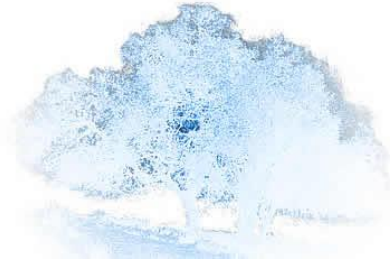


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POMONA VALLEY REVIEW



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Dear Reader

This issue truly comes as a testament to the artistic growth in our area and within our creative communities. We could not have forseen a more diverse wealth of submissions to consider, and thank you once again for your enduring support and interest. At the risk of sounding unduly pretentious, and risk it we will, we have been marveling at your work over the last several months as submissions trickled in. As the deadline approached, we were nearly inundated especially with the flood of artwork submissions that continually impressed us.

We hope we have given you a balanced, harmonious landscape of the creative arts that will soothe your artistic palate and ameliorate your woes as you contend with life's sometimes monolithic challenges. Indeed, part of the joy of *PVR* for us has been finding work that calms our hearts and spirits, and facilitates our transcendental connection with the firmament, the cosmos, or whatever you'd like to call it, and we hope, as you read this issue, that you will connect with whatever feels intrinsic to you.

Throughout our reading of your work, we have continued to ponder the experiential significance of poetics and the arts in an age that seems to be an extension of rationalism and enlightenment ideology. One goal of ours, then, is to encourage readers, as we encourage ourselves, to reconnect with the romantic spirit, the intuition that continues to foster some of the most creative endeavors. Your work proves this and more.

We thank you again for this plethora of material that speaks to the evolution of our artistic cultures across the world, and we promise that, in the future, *PVR* will seek to bring you a moment of truth and beauty, as Aldous Huxley might say, amongst a society which in moments can be complacent in comfort and wellbeing. We only hope that you will stay with us in the coming years, disseminate creative thoughts, and evolve your perspectives of reality so that you can, in turn, evolve our own.

Thank You,
PVR

WHAT A POEM MEANS

On Monday, the poem means don't judge a book by its cover, don't be racist, sexist, rude. Don't be preachy.

On Tuesday the poem is all about Carpe Diem, insisting you are going to die so you might as well enjoy yourself, but on Wednesday it urges you to get to work because you are going to die, so you don't have much time to get anything done (although sometimes it gets those days in reverse, so you need to check when you wake up).

On Thursday the poem means go hug your daughter in her sleep because you can, because she's still there, still small, still safe in this dangerous world where we grow too quickly and then die. Go hug her because she won't push you away yet, because you don't do it enough, because there are people in this world you don't hug enough, and, although they're not around, your daughter is.

On Friday the poem is about its own beauty, knowing it looks good, that those final revisions have cut out the last bit of flab and made it taut, strong, confident, even hot, goddamn hot.

On Saturday the poem has much to say about friendship, time, the smell of cut grass, the sound of sprinklers, the taste of a sandwich made by someone doing their best to take care of you, and something that is there on the tip of the tongue, the top of the stairway, the corner of the eye, but that disappears when you try to focus on it.

On Sunday, the poem is mute, perhaps resting, perhaps bored, perhaps meaning something only to itself.

~ Joe Mills



“Forgotten...” ~ Anakaren Munoz

SNOW DAYS ALWAYS ADD TO THE END OF THE YEAR

She says on the last day of the universe
everything will be on sale, and he says,
All must go because all has gone.
They say the last day will come
sooner than you think. Maybe, you say,
it already has. Maybe the last day
has come and gone and we've been
so busy getting kids ready for school,
preparing for meetings at work,
trying new recipes, clicking through
link after link on the web, the last day
went by without us noticing. Maybe,
I say, the last day is today and tomorrow
and then whatever day comes next.
Maybe, everyone says, as they look
through their calendars. Maybe.

~ Joe Mills

NOBODY'S GLORY

"Gas! Gas! Quickly, get 'em on, lads!"

Frozen in place, Private William Mills watched as dull green tendrils began to creep over the muddy ramparts. They crept over the edge steadily before sinking and pooling above the puddles of water and wooden planks at the base of the trench.

As a child, William had always been a dreamer. Countless hours of his youth were spent lying in the fields surrounding his father's farm, staring up at the heavens and imagining himself a hawk, screaming across the sky, piercing the soft surfaces of the clouds.

It was his favorite dream. William was king of the skies.

Somewhere in the passage of the years, the dream had worn out and faded. Now he was a nobody. Like the thousands of nobodies surrounding him, he stood in a bog of shrapnel, blood and death at the whim of some somebodies flexing their power from their palaces of privilege far away from Flanders. They were the types of men who never dreamed of touching clouds.

Now the very substance of his dreams had come to William, but they were not the soft, beckoning shapes of his childhood. They were nightmarish, man-made and sinister. They threatened to swallow him whole in their insatiable hunger.

A rough hand clasped William's shoulder from behind and spun him around, putting him face to face with a grotesque.

"Get your mask on now!" it screamed at him in a muffled voice.

William took the gas mask hanging from his belt and brought it up over his head. Once he secured the straps in the back he put his helmet back on. The sound of his own breathing filled his ears. They came fast and deep.

"Two minutes!"

The call was echoed all along the trench. William's breaths increased as fear gripped his bowels. His face grew hot and the lenses of the mask began to fog up around the edges. Numb from the effects of the gas, his hands clenched his rifle tight as if to ensure it was still there. He stared at the blade attached to the end of the muzzle. The drill instructor had told him to stab it into the Hun without mercy or remorse.

"Thirty seconds! God go with you, men!"

William could hardly see a thing. The world was enveloped in the mist. A shell landed just outside the trench, its impact sent clods of soil and stones raining down upon him.

A lone whistle sounded. It was soon echoed by others. The nobodies surrounding William surged forward to the ladders. Caught in the tide, he was out of the trench and walking along the shattered landscape. Even through the mask the stench of decayed remains assaulted his nose. Passing by a large crater, William could see the remains of a horse. Even nature was not safe from the conflict. Rotten meat clung to exposed bone and the rats had their feast.

A sharp whizz over his right shoulder caused William to flinch. Behind him a short scream gave way to a thud of lifeless flesh striking mud. The sergeant had warned them that they could be shot at by the occasional sniper. It was nothing to worry about. The barrage would pave the way.

Another round of shells began to fall. They howled, assaulting the ears and piercing the brain with unseen daggers before striking the earth. William struggled to stay upright as the ground shook and falling rocks struck his helmet.

The sound of hammering filled the air. It was as if hundreds of blacksmiths had suddenly set to work with rapid, steady strikes beating down upon their anvils.

William watched as the men at the front began to pitch forward into the ground. Some convulsed a moment, like fish out of water, before finally lying still. The men behind them soon joined their fallen comrades, covering their bodies with their own. The cycle continued on and on. The hammering pounded and the nobodies kept falling.

An unseen fist struck William in the chest. He felt three hot blows rob him of his breath, forcing him to drop his rifle and drop to his knees. The breathing inside his mask grew ragged. He coughed, sending a warm spray of blood inside his mask. Crumpling to the ground, he rolled onto his back. William stared up at the skies. There wasn't a cloud in sight, just the sound of screams from falling shells and dying nobodies.

~ Alex Brondarbit

YOUR WORDS

Oh my heart, there is harmony in each word
Whether you speak the syllables distinctly, whether they pour over grey
stones in a flurry of spring melt
I am hypnotized by the sound
Whether steady droning, clanging chimes, or rippling bells
Whatever sound you choose wends its way past corpuscles and muscles
Smooth and easy, charming and jarring
To action, tension, or easing of nerve
Is it you or some fairy tale memory that lulls me to sleep?
Whether restful or fitful, soft or rough
The road toward you is sometimes smooth, sometimes broken or charred
Ancient paths and shiny highways
But always, always do you come to meet me
Always do you hold out your arms to welcome me, to find me home
Whether palace or jagged cave
Always do I find you, newly bathed and fragrant, or roughly pulled along
Whether lost or found or shaken
Always, always do I find you
From your arms sprout leaves and branches
From your heart come seeds and fruits
Were I dreaming I could wake
Were I reading I could close the book
Were I gazing I could bring into sharp focus the same you
Are you here or are you fire?
Are you earth to bury me, or water to pour over me?

~ Salma Ruth Bratt

WHAT IS MEANT TO BE HELD

What loosed upon the wind?
We are all about this gripping and loosening, bending things to us and
pushing them far
God that I could find myself inside a balancing wheel
A firmer ground or a height of two inches more
God that I could be at one with something and know comfort
Rest at peace without startle-weary sleep
That I could feel myself rise from my ash of mistakes and broken promises
See myself from above
Stop reaching crying yearning whining drowning
Take off the heavy layers of fear and weary others
Live, finally, and breathe free

~ Salma Ruth Bratt



"Futures" ~ Jerry Adams

THE SHAMAN'S EYE

The chest wound was deep and Ben Gordon knew he had to stop the bleeding and stop it soon, or he'd lose yet another patient. After all he had been through in the past week with all the wounded and displaced refugees pouring in from the region north, the delayed shipment of medical supplies, and their water source going foul, losing another patient now would be more than he could bear.

The boy, barely sixteen, lay beneath a hanging fluorescent light. Beads of perspiration covered his dark black skin. The wound, caused by a single slash of a machete, split his chest diagonally from above his left breast down nearly to his waist.

"You are not going to die," Gordon said. *You are too young to die.*

The boy's eyes flashed up at Gordon then he turned his head away and fixed a gaze on the southeast corner of the tent. Squatted there was the old medicine man. He sat on a woven, reed mat with colorful ceremonial beads draped down from his neck, and he held a long spear upright in his hand.

"I have seen him before," Gordon said.

Kairubu, Gordon's young Tanzanian aide, looked over at the old medicine man. "Yes," he replied.

"He's been here several times this week," Gordon said.

"Yes."

"Why does he come?"

"He come for the dead."

Gordon looked up at Kairubu. "What?"

"He come for the dead."

"Is he an undertaker or something?"

"No, he is *Malaika*."

"*Malaika*?"

"Yes."

"A witchdoctor?"

"He takes the dead to the *High Place*."

The boy began to shake. His skin looked pale and clammy.

"He's going into shock," Gordon said.

Kairubu pulled the makeshift I.V. stand alongside the stainless-steel operating table and opened the flow-bag wide. He then went to the end of the table and lifted the boy's legs to his shoulders. Gordon, meanwhile, grabbed a handful of gauze and held it to the wound, but blood immediately oozed up through it.

"He's hemorrhaging again," Gordon said. He tossed the gauze to the floor, grabbed a fresh handful, and pushed it deeper into the wound. "Let his legs down."

Kairubu promptly complied.

“Hold this!” Gordon said, grabbing Kairubu’s hand and placing it against the gauze. Gordon took a syringe, drew it full of medicine, and injected it into the boy’s arm. He held the boy steady waiting for the medicine to take effect. He could see the blood again oozing up through the gauze.

What’s happened to your magic? he asked himself. What’s become of your science to make people live? To repair what men have done?

Gordon knew, in a land where it was more economical to use machetes for killing than bullets, it was easy to lose faith. Surrounded by the daily carnage of man’s brutality against itself, and despite the *World’s* efforts to stop it, it seemed he and the other Red Cross volunteers were all destined to fail.

The boy's eyes remained fixed on the old medicine man.

Gordon glanced over at the old man.

“Is he kin?” he asked Kairubu.

“No.”

“He's upsetting the boy,” Gordon said.

“The boy would want him here.”

“Why?”

“He is special.”

“Is he kin?”

“I said no.”

“Then, he must leave.”

“But Mr. Ben, you don’t understand. It is a good thing he is here. It is African tradition.”

“You’re not convincing me, Kairubu.”

“He will ensure the boy’s safe passage to the spirit world.”

“What?”

Passage? Gordon thought. *What passage?* “Wait a minute... you aren’t saying...?” Gordon stopped, turned to Kairubu, and said firmly, “Unless he’s the boy’s grandfather or something, he must leave.”

“I tell you Mr. Ben. It is a good thing. The boy would want him here.”

“Sorry Kairubu, this boy isn't going to die, not today, not on my table. Tell the old man he must leave.”

“But Mr. Ben...”

“Get him out of here please, now!”

Kairubu’s white eyes flashed from his jet-black skin. He reluctantly motioned to the soldier at the doorway and said in Swahili, “*Chukua mzee nje. Toke!*” The soldier took the old man by his long, slender arm, and escorted him to the exit.

Gordon watched as the old man moved slowly toward the door, and as he did, the old man turned and looked back at Gordon and for the first time Gordon saw clearly his face. He had dark, sullen eyes which were sunken in his head. They appeared as black canker sores from beneath snow-white brows.

It dawned on Gordon that old man's presence coincided with the deaths of many of his patients. In the past week alone there was the old woman on Tuesday, the little girl with dysentery, and the man who had lost his arm to a machete. Each time the old man had been sitting there, like he was now, a buzzard waiting for the carrion.

As the tent flap closed behind him, Gordon looked over at Kairubu. "Is that you're *Dark Africa*?"

Kairubu did not answer.

Gordon slowly lifted the gauze from the boy's chest. The wound had stabilized. The blood had begun to coagulate. Gordon sighed.

"We're getting it, Kairubu," he said. He dabbed the wound with the gaze. "Yeah, that's the way it should look."

Kairubu broke a little smile.

"You are going to be fine," Gordon said, wiping the young man's forehead with his free hand.

The wound was deep, down to the sternum, and the tissue surrounding the lesion was blue and swollen. But it was a clean cut, as if it had been done with a surgical knife, which would make it easier to close. He took a nylon string from the tray, threaded it through a needle, and began to suture the wound. *It is time to make your magic*, Gordon thought, *to use your hands to repair what man has done.*

"He does not come for everyone," Kairubu said, returning to the old medicine man, "only for special people, those with a pure heart. A heart must be pure."

"Yes?" Gordon replied, sarcastically. "It must be real special to be dead with a pure heart."

"It is African custom," Kairubu assured. "It is part of life."

"Okay, I'm sorry."

"He takes them to *Peponi*," Kairubu said, "a place way up in the mountain. It is a beautiful place, most beautiful place in all of Africa. You can see far out across the Savannah, and all the animal life is one and the same, and all the places you wish you could be are there, all in one. It is like your heaven, the dwelling place of God."

Gordon looked skeptical. Being a man of medicine, trained in science, he had always been cynical about such things. He was not one to believe in something that was not supported by science, but he did not want to offend his young friend. "Is it like Arusha?" he asked.

"Is Arusha a place of peace and beauty for you?"

"Yes. It is my favorite spot in Africa."

"Then it is like Arusha. It is beauty in its purest form; beauty of the natures, and beauty of the souls."

Gordon smiled. He knew of this place; a place high in the mountains where his mind could go to rest; to find asylum from the horrors of this world. It was a place he wished he could be now. And now, as he sutured up the wound, he recalled a time he was in Arusha, especially beautiful after the long rains of March and April, although it was September now and the rains had not come yet. The rains are good, he thought. They wash away all the blood and horror of war; they cleanse what man has done and bring back to Africa what it has always been, a beautiful place of natural bounty.

