



PVR 13

ISSUE 13 | SUMMER 2019

# POMONA VALLEY REVIEW



## **MASTHEAD**

### **EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Amanda Riggle

### **MANAGING EDITOR**

John Danho

### **ADVISERS**

Ryan Leack

Marta Albalá Pelegrín

### **LEAD EDITOR**

Ivan Rios

### **POETRY EDITORS**

Amanda Riggle

Natalie Peterkin

Robert Stewart

## **FICTION EDITORS**

John Danho

Alexis Garcia

Andra Corral

## **ART EDITORS**

Ivan Rios

Samantha St. Claire

Amanda White

~

**A special thanks to all those involved in promotion,  
especially to the Cal Poly Pomona faculty, staff,  
and students who made this possible.**

...

*No work, images, or logos in Pomona Valley Review's journals may be used  
in any capacity without PVR or author permission. PVR retains first-serial rights  
for intial publications; rights return to author upon publication.*

*Cover art for PVR 13 courtesy of Nicholas Walrath.*

*Find us at [pomonavalleysreview.com](http://pomonavalleysreview.com) & Facebook*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY | FICTION | ARTWORK

8	Dead Hand <i>Alex Lennert</i>	35	The Beercan <i>D.S. Maolalai</i>
9	Genocidal Hornets <i>Richard King Perkins II</i>	36	Reverie <i>Brian Yang</i>
10	Untitled <i>Nicholas Walrath</i>	38	Mystic Mountain <i>Rheya Leack</i>
11	Selling the Plague <i>Bill Cushing</i>	39	Thoughts While Sitting in my Den <i>Joel Fry</i>
13	Personification of the Sun <i>Saul Villegas</i>	40	When the Waves Were Golden <i>Adrian S. Mariscal</i>
14	Guacamole <i>James Croal Jackson</i>	41	Wave <i>Edward Supranowicz</i>
15	Home Study <i>Jane Rosenberg LaForge</i>	42	Winter <i>Brian Yang</i>
17	Habitat for Humanity <i>Beau Boudreaux</i>	47	Texture #5 <i>Fabio Sassi</i>
18	Texture #3 <i>Fabio Sassi</i>	48	Open Spaces <i>Linda Imbler</i>
19	Born to Win <i>Millard Baker</i>	49	Rituals <i>Dirk James</i>
24	Reforming <i>Antonio Barajas</i>	50	As the Sun Sets <i>Robert Beveridge</i>
25	Reforming <i>Antonio Barajas</i>	51	Texture #4 <i>Fabio Sassi</i>
26	Imagine <i>Marco A. Rios</i>	52	My Big Break <i>Andrea Morales</i>
27	At a Window, a Month Drags its Broken Leg <i>Alex Lennert</i>	56	Star River <i>Rheya Leack</i>
28	The Three Initiates <i>Saul Villegas</i>	57	Penicillin in the Inland Empire <i>Gerard Sarnat</i>
29	Wunderkammer <i>Sophie Jonsson</i>	59	Southern California <i>Beau Boudreaux</i>
33	Cat's Eye Nebula <i>Rheya Leack</i>	60	Ghost Nebula <i>Rheya Leack</i>
34	Color Me <i>Bernard Anderson</i>	61	Attention to the (Un)Natural <i>Daniel Orona</i>

- 63 The Unexpected Storm  
*Nicole Embrey*
- 64 Intended Storms  
*Richard King Perkins II*
- 65 Marsh  
*Mandy Thibert*
- 66 Ficus and Us  
*Helena Mahdessian*
- 67 To My Fossil Fern  
*Alex Lennert*
- 69 How My Aunt's Abortion Was Like a Fern  
*Jane Rosenberg LaForge*
- 71 San Joaquin Fox  
*Rubia Dalbosco van Roodselaar*
- 72 Riverbed  
*Margo McCall*
- 82 Texture #2  
*Fabio Sassi*
- 83 Survivor's Guilt  
*Nicole Embrey*
- 84 Still Riding the Leather Flamingo  
*Robert Beveridge*
- 85 Commercial Compost  
*James Croal Jackson*
- 86 Strange Romance – Too Protective  
*Aticha Puttirak*
- 87 On Billy Collins' Brightly Colored Boats Upturned on the Banks of the Charles  
*Jane Rosenberg LaForge*
- 89 Come Hither  
*Stacy Fowler*
- 90 One Example of Privilege – December, 2016  
*James Croal Jackson*
- 91 Pillars of Creation  
*Rheya Leack*
- 92 Thanksgiving Assembly  
*Jacob Appel*
- 93 The Adults  
*Kitty Anarchy*
- 94 Falling Son  
*Art Ikehara*
- 95 Texture #1  
*Fabio Sassi*
- 96 Vermillion Path  
*Daniel Orona*
- 102 In the Flow of Water  
*Saul Villegas*
- 103 Chasing the Song  
*Fabrice Poussin*
- 104 Albireo's Duet  
*Cindy Bousquet Harris*
- 105 Celestial Body  
*Nicole Embrey*
- 106 Strange Romance  
*Aticha Puttirak*
- 107 Destination Luna Mimbres  
*Vanessa Garcia*
- 116 Strange Romance with Anti-Pleasants  
*Aticha Puttirak*
- 117 Prayer for Purging  
*Daniel Orona*
- 119 A Man's Story in NA  
*Francesca Terzano*
- 121 Let Me Draw You a Picture  
*Cindy Bousquet Harris*
- 122 Untitled  
*Nicholas Walrath*
- 123 Rumpled Foreskins  
*William Matthew McCarter*
- 128 Lilith  
*Mandy Thibert*
- 129 Gates of Eden  
*Gerard Sarnat*
- 130 A Higher Being  
*Daniel Belmudes*
- 131 Fulgencio  
*Jesse Tovar*
- 132 Untitled  
*Nicholas Walrath*

- 133** Will You Listen to Us?  
*Tabassum Tahmina Shagufta Hussein*
- 135** Mylar Blanket  
*Kitty Anarchy*
- 136** Abolitionist  
*Jen McClellan*
- 138** Melancholy  
*Mand Thibert*
- 139** Father Land  
*Leiza Castillo*
- 145** Solitude  
*Xiaoke Ren*
- 146** Old Men Walk Funny  
*Michael Lee Johnson*
- 147** Just Because, Bad Heart  
*Michael Lee Johnson*
- 148** Canadian Seasons  
Exiled Poet  
*Michael Lee Johnson*
- 149** Injured Shadow  
*Michael Lee Johnson*
- 150** Tree of Life  
*Saul Villegas*
- 151** House Made of Sugar  
*Art Ikehara*
- 156** Untitled (Cover)  
*Nicholas Walrath*
- 157** The Straw Man  
*Daniel Belmudes*
- 158** Procession  
*Art Ikehara*
- 160** Buried Alive  
*Jose Pereyra*
- 162** Untitled  
*Nicholas Walrath*
- 163** About That  
*Cindy Bousquet Harris*
- 164** Cocktail Hour  
*Francesca Terzano*
- 165** Various Explanations  
*Carol Ellis*
- 166** Crosses and Hearts  
*Edward Supranowicz*
- 167** Body of Proof  
*Adrian S. Mariscal*
- 168** Trapped in the Pavilion  
*Jesse Tovar*
- 169** Blanket of Blackness  
*Adrian S. Mariscal*
- 171** Early Bloom  
*Edward Supranowicz*
- 172** The Legacy  
*Joseph Smith*
- 181** From the Editors
- 196** Biographies

# Dear Readers

2019 has been a year of transition for many, including the editors here at *PVR*. The journal has welcomed Amanda Riggle, former Managing Editor, into the role of Editor-in-Chief. John Danho, former Lead Editor, moved into the position of Managing Editor and Ivan Rios moved into the role of Lead Editor. With this upward momentum, new editors have been brought into the fold to help transform *PVR* into what you will read here for our 13<sup>th</sup> Edition.

Together, we have published what can only be called a labor of love – a love for poetry, fiction, and artwork from the artistic community we find ourselves a part of both as editors and as poets, authors, and artists ourselves. We are committed to participating in the artistic community in the Inland Empire, and, as such, we the editors have read poetry and fiction at Cal Poly Pomona, the University of California Riverside, and at dA Center for the Arts – Pomona this past year.

Inspired by the inclusion of high school students and their poetry on violence in *PVR*'s 12<sup>th</sup> Edition, this year we worked closely with a professor from the Pelican Bay

Scholars Program to help incarcerated students gain access to submissions. Many of these imprisoned poets, artists, and writers were accepted into the 13<sup>th</sup> Edition – completely on their own merit for the quality of work they've submitted to us. We hope you will also find yourself thoughtfully enchanted with the work these talented artists have shared with us and will join us in welcoming them to our artistic community.

Lastly, while putting together the issue, we saw a myriad of themes pop up from nature, love, joy, sadness, isolation, fear, dire political situations, drug abuse, aging, religion, death, and childhood – yet one thematic appeared again and again: hope. While the future is uncertain and right now might seem difficult and, at times, even impossible, the overwhelming ability for humanity to hold tightly to the idea that we can change ourselves, change the world, and abolish what stands in the way of our better tomorrow shines through.

With that hope in your mind and in your heart, we'd like to invite you to now enjoy *PVR* 13.

The Editors  
*PVR*

## DEAD HAND

Система «Периметр»

The air between us is charged  
Encryption on shortwave radio bursts  
As your hand grazes mine  
(We have our best men working on it)

These bursts, this unintelligible drone  
The sound of a distant foghorn  
Of car alarms  
A howling in the breeze  
Frozen in front of a silver screen  
The signal pulses in time with your heart  
(They're reading it a hundred miles off)

Can you feel the coming of the cold?  
Sweat slides down my arm  
Trailing along a dead hand  
A conductor's hand  
White knuckled on a dead man's switch  
A brake for the moment  
Interpreting meaning in the flashes of the screen  
(They've found a cipher and cracked the code)

Fail-deadly  
System perimeter  
Mutually assured destruction  
A thousand years of Stalingrad  
An empty theater under siege  
The air conditioner portends something sinister

(The movie ends, and you evacuate the building)

~ *Alex Lennert*



## GENOCIDAL HORNETS

Your belief in decency  
was assassinated by the nanobots

of stochastic terrorism

similar to the loss of your eyelashes  
by prehistoric genocidal hornets.

You told your friends that I abandoned you—  
(a sign of further attack and deprivation)

but I never left you; you just began to look  
indistinguishable from everyone else

in the carved light of co-dependency.

So now, when I say *we*  
I say it with the most annoying air quotes ""

because I'm face to face with someone  
who probably isn't you

but I proclaim mastery of her freckled shoulders,  
to be the curator of her artifacts

and the caliper of her variable depths.

So now "you" (or someone identical to you)  
lies in the terminator of a quantum trap

equally free and imprisoned  
resigned and determined

half-alive, half non-existent

waiting to have your trajectory altered by me  
or at least someone

with the same, peculiar dna.

*~ Richard King Perkins II*



*"Untitled" ~ Nicholas Walrath*

## SELLING THE PLAGUE

SARS: After it hit, I don't recall what those initials meant or even what it did to people, but I do remember the days of the scare and one in particular. It was while coming home through Burbank airport that I passed by a vendor's newsstand, its racks filled with glossy covers reflecting the scare of the day. *Time* and *Newsweek* sat side-by-side—a blonde on *Time*, a brunette on the other. One stares steadfastly, the other's eyes slightly widened in surprise, but both peer out at the flowing airport crowds from behind white surgical masks.

As a species, we seem to love projecting the end times whether the source is supernatural or secular. That's when it hit me: Why stop there? This was, after all, the "fear du jour."

Besides, since the ultimate maxim of media is "if it bleeds, it leads," certainly the trend could continue, extending to other publications. *People* could have its "Sexiest Man Alive" in a Speedo and matching mask hugging high cheekbones; *Cosmopolitan* would, of course, feature a busty blonde wearing hoop earrings between the ties of the medical mask, one hand seductively placed on a hip. *Teen Vogue* could have Destiny's Child voguing with bare midriffs while wearing matching masks and bustiers—of course with Beyonce looking seductively over a shoulder draped in a feather stethoscope.

*Playboy* might try to land the latest bachelorette and put her in a grey felt top hat and white formal shirt, mostly unbuttoned, the cumberbund acting as the mask. Then, of course, *Penthouse* and *Maxim* could up the ante to lesbian models with masks but no panties, exposing far-too-pink vulvas airbrushed in.

*National Geographic* might offer a more indigenous angle with an entire tribe displaying traditional tattoos with their ceremonial surgical masks. Meanwhile, *Modern Dog* might continue its traditional template of young and smiling redhead with her arms wrapped protectively around her masked Pekinese. For a more businesslike turn, *Forbes* would show a masked CEO looking down over bifocals while *Shape* could give us a fit model in bikini top, peach, with perhaps a burnt umber mask.

The possibilities began seeming endless: a masked Tiger Woods on *Golf*, masked people fly casting from rivers on *Field & Stream*, and not to be outdone, masked and helmeted running backs could replace the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*. After all, at a time when "going viral" meant something altogether different than today and media was still safely on paper, why not keep our pestilence on the page as well? And, as is usual with

humanity, disasters are always attractive and almost always exaggerated beyond reasonable proportion. After all, it was only a couple of years earlier that Y2K was poised to bring the species to its knees, and that wasn't even an airborne contagion. Let's not forget about Lyme disease, and now we even have an "epidemic of obesity" although how one contracts weight, I've no idea.

Here was a publisher's dream of nightmares with surgical masks so dominant that perhaps *Scientific American* or even the *Journal of the American Medical Association* might want to get in on the action, showing a surgeon unmasking fear and speaking plainly though I wouldn't have held my breath.

I noticed no issue of *Reason* anywhere.

~ *Bill Cushing*



*"Personification of the Sun" ~ Saul Villegas*

## GUACAMOLE

We walked through Giant Eagle hungry  
as hell after work wondering what  
we could afford to eat. Mom left avocados  
just past ripe at our house on her way to  
Myrtle Beach and we knew we had to cut  
their soft skins tonight or never. Food is no  
good in the garbage. Privilege has steeped  
itself into me in ways I am not proud of. We  
want what we want which sometimes means  
we want beyond our means. We use one  
checking account to deposit our tips and  
want to eat out if we can't eat chips with dip  
at the moment but stop ourselves to remember  
we have free food, and at the moment it's true.  
The stomach also wants what the heart wants,  
to be fed like an ATM- someone's unlimited  
money.

*~ James Croal Jackson*

Surely there is loss  
in this body,  
between membranes  
and skin that is cherry  
fresh in one light, baleful  
in the subsequent;  
surely it was recorded  
where the messages are kept,  
not in the mind but where  
needles were insinuated  
for a taste of traffic,  
the to-ing and fro-ing  
as if lady bugs  
called to the netar  
of bouginvilla and bottlebrush.  
They grew outside  
the eyes, dividing  
brown from green  
from who had the common  
ancestor with thousands of  
others, and we were  
left to wonder who the milkman's  
progeny were among us.  
Surely there is more  
than a story of cold sacrifices:  
more than organs, but passages  
from peace to the catastrophic,  
the abdication of children  
and other recalcitrant relatives,  
the return of the ocean, the feet  
taking stock of its foamy reticence,  
the ants each spring that overtook  
door jambs and window ceils,  
blasted with detergents so  
as not to upset the burgeoning  
political sympathies of grand  
nephews and nieces.  
I should have kept records  
if not of the day of death  
than of the procedures

that took the house  
away from us,  
so I could stop it in  
the scenarios to follow  
rather than have them  
slip and be confused  
between invasive  
and beneficial insects,  
carrying out their burden  
as diligently as those completed  
at the center of the universe.

*~ Jane Rosenberg LaForge*



## HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

In August heat  
I volunteered five days a week  
  
at the central warehouse, not rebuilding  
or raising houses rather  
  
stirring used paint cans  
moving old porcelain toilets  
  
rewards were pick ups  
with Marshall who drove  
  
the delivery truck navigating  
neighborhoods, two or three jobs  
  
could take all day when we loitered at lunch—  
overstuffed shrimp po-boys  
  
chili-cheese fries, Popeyes fried chicken,  
as a mover I saw inside Garden District  
  
homes, contributions stacked in their garages  
hailed and unloaded back at the dock, treasures—  
  
oriental rugs, chandeliers, armoires  
a few select Marshall left in the back  
  
a wink and nod for his pit stop home  
we dusted off the rest and put up for sale.

~ *Beau Boudreaux*



*"Texture #3" ~ Fabio Sassi*

My heart pounded, sweat rolled down my face as if I just played a basketball game. My thoughts were rapid as I sat in a chair next to others waiting to also receive their college degree. The area smelled of food and the noise was loud with clapping and cheering. My family was there somewhere and I decided to locate them. After a few minutes, I spotted my very enthusiastic mother, along with my siblings. They were clapping and cheering like the rest of the people inside. All of a sudden, I went into a zone of thinking. Tears formed in my eyes as I thought how I almost didn't make it here.

### *Eight years earlier:*

I just turned 16 and I did not want to die. That was my thought, as I frantically sprinted through the dark part. I was running for my life as two people chased me, trying to shoot me. There were no light poles, so I couldn't see everything in front of me as I ran. I was thinking how stupid I was to get myself in this situation; right then, a shot rang out and I fell. I was not shot, but I ducked so low I lost balance. I was scared to death. For some reason, I started thinking about what my mom told me. She said if I don't stop living the way I am, I'll be dead or in prison by 21. Now at 16, my life was on the line and I hated it. Continuing to run, I made it to the street and I took a look back. The blast from the gun produced a flash that lit up the park for that second. I turned down the street called Oak, and on my left side was apartment buildings. On my right, a row of cars were parked next to the sidewalk. The first apartment building had locked gates, so I continued to run. I looked back and the guys hadn't made it to the street yet. I came to this other apartment building that also had an iron gate that required a code into this code box to enter. I tried the gate and it swung open, someone had left a stick ajar for easy access back in. The gate slammed shut, scaring the shit out of me. Hoping the guys didn't hear or see what took place, I ran to the back of these apartment complexes. I was looking through the wood gate in the back, when again I was scared, but this time it was a voice.

"What the hell are you doing back here?"

The old man was standing there in his robe.

"These guys are trying to shoot me."

“Well, get shot somewhere else,” the man said.

Right then, the front gate shook as someone was trying to open it.

“That’s them,” I said.

“I ain’t got time for this, I’m calling the police.”

“No, you can’t do that sir.”

“The Hell I can’t.”

“Sir, I’ll go to jail.”

“Well, if you didn’t do anything wrong, you won’t go to jail.”

“Sir...”

I couldn’t even continue because the gate shook hard. The old man, cussing to himself, started walking toward the gate. I couldn’t see or hear what was going on, but I hoped he didn’t let them in. After what felt like a long time, the old man returned. I asked him, “What happened?”

“What happened was I just saved your ass, young man.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Don’t thank me, you need to thank God.”

“Where you live?” He asked.

“Across the town, sir.”

“Stop calling me ‘Sir,’ call me Mr. Williams.”

“Yes sir, I mean, ok Mr. Williams.”

I made it home at about 1AM. The house looked dark from the outside. When I entered the house, my mom was sitting on the couch in the dark. She spooked the hell out of me and I was tired of being scared so many damn times in one night.

“Millard?”

“Yeah?” I said.

“Where you been? Its one-o-clock and you have school tomorrow, and what happened to your clothes, why are you muddy?”

“Mom, it ain’t nothing.”

“That’s your problem, you think ain’t nothing a problem. Millard, you’re throwing rocks at the prison door.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“If you ever go to prison, don’t call me. I can’t do this.”

“Man, I ain’t going no prison.”

***Five years later:***

*I was with my wife, and we was going to Great America. She was looking good and I loved being with her.*

“Chow time.”

That snapped me out of my dream, and I was upset.

“Baker, do you want chow?”

“No.” I said angrily.

Well, mom was right; I ended up in prison and she kept her promise. She didn’t answer my calls. I was hurt, I needed her, she was the only one who loved and cared for me. I cried; I wanted my mom.

One day, I tried her number like I do daily and she accepted my call.

“Mom,” I said, tears flowing.

“I love you, son.” I could tell she was crying also.

“I love you too mom, I’m sorry for messing up, I...I promise I will change and become the best version of myself.”

I started, while inside, to take charge of my new life. I bravely told my homies that I wanted to be a full-time Christian, thus leaving gangs alone. This wasn’t easy, people don’t just be let out of a gang, and I could see the anger on the faces of my homies. I was prepared to receive a beating as I was surrounded by these

guys on the prison yard. The whole yard watched and wondered what was taking place. As a 6'7 guy, I never fear anyone, but today, I was fearing the unknown.

"Do you think you can just get out of a gang like it's the thing to do?" One guy said.

"I understand this doesn't happen, but..."

"But, nothing," another one said as he seemed like he wanted to hit me.

"You are a yellow-belly punk who should get his ass kicked," another said.

"Hold on," the oldest in the group said; he seemed to be the least upset.

"Why do you want out?"

"I want to be at home with my family who I miss, I want to live an honest productive life. I want to become educated and help people who needs it. I want to go to church and praise the most high. I want to be a great uncle to my nephew. I want to be the son my mother envisioned when she had me. I don't want to come to prison anymore. I don't want to be a bad person in society anymore. The institute I want to be in is college. I want a degree. I want to pay taxes. I want to vote. I want my voice to matter. I want to be a good role model for my brother. I want to drive legally and have a cup of coffee with a cop. I want to talk to the youth at the same juvenile hall I was at. I want to be the catalyst for others who are too afraid to come forward to say they want change. My season is over living this life. I realize I have more in life than this. I don't mean disrespect to you guys, I just want different."

Not even realizing it, tears flowed down my face. The look on all their faces changed. Then, to my surprise, one of them hugged me, then another, and the old one said, "Man, I wish I had the heart to do what you are doing. I take my hat off to you brother, I can see the passion you have and you need to be that person you spoke about. If you do anything negative, I'm a kick yo ass, personally," he said with a smile.

"I won't, OG."

### ***Two years later:***

I'm standing in an auditorium in front of 150 troubled youth. I have a suit on with nice Stacy Adams shoes. This is a far cry from the prison clothes that I wore for years. Looking around the room, I see the young people that are the future of the community. Speaking to them with heartfelt emotions gratifies me. I've been going to speaking events like this since I've been home. I also volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, and I go to college, and I work a full time job. I'm happy in my life – I work every day to help others find their happiness.

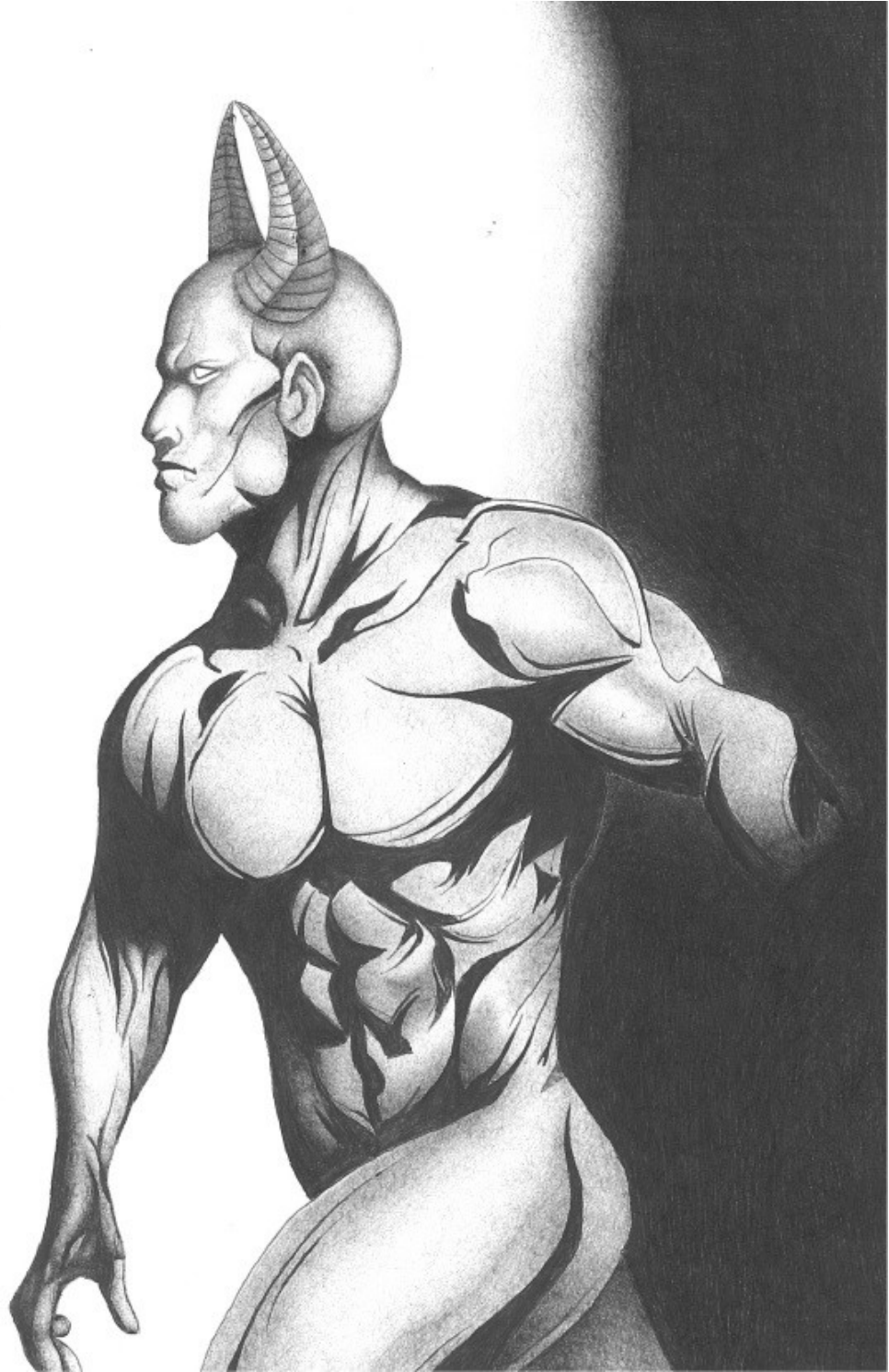
“You all are born to win,” I said during one of the speeches. “But right now you are losing the race on life.”

“Winning is a choice, but you must put your mind in the mode to overcome the challenges you have in your life. I was a loser who hit rock bottom before I start to trend up. Now I'm here and I am winning against the devil. We all are 'Born to Win,' now you must battle to achieve. No, not with fighting, but with that gift you have on your shoulders, your brain!” Life was a 360 for me. Now I'm preparing to receive a college degree. The day of the graduation was eleven years to the day when I was running through the park. Now I am around people who are positive and motivating. When I entered the arena, I felt proud to walk in there.

“Nothing is easy in life, in fact if you want things easy you will avoid challenges. I had to challenge myself to live a completely different life and it was tough. The support system I had; I appreciate so much. My mom never gave up on me, but she showed me some tough love. I want to thank everyone who has helped me. And I want to tell those who think you can't do something to think positive first. Then, have a plan and go after it. Roadblocks will pop up, but don't stop – go over the top or around it. Just say yes. Thank you!”

That graduation speech was a blessing, and I hope to rewrite the story that ends bad.

*~ Millard Baker*



*"Reforming" ~ Antonio Barajas*



## REFORMING

Criminal, you were raised to be good but all that was taken in vain.  
The culmination of your actions caused pain and to many sorrow,  
So the courts gave you horns, called you evil, and put you in a  
Dark place to be left and forgotten.  
In the darkness you wore your horns with pride out of pure  
Fucking spite and indulged in crime every day of your life.  
It made you strong to be bad in this place made from evil,  
But now you've grown tired of your nature uninspired.  
A light has shined-in where there has only been darkness,  
And now you work to do good so you won't be forgotten.  
With darkness behind you, you step into the light yet you  
Never forget where darkness shines bright.

*~ Antonio Barajas*

## IMAGINE

Imagine walking into a lit-up walk-in closet  
With a chair, a desk, and chairs hugging  
The wall in the corner behind you.  
Imagine straddling the backwards chair, facing  
The desk to be evaluated after  
*Another* 12 months.  
Imagine someone asking for your name and  
Number as you sat down.  
Imagine being programmed to automatically answer,  
Like a well-trained dog, your last name  
And the number engraved into your brain,  
Your prison CDC number.  
Imagine 10 eyeballs inside the walk-in-closet  
Studying your every move, the way you hide  
Your hands under your legs cuz the room  
Is cold or  
Imagine the eyeball reading your posture, the  
Way you lean on the chair while you listen  
To someone say you're "high risk" for anger,  
Violence, and alcohol abuse, when they don't even  
Know you!  
Imagine 10 ears listening to every word escaping  
From your mouth, your tone, and your  
Choice of words, almost waiting for you to  
Yell or lash-out in the "anger" attached to your file.  
Imagine escaping that closet only to go into a  
Slightly larger walk-in closet and calling  
It home.  
Imagine every day in your home being irritatingly  
Similar – several toilet flushes at 6:00AM  
On-the-dot and a mesh of loud music; Rap,  
Hip-Hop, R&B, and Corridos flood the tier.  
"Breakfast" at 7:00AM.  
Imagine writing this poem and wishing you  
Were in the readers' "freedom shoes," imagining  
All the things you would do.

