her eyes widen, she stares at me, does not blink, waits for what’s to be said next.

“He said that he’s open to me dating girls again, but I don’t know, what should I do, I’m so scarred with what went down with crazy girl . . . I mean I miss having sex with women, I want to do it again, but hmmm.” I pause and look at her hazel eyes, clear face, thick brows. “Maybe, I can try to find meaningless, no-feeling-kinda-sex? I don’t know. It’s hard to find, but I’ve had it. I’m confused, dude. What do you think?”

Natalie meets my gaze firmly, for a second. I look away. She remains silent, takes her time. “I sort of feel like no amount of great, amazing, mind-blowing sex is ever worth the kind of stress and anxiety you went through. Why can’t you just have sex with Karl? He’s really good, isn’t he?”

I look down in defeat. I can feel the tears coming. I close my eyes. My back quickly rises as it tenses up, “Yeah, dude, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. Why can’t I be satisfied?” My hand meets hers. I hold onto her palm, hard.

I feel alone in her presence yet contained by her company.

There's now only silence between us. It fills the air. It's loud. It is pressing. But yet somehow that's the only thing left for us to express.

INFUSION CENTER
by SARA WINSTON

The Infusion Center notified me of a policy change:
Starting today,
female patients receiving Tysabri will be required BY LAW to undergo
pregnancy testing
as part of their vital exams
Other tests include but are not limited to
temperature,
blood pressure,
heart rate

I'll pee on a stick to guarantee my immune-modifying medication
does not harm a small fetus
despite what it may do to the limbs of my existing body
Praise be! John Cunningham (JC) virus bi-annually.
save me the brain infection, (progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy
(PML))

Praise be! The government, saving my unborn, unimagined fetus

MEDICAL PAIN

What kind of medical realities are prerequisite for compassion?

Pain doesn't fit neatly on a scale of 1-10

Pain transcends the boundaries of language.

To use metaphor, simile, or hyperbole to describe pain often de-legitimizes the severity of the physical symptom one feels, but may be the only way to adequately describe crippling discomfort.

Did you know that in order to treat physical pain a doctor must be able to medically diagnose the cause of physical pain?

POROUS BODIES

Our bodies are much more porous than we once thought
Acknowledgement of this is a mercy

NORMAL 30/50 Y/O BRAIN

To save anyone else
the confusion or concern
the language *mild sulcal prominence suggestive of mild cerebral atrophy*, commonly used by Radiologists
in a brain MRI report means overall, normal 30-50 year old brain

WELL, ADULT, HUMAN, BODY

How are sickness and wellness defined, and by whom?

What are the effects of these definitions?

If illness is the human experience of symptoms and suffering,
and disease is the problem from the practitioner's perspective,
& sickness is the invocation of disorders in relation to macro social
forces,
what is a well adult human body

I DIDN'T
by ARIADNE WOLF

After Stuart Dybek's "We Didn't"

I didn't, not after you walked in and looked exactly the way I thought you would, and also not the same at all. Your hair was the dark of the woods above Santa Cruz where I found myself and the Redwoods found me and I belonged to the universe after all. You entered with the smell of cinnamon and soil and maybe there was a hitch in your voice, maybe you tried too hard not to look at me. I didn't after you stood at the board and told me with a hint of amazement that's a good question and looked me square in the face and your chin softened like surrender and I wanted to shake my head no, don't surrender to me, just keep your eyes on me and I'll be okay and I'll find some way to make you okay too. Your eyes black as the universe met my eyes with a steady gaze like you were looking for something, and there was a hint of satisfaction in the right corner of your mouth when it lifted, like maybe you had found the thing you were looking for, unexpectedly and late in the game, but there. I started back from you and fear sent a chain of falling snowflakes down my spine, because no one is ever ready for this kind of thing when it happens.

I didn't after you walked out of the room and a series of rockslides began beneath my navel and rolled outward through the series of feminine muscles I never use and pretend do not exist. Foreboding prickled underneath the nape of my neck because I knew I would never know what to say to you. I knew the sentences I wanted to speak would remain buried alive inside my belly while every word out of my mouth in your direction would be another gravestone for another kiss we did not share.