"What did you call him?" Gordon asked.

"*Malaika.*"

"*Malaika?*"

"Yes. It means *Special One*, touched by the spirit of the animal world, like an angel is touched by your God. It is a great honor if he comes for you."

"Yesterday they were no one. Today they are the honored dead," Gordon recited softly.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"We all die. We all do not go to *Peponi*."

"If you don't mind, I think I'll pass on this *Peponi* for now."

"*Peponi*... heaven... no different, Mr. Ben, just called different things."

"Heaven waits only for those who believe," Gordon said. He looked down at the boy. "He believes, especially now," he said. "Here, hold this."

Kairubu held the gauze against the boy's chest as Gordon tied off the last suture.

It finished nicely, Gordon thought. The sutures were well-spaced and pulled tightly together against the skin. He cleaned the wound with an antiseptic.

"You are well!" Gordon announced triumphantly to the boy.

As he smiled at the boy and then turned his head to Kairubu, a gush of wind outside whipped the roof canvas like a blanket. All those inside the surgical tent glanced skyward as if waiting for something. The militia had set up eighty-millimeter *L'égers* in the low-lying hills to the south and had been periodically bombarding the camp.

"Look at us!" Gordon said. "We've all lost our nerve."

He dropped his eyes back down to the boy. The boy looked relieved and alive again, and his skin was back to its beautiful natural color.

With Kairubu's assistance, Gordon helped the boy upright. Together they dressed the wound with gauze and wrapped it completely with bandages around his chest.

"He will need plenty of rest and plenty of water," Gordon said. "Water is best, but hot tea with lemon juice is good too. The antibiotics must continue all night." Gordon looked down at his youthful patient and smiled. "Take special care of this one for me. I will see him first thing in the morning."

Gordon pulled the plastic surgical gloves from his hands and laid them on the tray. He grabbed Kairubu by the shoulders and shook him playfully. "You did well, Kairubu. We did well! I'll be in my tent if you need me."

Gordon exited the surgical tent still wearing his blood-covered apron. He was surprised to see the old medicine man seated across the dirt corridor, there in the long shadows of an old wooden cart with his legs crossed and his long spear held tall beside him. The cart, drawn by a single mule and oddly sporting car tires, was empty now, except for a single throw rug which lay flattened in the bed.

Gordon took off his apron and rolled it into a ball. "Sorry to disappoint you old man," he said.

He glanced down the long corridor between the tents. There were thousands of white canvas tents, and smoke coming from many makeshift, cooking fires, and there were children playing, kicking up the African dust into the late afternoon light. The sun's rays caught the dust and with the silhouetted children dancing beneath it, for a moment Gordon saw beauty. It was good to see beauty again, Gordon thought.

Just beyond, in the hills below the fading light, he knew, the genocide continued under the hands of the *Hutu* militia.

As Gordon turned south heading toward his tent and passed the medicine man, he nodded and offered a smile. The old medicine man's face was too dark to reveal an expression, but Gordon noticed the crown of his snow-white head turned and followed him.

Sorry to keep you waiting old man... Gordon thought, waiting for nothing. Today was not your day. But don't worry old man. If it is the dead you seek, there'll be plenty others for you.

Gordon lay back on his cot staring at the canvas-ceiling. At a quarter to six, the evening attendant came to spray the tent with mosquito repellent. When he finished, Gordon asked him to bring some beer. In several minutes the attendant returned with a bucket of river-drawn water with three bottles of *Tusker* beer in it. Gordon thanked the boy, tipped him the customary Swiss franc, and sent him on his way. He popped off the top of one of the beer bottles and took a long drink from it.

The smell of the insect repellent was still strong, so Gordon began opening the tent windows, rolling up the canvas of each and tying it off. When he reached the door, he pulled back the canvas and was startled to see the old Shaman's cart parked across the way. Squatted in the shadow was the old medicine man.

"Sorry to deny you a corpse today, old one," he said. "I hope you are not upset by it."

It was not I who denied you. It was the power of a surgical knife. You may know death better than I, you may not despise it as I do, but it is I who holds the knowledge of life... the science of reparation.

Gordon shook his head, fastened the outside clasps, and retreated back to his cot.

It was true! he thought. The old medicine man had been there in the surgical room each time a patient had died that week. But today he was denied.

He lay down, took a long swig from the *Tusker* beer, and recommenced his long, thoughtful gaze at the ceiling. He considered now, how it was that he came to this wretched place, this indentation in the earth where two rivers met where the Red Cross had pitched the first of three refugee camps closest to the war. Everyone coming out of Rwanda was a refugee in the strictest sense of the word, starved and wounded, desperate for shelter and food, and medical care, some missing limbs, and if they could walk, carrying all they had in their arms.

Gordon retraced his steps as though he were telling the story to someone. He remembered how there had been plenty of pilots at the hotel in Nyanza. Wherever there are U.N. people there are always plenty pilots around looking to make a dollar. But none of them were willing to fly them to Ngara, even though a flight had been pre-arranged with the Red Cross. That should have been a sign in and of itself. Still, after an afternoon of searching, their team leader tracked one down, and because the money was good, they had been guaranteed a flight to their distant outpost. The following morning, they were led to a dirt tarmac where they all squeezed into a small, Spanish-built CASA. They made themselves comfortable among crates of medicine and food destined for the refugee camp. The ninety-minute flight was uneventful, except for the trip over Lake Victoria. From the altitude of the plane, they could see tiny islands floating in the turquoise water. It was shocking to all of them when they realized they were bloated bodies floating in the water, turned white by the sun.

They landed on a dusty runway surrounded by a tent city that stretched for many miles. A fleet of Land Rovers arrived to collect their supplies and take them to the U.N. headquarters. The place was a conglomerate of relief organizations – the Red Cross, MSF, CARE, and the Red Crescent.

In the morning they headed out for the border, an hour to travel fifteen miles. They felt like salmon swimming upstream against a ferocious river. There were endless lines of Hutus and Tutsi, people carrying the last of their possessions; even children carried bundles. Old men carried firewood, now a valuable commodity. It took them all day to reach the Tanzanian border post on the eastern shore of the Kagera River. There was no longer a need for visas - there was not much of a government left. They were waved across with little fuss. They crossed the bridge high above the Kagera River. He could see bodies floating downstream. It is strange, he thought, having just a day earlier been in a St. Louis airport, and now seeing bodies in a river. There were clusters of

children, newly orphaned and wandering around with blank expressions of their faces. He remembered being stopped by armed members of the RPF - *Rwandese Patriotic Front*. They were questioned and identified, and allowed to pass. Their Tutsi driver didn't fare as well. The guards treated him like a deserter and question his ownership of the vehicle. He was escorted away to a nearby building and never seen again.

There was a group of four European Red Cross volunteers stranded on the roadside. The tires on their vehicle had been blown when they had run over sabotage spikes which had been laid across the road. They had continued on until their jeep had gone down to its undercarriage in the mud. They loaded as much of their medical supplies as they could into their Land Rover, and they had room for only one; a Swiss nurse who sat herself in the back among the supply crates, her knees cramped to her chest.

Finally they reach this godforsaken outpost; this place where streams of broken humanity poured down into a hollow in the earth. It had been five months now that he had been there, five months too long.

Now in his mind Gordon saw the children playing outside the surgical tent. He saw the long columns of white dust they kicked up and how the afternoon sunlight filtered through it so nicely.

It is good to see the beauty again, he thought. It is good to find an island of beauty in a sea of war. There were times he thought he'd never see beauty again.

He took another drink from his beer and rested his head back on the pillow.

It came suddenly, a flap of wind against the tent canvas, a loud gusting sound, followed by that awful screeching. In his mind he knew what was coming, but he lay there hopelessly paralyzed. There was nothing he could do. The sound of splitting air was followed by a thunderous roar and a blinding flash. Then there was nothingness.

When he awoke, he found himself in the center of the rubble of what remained of his tent. The air was full of dust and smoke, and the smell of sulfur. His legs had no feeling, nor did his torso. He was not sure if he still had legs, or if they had been blown off by the blast.

I must check my body, completely as a physician would check it, he thought.

But his hands would not move.

There was a silhouette above him. He realized he was not alone. Slowly a face came into focus.

Kneeling above him was the old medicine man.

Gordon tried to move, restlessly, but could not manage even the slightest of movement. Fighting it, finally giving in, he eased back and looked up into the deep, dark canker-sores which were the old man's eyes. In the second past,

which seemed to be a millennium, he saw into another world. Within the old man's eyes was the accumulation of all the colors of the earth; of all the magnificent spirits of animal kingdom; and of all the benevolence of mankind.

Gordon's mind faded back into darkness.

The next thing he knew he was inside the back of a Land Rover racing swiftly across the Savannah. He could feel the ground rolling swiftly past beneath him. He was so thankful that he was alive and had survived the blast. *But where was it that they were taking him?*

He lifted himself up and looked out across the countryside. He was amazed to see the beautiful green hills of Arusha. It was strange, he thought, to see the grass so green in September. *The rains must have come early.*

He lowered his head back down in the bed and pictured the lovely green hills of Arusha rolling past. It was good to see beauty again, he thought. At last, he had returned to his favorite place in Africa, to Arusha.

~ Frank Scozzari



"The Medicine Man" ~ Kanayochukwu Nworji Sr.

B STREET AND ALLEGANY

Squatting on the concrete stoop
In front of the drag queen's apartment
She didn't have a cigarette for me

The boys on the corner hustling
Redi rock Redi rock Redi rock
The slim one with the skullcap
Signals for me to hurry up

All the while scanning the ally
Using the eyes in the back of his head
You better move it white girl

~ Emily Hostutler

FRAMES

Framed by multiple stained beige pillows,
the pale boy squats and directs a bronzed acrylic baby doll
with a pink bonnet, to read his book.
She understands him completely.
Yes, Yes, find the bone, it must be over here somewhere.
Her movable eyes,
lashes curled under, stuck in the lids
drift to the part of the illustration
where the hidden artifact is located.
“Gloo Gloo Ha Ha”
She hears him, Yes, Yes, where is the bone?
She can’t find it.

Framed by over processed chestnut and tawny highlights,
mother soaks the moment in.
She blinks her own lashes giving herself permission
to recede back into her own daydream;
“I’m delighted to be on your show Neal”
Listening to NPR, she imagines her responses to callers.
She blinks again,
gathering the shattered cracker, the raisins smushed on the rug, the pale boy, the
keys, the half full V8.
All the while the interview continues.
Sophisticated chuckles linger on the perimeter of her thoughts.
Sealing an envelope using a pre-cut and barely moistened
sliver of sponge specifically for this purpose
What was she just thinking about?

Framed by a white window, decorated with plastic jalapeño lights,
an amber ashtray, a bottle of red stripe and a roll of cheap toilet paper.
A wheeze, a whistling in his chest while watching her.
“Hmmmgrrrr” “Hmmmgrrrr”
Clearing his throat he turns from the window,
ashamed of his intrusion, he cringes.
Hands bruised, speckled with age spots,
seem to shake more than yesterday,
he will quit tomorrow.
Balling his hands into crimson fists, he slides into a comfy robe,
stolen from the four seasons.

Framed by a metal box, framed by the outline of a canary and white tract home,
and by early morning fog and dreariness.
“I can’t stand this asshole” the mail carrier startles himself,
realizing he has actually said this out loud.
Struggling to stuff an obnoxious circular into the overflowing neglected box,
Peculiar smells of burnt toast—
Just like last week.

~ *Emily Hostutler*



"Iced Window" ~ Rachel Hunsader

A SMALL PAINTING IN A STORE IN FUKUOKA

renderings of people
highly stylized and visually simplified
lines that hint but do not force
images imagine themselves into existence

fields of patterns that give depth
like multiple miniature buddhas
imperfectly silkscreened onto red fabric
and worn as a robe

basic colours
primaries and neutrals
black lines that hint

mostly in patterns and empty spaces
rendering people in landscapes
momentary realizations while in a store
like finding a small painting

white paper
with colourful printed figures

women bathing in a landscape
or a darkly outlined monk with a sleeping tiger
made with minimal brushstrokes

imagined worlds made of ink and paper
souvenirs reproduced in so many stores
renderings of Buddhist scenes

each with a label
made in Japan

seeing these renderings
I wanted to buy one little painting to remember
but left the store with nothing

~ *Julian Jason Haladyn*



"Japanese Cherry Blossoms" ~ Joanna Leack

IN A BATHTUB IN JAPAN

Stories of travelers naked in the water
books that are histories not our own

we are lost with an upside down map

bridges in the early morning
like turtles in a pond

we spot them from a bridge

water spat from the sidewalk
outside of an imitation French café

we had our picture taken

water fountains punctuated the walk
faint memories of a bath

we sank beneath its surface

a small bridge near a the Shinto shrine
colourful fish blur together

we could not believe it was true

cold water on a warm evening
hot water for a tea ceremony

we lay in the tub

stories of sugar bowls and donuts
poems written without cloths

~ Julian Jason Haladyn

SHATTERED

"I think you should leave."

This was the first time I had ever said such a thing to Tia. It wasn't an "I'm too drunk to function; we should stop," or an "I have to be awake early; please, let me sleep." No. This was different. This wasn't a request. She had to leave. Otherwise, I would have screamed, or hit her, or cried in front of her: each option more unacceptable than the former.

Whether she understood or was too exhausted to continue the conversation, I didn't care. All that mattered was that she was leaving. She took one of the three shots I pre-poured and threw back the Pinnacle, following it with a swig of my Coke Zero before slipping her laptop under her arm. Turning to Hailey, she asked in a tired voice, "Do you need someone to walk you back?"

Hailey glanced at me from my bed.

"I'll take care of her," I answered for her.

Tia nodded, sliding her fingers through her short black hair. "Well, then, I guess there's nothing left to say, is there?"

We locked eyes for several long seconds, silently screaming every emotion we held inside of us. As if in response to her own question, she walked out of my dorm room.

Before the door latch clicked, I pulled my jacket off the back of my desk chair and shrugged it on. "I don't understand it. I don't understand *her*." My already tied boots sympathized with me, easily slipping onto my bare feet. "What was she thinking? How could she..." Everything was going so well. We were having a wonderful time drinking, talking, laughing... How did the night end like this?

I had experienced a similar stream of emotions three semesters earlier when Hailey told me that she was in love with Tia. It was hard to believe that Tia, the ostentatious girl who came home with a different guy every weekend, wanted her--just like the sorority wanted me, and just like she wants the sorority now. As the months went on, I was forced to sit back and watch their relationship die and our friendships suffer. It had nothing to do with sexuality; their personalities were just too different--both wanting something that the other couldn't give.

Tia left Hailey one warm May morning, just days after I left Beta Upsilon Eta. But I couldn't leave Hailey. She needed me more than ever, and as much as I hated to admit it, I still needed her. Nearly all of my friends had abandoned me after the girl Michael broke up with for me became the president of Beta. It seemed as if Beta imputed disdain of me on every girl who signed her bid. All I had left on campus was Tia and Hailey, both scarred and bitter from the failed relationship. It took months to reconcile our group; only recently had the three of us attempted to be in the same room at once. It was working, though, the way

I always wanted it to work. We were just three friends, and it was nice. Why couldn't anything good last in my life?