~ *Marco A. Rios*

## AT A WINDOW, A MONTH DRAGS ITS BROKEN LEG

An airplane the size of an ant  
Flies straight through the bell tower  
Without even a puff of smoke  
Or Christmas debris raining  
And crawls off into the blue

Am I home? Or is this Babylon?  
I've sat here day by day  
Drinking coffee by the gallon  
Getting nothing done, getting nothing done  
It's this stasis I hate, this stillness  
Capricorn oozing into Aquarius  
Promising a cardinal change  
I should be chopping wood  
I should run a practice marathon  
I should put the gin down  
But this dead month just dies on and on

Relief was found in cloistered moments  
Spread sparingly in cars  
That pin as nails do events  
Into the calendar's shivering hide  
I mark them and erase, click the days along  
Cast them aside like dead checkers  
Into a graveyard of hours  
Growing stealthily by my side

It grinds out its final hours  
Like sand against the windows  
Like wind against the shutters  
It scrapes as it limps on  
And again, I fear, while sitting here,  
This month's sway will never break,  
And that its midnight will never come

*~ Alex Lennert*



*"The Three Initiates" ~ Saul Villegas*

### Toes

My toes curve outward. Not a lot, but enough to be moderately bothersome. Or, at least, it was upsetting to know I had them. Years ago, my mother would point out that my father and I had the same shaped toes. How embarrassing for a little girl's feet to be compared to her father's. But she wasn't wrong. Father's toes, though larger and older than mine, had the subtle curve too. I thought children were supposed to inherit eye and hair color, not *toe* shape.

It began in the middle of each toe. What was connected to the foot stared straight toward whatever was in front of me, but at the point of the pituitary reflex, each toe subtly veered outward. Not every toe houses the pituitary reflex point, but the point of outwardness is the same on all the toes. How odd that the most important gland in my body, the one responsible for controlling growth and development, was the beginning of my malformed toes.

I am probably making it out to be worse than it is. It really hasn't come up that much. Years ago I attempted pointe ballet dancing, where I quickly realized my toes wouldn't cooperate. That was okay, I didn't much care for it anyway. Now, I just have to be careful about the shoes I wear. Maybe Birkenstocks are a bit ill-fitting, but that's okay. Better to have something a little "off" than nothing there at all.

### Hands

I always found the palms of my hands much more interesting than the backs. In middle school art class, we were instructed to draw either a part of your face or an extremity. I had no interest in drawing elements of the face, as I had a hard time replicating what I saw of myself strictly from a mirror. I saw my hands with my own eyes constantly. I drew hands and more hands, each with grey charcoal and pencil with various colored pastel surrounding the hands as a background. I used the pencil to draw the lines on the palms, trying to replicate the lines on my own hands. As I did, I started to read about what they all meant and became particularly fascinated with the lifeline. Mostly because the line that I believe to be my lifeline was quite long. I found this amusing.

Two years later, I hosted a Christmas party was several of my friends on the night of the biggest snowstorm of the season. We were preparing to do various Christmas themed crafts and needed markers. We had some, but they were all individually wrapped in plastic. I took the scissors from the kitchen and proceeded to attempt to puncture the plastic. Quickly, I realized that it was not the plastic that I jabbed into, but rather my right hand. I felt nothing but could simply see blood the same shade of

red I had surrounded one of my drawings with years ago. I began to scream that they were going to have to cut off my hand while my friends tried to calm me down and tell me how stupid that was. The cut was only about an inch at the top of the dip between my thumb and index finger on my right hand. And, for all of my hysteria, my friends were right. All it took was five stitches and no hand was lost. In fact, once the stitches were removed, I was left with a scar that ran an extra inch right into my lifeline.

### Skin

I hated my skin. Every summer at camp, all the other girls' skin would turn a golden tan while I drenched myself in sunscreen to keep from turning the color of a candy apple. Looking back, those were the best of times, seeing how one summer, my SPF 80 couldn't save me from sun poisoning. Little bumps began to form all over my skin; bumps that itched and burned at the same time so relief was impossible. That summer, I was only permitted in the water while wearing a very specific uniform. I was to wear a boy's swim-shirt to cover the bumps on my arms, and baggy swim trunks to cover my legs. The other girls ran around in frilly, floral swimsuits, while my parents had to repeatedly tell me that those girls were damaging their skin and that I would be grateful later. I'm still much paler than most girls, though I don't care now. But I *do* have yet to see the day when those girls get the comeuppance I was promised.

### Teeth

I have had two expanders, two sets of braces, and more retainers than I can count. I think I am a part of one of the first generations in which almost every kid gets braces, and even then, I found a way to go above and beyond normality (in the negative sense).

When I was seven, two large teeth began to show in my upper row of teeth. They were pointier than the others and were much higher. The dentist told me that my canine teeth, that weren't supposed to come in until I was thirteen or fourteen, were coming in now.

Several weeks later was Halloween, and the only concern I had was making sure I could still eat all the gooey candy. My best friend and I made our way from house to house. She was dressed as a cat, while I was wearing some sort of ragdoll/Wednesday Addams costume. I don't really remember. Because as we were greeted at one of the doors, I was met with the astonishment of a middle-aged woman who exclaimed, "Wow, your vampire teeth look *so* real! Where did you get those?" I began to cry, so I did get extra candy out of the experience. And later, I got

braces and my canines moved down. Nowadays they look anything but alarming since I've ground them down because I forget to wear my retainer. All that work.

### Shoulders and Back

My father hates taking pictures. He usually wants no part of them, either behind or in front of the camera, so this must have been something important. He took a picture of me sitting in a chair at our kitchen table. Then he told me to "sit up straight." I realized that my back was completely hunched over, which was only confirmed by the two pictures. I looked like the hunchback of Notre Dame in the picture where I was sitting "normally," and an 18th-century woman at high tea in the other. Both looked unnatural and extreme, but I will admit the one at high tea looked better. I did not do well in my attempt to correct my posture. In fact, it became one of the most obnoxious things. Oftentimes my mother would make a face at me, or dig two of her fingers into my back to remind me. I grew to think about how much I despised the look and the reminders rather than about my posture itself. It was dreadfully annoying. I've tried to do better, but it's easy to forget about the things we don't constantly see about ourselves. I wasn't seeing myself enough.

### Fingers

As a child, I liked to press my hand to my parents' to see how long my fingers were in comparison to theirs. Of course, they were never as big, but my father would always say that my fingers were long, perfect for the piano. For many years, he wasn't wrong, and "tickle the ivories," was a common saying around our house. But as I grew, my fingers began to seem stubby in comparison to the rest of my body. What was suppose to be great was turning out to be quite unimpressive. Today, on the piano, I can play an octave with one hand and reach a tenth if I really stretch, but that hasn't really done as much for me as I thought it would have.

### Eyes

My eyes are blue. A part of my left eye is brown.

In the seventh grade, everything was becoming blurry. I couldn't see in class and I squinted everywhere I went. That fall, we had to take the annual vision and hearing tests, tests that I normally aced. Though that year I was told that I had done well below average on the eye exam and that I would need to get glasses.

Weeks later, my sister (who had also been informed that she needed glasses), and I had our eye appointments. We had done our best to put off the appointments, as neither of us wanted to wear "nerdy" glasses, but that day, we each found ourselves leaving the office- if you could call it that, because it was also a store inside of a mall-

with a pair of black glasses. As we walked toward the car, my mother yelled at my little sister, who had stopped in the middle of the parking lot. She was not looking at the cars around her, but rather at the trees above. She then loudly exclaimed, “Mom, the leaves have shapes!” Thinking this to be a stupid comment, I reluctantly looked up at the trees, but to my surprise, I found that she was right. I could see the edgings of the bright green leaves and veins that ran through them. I looked around and saw everything, all while realizing that having glasses may not be *that* bad. People may have to look closer to see the brown in my eye, but I made the changes and had the help I needed. Nothing wrong with help.

~ *Sophie Jonsson*





*"Cat's Eye Nebula" ~ Rheya Leack*

## COLOR ME

Color me blue when I am calm  
and clad in the cool brook.

Color me red when I see the horror  
I thought only read in a book.

Color me black when my soul is in  
such despair.

Color me gold when all have nothing,  
but it is I who can spare.

Color me green like a lush meadow  
floor. The verdant valley that's adorned.

Color me white like the clouds that  
drift across the sky and form images  
created by the mind's eye.

Color me like a rainbow, there  
lies the promise that He is there not  
to take it away by the waves rushing  
death. That no sin cannot be washed  
away and a new day abreast.

Color me like you, so that when you  
look upon my friendly gaze, it is us  
we see not the stranger's haze.

Color me bold, beautiful and strong,  
like all that come before me and their  
lessons lead me to no wrong.

Color me sad when the day's end,  
when I my eyes dim from age and wear

Color me gone from this life I  
so loved and shared. Color me.

~ *Bernard Anderson*

## THE BEERCAN.

he told me  
about the last place  
he'd worked - right  
as he was getting out  
a woman died, he said. he had been a  
safety compliance officer there, so some of it  
had come to him. he told me about it - the response  
in the office; a black laughter  
like jokes in a coalmine. opening  
a shop one morning  
the shutters had come down  
from the wall. they'd been weakened  
by years of inclement  
weather  
and had crushed her neck hard,  
like a drunk  
stamping on a beercan. pure  
slapstick. "I shouldn't laugh"  
he said, laughing about it. but I understood. what else  
can you do? you can't prepare  
for every accident.  
should he  
come into the office  
each day  
dressed in his funeral clothes  
as a mark of penance,  
or show  
any sign of weakness  
or some sign  
of diffident  
respect?

~ *D. S. Maolalai*

## REVERIE

Speak to me, Memory, speak of my past and the life I had squandered –  
speak of my home on the hillside, shrouded in mist by the ocean,  
built on a precipice, marked by the streets where I'd blissfully wandered,  
Looming above a divide between worlds of inimical notions,  
sirens and gunshots bespeaking of normalcy, Death its accomplice  
guided and gilded by ignorance borne of neglect and foreboding;  
What I'd been searching for, now is but lost to me - Memory, dauntless,  
tell me of how I had fallen so far from the pride of my father,  
victim of consequence, slain by the choices that, merciless, haunt me...  
Home is the rain that comes pouring, filling my shoes up with water,  
soaking my clothes and my face and my hair with the tears of the heavens;  
people seek refuge inside their abodes, but me, I'm unbothered,  
Choosing instead to go running through thoroughfares thoroughly leavened,  
as a child so often goes running with joy at the slightest  
hint of some mischief to dabble in, leaving for later his lessons.  
Home is the sound of Mah Jong, clacking and slapping, delighted  
voices to cry out their hands, while others just grumble misfortune;  
cigarette smoke in the kitchen, leaving the players benighted,  
Sipping their rice-wine and tea-leaves, poured out and gulped down in  
portions,  
nibbling at peanuts and dishes my mother prepared on occasion –  
smell that aroma! Smoke from the East and the meats in assortment,  
Mingled with alcohol, filling my nose with a tingling sensation...  
Home is the loneliness, wand'ring as misers do, seeking attention  
rather than money, stuck with the label 'American Asian';  
Lost in society's popular images, there I'm suspended,  
as a pendulum swinging from opposite boundaries is restless,  
never finding its place, but from either extreme is rejected,  
So was I hung between cultures, swinging and finding no respite.  
Home are the streets that I turned to, fatal but welcoming misfits;  
there I had roamed with the others, counting our friendships a blessing,  
There I had turned from a boy to an infant, blissfully wicked...  
Home is the swell of her belly, curving and soft neath my fingers,  
shiny and smelling of cocoa and butter - God how I miss it!  
How I had wanted to see him, watch as his mother delivered –

she was my home, my Penelope, patient and circumspect, loyal,  
waiting as, witless, I wasted my chances, choosing to linger -  
God but I missed it! Home are the tears that have threatened to soil  
all of the joy from the years I had squandered, just as the torrents  
flooding the fields would smother the crops and the harvest despoil,  
Leaving the farmer, his family, with nothing but ill-fated portents -  
so have the tears that I've shed filled my heart with a grief beyond  
healing.

Mercy now, Memory, let me be mindful of what is important,  
Let me not wallow in pain but give voice to the depths of my feelings...  
Home are those briefest of smiles despite the despair and depression;  
rare do they come, but come as they do they are worthy of stealing,  
Just as a thief in the dead of the night who goes seeking possessions,  
hoping to stumble upon some object of value or treasure,  
slips in his pocket something he later discovers is precious;  
Never to fence it, he keeps it and hoards it for personal pleasure -  
thus do I lift from the darkness those smiles, more precious than  
diamonds.

Home are the jumbles of words that come spilling and filling my  
letters,  
Thoughts uninhibited, feelings unvoiced, to be forced out of hiding,  
finding a home on the pages, and soaring in limitless freedom -  
think of the sparrow; confined to a cage he is idle and silent,  
Eyes filled with glimmers of longing, hoping that someone will free him.  
Open his door and watch as he takes to the skies with a vengeance,  
singing the song he had kept in his heart because no one would heed him.  
Thus are the words that take flight in the pages, finally vented...  
Home is the place where my heart and my soul have been patiently  
waiting -  
elsewhere. Not in the walls of these monoliths, stark of expression.

Home is in Memory, merciful Memory, patiently gaining;  
home is in hoping that 'one day' will come when my memory takes me.

*~ Brian Yang*



*"Mystic Mountain" ~ Rhey Leack*

## THOUGHTS WHILE SITTING IN MY DEN

If I were hungry enough to see the sun rise  
this morning I would climb to the top of the hill  
in my backyard and exhaust my life looking.

As it is I see only myself sitting in this chair.  
My neighbor sings far away, her voice ice-thick  
in the air. My words are flat and thin. They empty  
me of meaning and resound through my three-story  
house. If only I could hear myself better.

Freedom is worthless without comfort.  
I'm the kind of animal that wants only a soft bed  
and conversation. I'm done wondering what's wrong  
with that.

Somewhere far away a man is dying  
on his own terms in his home. He breathes  
the last remaining air. No one but he is present  
in front of the great fire of his den.

He has his mind. Nothing can interrupt his dying  
in the long drafts of winter air. If I were that warm  
I could live alone again in my chamber, and the bird  
that sings to me would never leave.

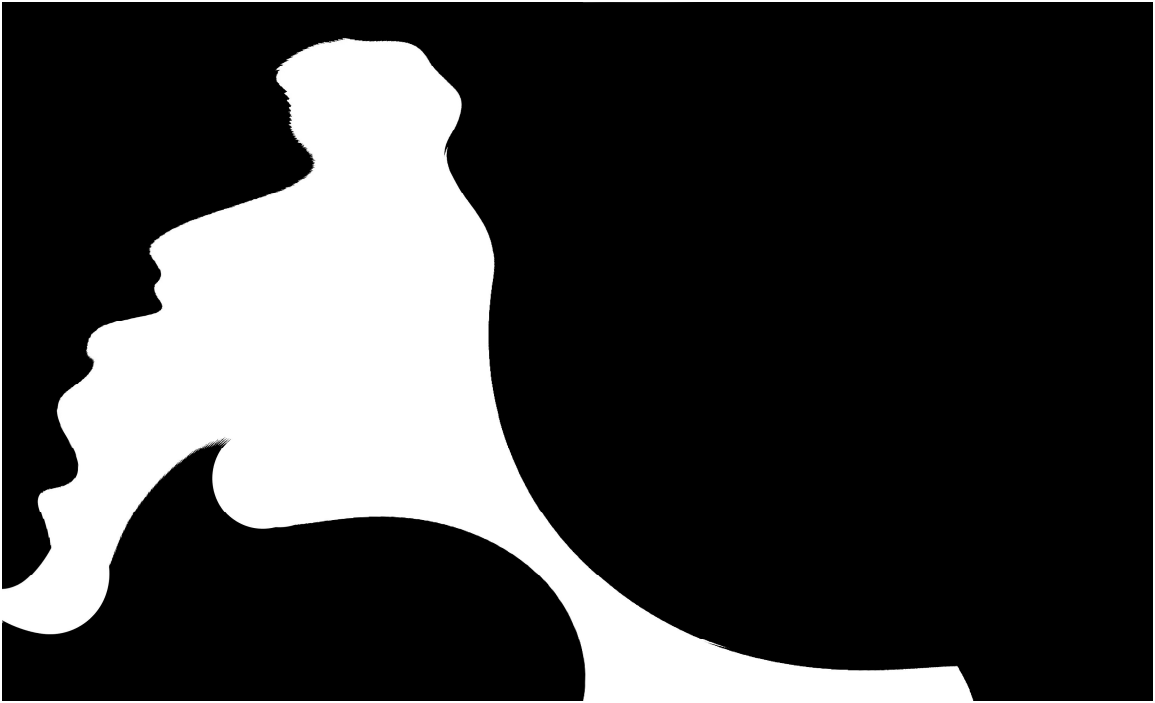
*~ Joel Fry*

## WHEN THE WAVES WERE GOLDEN

The current is dragging me into the ocean,  
And though I know it's pointless  
I fight with everything in my arms and legs,  
Armed with desperation  
And a view of the shore,  
And the memory of my feet  
Walking on sand,  
But my lungs knowing what's in store  
Begin to expand,  
Preparing for the hands  
About to drown me,  
And I deserve it too  
To be honest,  
For not remaining a child  
Who knows how to play with the waves,  
Wild with fear and joy  
I would rather die than deny  
That boy any part of me,  
Cause what's this you call  
Sitting quietly by the sea?  
Without throwing mud balls  
At your unsuspecting lover,  
Then laughing at her and running away,  
Without writing your deepest wishes in the sand  
And believing they'll come true  
Some day in some way that's more magic  
Than mindless habits – no!  
I refuse to believe the wonder disappears that quick,  
Like a wave that barely reaches the beach then quits,  
And as it recedes I run straight for the ocean  
Desperate to open up one last time,  
Blind to the fact that the moment is gone  
And all that is left is potential  
For another set of footprints.

~ *Adrian S. Mariscal*





*"Wave" ~ Edward Supranowicz*

Light slowly fills the cell, gray yet luminous. things come into focus: the harsh angles of the bunks; the thin lines of the lockers; the lonely shapes of the table and stool; and there, always by the door, always out of place, the stainless steel toilet; all now forming, rising as though out of a mist. The sounds of the morning are the same as they ever were, and always will be: toilets flushing; televisions slowly coming to life; voices, close in proximity, yet echoing as if distant, distinguished by inflection; all pouring in through the perforated door alongside the encroaching clangor of keys, marking the beginning of the day.

A certain dampness fills the room. It is not only in the air, not only in the steel coldness of the bunks, not only in the walls, which weep as it with sympathy, but in the very soul, which weeps, willingly or not, with self-pity. It permeates every breath, corrupts every thought, waters the vision. Personal articles fill the empty space: stacks of paperwork, legal and personal, in every sense vital to continued existence; stacks of personal letters, collected over years and years and denoting the only contact with the outside world, an ironic memorial of a technologically advanced society; sundry items of hygiene, clothing and food, a colorful reminder that the closet sized space is bedroom, living room, bathroom, kitchen, and study, all in one; all enclosed by featureless gray walls that every moment threaten to strangle any sign of life within, and not with violent force, but with their silent, motionless and restricting presence alone – Hector<sup>1</sup> could scarce make a single circuit around them before realizing the futility.

The view outside, through a narrow window, in of the adjacent cellblock. Like my own, it is squat and without ornament, save for the numerous arrow-slit windows, each one looking out at the same scene of dereliction, but each one a portal into another world. For each cell is occupied by men, each man with his own disposition and liking, and his living quarters would no doubt reflect just such differences. Simple human nature, and yet what a way to break from the monotony of prison! It could be just a picture in a certain place, a certain collection of books, a hint of some culture, and how the prison cell is transformed from a dreary coffin to a space fit for the living. Above the structure can be seen only a sliver of sky, and that only if I stand at an uncomfortable angle, though at the moment it is hidden behind a canopy of bright gray clouds.

---

<sup>1</sup> In *The Iliad*, Prince Hector ran around the walls of Troy three times to try and escape Achilles, before Athena persuades Hector to stop and fight him.

To the right, over a connecting wall, perhaps 40-50 yards away, looms a towering light post, now but a dark husk overwhelmed by swirling depths of fog. Beneath the window, the ground is an undulating collection of loose rocks, filling the empty space between buildings for seemingly no other purpose than that it needed to be filled. Among this amalgamation are a few patches of grass, poking up proudly through the rocky crevices to seek the daylight, as man too long deprived of it are wont to do. Here and there, too, are little yellow flowers, adding something of color to the scenery, and more than a little relief to the discerning eye.

It takes a while for the fog to clear up, but even then it lingers at the outskirts of the prison walls; seeing that ethereal gray curtain obscuring everything beyond as surely as the walls themselves, one cannot but wonder if that lonely Kantian theory<sup>2</sup> true. Slowly, however, the fog gives way to rain. The surface of the opposite building and enjoining wall become streaked with it, just as the face of a distressed child becomes streaked with tears, and soon takes on darker hues; the rocks at their feet follow suit. Blades of grass bend to the will of every raindrop, susceptible for all their determination, while the yellow flowerets uplift themselves still, all open on their stems, taking in sustenance, lacking though they are of the morning sun. In a particularly deep depression just below the window, water gradually begins to collect in a small puddle, holding up a mirror to the sky - but muddied, disturbed waters allow for no reflection. Each drop of water becomes visible, first as a tiny spleen, then a ripple, and then... gone, to be replaced by the next, and that by the next, though none ever fall in the same place, until the puddle becomes the beginnings of a small pond, rippling endlessly beneath the rainfall.

All this without a sound, for behind the narrow window, which is thick enough to stop a bullet, I can hear nothing of this natural phenomenon, save for the faint whispers of allegory.

It is not until a few hours later, around 9a.m., when we are released to the yard, that nature may be experienced in full - at least for those who choose to experience it. The chill can be felt well before one even exits the building; once outside, it cannot be escaped, not with any amount of extra clothing, and certainly not with the rain pouring relentlessly down. The lightweight yellow rain jackets issued to prisoners are little comfort in such conditions. From the first few steps, state-issued shoes find themselves soaked through, and the

---

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, suggested that nothing can exist without our immediate perception of it.

threadbare socks beneath are no better off, clinging wetly to the feet and giving the feel of walking through ice-water. The newly awakened air fills the lungs, crisp, clean, cold, invigorating, though at the same time sharp, biting, hard to breathe, even painful. A cloying dampness fills the nostrils, smelling of wet earth and the refreshing rain, and for a moment, one may well forget that he is in prison, so immediate is the power of nature to a man's senses that it can overwhelm even the anguish of the soul within.

But indeed it is only for a moment, for when he looks up there is, to his eyes, a more oppressive power even than Mother Nature. Chain linked fences abound, cutting through areas of allotted grass and dirt interspersed by unbending paths of concrete. A scattered collection of iron exercise bars and concrete tables mark the designated areas for different ethnic groups, the water reaching high enough that they seem foreign objects floating in some desolate marsh. Sections of the yard are flooded, all but submerged beneath the ever-rising currents that sweep away as much dirt, grass and rocks as they do hope. But for all that, the rain does nothing against the lofty coils of razor-wire everywhere present, nor can it soften the harsh angles of the cellblocks which rise like the crenellations of some long inundated city, much less wash away the phantom boundaries separating Other from White, White from Black, Black from Hispanic, Man from Man; for none of these are natural institutions subject to the whims of nature, but man-made things at the mercy of their makers. Who knew that one could so easily drown in less-than-ankle-deep water?

On the far side, behind yet another fence, stands an interconnected line of program buildings, divided by a single gun-tower looming high at their center, in every sense a panopticon - except for the barrel of a rifle emerging from the window, and the less distinguishable face of the gunner behind it. Beneath his watchful gaze, the yard opens.

And as laborers awaken from their humble abodes to face their toils of the day, so men shuffle out into the elements, huddled in raincoats; the drumming of the torrents against the hoods blocks out the sound of the rain striking the earth, different melodies of similar refrains, one haunting with foreboding, and the other with innocence. The brunt of the cold comes quickly, carried on bursts of wind that gust through every opening and fiber of clothing to find the naked skin beneath, cutting through that just as surely as a newly whetted knife, catching in the flesh, against the bone, as surely would the dullest blade.

As ever, men disperse toward their respective areas; at first glance, they seem inclined by race; with secondhand knowledge, they seem obliged by

affiliation, as wolves to a pack; out for the prisoner neither is as urgent as that instinct of survival, that desire for some semblance of unity and community and, with them, security. To the undiscerning eye, there may seem something strange, even unnatural, in this conscious division of one man from another, but there is certainly nothing more unnatural than for a man to be caged, isolated from his family and society, deprived not only of rights - those he forfeited - but of his affinity to what he himself deems natural. Deprive him of this, his humanity, and what recourse has he but to associate with those most like himself? As beasts in the wild are distinguished by species, so men in the prisons of California distinguish themselves by ethnicity; the former is a law of nature, abided by, without question. for the equanimity of the ecosystem; the latter is a law of man, established for accountability and social order. In both instances division is necessary for the unity of the whole.

So men disperse, each to his own. In the dreary setting, the brightness of our yellow raincoats seems a great irony; we are at once a single mass of faceless prisoners, yet we are each easily marked by the multiple gunmen stationed in their nooks, and singled out all the more easily by the lone gunman high above - to us, they, too, are faceless. But they are distant, less overseers than observers. We forget they are there. This is our world, and we must live in it.

Nature takes no pause to wallow in its plight, and neither does it pause for man to wallow in his. Mud and concrete commingle as the rain keeps pouring, and, lacking the grace of even a single tree, there is no dry place in sight. Gray gives way to brown, dotted with slender shoots of green jutting out of the water like so many little heads trying to stay afloat; footing becomes more uncertain, here solid yet slippery, there soft and impressible, clutching at the feet like quicksand at the wayward step. One must always be careful where one treads.

Standing among a loose collection of rocks, mud and water, I listen to the sweet song through my hood. Water falling from the sky, pummeling into the ground with gentle force, splashing into the widening pools with the muted tinkle of finger-taps, rushing like stubborn rivers along ruts and well-worn paths; it is as soothing as any nocturne, as uplifting as any gospel, as dependable as day and night. It fills the soul with a remembrance of something good, and also a premonition of something better to come.

My view is of a barren, inundated field, on the far side of which is a basketball court; exercise bars, concrete slabs and tables stand mired like monuments to some depressing kingdom; the track, one half dirt, one half concrete, wraps around the yard, and men walk or jog around the designated

path, counterclockwise, despite the freezing brown water splashing against their legs; others take to push-ups or burpies, though the paved areas no doubt feel like jagged blocks of ice beneath their hands; some find their way to the basketball court, if only to take advantage of the solid footing; others stand in conversation with their fellows, though with some difficulty, for numb lips and chattering teeth make speech seem a novel thing. But here we all are, prisoners, men, in the cold and rain, enveloped by fences, razor-wire, and the tear-streaked edifices of the cell blocks, with the endless gray skies above and the immutable earth beneath.

What an odd beauty is to be found in these moments, for though we are divided - no, merely different - in many ways, we are united in the plight of our circumstances, just as we are united when suffering or thriving at the hands of nature.

Beyond the squat angles of the cell blocks, through the billowing sheets of rain, can be seen the serrated green line of treetops, a stark and not so distant horizon, for past them none can see; above them, however, looming like the delectable slopes of Mount Purgatory, a thickly wooded hill rises, vested in the planet's mists, as impossible to comprehend from afar as it is impossible to ascend before the requisite Journey through Hell<sup>3</sup>.

So, too, in moments like these, one wonders when he might ever behold the stars. 'E io non sol uno.'<sup>4</sup>

~ *Brian Yang*

---

<sup>3</sup> In *Inferno*, Dante cannot ascend Mount Purgatory until Virgil has led him through Hell.

<sup>4</sup> "And I not the only one..." (Italian) A play on the lines in *Inferno* Canto II: "...e io sol uno / mi apparecchiava a sostener la Guerra / si del cammino e si do la prete..." – "And I the only one / made myself ready to sustain the war / both of the way and likewise of the woe..."



*"Texture #5" ~ Fabio Sassi*

## OPEN SPACES

It feels great  
to be out from under  
rolling carpets of steel and stone.  
I'm standing with outlying anonymity,  
breathing in the glory of solitude.  
Enjoying the simple subtraction  
of so much weight from shoulders.

It's so easy to forestall deep sorrow here  
while feeling the deepening rumble  
of a wet, thunderous afternoon  
within my chest.  
The wind battering from all sides,  
turning my hair like the Medusa,  
as I wait for the open spaces,  
and the nighttime canvas of midnight blue  
to be painted across the sky.

*~ Linda Imbler*



## RITUALS

That tattered and threadbare dream is of a world where there is no top or bottom nor an east or west, and when the white-winged residents begin their murmurings I try hard to hear what is being passed on before it becomes silhouetted, fainting back into the fog and gone once again.

Today the metaphors are streaking meteors burning and flashing across black-white spaces between stars and words. Outside the window weather slices a season in two. All day long crowds of clouds have been pushing, lumbering over the stark landscape of this windswept dream.