I didn't when my friend told me how much she hated the workshop she shared with you, because of you, and I felt an instinctive betrayal but I let her go on because I wanted to hear more about you.

I didn't when I heard the tension in your voice on the first day of a new class and I wondered who was going to be the target of the next punch of that voice which I had been told over and over again to cringe from. I didn't when I was a little afraid of you and I didn't when I looked at you and there was desperation in the hollows of your voice and I wanted to take your hand and tell you to let me in,

please let me in, I'll protect you from whatever you need protection from.

I didn't when I found myself sitting next to you and I hungered for your words all during the first half of class but during break you panicked and included someone else in our conversation. Suddenly there was another exchange happening and I know nothing about sci-fi and I did not know what to say. I said something stupid and you called me on it, so I stopped trying to be interesting and started playing stupid instead to piss you off. I let you tell me Shakespeare saw everything as a play and that the classroom is a kind of play, and I told you that the classroom is also a court. I didn't when you looked shaken because sometimes I do that to people who think twenty-somethings cannot be perceptive, and I saw you swallow hard and turn away without turning away.

I didn't when I wanted you to be my mentor and I fought and then I accidentally used the word "passionate", as in I am passionate about my writing and I am passionate about needing your help, although I never told anyone I need your humor and encouragement much more than I ever needed your editorial comments, which mostly are about how much you love my work. I never told you how much I need you to love my work.

I didn't when you were leaving school one day and I was on the couch reading, and I put aside my book and you put aside your hectic life so I could talk to you about writing a short essay about lesbians in *Carmilla*. You stood there awkwardly and I tried to figure out something impressive to say that was not *come cuddle with me, I need to touch you*. Instead I said I did not like Octavia Butler which is not true, but I wanted to be different, I wanted to stand out, even for my hate.

I have been thanking the stars every night since you appeared but every time you looked my way like you were looking for me, I pretended not to know what you were doing. I thought we were playing a game and if we won, you would be mine. I thought I had to beat you to be with you.

I didn't when I shoved food at you, eat eat, or when you shoved food at me, because in our two cultures we feed people we love to show we love them.

I didn't when my I showed up early and you walked down the hall towards me in our carefully but nonchalantly choreographed Wednesday dance, and my friend asked if you had a new haircut and I was already shaking my head no when you said, *no*. I laughed from sheer delight at hearing the liquid trail of smoke in your voice, and my laugh echoed through the hallway. You thought I was laughing at you and your shoulders slumped and I was not, I never would, but I never corrected you. I never interrupted our unspoken agreement never to mention this, never to mention any of this. I kept that code faithfully because it was the only way you would let me love you.

I didn't when you were leaving me and finally I had an excuse to talk to you, so that you could tell me I would be fine without you. My face was completely blank and I refused to let you feel better about choices already made, I refused to let you comfort me. Your feet were bare against the hallway carpet and the slender bones of your ankles fascinated me, I wanted to touch you again. Instead I let you insist I join you in a cup of tea because maybe you needed to take care of me, a little. The kitchen was so small and you came in to help me find tea even though I did not need help finding tea, I needed help steeling my nerves before spending time in a contained space with you, and with a locked door separating us from the world outside. I didn't when you asked me about my life and I could think of nothing to say because I was in shock knowing you were going to leave and I was not going to ask you to stay, not stay in this physical location but with me. With me.

I didn't when you asked me why I do not work at present and I told you it is because my daddy pays for everything, and when I said it's complicated you said it's better for complicated to include money. I almost said, *I spent a decade learning to be the kind of whore who gets paid, rather than the kind of daughter who does not*. But I didn't.

I didn't when I told you I am celibate and you told me you are not gay, adamantly not gay, even though sometimes people think you are gay and even though your students interrupted class once to ask you if you are gay, you are not. I respected your right to be anachronistically straight at a college populated almost exclusively by queer people. You respected my right not to have sex.

I didn't when you insisted *I am fifty, I am fifty* over and over again and it was distance between us, a wall I could not get over even on

horseback the way I used to jump walls before I learned to be afraid of what gives me pleasure. I am 30 and you are too old and it was my goal for this year to learn to fall in love with people my own age, but I challenge anyone to look at you as deeply as I do, as I cannot help but do, and not fall in love with what they see.