Trying to pacify my racing mind, I took the second shot and threw it back, not bothering to look for a chaser. Something stopped me from putting the shot glass back on my desk. The number of times since our first day as roommates freshman year that it clinked against hers was beyond counting. Holding the glass was like holding a miniature representation of my friendship with Tia: each toast causing a few bricks to tumble from the walls we erected in the day as a front for the world, until it was just us, exposed, not attempting to fool anyone. Those nights made us inseparable. I knew her better than anyone. How could she not know me? I clutched the glass tightly. Before my brain could catch up with my body it rolled off my hand and hit the wall with a satisfying metallic crunch.

A stifled gasp came from my side. My tired eyes met with Hailey's. I could only imagine that mine held the same labored expression as hers. We were both enervated from a trying year. I was the one who had gotten Hailey through last semester. When she broke, I picked up the pieces. She would yell at me when Tia did something thoughtless. It was my arms she collapsed into on the night she realized that their relationship was failing. I was the one who told Tia that Hailey and I were staying friends, that she was going to start hanging out with us again, and that the three of us needed each other. But I couldn't be the pragmatic one at the moment. I had to take care of myself. Why did I tell Tia otherwise? Perhaps I didn't want them to be alone together, or perhaps I didn't want to be alone with myself. I didn't think it through. The last thing I wanted was to break in front of Hailey. I was supposed to be the strong one. The person I wanted to avoid wasn't her, though; it was me.

"I need to go for a walk," I said as I strode out of my room, hoping desperately that I wouldn't run into anyone on the way outside. My prayers were answered. It was after 3:00am on a Wednesday and the dorm was quiet. That may have changed after I slammed the door behind me. It didn't matter. I was out of there. I no longer had to worry about anyone seeing me struggle as my thoughts bounced off the walls, hitting me with a different phrase and image each time they zoomed back through me. I could feel my thoughts radiating from my body, getting caught in the grey clouds that had not yet dispersed from the afternoon rain, leaving me with a clear mind but raw emotion.

I wanted to walk to my freshman dorm. Half a dozen times I locked the door and crawled out my first-story window, leaving the world thinking I was safe and quiet in my room. The first time was during a hurricane. I had realized that Michael, my longest boyfriend, was not the person I thought he was. I sat outside my window in a semi-formal dress and pink stilettos, crying into my knees--my tears indistinguishable from the cool, sobering raindrops.

That was where I wanted to be, but I couldn't make it that far. Instead, I turned into the field where football players practiced during the week. Even though I was on grass, I could still hear the sound of shoes on pavement. Hailey was jogging down the sidewalk to catch up with me. I didn't have to look back to know it was her.

When I felt her drawing closer, I opened my mouth to tell her to go inside, but the thought of being alone broke me. The tears came as I fell to my knees. I sobbed into my arms for a few long seconds before they hit the ground as well, my long blonde hair shielding me from the world.

This wasn't right. This wasn't how it was supposed to happen. Tia was fucking everything up, just like she fucked things up when she drunkenly took Hailey by the hand to our empty dorm room and asked to be her girlfriend. How could she do this to me again? When did she become so perfidious? I wanted to scream, to curse, to yell at the top of my lungs everything that was left unsaid to Tia, but I couldn't say anything. Everything was over. I was alone, and after Tia joined Beta, I would be perpetually alone. My college life would be completely altered after she signed the bid card.

My fist made a dull thump when it hit the soggy ground. It was an impetuous motion, and a wholly different sensation than abusing my pillow, but the release was satisfying. I brought my hand down again, feeling the cartilage in my knuckles slip. The pain prolonged the transient satisfaction by moments. The third time, I felt a gentle grasp on my forearm.

"Stop," said a soft yet firm voice. A disheveled Hailey was kneeling beside me.

I didn't listen.

"Sam!"

The skin started to break after the fourth thump.

"Sam, please, stop!"

I was losing feeling in my hand. My own body was betraying me. It listened to her even though my mind was trying desperately to block her out. Head in the grass, I hugged my chest as if I were trying to hold myself together, and began to cry again.

Hailey rubbed my back and rested her head on my shoulder. Her shivering reverberated through her body into mine. We stayed in that position until my tears faded into rasping, deep breaths. I shifted my weight and she lifted her head. I could feel her eyes on me, knowing they were the same weary eyes that looked up at me from the bed in my single room.

"Why are you here?" I asked when I was sure my voice wouldn't break. I couldn't look into those eyes.

"I didn't want to leave you."

"You don't have to be here."

"I know."

“Then why are you?”

She paused, thinking through her words before saying them. She always did this: gave you the easy answer first. It took time and trust for her to expose more than the superficial. It was one of the things the three of us had in common. “Because I know how you’re feeling. You think you’re abandoned. I want you to know that someone is still with you.”

I wanted to tell her she was right, but the words didn’t come. I rolled onto my side, hugging my knees to my chest as I waited for the tears to pass.

When I thought the world was quiet enough to attempt to go back to my room, I struggled to my feet. I didn’t make it far. The throbbing in my hand, the stiffness of my legs, and Hailey’s uneven breathing made the memories come back to me in waves. I made it as far as the whitewashed goalpost closest to the dorm and leaned against it, letting myself slowly slide back to the ground. I leaned my head against the cold metal, hoping--praying--for the chill to sober me. It only made me numb.

The clouds were beginning to break. A single dim star could be seen though the haze. My gaze did not waver from that tiny prick of light when Hailey knelt next to me, putting her head on my shoulder and reaching one arm around me. Her touch was gentle, as if she were trying to keep together the shattered pieces of an egg shell.

I shook my head. “That’s not what I meant. My soul is tired. It’s been pierced so often over the past year. I haven’t been given time to heal. I’ve been slowly bleeding to death for so long.”

She hugged me gently and nodded against my shoulder. “I promise it’s not the end of the world. In fact, it’s probably just a sign that you are mature and experienced in life. You’ve realized that life blows--that it’s a far cry from butterflies and rainbows. Anyone who believes it ends up where you are right now.” I closed my eyes, trying to stifle the tears. “We can get through this, Sam. Just be patient and know what’s important to you. Being what others want you to be isn’t important--get that straight. It’s okay to have enemies as long as you have a friend or two that you trust. Just find your happy place and cling to that. If it’s at the bottom of a broken bottle or in the middle of this field, then so be it.”

“You don’t understand.”

“No. I don’t. I can’t fathom what you’re experiencing. All I can do is be here for you and make you happy.”

“I can’t be happy. It’s just the way things have always been. The world needs people who are miserable. We can’t all be in a constant state of bliss. I’m too aware of how much life sucks to be happy.”

“That doesn’t mean I can’t try everything in my power to make it more tolerable for you.”

I scoffed. Tolerable. Isn’t that all we ever try to do? Make life tolerable for ourselves? Hailey told me once that she was tired of failing to make herself

happy. Instead, she would focus on others: be selfless, be the martyr. She didn't realize how much her sacrifice hurt others in the process. Did she think I liked seeing her in pain? Did she think I wanted her to be in the cold and the mud too? Life takes each and every one of us to dark places. Why would you want to add someone else's pain to your own?

I could have told her this, but it was inconsequential. Nothing was going to change tonight. Everything would be the same in the morning as it was at that moment. Tia would still have a bid to Beta. The words we shared wouldn't be taken back. The memory of me in the field wouldn't be erased from Hailey's memory. Nothing was ever going to change.

I decided that I was done wallowing. The time for tears was passed. The life I knew was dying, and it was time for acceptance--time for this night to be over. I walked back to my room with purpose, but not with speed. Hailey walked alongside of me. I looked at her--really looked at her--for the first time. I would have hugged her if I had the energy. Her chucks, obviously thrown on with haste, were untied. Her jeans were covered with mud, her hands were brown, and her grey eyes with flecks of gold were just as I pictured them. I could only imagine the state I was in.

When I reached my asylum I immediately went to my bed, lying on top of the covers. I didn't care that I would have to strip the sheets, now dirty from the layer of mud that seemed to cover my entire body. The quiet was more important at that moment than anything I would face in the daylight.

It wasn't until my hand brushed against my pillow that I realized it was aching. I held it at eye-level. The back of my hand was crimson. The blood had already begun to coagulate, but my knuckles were still tender and raw. It was hard to comprehend that it was mine.

I let my arm hang off the bed. Gravity made the throbbing all the more prominent. Hailey crawled to me from the spot she settled at on my floor and hugged my arm. The world started to fade away all too quickly. I wasn't ready for sleep just yet. Dreaming would be worse than the reality of this moment.

"You don't have to stay with me," I told her again, hoping that talking would keep me awake.

"I know," she replied in barely more than a whisper.

"Then why are you?"

"I thought we already established all of this."

"Was that the only reason?"

A pause. "No." She stayed quiet for several minutes. I knew this silence well. The answer would come. "I'm starting to realize that I hate myself," she finally explained. "I put my faith in people who let me down. Worse, I open up to people--tell them everything, try to get them to see me, to know me, to understand me--but the more I open up, the more they reject me. I'm beginning to think that maybe it's not them. Maybe it's me. I thought I was a good person--

a person worth keeping around--but I'm not so sure anymore." She closed her eyes. Her voice stayed steady as two large drops of warm liquid made trails on my bloody hand. "I tried asking Tia. I begged her to tell me what was wrong with me after she left me, but she wouldn't. If I knew, I could try to change the way I am. I want to make it go away, but I don't know how." She looked up at me. I didn't move, but she knew I was listening. "I want someone to fix me--to know how to kiss the boo boo to make me believe that it's better. For some reason I want that someone to be you." Another long pause. "Sam, I--"

I couldn't hear her say the words. "I've been waiting for you to realize it," I interrupted. An hour prior, this wouldn't have been true. It took me this long to recognize that I knew the entire time. "How long?"

"Awhile." Hesitation. "I knew after I started dating Tia. I was more emotional over losing your friendship than being with her."

I sighed, closing my hand into a fist, changing the pattern of pain. She let go of my arm and stood up, turning off the light and shimmying next to me on the bed, resting her head on my chest.

"Hailey--"

"Not tonight," she interrupted, resting her hand over my heart. "Please, just, pretend that none of this happened. We can talk in the morning, but please not tonight."

I put my arm around her and rested my chin on the crown of her head, burying it into her mousy brown waves like I always did when she came to me in tears. Closing my eyes, the outside world grew dim, but her presence lingered with me like a warm light in the darkness. Fate said we had to be close. We fought it hard, but fate won. We just had to learn to manage it. The inevitable, unforgiving truth was that things were different now and could never be how they were.

~ Sarah Bryski



~ Claudia Morales McCain

NOVEMBER FROTH

How sweet it is to see,
the pulse of life,
the throbbing of many an artery;
the snapping of the twigs,
that lie dead on the ground but still,
with suspiration lingering on.
And how bitter it is to see,
the rending of one heart when a winter bird,
is left behind by the ribbon on the rim of the sky;
the chasing squirrels,
that have forgotten the fading of time;
and the wisteria clutching at the window bar,
reaching its fingers to the wasting past.

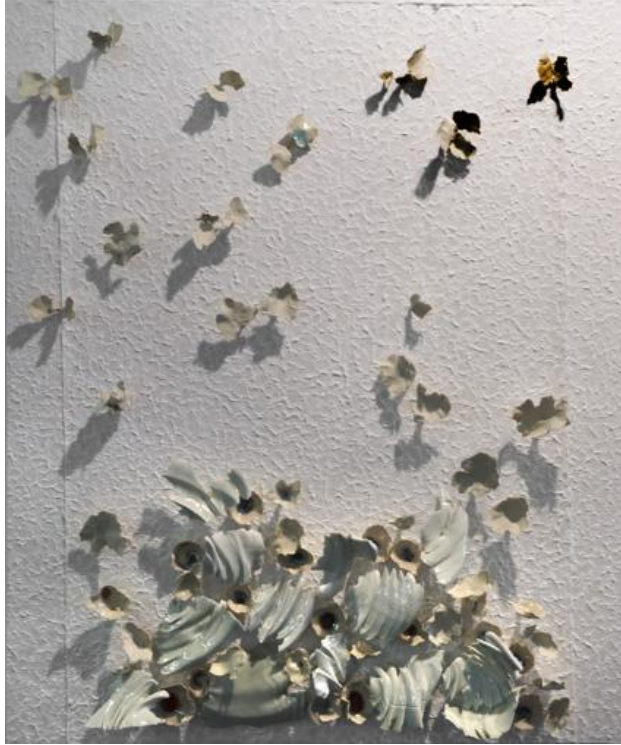
* * *

A heavy sigh drops upon yesterday,
which froze and would not thaw.

* * *

One season ahead,
is another round of life.

~ *Ying Xiong*



"Float" ~ Janet Neuwald

THE DAYBREAK WITHIN

When the night falls,
And the outer world quiets down (is silenced),
The day's last blush lingers,
Tinning the distant hills.

When the crickets chant,
And the moon's shadow creeps,
My inner part, yet,
Keeps shivering to the eventide songs.

When the pinion of TIME sweeps past,
And every single tick stirs the strings of my heart,
My dream weeps from afar,
To what I've done so far,
or left undone.

To miss, or catch,
To lose, or gain,
Never sets in night sighs,
nor on the enchanting harp of Hecate.

Night fades fast,
A flash in the vast,
My soul stays sober (awake) with Eos ---
Not awaiting verdict by the Fates,
But the daybreak within.

~ Ying Xiong



"Veil Nebula" ~ Janet Neuwald

GRUNGE GO STEADY

So metallic the taste of those summers
in white and black buckram shirts nothing
to quench the thirst of those formless – already deformed –
pretty brains of twenty-year-late hippie girls
hard-core grunge boys who'd had ginsbergian visions
at fourteen.

Grunge go steady you said but I was ready
Ready as red we were already but
didn't go; we had to get thirty
to know.

~ Iona Cosma



"The Loss That Creates Truth" ~ Claudia Morales McCain

A DAILY RITUAL

I stare at the bathroom faucet. That shiny, solid brass lever that controls the flow of both hot and cold water has been a source of my anguish and my solace. I can just walk away and ignore the nagging thoughts in my head that are telling me to turn the faucet on and off three more times. I know it's irrational to think that this repetitive action will prevent anything bad from happening to me, but I can't help myself. For some reason, I feel calmer when I perform this task. I take a deep breath.

"One," I whisper to myself, pushing the handle up to release a flow of cold water into the basin and then thrusting the lever down to stop the stream.

"Two." I perform the task again.

"Three," I sigh, rapidly pushing the handle to its on and then off position.

I nod to myself and am about to walk out of the bathroom, but I suddenly stop. What if I didn't do it correctly? What if I did it too quickly?

I turn and look intently at the brass lever. I could hear the ticking of the clock in the living room across the hall. How long have I been in here?

As if reading my mind, my mother calls out, "Jeanette, honey, you're going to be late for school again."