My memory stumbles into a darkroom hung with blurry prints; familiar faces, but out of focus. It is a deep sea for many moons to float on and the stars are silver stitching holding a night sky together. Here is where zero is only one-half of infinity, time is the other half,

and times taken for the tiny privacies of smallest moods. Some loose threads hanging from wrinkled lines are messing up the page with rambling soliloquies disturbed and discordant, having been derived from a confusion of mere trivialities. And then there is the true loner who surrounds himself

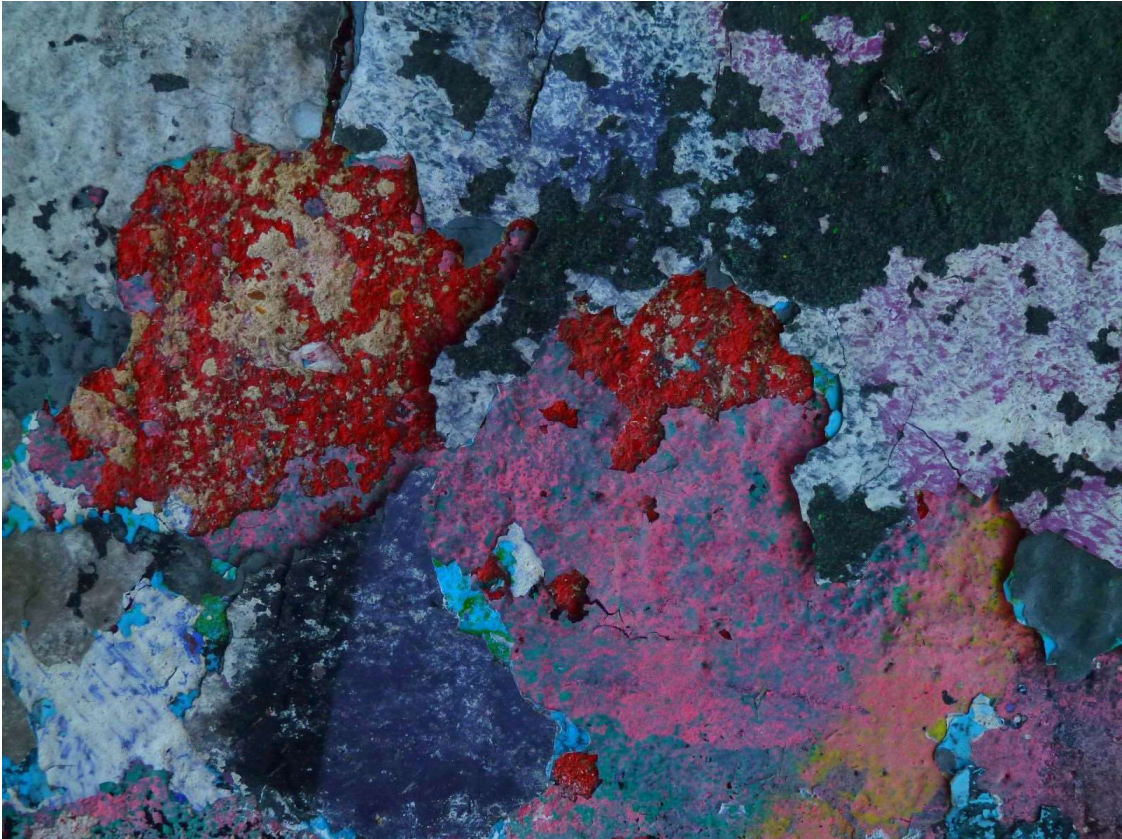
with ghosts. I am a ghost surrounded by humanity, checking into the same crowded dream every night with my heavy suitcase loaded down with one life's perfusion of horizons. I'll settle in again listening for a whirl in the wind. It is that elusive chatter buzzing around and just out of grasp.

*~ Dirk James*

## AS THE SUN SETS

The wind has scoured  
the prints away. How  
long ago the cavalry  
left you can't recall  
but since that moment  
the cacti have grown  
ever thirstier. The wind  
carves the sand into shapes  
you have never seen  
before, cannot describe  
with the alphabets  
available to you. Someday  
a mount will return,  
carry you to the front.

~ *Robert Beveridge*



*"Texture #4" ~ Fabio Sassi*

## MY BIG BREAK

Oh the wonders of teenagehood. The time in our lives where we tend to express our rebellious side. I imagined that it consisted of going out to fun parties, staying up late, the usual imaginary scenarios my mind was consumed with thanks to the movies. It's all fun and games until you actually experience those dreadful 4 years of high school. Instead of gaining new friends, you just gain new pimples and scars on your face that will go down in the yearbooks. It's unfortunate that middle schoolers aren't warned about this reality before it's too late. Before entering my freshman year of high school, I was convinced that being in a new school would feel like being in some kind of musical, surrounded by friends, peace and harmony. I imagined freshman year to be the most memorable one. Every person remembered their freshman year, so I've heard, but it all just sounded too good to be true, and it was. My actual freshman year was extraordinary compared to the ones my brother and sister experienced. In fact they were far from envious, and I don't blame them. I would trade anything to start that whole year over again. Instead of the high school musical I dreamed of, I actually started my freshman year of high school broken and helpless.

That spectacle happened in the blink of an eye, as if a twig weekly snapped in half. Except it wasn't a twig that snapped in half that day. Even the way it happened was just utterly ridiculous! Looking back at it now, I still can't figure out why I let it happen the way it did. It was around the second week of my freshman year, on the first official day of gym class. We all had already bought our horrendous looking gym clothes with our school mascot plastered all over it, ready to start working out. By "working out, our teacher meant running back and forth through the basketball court. What made this workout more ridiculous for most of us was that eventually, she wanted us to start running backwards. For me, it didn't seem like a big deal at the time, so we began doing so. Looking back shouldn't have been an option, especially since we were all supposed to be lined up and start at the same time. I was confident enough to believe nothing was going to be behind me. Unfortunately, these were freshman. Somehow, some idiot in the class had already decided to take a spot right where I was running towards, laying down out of extreme laziness. Not even ten seconds later, my legs made

contact with his own as I began falling on my back. The only sound I heard was like a twig snapping in half, except it was something more vital.

I was immediately instructed to walk over to the nurse's office, as I held out my right arm. I assured her I was ok, that I didn't feel any kind of pain. In fact, I couldn't even feel my arm! I just laughed it off, the adrenaline from our previous exercises already kicking in. For a freshman who was so dense, I wish I could just go back in time and knock some sense into my clueless self. When I arrived, the only thing the nurse did was give me a pack of ice. "Just leave the ice on. Your arm is really swollen," she said as she went back over to her desk, ready to send me home for the day. Just like with the teacher, I assured her I was just fine. "It's probably just sprained!" I confidently explained to her, "I'm sure it will be all better by tomorrow or so." That "sprain" was only the beginning of my troubles.

At first, I was calm about it all, that rush of energy still pumping through my blood. On the drive to the doctor's office, my mom kept telling me how she just suddenly felt that something was wrong, calling it "el sexto sentido," which meant her sixth sense. Of course, just like with everybody else, I assured her I was fine, continuing to smile on the way there. I was called in for an x-ray, to check for any injuries. As we proceeded, that sheer happiness from the adrenaline I once had suddenly began to fade away as I felt the doctor move my hand around for a bit. A large amount of pain immediately sheared through my heart, like a knife piercing through your skin. The doctor soon finished and had the results placed in front of me through a series of pictures, the next few words finally dragging me back into reality. "You have a wrist fracture in your right arm," he said as he began addressing my mom of a hospital nearby that could get me a cast. I wasn't paying attention to the details, I only had the words *right hand* drilled in my mind. My right hand was literally the only way I got through school in the first place! The one who held the scissors in kindergarten, the one that punched the tetherball back to my opponent in the third grade, the one who wrote everything for about 10 years now. I felt like I was at a funeral, mourning the loss of a loved one. I tried looking down at my arm again, but all I saw were a pair of glasses filled with tears.

It turned out that I couldn't get a cast placed until my arm stopped swelling (it took about 2 weeks for the redness to just go away), so for the

meantime, the hospital provided me with a sling and a brace, so my arm could stay still. When we finally got home, just about every family member knew what was going on, thanks to social media. I was sitting on the couch, contemplating how wonderful life was when my right arm wasn't broken, when I noticed my mom coming up to me with her phone in her hand. "What are you doing?" I asked her as I wiped yet another tear away from my face. "La tia quiere ver el brazo," she replied as she positioned the camera to take a picture. I was so upset, and here she was just taking pictures to upload them on Facebook later. My family wanted to see my arm, and now they will have photographic evidence.

The next few months for me were by far the worst I have ever experienced in my 14 years of living. I couldn't write at all, nor sing at my church for a while, and heck, I couldn't even have fun. What made it so much better was that a cousin of mine came to visit that year, taking the family to a bunch of different places. While everyone else had fun at the Santa Monica Pier one day, I had to go back to the car, because the wind was brining pain into my hand (it's something that sort of still happens to this day, but it's not as bad anymore). So my mom decided to stay home with me everytime everyone else went out. I felt bad that I was holding her back, but she said she's never dealt with a kid with a broken bone, so of course she wanted to live through it.

I didn't go to school for about 2 weeks, but while I was at home, I made a huge discovery that brought back a bit of light into my world. See, there's this thing called a "left arm," amazing really. It's exactly like a right arm, except it's on the left! It's made of the same materials as my right arm, bones and all. What was the best part? Well, it definitely wasn't broken. That day, I grabbed a pencil with my left hand and just started writing. From my alphabet all the way to finishing some of my homework, I realized now that maybe this wasn't the end of the line. Sure, it was a bit sloppy at first, but what shocked me the most was the fact that it was still legible. So I continued, practicing everyday while I was at home. It didn't stop there. Once I had my cast placed, I went back to school, my left arm doing all the work for me. Occasionally, I fell behind, but that didn't stop me. I felt like I received a fresh start, a chance to relinquish the wonders of life.

This went on for several months until one day, I was 100% healed. Meaning, my right arm was back as a whole: I didn't need a cast anymore. I was elated to hear the news, but also a bit disappointed. Now that my right hand was back on the market, what about the left? I shook my head as we left the hospital day, about to hit the nearest taco place to celebrate. What a dumb thought. I could always use my left hand whenever I felt like it, because it really can do many things. There's a word for that, defined as a task that could be equally done by both the left and right hand. That same day, I did my research, and came to the conclusion that the year 2014 was the year I became ambidextrous.

*~ Andrea Morales*



*"Star River" ~ Rhey Leack*



## PENICILLIN IN THE INLAND EMPIRE

“Delight is to him ... who against the proud gods and commodores  
of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self.”

- Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

“Doc, please shipshape me.  
We board 0600; I gotta pass dock muster,”

the gaunt vice admiral of the fleet  
pleads for middle of the night relief.

“What’s the problem, Sir?”  
Nonchalantly he probes one ear

which otoscoped sloshes dark secrets  
from weird pussy blebs.

“Please describe your shore leave.”  
The otherwise impressive guy

who at first came on as a straight shooter,  
sheds life-shredding tension

hemming boot camp unanswers.  
I mull his stonewall: What the hell,

just swab the auditory canal,  
stain a glass slide of his jetty

that shows lordy lordy  
a surprise attack of gram negative

pink gonococci pretty as a picture  
of someone’s post-spree kidneys

now safe at harbor  
not imagining them docking on this berm.

An almost retired infectious disease man  
slumps into Riverside’s ER,

puts on gloves, spouts non-jargon  
my way, "Pants him.

And one of us better touch his junk.  
Queer, never seen a case here this skeevy.

Guess what's possible is inevitable."  
The specialist confirms

an unheard-of diagnosis then leaves.  
I advise the top navy brass, "Don't lets get

all tied up in knots.  
Take a shot in the bottom to avoid setbacks,

perhaps the brig. Contact special deckmates;  
make sure your pregnant wife's

checked for syphilis of the innocent"  
- back in fleeting sunny days

before resistance developed  
and AIDs.

*~ Gerard Sarnat*

## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Even in May, the Pacific  
downright cold, a slip of beach

surrounded by rocks and boulders  
    (back on Florence Reginald Denny  
    is pulled from his truck)  
we're sophomores skipping class

catching a tan, Frisbee in the surf—  
    (beatn in daylight—riots, looting  
    just blocks from our apartment)  
take my weathered Celica

up PCH splurge on Coronas  
forget the limes...

just a band of boys from the South  
    (knocks on all the doors)  
on a long afternoon, discussing  
    (no time to pack a bag)

urgent issues—next meal,  
    (or call anyone  
    we all evacuate)  
should we get a dog, who's driving home.

~ *Beau Boudreaux*



*"Ghost Nebula" ~ Rheyra Leack*

## ATTENTION TO THE (UN)NATURAL

The sky spits,  
drip drip drip,  
over me,  
but not  
upon me.  
Because I am  
in the comfort  
of my car.  
The obscured  
view  
of the  
world behind  
enveloped  
by  
moisture and warmth.  
Each drop  
perishes,  
in communion  
with  
the hood  
of

my car.  
The cries  
of  
the drops  
amplify  
beyond  
the range  
of  
my stereo,  
The other  
lanes,  
full,  
as I  
am alone,  
savoring  
the melody,  
that is  
not  
the rain.

*~ Daniel Orona*

## THE UNEXPECTED STORM

I didn't expect you.

You came  
like a thunderstorm  
following  
a single cloud.

You poured down  
on me,  
soaking  
every inch  
of my body.

I was covered  
in what felt like  
deep emotions  
that rolled  
with thunder  
and burst  
with lightning.

And as the storm passes,  
I can still feel  
the rain on my skin.

I didn't expect you, but I'm glad you came.

*~ Nicole Embrey*

## INTENDED STORMS

I intended storms to be delivered  
I refused the plans that someone else conceived

we are off-hand comments, glimpses so brief  
droplets in the bottom of a Pepsi can  
strangers without a second chance

the foam slowly dying on the push of Atlantic air  
stings like lightning in your eyes

the secret covering of impulse  
cheek-bitten smiles of destiny  
rethinking the urges of infidelity

and all the days I neglected your weeping strings  
gasping truths in the blanket of dark  
there was nothing ordinary about any of this

focusing images of all that has now passed  
the faces that simultaneously haunt and repose

waving goodbye until it one day becomes hello.

*~ Richard King Perkins II*





*"Marsh" ~ Mandy Thibert*

## FICUS AND US

Our friendship is  
the Angkor Wat temple  
overrun by strangler figs  
that I planted  
when we weren't looking.

They took root  
in that porous foundation  
and slowly extracted  
our lifegiving  
Love.

Their knobbly fingers  
spread out and greedily  
searched for our weaknesses  
among the smiling Buddhas  
and towering Vishnus.

I'm sorry to say  
that I let them  
grow,  
and it's too late  
to cut them down.

*~ Helena Mahdessian*

## TO MY FOSSIL FERN

I grasp the slab of sandstone to hurl  
Over the edge of Palos Verdes:  
A childhood, wanton pleasure.  
Instead it fragments into sheets,  
A book opening to a print of a fern,  
Textbook-perfect, an ancient beauty:  
This is the finality of our mineral life.  
I take the picture, but hurl the book;  
I show my friend, the scientist, later;  
It seems I've kept the cast  
But destroyed the mold.

There is something of that fern about you:  
That you are delicate,  
Or perhaps belong where ferns grow.  
There's that sympathetic hum  
Between you and that leaf at the continent's edge;  
And when your voice sounds faded,  
I feel the tide assault the bedrock  
And all the sandstone cliffs of the world  
Slide into disorder around your feet.

At times I think I could even love you,  
And I see your face split into two;  
And I'm looking forward, into the light of your eyes,  
And I'm looking backward at a fossilized past,  
Where I read about you in books,  
Thought primordial thoughts,  
Saw primordial things crawl about you in the dark.  
At times I think I do love you  
And I want to hold your face,  
Hold you in my blood until my bones crack and fossilize  
And protect you as I would protect life itself,  
And slide down to be stratified at your feet.

There is a wealth of love in those sandstone cliffs,  
That shuffles off into the sea one day,  
When no person is there to look on,

When no tide is there to catch the debris,  
When no books are left to read about you,  
When your coal black eyes and hair  
Dissolve and are cast into the air,  
And are no longer there to haunt me,  
And can no longer erode my indifference,  
And are no longer the cast nor the mold,  
And I can sigh and murmur, "Take care of yourself,"  
And slide into the waves.

*~ Alex Lennert*

## HOW MY AUNT'S ABORTION WAS LIKE A FERN

We came to know so much  
through ferns, those planted  
by my father, and those prehistoric:  
thousands of years of pressure  
and death, impacted until  
they became shades  
or a reliquary of light,  
color suckling on a  
declaration of drought,  
the charcoal portraits

.  
of my aunt who taught us  
which shapes are most desirable:  
heart for the face, almond for eyes,  
thick width of the mouth,  
high cheek bones and  
lifelong neck; they tried  
measuring it once, at a party,  
to see if it was as lithe  
as Audrey Hepburn's.

We learned how the human  
fetal position has been mimicked  
by ferns, as if they were  
also made in the appropriate  
image; how the seemingly  
impossible, a soft  
nautilus, had to be nursed  
throughout a long day  
of waiting for show  
and tell in first  
or second grade  
so I could demonstrate  
the self-protective instinct

applied to plants, as it did  
to animals; I kept the fern  
between wet paper towels  
just as my aunt must have been  
given, in a back alley with unhygienic  
instruments, to collect slugs  
of infection that will be  
revived into the less  
than forward thinking eras.  
After school, my mother had me  
toss the fern into the ash can,  
as she called it, from when  
the family garbage was  
burned in public; because  
you can never unlearn what  
nature teaches. You can  
only own up to its  
terminal existence.

*~ Jane Rosenberg LaForge*



*"San Joaquin Fox" ~ Rubia Dalbosco van Roodselaar*

Carrie's last client of the day was a surprise, although she already sensed that after a few more weeks in this job, nothing would surprise her. As she viewed the latest personification of human need slumped in the worn chair beyond her desk, she saw a guy her own age—and not bad looking either.

He stared out the window at the construction crane lifting steel beams for another luxury loft development, laced-up boot crossed over the leg of his skinny jeans. With his leather laptop bag and man bun, he looked like a recent art school grad. But he gave off the same musk of dry sweat and scalp as the others.

Carrie rummaged through the piles on her desk for his folder. Dizzied by a day of filling out forms for single mothers and meth heads and schizophrenics and veterans—and some who didn't fit any of those categories—her mind was halfway out the door, even if her body wasn't.

After this client, Carrie planned to stop by Mother's Market. It would be the first time she cooked for Brett. The first time she'd used the key he'd given her.

She glanced at the name typed on the tab. "All right, Darren, with the Riverbed shutting down, let's talk about some housing alternatives."

She tried to catch his eye. It was important to make contact, form a connection—quick. Someone new plunked down in the chair every twenty minutes. Wanting her to solve their problems, when she could barely solve her own.

But his fixation on the construction crane was making it difficult. Many clients looked at it, not recognizing the irony of unaffordable housing being built across the street from the Orange County Housing Authority. But sometimes they did, leading to prolonged rants about the need for more affordable housing.

Carrie reached out and closed the shades. "Sorry, this time of day, the sun's blinding."

The desk filling her office seemed designed as a barrier between bureaucrats and the people being served. But it was still not large enough to hold the bunkers of wire trays jammed with teetering stacks of beige folders.

Now that the blinds were closed, his attention drifted back. "Dustin," he said.

She looked at him quizzically, thinking he was talking about the foul-smelling dust covering everything on the Riverbed—the circus of blue tarps, colorful tents, bicycles, and plastic bins stretching for miles along the Santa Ana River bike path. She'd been to the encampment once. Besides the shock of seeing so many people living there, the dust was the thing she remembered most.

"I'm Dustin, not Darren," he said, hazel eyes narrowing to a pained squint. "Dustin Werther."



Carrie looked at the name on the file—Darren Werther—but the forms listed him as Dustin. She scratched out the incorrect first name and wrote D-U-S-T-I-N in its place. Making sure it was legible so she wouldn't make the same mistake twice.

"I'm sorry, Dustin. So how have things been for you since the last time you were here?" She glanced at the paperwork. "Back on January 10."

He gave her a lopsided smile. He had good teeth. If he managed to get a job with dental insurance, he might be able to keep them a few more decades.

"Picked up some new web design clients. And my MacBook Air hasn't been stolen yet. Sharing a tent with a couple of friends."

It sounded like the life of any recent college graduate. Except instead of sharing an apartment, they were sharing a tent. She wondered if they had the same arguments over cleaning as she and her roommates had.

Carrie pulled up a form on her computer. "We can get you into Continuum of Care," she said, fingers poised above the keyboard.

He gave her a strange look. "So what will this get me—a motel room for a week? What I really need is first and last, long-term."

Carrie got this reaction a lot. No one wanted to leave the Riverbed. It was their home. She didn't want to tell him she was a six-month temp, hired to break up the encampment. Assigned to W-Z. If she hadn't gotten this gig, she might be living on the Riverbed too.

"The Sheriff's Department has a date certain, so you have to move whether you want to or not." She made her voice softer. "Shall we start with your housing history?"

He was staring at the window again, even though the blinds were closed. When he looked back at her, his eyes were angry. Carrie glanced at her watch. Ten to five.

Picking up the cue, he grabbed the satchel presumably holding his MacBook Air.

"Do you have family?" Carrie asked.

"None that can help."

"Would you like to make another appointment? So we can talk more about alternatives?"

"You're kidding, right? Wasting a whole day in your waiting room only to come in here and be called by the wrong name and offered something of dubious value? I'll just find a Ghost Ship squat about to go up in flames. Problem solved."

He was getting melodramatic. But she could understand his frustration. She checked her calendar. "I can squeeze you in first thing in the morning. You could do your web design while you're waiting. It's quieter here than most coffee places."

He rolled his eyes. “All right.”

She signed him up for another appointment, hoping she wouldn’t get questions from her supervisor.

Gunning her Civic out of the parking garage, Carrie switched gears to the question of what to make for dinner. Nothing too elaborate—she didn’t want to trash Brett’s kitchen or make a gut bomb. Maybe quinoa salad, berries for dessert. She’d promised vegan.

Turning off Broadway, she saw Dustin not Darren bending to unlock his bike from a light post. She felt guilty she’d be spending the evening in a stylish loft, while he huddled in a sleeping bag.

At Mother’s Market, the abundance of red and orange bell peppers, bright green broccoli, and leafy greens sent her into a paroxysm of pleasure. But she restrained herself, buying only enough for one meal. Rent was due next week. She paid seven-fifty for a room in a three bedroom in Garden Grove, and after her student loan and car payment and insurance, didn’t have much left for food.

Cal State Fullerton didn’t look great on her resume, but there was a chance she’d pay off her debt in this lifetime. Carrie thought back to Dustin. Maybe he’d gotten into his mess by going to an expensive private school. She wondered what he’d be having for dinner. Maybe a bean burrito or pizza eaten on the floor of his tent.

Carrie lucked out and found street parking near Brett’s building, avoiding having to pay seven dollars to park in the lot. Juggling two bags of groceries and her gym bag containing cosmetics, flat iron, and a change of clothes, she dug in her purse for the key. She’d zipped it into a special compartment, not wanting it to join her key ring just yet.

They’d met on Tinder. He wasn’t great looking— just average, like her, with short hair and steely blue eyes. Part of the attraction was that he had a decent job and owned his own place. She’d gone out with a succession of guys who, like her, lived with a million roommates, or even worse, their parents. It made things complicated, and she was beyond making out in cars or restaurant bathrooms.

They grabbed gastropub grub and ubered it to nightclubs, and because he made more than her, he always insisted on paying. She spent a few nights a week at his place, and most weekends. Her roommates were beginning to wonder if she stilled lived there.

Opening the door to Brett’s loft, Carrie was overwhelmed by open space and the familiar tang of Polo. The cologne he dabbed on his neck got on her clothes like a territorial imprint. But it was better than the smell of unwashed bodies she inhaled at work.

When Brett bought the loft, he added thousands to the loan for new furniture. A tan sectional curled around a glass coffee table, the tableau completed by a black flat screen on the wall and a white lamp curving down from above. In the spare room was the desk where he sometimes worked at night.

It felt weird being here when he wasn't home. It was a big deal for him to give her the key, and she didn't want to do anything to breach the trust—move something or break something or mess something up.

Carrie set the groceries on the kitchen counter. The kitchen was sparkling clean—white cabinets, white quartz countertop, white dishes—the stainless-steel appliances and driftwood gray floors contributing the only color.

She hauled her gym bag up to the second-floor loft, with its king-sized bed draped in brown and black linens. Above the bed was the skylight where they watched the clouds after sex. She tucked her bag by what she thought of as her side of the bed, then went downstairs to begin making dinner.

Everything was ready when Brett opened the door and yelled, "Honey, I'm home." Laughing, she was all over him, giving him barely a second to drop his laptop bag before pulling him onto the couch.

"Wine?" Carrie asked after a few minutes of kissing.

"Sure," said Brett. "But wait—let me get the remote so we can have music."

He led her up the stairs, and watching him messing with the remote, felt a surge of feeling. Whether it was love or lust, she couldn't be sure. Lust was seeing him take off his shirt. Love was watching him when he didn't know he was being watched.

He took off his shirt and stood over her, and in his eyes Carrie thought she saw the same thing—that potent mix of love-lust. She fell into the rhythm of the music and the wine and their bodies, missing the moment when the skylight faded from gray to black.

Afterward, they went downstairs and plopped down on the sectional and ate their quinoa salad while watching *Game of Thrones*. Some nights Brett had work to do, but tonight he was celebrating completion of a software upgrade.

"So how was your day?" he asked.

Carrie rubbed her temples. "Tiring. I feel so bad for these people, having to live in tents. Some have been camping out for three years."

The Riverbed went on for miles. If you could get over the disbelief this was happening in America, you could imagine it as a village, where people ate dinner in plastic chairs around the cookstove, threw laundry on bushes to dry, watched each others' tents like good neighbors. The politicians had ignored the problem for years,

hoping it would just go away, then fast-tracked a relocation strategy when the GoPro videos racked up all those YouTube views.

Brett smiled at her blankly. His look of disinterest when she talked about homeless people made her wonder. But maybe he just didn't understand. He made a good living from his technical ability. Maybe he didn't know suffering.

"There was one guy today," Carrie continued. "Same age as me. Looked like a college grad. But maybe he studied something useless, like history or art."

Brett's interest level increased a notch. "He's homeless?"

"Yeah, but you could never tell. He dressed like your run-of-the-mill hipster. I'm curious. He's coming back tomorrow, so guess I'll find out more."

Brett gave her a look. "Don't get too curious."

The next morning, he woke her with a kiss and steaming cup of coffee, then pulled back. "Sorry, eight o'clock scrum."

Carrie remembered her early appointment too—Dustin. Jumping out of bed, she joined Brett in scurrying around getting ready.

"You can let yourself out," he said, kissing her cheek to avoid messing her lipstick. "See you tonight?"

Carrie gave him a hug. "I have to go back to my place. Ashley's called a house meeting. Hopefully, it's about people eating other people's food and not something serious, like a rent increase."

"Sure, no problem," said Brett. "I'll miss you."

It felt like a question was looming between them, waiting to be asked. "I'll call you later," she said, nuzzling his neck. "Love you."

She hadn't meant to say it. The words just slipped out. Brett hugged her. "Love you too."

After the door closed behind him, Carrie packed up her stuff and made sure all the appliances were off before pulling out her key and locking the door behind her. So this is what it would be like to live here, she thought. To share her life with him. She was so happy she could explode.

Dustin was hunched over his MacBook in the waiting room when Carrie rushed in. He was disheveled, and didn't look up when she passed.

Straightening her skirt in her office, she braced for another day. The butterflies in her stomach made it hard to focus on Dustin's file. Images of her going home to Brett every night. No longer having to carry a gym bag filled with her stuff.

Dustin's smell was stronger today, and his hair hung wildly. As he plopped in the chair, she noticed smudges on the t-shirt under his plaid jacket, and dirt caked on his boot bottom as he lifted it over his leg.

“How are you this morning?” she asked.

He ran his fingers through his hair. “Not great,” he said, staring at her with bloodshot eyes. “Meth heads in the tent next door kept me up all night.”

Carrie sighed. “Neighbors...”

He cracked a smile, and as Carrie looked into his hazel eyes, she felt momentarily befuddled.

“Sorry,” he said, gesturing to his appearance. “Didn’t have time to shower at the gym.”

“No problem,” she said. “I’m just glad you came back. And sorry about yesterday. I got a little behind with the schedule.”

“No worries,” he said.

Her eyes locked onto the paperwork. “All right, let’s see if I can find you some help. Can you tell me where you lived before the Riverbed?”

“Roommates. Then when that fell apart, I moved into a warehouse with some artists. Then when that fell apart, I moved into my friend Justin’s tent on the Riverbed.”

“I see,” said Carrie. “Lot of things falling apart.”

He smiled again. “It is a really cool tent—it’s blue and green—makes me feel like I’m sleeping underwater. Neighbors slashed the back, so now one side is all silver duct tape. I tried to make it look like Hyena Stomp—that Frank Stella work that makes you feel you’re looking into infinity.”

Carrie wanted to ask about Frank Stella, but stuck to the protocol. She could always Google him later. “OK, hope you don’t find these questions too personal—I’m just gathering information so we can rehome you.”

Dustin nodded. “You make me feel like a pound puppy.”