Falling in love is not a choice but it is an opportunity. You can say no. I said no and I keep saying it and I do not regret my choice to ignore the moment when there was a door in the wall and I might have loved you and you might have loved me back. I am addicted to my isolation and you cannot like what threatens your control and that's okay, that's okay, that has to be okay.

I don't want to hold on because I know that is not my role. I only want one last look at the life I might have had with you. I only want to write my own goodbye in my own words.

I didn't when I got drunk, five plastic cups of wine and no dinner, because I did not want to have to think about how this was your last class, and I still did not know what to say but I was going to have to think of something. I didn't when I stayed late, then later than late, to talk to you as long as I could while I still could. I told you *I have not forgiven you for leaving me but I will someday*. You said something about my writing and I took your words into my mouth and savored then swallowed them but they did not fill the empty place in my stomach. I knew they never would.

You hugged my goodbye and I hugged you back, both hands clasped to your fragile scapula. I think you're sick, really sick maybe, fatigued and too thin and worn out but it is none of my business so I refused to ask and you had no reason to tell me.

The hug was real for an instant before I pulled away before you could push me away. Maybe you wouldn't keep pushing me away if I didn't keep pulling away first but I do not want to find out.

I didn't when you asked me at your going-away party if I could play bouncer and maybe it was just an excuse to talk to me, or to tell me I've invited some people and maybe you just wanted to feel powerful, and attractive, but you already have so much power over me. I said *yes* so I would not say *I would say yes to anything you ask of me*, and that scares me, and it should.

I didn't when you slid up beside me as smoothly as a shadow to ask if you should kill the open mic, and my heart hammered in my throat and spun around like a shark to savage my insides, and my mind was serene as a field of frost. I melted just enough to beg you to read your work, and you let yourself be maneuvered into it even though you read too quickly and in a flat shy tone, and maybe now you know what it felt like all those times I had to read in front of you, exposed and vulnerable, thinking maybe you would slice me open just because you could.

I didn't when I said *thank you for reading* and you said something random in response, a non sequitur about music. I wanted to say something about the music of your voice in my ear, I wanted to wrap my arm around you, to feel your heartbeat through your back. I wanted to turn my body to face your body but I was wearing a muscle tank and jeans and I felt like an idiot, I felt fat, and you are so beautiful, even though you don't think so. Always so beautiful.

I didn't when I thought we would have hours more to say goodbye but I didn't, and we didn't, and now I will never get a chance to change my mind.

BIOGRAPHIES

SHANAN BALLAM is the author of the chapbook *The Red Riding Hood Papers* (Finishing Line 2010) and the full-length poetry collection *Pretty Marrow* (Negative Capability 2013). Her poetry has appeared in several literary journals including *Indiana Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *South Dakota Review*.

EM BEARD is a poet and performance artist from Indiana. They are currently an undergraduate student at Purdue University Fort Wayne.

CHARLIE BECKER is a speech-language pathologist who also brings poetry to under-served high school students in some of the Los Angeles Unified Schools through the Living Writers Series. Some of his poems have been published by Quill and Parchment, Grenadier Press (*My Life is Poetry* anthology), *Rush Magazine*, and *Passager* journal (Honorable Mention for 2018 Poetry Contest to be published in September, 2018). Charlie lives in West Hollywood, California.

SHANNON BRYANT is an elementary school teacher living in San Francisco. Though her salary is not extravagant she is grateful for her summers when she can wake up after everyone else has gone to work and write to her heart's content. She is currently working on a memoir.

MICHAEL J CARTER is a poet and clinical social worker who lives and works in Connecticut. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College he holds an MFA from Vermont College and an MSW from Smith. Poems of his have appeared in such journals as *Boulevard*, *Ploughshares*, *Provincetown Arts Magazine* among many others. He lives with his two hounds and spends his time swimming and knitting.

CHELLA COURINGTON is a writer and teacher. With a Ph.D. in American and British Literature and an MFA in Poetry, she is the author of six poetry and three flash fiction chapbooks. Her poetry appears in numerous anthologies and journals including *Non-Binary Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Pirene's Fountain*, and *The Los Angeles Review*. Originally from the Appalachian South, Courington lives in California with another writer and two cats. For more information: <chellacourington>.