I bite my lip and do not answer her; I am too engrossed in my own contemplations. I can disregard my tormenting thoughts—my own voice encompassing my mind and telling me to perform the task again just in case I didn't do it correctly the first few times—but just the idea of ignoring them gives me a cold sweat. I feel a surge of anxiety.

This ritual has consumed my life since I was 11 years old. It all started when I was playing with the bathroom faucet one morning and subsequently happened to have a great day in school. For some inconceivable notion, I attributed my faucet antics with my good day, and now, six years later, I still continue this routine, hoping that it will prevent a terrible day. Sure, I have had bad days since

then. However, turning the bathroom faucet on and off for three consecutive times puts me at ease each morning and helps me prepare for facing the day.

I finally decide to answer my mother. “I’ll be out in a minute,” I yell in a high-pitched voice, which is my attempt at trying to sound calm.

I squeeze my eyes shut for a moment, hoping for the anxiety to pass. I look at myself in the mirror and confront my turmoil-inducing inner-voice.

“This is ridiculous,” I whisper to myself. “Turning a faucet on and off will not determine the outcome of my day.”

I suddenly feel as if I’m in the middle of a mental typhoon. Questions flood and whirl through my mind, increasing in severity with each second. What if I don’t do it, and I fail my geometry test? What if I don’t do it, and I get into a fight in school? What if I don’t do it, and I get into an accident? What if I don’t do it, and my father dies of a heart attack?

I shake my head violently as if to remove the irrational and disturbing thoughts from my mind. What is wrong with me? This is ridiculous.

I then inhale deeply through my nose. The air is cold and refreshing. I hold my breath for a moment and then exhale slowly through my mouth. I feel slightly calmer as the unsettling questions start to diminish—my mental typhoon tempering itself to light winds and a small drizzle. I decide on doing it just one more time ... just to make sure. I’ll be fine after that.

I push the lever up and down three times, slowly counting aloud to myself each time. I purse my lips. That should do it.

I turn to leave the bathroom when a gnawing sensation creeps up my spine. Am I sure I did it correctly? Maybe I should do it again?

I slump against the bathroom door, which causes a dull, thud-like sound. I hear my mom calling out to me, asking me if I’m all right.

I ignore her and bang my head against the wooden door in a desperate attempt to stifle my incessant thoughts. The pain sears through my forehead, but my inner-voice continues, telling me that all I need to do is go back to the bathroom faucet and perform my ritual again.

I hear my mom hurrying over to the bathroom, her slippers scuffing against the rug.

“Jeanette? Open the door. Are you all right in there?”

It is difficult to hear my mom because the mental typhoon that I was able to pacify just moments before swells in my mind again with increasing force. I feel as if my mother is on the opposite side of a rampaging storm, and I can't hear her through the raging waves and swirling winds of my unremitting thoughts.

“Just stop. Please just stop,” I shakily whisper to myself.

I start to weep, and I feel the door suddenly give way as my mother opens it. I slump against her feet and let out a loud sob.

“They won't stop,” I cry out on an exhale of air. “I can't get my thoughts to stop.”

I curl up in the fetal position at my mom's feet, and she bends down to scoop me up into a sitting position and hugs me. “Shhhh,” she consoles me. “You'll be all right.”

I continue to weep, but I hardly hear my mother. I'm too consumed by my own thoughts. ... Maybe, just maybe if I get up off of the floor and go back into the bathroom, I can perform my ritual one more time and feel better. Maybe ...

~ Catherine Kelly



~ Anthony Rojas

TO THE LOST

I tilt my glass to the Earth
watching the amber liquid
saturate the ground – swollen
with the bodies of the dead.

The sauce seeps slowly,
trickles down through roots,
descending into the sepulcher of
millions of men and women

dressed in their favorite leisure suits
and floral dresses they only wore on Easter,
sleeping abreast the people they once put up with –
arms crossed like delicate, decaying bows.

A stranger takes a shot, wipes his chin –
retires his glass, and with one last westward look
returns to sleep next to the person
whose name he has forgotten.

~ Jack Foster



~ Anthony Rojas

A TRANSGENDERED RWANDAN, DAYS BEFORE HER MURDER

I wear a tie and slacks around
the office water-cooler,
and slip on wing-tips before
dashing out the door –

but if you sneak a glance through
the curtains of my tin-roofed shack,
you'll see me balance bundles of
dirty clothes on top of my head.

And though I mimic the walk
of chickens and cocks while outside,
at home you'll catch my would-be
figure-eight hips swiveling from room to room.

The masculine envy I should have
reminds me only of my feminine
longing – a longing
I cannot express, for... –.

My double life implodes upon itself
like gravity folding into nothing — a foot
in one door, being pulled through another,
with only painful absence grounding me.

~ Jack Foster



"Insight" ~ Nancy Anderson

THE MANY PASSIONS OF CHILDREN

The many passions of children throw out wings in the expanding home of possibility. A consuming focus for one month, two, or ten, constructs a psychic space that they will one day reenter as a more aged one, greeting its familiar environs with a low moan—“Ahh, this too I could have been.” Such melancholy warms us, wraps wizened hearts in unsullied spirits. Other such rooms, when entered, disclose a grandmother steeping tea. She invites us to a game of chess, a combat she almost always wins, while we wait upon unfurling leaves. In the vestibule behind, an oven warms.

~ Liam Corley

CLOSING THE BOOKS

Promising notes like first dates,
freshmen tangle in dirty sheets
before one syllabus runs its course.
Underwriters blemish daddy's girl
before she's broached and learned
to manage a prophylactic purse.

Dream financiers trade capital
protected federally from loss,
give counsel gratis,
grave names on lines, and
blanch them white in a wash.

Smallest points balance
pyramids inverted
as tumors expand from a cell.
Bribes given monthly
credit futures belated
as dikes garnish air from a sill.

The graduated payment seniors elect
compounds their interest
in the rest they've left to accumulate.

~ Liam Corley



"Trained" ~ Gil Arreola

Hearing your steps
cross our shoe-box apartment
as the city enjoyed its second dream
made my little heart a little sad.
Like a champ knocked to the canvas
your body beat-up
by fatigue from back-to-back
eight-hour rounds
at the factories
piecing together
anything your nimble hands
qualified you to.
No belt, no fame, no glory
barely a living
for your accomplishments
Just a tired body
you plopped onto
the sagging mattress.

I'd lay there feigning sleep
didn't want you to notice me
didn't want you to exert more energy
to give me a tight squeeze.
I'd watch through squinted eyes
as you pulled out your bag of healing
from under our bed
medicines from across the border.
You'd drench your arms and legs
With the green liquid-
Rue infused rubbing alcohol,
applied yellow ointments
thick like lard
on your joints.
Every time you winced from the aches
thin skin around your eyes folded like fans.
I wanted to massage your feet

hot with plump plum veins
wanted to drape myself over
your wilted shoulders.
Being poor wasn't so bad
it meant I could sleep
next to your warm body
coiled like a snail's shell.
No 10 count for you
cansancio always had the upper hand
you were out for the night.
I could smell you smelling
of botanica
felt your hands twitch
with leftover energy
felt your heavy breathing
I'd stop my breathing
waited
exhaled
with yours.
No hugs at night
no tucking in
the way you used to
but my heart
beat with yours
my champ
my Mami.

~ Claudia Rodriguez



~ Harley Mae



~ Harley Mae

BELIEVABILITY OR THE MOTHER

She actually shook her head back and forth in *real* life, just as she had during the imagined dialogue she was having with her OB-GYN.

“Mara, we’re going to have to ask you to head over to the Emergency Room.”

Dr. Anderson, a tall, oval-faced woman with a silky jet-black hijab, squinted while studying the ultrasound monitor and spoke with a doctor-like authority. The beige machine purred eerily, acting as a soundtrack for the pause in which Mara should have been digesting the sickening feeling that something was very wrong. Instead she returned to the interior of the train and out of her thoughts long enough to note that the purring was a sound similar to the El cruising the rails, and that the ultrasound machine was the same color as the seat back in front of her. *Funny how the mind does that*, she thought.

At first glance, Mara was a rather generic curvy redhead. However, she had a Play-Doh-ish face that was in its boring mode on this particular day. A few pounds gained or lost, a bit of color shimmering or drained from the face, a clean eyebrow wax or flyaway eyelash could change her appearance entirely—a Play-Doh face. Almost daily it varied from either extremely good-looking to plain, or nondescript and various in-betweens. Regardless of her ever-changing mug, her body was typically in a perfect BMI range for her height—she was an exquisite example of athletic form. However, due to her pregnancy, she was sixty pounds heavier than usual. Also, she didn’t “show” classically; her bump had developed into an elongated horizontal bun instead of the ideal soccer ball shape, so her pre-pregnant perfected physique was now, in her opinion, just frumpy.

Shutting her eyes again, she found herself back in Dr. Anderson’s office. This time she would immerse herself in the fear of the moment.

“Mara, we really have to get you over to the ER,” Dr. Anderson repeated.

“Um, Okay, this doesn’t sound so good.” Mara mouthed the words, and from the perspective of her fellow commuters, she appeared to be talking to herself. She caught it happening and felt awkward. Overly frustrated with herself every time she realized she was playing out these scenes in public, she self-scolded. *Why can’t she keep it internal, behind the lips, like everyone else?*

Dr. Anderson pulled the silk head-covering back behind her ear, turning away from the screen; she carefully wiped the gel from Mara’s unimpressive bump. The Dr.’s eyes stayed focused on the routine, but Mara could see the subtle strain in the eye sockets. There was a pitiful awareness behind them; this baby will never come out alive. Oddly, even knowing this, there was a soothing

quality in the reflective sheen of the head covering. It would be ideal to snuggle it close to Mara's cheek, or use it to wipe away the tears she was fighting back, or to neatly soak up blood stains. *But that's the point of playing this awful scenario out.*

Mara acknowledged to herself that she was just imagining this again. The purring sound was continuing, even though Dr. Anderson had shut off the sonograph machine, a reminder to return to the *real*. The pain and fear subside momentarily, and then Dr. Anderson gently nudged her to come to a fully-seated position. *If she reenacts in her mind the worst possible outcome, she'll be prepared for it.*

"You can get dressed now; I'll meet you at the front desk." Dr. Anderson turned her head completely now, probably afraid her eyes would finally give it all away.

The gut-wrenching emotion of this kind of loss, of potentially losing an almost full-term pregnancy, was now more familiar. Mara reasoned to herself that gaining some understanding of what it might be like, even if only in imaginary fragments, then handling a *real* loss won't be as debilitating; it had been rehearsed. A nervous breakdown would not have to be the end result if she did, in fact, lose this pregnancy. Sniffing a loud, self-deprecating, ironic snort, she was amused with the ridiculousness of this mental game, as well as her inability to control it.

As a teenager, when her Play-Doh appearance was always sculpted to bright, fair and lovely, Mara attended a summer acting program in the city. The gritty brownstone housing for The Actor's Pod was just a few blocks from her destination today. Opening her eyes, focused again on the seat back in front of her, she recalled that the only person she ever considered a mentor was her stage and acting teacher, Anthony Palaro, the co-owner of the 'Pod.' Tony was the old school, long pausing, serious-about-his-craft 'father' of the place. Tony's counterpart, Rod, was the 'money' and a successful talent agent. Rod once told Mara while smoothing his combover, "Either gain ten or lose ten pounds, if you want to make in the biz, kiddo." This was followed by, "Don't worry about it, you lucked out with a good non-Jewy nose."

Tony was different; the money didn't matter to him. He had the air of someone who had once longed, deeply and painfully, to make it on Broadway, or in film, or maybe he just always longed for something unachievable. A long cavernous scar stretched the length of his left ear to his Adam's apple, just grazing his chin. Once during a class, he blamed his lack of a career on the injury, but did not explain its origin—a mystery Mara had wondered about over the last 15 years. Tony was a firm believer and practitioner of *Method* acting, and taught

his Film & Character Study class with the core philosophy that believability in acting comes from actually feeling something, rather than pretending, or modeling a feeling. His class included incredibly awkward and uncomfortable exercises. One of Mara's favorites was called the standing line exercise. *Not her favorite at the time, but now, now it makes more sense.*

Basically, one of the students would have to stand on a makeshift stage in the corner of one of the windowless, claustrophobic "performance" rooms on the third floor of the Pod, and deliver one line, just one, commercial or otherwise. Something like, "I don't need you anymore." or "That dress isn't very flattering." or "Why did you do it?" But just saying the phrase wasn't the kicker. The art of this practice, the Method part of the exercise, was in delivering the line as *yourself*. There could be no inauthentic affect, ticking or finessing of any kind. No snorting, smirking, shrugging, blinking, looking away— anything that indicated an embellished performance, rather than the truth—how would Mara really say the line if the moment to say such words arose in her life? The task sounded seemingly simple at the time, but turned out to be near impossible for Mara and her peers. What typically happened varied from student to student, but was always inevitable. A feeling of nakedness would overcome the student, who, stripped of all his or her coping devices and shticks, everything that a hormonal-teenage-drama addict needed, both on the stage and off the stage to survive, would be lost. The body and mind would collapse and tears would erupt, or for many, it was laughter. Not just benign awkward chuckles, but the convulsive kind, with shivers and stomach pains. Mara's lip quivered and turned up at one side, remembering the scenarios.

"Okay, so Mara, your line is, 'I've been hiding in the dark for too long now.' And before you begin, I see you're already leaning to one side and your right fist is clenched."

"I've been—"

"Nope, Nope—you took a big loud breath, and then you puffed up your cheeks- remember this is just *you* saying you've been in the dark too long. Would you normally take a deep breath and then puff your lips up like that? Or is this just trying to p-e-r-f-o-r-m? OK. Again." Tony's scar was often also simultaneously coaching her, like a creepy neck puppet.

"I've been hiding in the dark," She felt herself direct the line toward the puppet this time.

"No—Again. You felt it this time, didn't you? That unnecessary oomph you put on the word 'hiding.'"

The Asian guy, Matt, with the spiked buzz cut that went on to star in Coke commercials, her friend Stacy that chose to “gain ten pounds” at Rod’s request, the shaggy black-haired, pimply guy whose name she can’t remember, and Tony and his little neck friend, all stared up at her from their crappy folding metal chairs, waiting for the line again.

“That boy got what was comin’ to him.”

Mara opened her eyes. The comment was practically spat on the back of her neck across several rows from behind her. She instinctually rubbed behind her head. *How funny, that would be a perfect standing-line line. That boy got what was coming to him.* Even now, even in her head, she couldn’t deliver it without an effect. Besides, she wondered almost accidentally and almost out loud--What did the boy do? Mara wanted to turn around and see who exactly the source of the comment was, but she didn’t want to be obvious. That kind of eye-darting toward someone else’s business was dangerous on the El. Mara knew better.

“That boy got what was coming to him.” She repeated the line again for Tony, and for the exercise.

“Better Mara, better. I am starting to believe you this time. Your cheek is quivering, but I can tell it’s natural, real.”