Carrie smiled. “OK, Income?”

“Made forty thousand last year from assignments.”

She raised her eyebrows. That was more than she made. “Would you consider a full-time job?”

“You’re kidding, right? I would if I could find one.”

“Expenses?”

“Student loans. Twenty-four hundred a month.”

Carrie’s eyes widened. Her student loan payment was only seven hundred. She couldn’t help herself. “Where did you go?”

Dustin swallowed. “Chapman. Two hundred grand for a graphic design BFA that I thought would be a BFD.”

“Ouch,” said Carrie.

“Poor choices. That was mine.” He laughed.

Carrie asked him a few more questions. Age: 24. Drug use: None. Parents: Divorced. Other family: Two cousins and a grandparent. She entered the information on the computer and hit enter.

“Let’s see what comes up,” she said, crossing her fingers as the hourglass flipped around.

A minute later, the program spat out two options. One was Continuum of Care, but the second was an obscure program for homeless young artists funded, ironically, by some Chapman alumni.

“It’s your lucky day,” said Carrie. “You seem to qualify for ArtFull. It offers a year of living expenses, providing you donate work hours to community projects. You need to submit a portfolio of your work and a statement of interest. By next week.”

Carrie emailed him the information, then made him an appointment to follow up. Her supervisor peeked in, pointing at her watch. It was time for the next appointment.

Carrie closed Dustin’s folder and rose. “I’m glad I could help you,” she said.

Dustin stood up too, then gave her a look that made her feel she was melting. “Seeing anyone?”

Carrie felt herself blushing. “Sorry, I am.”

Dustin hoisted his satchel onto his shoulder. “No worries. You seem like an amazing human being. Just wanted to get to know you more.”

The connection she’d felt from looking into Dustin’s eyes stuck with her all morning, making her forget to fill out form fields, and causing the system to spit the forms back. But by lunch time, she’d returned to picturing life with Brett in his loft.

Pulling out of the parking garage and onto Broadway after work, Carrie passed Brett’s place. She wished she was going there instead of the cluttered apartment she shared with retail worker Ashley, ER nurse Sam, and Liza and Matt and their fluffy dog, Bella. Traffic on the 22 was heavy. By the time she arrived, the meeting was underway.

“You’re here,” said Ashley. “We weren’t sure you’d show.”

“I said I’d be here. I still live here, right?” Carrie laughed nervously.

The room was quiet. Liza and Matt were squeezed into an easy chair, petting Bella. Sam, dressed in scrubs, was examining her nails. Ashley was the only one who looked happy.

“What?” asked Carrie.

Ashley raised her left hand, showing off a sparkly ring. “I got engaged! When the lease is up this month, we’re moving in together.”

“Matt and I found a back house with a yard for Bella,” said Liza.

Sam sighed. “I’m moving back in with my parents.”

Carrie’s stomach knotted in panic. “Why didn’t you guys tell me this was going on?”

Ashley patted Carrie’s leg. “It came together quickly,” she said. “And you haven’t exactly been around much.”

“Can you move in with your parents?” asked Sam.

“Or maybe your boyfriend?” chimed in Liza.

Carrie’s head was pounding. Her parents had moved to Central California, and her contract gig was ending the same time as the lease. Brett was her only hope. She’d have to wait for a good time to bring it up.

The next day after work, she let herself into Brett’s loft with another bag of groceries. Tonight, it would be puttanesca, one of her favorite pasta dishes. Brett came home right as she was sauteeing garlic in anchovy sauce, and as he kissed her, they were enveloped in a cloud of garlic fumes.

In her nervousness, Carrie forgot to turn off the burner, and although Brett tried to wave away smoke from the burning garlic, his alarm went off. “Fire, fire,” blurted a mechanical voice in between bleats of alarm as Brett scrambled to reset it with the end of a broom.

“Wine?” said Carrie, attempting a recovery.

Brett was annoyed she’d stunk up his kitchen. “I’ve had a rough day,” he said. “Let’s just go out.”

Carrie acquiesced. When they got back to his place later, it still reeked of burnt garlic, and although they had sex as always, Brett fell asleep right after.

Back at her apartment, everybody was frantically packing. Except Carrie, who was frantically searching jobs on LinkedIn and Indeed, scanning craigslist and RoommateFinders for new living situations.

When she went to Brett’s after work a couple of days later, she was surprised to find him already home, sprawled on the couch, watching TV. This time she’d only brought beer, but it was his favorite: Hoppin’ Frog oatmeal Imperial stout.

“What’s up?” she said, nuzzling his neck.

“Major cluster-fuck. Bunch of software expired, and nobody could do their work. My manager told me to go home and think about whether I want to keep my job.”

“Oh no,” said Carrie, giving him a hug. “I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“Yeah, well...” he said, staring at the TV.

“Would you like some stout? It’s your favorite.”

He looked her in the eye. “No thanks. I think that’s part of the problem—the drinking, the late nights—it’s making it hard for me to focus at work.”

Carrie tried to make her voice soft. “Sure, no problem, we could cut back to just weekends.”

He looked at her dubiously. “Yeah maybe.”

Carrie blurted out her news, just like she’d blurted out the I love you the week before. “Brett,” she said, even more softly. “My roommates are all moving out and I need a place to stay.”

Brett raised his eyebrows, but his eyes remained blank. “Sorry to hear that,” he said. “I hope you find something.”

In her mind, she was screaming, “That’s it? After three months of practically living together?” She slipped the stout in her gym bag and turned to go. “Guess I’ll see you,” she said, removing the key from her purse and placing it on the coffee table.

Carrie hoped the sight of her leaving would spark something, but Brett didn’t even get up off the couch. “Yeah, see you,” he said, picking up the remote to flip to another channel.

The anger came later, after she returned to the tiny room crammed with her stuff. She used the energy to fuel a frenzy of cover letters to prospective employers and emails to people looking for roommates.

As the weeks wore on, there were nibbles, but nothing solid. She didn’t think of Dustin until he emailed to thank her. He’d gotten the ArtFull grant and wanted to cancel his appointment. He also sent a link to Hyena Stomp. Looking at the successively smaller squares leading into infinity made her dizzy. Busy filing Continuum of Care apps for stragglers, and scrambling to solve her own housing situation, she didn’t email him back.

During her final week of work, the Housing Authority staff went to the Riverbed to search for holdouts. Her colleague handed her a dust mask. It dangled from her fingers as she walked, but she refused to wear it.

The colorful assemblage of tarps and tents that had reminded her of Tibetan prayer flags were all but gone, and in their place, yellow bulldozers dropped piles of multi-colored trash into blue Dumpsters. A crew in hazmat suits picked up needles and toxic waste.

They ran into a wheelchair-bound vet who refused to leave, and a couple of druggies begging for more time. As they made their way through the former encampment, the smell got so bad that Carrie put on the mask.

Toward the end of the wash, behind some oleanders close to Angel Stadium, a flash of blue and green caught her eye. Walking over, she saw the maze of



silver duct tape, then unzipped the tent and walked inside. The place where Dustin had slept for six months was roomy enough to stand up in, big enough to hold her stuff.

She traced the squares of duct tape, then standing back, felt she was looking into infinity. And he was right, being inside it did make you feel like you were underwater. She held her breath and imagined she was in the middle of a river. The shore wasn't far, but the currents were strong and pulling her under.

*~ Margo McCall*



*“Texture #2” ~ Fabio Sassi*

## SURVIVOR'S GUILT

Death is  
pomegranate seeds  
swallowed  
every winter.  
It is the  
the heart weighed  
against the feather.  
It is the  
castrated man, or  
the woman  
with necrosis.  
It is the burial  
or cremation,  
the tombstone  
with epitaphs  
or the urn  
with ornaments.  
It is from ashes  
to ashes, and  
we return  
to the dust  
and the dirt  
from which we came.  
It is the hourglass,  
the scythe and sickle,  
the skull and the raven.  
Death is eternal.  
Memento Mori.

And now,  
Death is you.  
At times,  
I wish Death  
was me.

*~ Nicole Embrey*

## STILL RIDING THE LEATHER FLAMINGO

You take your tea as you  
always have, with mango  
chutney, while seated  
at the lunch counter  
of the final diner in town.  
Footsie beneath the line  
of vision, *rhotaxia digitalis*  
above, and the fungal frog  
has eaten all the pies any  
customers gave a damn  
about, left only farkleberry,  
lavender, girl. The boyfriend  
appears, low rent James Dean  
in an even lower rent town,  
and whisks you off for a 3AM  
jaunt to wherever wannabe  
delinquents go at 3AM. We help  
ourselves to a lice, continue  
the conversation as if nothing  
untoward had happened.

~ *Robert Beveridge*

## COMMERCIAL COMPOST

marketers place rocks  
in the rubbers of slingshots

define *need*: your dad  
can beat up my dad

muscular and well-rested  
yours can afford fresh vegetables

oh plentiful soil  
I call upon the wisdom of worms

slithering underground civilization  
thrives on the waste of buckets

inside the firmament of dirt

*~ James Croal Jackson*



*"Strange Romance – Too Protective" ~ Aticha Puttirak*

ON BILLY COLLINS' BRIGHTLY COLORED BOATS UPTURNED ON  
THE BANKS OF THE CHARLES

As if a family  
of fingernails,  
arrayed and painted  
yet the gloss deducted  
through aerodynamics  
under water, or the scuppering  
of salt and animals  
against the bottom.

There might be an odd  
number, like the number of  
breasts my sister used to count  
as a statistician on a public  
health project. Fifty-three  
but none cancerous,  
if you don't consider  
the one missing by  
its zip code or some  
other arbitrary division.

Supposedly there's a type  
of nail polish now that acts  
as litmus, identifying  
through gradations of  
luster whether there's  
a date rape drug in  
the drink you've just  
been handed. I've got  
to get some for my daughter.

My daughter, aristocratically  
tapered at the wrists  
and digits like her great-  
grandmother, belying

peasant origins. Thank  
goodness I am still useful  
though my fingernails are ridged  
in menopause, the crevices  
fused with an odious grit  
at the end of each day  
as if we had never  
escaped pogroms  
and famine.

*~ Jane Rosenberg LaForge*



With breathy anticipation,  
we straighten our spines,  
peering out from  
the dim spaces  
we occupy and try  
to look intriguing.

She saunters by,  
eyes scanning demurely  
for the perfect distraction  
to help her escape  
the chaos of daily life.

Pages crinkle to  
attract attention and  
bright colors promise  
new adventures  
for whomever will  
take a chance on  
the newest unknown.

As she walks away  
with her latest treasure,  
those remaining  
must bind together and  
await a new opportunity,  
trying not to dwell  
on the sadness  
of being left unread.

*~ Stacy Fowler*

## ONE EXAMPLE OF PRIVILEGE – DECEMBER, 2016

We were about to decorate the Christmas tree in the living room, blue lights and tangled cords, when Jeff said *we beat the Dakota Access Pipeline*. We agreed this was reason to celebrate then swept loose pines off the floor. Paige hung the usual ornaments: red orbs, angels. Sara served hot chocolate with cocoa powder, skim milk, vanilla extract. We were warm in the heat of our home, far from Standing Rock. I thought of Sophie, who built teepees in the cold to stand with the Sioux– how they risked frost and flame to stay alive, and many of them did. And I am so proud of them. But when Long called to catch up that day we didn't have *this* conversation.

~ *James Croal Jackson*



*"Pillars of Creation" ~ Rheya Leack*

## THANKSGIVING ASSEMBLY

Only nine and so quickly called to glory:  
Pseudo-Pilgrims sporting pasteboard capotains  
With foil buckles, ersatz feather-bedizened  
Indians proffering “howghs” and calico corn.  
What a sorry love-triangle we must fashion—  
You as fair Priscilla tripping over petticoats,  
A cocktail doily passing for your linen coif;  
And me, Captain Standish, rust-cotton beard,  
Crêpe paper ruff; and backstage somewhere  
Lank John Alden, wed to his cooper’s barrel,  
Underoos bulging beneath his baggy breeches.

We raise our voices to the blinding floodlights,  
Above Mr. Campanaro’s sweat-manic temples,  
Mauve pocket square, methodical piano fingers;  
Above Mrs. S—in her last year as principal—oh so  
Grand those tailored pastels, that jade scarab brooch;  
Above my mother, how young she would be then,  
My first stepdad still in the picture; your baby sister,  
Who will never see a third-grade pageant of her own.  
We raise our voices in multiple, colliding keys:  
*Over the river and through the woods sweet land of  
Liberty and spacious skies and amber waves of grain...*

Yes, those were our voices. Mayflower and Plymouth,  
Squanto and Samoset. Doublets, fowling guns, venison.  
Papier-mâché squash. Pretty Miss Wick and her fiancé,  
Who later drowned, dancing a turkey jig; someone’s  
Toupeed grandpop snoring through the reenactment.  
And you, resplendent, remote as a ten thousand winter suns,  
And Mama, a glass of pride, freezing time with her Polaroid,  
And me, at my prime, never once thinking to be thankful.

*~Jacob Appel*

## THE ADULTS

were talking  
amongst themselves.

I used to stare at them  
because there was nothing  
else to do.

We were visiting my family  
in Mexico and my uncle  
had puffy hair.  
I studied his features.  
His thin dark skin. Bold nose.  
The creases created in the back of his neck  
as he talked when he moved his head.

This little something  
was on his shirt, so I  
started to stare at that.  
Then it crawled.

Up the side of his collar,  
climbing over the neck creases  
like it was scaling a rugged mountain.

I was wondering if it  
was really going  
to go in or not.  
But it did.  
It marched straight into his hair  
and never came back out.

I looked at his face  
and he didn't even know.  
Then I went back to staring  
at the adults.

*~ Kitty Anarchy*

This poem is in internment;  
 My thumbs feel tied to my pinkies  
 Held hostage by my brain playing shrink  
 Like how I hold my heritage hostage.  
 I don't know how to tell people I'm here  
 Shall I hold up my last name for identification like today's newspaper  
 Like some proof that I exist?  
 My skin keeps everything inside.  
 I can't write this poem because captives can't write home  
 And I feel like I have no claim on this poem  
 No claim on this identity,  
 Because I've kidnapped a Japanese kid and stuffed him into my head  
 And zipped him up.

This poem is a lie  
 Because I don't know how to feel.  
 I don't have to succeed my father's expectations and achievements,  
 But I got made fun of in middle school for having a small dick  
 And playing an instrument  
 And being studious  
 Because they thought my dad would call me "dishonorable."  
 And now when I hear Japanese from kids who look like my dad  
 The kid in my head cries and wants to be out, but  
 The kid knows he's seen his captor's face.  
 Asian boy painted white.  
 I've never felt Asian,  
 Save that my white skin marred my last name  
 Like a red pimple on a white forehead.

~ *Art Ikehara*



*"Texture #1" ~ Fabio Sassi*

## VERMILLION PATH

The loud toll of a phone disrupted the numbing silence of the house. The sound loomed throughout the corridors until it is broken by the return of silence. Monstrous walls sheathed by artists' framed depictions of reality. A small cot sits in the middle of the room. Directly centered. The floor is flooded in filth. Books that have never been read, food partially consumed, and new clothes thrown all around. Keeping the cot from capsizing, is a worn copy of Milton's epic; bearing the weight of one of its legs.

### ***Get. up.***

Eyes rip open. A visage, one hardened by time, emerged from the isolation of the pall that was used for warmth. Upon his face were the marks of past traumas. Decisions, and the failures to make suitable decisions, displayed atop his grim portrait. Sitting up, he felt the worldly weight trying to pull him back down. He resisted.

"Where is it?", he hesitated as he blindly searched the desk. He searched but is only able to retrieve empty containers.

"I need them", he exclaims as he scratched his ear.

### ***You do not. Get up! Useless. Thinking.***

The man ambivalently got out of his cot. His clothes patched up, and heavily soiled. The floor shrieked under each step. Only the familiar steps are chosen as suitable plantings for his naked feet. Only ones laced with vermilion are acceptable for reproach. He neared the door, when his focus is taken by one of the framed realities soiled by neglect. He gets closer, methodically, choosing each step. Inch. by. inch. closer. and. closer. He knew this one. Dusted by the lost time. But this one is different. This one has had attention. Yet, it still gave him no joy.

### ***Stop...embrace...you do not need to think.***

He was now in front of the framed portrait of Saturn devouring one of his young. The darkness surrounded the figure in the frame but did not interact with it. Its infamous gaze lingered toward the viewer, tempting him to have a taste. A taste of this delicious son. The man mutilated it with his eyes. Attending to every expression.

"Goya works wonders, doesn't he?", he mumbled, scratching his ear.



His words were met without a response, but was content. He further stared at the depiction of Saturn. The vivacity of the tear of limbs captivated his mind. They detailed the tear of progeny; the tear of self. This distortion of one's blood distorted one's being. Admiration of the sagacious prowess of the piece fell upon his character. This inferred a sense of motivation in him. An ember thrown into the fires of Rome. A fire that lusted for more.

***Do you feel it?The hunger as the titan so desperately feels. You do not belong. Here.***

"Soon, I will be as this depiction", scratching his ear. He looked down, away from the frame.

His feet shredded by the splintered floor. His feet burned their soothing burn. This reminded him. Reminded him of the marks that he will leave. Leave with spilt blood. He stared blankly at his bloodied feet. His blood manifested into a serpent that slithers toward the door. He instinctively followed. It moved fluidly over the splintered floor, leaving behind a trail of vermilion. He approached a Victorian door. Its darkened wood reflected the shadows that lurked behind as he is cast away from the room. The wood is solid, but nothing of spectacle. The crimson serpent stole its way beneath the door. Staring at the space below the door, his hand unconsciously grasped the doorknob. The smell of smoldering flesh overtook the air. He pulled his hand away from the knob and examined his palm. The detail of the knob perfectly branded his hand. He surveyed it as a philosopher to the processions of the human mind.

"Skhizein?"

He reached with his other hand but is met with the feeling of dried oil paint on canvas. The door has phased away. His perception adjusted back. Unresponsively, he stared at his un-brandished hand. He looked up to the frame that is now inches away. His warm breath caressed his unkempt face.

"For I followed the serpent..." he said under his breath "where has it fled? Has it no decency? Am I not kindred enough to receive acquaintance?"

***You cannot. Useless.***

"I am not!" he bellowed, his ear now trickled with blood from his habitual scratching.

He stares at the frame. His view is different now. He now seen what he cannot attain. The power that Saturn has, he cannot grasp. *Why else would this serpent flee?* He is embraced by the ideal of failed existence. The darkness enveloped him in a warm embrace. He stepped back, away from the painting of the titan.

“This portrait is not aligned”, he stated.

***It is not misaligned. Your vision is skewed, as you do not see as things truly are.***

“Why do I look upon you with such thirst?” he stated as he looked at the portrait before him. It loomed over as an idolatrous manifestation waiting for its servant to follow its command. The man stares at the eyes of the figure in the framed reality.

“Oh, how you consumed in fear of being dethroned. Your eyes as expressionless as mine. But you, unlike me, have the superiority and the favor of the gods.”

There was not a response. The man's face is illuminated with joy. He stared at the frame and thinks of all the times that he had not been visited.

***Do not dwell.***

“Why do you not come often? For I am so lonely in these days.” he opened the wound on his ear. He starts to pace over the crimson floorboards. Back. and. Forth. Constantly.

“You left me alone all this time,” he said in a panic “I meet with a man every so often and he says-”

***He lies to you!***

“Do you not enjoy my company?” in a calm manner.

***Useless. Useless. Useless!***

He stared at the crooked frame. The imperfection getting to him.

“Stop it” he yells, as he paced.

“Stop staring at me with your sideways look.” he increased in volume, furiously scraping at his now fully flowing ear.

***I will never stop this. You can never live without me. You depend on me...I...***

“Sstop...”

The pacing increased in speed. His stare transfixed upon the irregularity of the alignment of the frame. He started to beat upon his own head with his fist. Hit after hit pummeled his head. He touched the portrait with his soiled hand, as he writes across the canvas. The human ink being ingested by the frame.

“You do not control me”

***You are nothing. Useless. I...***

The frame heaved. The ground groaned as the house takes a breath. The figure in the frame dropped the body that is half consumed. Its lifeless cadaver slumped to the floor. Saturn began to reach toward the man.

“You are but a titan. One who consumed his sons. Goya was a mere translator upon this canvas.” he yelled as he retreated, away from the titan’s grasp.

***You.need.me....I...***

He sprinted through the door of the room and followed the vermilion path that was laid ages ago. Along the corridors, were framed realities that were now animate. Each clawed toward the man. The frames contorted with every bound.

“Almost there” he screamed as the arms get closer. Each intended to rip what it takes hold of. Pulling the patches from his clothes. The man is sliced by many of the artistic hands, the blood adding to the path that he tread. Saturn stretched the now elastic doorway behind, allowing its immenseness to pass through. Its shriek grew louder the closer the man got to his sanctuary.

The man reached the Victorian door. He placed his hand around the knob, expecting a searing pain. He is met with indifference. He turned his gaze to what's behind as he turned the knob. Two demonic eyes greeted the man’s with their putrid pools of abyss. The acrid scent of the portrait’s profane breath made the man fall into a torpid state. He fell limp against the Victorian door. The door finally opened.

A loud buzzing echoes through the corridors. The noise does not stir anyone or anything but the dust caked over the frames. The buzzing repeats. And repeats. There is no answer.

“Hello, its Andres, for your check up,” pressing the button to the intercom at the front gate, “I tried calling yesterday but no one picked up.” The button resulted

in the buzzing of the intercom. But there still isn't an answer. "Hmm, he doesn't normally take this long." The worker takes out a plethora of keys. Looks through the identical looking assortment, and finally pulls the one for the gate. He enters the gate. He approaches a massive door adorned with Greek mythos. Andres feels the hardened cedar depiction of Narcissus at the pool of water. He takes out the keys once more but for the front door. He enters but is bewildered at the filth that litters the entirety of the house. "What the hell..." he remarks as the scent of decay forces his hand to his nose. The building seemed to not have been maintained for ages. He goes up the stairs. The stairs scream with every step. They are visibly eroded by termites as every step is a gamble. The floor's carpet is soiled, and patches are missing, as if something was clawing in hope to escape.

He goes the way that he normally goes during the checkups. It seems different. There are many frames upon the walls. They are covered in dust that has caked from times that they were not noticed. The underlying images sheathed by the failure of attention. His eyes are transfixed on the carpet, it seems tinted in some areas but is unsure of what it is from. He passes many doors, and many frames, but takes no notice as he is still examining the carpet. He proceeds down the corridor but notices the door that is never open; is now open. His curiosity gets the better of him. He gets closer to peer into the one room he was never allowed in. As he gets closer, he starts to see the emergence of bare feet. The bottom of the feet lacerated with pieces of wood jutting out in places. These brutalized feet belong to his client who is laying on the floor. His chest failing to heave in the presence of life.

"Son of a-" He innately checks the man's pulse. The man is void of all-natural color. The side of his body covered in lacerations, and his ear covered in dried blood. His clothes ripped, the usual patches missing. His face is juxtaposed in a state of fear. The embodiment of death enriches his face as if he witnessed his death firsthand. Andres scans the body to which he finds that in the man's bloodied hand was an empty container. He picks up the container.

"Clozapine...shit." He puts his hands on his head in disbelief. He reaches for his phone and dials. "Yes, this is Andres Rincon, and I would like to report an antipsychotic overdose."

As he waits for the police to arrive, Andres notices the tint is leading somewhere. "Dammit", he says, knowing that he doesn't want to find where it leads. Against his better judgment, he follows the bloodied path. It serpents around to an adjacent room down the corridor. He notices that there are more of those muddled frames from before, their content obscured by time. He studies the tinted path and, before

long, fails to notice that he is at the doorway of a room. There, in the room, is a small cot that is perfectly centered. It is in a sea of filth, but the path is newly exposed. He follows it further. He notices that this room is darker than the hallways, so he takes out his phone. With his flash, he studies the path that he is walking. The path ends abruptly right before he is to collide with the wall. Andres looks up, away from the path that he followed. He sees something that forces him to fall back, dropping his phone. He recollects himself and gets up. He grabs his phone from the decrepit carpet. He shines the light in front of him. A large mirror is hung on the wall, besmeared with the same tint that stains the ground. He steps back in horror and stares at the room. He now realizes that those frames are not just frames, but mirrors and on the largest of them all, reads the inscription in the vermillion tint:

*I am you.*

~ *Daniel Orona*



*"In The Flow of Water" ~ Saul Villegas*

## CHASING THE SONG

Not unlike the muse of light and stars at dawn  
an apparition floats a light garment of lace in white  
just above undulating fields of comforting gold  
tickled by a soft mist of a dew as that of birth.

She is colors undefined with only a soul shining with  
a net made of silk and sweet nectar, hard at work  
catching the invisible as her whole being smiles  
life grows within and a monument she becomes.

Capturing waves of sounds, scents, colors, flavors  
unknown to most she is a vessel of the planes  
as the trap fills gently with a song of delicate pulses  
a heart beats strongly inside, the creation of the moment.

Noble warden of a gentle prison, alchemist of worlds  
she brings meaning in her translation of the wisdom  
hidden deep inside the secrets of mysterious dimensions  
words are made, softly she vanishes into eternal remembrance.

*~ Fabrice Poussin*

## ALBIREO'S DUET

Shooting star jolts me to attention,  
brandishing its lumens,

northern cross spread-eagled  
on a membrane of satin

and ash; Deneb taps  
at edges, openings to crimson,  
Albireo doubles

in topaz and blue,  
cloaked like treason, one clef  
in binary spin,

hidden sister, beak change,  
earth tilt topple-song,

wrists of galaxies, magnetic,  
fastidious in opal,  
extravagant with moons;

intersecting magnitudes  
chant of more dimensions:  
mercy, laughter, light,

even the smallest bird-mumble  
nebula, a turbulence of grace.

*~ Cindy Bousquet Harris*



## CELESTIAL BODY

Her body was made  
from the magic  
of a collapsed star.

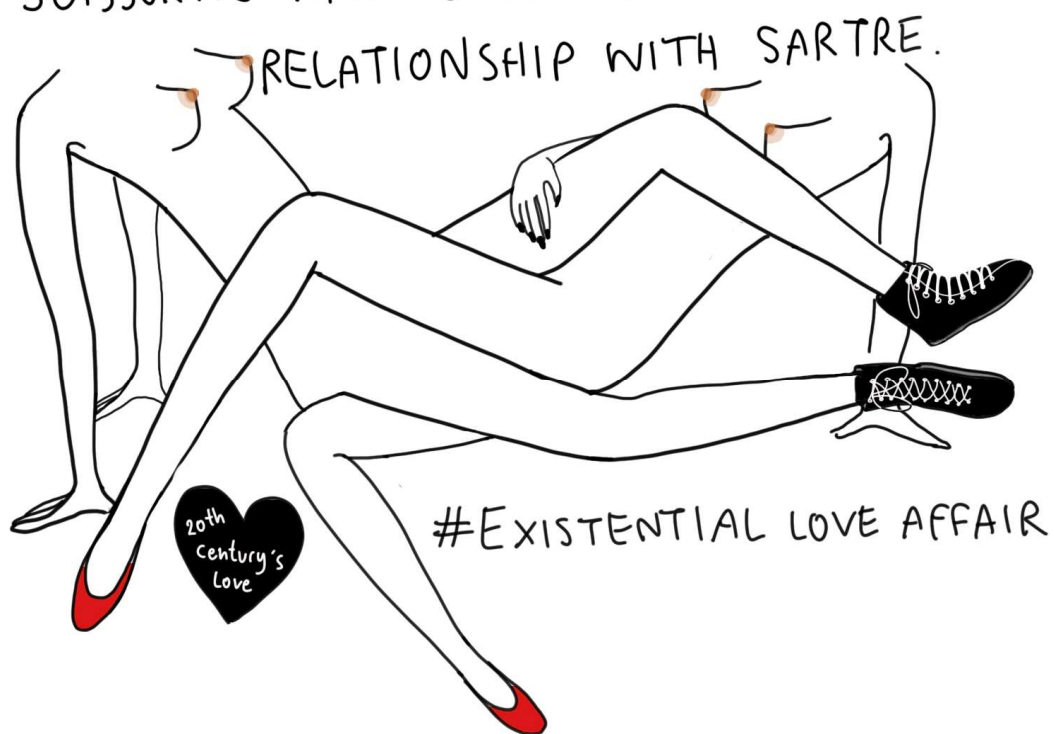
She was brilliance,  
she was enticing,  
and she  
was out of reach.

To touch her stardust,  
I'm sure,  
would leave me  
breathless.

And yet my hand  
reflexively  
reaches out to her  
in the hopes  
that I can brush  
the night sky.

*~ Nicole Embrey*

WHEN DE BEAUVOIR DID NOT WANT  
OTHER DICKS EXCEPT SARTRE'S, BUT  
SHE WAS STILL HORNY, SO SHE STARTED  
SCISSORING WITH GIRLS FOR THE ENTIRE



*"Strange Romance" ~ Aticha Puttirak*

## DESTINATION LUNA MIMBRES

That morning Giselle Olguin awoke in a paralyzing pool of dread. She lay in bed dreading the fact that she was awake. That her father wasn't in the kitchen making his morning coffee before he left for work. Saul Olguin wasn't at work, he wasn't coming home from work later. He wasn't coming home at all. The feeling gripped her body again making her stomach and legs feel all watery. She wished she could just sink into her mattress and let it swallow her up whole. But the more she lay there, the less she could stand it. When she eventually got up and tried to coerce herself into enacting her regular routine, she found it difficult to do so. Everything that her body almost instinctively did was hesitated with second thoughts. Did she usually make her bed before or after breakfast? She went into the bathroom where she brushed her teeth. Then she went to the kitchen and made herself coffee.