RICKI CUMMINGS is a 36-year-old MFA Poetry student at Columbia College Chicago and living in Chicago, IL. Their work has appeared in *Ginger Piglet*, *Confluence*, *Vallum*, *CalibanOnline*, and has been shortlisted for the *Vallum Poetry Award*. The centerpiece of their student loan repayment plan rests on the likelihood of nuclear winter.

Metro Detroit Freelancer JENIFER DEBELLIS'S debut poetry collection, *Blood Sisters*, is forthcoming from *Main Street Rag* (2018). She's *Pink Panther Magazine's* executive editor and directs the Detroit Writers' Guild.

She earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Solstice of Pine Manor College. A former writer-in-residence for the Meadow Brook Writing Project, she facilitates workshops for Oakland University's MBWP Writing Camps. JDB teaches for Saginaw Valley State University and Macomb Community College. Her poetry was nominated for a 2018 Pushcart Prize and she's published in the *Good Men Project*, *Literary Orphans*, *Sliver of Stone*, *Solstice Lit Mag*, and other fine journals.

MORROW DOWDLE is a poet residing in Hillsborough, NC and has published in a variety of journals and anthologies since 2008, most recently *NonBinary Review*, *Poetry South*, and *River and South Review*. She was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2018. She also writes graphic novels, including *An Unlikely Refugee*, which was produced in conjunction with the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. Morrow works as a mental healthcare provider in her community.

MINNA DUBIN is a writer, performer, and educator in Berkeley, California. She is the founder of #MomLists, a literary public art project. Her writing has been featured in Parents Magazine, Huffington Post, MUTHA Magazine, The Forward, and various literary magazines and anthologies. She is currently completing a two-year "artist residency in motherhood." When not chasing her children in circles around the dining room table, she is eating chocolate in the bathroom while texting. You can follow her work on Instagram @momlists.

SARA EDDY teaches writing at Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts. Her poems have appeared recently in Forage, Panoply, and Surreal Poetics, along with Terrapin Press' anthology The Donut Book. She lives in Amherst with two teenagers, a hedgehog, a black cat, and three beehives.

LINDA MCCAULEY FREEMAN has been widely published in literary journals and anthologies, including a Chinese translation of her work for an international journal. She recently won Grand Prize in Storiarts poetry contest honoring Maya Angelou, and her work was selected by the Arts Mid Hudson for inclusion in their Artists Respond to Poetry 2018 show. She was a three-time winner in the Talespinners Short Story contest judged by Michael Korda. She has an MFA in Writing and Literature from Bennington College and is the former poet-in-residence of the Putnam Arts Council. She and her husband are professional swing dance instructors in the Hudson Valley, NY (www.got2lindy.com).

KARA GOUGHNOUR is a queer writer and documentarian currently unpacked in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is the 2018 winner of the Gerald Stern Poetry Award and has work published or forthcoming in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Pamplemousse Literary Journal, Oyster River Pages, and Girls/Girls/Girls! Zine. Twitter: kara_goughnour

MEGAN HINES is a YA fiction and poetry writer and a full-time college student at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, who lives in Kendallville, Indiana, but stays at Camp Half-Blood in Cabin 6 during the summer (though they often hang out with campers from Cabin 11). Poems they have written have been published in IPFW Confluence and Indiana's Best Emerging Poets, both print and online publications. They adore humor and bad puns, no matter how many times they hear them, and reading up on any mythology, especially Greek. They aspire to publish a YA fiction novel someday and more poetry.

MATTHEW LANDRUM (Translator) holds an MFA from Bennington College. His translations from Faroese have recently appeared in *Asymptote Journal*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Image Journal*, and *Modern Poetry in Translation*. He lives in Detroit.

KATRIN OTTARSDÓTTIR (Author) is a pioneer in Faroese filmmaking and has made several feature films, documentaries, shorts etc., e.g. the award winning feature films *Atlantic Rhapsody* (1989), *Bye Bye Blue Bird* (1999), and *LUDO* (2014). Born 1957 in Tórshavn, Faroe Islands, she studied film directing at the National Danish Film School. She debuted as a writer in 2012 with the poetry collection *Are Copper Pipes In Heaven* (awarded the Faroese Literature Award 2013). In 2015 she published the poetry collection *Mass For A Film*, and in 2016 a collection of short stories, *After Before*.