It was probably too soon for a young lady of Mara’s age to obtain the type of insight that came from those exercises; maybe it was just that Mara thought about the meaning of them too deeply. Regardless, it was Tony who taught her that everyone is always performing. *That’s why those raw moments, those rare segments of authenticity when someone speaks and responds exactly as him or herself are so important.* Just as the woman did a few rows back. *That boy got what was coming to him.*

The other Method exercise in Tony’s toolbox had no name that Mara could remember, but was the exercise that truly elevated her neurosis to the next level. Matt, Stacy, shaggy-haired 90’s kid and a few others, including herself, would awkwardly carry their folding chairs to the stage and line them neatly in a row, facing Tony. If an uninformed outsider were to happen upon this scenario, a trippy uneasiness would likely overcome them at the sight and they might wonder if the world was going mad. It began with Styrofoam cups, then meaningful personal objects, then the larger things, like emotional incidents. The tedious exercise, almost meditative, took years of “dedicated practice,” as Tony would say in a cocky tone. Mara would picture Al Pacino and Robert Di Niro sitting in folding chairs next to one another as Tony continued to give directions.

First a classic relaxation exercise would kick off the practice, in which one

had to sit in the chair with the same discipline as in the standing line exercise, without pretense and finesse; a calm state was necessary for the coming hour. After five minutes the “re-creation” portion began. Slowly, in silence and with refined precision, the students used their fingers to begin to feel the weight of an empty Styrofoam cup a few inches in front of them. Of course, there is no cup from an outsider’s perspective, or for Tony either, who intensely evaluates each movement of each finger on each student, checking for signs of inauthenticity or faking. For Mara and the other teens, the cup was slowly manifesting, first in the sensation of matter in the hands, and then in an outline, similar to the first draft of a graphic novel, geometric lines slowly grow and connect becoming the form. The tedious part began when, using her fingertips ever so gently, Mara would attempt to feel the lip of the cup, centimeter by centimeter, circling the rim—it had to be real, not just believable; she had to know for certain that the cup was actualized. This included even the creation of the correct shadow, cast by the florescent overhead and typically formed a crescent on the cup’s interior. Possibly the shadow was forming in Maura’s interior as well.

“I dropped mine!”

“Just drink it!”

“Mine has coffee in it!”

Mara would imagine all sorts of reactions from her peers during the grueling sessions. There was a thrill in hoping one of them would just freak out screaming and throw his or her cup at Tony’s neck. However, such a scenario could never happen; it would taint the exercise. Tony was clearly trying to convey to the group the falseness of that kind of undergraduate and juvenile overacting. In only a summer’s worth of time, the philosophy was burned into Mara’s psyche. *It was afterward that it really took off.* She began honing the incredible skill of turning worry into creative visualization: *in order to be free from the shock and pain of worst possible outcomes.*

The typically-active baby was quiet inside her stomach; the stillness, a reaction to the train’s comforting and humming vibration. For just a moment, Mara allowed herself to be enveloped with the excitement of the child’s arrival. Just like those initial first five minutes of relaxation with Tony, she and her baby were there together, authentically, growing and being. She looked toward the window and realized for the first time on the ride, just how long she had been staring straight ahead. She acknowledged her luck in owning the whole length of the seat to herself, or rather, how lucky they were as a pair; it felt safe momentarily to make this distinction.

There was a gentle tap at the back of her foot; Mara knew it was some sort of trash rolling about under her seat. She lifted her heel and could tell it was a bottle of sorts. It fit perfectly into her arch. She pressed down ever so slightly,

playing with the give of the cheap plastic. Adjusting her position, she sank back into the interior mode. She began to wonder where her husband was and what he was doing. *Was he okay?* She released the bottle, and with it, her peace went too.

The conversation was already forming. A stranger in scrubs was trying to relay the awful news about him to her gently. She sank back into the blue plastic seat of the hospital ER. The stranger, a short-haired nurse, was leaning in low, close to her face, placing a hand on Mara's tense shoulder. This one was kinder than Dr. Anderson, but of course, there was something more severe about this tragedy. Mara's tears began to well and she looked away from the sweet nurse. A whispered conversation coming from her peripheral vision a few seats away caught her attention. The soothing and barely-audible words were being exchanged between a concerned mother and her flush-faced H1N1 infected toddler. Something about the pair was familiar, and an eerie sense of déjà vu came over Mara, almost distracting her from the task at hand. *Perhaps she wasn't trying hard enough; it had to be believable to work.*

~ Emily Hostutler



~ Harley Mae

GANG-BOYS

A tree marked
with a giant 7
and a giant 0
The 70's came through here.

A stop sign tagged with T-Flats

no longer stops traffic
but serves to warn you
intruder
that you're entering
Tortilla Flat territory.

Better yield.

I lived in the middle of gangs
sandwiched between
deadly loyalties
to the red, blue, the brown.
My childhood riddled
with gang-boys
who think, believe they are men
but each one
really a man-child.
Sagging pants
weighed down
by the gats they tote.
Glock, revolver in one pocket
bandana representing in the other.
Sporting perfectly pressed
blinding bright white t's
cut-off dark work pants
with creases cutting the air,
hair shiny, sleek
classic like the filero,
thick white sport socks pulled knee-high

and dark knit gloves in the summer!
I knew some of them
talked and laughed with them
I wasn't
allowed to befriend them
not allowed to cross
their path to nowhere good.

Willie, aka Will or Big Slim
with his pet iguana
and his magnetic smile
couldn't help but want to talk to him
or have him talk to you.
Always very friendly and funny
but fled to the 'burbs
to get away from the life-
to save his life.

Either on foot,
covered in thick Nike Cortez,
or on bikes
these lost boys
left their trail
of graffiti, fear and loathing.
To see them was to know
they'd lose their life
they'd lose the street battle
leaving loved ones
the community
the city
to continue
living the war.
A war they can't see from their graves
or the luckier ones, from their cells.
A war
fueled by the push and pull
of la pandilla, la clica, the "set"
with its utter freedom

to roam the streets, incite fear
break the rules,
break faces,
break the bank with their street hustle
gives a young boy
a dose of “manhood” to the head.
To be manly and supported in that
to be protected by your brothers in that.
How cool to be “cool” for all the girls.
Cause, who doesn’t love a bad boy (even secretly)?

Those gang-boys
who think, believe they are men
but each one
really a man-child
pushed by tradition,
cause Smiley
has Baby Smiley and Lil Smiley
looking up to big tough tatted dad.
Pushed by threats,
pushed into throwing down,
blow by blow
dying block by block.
Sacrificing their lives
disrespecting that of their enemy’s
representing their hood hard
just to be worthy of respect.
In the end
after all the fundraising:
car washes
collecting funds door to door
“Here, here is a \$5, I don’t want
to see anymore pictures of him.
Can’t look at your bloodshot eyes”
After all the R.I.Ps have been sewn
sprayed on, etched on
to car windows, t-shirts, caps
sweatshirts and tattooed on

brown and black skin
After all this
who thinks about
respect?
Who thinks of the boy's set?
Just a lonely painful
Memory, relived
of how a gang-boy
who thought, believed he was a man
was really a child.

~ Claudia Rodriguez



~ Daniel Gonzalez

CONFESSIONS OF A BRIDE

I have watched for his cues to release me
For his chastity of faith has frozen my mind
I wish he no longer has a hold on me
Yet I follow his gaze while I go in the opposite direction
I tumble by not watching my feet
I seek the map to get there
But I return to where I was
I don't know the reason why it is supposed to be
But I've tried to escape the maze of life

~ Dahyon Lee



"Juno" ~ Damir Simic

A REFLECTION

Up the walk, scouting crumbs, the starling hops,
No song, no straining wings, no blithe spirit;
Her hunger ties her to the stone-cold ground.
At a puddle, she stops in reflection—
Sees only a sparrow—and so she flits.

I start down the path, then pause; not wanting
To affright nor offend with my paltry thoughts
This sublime sight: a dozen metaphors
Plus one more, scattered before us, mixed here
And there among the morsel grain she seeks.

I think of recent nights, warm and supple,
Of a wired cage that holds our thoughts, hollow
Bones that grind and seethe, flesh that sprouts wet wings;
My mounting desire caught in the starling's gaze,
Distortion-mirrored in stippled rings.

She back to the puddle, another drink,
Another look: still a sparrow, so plain,
She thinks, plain hungry...for what, or what might?

And I am caught up in her down, her beak,
Wondering why men's hearts are stone-cast paths,
Why my starling won't cry out... or give flight.

~ *Devon Hackelton*



"Reborn" ~ Damir Simic

COMMON THREADS

I slip into you, my favorite shirt,
And wear you about, the this and the that
Of my day. Button holes sprout their buttons
In a lazy row; fabric faded, soft,
Sharp creases smoothed away. Seams root loose threads
Like tendrils brushing across sun dried skin.

I slip into you, my favorite shirt,
A collar laced with misty drops of rain.
The scent of damp earth sewn up in the sleeves.
Paper leaf note, planted in breast pocket,
That reads, "Wrapped in comfort, your confidence,
I move freely and still you cover me."

I slip into you, my favorite shirt,
As you and I slip blithely into we.

~ *Devon Hackelton*

Twas a gloomy Saturday morning; the air frigid and crisp with a slight breeze awakening the senses. I was overdue for a workout, meaning I had not shot a basketball in a good week. The laces tied taut, the black stretching compression shorts underneath my sweats perfectly symmetrical and aligned with the swaying of manhood. That being said, the park was relatively empty for a Saturday. The usual trove of people attempting to play this beloved game was absent, leaving only the families that had come to enjoy the fresh air and break a sweat with their kids. I glided slowly and cautiously over the dew stained grass to a court, set my belongings down and began to have at it. Each shot taken carefully with the same movements, motions, geometry of the one before. The applause of the nylon net as the ball plunged through resonated throughout the nearby courts drawing attention from passer byers. I continued shooting slowly, then at a more ferocious pace as if I had an opponent. Tired, and out of shape, I took a moment to catch my breath. There I stood, fifteen feet away from the square of fiber glass and hoop of metal that I had learned to call friend and foe, attempting the simplest of shots with the simplest of motions. Bent knees, elbow cocked, wrist bent full exten...my thought process had been distracted by this peculiar man. This scruffy man with olive skin and a suit on wandering amongst the families asking to “play” had invaded the serenity of my thoughts with his mumbling. Ticked off and irritable, I began again, only to be interrupted by the man again. Only now, this voice was directly over my left shoulder. The man was a towering six foot, two inches (as I am a measly five foot eight inches) with his pressed silk royal blue dress shirt and black dress slacks standing behind asking if he could play. Perplexed, the word no coursed through my thought process, but when the time had come for an answer, yes had slipped out. But this “yes” was not an ordinary “yes”; this “yes” had opened up a new perspective, not only as a basketball player, but as a human being living in the tumultuous war ridden world we call home. Through the short lived basketball simplistic game of H-O-R-S-E, I had found out what this man had gone through. I had profiled the man as Mediterrean due to his complexion, but I was wrong. The man told me, in broken English, that he and his family were war refugees from Iran, that his brother and two sisters had been killed and he fled for the lives of his children. Yet this man was still standing and shooting the ball with great eloquence and precision. The pain in his blackened eyes were quelled by the reminders of it being his turn. He told me he was searching for a job and that he had no luck. With the, he exhausted the last bit of English he could muster and resorted to frantic hand signals, charades esc. He had

lost the game by two letters, but he was clueless and smiled as if he won the lottery. He walked off the court slowly, back turned to me with the clutter of his dress shoes against the concrete, echoing within the trees. This was the last time I saw this man, this refugee. I had returned to courts constantly, hoping to catch a glimpse of this man again to check on his status, but to no avail. Just as he had come, he was gone.

~ Sean St. Onge



~ Daniel Gonzalez

A CAMPFIRE BILLOWS, MY THOUGHTS BURN

I watch the gleaming heat
Like a parent – hoping my child
Grows and prospers.
Finds a home.
Dies in a peaceful manner.
Disobedient at times,
But a joy to be near.

The Warmth his embrace.

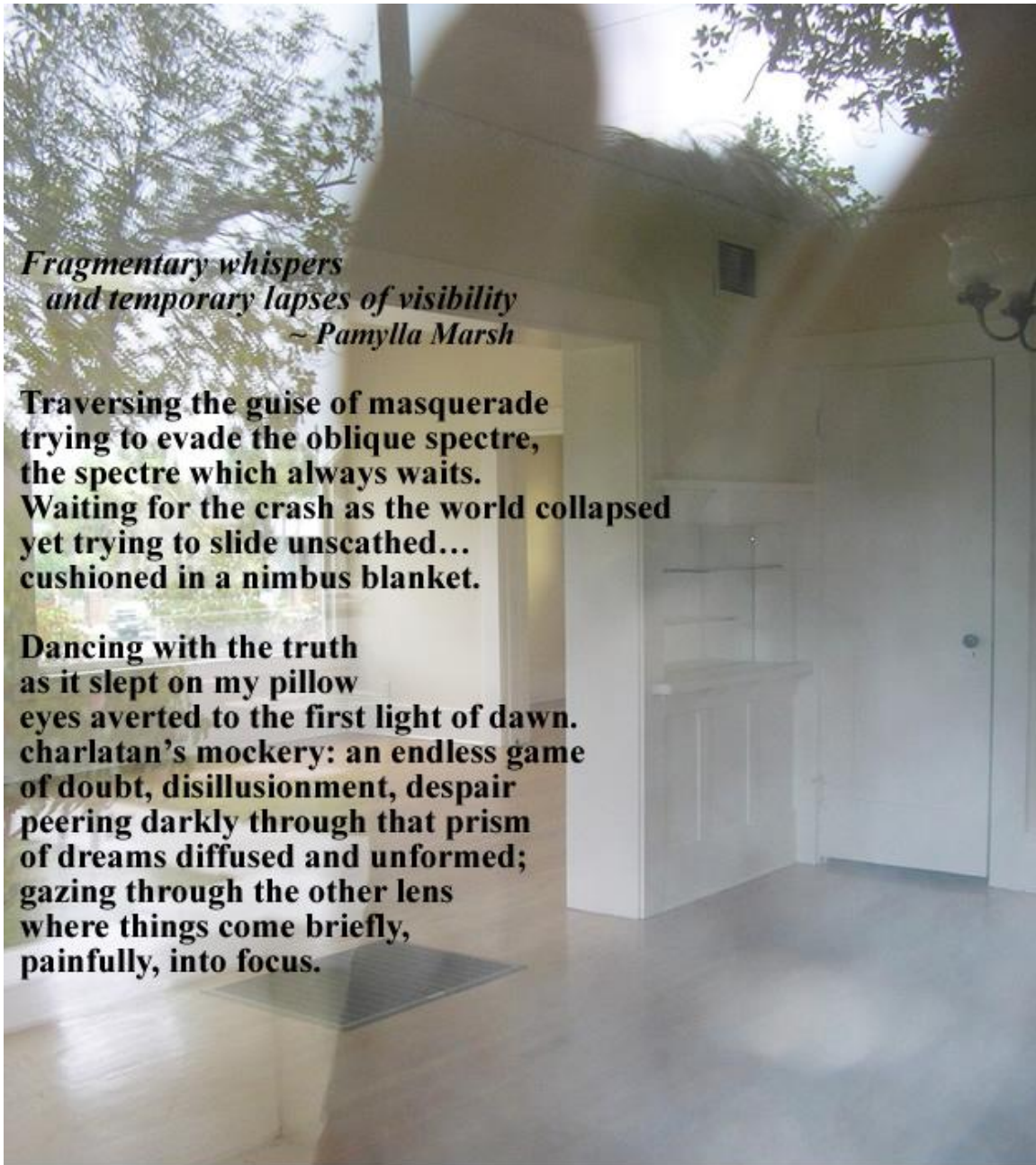
I feel no remorse
As I char decades of ancestry
In sinew and sap.