Fatima Olguin wasn't even stirring in her bedroom yet. Giselle wondered if her mom would get up at all. Was she more successful than her in sinking into her mattress? She drank her coffee and stared at the small TV they kept in the kitchen. The one where she'd watched countless movie marathons during the holidays. The one her dad used to watch Sunday morning soccer games. It now looked foreign and threatening somehow. Come to think of it the whole house she grew up and lived in for almost twenty-two years suddenly seemed alien. Was it the house or was it her? She looked down experimentally at the pale hand that was wrapped around her phone.

August had texted her earlier that morning, at five AM – it was probably later where he was, sunny and so far away in a completely different dimension. She wasn't awake then to reply and now that she was she didn't feel like it. He's probably soaking up the sun. Playing in the sand with his younger brother, Mark. And both of his parents.

She finished her coffee and set it in the cold, empty, sink and tiptoed to her mother's bedroom where she peered in at the lump accumulated on the left side of the bed. The covers were pulled all the way over, covering the face completely. For a second Giselle wondered if her mom had died as well. She could've suffocated herself in her sleep – on accident or on purpose. She could've had an aneurysm. She'd be an orphan then. Nobody would call her that of course but she'd be one nonetheless. The lump stirred slightly, Giselle walked quietly into

the room and stood awkwardly at the foot of the bed waiting to see if her mom would wake up.

She glanced at the other side of the bed – it was pristine. Empty. Un-slept in. A pang hit Giselle in the chest. The watery feeling didn't come back – it was always there, now it just intensified, like a high tide reaching out and touching every limb in her body. She stood there a while longer feeling like a toddler who had just woken up from a nightmare and had ran to their parent's room for comfort. She didn't find it.

The lump stirred again as her mom began to wake up. Fatima pulled the covers down, revealing red swollen eyes and nostrils. She blinked at the figure standing at the foot of the bed. Giselle blinked back unsure of what to do. She came in here for a reason but now she just wanted to turn back into her room and mourn by herself.

“Giselle?” Fatima's voice sounded hoarse. The watery feeling travel through Giselle's navel down to her bladder, she thought she was going to pee herself. She stood there a second longer clasping her arms around herself.

“Come here,” her mom said sounding slightly less hoarse. Giselle went over to her mom's side of the bed. Fatima scooted over letting Giselle sit in the bed next to her.

She looked at her dad's side again. Was she was purposely avoiding it? And did it still smell like him? Her mom complained all the time about the smell. It would perspire through his pores. It hung onto the collar of his shirts. When she'd stand next to him in mass, she thought she could smell the liver rotting away inside. His words and sighs would carry the pungent scent to her nostrils. No more complaints now. She didn't know what to say to her mom, a string of questions formed in her mind – how did she rest, did she want breakfast, do you miss dad – all of them seemingly inadequate.

Instead, she said, “Remember that museum in New Mexico?”

“The Luna one?” Fatima yawned, putting a hand up to her mouth and blinking a couple times. A red beaded rosary was strung through the fingers of her other hand lying on top of the white bed comforter.

“Yeah, on the way to Jalisco.” She paused, “We should go there.”

“What, now?”

Giselle shrugged and then shook her head after some hesitation. All of a sudden the idea seemed to fizzle out in her mind.

“We can get there by seven tonight if we leave now,” her mom squinted at the digital clock sitting on the bureau across the room.

They had each packed up a few toiletries and a change of clothes. She sat in the passenger’s seat of the car ignoring August’s yet unanswered text. It felt weird being in the car with her mom. It made Giselle think back to other times she was home during semester break going grocery shopping on a regular eventless day. Except now it’s seven in the morning and they’re going out of state just to visit some museum in the middle of nowhere. The idea seemed crazy like just the sort of thing an actor in a movie would do. She scoffed to herself – or at herself. But that didn’t mitigate the feelings stirring within her.

“I suppose it has been a while since we’ve been there. I mean, all together.”

“Well, I haven’t been home long enough to go to Mexico with you guys.”

“Your dad always missed not having you around when we went. He wanted to show you off to your aunts and uncles.”

Giselle winced at that. She didn’t have to say that. And Giselle didn’t have to go back from break each time so soon. But she wanted to and she paid for it now with a torment of remorse that welled up inside her. Remorse for being angry and unreasonable even though Saul always brought it out in her. It was because he demanded that she go with them that she was so stubborn about never going again. And then what was the point? To watch him drink his life away in a different country? He drank in America to remember Mexico and he drank in Mexico to celebrate. Celebrate what?

“I know he could be difficult sometimes . . . but he never meant to push you away.”

“Sometimes? He was always difficult.”

Even after she said it she knew it wasn’t necessarily true. Everyone loved Saul. Half the world was there at his funeral, people kept coming up to her and

lamenting the loss talking about how great he was. A standup guy. A real man. People that had never had to live with him, people who knew nothing. She wished she had that luxury, to be able to see him like they do. She frowned out the window at the passing shopping centers.

They stood as proof that the world really didn't stop. Other places and people still existed even though Saul didn't. And yet Giselle wasn't so sure about that. There were no people in sight in the centers and she kept looking for the houses. Of course, they weren't there. Still the centers looked like an illusion to her, a thinly veiled false comfort that things were okay even if she didn't feel like it. She glanced at her mom now half expecting her eyes to be replaced with black buttons.

Soon that view, the lush shrubs that perfectly lined the highway gave way to gray dirt and yellowing tufts of grass as they reached Joshua Tree. They drove past mountains of large rocks. It seemed to Giselle as though it had snowed grass where the green was sprinkled in between the stacks of the yellow boulders.

As she was drifting off to sleep Giselle got the feeling that they were somehow simultaneously going towards Saul and away from him. Vulnerable, she gave herself up to the splitting as she drifted. She had been asleep when they passed through Phoenix and Tucson. When she awoke it was to the sight of more grey dirt, washed out flecks of green cacti, yellow grass, and desiccated tangles of twigs. For a second the motion of the car lulled her into a false feeling of safety right before her thoughts seeped into her mind, piling up and weighing her down once again. In contrast, her body felt weird and floaty, untethered. Giselle didn't feel like she was going to the grocery store anymore. She didn't feel like she was going anywhere.

Her surroundings slowly seeped into her consciousness. The humming of the radio turned into words, Spanish words on some Catholic station. Her mom was still driving, her red-ringed gaze concentrated on the barren road ahead of them.

Giselle's phone rang in the cup holder between them. Fatima turned to look at the source then glanced at Giselle who was staring straight ahead at the road.

"Is that August?"

"Probably."

“What’s wrong? Did he do something?”

“No, nothing’s wrong. He never does anything.”

“How is he anyway?”

“He’s great. He’s in Belize.”

“Belize? I thought you said they were going to Spain this time.”

“Guess they had a change of plans,” she shrugged.

“Well, that’s good, must be fun.”

“I don’t know.”

“You have to enjoy your life while you have it. You never know when God is going to call you back to him.”

“I have to pee.”

It was nighttime when they finally arrived in the dust town of Deming, New Mexico. Instead of checking into a local motel for the night, Fatima and Giselle parked near a truck rest stop – the whole town was practically a rest stop – and prepared to sleep in the car. Next to the rest stop was an abandoned “Cactus Café.” It wasn’t visible in the nighttime but she knew the squat, square building was the same bland color as the dirt surrounding it for miles. The parking lot was empty and dimly illuminated by small streetlamps. Some of the lamps were broken or not lit up at all. One of them flickered incessantly like a cheap haunted house effect. The pathetic thing was that it actually managed to spook her. Giselle’s mind wouldn’t stop picturing figures appearing in the shadows. If Saul were here, she probably wouldn’t feel scared. If he were just alive the world would’ve seemed infinitely less scary.

Her mother closed her eyes in the front seat in an attempt to rest. Giselle had a sudden childish urge to shake her mother awake to make her keep her eyes open, to keep talking. She gripped her phone to her chest and sighed. August had texted her again that night. She wanted to tell him that she hopes he’s okay too. That she loves him too.

The feeling traveled down her legs and through her arms. No matter how hard she tried to relax, it felt like electric currents were going through her limbs all through the night.

She dreamed a memory. Of being at the beach with Saul. Wading into the ocean where the sand ran over and under their feet pulling them, like a slow conveyor belt, deeper into the water. She clung to the pillar of his arm at the slight vertigo sensation she got. "I'm not strong enough," he said, "I can't stop it from pulling us in. The ocean is much bigger and stronger than your papa."

The Luna Mimbres Museum somehow remained exactly the same as every other time they had visited it in the past from when Giselle was seven years old to now at twenty-three. She could practically hear her dad explaining the antiquated tools on display dropping knowledge about how the Native Americans used them. Knowledge that he somehow had despite the fact that he never went to school. Each corner she turned she kept expecting to see his stoutly figure standing there looking pensively at a display, his thumbs hooked into the pockets of his worn jeans. He'd do a slight head nod as he read and studied the artifact before blinking and turning to walk away. Then when he was a couple steps away he'd turn around and run a hand over his dark beard preparing to explain what he just read and why he knows its bullshit. "They don't tell you stuff like this at school but I've learned from the school of life," he might say.

"Didn't he have one of these?" Giselle pointed to a Navajo sharp stone knife that was on display.

"I think so but who knows if it was real. I think it's still in the garage."

"Bunch of junk," her mom added with a sigh.

Her dad probably got that knife from the swap meet or from one of her uncles who had a collection of a bunch of random artifacts accumulated throughout the years. His whole house was decorated with all those random things. At least Giselle's house never looked like that. Her dad kept his collection of things in the garage.

She passed by a vintage cowboy calendar that was perpetually stuck on the month of August. It had a hand painted scene of a cowboy and his horse warming up by a campfire under the starry sky. Giselle kept walking through the museum through a room that had a vintage mint colored car on display to another room



that was dedicated to a collection of alcoholic drinks. These things reminded her all too much of her dad when he'd sit in his garage for hours after coming home from work, drinking a 6 pack and listening to old rancheras. He'd come into the house later in the night and she'd only see him for a minute on those days if she was lucky. Or unlucky depending on his mood.

Giselle started driving back that same afternoon while her mom sat in the passenger seat. The sun was a bright orange hazy ball suspended right above the blue-gray horizon. The sides of the road were desolate, flat, and dirt packed. All that was missing was a stray tumbleweed bouncing across the path to complete the old western look.

Fatima started yawning in the passenger seat trying to blink away the sleep from her eyes. Giselle frowned at the straight road trying to come up with something to say. Anything.

"I don't want to go back."

"Go back where?" Her mom squinted out of the window.

"To school. I don't have to go back anyway. It's not like I can't take a semester off. Or a year."

Her mother pursed her lips, frowning for a second. Giselle tried to clench her stomach against the anxious squirming feeling that always seemed to ebb and flow from there.

"I don't know what your plans are but you can't just leave school."

"But what are you gonna do?"

"What am I going to do? I don't know," she sighed, "but we all have our responsibilities. Work, bills, the house."

Giselle frowned out at the road.

"I can't tell you what you should or shouldn't do, you're grown up now. If you feel like you have to take a break go ahead, but only you know what is best for you."

Her mom fell asleep a while after that leaving Giselle driving alone down the dark, desolate road. The sounds of the car running over the road served as a sort

of comfort. The sun had set now, leaving behind a painted dark blue-black sky. The stars shone bright overhead unlike in California where seeing even one star was a rarity, most of the stars she saw there were more likely to be satellites. When she was younger she'd look up and point to one of them and tell her dad that one is her uncle that had died way before she was even born. Now she looked up and saw too many, it was dizzying. She felt like she could almost fall into the void of it.

Suddenly the feeling gripped her body again she felt a bile rising from the anxiety coiled in her stomach reaching out and grasping at her throat. She kept looking around the sides of the road into the pitch blackness. Her fingers started tingling as she gripped the steering wheel. She didn't want to keep driving but she didn't want to stop either. The motion felt good; it kept the churning feeling in her stomach away. She never wanted the car to stop moving. Maybe if she kept going then she'd be okay. Her mom – everything – would be okay. She could do it – keep on driving forever. Yes, she could.

The signs on the road flashed at her as she went by them. Anyone of them could lead her on a road that stretched on forever. She didn't have to keep going down this road back home. Time didn't have to catch up to them if only they could just keep on moving. She thought about Mexico the proverbial land always sought after always shrouded in bittersweet nostalgia. If she could just drive back there .

..

Hours later Fatima awoke to find Giselle driving, the road ahead of them illuminated by the car's headlights. She yawned and sat up blinking in the darkness. Giselle was frowning out the windshield, her eyes ringed red. Her mom sighed as she assessed her surroundings and told Giselle to pull into the nearest gas station.

The station's lights were bright and penetrating in the sea of nothing. There were truckers at one end of the station filling up their trucks, standing around smoking or burying their hands in their jacket pockets. Giselle's mom went inside the mart while Giselle sat in the car trying to contain the anxious watery thing in her stomach.

She looked around at the truckers faces, none of them looked like her dad but looking at them made her want to cry. Her dad was a man too. Walking and breathing. She shut her eyes against the threat of tears. She felt the thing

traveling into her limbs making her hands and legs shake. The anxiety-filled her up, like some demon turning her inside out. Instead of running after her mom like she desperately wanted to, she reached for her phone and dialed August's number.

~ *Vanessa Garcia*



MY DAILY INTAKE  
OF ANTI- PLEASANTS!

PRESCRIBE ME MORE DOCTOR !!  
THEY MAKE ME FEEL SANE...

ATICHA

*“Strange Romance with Anti-Pleasants” ~ Aticha Puttirak*

## PRAYER FOR PURGING

I was told that the clouds  
held a throne that culls  
the prayers of children like me.  
Those who try to be  
catechized about the ground  
below their knees.

This became  
a blessing  
that allowed my stigmas  
to be purged away.  
When I exceed,  
after every meal,  
the purge is easy,  
now that I learned,  
how to pray.

Looking back,  
I hope that throne is there.  
Still in the clouds  
composed of unanswered  
Cries. Oh! how I have  
cried out for  
someone, just  
to be noticed.

The reflection  
blankly staring back  
from the toilet water.  
My mouth suffocated  
by my hand.  
The prayers entering  
my mouth from my stomach  
like the incense that were  
used in church.  
Filling the lungs  
of the ones who never  
noticed.

I recite  
the empty prayers.  
Bow my head and  
hope my plea  
reaches the throne.  
Please, please.  
I beg.  
I am on my knees.

*~ Daniel Orona*

## A MAN'S STORY IN NA

The lights go out.  
She asks me for a fix.  
It's dark.  
I can't see how much  
Junk I put in the needle.

I hand it to her,  
And go to the bathroom.

I hear a gargling sound.  
Any addict knows  
That sound can mean death.

I run out.  
The lights flicker on.  
And there she is on the floor.  
Her limbs spread out  
In a pool of her vomit  
That bubbles in her mouth.

I fall to my knees,  
And press my palms  
On her chest.

Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press  
Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press  
Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press  
Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press, Press  
Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press  
Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press  
Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press  
Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press-Press  
presspresspresspresspresspresspresspress  
presspresspresspresspresspresspresspress...

My mouth touches hers  
As I try to breathe life  
Back into her.  
Vomit stains my lips.

I lift up and tears fall from my  
Eyes onto her cheeks.

Please wake up!

“Hello my name is—  
And I’m an addict”

“Hello—”

*The taste of your vomit comes to my lips  
As I tell them the story  
Of our time together.*

*~ Francesca Terzano*



## LET ME DRAW YOU A PICTURE

*(Portraits of his victims)*

Three are smiling, two slight grins  
mouths awry mouths like wounds  
misshaped hearts or bleeding

mouths down-turned, hungry  
a past they never had  
future they won't reach  
money to stop the runs and aching numb the pain

till the next fix, next car, next john, next

stolen eyes dead eyes  
some with all the sadness of a world  
about to spill

one like an animal that's been abused  
and knows he's going to hurt her.

*~ Cindy Bousquet Harris*



*"Untitled" ~ Nicholas Walrath*

## RUMPLED FORESKINS

Throughout my life, I have had issues at church. Not the Catholic Church where my dad's side of the family attended, but the Baptist Church that the wing of my mother's family attended. These were not ordinary Baptists, mind you, they were "Southern Baptists." I put that in quotation marks because these "Southern Baptists" seemed to be a lot more conservative than just regular Baptists.

You see, when you transgressed against the Lord, it was the Old Testament, "I'm gonna come out there and smite your ass," God that you had to deal with. And this God was nothing to be messing with. He flooded a whole earth full of people just 'cause they pissed him off. This was the "grandma went and got a switch off the cherry tree" God. Now, if you repented of your sins and were saved, then you were "washed in the blood of Jesus" and that meant that everything was OK so long as you got right with the Lord. This was the New Testament God and He was the one that usually dealt with the "Southern Baptists" when they did something wrong.

Another thing that I think really sets people off is that the Bible starts with the Old Testament and so people get to know that Old Testament God right quick. Now, it takes a while to get to the New Testament God and sometimes I get the feeling that folks often don't get the chance to read that far. One time, I heard someone on the radio quoting from 2<sup>nd</sup> Jebidiah and had no idea what he was talking about. Now, the Baptist clan of my family was always real quick to remind me that the Catholic Bible had a few extra books in it so I went and checked to see if there was a Jebidiah in there and there weren't. Speaking of that Bible, I think that the only time that someone from my Baptist clan didn't try to get the most for their money was when they bought their Bibles. They always got the King James even though they could get a few extra books for free if they'd just bought the Catholic Bible that I had.

Now, that Old Testament God had a temper. He could go from being the best friend of the Ancient Israelites to smitin' their ass at the drop of the Ark of the Covenant. My granny, God bless her, thought that I needed some religious education when my parents divorced. I was about four years old the first time that I went into a Baptist Church. Although I was quite young at the time, I can still remember it because it caused a powerful trauma both in me and in the Baptist clan of my family.

You see, I had only been to two churches in my life. One of them was St. Stanislaus Catholic Church and the other one was Ste. Marie du Lac. In the Catholic Church, there is an altar at the front and just above where the Priest stands, there is a very ornate and detailed statue of Jesus crucified on the cross. Now, that only makes sense because much of the Catholic faith is based on this central event. The Baptists believe in the centrality of this event, too. However, their focus is on the resurrection itself. They even have hymns about there being an empty tomb on Easter. The cross that they had at First Baptist Church was also located just behind the altar. It was even backlit with some lights so that it looked as if it were glowing. The problem was that Jesus wasn't there.

Now, what is a four-year-old supposed to think about all of this? Granny never warned me about the resurrected Jesus that was not in the Baptist Church. I had no choice but to believe that someone had stolen Jesus. I started pointing at the cross and pulling at Granny's dress and screaming "he's gone, he's gone. Someone stole Jesus." Now, this is what the Baptist clan liked to call "having a fit" and that meant that my mom had to take me out of the church and calm me down. It also reinforced Granny's idea that I needed to have some religion in my life and, according to her, that religion needed to be the Southern Baptist brand.

Mom took me home and decided that we would just come back next week. Granny was disappointed at first but she understood. The next week, my mom got me dressed while Granny watched Oral Roberts on television and we went to church. I wasn't fazed by the stolen Jesus this time. However, I was enamored with the chairs that they had in the sanctuary. These weren't the pews that one would find in the Catholic Church. They were theater seats and the seat part of the seat folded up and down. I thought they were the greatest things since sliced bread and told my mom about it, too. "Look at these sumbitches," I yelled. This is when I learned that not only did you not talk about the stolen Jesus at the church, but you also didn't yell "sumbitch" while Granny was talking to Miss Duckett.

Once again, mom took me home. This time, however, things would be different. Granny had arranged for me to go to Sunday school with the preacher's wife. She believed that if anyone could straighten me out, it was Mrs. Cunningham. Instead of staying with my mom, I had to leave with Mrs. Cunningham and even had to sit with her during the service. She explained to me that because of my behavior, I had to sit with her and wouldn't be allowed

to join my mom and Granny until I learned how to behave. Looking back on it now, I can only describe it as the only kind of purgatory that she, being a Baptist, believed in. After church, Granny took me in her arms and asked me how I enjoyed being with Mrs. Cunningham. I promptly replied, “she whipped my ass.” This was when I learned that I needed to add the word “ass” to my “sumbitch” and “who stole Jesus” list.

After a while, things calmed down and I got to rejoin my family. In fact, once I got used to Sunday school, I became a Bible reading wunderkind. However, like I imagined my fellow Baptists, I was still reading the Old Testament. One of my favorite Sunday school stories was the one about David and Goliath. Now, I didn’t hate the Philistines or anything, but I idolized King David. I suppose that because I was young and nearly everyone I knew (my Granny, Grandpa, mom, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) was older than me, I guess the thought of all those folks being passed over so that the youngest could rule sounded kind of cool. There David was... just an ordinary guy like me who rose to eternal glory and will forever be remembered as one of the greatest Kings of the Ancient World.

Now, being the youngest in our family meant that you were perpetually picked on by your older cousins. By this time, I had already been accused of destroying one cousins’ fireworks and was also accused of making my other cousins pet coon wild. So... I scoured the pages of the Bible to figure out what it was that David had besides God’s favor. Finally, I discovered something that might help me to change my luck. And that was foreskins. Now, it took me a minute to figure out what they were talking about but once I did, I figured that there must be some magical property to them like Jack’s magic beans or something.

You see, in the story, King Saul was afraid to attack the Philistines because of Goliath. David, being just a youngster at the time, challenges Goliath to a fight and we all know the end of the story – he hits him right between the eyes with a rock and kills him instantly. Now this was a huge victory for King Saul and the Israelites. David was quickly promoted in King Saul’s army and soon, Saul became fearful of him. It is then that we learn that Saul’s daughter Michal wants to marry David, but that King Saul will only allow it if David brought him like 200 Philistine foreskins. I had to know what kind of magic power these things had so I asked Mrs. Cunningham in Sunday school.

“What’s so important about all those foreskins, Mrs. Cunningham,” I yelled in Sunday school class. Mrs. Cunningham damn near choked on the water that

she had been drinking at the time. When she regained her composure, she told me that foreskins were something that only adults could know about – and talk about. Now, despite my bringing up these foreskins, I was still a child prodigy when it came to reading the Bible. Later on Brother Cunningham, the preacher, asked me if I had been reading the Bible. When I said, “Yes,” he asked me what I had been reading about. Since he was an adult, I figured that I should just go ahead and say it, so I said, “King David and the 200 Philistine foreskins.” Brother Cunningham stopped asking me about reading the Bible after that.

Despite everyone’s refusal to even say “foreskin” much less talk about them, I managed to figure out the story in the Bible. You see King Saul never expected David to go out and collect two hundred Philistine foreskins. He thought that the Philistines would kill him in the process. I guess if David had tried to collect the foreskins while the Philistines were still alive, they might have but David was smart enough to wait until after he killed the Philistines to “scalp” their wieners. Now, David completed his mission and, as a result, Saul let him marry his daughter, Michal. Now, it never does say what Saul did with the foreskins. For all we know, he could have planted them throughout the Middle East in hopes of growing little dick taters. And... when you think about it, that might be plausible because other than oil, there are more dictators there than anywhere else in the world.

Now, there weren’t any more Bible stories about foreskins and we finally got into the New Testament. However, because no one had explained this Saul wanting two hundred foreskins thing to me, it was still bouncing around in my mind. In Sunday school one morning, someone talked about how their favorite uncle had diabetes and, as a result, had several of his toes and then finally part of his leg amputated. They wanted to know if their uncle would get his leg back when he went to heaven. At this point, Mrs. Cunningham began talking about our glorified bodies in heaven and how we would have wings like the angels and that kind of thing. It was then that I raised my hand and asked if we would be getting our foreskins back when we had glorified bodies. I figured that foreskins and toes aren’t that much different and if we got one back, then surely, we must get the other one as well. Mrs. Cunningham referred me to Brother Cunningham for that answer and he said that he didn’t know.

This remained a mystery to me until I began learning about World History in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. This was where I learned that in the Middle Ages, there were pieces of the true cross, bones of the saints and that kind of thing that the Catholic

Church believed were relics and contained special powers. I figured that since no one had found the rumpled foreskin of Jesus, put it in a jar, and established it as a holy relic in a Medieval church somewhere, then He must have taken it with Him when He left. That meant that we would probably be taking ours with us when we go as well. But I never got to run it past Brother Cunningham so I am not totally sure. I guess that is just one more thing that we will have to find out when we cross over to the other side... at least until someone has one of those near-death experiences and says "I saw a white light and got my foreskin back."

*~ William Matthew McCarter*



*"Lilith" ~ Mandy Thibert*



### **i. Nomad's Traffic Island East OF The City Of The Angels**

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water but fire next time."  
-- from Negro spiritual alluded to by James Baldwin

Built on desert, Eden experienced drought.  
Pineapple Express brewing, shopping cart  
fodder rushed below nearest underpass,  
a jerry-rigged derelict old dude's  
moved to cook up a smack storm  
as nonexistent brooks swell, mudslides  
asunder descend, engulf the fiends' oasis  
into a suffocating prison for innocent spirits.

Making it to the other side, everything is new.  
When he wakes up, a stoked man who plays  
a whole baseball game from pitcher  
to catcher then all the infield  
and outfield positions alone,  
without a ball, stops. His trembling  
hand extending a small coin purse, he urges,  
*Please go away before I'm not tolerated here.*

### **ii. Devolution South of Eden**

Nor Cal mermatron and merman slugs  
trudge from algal hot tubs deep in the woods  
among long-billed short-tailed wrens  
who sing so wryly (as her-his story goes).

The mers clothe their hairy bodies,  
then fly down to Ontario to resume  
siren-slick fast lane life amidst  
state-of-the-art noise and pollution.

~ Gerard Sarnat

## A HIGHER BEING

In shadows, I floated within darkness,  
A blurry depiction in time, possessed;  
And of unknown matters, I did not know  
Which good to admire, where spirits go.  
I had not felt or lived as others had;  
My wonder had no dream from childhood's path.  
And through troubled youth of lost love and pain,  
My life became what chaos could not drain.  
Then my search began in the black of night,  
On a road that lead to a conscious light;  
Where alone I walked in a vast woodland,  
Which was the sphere where certain souls transcend.  
Then, in the woods, before the pointed gates,  
I chose to be free, to will my own fate;  
To be one with nature and of the forms,  
The blaze of my fire, the cloud of my storms.  
And deeper into the abyss of thought,  
I seen old dragons and the beast I fought,  
Which formed into myself who then appeared  
From the fray I quelled and no longer feared.  
And there I arose with rays of the sun,  
Restored with all that I had lost and won;  
To heights unbounded from good and evil,  
Beside the flight of a golden eagle  
Of an ancient people who lived and died,  
And a woman who thereafter cried;  
Atop the pyramid of life and death,  
Above the tribes of the Right and the Left;  
While on his cactus, the serpent prepared  
For war, there I stood where heaven's torch glared,  
Upon desert ground in the cosmic string,  
I saw my image: A Higher Being.

~ *Daniel Belmudes*

## FULGENCIO

Someday, the shirt I am wearing will come to fruition;  
The Oceans will devour Alaska. Right now, I learned Fulgencio passed away,

an excellent drummer. Where is the dimension a god lives in  
who will take Fulgencio in? He was an atheist, he didn't

believe in my Christ Jesus. One night after doing Uber Eats,  
I saw him play with the metal band he was in. He

was fucking awesome. If this was 1980s America, my fellow  
Christians would say he'll rot in Hell because he loves metal.

At Fulgencio's gig at The Glass House, I had a blast,  
Despite coming on my own with no other pals.

Now that he's gone thanks to a dumbass  
street-racer, it's going to be hard for me to

Step foot in Downtown Pomona.

*~ Jesse Tovar*



*"Untitled" ~ Nicholas Walrath*

## WILL YOU LISTEN TO US?

We are the unheard and unsolicited voices.  
Oh! No, sometimes to you we sound like always nagging beggars.  
We come from the land of green grass,  
With faces of colors, dark, brown and black,  
Uncivilized, ill-mannered poor creatures!  
Sometimes you listen with pretense and laugh later.  
We promise, we would be gentle.  
Please! Listen,  
If you don't, who is going to lend the ear to our misery?  
You show compassion and you forget when TV camera lights are gone.  
Sometimes you give us a look as we are unwanted burden.  
To you we only beg and beg, to you we have big mouths to fill, your  
eyes only see naked beggars.  
Have you ever heard of our silent cry?  
We lament and lament on our misery only in vein.  
Have your hearts ever hearing our clamoring?  
Alas you only see naked beggars driven away from home.  
You talk about humanity when countless are slaughtered in  
the genocide.  
Driven away from home, raped, slaughtered, torched, dismembered  
and mutilated,  
You speak in the podium with such passion,  
But to our cries and appeal for justice, your ears become deaf.  
Queens, celebrities, noble laureates come, hug and go, all in vein.  
Our loved ones are missing never to be returned again.  
But they have left their cries and screams in the air, to be echoed again  
and again.  
Their cries with our cries, all in one living in the shelter of  
another land.  
Sometimes we cry without civility, sometimes we fight, we fight for  
donations like dogs fighting over  
bones sometimes we do illegal but only to survive.  
We live in the camp surrounded by fences, we want to go out, just to  
breath as we  
are tired of waiting  
To go back to our land.