SÁMAL SOLL (Co-translator) is a Faroese writer and translator. His first short story collection titled *Glasbúrið* was published in 2015. He has an MA degree in English Language and Literature from Aalborg University in Denmark and has just completed a degree in Faroese Language at the Faroese University in the Faroe Islands. He is currently working on a translation of Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*. You can read more about his work [here](#).

A Mississippi poet, AMY LAUREN authored the chapbooks *Prodigal* (Bottlecap Press) and *God With Us* (Headmistress Press), the semi-finalist in the Charlotte Mew Chapbook Contest.

LISA MASÉ has been writing poetry for 30 years. She teaches poetry workshops for Vermont's Poem City events, co-facilitates a writing group, and has translated the poetry of writers from Italy, France, and the Dominican Republic. Her poems have been published by *Open Journal of Arts and Letters*, *Wander Lost*, the *Long Island Review*, *3 Elements*, *Zingara Review*, *River and South*, and *Silver Needle Press* among others.

EMILY MILLER is a cat lover first and a person second. She lives to please her five cats and works when they let her. Otherwise she can be found tending to their every whim and trying to get the cat hair out of her clothes. Emily is currently a student at Saint Leo University in South Florida. She is an English major with a specialization in professional writing and is currently working towards her bachelor's degree. In the past she has worked as assistant editor

for Saint Leo University's annual literary publication, Sandhill Review, and has been published in Sandhill Review in 2017 and 2018.

JULIA LEE BARCLAY-MORTON is an award-winning writer and director whose work has been published and produced internationally; recently, her stage text *Shit* was chosen for [2018 Cimientos at IATI](#). Her stage and prose texts have been published online and in printed anthologies, including Prentice-Hall, TL;DR, Stockholm Review, Ohio Edit, The Other Stories, and New York Theatre Experience. When in London (2003-11), she founded [Apocryphal Theatre](#) and was awarded a fellowship for her practice-as-research doctorate at University of Northampton, arguing theater can be an act of philosophy. She moved back to NYC in 2011 to research and write a book about her grandmothers' divergent paths through the 20th Century, *The Amazing True Imaginary Autobiography of Dick and Jani*. Having taught at universities in NYC and the UK, she now teaches private workshops, edits, and coaches writers; her blog is [Somewhere in Transition](#).

CLAIRE NELSON is a human, poet, and friend living in Savannah, Georgia. Previous works have appeared on napkins and sidewalks.

SHEILA PACKA: I'm a writer from northern Minnesota, and I live in Duluth. I have four books of poems, and I have edited an anthology of 75 writers of the Lake Superior region, "Migrations." I have had poems published in several literary magazines, and fiction in Cortland Review and forthcoming from Chicago Memoryhouse. 2010-2012, I was Duluth's Poet Laureate. Four of my poems were used by Finnish composer Olli Kortekangas in a cantata premiered by the Minnesota Orchestra, conducted by Osmo Vänskä, in February 2016.

STACY PENDERGRAST earned an MFA in Creative Writing from Chatham University in Pittsburgh. Her work has appeared in Blue Mesa Review, Sliver of Stone Journal, Still: A Journal, and Fourth River: Tributaries. She currently teaches at NorthWest Arkansas Community College. In 2017 she won the Nan Snow Emerging Writer Award from the University of Central Arkansas.

JC REILLY writes across genres and has received Pushcart and Wigleaf nominations for her work. She serves as the Managing Editor of the *Atlanta Review* and has pieces published in the *South Carolina Review*, *PoetrySouth*, *POEM*, and the anthology, *Nasty Women Poets*, among others. When she isn't writing, she plays tennis or works on improving her Italian. Follow her @aishatonu.

SHERRY RIND'S poetry books are *The Hawk in the Back Yard* (Anhinga Award) and *A Fall Out the Door* (King County Arts Award, Confluence Press). Chapbooks are *The Whooping Crane Dance* and *A Natural History of Grief*. She has received grants and awards from the Seattle and King County Arts Commissions, Pacific Northwest Writers, National Endowment for the Arts, and Artist Trust. Her poems have appeared recently in *Cloudbank*,

Marathon Literary Review, *Crosswinds*, *Weatherbeaten*, *Shark Reef Review*, and others.