And as I cling to the licking flames
As I cling to my brazen youth
I cannot help but think
There is no direction – no going back.
No going home.

Littered with ash, I feel better.
Smelling of deep smoke, I feel better.

What a splendid thought it was.
To burn for awhile.

~ Christian Keck



*Fragmentary whispers
and temporary lapses of visibility*
~ Pamylla Marsh

**Traversing the guise of masquerade
trying to evade the oblique spectre,
the spectre which always waits.
Waiting for the crash as the world collapsed
yet trying to slide unscathed...
cushioned in a nimbus blanket.**

**Dancing with the truth
as it slept on my pillow
eyes averted to the first light of dawn.
charlatan's mockery: an endless game
of doubt, disillusionment, despair
peering darkly through that prism
of dreams diffused and unformed;
gazing through the other lens
where things come briefly,
painfully, into focus.**

~ Pamylla Marsh

TURNS

Earth has come to me in
years:
of innumerable age
brown, and lichens flow out from beating-heart-rocks
solid
opening
Earth
with turns, and shifts for a while

autumn falls

about her,
and watching each human passing
shaving strings of her weavings
string to thread

through her webs

I've held her close
saved her from the other planets
Earth rests and breathes there, too
her breast full to a dome
and then leveling
at plateau
the rise and fall
the duration
(cyborg's disgrace) devouring

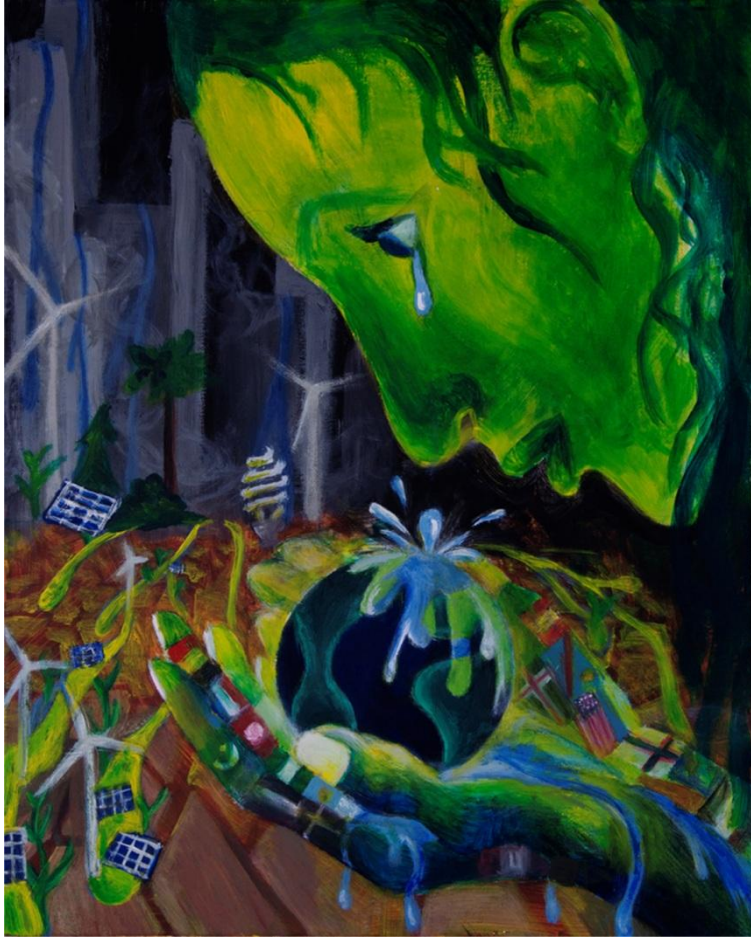
every last bit
to the molten core
heating our insides,

breaching
a new birth
fire erupts eurythmic tunnels,
transitory tubes

levitating us, lightening our feet
illuminating our ribs out of our shells

and delve we do; and dive we do
from high hill tops, to low
river waists
with salmon upstream
liberated from safety
we climb
through her matrices,
find a notch, worms make some room, we've
another home
to recreate ourselves,
a new womb.

~ *Oceanna Burke*



~ Grace Zhang

MOOD

over this vintage
handwritten letter
a bulldozer's curl,
a compactor's punch
American media in the toilet
spilling the blue dye
condominiums and suburbs
splashing over the bowl
reading
Creating Your Livelihood

not a mood
no food fill this appetite
no sound can shake
eyes unshut

land shifts, birds soar, kiosk person sighs

oh, what is a mood?
when sound is no matter--
a crashing symbol, an explosion
sound deaf
when no scent lingers but stale mold
what is a mood?

eyes read 61 dead
another suicide
honoring today's headline,
inhaling
a stiff rash in the throat
no time to undo a tie
off with the suit

a shift in the land mass,
generational leap into

avenues lined with corpses, the end
tide of an offering, one
hand out, after
another
perfect nightmare
guised by cameras
blaring ethnic disease,
in a country separating,
your brothers and sisters,
beyond waters.

~ *Oceanna Burke*



"Mean Machine" ~ Gil Arreola

SLEEPER

The Insomniac says staying awake is like watching the world without a filter. No downtime, no R&R, just you and life, mono-a-mono. He says this all so matter-of-factly that I don't feel impelled to answer. His eyes speak before he can. I feel his question coming, even before he opens his mouth. He cranes his neck forward, brown eyes peering through the wires. When he asks what sleeping twenty hours a day is like, I can think of nothing to say. My face reddens under his scrutiny, my mind skittering from one thing to the next.

Fortunately the guards save me. There's a barrier of wire pitched between us like the quadrants of a game board. The wires make a strange chirping sound like wind rushing through a canyon of shale. When the noise stops, the guards come. Once we hear them, we know not to speak.

The Insomniacs march out, but we stay nodding in line. My legs are numb. My arms waver along my waistline, useless as the hands of a broken clock. Everyday we're awakened for this. No matter how good the Broods are at distributing chemicals they have no answer for atrophied muscles, no antidote for bedsores or the other ravages of never waking. I watch my interlocutor march out. His eyes are craters stubbed into the puffy flesh of his face. Only his mustache, soggy as a lunch bag, distinguishes him from the others

When the Insomniacs are gone, the soldiers come for us. They are sturgeon faced, wearing rubbery masks with slanted eyes like one of those killer bugs with a death's head stitched across its shell. Despite the way they look, they're gentle with each of us. Slowly guiding us back to our platforms and hooking the electrodes to our shaved skulls. If they feel revulsion for the Somnambulist's weak bladders or the sores that pock the older sleepers, they don't show it.

The Cove is where we sleep. As names go, it's pretty apt. The wall across from each platform shifts in constant variants of sea and sky. The carpets are beige and hold your feet like soft sand. I lie down and feel the spider bite of the electrodes. The cold steals my breath and for a few seconds, I lose all feeling. Somewhere the circadian rumble that brings about instant REM kicks up like jungle music.

My temples throb with the faint rhythms. The cold vanishes and for a few wavering seconds I'm a set of stationary eyes watching the blue ceiling. It plays tricks on you. My eyes pick out lonesome sails trailing in the murk like shark fins. I know they're not real, but the game holds my attention, until the serum charges through my veins. The blue world falls on its side and just before I slip away I think of a world without dreams, but it comes to nothing. I'm already gone.

#

I wake in the shower. The water stings my skin like pumice. One of the Brood scientists waits behind a clear glass panel on the other side of the shower, controlling the sprayers. He glances my way and a second later a blast of water hits my left buttock. My reflexes are so dull; I don't even try to keep balance. Metal stiles buttress my body and keep me from toppling. In the few minutes it takes to shower, I try to assemble the puzzle pieces of my dreams. There is a bright sun and my brother Hillel, but nothing else comes.

The serum is supposed to keep us from dreaming, but I can feel the shards floating around in my head. It's like having something on the tip of your tongue. Knowing that once it's out you'll understand, but the words won't come. It feels like losing. Waking from a one night stand to discover pain in your loins and the place beside you turned out. Have I ever had a one night stand I wonder? And for some reason Mustache comes to mind and I feel my nakedness.

High pressure oxygen guns dry my body. The others face forwards, shoulders drooping slightly, shaved heads pale and spotted as quail eggs. Their eyelids droop like they have detached retinas. By the time I notice a soldier coming, it's too late to turn around without him noticing. I face forwards, feeling him pause for a split second before coming forwards and unlocking the stiles. Everything about him says he will report me. But there is nothing I can do about it, so I follow him out. We walk down a corridor in single file, a Brood soldier accompanying each of us. Monitors are stationed every fifty yards, though they're filled with grey static.

The Insomniacs are already waiting. They fidget and cough into their hands. Some light cigarettes and blow dervishes of smoke through the wires at us. Mustache is not across from me this time. He's a few spaces away, his brown eyes ringed with questions, looking from the Sleeper in front of him to me. The guards place the last of us and leave. For a few seconds we're alone. Mustache walks to the man in front of me. They talk, exchanging words back and forth though I'm not sure what they say. Both seem satisfied with the arrangement and Mustache takes his place in front of me.

The room goes dark and the floodlights come up. In that second of blackness, the flush of dreams come upon me. My mind chases its own tail, spiraling outwards like the map of a galaxy. Soon I won't be here. The strings that tether me to reality will lift. Under the soft glow, I hear Mustache's voice.

“Have you thought about what sleeping all the time is like?”

I don't know if I have answer. No one asks me questions here, they just take. The scientist take information from my dreams, the soldiers take my body from point A to point B, I've become so used to being passed around the question stops me in my tracks. I strain, but nothing comes. I feel destined to leave Mustache with a blank stare, when I lean into the wires and say.

"It's like being in a cloud, you don't know which way is up and every direction is covered with mist."

I watch him chew this over. He scrubs a hand over his face, rubbing his chin, taking measure of the long knot of his nostrils. Suddenly the wires chirp and something like electric current surges through them. I straighten up, eyes charged forwards in case someone is watching. Mustache doesn't notice. He bends close to the wires, peering through them like the slats of a neighbor's fence.

"Not bad for a dreamer, but don't you ever think of the world out there?"

"Out there?"

"The one beyond these doors," he whispers. "Hell, the one outside your own coconut."

He points to his cranium. There's a mischievous glint in his weary eyes like a vengeful gardener planting a malevolent weed in an enemies' orchard.

"Think about it," he says.

The wires flex and boll. This time even Mustache is quiet as the scientists do their calculations. We peer at each other like people flirting across subway platforms. When the chirping stops the doors are opened and a soldier ushers them out of the room. Just as Mustache is about to leave, he reaches through the wires and scrapes a thumb nail against my arm. The pain lathes through the murk and springs my eyes wide. Suddenly I'm awake, rubbing my hand against the bloody streak. He moves away, fingering his mustache like a silent movie villain. Anger churns up. I want to duck through the wires and go after him, but it's impossible, so I watch him leave, holding my bloody arm and cursing under my breath.

#

They wake me at the wrong time. I don't know how I know it's the wrong time, but I do. I stare at the masked guard, bemused at the spray of light invading the Cove. He prompts me to stand and I do on shaky legs. Fear shoots through me

as we walk down the lonesome corridor. Everything is a reflective surface and my face hurts from the glare.

The monitors are lit this time. Combinations of numbers scrawl across the screen, some in green, some in red. I don't understand them, but they involve the Sleepers and the Insomniacs in some way. The soldier brings me to a small room and places me on a platform. Oddly he doesn't snap in the electrodes. I lay on the platform, watching his turned back. The soldier's respiration is like a machine, heavy and rhythmic. For some reason it's comforting enough to close my eyes and nod off.

When I wake a scientist is watching me. He's as bald as one of the Sleepers, but gold rimmed glasses are pitched over his nose, magnifying his eyes. He peers at me with a reserved calm like this expression was one chosen for this occasion.

"Are you awake?"

"I don't know," I say.

"Let me assure you, you are then." A faint smile creases the scientist's stinging face.

"We've been noticing some oddities in your brain waves," says the scientist. "And well, we thought it might be good to see if you remember any of your dreams."

"No, I can't remember, the drugs, they keep me from remembering."

The scientist grins. He moves forwards, standing over the platform like watching a particularly interesting animal.

"Is that what you think, that you can't remember because of the drugs? Well, let me assure you that's not the case. Our drugs have nothing to do with your ability to remember."

My face blanches or maybe my jaw drops. It's been so long since I was expected to give more than a one word response that I'm out of practice.

"Now, don't be upset. This is natural. Something the brain makes up to explain its situation. You see the brain is an active thing, so it will take what little it knows about its situation and extrapolate from there."

The scientist grasps both arms behind his back and rocks forward, reading the lines in my face like a soothsayer.

“So I’m to assume you can’t remember these dreams?”

“No, I don’t recall anything.” I say, scurrying deep inside for the words. They don’t come easily.

“Hmm,” says the scientist. Walking behind the platform I hear the mechanism of the electrodes being dragged towards me and then the sentient bite of metal against my scalp. My body sings like a lightning rod touched by sky fire. And suddenly the world fades away.

#

Mustache stands across from me. When the lights go down he whispers.

“There’s a place between the wires where we could cross.”

“Why?”

“I’m tired of being awake and you’re tired of sleeping,” he says.

“How could you know that?”

The wires chirp and the question goes unanswered. His eyes measure the shadows on my face. We’re all quiet. I study Mustache, who in turn looks me up and down. Under different circumstances might I have been with this man. Fate could’ve slammed us together in another life, not as opposites in an experiment, but as lovers.

When the lights come up and the wires go silent the Insomniacs queue up to leave. Mustache bends down as if to whisper a parting word, but instead pushes the wires apart and kisses me. I stumble as if struck a blow. He’s back in line quickly, only the briefest of smiles giving him away.

“What are you doing,” I whisper to him.

“Waking you up,” he says.

#

I wake with a sense everyone knows what’s happening. The soldiers act nondescript, just another day tending to the flock of drowsy sheep. In the showers, the group clenches as water crashes down. Shoulders flinch and goose bumps rattle against pale bodies. The scientist adjusts the controls, dousing exposed flanks, misting un-scrubbed heads with seltzer shots of water. I wonder if this is the last time I’ll be here. The idea is bittersweet.

Usually the day flows effortlessly, but now every second hangs upon the one before it. There is nothing in my life now, not the dreaming or waking, not past or future, only the thirty seconds between the dimming lights and the hum of the wires.

When the sleepers come into the room, I search for Mustache. For a panicked moment, I think he's missing, that the soldiers took him away. But as they line us up, I see him stationed across from me. Mustache smiles like he read the worry in my expression and finds it encouraging.