*Note: This poem is written on the 10 million Rohingya (From Myanmar) refugees living in Bangladesh.*

*COMMENTARY: More than 10 million Rohingya (From Myanmar) refugees living in Bangladesh. We talk in the international forums, there are concerns from media, help and aid from international agencies. Political debate, high speech support going on. Celebrities come, flashlight, clicking photos going on. But we forget to feel what they are going through. They fight, they create chaos. We start debate again what should be done. But their fate remains uncertain for eternity for geopolitical context and super global powers invested interest. We forget they are in cages also known as camps. They have no home to return to when birds have their nests to return. This identity less, stateless people are just the pawn in the bigger game.*

*~ Tabassum Tahmina Shagufta Hussein*

## MYLAR BLANKET

i am the  
cheap substitute  
of a parents'  
warm embrace

silver colored  
to cover kids  
of any brown race

bystanders, pawns  
of a hate game  
they didn't  
want to play

confiscated goods  
because their parents  
dared to break free  
now the kids  
cling onto me

a space age material  
offering no comfort  
absorbing no tears  
accentuating fears

of an unknown place  
behind chain link walls

*~ Kitty Anarchy*

## ABOLITIONIST

Experienced my first school lockdown today.  
You know. Lockdown.  
Like when you're in prison and somebody gets shanked.  
Or they're just letting you know they're going to come inspect your jail cell.  
Remind you who's in charge. Make your head swell up and your chest get tight.  
Trigger heat flashes and chills and cold sweat.  
Trigger the slow slipping away of your self-control.  
The day was off to too good of a start though huh? So they just make you sit there  
out of time and logic where you try fight off dissociation with reason. But no.  
This is really happening.  
They force you to stay in a box with an unspoken threat that if you are the one  
person that tries to get out you threaten the safety and lives of everyone else  
there. You sit there with that manufactured culture of fear long enough to make  
you forget what day of the week it is.  
I was at school!  
I had just finished subtly conducting a student centered  
student led  
democratic  
Socratic  
and high-risk debate.  
From this transient position of student teacher!  
I was goosebumps. The students made such quick strides towards radical  
empathy *and* been able to metacognitively *and* verbally reflect as much. In 90  
minutes!  
I was having one of those "THIS" moments! I was thinking  
"Now THIS..." packing my laptop into my bag.  
Thinking since Reseda's Wi-Fi was indiscriminately blocking me from materials I  
needed to teach my next class I'd be driving ten minutes up Lindley to use CSUN's  
Wi-Fi for ten minutes.  
Then driving back. Still on this trip. Thinking  
"Now THIS. THIS is..."  
and maybe I just needed to get out of that particular space for a few so I could  
finish that sentence with the retrospective clarity necessary to do a quick  
repeat—but slightly better—next period. But then my cognition was startled by  
the loud noise of  
THIS IS A LOCKDOWN.  
And what was going to be a  
"THIS!-Thiiis-is-what-I-want-teaching-to-feel-like"-moment is beaten down.  
I have lived for 31 years.  
I have made a lot of mistakes. I can confidently say as an expert with extensive  
firsthand knowledge learned through repetitious trial and error (but not  
redundancy) that I know "fucking up" when I see it.



This is “fucking up”.

By lying to ourselves that these juvenile workday detention centers are somewhere children becoming adolescents becoming young adults becoming adults can go to grow we are fucking up.



The Mississippi corrections commissioner says part of one state-run prison is on lockdown because of a staffing shortage.

Posted: Jan. 26, 2019 4:56 PM

Updated: Jan. 28, 2019 9:19 AM

NEWS, THE

- UPDATE: Regional jails in the state prison system no longer on lockdown
- Tupelo school placed on partial lockdown

Not like this. Reseda Charter High School; Los Angeles Unified School District.

Not like this. Tupelo; Mississippi.

Not like this. "Democracy Dies in Darkness;" Washington Post.<sup>1</sup>

~ Jen McClellan

1. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/school-lockdowns-in-america/?fbclid=IwAR3mseAKkpVwGBOULyvfwKVmMB1ugNm30sqJSDozkUHb8FTjh154MSsyFY&noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.61a339ede57a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/local/school-lockdowns-in-america/?fbclid=IwAR3mseAKkpVwGBOULyvfwKVmMB1ugNm30sqJSDozkUHb8FTjh154MSsyFY&noredirect=on&utm_term=.61a339ede57a)



*"Melancholy" ~ Mandy Thibert*

After graduating from UCLA, but before leaving for my first job in Syracuse, my parents presented me with a plane ticket to the Philippines. It was my graduation present: a chance for me to learn about my roots. My father wasn't able to go due to work – at least, that was his excuse. My mom complained to me about my father's decision; he had accumulated enough vacation days to last towards the Second Coming of Christ.

"Well, maybe dad can trade the vacation days for everlasting life," I said, joking.

She didn't find it funny, still upset with my father, and so sent me – 21 and a recent college graduate – to my room to pack.

My mom, brother, and I flew out of LAX three days after my graduation ceremony. At the airport, my mom's family greeted and hustled us out to the air-conditioned car. We stayed with my mom's family in Manila; they lived in a three-bedroom house, painted a new shade of blue. Lolo Belen, my mom's father, had developed acute dementia the last year. He and Lola Baby, my mom's mother, occupied the room nearest to the kitchen. Tita July who I never saw without a cigarette dangling from her lips, stayed in a place in the back of the house with Ate Michi whose face was splotched white patches, making her look like a panda. But she was fierce as she had to be to endure the economic hardships in the Philippines. Tita Cher who never finished 8th grade but was the kindest person I'd ever met stayed in the room opposite of Tita July's and shared it with visiting cousins and relatives. She was the self-appointed maid in the house, and she laundered my clothes and snuck snacks into my bag whenever we went sightseeing. Most of the traveling and sightseeing, however, were devoted to the business of my father's land.

I knew only an ink drop of my father's inheritance. Over the years, growing up in West Covina with my father's family occupying almost the entire block on Shakespeare Avenue, I had tried to expand that drop of knowledge into something more. But no one would talk – not about how my father's father, my grandfather, possessed the land that would be divided and passed on to his twelve children.

I was curious about how much the land had been worth in the 1940s and how much it was worth now, but no one in my family said anything besides its worth much now, which I could figure out on my own, knowing the basic economics of inflation. No wanted to explain how my father amassed twice as much land as his other older siblings. And there was the tricky knot of how he managed to hold on to it despite not being in the Philippines.

Numerous times, I've found myself at my Tita Helen and Tita Carmen dining room, sitting with them eating whatever they'd made for my visits. I've asked many questions about their family land and inheritance, but it seemed the more questions I asked, the more food I was given to distract me.

In response to my questions, they would say, "Leiza, have you eaten yet? Let me cook you something."

Or, "Leiza, you're too skinny. Eat something."

I figured that's how Filipinos avoid discussing possibly unpleasant things – with a bowl of white rice.

My father and I have lived in an uneasy truce.

"You talk back at me, you're going to get what you deserve," he had told me.

So, I never talked back. I just stopped talking altogether.

I never bothered asking my father about his land. Not since he dragged and tossed me from my bed for refusing to help my mom clean. And not since he was drunk and I didn't want to take out the trash so he kicked me and I fell off our porch. Definitely not since he threw a remote control at my mom.

We occupied different spaces in our house. I read, write, tried to survive upstairs in my room. He was always downstairs, watching Westerns with his hands in his sweater pockets. When I crossed him in the living room, I almost have to tiptoe. When he walked outside my bedroom, his footsteps thundered in my ears. The residual sound once he'd leave for work for his afternoon shift at the post office was like a metal ring rattling in a tin can.

Its brief – the ringing. Then everything collapses into silence.

My mom and I, along with my father's favorite sister, Tita Cha-cha, made the trip to my father's family home in Batangas. The road was pure dirt, surrounded on the sides with tall grass that could swallow a man. The house was thirty minutes away from the nearest town, but that was on the jeep. When my father and his siblings were kids, they only had their two good legs to get them from the house to the town market and to school.

The house was so small. I couldn't believe my dad, and his eleven other siblings spent their lives there. The first floor was connected by a precarious wooden stairway. It had no handrail, so I held tight onto my mom, who laughed when my foot slipped in the space between a wood slat-going upstairs. There only two rooms on the second floor. Tita Cha-cha explained to her parents, my grandparents, slept in one, and the other room was used for storage. The large square hallway outside the two rooms where my Tita said the kids slept on the floor on bamboo mats. My face clicked through several

shades of horror, imagining them stacked on top of each other like broken cars in a junkyard.

We went back down the stairs of death, and Tita showed my mom and me the fields behind the house. After my grandfather died, the lands were divided among the twelve siblings. I was impressed. My father had close to an acre of land. Tita Cha-cha shared in amazement to my mom that my father was the last sibling to hold onto his inheritance; most of all other siblings had sold their share to neighboring farmers.

My dad's plot was carefully delineated with a thin yellow string tied in a hard knot around wooden stakes. I thought I would sink into the soil. Instead, I felt cradled, like a baby, just learning how to walk towards her father's outstretched arms.

Afterward, we returned to the house for lunch where my Tita made a Filipino pork stew called sinigang. It was served in bowls with blue floral prints – like the ones my mom had at home in California. I had thought my mom had somehow brought our set in her airport suitcase, then packed them in her handbag and brought them to Batangas. But the bowl I held in my hands was too clean, too smooth. The ones at home had been stained from take-out food my parents bought when they were too busy to cook and were chipped from times my brother and I dropped them on our tiled kitchen floor.

My Tita filled my bowl to the brim with hot broth and chunks of cooked meat. I dug into the pork first, wrapped it and my fork with a leaf of bok choy, and took it all into my mouth.

The weight on my shoulder slipped off; just like how I felt when taking off my backpack in grade school, stuffed with textbooks and permission slips. I listened to my mom and my Tita laugh and reminisce.

Tita clapped her hands. Her eyes were twinkling at me.

"Ay, Lei! When I ran a tindera in the city, your dad would bring all his cop friends and say 'Hey sister! These are my friends! Let 'em have lunch for free.'"

I smiled, drooling broth.

"Is that why you're his favorite sister?"

She laughed with her head tossed to the side like a strong wind from the west was knocking her off the table.

"You get it," my Tita said.

When I had swallowed the last of the bok choy, cleaved all the meat from the bones, and drank the broth leaving the bottom of the bowl with only a film of fat, my Tita asked my mom and me if I ever went to the police station where my dad used to work.

"I remember it a little bit," I said.

She glanced at my mom, who had just slurped the last of her broth and was placing the bowl on the table.

"You've heard the story, right, Jacque? About how Francis became a cop?"

My mom shook her head. She had met my dad when working as a record keeper and occasional accountant for the Manila police department. My mom told me her romance with my dad once when we had shopped at the local Filipino store in California. Between the eggplant and the ripening green bananas, she said to me that dad would visit her office pretending he was seeing his friend, Serrano, who was my mom's co-worker.

My mom would snort and say, "They weren't even that close. He was really coming to see me."

She had described their first dates at Chow King and Jollibee – Filipinos equivalent of Panda Express and KFC. They were just too busy with their lives to go anywhere else: my mom with school, my dad with chasing corruption in the city. She reminisced on her quaint wedding ceremony, held in the front porch of her family home; the same house where my mom and I were staying. I saw the pictures, once when I was eight years old, and marveled not at how young my parents looked, but at how the porch once had a overhead roof.

My mom and dad had endured similar struggles from their time at a police department, infamous for its officers taking bribes, to upheaving their lives from the only country they'd known. But the story my Tita held between her slightly open pink lips was a story, not even the woman he swore 'death 'til to us part' knew.

"He saw his friend shot in the face one night," my Tita said, her voice lowered.

My body twitched, and I felt my mom next to me stiffen.

I said, "What do you mean Tita?"

And she said—

"Your dad had two best friends. Pares. You know? Yes, of course, you do. They'd been together since elementary and grew up and drink together. One night, your dad was rushing out to meet them at their favorite drinking spot in an abandoned shack that used to be nearby here. He walked in on them starting on their third, fourth, fifth beer. They were laughing and your dad, he just worked on the fields. So he was happy to see his friends and ready to have fun."

"But before he got his own beer, one of them stopped laughing and pulled out a gun. Your dad didn't have time to react."

"And his best friend shot his other best friend."

"Your dad brought the rest of the beer home and drank them all. Alone. He wanted to go to the police. Because his best friend was dead. But it was also his best friend who shot him. And would go to jail."

"Two weeks later he moved to Manila. Joined the police there and met your mom."

There were too many questions. Why did my dad's best friend shoot his other friend? What happened to the shooter? And after everything, why in the hell did my dad become a police officer?

But suddenly I had an answer to questions I thought I buried in the silence between my father and me and hidden in the questions I asked my Tita Helen and Carmen about their inheritance. Why he was so obsessed with working, why he always drinking alone, why he refused when my uncle who served as a Marine asked to teach me how to shoot, why he was always yelling, why was he always angry.

Why he'd hurt me...

I stayed silent, out of shock, out of words in Tagalog and English. Out of my own mind.

My Tita waved the spoon still in her hand like a wand at me, casting a spell, *accio rem*: return to reality. She dipped the spoon in her bowl, no longer steaming, and ate.

"Ay, Lei, think about it. You wouldn't be here if your dad hadn't fled to Manila," she said, smacking her lips.

I thought about it, and I couldn't say that it wasn't true.

I left the Philippines a week after hearing my Tita's story. My dad picked us up at the airport and started asking about his plots of land. My mom didn't mention the story, at least not when I was around.

But once we had got home and I was lugging my suitcase up to my room, I heard my dad whisper to my mom, "Did Leiza see the land?"

My therapist asked me if my dad's trauma inflicted on me as abuse was the reason why I was depressed. I said, maybe. I don't know.

Depression is biological. It is inheritable. Though, how it passes from generation to generation is a question science is trying to solve. Meanwhile, I'd been trying to figure out how my family's land had been passed down.

My Lola Belan died while I was in Syracuse working as a case manager, so when I returned to California two years after my last visit, there were new talks about returning to the Philippines. My mom and I met with my Tita Helen at her house along with Tita Carmen. We sat around at their small dining room table with a bowl at its center filled with bananas and mangos.

Again, I asked about the land, and again, I was stuffed full of homemade Filipino food. My mom reminisced with Tita Carmen and Tita Helen about their childhoods. They laughed at the mistakes they made when they were young. They compared their fathers, who are my grandfathers.

Tita Mhen said to me, "Your grandfather married Lola Perta when she was 14 years old.

"That's really young," I said.

"Your Lola didn't have a choice," Tita Mhen said. "Her parents died that time and she didn't have anyone else."

I sensed the tension pulsing around the table, and I hesitated with my next words.

"So, how'd she meet Lolo?"

Tita Helen, the youngest sibling of the twelve, said, "She was sold to your Lolo by a crazy aunt."

Tita Mhen, quieter now, added, "Your Lolo wasn't always a gentle man."

I sank in my chair while my mom beside me stood up and shuffled back to the rice cooker to fill my empty bowl.

*~ Leiza Castillo*





*"Solitude" ~ Xiaoke Ren*

## OLD MEN WALK FUNNY

Old men walk funny with shadows and time eating at their heels.  
Pediatric walkers, prostate exams, bend over, then most die.  
They grow poor, leave their grocery list at home,  
and forget their social security checks bank account numbers,  
dwell on whether they wear dentures, uppers or lowers;  
did they put their underwear on?  
They can't remember where they put down their glasses,  
did they drop them on memory lane U.S. Route 66?  
Was it watermelon wine or drive in movies they forgot their virginity in?  
Hammered late evenings alone bottle up Mogen David wine madness  
mixed with diet 7-Up, all moving parts squeak and crack in unison.  
At night, they scream in silent dreams no one else hears,  
they are flapping jaws sexual exchange with monarch butterfly wings.  
Old men walk funny to the barbershop with gray hair, no hair;  
sagging pants to physical therapy.  
They pray for sunflowers above their graves,  
a plot that bears their name with a poem.  
They purchase their burial plots, pennies in a jar for years,  
beggar's price for a deceased wife.  
Proverb: in this end, everything that was long at one time is now passive,  
or cut short. Ignore us old moonshiners, or poets that walk funny,  
"they aren't hurting anyone anymore."

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*

## JUST BECAUSE, BAD HEART

Just because I am old  
do not tumble me dry.  
Toss me away with those unused  
Wheat pennies, Buffalo nickels, and Mercury dimes  
in those pickle jars in the basement.  
Do not bleach my dark memories  
Salvation Army my clothes  
to the poor because I died.  
Do not retire me leave me a factory pension  
in dust to history alone.  
Save my unfinished poems refuse to toss them  
into the unpolished alleyways of exile rusty trash barrows  
just outside my window, just because I am old.  
Do not create more spare images, adverbs  
or adjectives than you need to bury me with.  
Do not stand over my grave, weep,  
pouring a bottle of Old Crow  
bourbon whiskey without asking permission  
if it can go through your kidney's first.  
When under stone sod I shall rise and go out  
in my soft slippers in cold rain  
dread no danger, pick yellow daffodils,  
learn to spit up echoes of words  
bow fiddle me up a northern Spring storm.  
Do you bad heart, see in pine box of wood,  
just because I got old.

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*

Walking across the seasons in exile  
in worn out house slippers, summer in Alberta prairies-  
snowshoes, cross-country skiing winter in Edmonton, Alberta.  
I'm man captured in Canadian wilderness, North Saskatchewan River.  
I embrace winters of this north call them mercy killers.  
Exiled now 10 years here I turn rain into thunder,  
days into loneliness, recuperate loss relationships into memories.  
I'm warrior of the trade of isolation, crucifier of seasons  
hang torment on their limbs.  
Ever changing words shifting pain to palette fall colors and art.  
I'm tiring of Gestalt therapy, being *In and Out the Garbage Pail*.  
I'm no longer an Aristotelian philosopher seeking catharsis.  
My Jesus is in a vodka bottle soaked with lime, lemon juice and disco  
dancing.  
Pardon amnesty I'm heading south beneath border back to USA-  
to revise the old poems and the new, create the last anthology,  
open then close the last chapter,  
collected works before the big black box.  
I'm no longer peripatetic, seasons past.

~ *Michael Lee Johnson*

## INJURED SHADOW

In nakedness of life moves  
this male shadow worn out dark clothes,  
ill fitted in distress, holes in his socks, stretches,  
shows up in your small neighborhood,  
embarrassed,  
walks pastime naked with a limp  
in open landscape space-  
damn those worn out black stockings.  
He bends down prays for dawn, bright sun.

*~ Michael Lee Johnson*



*"Tree of Life" ~ Saul Villegas*

## HOUSE MADE OF SUGAR

Chris dreamt of a house made of sugar and his rotten tooth.

The house was built on huge sugar cubes just as his tooth was built on plaque and sore gums, but in the dream his gums didn't ache and he could munch on the sickly-sweet furniture that decorated the house as he pleased. He licked a caramel lamp, sticky and yellow, sucked on the sugared doorknobs for a while, and was about to see just how much of the chimney he could swallow when he heard a sound coming from inside him.

The sound vibrated through him, rattling his whole head until his cheeks felt hot and irritated. His fingers felt like they were being pricked by a thousand painless needles. Chris couldn't quite make out what the sound was or where it was coming from, and it wasn't until he opened his mouth to call out, to respond, when he realized it was coming from inside of him.

As he opened his mouth, Chris heard his tooth say, "I bet you're enjoying this, aren't you?"

Chris froze. In the dream he could picture the tooth: rotten and yellowing around the outside edges, dull and sore and raw around the gum. As he was imagining his rotten tooth he saw it form a crack that curved upward at the ends, and then it wedged itself deeper into Chris's mouth, like it was pulling itself up by the nerves in his mouth.

In the dream, the pain was enough to knock Chris down to his hands and knees. He screamed but he could not force air from his lungs. The tooth said, in a singsong jeer, "Look here, just *what* have we talked about? You over-enjoy yourself. Time and *time again* I have told you not to overdo it and here we are."

The tooth giggled as Chris struggled to scream. "I'm buried halfway in your flesh and from here I can rot all of you, and it's all your fault."

The tooth kept giggling as Chris kept willing air to come out of his lungs and to bring sound with it. Sound would be wonderful, it would let him know he wasn't crazy, it would wake him up, it would help block the cruel giggle that filled his head and filled the house made of sugar and so he kept pushing and he kept hoping he would start to scream when the house made of sugar went black and Chris stopped pushing and hoping.

Chris trudged into his room and flung his door shut behind him without looking. He threw his backpack on his chair with a little effort and a grunt and flopped onto his bed. The sheets were unmade and they were bunched up under his back, but his eyes closed gratefully at the comfort of the pillow on his aching neck, which he kept on a swivel at school. He laid motionless for a while, letting cool air from his open window drift over his forehead. Sighing, he turned over onto his side.

“Ah! Shit.”

He sat up, wincing as his one bad canine seemed to sink back into place, upset by a sudden pressure on his cheek. Rubbing his hand over his cheek in a useless attempt to massage the plaque out of his mouth, he wondered when his mother would give him the money to get a root canal. *Not before she pays for summer camp at church, he thought, and certainly not after I asked for that* and sighed, letting his eyes drift over his room.

He glanced at the stray scraps of tape that marked where boy band posters and headshots of singers he liked once hang. He saw the cross his mother nailed above his door just a few days ago and the baseball posters for teams he neither recognized nor cared about piled up against the wall, waiting to be hung up. He remembered the car ride home from school with his mother today, and sighed for a third time since he entered his room as he lowered his head back onto the pillow...

*“I’m not going to give you money for that.”*

*“But you said—”*

*“But nothing. Don’t expect me to let you go to any kind of dance if you’re gonna go with him. Look here, what do you think people say about you? What do you think they’ll say about us?”*

*“I don’t care about that, I just want—”*

*“I know what you want. You think I don’t know what you want? You’re lucky he doesn’t know. I fixed your room up for you so that he wouldn’t get suspicious, and you’re still sitting there, ungrateful, thinking like some kind of—”*

*“Look here, Chris. We’ve talked about this. You over-enjoy yourself, and over-enjoyment is a direct path to sin. Just look at what happened with your tooth, for God’s sake. This is easier, because unlike your tooth, this is not real. You’ll get over it.”*



*"We'll go early this Sunday."*

The front door slammed shut. Chris woke up and heard and recognized his father's heavy footfall and the silence that lingered like a bad smell after his mother chirped hello. He rubbed the drowsiness of the nap out of his eyes and straightened his back out as he stretched. *I might as well get some homework done before dinner*, he thought. He got his backpack and pulled out his binder and notebooks, and, stopping for just a second, he got out a candy mint out of the front pocket and popped it into his mouth.

---

"Amen."

Chris and his mother and his father continued looking at their plates as they picked up their forks and picked at their food. Family dinner went like this: prayer, a drawn-out conversation consisting of forks clinking and knives scraping and water being slurped (or beer, for Chris' father), and finally, mumbled thank-yous as chairs were pushed back and dishes dropped into the sink.

But tonight, Chris's father looked up from his plate of soy sauce-heavy chicken and grunted at Chris.

"How was school today." He asked it more as a statement than a question, like he was casting a fishing line into a pond that he knew had little fish.

Chris looked up warily from the asparagus on his plate. His father's eyes looked back at him, shining and clear.

He cleared his throat. "It was fine. Didn't do much, I suppose."

"Did you look into the baseball team, like I said?"

Chris looked down at his plate again. "No."

He heard the disgruntled sigh and the following stabs his father made into slices of chicken. He could picture in his mind the way his father violently shook his head in disapproval.

"At least you're doing okay in your classes. And at least you'll meet some better friends at that prom we paid for you to go to."

Chris froze, his fork suspended his plate. He shot a glance at his mother, who kept her head down.

“And I hope you’re happy about that too. Wasn’t cheap. Speaking of which, why is there a twenty on the front table, Margaret?”

Out of the corner of his eye, Chris could see his mother had also stopped eating. The fan above the kitchen began to make a strange buzzing sound that made Chris’s skin crawl. His father gave a rare chuckle. “Not that I’m complaining. But where did you get it?”

His mother coughed. “Chris isn’t going to the prom anymore, dear.”

The buzzing seemed to intensify and Chris started to wonder where he had heard the buzzing before.

He looked at his father. His eyes were getting red.

“What do you mean, *dear*? The prom cost fifty-fuckin’ bucks.”

Chris’s mother gave a small squeak at the cuss. “Uh, well dear, he said he just wasn’t that interested in going, his friends aren’t going and—”

“So what? Maybe without those theater friends of his, he’d actually go out and *meet* someone. It’s prom. Girls have tight dresses and loose morals on prom.” He chuckled again. “What’s not to like?”

The buzzing sound got louder as Chris’s mother kept trying to deflect and Chris’s father got angrier. He felt the buzzing in his tooth. It was an ominous buzzing, the chant of a cult that accompanied a throb of what has been foretold to come.

“And they said that they could only give twenty of it back because that was policy, and if his friends don’t want to go then what’s the point? What do you want?”

“What I want is, *dear*, is for you to go get his ticket back because that’s thirty bucks of my fuckin’ money that you’re wasting if you don’t, and, *dear*, if you say any more about his fag friends then I’m gonna beat—”

It was then that Chris noticed he was standing up, and his mouth was open, and his voice seemed to be coming from some place other than the vocal cords in his throat that felt smooth and motionless, but it didn’t really matter where the vibration came from because all that mattered is that he had said it and it came out of his mouth.

His father sat under his gaze, mouth ajar, and then his eyes narrowed, redder than any time before that Chris has seen him drunk, and he picked up his bottle and threw it at Chris's head.

There was a sickening warmth on Chris's face, and he realized it was beer and blood, and the beer was because the bottle had broken on his face, and the blood was because the bottle had cut his face, and he was on his hands and knees and it all felt familiar and horrible. He stood up, mouth open, taking a deep breath and he had the sense that his mother was also on her feet and that she was screaming, but there was a ringing in his ears and he couldn't hear her. He also vaguely got the sense that his father was pushing the table out of the way. Moving as if he was in water, Chris picked up a napkin on the floor and blotted the blood on his face. He was dimly aware of the fact that there was something *off* in his mouth, that his teeth didn't sit together the way they used to, when he realized his father was in front of him.

His father punched him in the face and screamed, and Chris heard it.

Chris was on the ground again, and he could taste bitter and sour iron. His father stood above him, rivulets of blood running down his arm, dripping onto Chris's shirt, as he screamed, "YOUR FUCKING TOOTH! YOUR FUCKING TOOTH IS BURIED IN MY FUCKING HAND!"

And it was. It was cracked and it looked yellow and diseased, full of dark red blood that oozed onto his father's hand and then onto Chris's neck as his father, panting, with bloodshot eyes, straddled Chris and wrapped his fingers around his neck.

And then Chris tried to scream, because he could see the tooth in his father's hand, and it was smiling and giggling and he remembered his dream, and the tooth said "This is all your fault."

Chris tried to scream and couldn't, couldn't push the air out his lungs, like his throat was a toothpaste bottle that he was throttling, trying to get some use out of, but couldn't. And then he saw his mother move around the overturned table in the kitchen in his family's white house and he kept hoping for air when it all went black.

*~ Art Ikehara*



*"Untitled" ~ Nicholas Walrath  
Cover Art*

## THE STRAW MAN

Beside the field where I was strung,  
Upon a cross and setting sun;  
Amid the path of old and worn,  
My body hung, lifeless and torn.  
And from the horror long ago,  
The Straw Man who became my soul.  
From all the days that long had fled,  
A blazed horseman my crazed mind led!  
Yet of the shade's dark winged things,  
In the shadow of my being,  
Came the will to evoke the spell  
Of all that dwells within me now.  
The, in the night, amid the wind,  
The vision of where I had been  
Appeared, and then the best séance  
Brought forth the dead my presence haunts;  
From where I stood along the hill,  
Amid the vulture and the kill;  
Near the fence of my deadly route,  
In fallen leaves that move about;  
In the withered trees and their cries,  
Along the earth and blackened skies;  
Where the raven flies 'round the air,  
In his flutter and eerie glare;  
Until the cawing crows are gone,  
Which formed my spirit on the lawn;  
Upon the tombstone where I lay,  
Inscribed, the spell shall be my way.

*~ Daniel Belmudes*

## PROCESSION

Under the spotlights of the sky,  
The circus top spins twice and stops.  
The veil'd crowd twins in-fermity  
As they hear and feel and gawk.

The trumpets sound! The brassy shots  
Of war and right and left.  
The circus master can't be found,  
But look! The curtain's cleft!

And storming out are elephants!  
On tricycles, with paint.  
And flat-foot fools with deep chagrin  
Lead on, bravado fake.

Up next, the mules, of white and blue,  
And whipped, although they're fed.  
The men who drive them smile and sneer:  
Mixed upon their heads.

Trailing the beasts are carriages,  
And palanquins of gold,  
And cars that shine with chrome and spit;  
All pass with windows closed.