FELICIA ROSE is a writer, editor, and homesteader. Her work has appeared in *The Helicon West Anthology*, *The Way to My Heart Anthology*, *The League of Utah Writers Anthology*, *Poetry at Three*, *The Sun*, and elsewhere. She has been a featured reader at several poetry readings and her poetry has been published on broadsides. When the spirit moves her, she pens essays and how-to articles for *Mother Earth News*. A native New Yorker, she lives with her wife on a rural homestead in Utah.

MANDY SHUNNARAH is a bisexual Alabama-born writer now living in Columbus, Ohio. Her essays and book reviews have been published in or are forthcoming from *The Citron Review*, *Barely South Review*, *Entropy Magazine*, *The Missing Slate*, *New Southerner Magazine*, *PANK Magazine*, and *Deep South Magazine*. Read more on her website offthebeatenshelf.com.

LINDA SIMONE is the author of *Archeology*, *Cow Tippers*, and the forthcoming full-length poetry collection, *The River Will Save Us* (Aldrich Press/Kelsay Books). Her Pushcart-nominated poems appear in numerous journals and anthologies, most recently in *Bearing the Mask: Southwest Persona Poems* (Dos Gatos Press). A native New Yorker, she now lives in San Antonio, TX. www.lindasimone.com

ELLEN MCGRATH SMITH teaches at the University of Pittsburgh and in the Carlow University Madwomen in the Attic program. Her writing has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Quiddity*, *Cimarron*, and other journals, and in several anthologies, including *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability*. Smith has been the recipient of an Orlando Prize, an Academy of American Poets award, a Rainmaker Award from *Zone 3* magazine, and a 2007 Individual Artist grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Her second chapbook, *Scatter, Feed*, was published by Seven Kitchens Press in the fall of 2014, and her book, *Nobody's Jackknife*, was published in 2015 by the West End Press. www.ellenmcgrathsmith.com

BEKAH STEIMEL is a poet and a flirt. Her recent work has appeared in *River Poets Journal*, *Third Wednesday*, and *The Blue Nib*. She lives in St. Louis, MO and can be found online at bekahsteimel.com and followed on Twitter and Instagram @BekahSteimel.

OLIVIA TORRES I am a senior studying English at Westfield State University, MA. Currently, I have a focus in writing. As a writer, I consider my prose to be my greatest strength and am working hard to complete a number of projects—that incorporate poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction—so that I may expand my publication experience. For fun, I indulge in video games and vast quantities of Netflix on the weekends.

JUANITA TOVAR is an emerging creative nonfiction writer with only a small scattering of published pieces. She currently writes for Spoiled NYC and acts as the creative director of their art department. Juanita is a bisexual woman from Colombia and has lived in New York City since 2014.

SARA J. WINSTON is a New York-based artist. Her work explores representations of sickness, wellness, and healthcare. She is currently working on a multivolume project investigating autoimmune diseases, and the "genetic & environmental factors" that are believed to be the cause of sickness. Two published volumes include *Homesick* (Zatara Press, 2015) and *A Lick and a Promise* (Candor Arts, 2017). Winston earned her MFA from Columbia College Chicago in 2014. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and is held in public collections including Yale's Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library and University of Michigan's Artist Book Collection.

ARIADNE WOLF is an MFA student in the Creative Nonfiction program at Mills College. Wolf has been accepted into the Alderworks Residency, the Wellstone Residency, and the Sunpress Residency for summer 2018. There Wolf hopes to finish drafting her speculative memoir, a discussion of trauma, family, redemption, feminist spirituality, and Jewish identity. Wolf uses the mermaid as symbol for feminine and sexual development, and as metaphor for the queer and disabled body. Wolf's work has been published in literary journals including *The Poeming Pigeon*, *The Crambo*, *Echo Literary Journal*, *DIN*, and others. Wolf's work was published in the anthology *11/9: The Fall of American Democracy*, and is forthcoming in the Darkhouse Press anthology *Sanctuary*.