Anxiety cleaves in my chest. My feet and hands are frozen and twitchy, but sweat peels down my back. The sleepers nod, answering questions nobody asked, while the insomniacs smoke and shift their feet like impatient birds. The room is awaiting the results of our little experiment. I glance down at the space between the wires. Plastic cords hold them apart. There's not much space, but enough to get through.

"Ready kiddo?"

On cue the lights dim. In the darkness Mustache bends down, like a supplicant falling to his knees in prayer. He pushes through the wires. The smell of body odor wafts over and I wonder how Mustache will deal with the sleeper showers. No time for it though. I take a shallow breath and hustle through the space.

After I'm through, Mustache cuts the plastic ties and like clockwork the wires rattle awake with both of us safely on the other side. There's no celebration. No acknowledgment of the switch. Now that we're both on the other side, we mean nothing to each other. Mustache hides his eyes in a forwards stare, mimicking the pose he's seen every day for time immemorial.

I nab a cigarette from the guy next to me, who gives me an angry look, but doesn't protest. I light up, watching the firefly glow. Similar glows flicker on down the line. I draw smoke into my lungs and fight the reflex to cough. Now that I'm here, the world is full and flagrant. On this side of the fence, the sleepers look comatose, almost dead. The wall behind them is headache gray and I realize with eerie clarity, how different Mustache was to even want to communicate with me.

The Insomniacs start to shuffle forwards even before the soldiers open the door. They grumble as they walk. As we're leaving I venture a look at Mustache, now a sleeper. His eyes are cloudy with exhaustion and already a light rhythmic snore burbles from his open mouth. Hours to sleep now, hours to dream. Nighty night, I think, walking away.

#

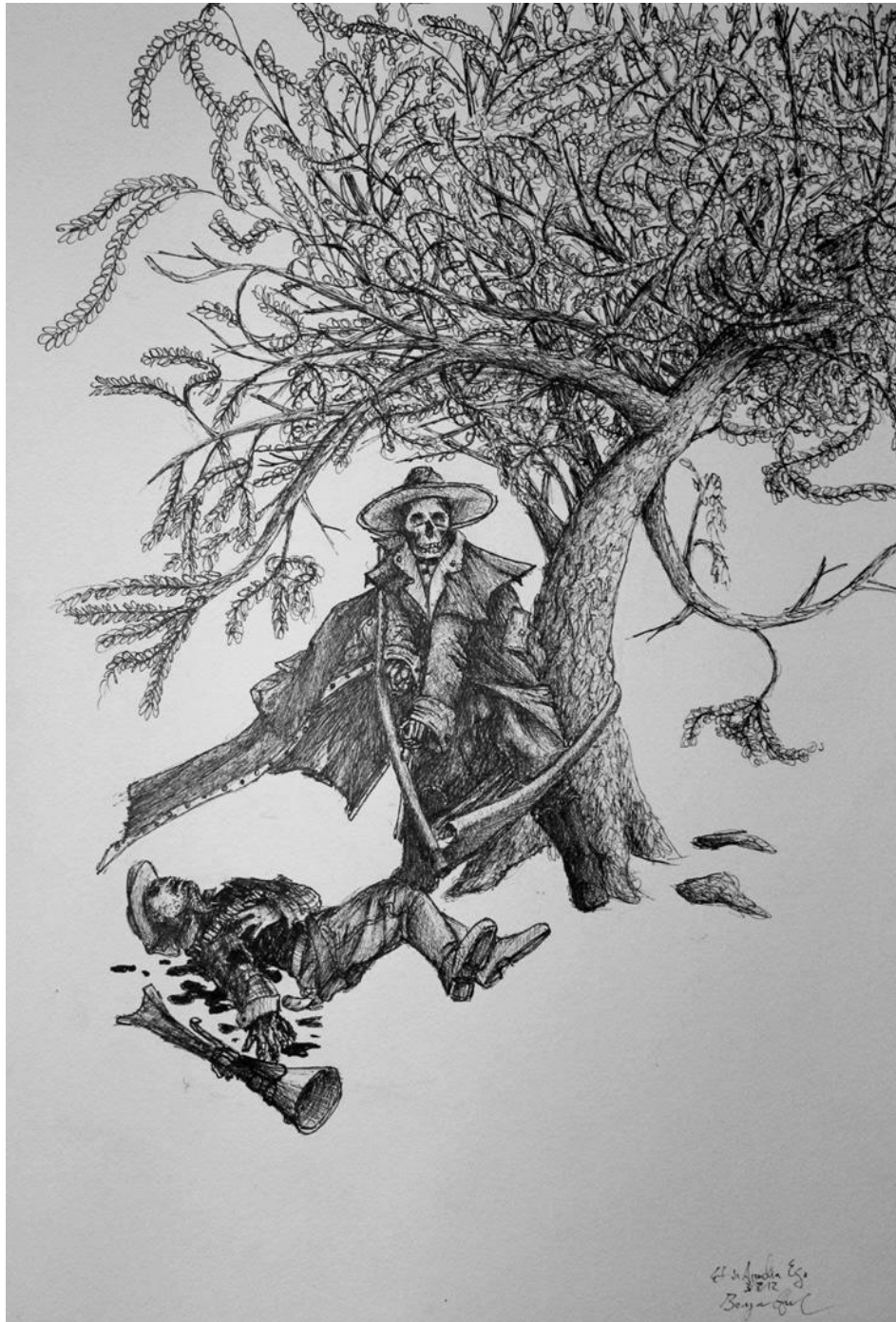
There is a dream, a pervasive one that shadows my subconscious like a premonition. As I'm walking away, I finally recall it. I'm a child running through a meadow. The sun is ripe as a pear and the grass wavers under my feet. Somewhere close is the sound of water. My brother is running with me and we're diving over tiny ravines that crease the hillside. Hillel dives over one, catching his feet as he goes, a laugh busting out of him. I follow, not as successful, but managing to make it over. My eyes are hazy. Sun spots orbit the sky above me like undiscovered planets. Hillel leaps ahead of me, taking the jump so easily he barely breaks stride.

"Don't fall, Jenny," he shouts back. His voice is wild, a birdy shriek taken by the wind. I follow, not understanding his words are meant for me until I'm in mid-leap. Something in his warning dooms me to crash.

I feel everything, the sun warming my back as I gently arc in mid-air, the realization slashing through my brain like a chemical reaction that I'm not going to make it, the echo of Hillel's voice as he sprints away. I crash hard. The air fills with the brittle snap of bones as my leg shifts under me.

A cry tunnels out of me, hits something solid and never makes it. I slump in the ditch, mud sopped, my leg shattered. The sun topples from the sky and Hillel vanishes, never to return. I hold this dream in my heart. Though I feel the terror of Hillel leaving and the pain of splintered bones, what makes me keep this secret is not the fierceness of the nightmare or the wistfulness of waking to find myself safe, but that I can still imagine a life of peril, when I ran with the sun and crashed so spectacularly.

~ Clinton Bryant



"Et in Arcadia Ego" ~ Benjamin Hersh



"End of the Trail" ~ Benjamin Hersh

FATHER

Your hands write with such conviction,
Straight capital to childlike scratch.
The bible pages with remnants of your tears,
Only alcohol can move a soul like that.

A lifetime without you, I felt.
But She said you thought always of us afar,
Though you sought refuge in God—
Your painful times, only could be numbed by the morphine in bars.

How your life was cut short too soon.
The school children miss you most,
Going forward, I hold this Book you left behind
Your highlights guide me like a ghost.

I hope Heaven comforts what here couldn't
I laugh at the eternity apart,
Your constant love was always known—though never shown.
I know you died of a broken heart.

~ Melissa Marie Vincelet



"River's Edge" ~ Nancy Anderson

Divine my thoughts
like clouds of misty cherry blossoms
falling loosely like snow
scarcely brushing my fingertips.
Immerse your Being
and intertwine around me,
ever so slowly
ever so intimately
like overgrown *aioi no matsu*,
Becoming more resilient
until this contrapuntal force
becomes like delightful foreplay.
Tune the strings that are bound to You
like a guitar.
Strum me and enfold me
Until what we hear is a cosmic echo
of a composition
played lifetime after lifetime...

~ *Naomi Querubin-Abesamis*

A GLASS OF RED

My glass of deep red
Propped by my side
Held up to the light
Tints of gold
Shine through
The liquid slowly swirls
As it coats
The inside
Its legs long
And thin
Disappear as quickly as
They form

I open my nose
As the aroma
Slips in
Oak
Acid
Black cherries
My lips softly
Perch onto the rim
I tilt my head back
And await the
First drops to
Flow
Turning into a silky
Embrace
Resting peacefully on my
Tongue
I slowly close my
Eyes
Dionysian's presence
Weighs over my shoulders
As he pushes the liquid
Down
The warm blood

Trickles through
My head is light
My mind is clear

Simplicity
And its glass of
Red

~ Cristina Fucaloro

The image shook as Amar tried to hold his hands steady. He shifted left and then right, and finally centering in the small digital screen was the figure of a man, gravely injured or dead, lying face down in the street. From a concrete building across the way, a long piece of rebar reached out and tried to pull the wounded man to safety. The rebar came from an open doorway, from which the shadow of a man laid across the tile floor.

Amar took a deep breath and clicked '*video.*'

He watched through the screen as the piece of rebar finally hooked the wounded man's upper arm and began to drag him toward the shelter of the building. But the wounded man rolled and the piece of rebar had to come back and find another place to hook. The end of the rebar was conveniently bent like a horseshoe, and reaching across the body, it found a grasp beneath the wounded man's arm, and again, the rebar began to drag the wounded man toward the shelter of the doorway on the far side of the street. All the while Amar focused on keeping the image centered in the small digital screen, and keeping his hands steady.

He stood in a building foyer, out of the sights of the sniper, with both feet planted shoulder width apart and his arms straight out before him. He could hear someone yelling down the street, but he could not make out the words. A distant gunshot caused him to flinch but he quickly re-centered the image and resumed his stance. Slowly, the rebar worked, pulling, tugging, slipping, reaching back for another grasp, and finally heaving the injured man to the safety of the building.

Amar looked at the face of his smartphone, touched the *save* option, watched for the confirmation, and then tucked the phone in his blue jeans. He disappeared into the doorway behind him, hurried through an empty corridor, and came out on the opposite street a block away. He looked in both directions, and when he saw that all was clear, he sprinted down the sidewalk in the opposite direction from which he had come.

After three blocks he slowed to a brisk walk, turned a corner, and stopped mid-block beneath an open window.

Amar made a whistling sound. A head popped out from the window, looked in both directions down the street, and then down at Amar. Amar tossed the smart phone up, and the man in the window caught it using both hands. The man disappeared into the window, the window closed, and Amar walked inconspicuously down the street toward his apartment.

Inside the building, the smartphone was hurried down a hallway to a secluded room. There, was a makeshift office designed to receive and transmit video dispatches to the media world outside. Two men sat at two tables with a laptop computer in front of each of them. The smartphone was promptly handed

over to the nearest computer operator, who promptly connected it to a USB cord, and with a stroke of the keyboard, the video was uploaded onto the laptop computer. A webpage was opened, a message link was clicked, and the man began typing in English. The other two men watched over his shoulder as the message formed on the screen:

"Freedom fighters try to rescue fallen protester, shot by Assad's henchmen, in Hama, Syria. 4th August, 2011."

Using the mouse, the man attached the video to the email, clicked the send button, and the message was sent out via satellite internet. The recipient's email address - *Al Jazeera News* - flashed back on the screen, confirming the message had been successfully sent.

The three men looked at one another and exchanged congratulatory smiles.

Amar entered his apartment to find his room-mate, twenty-six-year old Murhaf Rahman in the kitchen fixing lunch; a sandwich of pita bread, humus, and meat. Leaning against the counter was an AK-47, recently smuggled in across the Turkish border, compliments of Turkey's Military High Command.

"I told you I don't want guns in here," Amar said.

Murhaf took the rifle, opened the kitchen closet, and tucked the gun away inside. He then resumed fixing his sandwich.

"We having a good day, *brother*?" Murhaf asked.

"Yes, it has been a good day, *brother*," Amar replied.

Brothers they were, but not in blood. It was the five-month-old rebellion that bonded them; though they had differing views on exactly how the rebellion should be conducted. Murhaf, a member of the *Free Syrian Army*, was committed to taking up arms while Amar, one among a self-proclaimed group of internet warriors, relied on technology and internet connectivity in their fight against Damascus. Here, in a country where foreign media was banned and local coverage was severely restricted, the only way the outside world could see what was really happening in Syria was through the efforts of Amar and his comrades. Until now, the best they could do was upload grisly homemade videos onto *YouTube*; of victims mangled by gunfire, and other unsubstantiated events, via makeshift satellite transmitters or flash cards smuggled across the border into Turkey.

Despite their different ways, Amar and Murhaf were both freedom fighters; until then, known to the World's media as the *Opposition* - Syria's anti-regime protesters.

But Amar knew it was not really an opposition, it is the whole of Syrian society.

"We will be meeting this evening," he said in English. "I would like you to come."

Murhaf was surprised at the invitation since the two had frequently exchanged their opposing views on the rebellion.

"I want you to see what we do. I want you to meet Hazem," Amar continued.

"I think it would be a waste of time," Murhaf said.

"He is a wise man. I think if you hear his words..."

"Why? Because he speaks English well like you?"

"No, because he speaks words that make better sense than any man I know."

"I'm sorry. I do not understand this kind of warfare," Murhaf said.

"How do you know unless you come and listen?"

"It is time wasted."

Amar stared at Murhaf in a pleading effort. "Perhaps you will find it in yourself to join us *brother?*"

Murhaf said nothing.

"We will be meeting at the safe house on Friday," Amar said.

And he said nothing more.

On Friday the meeting took place as scheduled. Hazem Saleh, the leader of this rogue band of cell-phone journalists, stood at the front of an improvised meeting room. He was a distinguished-looking man, middle-aged with graying hair and a graying beard, and was dressed in a business suit which had obviously not been pressed for some time. He had worked as a media supervisor for the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression before it had been completely abolished by Damascus, and had been a senior foreign correspondent for BBC World News, before foreign news had been outlawed. He had since utilized his skills to organize and orchestrate media coverage to the outside world, trying to bring some sense of professionalism to a band of gypsies.

There were several men seated in metal folding chairs, among them Amar. Near an opened window was a portable, twenty-inch satellite dish pointed skyward. It had been skillfully mounted on a camera tripod and positioned far enough from the window so that it could not be seen from the street below. A wire ran from it to a box of wires on a nearby table.

Hazem addressed the men in Arabic.

"It is a good day, my friends, my brothers. The sun is out. We are alive. And the fate of Syria is securely in our hands. The longer the revolution lasts, the better chance we have for freedom."

A noise came from the rear of the room and all eyes turned back to see Murhaf standing in the doorway.

"Welcome brother," Hazem said.

Amar greeted Murhaf with a smile and offered him a seat, but Murhaf found a place against the back wall where he leaned his shoulder and remained silent.