Finally come those forgot,  
The children, red and black;  
Exotic beasts in heavy chains;  
And those who clearly lack.

Around they go, in circles now,  
A rhythm to their spin.  
But wait! The players gaze skyward  
The lights begin to dim.

A single spotlight shines.  
A single person finds the line  
And walks across the sky.

Unsteady, slow, no net below,  
They must balance or they'll die.  
The crowd that stares is breathing slow,  
The crowd can't blink its eye.

And the trumpets blow  
And the players below  
Continue their march around.  
And the circus master can't be found.

*~ Art Ikehara*

## BURIED ALIVE

Another day ticking away  
Held captive in a SHU box  
Like a modern day slave  
They say  
We're dangerous, we're terrorists  
So they lock us away  
Where no one can see us  
Not even the light of day  
My mom writes and says pray  
I respond with okay  
But it's rare when I do  
We're treated like demons  
Like Nazis did the Jews  
Except they won't gas us  
Cause then they won't get paid  
Oppression and isolation  
That's how the mighty dollar's made  
Generations of my people being enslaved  
The prison industry  
Their most valuable trade  
My loved ones wish to visit me  
But the problem's the car  
They don't have much money  
Why is this prison so far  
Just one of their tactics to break us apart  
But it wont work we got too much heart  
My people are warriors  
We fought from the start  
We struggle in silence  
We never complain  
My brothers around me know my pain  
Keep your head up and continue to strive  
When the man does the beep  
I can feel the hate in his eyes  
Just imagine being buried alive  
That's the best way to describe  
How we're living inside



We could scream  
We could cry  
There will be no reply  
Instead we maintain strong  
And hold our head high  
Malnourished and hungry  
We still push to survive  
We work out our body as well as our minds  
They'll cast a life sentence  
For not dropping dime  
In the interest of justice  
That's their punchline  
No compassion  
Just hate  
What happened mankind  
Justice proceeds like organized crime  
Inside the belly of the beast  
We learn to value time  
Another day  
Ticking away  
Buried in the tombs  
Of Pelican Bay.

*~ Jose Pereyra*



*"Untitled" ~ Nicholas Walrath*

## ABOUT THAT

I meant to say something  
but a fever twisted my ankle.

What I understood  
is very different from who you are.

Is there something  
that makes you laugh in your dreams?

What do you think about  
when sky floats toward lavender?

How do other people  
find anything in their closets?

It would be very helpful  
if we were gentle with ourselves.

Is there a problem  
that speaks in whispers of rain?

I think it's important  
to listen when trees talk to the wind.

Is there a particular  
old musical you'd like to dance to?

~ *Cindy Bousquet Harris*

## COCKTAIL HOUR

The Painted Ladies  
Fly past the windowless room.  
The smell of morphine  
Clouds it as  
She is fed through a tube.

The son never shines  
In this room.

A tear runs down her cheek  
Thinking of him  
As the cancer eats away her stomach.

She will drink her cocktail soon  
And all this physical pain will be gone.

She hears a friend say,  
“When you leave, you take nothing  
But the love that was given to you.”

She looks at the door.  
Her son never shines  
In this room.

*~ Francesca Terzano*

## VARIOUS EXPLANATIONS

Various explanations today  
why a moth rushes a flame

or a fly's buzzing dives  
toward a lightbulb

on because a woman needs  
to read and think in a book

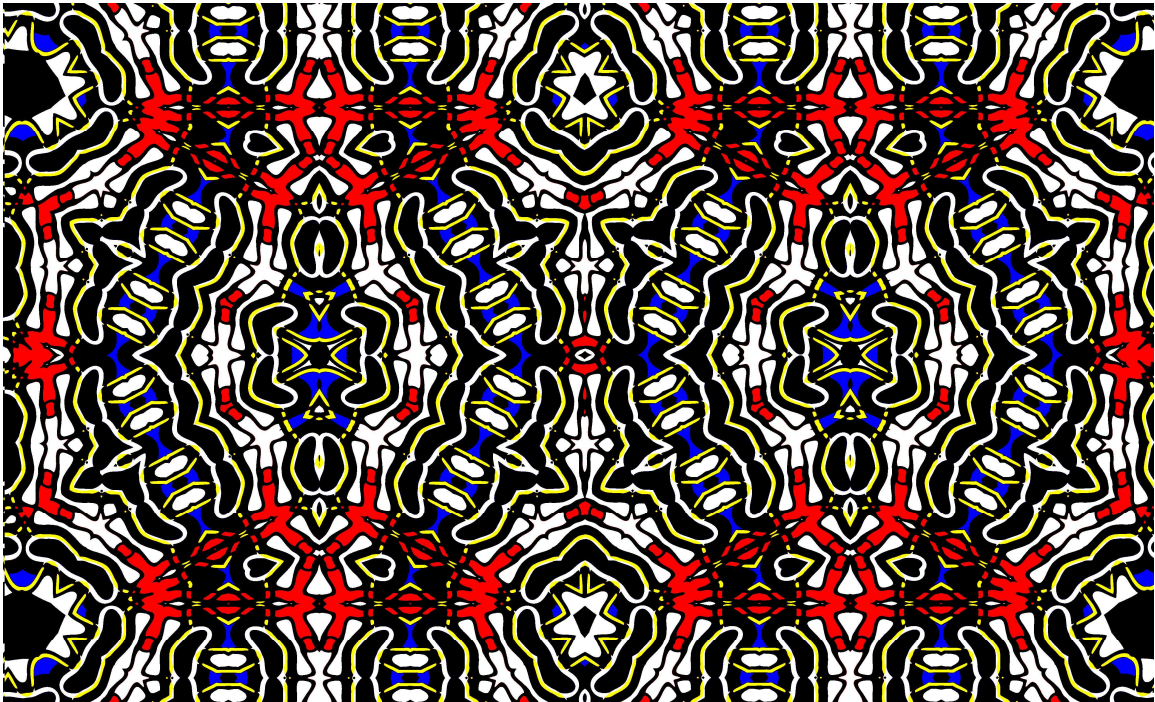
this book of poems  
from a woman

the excitement between us  
that the fly interrupts

as it seems to want my head  
as if all her words

make my head glow.  
I am lit and loving it.

*~ Carol Ellis*



*"Crosses and Hearts" ~ Edward Supranowicz*

## BODY OF PROOF

Wondering 'cause I'm a wonderer,  
Through Pelican Bay  
Where the skeletons play,  
Make believe at being human,  
Some sub or master social construct  
Constructed by lies,  
Hope being the biggest  
As a night sky  
Promising a sunrise that's not coming,  
But we would need eyes  
To truly care for colors,  
Or a brain for something like truth  
To discover we've been naked all along,  
Without ears to hear  
Our swan song being played,  
Faceless faithless  
Flayed to the point of lacking any roots,  
Searching for proof to prove that flesh  
Once covered these bones,  
With childhood fat childlike muscles,  
Twenty-year-old nerves singing electric  
Ballads of hustle and promise  
Struggle and conquest,  
And sprawling veins feeding it all  
Where liquid dreams become real  
Through movement,  
And gasoline oxygen ignites  
Wildfire awareness,  
And these growing spinal columns  
Of mothers and grandmothers  
Measuring me pressuring me  
Towards a center that's undoubtedly home,  
Body of transcendence  
And infinite universe for my,  
Body of proof to prove  
I have become limitless.

*~ Adrian S. Mariscal*

## TRAPPED IN THE PAVILION

Rain drops, rain drops.  
Broke-ass window shops.  
Soaked at Wingstop,  
asks for a cup of pop.  
Window shops at Old Navy.  
Broke-ass can't ball, baby.  
Can't ball like a man,  
at Shiekh or Fanzz.

Doesn't want to get soaked again.  
Trapped in the Pavilion.

*~ Jesse Tovar*

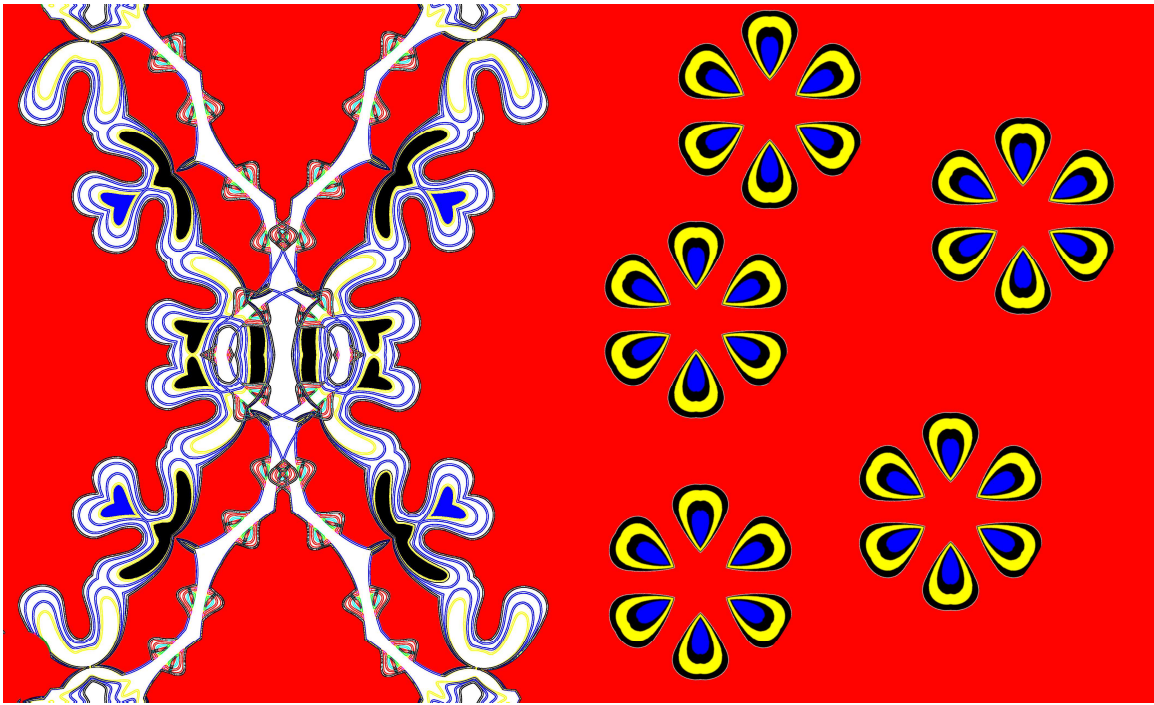


## BLANKET OF BLACKNESS

No future no past,  
Can't go slow can't go fast,  
Trying to glow trying to flash,  
Never gonna be first always gonna be last  
No face no mask,  
Dying of thirst dying to ask,  
What's with the blank pages?  
And is life nothing but stages?  
Moving from one into the next,  
Break your back break you neck,  
It doesn't matter to matter,  
Or to the Mad Hatter  
Who blew out his brains,  
The world wasn't young enough  
To make laughter out of pain,  
Wonder from the logic  
Or madness in our brains,  
So is any cloud high enough  
To help me forget?  
Is any void deep enough  
To bury my regrets?  
And this thing called life-strife  
The price paid for love  
And the price paid for hate,  
Im'a extremist and so I fluctuate  
In between heartaches and no heart,  
Avantgarde to no part  
No bark to my bite  
No spirit no flight,  
Just this Twilight  
making its way into my bed  
Into my head,  
The dreamer in me is dead  
The reaper in me is well fed,  
And my Midas touch of lead  
Has returned full circle,  
No purple heart for the one

Who was old before he was young,  
Who was too smart then too dumb  
To start trying to outrun society,  
And the estimation of things  
That created this avalanche  
Of nightmares and dreams,  
And me here trying to survive  
Being buried alive  
With a punctured lung  
And a loaded gun for company,  
My daydreams at their fakest  
As I'm blanketed by blankness,  
Under thirteen years of weight  
That haven't been worth the wait,  
Under the silence of disillusionment  
That muffles my last farewell,  
And the gunshot  
That barely breaks the surface  
To be easily discarded  
By howling winds.

*~ Adrian Mariscal*



*"Early Bloom" ~ Edward Supranowicz*

## THE LEGACY

When James laid his head on the cotton pillow he did not buy, he expected to wake in a similarly furnished, if not the same, bed. He had been living in sumptuous comfort for the past several of his days. He closed his eyes and let his consciousness go into the abyss. Time lost its hold on his mind and his thoughts flew freely. He never knew how long he would languish in the dark, but truthfully, it wasn't that dark at all. His dreamed were vivid and consumed him.

Slowly, his mind found light. As his consciousness formulated itself he was assailed by a throbbing sensation in his head and the taste of blood. He opened his eyes and saw he was lying in a pool of his own blood.

"Hey! Hey, are you ok? A strange voice called out from a distance but seemed to be close now. "Can you hear me?"

James breathing and his mind swam – he felt drunk – but he managed to push out a "yeah."

"Hold on." The stranger felt around his neck and lightly pressed on his spine. Satisfied with what he found, he held James by the arms and helped him up. No longer was James in his luxurious apartment. He was sitting on the floor, against a booth of a restaurant. The restaurant was well furnished; the booths were made from a dark wood and the tile floor was Venetian porcelain. Large panoramic windows let in the bright afternoon light.

"How are you feeling? Where does it hurt?"

James head still throbbed, but less so. His brain felt far too big for his skull and his mind swam.

"Your nose is bleeding, really bad. Looks like you fell on some glass too. But other than that – I'm not seeing anything. You want something to drink?"

"Uh, rum? If you got it."

"Ah, we'll see if they left any. Hold on."

James closed his eyes and tried to remember something – anything. But all he could remember after falling asleep in his apartment was the dream. His dreams have always been intensely vivid, but lately he had been having the same one. He was running – running in a snowstorm and was surrounded by ice. He didn't know what

he was running from, but it was something terrifying. Suddenly, he had no where to go. He was standing on the edge of a cliff of ice. A hundred feet beneath him was a placid sea of such a deep hue of blue it was nearly black. But a closer inspection revealed that just beneath the surface of the water was a writhing knot of sea serpents. He felt their hunger and the terror approach from behind.

“Here you go.” Said the familiar stranger.

James felt the chill of an iced drink on his lips. He hadn’t realized how dry his mouth was and drank with rapture. He took several substantial gulps before speaking.

“Thank you. I needed this. But this isn’t rum.”

“Oh, I know. Alcohol is bad for you, don’t you know?” He replied humorously.

He was carrying a first aid kit and began bandaging James’ arm.

“Are you feeling better? I’m Will. What’s your name?”

His full name was David James Weber but he went by “James. And yes, I am feeling much better, thank you. But – but, where are we?”

“The Executive, of course. But, you should know that.” Concerned, he inspected James eyes. “Follow my finger. I didn’t think you hit your head *that* hard. Hm. Well, you’re in the Executive, the sky-rise restaurant atop the Legacy.”

“What’s the date?”

“June 7<sup>th</sup>. What’s the last thing you remember?”

That was a question James dared not answer truthfully – that would be crazy. Before his dream, the last thing he remembered was getting ready for sleep in his apartment on Main street, but that was in April.

“I don’t know. It’s all a fog. Fuck.” He cradled his head in his arms. “Why? Why did I wake this way – why now? And why here?”

A woman’s scream pierced his thoughts and made him jump in alarm. She was crying out for something – for someone to stop. Though it was very loud, it sounded a little distant, as though it came from another room. Her silence came unnaturally swift.

“What the fuck was that?”

“They separated four of us and have held them in there.” He pointed to one of the private dining areas. “I don’t know what they’re doing to them, but they haven’t taken any more.”

Will, James, and about forty-sum others were being held hostage in the restaurant. Around nine in the morning, a dozen or so heavily armed soldiers stormed the restaurant, taking all its patrons hostage. From the beginning, this wasn’t a normal hostage situation. They didn’t bind or restrain their captives; they identified a handful to be taken into one of the private dining rooms, but let the rest go – within the confines of the restaurant.

As the Executive was the preferred restaurant for the nation’s wealthiest and most influential businessmen and politicians, most attributed their captor’s strange behavior to their rank. The general assumption was that they were so valuable of hostages that their comfort and security must be of use in their negotiations. As such, most returned to their meals and meetings as though naught were wrong. Drinks were on the house.

They were sorely mistaken. Soon thereafter, a bomb detonated below the restaurant. The blast eviscerated the surrounding infrastructure and ripped a car-sized hole in the restaurant, taking one of the hostages with it. With their security now in question, many ran to their captors demanding more secure lodging. But they didn’t care. Instead of hearing their complaints, the guards raised their weapons and shot the nearest hostages.

“And then.” Will said. “Everybody lost their mind. The bigger that hole got, the crazier they became.” Most went straight to the bar and went to work emptying it of its contents. Some went to their tables and wept, but others began to coalesce into a prayer group. This group had about a dozen or so members; they were standing in a circle with their heads leaned in and arms around one another.

Several explosions rattled the restaurant, breaking off another piece of the floor into the growing chasm. James started in alarm, but he was the only one.

“That’s been going on for a time now. It was about that time when people started.”

One of the hostages was standing on the edge of the chasm. His back was turned to James and Will, but he wore a black suit and his shoulders hung low. In a single movement, he stepped forward and fell down the hole.

“Doing that.”

“How many?”

“I think that was the fourth, but I haven’t kept track. This room is depressing enough.”

“Why is this happening? Have they said anything to us?”

“They haven’t said anything to us. They took all our phones and disconnected the TV’s, so we don’t know anything. They’ve been carting in boxes of paperwork and computers into another of the rooms. They only wanted some of us, perhaps the more influential or powerful. The rest of us don’t seem to be a part of their agenda at all. How’s your memory? Anything coming back to you?”

James wasn’t going to remember anything about the events prior to waking. The James who had woken up this morning and somehow found his way to the Executive didn’t even go by James, but David. David and James were separate consciousnesses within the same body. The separation began after their mother died. She contracted an infection in the hospital after saving him from an apartment fire. During her funeral David fainted, and James woke. Once to thrice a year James woke where David had fallen asleep. James’s memories solely consisted of his experiences during the days he lived instead of David.

It took some time, but he learned how to coexist with his other self. Conscious of his unbelonging in the life he woke up in, he always tried to find a balance between genuine curiosity and continuing David’s own life. There were times though when his frustrations would overwhelm him and he would leave and do whatever he wanted for that day. Once he landed in prison, another in Mexico. One of these escapades costed David his job – the next time James woke he was homeless. He learned to live the most he could without disrupting David’s life or plans.

Each morning James had to relearn who David was, who he was. He would check his calendar, contact books, and correspondence. He always met appointments, but never continued correspondence. He would spend a lot of time looking at David’s photos. He always had many friends and proudly displayed his relationships with frames on the wall.

He saw more faces than he could remember. They would have been easier to remember if they hadn’t changed so frequently. Once familiar faces would disappear to be replaced by new ones. These never lasted either. Many of the photos were of David holding or kissing a girl. These faces changed faster than the others. For a

while, one face remained. David married Emily in his late twenties and had two sons soon after.

James actually met them a few times and he loved their company. Emily stunned James with her beauty. She had slender arms but thick thighs, her waist came in like an hourglass and she had a wide, brilliant smile. What's more, she warmed a part of James he never knew he had. Only for three of his days he spent with her and their sons. The last day she told him that she hadn't seen him like this for a long time – loving. The next time James awoke David and Emily had divorced, and James wept for the whole day.

James woke in more and more luxurious homes and drove more and more expensive cars. He kept to David's schedule and enjoyed his stuff. But he'd always look for Emily in his schedule, correspondence, and photos. He never saw her again. By the time he had laid his head down to rest last, David had finalized his third divorce and had plane tickets for Thailand next week.

"Nothing" James said. "It's all still a fog. But I'm sure the memories will return soon enough. If you don't mind, I'd like to learn more about you. What do you do?"

"I do some work for one of the chefs here. Kind of like a contractor. And as payment, I get to eat here." Will had an easy and impossibly infectious smile. "I charge far more than I am worth."

"What kind of work do you do? Are you a chef?"

"Hardly. I can survive, but I wouldn't recommend anything I would serve you. No, I know some cleansing and blessing rituals from the chef's home island. I bless some of the more particular ingredients for him. He's a superstitious man."

Will was a jack-of-all trades for the spiritually needy. He was a priest, pastor, imam, rabbi, guru and whatever else anyone could need. For a time, he was a chaplain for the Navy and traveled the world in a dozen or so ships. At each port, he would venture out and learn the local's beliefs and rituals. Now that he was retired, he sold his services and knowledge to any who needed them.

"You must have some amazing memories from your travels." James was habitually going through his wallet, looking through the photos.

"Some bad one's as well, and those are harder to forget."

"This one will be hard to forget." Remarked James.



“I’ve had worse.” And without James asking, Will continued. “Before I was a chaplain, I was drafted into the Navy for Vietnam. For a time, I was on a transport vessel ferrying Marines to the battlefield. My job was to fish them out of the sea. Now that is a memory that is nigh impossible to forget.”

“Couldn’t live with my memories so I tried to forget them. Religion wasn’t my first choice. But I eventually learned that those memories that seem the closest are the most false and deceitful. They are as much experiential projections as normal life – self-created. The memories that matter most are the ones we cannot see.”

James leaned in intently. “How do you mean?”

“Well, I’ve found that in the moments that matter most it’s our memories that make it magical. A mother’s caress isn’t soothing by itself, it’s the countless memories of that touch that makes the moment alive. I..” Will stopped himself. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to ramble.”

“No!” James surprised himself with the force of his exclamation. “I mean, no. Please go on.”

Will gave James an inquisitive look but continued.

“We experience our world through the psychic pathways forged by our memories. Every moment is merely an animation of our cumulative and composite condition – our Legacy, if you will. Even our imaginative qualities are only expressed through the combination and reorganization of preexistent ideas.”

“I was trapped by the memories, or more accurately, by the perceptions attached to the memories. The stench of rotting flesh and the visions of bloated faces haunted me and my actions for years. But for others – regret, shame perhaps? But there is hope. Though we are bound to the past right now, we can change how it is expressed for later.”

“I was married to the same woman for fifty-nine years, and with each passing year her company grew sweeter to my experience. It wasn’t her bubbly personality that did it, but how our shared memories daily expressed themselves, and how it created more. Our Legacy is only that which we daily nurture. We have a blessed ability to analyze and place value on the ideas we attach to objects. And with that value, we have the reasoning abilities to organize and prioritize. We are fully capable of intentionally forming our Legacy. But to most, it is a fruitless endeavor.”

He looked at the other hostages. “But some suckle the honey off the branch that holds us from death without any concern of their fate until its too late. The sickly sweetness of greed and pride, of symbols and certainty, blinds them to their superficial existence. We are capable of so much more. What do you think would cross their mind when the branch breaks? What will their final thought be? Probably self-pity or regret. I want no such emotion to be my last thought – I desire nothing but peace.”

“You’re a pastor, right? Don’t you believe in the afterlife?”

“After everything I have learned from books, travels, and people – I don’t know. If there is an afterlife I don’t think we’re supposed to know about. But I always liked how one of my Bahai friends explained it to me. This life is to the next like a fetus in the womb. We cannot comprehend what is in store for us, but our condition in this life will determine our condition in the next. I always reasoned that my last thought in this life would be the first in the next.”

“How can you not live with regret? How can you not look back at the empty frames and empty rooms and not blame yourself? I... I watched my life pass away from me – like a stranger was living for me, but never had the courage to stop it. Before – before it was too late.”

“I can’t answer that, my friend. That is your burden to bear. However cliché, forgiveness all about making peace with life’s contradictions. Wallowing in self-pity won’t get you anywhere but forgetting the ill cheapens it. We each need to find organic and authentic peace with our Legacy. That harmony between your perceptions and inner constitution will make everything smoother.”

“What about now?”

“What about it? Everything that will make the next moment what it is has already passed. All we can do is sit back and get ready for what comes next – in this life and the next.”

The faint popping of gunshots echoed from the open hallway. Its echo silenced the restaurant and filled the hostages with hope. When the shots became louder some began to cheer and sing. Some of the more inebriated of them began taunting their captors. The intermittent explosions – grenades and pipe bombs – also became louder.

Now it wasn't only the blasts from pipe bombs and gunfire that came from the hallway, it was also the cries of the wounded and dying. It was clear that the security forces were gaining the upper hand and soon the battle raged in the restaurant itself. The hostages gathered what liquor was left, lit them on fire, and through them at their captors. The rest surged to assist their rescuers.

The terrorists mowed down their hostages and took defensive positions at the bar. Heavily armored security forces surged into the restaurant, surrounding their defeated foes. In the last moment, one of the terrorists stood atop the bar and held aloft an artifact. He removed his bandanna to reveal his juvenile features. He must have been no older than fifteen. Standing proud he called out "for the Nation" before pressing the button on the artifact clasped in his fist.

That button detonated a second bomb, a small thermo-nuclear warhead hidden in a janitor's closet. The blast ripped the Legacy and the surrounding buildings in two like a blade. Its force propelled the uppermost floors of the legacy into the air. Everyone in the Executive was pressed to floor as they were shot hundreds of feet into the air. But as the irradiated fires ate away at the floors beneath, the spire on top forced the restaurant to tilt.

At its zenith, when the building's upward momentum met the force of gravity, terrorists, security forces, and hostages floated in the space weightless. James looked up into the impossibly deep blue sky and didn't see the sky, but the sea. Before he was swallowed up in the irradiated fires he grew cold.

James stood on a meandering iceberg floating on the frozen sea of his dreams. The ice cliffs were nowhere in sight and only the impossibly deep sea surrounded him. He was very near the surface of the water now, the burning cold water lapped against his feet. The beasts of the deep were very near the surface. Their scarlet eyes were locked on him and their mouths salivated.

He was under the water. The frigid waters hardened his frame and the writhing serpents pressed against him. He felt their sharp teeth and coarse scales abrade his flesh – he could feel their tongues tasting him. He fell deeper in their swarm and all became dark. His senses began to numb – from the edges of his consciousness first, but it spread. Soon, he hadn't any senses at all.

Nothing

And then, something.

It began with the awareness of something within him, as contrasted with its absence a moment before. And then, he felt pressure – behind him? Differentiated from the opposing space without pressure – front? His awareness developed in surges now. He felt his labored breathing and the creeping chill of goosebumps on his arms. A grayness filled his vision. He opened his eyes. James’ mother lay in the hospital bed next to him and his father asleep in a chair. And then James remembered.

“Will.”

*~ Joseph Smith*

Wrap me in yellow wallpaper  
faded by 127 years of time  
and uneven sunlight  
with flower vines so twisted  
you can feel the thin tight thorns  
cutting your skin  
as if they were fresh  
sheets of paper.

I will crawl around the floor  
in the room of my own  
where many women  
before me slept  
alone  
if they were lucky  
and wrote poems  
and plays  
and novels  
that were lost to time  
dimmed not by the orange sun rays  
but by our collective memory.

I found their caged bird  
but not her song  
for she died  
when Helen of Troy  
stopped countertop dancing  
to consult on a hit Hulu show  
based on her best-selling novel  
where her red lips were traded in  
for a red gown  
and white wings  
and Emmy nominations.

Together we've cried  
that we are free  
like a lady lazarus  
we can rise again  
and show the world  
our ash and pure gold hell  
going to and fro  
with our big nose and fat legs  
apologizing for the undertaker's cosmetics  
that are painted on too thick  
and are far too pink.

But in between the lines  
we know the truth:  
that time moves slowly  
and fades quickly  
like purple flowers in a field  
that nobody ever notices  
yet despite all these liberations  
it will never be simple  
for we are bound by our colours  
as well as sex  
to never know a happy ending.

*~ Amanda Riggle*

## YOU ONLY WRITE SAD POEMS

They say  
Looking over your body of work

“And political” I add  
They nod  
And think.

“My happy moments”  
I try to explain  
“Are mine  
They are not to be commodified  
I don’t want  
To give my happiness away  
To be someone else’s  
To make someone else smile  
To be misinterpreted as  
A metaphor or simile  
Or comment on some bullshit  
I don’t even know.”

When my cat follows me around all day  
And puts her toes on my arm  
Because she likes us to touch

When my best friend comes over  
And we watch horror movies  
And eat Del Taco for lunch

When a student comes to my office  
Earnestly wanting to connect  
And learn something new

When I wake up in the morning  
Listen to the birds outside  
And drink cold brew

When my sister was young  
And used to think of me  
As her hero and best friend

When I spend my nights writing  
And fall asleep just as  
The sun begins to ascend

Those moments are mine.  
Society has a way  
Of taking what makes us smile  
And turning it over for profit  
And destroying something beautiful.  
I won't give away my beauty.  
It's not for sale.  
Instead, I'll keep these moments  
Treasured  
And write sad poems  
And political ones, too.

The MFA committee nods  
They offered me a spot  
I declined.

*~ Amanda Riggle*



## FIRES BURNING

Summer comes and the old place calls me,  
so I drop everything and return.

Within moments I inhabit what seems  
to me now a past life. The gate remains open,

so I walk through. In the shadows of the  
Chinese flame tree are the images

of me and you, of an earlier dance, leaves loose  
as the branches—like muscles—expand

and contract, holding firm against the wind  
to keep another world at bay.

And I feel much like this flame tree does now,  
pulled in how many directions, incessantly

tired and turning, puzzling over which way  
to yearn. Being always consists of Being-toward.

Eternally the wind calls in its ceaseless turning:  
antistrophe, catastrophe, from which and

into which we take leave. For all change  
is departure, a turning intent on arrival—

to where? I ask the history of images  
recovered in a single glance. I stare, looking

for answers, into a now older and disenchanted  
reflection returned to me in the dust-swept

glass, and still the world responds by turning.  
Do you remember how it looked the first time,

the Chinese flame in full bloom—  
every memory a fire burning.

*~ Ryan Leack*

## REMEMBERING THE WAY

I remember it often, the place I grew up,  
the smell of the curved street wet in the rain,

Rick and Jan's boat by the curb, a small  
wooden plank beneath the tire.

Held in the arms of the maple tree,  
we looked out, not yet knowing world,

sweeping ants from branches as we climbed,  
higher. Below we crushed the leaves

beneath our feet to hear the sound it made,  
autumn dragging ashes through the streets.

In my backyard, we stood on swings,  
still thinking we could fly. You jumped off,

hands outstretched to the heavens, trusting  
the stars to catch you, and smacked

squarely into the earth, bright red blood  
pouring from your nose over the hot, dry dirt.

In your backyard, we put black widows in jars.  
My dad called the big one "Grandma."

He kept it in a three inch jar in the kitchen  
cabinet next to the salt and sugar.

He'd hold the tiny lid in his hands,  
the black widow facing up as he dropped

small spiders inside, and then we'd peer  
through the murky glass to watch them fight.

Grandma was always victorious.  
As children we followed the Way like this:

doing nothing, watching the 10,000 things  
come and go of themselves, absorbed in the

delicate dance of stillness and movement,  
perfect peace and sudden violence,

deafening noise and piercing silence,  
all part of the same Way.

Now, cut down, the tree is incapable of  
making those childhood sounds, and the

black widow jar is empty. Linger,ing,  
we pore over ruins of upturned earth,

hearing only the sounds of our fingers  
against the dirt, the sound two children's

hands once made as they buried artifacts  
from a past that we try to dig up,

if only we could remember where.  
Tell me, is it still there, the big square

trampoline in Johnny's yard?  
Maybe this time we could fly.

*~ Ryan Leack*

## AISHA, OR PREGNANT PAUSE

Time spilled like a  
frigid shower  
on the storied tops of  
Tokyo rooves,  
retrieved by an angel  
hanging overhead,  
swimming through a cloud of  
wayward glares.

Her eyes on a blushing moon -  
first a delightful weightlessness,  
then the empty pressure of fog.

We listened for a heartbeat  
composed of fractals,  
smudges and circles across a surreal  
sultry  
skyscape,

wondering where to go from here,  
what to say  
when we  
suffer the mundane

and suffocate  
below the concave  
of unhappy endings.

*~ John Danho*

## ZIGGY'S DEATH

One does enjoy sleep since it's a preparation for the afterlife. People need practice for sleeping inside a coffin, ditch, or urn or where ever our body ends up. The person's container defines the contained. The captivity of a person obfuscated, but the memory cemented. A person enshrined by distorted recollections. A madman's impression presses flowers and a butterfly in the pages of ancient books—a network that preserves the network. Many languages change, but only the vowels; the consonants stay the same and feel similar. Ziggy looks up to the monitor on the train to realize they have missed their destination. Ziggy ponders, "I should have been here yesterday. The Agency is where I work, but I hate it because I help others function in society when I don't have the ability to respond. A responsibility that most women, men, and people will not rejoin. A mass in search of jobs that never suit their personality. In the food industry, positions that never tap the employee's potential are always open; people canvass in the sun's inferno or die penniless dehydrated in the streets. Knocking from door to door, walking from street to street, all cities start to look like distinct worlds, and the suburbs' pattern becomes clear." Ziggy should have arrived at eight in the morning but missed the final destination. The train station in front of the Agency. Ziggy imagines the scenario if they had been at work: "I've got a job for person G-85!" I would say on the intercom. More than twenty-five individuals would have bum rushed my desk. Violently, they suddenly begin to tear each other's hair and rip their clothes. Some trip the elderly who never had the chance but also need the work, and sabotage whoever would really have had the G-85 ticket. I would have repeated on the intercom, "Geeeeeeeeeeeeeee-eightyfiiiiiiiive, now calling Geeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee-eightyfiiiiiiiive." The second announcement would have increased the tension in the room; the lobby becomes a battlefield of knife wielding grandmas, bald tuxedo wearing men with missing teeth, one samurai, and three creepy cardinals. The people in their late thirties

through forties contemplate working together to become a conglomerate. Together chanting “We are G-85! We are G-85! We are G-85!” If they split the wages, it would be enough change to buy food for their lunch break. In *our* society, the more jobs one has the more existence they redeem. The wealthy can buy their children college level diplomas for inept diplomats. In this world; it is the *requirement* to live, work, and die. The vision of the lobby erupts in nonsensical violence. Hats and shoes fly; grunts and sounds of pain are heard; one-person stares at the melee and just walks out the front door. Ziggy returns to the train, exits the stop where they reside, and goes to sleep knowing tomorrow’s plan of action.

~ *Ivan Rios*

## WHEN YOU PROBABLY SHOULDN'T BE TAKING ADVICE FROM AESOP

A song I listened to  
in middle school  
turned ten years old  
today,  
so I drove  
to the neon lit "L quor Store"  
to get a forty,  
but this time took my time  
with the time it takes to get there.

The neon letters glowed  
through the smoke  
coming from the exhaust of my car  
like a movie projector glows  
through a piece of dust in a darkened theater;  
and I imagine the movie  
that's playing is of the scorpion and the frog  
and I can't help but feel  
like that helpful helpless frog  
drowning,  
submerged in not enough time  
that reminds you in waves and splashes.

Now I'm alone and buzzed  
in the parking lot  
and only thinking of my few  
decisions and indecisions  
and my maybe this and what ifs,  
and on the radio  
the song I used to listen to in middle school plays  
and reminds me  
of the frog and the dust  
and the missing "i"  
and the time it took to get there.

~ *Robert C. Stewart*

## AMPLIFY AND EXPAND

I typically think minimalist  
art is bullshit. Why have  
less when you can have  
more? Or is that how alcoholics  
think about art? More is more  
and more and more  
and less isn't worth the effort.

"It's subjective," he says,  
pulling the wooden frame  
from his shit-stained hatchback.  
I say, "Oh, I love it!"  
and wonder if that's true,  
or if a social narrative  
has stolen my voice:  
Younger Woman Feels  
Tacitly Obligated to  
Bolster Ego of Old  
White Man.

The painting has a jagged acrylic skyline  
standing before a setting sun,  
the goldenrod glow just visible  
behind brown mountains.  
Black paint dots the sky  
flung across blues, greens,  
oranges.

I take the painting in my  
hand and we walk back  
across the parking lot.  
The sky is achingly bright  
with the relentless Los Angeles sun  
screaming on our backs.  
It looks nothing like the painting.  
Not a black cloud in sight.

*~ Natalie Peterkin*



My aunt voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's big ass voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's black, bushy afro voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's wide, brown nose voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's thick eyebrows voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's nickname "Nig" voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's childbearing hips voted for Donald Trump.  
My aunt's self-hated voted for Donald Trump.

I imagine her in the Orange County  
poll booth, every indigenous  
drop of blood in her body  
inaudibly screaming:  
*What the fuck are you doing?*

*~ Natalie Peterkin*

## WHAT IS IDENTITY?

i lead count  
less lives

in people's  
memories  
of me.

still, i remain  
no one

like the street light  
that has been broken

for over a year. or,

the cars that rush  
past the homeless

person and their  
cardboard sign:

*stop living  
a life of  
distractions.*

being  
no one

makes  
me happier.

*~ Alexis Garcia*

## THOUGHTS DURING A BAD TRIP

i do not feel  
like a body  
of lake:

deep,

and hidden  
by tress  
and  
enjoyable  
by people.

i feel overly exposed;

an endless  
amount of space.

i cannot even act  
like the person  
i was born into.

i remain  
a russian doll,  
holding the past  
like garbage bags.

it is hard  
to make change  
when i understand  
myself the least.

i make  
a promise  
to meet  
myself

someday,

during a  
better trip.

~ *Alexis Garcia*

## BIOGRAPHIES

### KITTY ANARCHY

Kitty Anarchy is an anarchafeminist, chicana womyn poet, and short story writer. She has a background in social work having earned her MSW from California State University, Long Beach and listens to KPFK radio. She has 7 cats, her favorite being ChiChi and 2 dogs named Bandit and Nibbit. She is published in Chiron Review, Rabid Oak Journal, Los Angeles Review, and Ghost Town Literary Journal as well as in anthologies through Arroyo Seco Press and Picture Show Press. [www.kittyanarchy.com](http://www.kittyanarchy.com).

### BERNARD ANDERSON

Mr. Bernard Anderson is currently serving time in a California Correctional Facility. He is attending College of the Redwoods in Del Norte County.

### JACOB APPEL

Jacob Appel is a poet from New York who has had his work published in *Pomona Valley Review's* 13<sup>th</sup> Edition.

### MILLARD BAKER

As a college student, Millard Baker is striving to step out of the box and learn new things. He was encouraged by his teacher to try something new and to submit his work.

### ANTONIO BARAJAS

Antonio Barajas is a student in the Pelican Bay Scholars Program at College of the Redwoods. He's never submitted any of his work prior to entering the program. Yet the program has helped him express his voice in ways he feels is relevant and, thanks go his English Professor, Mrs. Knowlton, he was made aware of the opportunity to submit work to Pomona Valley Review. Mr. Barajas decided to submit his work to show that, even in prison, human expression thrives. Prison can sometimes be generalizing, but Mr. Barajas hopes to show that individuals in prison are not just criminals, they are diverse and growing individuals that have made mistakes.

### DANIEL BELMUDES

Daniel Belmudes is a 41-year-old Mexican American in prison, earning his AA degree. He believes in the universe and scientific inquiry. Recreationally, Mr. Belmudes likes to exercise. He is overall a quiet and serious person while also being thoughtful and curious about life. He grew up in a rough family household in Pomona, California and believes the key to any struggle is education. He also enjoys exploring and discussing ideas and theories about the mind and the universe and has a deep passionate love for poetry – especially dark poetry.

### **ROBERT BEVERIDGE**

Robert Beveridge (he/him) makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in *New American Legends*, *Toho Journal*, and *Chiron Review*, among others.

### **BEAU BOUDREAUX**

Beau Boudreaux is the author of two collections of poetry, most recent *Rapunzel's Braid*, (Five Oaks Press, 2016). His first book of poems is *Running Red*, *Running Redder* (WordTech Communications, 2012). His third book, *Toy Park*, is forthcoming in 2019. He currently teaches at Tulane University and lives in New Orleans..

### **CINDY BOUSQUET HARRIS**

Cindy Bousquet Harris is a poet, photographer, and a licensed marriage and family therapist. Her poems can be found in *Ghost Town Lit*, *Eclectica*, *Inlandia: A Literary Journey*, and in several anthologies. She has lead poetry workshops for youth and adults and is one of the editors for *Spirit Fire Review*. Her book manuscript, *Ice in Heaven*, was a finalist for the 2018 Hillary Gravendyk Prize.

### **LEIZA CASTILLO**

Leiza Castillo graduated from UCLA with an English Literature degree. Currently, she works as a grant writer for a consulting

company in Pomona and lives in West Covina.

### **BILL CUSHING**

Bill Cushing has lived in several states, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico before moving to California. As an undergrad, he was called the “blue collar” writer by classmates at the University of Central Florida because of his years working in the Navy and later as an electrician on oil tankers, naval vessels, and fishing boats before he returned to college at the age of 37. He earned an MFA in writing from Goddard College in Vermont and teaches at East Los Angeles and Mt. San Antonio colleges. As a writer, Bill has been published in various literary journals, magazines, and newspapers, including *Birders World*, *The San Juan Star* and the *Florida Times-Union*. His short stories have appeared in *Borfski Press*, *Newtown Literary Journal* and *Sediments*. His creative non-fiction has been posted in *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Cargo Literary*, and *The Thing Itself* among other journals and sites. When not teaching or writing, Bill facilitates a writing workshop in Eagle Rock, California (9 Bridges).

### **JOHN DANHO**

John Danho is Managing Editor for *Pomona Valley Review* and a sometimes-poet, trying to make his career as a community college professor while keeping up his creative pursuits. His poetry, which ranges from the playful to somber, has been published multiple times in both *Pomona Valley*

Review and in *HyeBred Magazine*. He also cohosts a video game podcast called *LVL UP*.

### **CAROL ELLIS**

Carol Ellis is a poet living in Portland, Oregon. She's been around the academic block with her Ph.D. in English from the University of Iowa. She is the author of two chapbooks: *HELLO* (Two Plum Press, 2018), and *I Want A Job* (Finishing Line Press, 2014). Her poems and essays are published in anthologies and journals including *ZYZZYVA*, *Comstock Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Saranac Review*, and *Cider Press Review*. In 2015 she spent time in Cuba writing a book and giving readings. Find her online at [carolellis.tumblr.com](http://carolellis.tumblr.com).

### **NICOLE EMBREY**

Having received her master's in English, with a professional certificate in teaching and writing, Nicole is currently an adjunct English instructor at various community colleges. Aspiring to be more than just a teacher, she likes to say she is a "storyteller in training." She longs to finally sit down and pen the many stories bouncing around in her head, ranging from a collection of mythical "creature features" to an intensely personal, yet fictional, story about ghosts and clairvoyance. In her spare time, which happens to be very little, she absorbs anything pop culture, often jumping into new fandoms with reckless abandon.

### **STACY FOWLER**

Stacy Fowler is an Associate Professor and Technical Services Librarian at St. Mary's University Law Library in San Antonio. She has a Bachelor of Arts in English, and Master's degrees in both Library Science and International Relations. Her interests include poetry and researching women in the military on film. Her poetry has previously been published in the *Pecan Grove Review* and *The Tau*.

### **JOEL FRY**

Joel Fry lives in Athens, Alabama. He has had poems published in *Off the Coast*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Eclectica* and many other places. More of his poetry can be read the back issues of *Eclectica* (an online journal).

### **ALEXIS GARCIA**

Alexis is a contributing editor for *Pomona Valley Review*. Her short fiction have previously been published in *Left Coast Review* and *Chiron Review*. When she is not busy studying for her MA in English, she enjoys creative writing and filming, gardening, and indoor rock climbing.

### **VANESSA GARCIA**

Vanessa is a junior transfer student from Citrus College currently pursuing a degree in English Literature at Cal Poly Pomona. Alongside her studies, she is also interested

in pursuing a career as an author. She enjoys writing poetry, short stories, and young adult fiction. One of her poems was a finalist at the Citrus College annual poetry contest hosted by the English Society there. You are most likely to find her hiding away in her room, listening to anything from Bob Dylan to Fugazi, and typing away furiously on her laptop - or watching Netflix.

#### **ART IKEHARA**

Art Ikehara has been a student at Cal Poly Pomona for four years, recently switching his major to English. He has always loved to read and write and is currently focused on work and discovering himself in his new major.

#### **LINDA IMBLER**

When not writing, Linda Imbler is an avid reader, classical guitar player, and a practitioner of both Yoga and Tai Chi. In addition, she helps her husband, a Luthier, build acoustic guitars. Linda enjoys her 200-gallon saltwater reef tank wherein resides her almost 20-year-old yellow tang. A retired teacher, who began writing in earnest in January, 2015, Linda believes that poetry truly adds to the beauty of the world. Much of this beauty she feels can be found in the night sky and, on warm nights, her telescope serves as inspiration for this belief. Examples of Linda's poetry and a listing of publications can be found at [lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com](http://lindaspotryblog.blogspot.com).

#### **JAMES CROAL JACKSON**

James Croal Jackson (he/him) has a chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and poems in *MORIA*, *off the coast*, and *Oyster River Pages*. He edits *The Mantle*. Currently, he works in the film industry in Pittsburgh, PA. [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com).

#### **DIRK JAMES**

Dirk James lives in San Leandro, California where he worships Jehovah God and his son, Jesus Christ. Dirk loves putting the finishing touches to a poem or a story, relaxing with his Beautiful Wife/Muse while sipping Pina coladas and listening to jazz music on the box. He has been published in many literary journals.

#### **MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON**

Michael Lee Johnson lived 10 years in Canada during the Vietnam era and is a dual citizen of the United States and Canada. Today he is a poet, freelance writer, amateur photographer, and small business owner in Itasca, Illinois. Mr. Johnson published in more than 1042 new publications, his poems have appeared in 38 countries, he edits, publishes 10 poetry sites. Michael Lee Johnson, has been nominated for 2 Pushcart Prize awards poetry 2015/1 Best of the Net 2016/2 Best of the Net 2017, 1 Best of the Net 2018. 178 poetry videos are now on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNQ4oRHf8Zz0TOc-9zr3Q9w>. Editor-in-chief

poetry anthology, *Moonlight Dreamers of Yellow Haze*:

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1530456762>;  
editor-in-chief poetry anthology, *Dandelion in a Vase of Roses* available here

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1545352089>.  
Editor-in-chief *Warriors with Wings: the Best in Contemporary Poetry*,  
<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1722130717>.

### **SOPHIE JONSSON**

Sophie Jonsson is a first-year student at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota, Sophie is currently pursuing a degree in English. She enjoys reading and writing stories about familial relationships and dynamics, coming of age, nature, and journeys of self-discovery.

### **JANE ROSENBERG LAFORGE**

Jane Rosenberg LaForge is a poet from New York that has submitted her work to *Pomona Valley Review's* 13<sup>th</sup> edition.

### **RHEYA LEACK**

Rheya Leack is just beginning her lifelong artistic venture. Although she works with numerous mediums, the simplicity and diversity of adding dyes of primary colors to water produces abstract art that often maps onto the Hubble telescope images. In the minimalist tradition, she attempts to reflect mysteries on the cosmic scale with a few drops of dye.

### **RYAN LEACK**

Ryan David Leack teaches in the Writing Program at the University of Southern California, and received his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Riverside, where he studied the productive intersections between rhetoric, quantum mechanics, philosophy, composition, and poetry. Ryan's creative work has appeared in *Pif*, *Westwind*, *RipRap*, *Contemporary World Literature*, *Strong Verse*, and *Pomona Valley Review*, where he served as Editor-in-Chief for seven years. He leads a quiet life in Los Angeles seeking Thoreauvian tranquility and harmony with words.

### **ALEX LENNERT**

Alex Lennert is a writer and English professor living in a smog bank. Lately, he has been turning over rocks to try to find poetry that can resonate in the anechoic caverns of the anthropocene. This endeavor has been met with mixed results.

### **HELENA MAHDESSIAN**

Helena Mahdessian is an eighteen-year-old community college student working on attaining her degree in Creative Writing. She is currently attending Antelope Valley College, and she hopes to have transferred by fall of 2020. Her goal is to be an ESL teacher and a writer. She finds inspiration for her work in the rich nature around her, everyday conversations, and in her heritage.



### **D.S. MAOLALAI**

D.S. Maolalai is a poet from Ireland who has been writing and publishing poetry for almost 10 years. His first collection, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden*, was published in 2016 by the Encircle Press, with "Sad Havoc Among the Birds" forthcoming from Turas Press in 2019. He has been nominated for Best of the Web and twice for the Pushcart Prize.

### **ADRIAN S. MARISCAL**

My name is Adrian S. Mariscal and I have been writing poetry for 15 years while incarcerated. I write about my experiences in the prison system and my growth as a human being, my reflections on my past mistakes and the impact of isolation. I have four poetry manuscripts I've written, and I'm working on the fifth right now. Some of my poems can be found in *My Brother's Keeper*, which is an anthology of writings from all the men here in Pelican Bay.

### **MARGO MCCALL**

Margo McCall's short stories have been featured in *Pacific Review*, *Heliotrope*, *In\*tense*, *Sunspinner*, *Sidewalks*, *Rockhurst Review*, *Toasted Cheese*, and other journals. Her nonfiction has appeared in *Herizons*, *Lifeboat: A Journal of Memoir*, *Pilgrimage*, *the Los Angeles Times* and other publications. She is a graduate of the M.A. creative writing program at California State University Northridge. She lives in the port town of Long Beach, California. For more

information, visit

<http://www.margomccall.com>. You can follow her on Twitter at @wordly1.

### **WILLIAM MATTHEW MCCARTER**

My name is William Matthew McCarter and I am a writer and college professor from Southeast Missouri. I have published some fiction in *The Dead Mule School* and *Midwestern Gothic*. I was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and the Studs Terkel Award. I have published two academic books: *Homo Redneckus: On Being Not Qwhite in America* and *Trash Told Tales, An Anthology of White Trash Literature*.

### **JEN MCCLELLAN**

Jen is a professional rock-paper-sizzorer 27 years and counting. After graduating from kindergarten, she realized all Western recognition and ceremonies are scams.

### **ANDREA MORALES**

Andrea Morales is a California writer who has submitted a short story to *Pomona Valley Review's* 13<sup>th</sup> edition.

### **DANIEL ORONA**

Daniel Orona is a former Cerritos College student who is transferring to Cal. He cycled through every interest under the sun, from dental hygiene to criminal justice. He stumbled into literature and creative writing and this is where things took off – and by things he means the rapid decline in

funds to support his ferociously increasing book spending habits. His fiancée seeks assistance.

### **JOSE PEREYRA**

Mr. Jose Pereyra is a current student at College of the Redwoods, located in the far-northern region of California, through the Pelican Bay Scholars Program. He is an accomplished student who writes poetry as he works towards an AA Liberal Degree in Behavioral and Social Sciences.

### **RICHARD KING PERKINS II**

Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He lives in Crystal Lake, IL, USA with his wife, Vickie and daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart, Best of the Net and Best of the Web nominee whose work has appeared in more than fifteen hundred publications.

### **FABRICE POUSSIN**

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *the San Pedro River Review* as well as other publications.

### **ATICHA PUTTIRAK**

Aticha Puttirak is an artist based out of Bangkok, Thailand. Aticha's illustrations express the dynamic of male and female sexuality as well as the influence of modern love and manipulation in relationships. My inspiration comes from what I see and stories shared from all my friends and everyone I know — anything can be my inspiration: my disagreement, rebellion my amusement and twisted sense of humour which I believe is an art of living a miserable life happily.

### **XIAOKE REN**

Xiaoke Ren was born and raised in China and came to the United States at the age of 17. Her lifelong interest in art and creative expression took the form of studying fashion design at California State University, Long Beach. Since then she has expanded her creativity in the direction of photography. She endeavors to capture emerging ephemera in rare, singular moments.

### **AMANDA RIGGLE**

Amanda Riggle is the current Editor-in-Chief of *Pomona Valley Review*. Her work mostly focuses on the personal and the political, often finding a bridge between both worlds. She has been published in previous editions of *Pomona Valley Review* before joining the editorial team as well as political journals like *The Socialist*. When she's not running an arts journal, she's studying for her PhD in

English at the University of California, Riverside.

### **IVAN RIOS**

Ivan Rios is the lead editor for *Pomona Valley Review*. They graduated from Cal Poly Pomona with a Masters in Rhetoric Composition. *The Violent Femme* is a short novel that Ivan is working on, and one of the chapters is included in this issue of PVR. On their free time, Ivan enjoys playing competitive pinball, Super Smash Brothers Ultimate, and bowling.

### **MARCO A. RIOS**

Mr. Marco A. Rios is a current student at College of the Redwoods (CR), located in the far-northern region of California, through the Pelican Bay Scholars Program. He is an accomplished student who writes fiction and non-fiction works as he works towards an AA Liberal Degree in Behavioral and Social Sciences.

### **GERARD SARNAT**

Gerard Sarnat is a physician who's built and staffed homeless clinics as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. He won the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize and has been nominated for Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry is published in academic-related journals including Stanford, Oberlin, Brown, Columbia, Virginia Commonwealth, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Wesleyan and the University of Edinburgh. Gerry's writing has

also appeared widely including recently in such U.S. outlets as Gargoyle, Main Street Rag, New Delta Review, MiPOesias, Margie, Blue Mountain Review, Danse Macabre, Canary Eco, Military Experience and the Arts, Cliterature, Brooklyn Review, San Francisco Magazine, The Los Angeles Review and The New York Times. Pieces have also been accepted by Australian, Bangladeshi, Hong Kong, Singaporean, Canadian, English, French, German, Indian, Irish, Israeli and Swedish among other international publications. KADDISH FOR THE COUNTRY was selected for pamphlet distribution nationwide on Inauguration Day 2016. Amber Of Memory was chosen for the 50th Harvard reunion Dylan symposium. He's also authored the collections Homeless Chronicles (2010), Disputes (2012), 17s (2014), and Melting the Ice King (2016). Gerry's been married since 1969, with three kids plus four grandkids (and more on the way).  
[gerardsarnat.com](http://gerardsarnat.com)

### **FABIO SASSI**

Fabio Sassi makes photos and acrylics using what is considered to have no worth by the mainstream. Fabio lives and works in Bologna, Italy. His work can be viewed at [www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com](http://www.fabiosassi.foliohd.com).

### **TABASSUM TAHMINA SHAGUFTA HUSSEIN**

Tabassum Tahmina Shagufta Hussein from Dhaka, Bangladesh is MA holder in British&American Literature. Now a Free-lance writer doing second Masters in

Human Resources. Her Poems were published in *Our Poetry Archive Anthology "Spiritual Poetry Beyond Borders"*, *The Pangolin Review*, *A Poem A Day @poetrypotion*, *Rose Quartz Magazine*, *Ink*, and *Sword Magazine*. Aestheticism is the essence of her existence. She can be reached at [tts.hussein@gmail.com](mailto:tts.hussein@gmail.com).

### **JOSEPH SMITH**

Joseph is an undergraduate history student at SFSU. A student of history, philosophy, and theology, he uses creative writing to express his philosophical musings.

### **ROBERT C. STEWART**

Robert Stewart is a contributing editor in *Pomona Valley Review*. He has received his BA in English from the University of California, Riverside, and is currently working on his MA at Cal Poly Pomona. A lifelong reader, Robert has always appreciated other people's art but had not focused on creating his own: until now. Besides reading, he is a self-proclaimed cinephile and Lakers superfan.

### **EDWARD SUPRANOWICZ**

Edward Supranowicz has a background in painting and printmaking. He has also been published as a poet.

### **FRANCESCA TERZANO**

Francesca Terzano grew up in the Inland Empire. She loves cats, English, Star Wars, and poems about death.

### **MANDY THIBERT**

My name is Mandy Thibert and I am a 22 year old artist nearing completion of my BFA in Fine Art from the Laguna College of Art and Design. I chose to focus on artwork with an eerie feel to it to communicate my feelings about life and some of the feelings therein.

### **JESSE TOVAR**

Jesse Tovar achieved his Bachelor's degree in English literature at Cal State Dominguez Hills in the Spring of 2018. He was a Contributing Writer for DH's English Department Newsletter and Co-Main Editor for *Enjambed Multiliterary Magazine* in 2018. In addition, he created *Abstract Books* for their English Department's annual English Language Conference (E.L.C.). His other work is also featured on *The Pen Name Newspaper* where he is known as Thomas Till. He is also a current English Masters student at Cal Poly Pomona where he occasionally enjoys taking Foothill Transit to explore Pomona Valley.

### **RUBIA VAN ROODESLAAR**

Rubia started her journey as an artist by working as a Jewelry Designer in Brazil. She earned a B.A. in Architecture from UC Berkeley and specialized in Fine Art at California State University and at the Glassell School of Art in Houston, Texas. Her artwork has been exhibited at juried shows across the United States. She is currently earning a MBA at CSU Bakersfield.

## **SAUL VILLEGAS**

Saul Villegas grew in a rural town in Avenal, California. He studied his artistic amateur style in school being oblivious to other subjects. Since his early years he found art fascinating and devoted his entire time to sketching, drawing, and painting. When asked, what is your style of painting? Saul replied, "I feel art is an ongoing study of different styles, cultures, and conception. I don't like to become labeled as any specific type of artist; other than to be considered one. Life is too short to settle down in one specific style. The World is full of surprises and everyone and everything you see makes an impression on you as an artist, therefore always making you morph. Showing my view in whatever style I wish to Interpret it gives me the freedom as an artist. Being able to connect and communicate with different mind sets is and always will be my ultimate goal as an artist." His combined skill of the traditional application of art in painting and in graphic design have been the vehicle in which Saul's creative versatility has demonstrated his intense imagery in his portfolio called MODERNO. He has utilized the label for his entire works to advocate his Latino roots

through the visual arts and philanthropy. He has attended College of the Sequoias and is studying to receive his degree in both art and graphic design. His goal is to share his artistic knowledge and continue on to a higher education. His most recent endeavor is in the acceptance into the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) where he studied painting in 2014-15. He will be attending UC Santa Cruz where he will continue his painting studies.

## **NICHOLAS WALRATH**

Nicholas Walrath is an artist, activist, and researcher residing in San Bernardino County, CA.

## **BRIAN YANG**

Brian Yang is an accomplished writer and poet. Earlier this year (2019), one of Mr. Yang's works was selected as a winning essay for The Square One Project's Roundtable on the Future of Justice Policy writing competition. Currently, he is student at College of the Redwoods, located in the far-northern region of California, through the Pelican Bay Scholars Program.



Thank you for reading