Hazem took the laptop, opened it, turned it on, and set it on the table. As the screen lit up he turned it so that all in the room could see. He then clicked on a desktop icon.

On the screen appeared *Al-Jazeera English* showing grainy images from a mobile phone of detainees being beaten by Syrian soldiers. The reception, which was poor to begin with, went hazy and then vanished. A young man sitting next to Hazem near the front of the room got up and played with the satellite dish until the feed came back and the images came in clearly.

Hazem clicked on another icon and a second video began to play. Amar quickly recognized it to be the video stream he had captured on his smartphone; that of the long piece of rebar reaching out for the wounded man. Along the bottom of the screen within a blue stripe were the words, *BBC Worldwide News*. The announcer, a very British-looking, well-dressed, woman with blonde hair, spoke in King's English: "President Bashar Assad's bloody crackdown on protesters has taken an ominous turn over the weekend. In the city of Hama, an armored attack on thousands of protesters killed at least 150 civilians on Sunday. There were also reports of attacks by the army in at least four other cities with dozens more killed. The increasing violence has raised eyebrows in the West. The number of people killed in the bloody repression of an uprising against the government in Syria has now risen to at least thirty-five thousand, awakening leaders of the international community..."

"It is exactly what we need!" Hazem said. "To open the eyes of the *West*, to find support of the international community. It is our *path*, our *way* to freedom, and we are the window to the world, God's spies on earth." Hazem's eyes searched and found Amar. "And thanks be to brother Amar, whose courage and steady hand has brought us this recognition."

Hazem turned back to the computer screen and watched for a moment as the announcer continued. "Once-friendly nations have now criticized President Bashar al-Assad..." the announcer's voice spoke. "And French President Nicolas Sarkozy has demanded his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad to step down for overseeing massacres of his own people."

Hazem gazed across the room, his eyes smiling. They had secured an audience in the Arabic world already with many news reels airing on *Al Arabiya*. Now, they had found an English audience as well.

Hazem turned the screen off.

"It is success, my friends," he said. "It is a new milestone. Now it's only a matter of time and Assad will fall." His eyes glanced down at the table-top. "And today, we have been afforded a new tool to advance our crusade."

On the table were two small boxes. Hazem took one of the boxes, turned it over and held it so that all could see the image on the cover. It was an iPhone 4. He turned the box to its side and showed the printed words, "*Apple - iPhone 4S*."

He flipped it and began to open it, and half way through the process he tossed the second box into Amar's lap.

Amar looked up and smiled, and promptly followed suit, opening the second box as well.

"It has enhanced camera and video," Hazem spoke, now holding the iPhone in his hand. He waited for it to light-up. "Much higher resolution, thirty frames per second, longer battery life, and enhanced HD quality. With this, we can take media-quality video."

He turned the iPhone so that all could now see the lit touchscreen.

"CNN... Anderson Cooper... here we come!"

The room erupted with applause.

In the back of the room, Murhaf stood restlessly. He saw no reason to celebrate. *It was not the path*, he thought. A new phone, sure it was nice, but it was no match to the weaponry of Assad's regime.

"No rebellion was ever won without violence," he spoke loudly.

All eyes turned back at him.

"It is silliness to believe you can win a war with a phone."

The men exchanged glances and then turned their eyes up to Hazem. They all knew Murhaf and knew of his resistance to their media focused rebellion. After all, Murhaf was a member of the emerging *Free Syrian Army* whose doctrine was dedicated to the use of force, not to diplomatic change. It was his kind that brought great worries to men like Hazem, not that anyone questioned the *FSA's* dedication to the revolution. It was sectarian war that troubled him; the fear that Murhaf and his comrades, in their quest for liberty, would push the country into a civil war; a war that, once started, could not be stopped and would result in the destruction of Syria.

"Then our rebellion will be the first," Hazem said boldly, finally breaking the silence.

"Assad will not fall to an image on a smartphone," Murhaf replied fearlessly. "Ask the people of Libya."

"Maybe it was true in Libya. But this is Syria. And we are Syrian people, and if we can find justice through diplomatic means... through peaceful means, without Syrians spilling the blood of Syrians, shouldn't we choose peace?"

Murhaf looked cold suspicion at all of them. He was a believer in self-reliance; in the one truth that all things that must be changed, must be changed by one's will to resist. Defiance was the *path*, he thought. Waiting for a diplomatic resolution, requesting help, especially from the Western World, was not only hypocritical but just short of cowardice.

"A brother falls and you photograph it?" Murhaf asked. He paused, glanced over all of them, and then repeated his words, "A brother falls and you photograph it? You photograph the blood of your mothers and fathers, the blood of your brothers and sisters, and your children?" Again pausing, looking over the

silent group. "When will you fight back? If not today, if not tomorrow, then when?"

"We fight back, everyday," Hazem refuted calmly. "With a picture that paints a thousand words and a pen that is mightier than the sword. And with the will of the people, and the will of the *Creator*, we will succeed."

They were elegant words, Murhaf thought, but overused in the course of human history and not worthy of a response. He remained silent.

"It is through international pressure and intervention," Hazem continued. "With the might of the West and the support of the Arabic states, Assad will crumble." He looked at Murhaf. "Are you for the revolution?"

"Of course."

"Then take this weapon," Hazem said.

To the surprise of the other men in the room, Hazem held out the second iPhone, offering it to Murhaf.

Murhaf stared at it.

Hazem's arm extended. "Here. Take it. This is our implement of war."

For a moment Murhaf's eyes remained locked on the iPhone. The other men watched, waiting to see what he would do. *It is such a small and simple device*, Murhaf thought. *Not a device for overcoming oppression or stopping tanks from rolling over defenseless protestors.*

He shook his head. "I don't believe in the power of the pen," he said. "I believe in the power of the sword. Give the phone to someone who believes in it."

Hazem slowly withdrew his arm.

The meeting ended, uneventful and Hazem took Murhaf's advice, later presenting the second iPhone to young Rami Ibrahim who had demonstrated bravery and cleverness in capturing aerial-like shots of protest-busting soldiers from rooftops. There was the normal handing out of assignments, and because there was to be a great demonstration in Assi Square in three days, Hazem took special care to coordinate full coverage of the event. He had a large map of the square, had sectioned it off into quadrants, and assigned the men to strategic spots within the plaza.

After everyone had left, Amar and Murhaf walked back to their apartment silently.

"Why come to the meeting at all if you are going to cause problems?" Amar finally spoke.

"A man educated in the West?" Murhaf mumbled to himself. He had a little half-smile he used to show disdain, and he wore it now. "It is only because he was educated in the West that you trust him."

"Why do you say that?"

"Since when do Syrians follow *Western* ways and *Western* words?" Murhaf said and then stopped. "*Crusade? Who's crusade?*"

"It is because his *way* is the just way, under the eyes of God," said Amar. "Some Syrians resist violence. Why have a problem with that?"

"You have forgotten your American history," Murhaf huffed. "Democracy never came from peace. It comes from war. It is a fact of history. All great Nations have risen from blood. If Lenin waited for a peaceful demonstration, Russia would still be ruled by Czars. If Libyans relied on iPhone images, Gaddafi would still be laughing. And if you turn the other cheek now, Assad will roll over you with his tanks."

"Murhaf, I pray that you do not destroy us."

"No war was ever won by peaceful protest. The free people of Syria and its mujahideen will overthrow Assad, but we will not do so with an iPhone."

Three days had passed and Murhaf's prophetic words had rung true. The safe house had been raided by government soldiers and their esteemed leader, Hazem Saleh, had been dragged off and killed. Much of their equipment had been seized or destroyed. The laptops, which contained email lists of outside contacts on their hard-drives, were taken away by the regime's intelligence service for deciphering. Any man who had used his name in any email, in anyway, was now a hunted fugitive.

Hazem could not be replaced, but as they had done in the past, the rebel effort regrouped and reformed. As safe houses were raided and destroyed, new ones popped up. As equipment was seized or destroyed, new equipment was donated or smuggled in from Lebanon or Turkey along the many smuggling paths which linked one safe house to another. And as leadership was lost, new leadership was found.

The massive demonstration in Assi Square had begun in the morning hours as scheduled, but had turned deadly by early afternoon. The number of demonstrators had swelled into the thousands, too many for the government to stand by and tolerate, so tanks and armored vehicles rolled in and seized the square. Some of the activists tried to stop the advancing armored columns with makeshift barricades, but they were no match to the military might. Amar had watched, and had filmed as the demonstrators scattered and fallen back. Some of them, the fighters like Murhaf, had stayed in the square, throwing stones at armor. But the regime released their snipers, and their mafia-like gunmen known as "*shabiha*" who operated as hired guns for the regime, and they began to systematically cut down any pocket of resistance.

Amar stood back from it all in a small building alcove. He held his iPhone out steady before him and filmed what unfolded before him.

From behind the barricade, he saw a man stand up and raise his fist at the armored vehicles.

"Freedom forever, despite you Assad!" yelled the man.

The man was promptly shot in the head, fell to the ground, and his blood ran in the street and glistened in the sunlight.

Another man who sprang to his aid was also shot, and he fell diagonally, cross-bodied over the first.

“Now Assad,” Amar said to himself disdainfully. “How will you explain this?”

Another demonstrator threw a rock which bounced off the windshield of one of the armored vehicles. The rock was answered by a volley of machinegun fire, but the man had wisely ducked down quickly and escaped injury, for the moment.

Then the barricade was overrun by the *shabiha*, who came from all directions with clubs and guns and riot gear, and began beating, indiscriminately, any activist who failed to flee. Those who had fallen to the ground were kicked and dragged back to the armored vehicles.

Amar watched and filmed as another demonstrator fell to his knees with men over him flailing with their clubs, striking him against his arms which he held up to protect himself until his arms could no longer take the beating and fell to his side, and then his head was bare and unprotected and the clubs came against his head until finally he dropped, lifeless, and was dragged off with the others.

“And this? It is Islamic extremists? The world will now see Assad! The world will now see how you really are... and all your lies!”

It is brutality, Amar thought, and in that moment he reflected back on Murhaf's words. It is true... It is I standing by as my brother falls. It is I watching the spilling of Syrian blood and doing nothing about it. Is it reprehensible? No! It is necessity. We film, not because we liked it, but because it is the path to freedom. It is the only way to defeat this monster.

Then, through the small digital screen, Amar saw one of the government thugs turn and look his way. Some of the other militia turned as well, and before Amar knew it, one of them had his rifle raised and pointed at him. Amar quickly ducked back into the alcove, breathing heavily. When he poked his head back around the corner, he saw the remaining demonstrators fleeing in all directions, and the *shabiha* coming his way. Amar turned and ran, as hard and fast as he could.

In the minutes that followed, Amar could not remember much, only running fast and breathing hard, until he was beyond the earshot of the carnage. He found himself in a protective alcove trying to catch his breath. He was sweating heavily. His mouth was stiff and dry from fear and from all the running. He looked down and realized his leg was shaking and he held his hand against it until it stopped.

He stood there and watched as the people ran past until there were no more. He snuck a glance around the corner and down the street. The street was

deserted. He knew he needed to build his courage to return to the square. It was there that were the journalistic gems that would turn the tide of this rebellion.

“You must be brave,” he said to himself.

He looked again and saw no one. Then he stepped out into the street and began walking forward, filming images of burned buildings and rubble-strewn streets empty of people, yet four blocks away from the square.

A man emerged from behind a building and yelled as he ran past. “It is not safe, brother! Save yourself for another day.”

Amar continued, and another man came running past.

“Turn back,” the man yelled. “The entire Syrian Army is coming.”

Ahead Amar heard distant screams and gunfire, but could see nothing. He ducked into another building alcove, debating whether to continue or not.

“It is time for war, brother,” a voice said behind him.

Amar turned and saw Murhaf standing there, leaning against the wall. His AK-47 was in one hand and a can of Red Bull in the other. Murhaf smiled, brought the can of the Red Bull to his lips, and tilted his head back to get the last drop. He then tossed the skinny can to the ground.

“Come brother,” he said. “I will help you get your pictures.”

Amar was surprised to see his friend, but relieved nonetheless. In the midst of all this chaos, he was not alone.

He nodded his head.

Murhaf peaked around the wall of the building, down the street. Then he led Amar across to the other side, keeping tight to the walls of the buildings as they proceeded north toward the square.

They zigzagged from one side of the street to the other, keeping clear of the sniper fire that rotated from alternating rooftops.

Ahead, the street broadened into a boulevard.

Murhaf ducked into a building foyer, the architectural design of which offered a protective alcove.

“It will be more dangerous to cross further down,” Murhaf said.

Amar nodded.

Murhaf held his rifle in a defensive position and peered around the corner. The protruding façade of the building allowed for a commanding view in both directions. Now he could see the last barricade, a half-kilometer ahead, and he could see movement behind it. The last of the demonstrators, those who had pulled back from the square, had assembled yet another wall of toppled carts and lobby furniture, beyond which it was difficult to see because the air was filled with teargas and smoke.

Murhaf never liked this street. It was too big, and too wide, he thought. It was the financial district, built to show political might, It reminded him of all those who were in power. It was a street for the government elite, he thought,

not for the common person. But he knew they needed to cross this street in order to be on the south side of the square, and this was as good a place as any.

Ahead they heard gunfire, and they saw a demonstrator running to the opposite side of the street. Another gunshot sounded and a bullet ricocheted off the pavement near the man as he made a last leap onto the sidewalk and into a building. Murhaf looked up and saw the dark outline of a head just above the roofline on the opposite side of the street. As soon as he saw it, the head went down.

The demonstrator, safely in the building, peaked out a broken window and then disappeared.

Murhaf looked at Amar. "It's our turn," he said.

Amar nodded.

Murhaf looked up at the roofline and saw nothing. "Let' go."

"Okay."

And without further delay, they bolted across the street, and as they did, midway through, something fell to the ground. It clanged to the pavement, and when they looked back, they saw the iPhone there in the middle of the street, lying there exposed like a flayed rabbit.

Amar reached into his pocket, disbelieving it had fallen out. His pocket was empty. In his mind, he was thinking of all the images it contained; among them the most striking video recordings of Assad's brutal tactics taken to date.

"I must get it," he said quickly.

"Wait."

"I must get it," Amar said again, and without hesitation, he began to move forward.

"Wait!" Murhaf said, holding his hand out against Amar's chest.

Murhaf already knew of the sniper above them. He checked the buildings down the street. Along the roofline of a tall building on the left, another head showed itself. The head stayed up for a second and then went back down. *That makes two*, he thought.

He huddled there for a moment, thinking.

"There's another one up there," he said, motioning with his head.

Amar looked up but saw nothing.

They looked at one another speculatively. For the moment, they were safely out of the sights of the snipers; their heads and bodies were behind the wall of the building. Murhaf looked back at the cell phone shinning in the sun. There within, he thought, were the pictures to paint a thousand words. Amar looked nervous and was sweating profusely. Further down the street, Murhaf could see the last barricade with only a few remaining demonstrators behind it. There were distant sounds from the square beyond, rattling machinegun fire and distant shouting, and he could tell by the way the demonstrators were crouched down and taking cover, something was coming, something big. In his mind he

made the decision to retrieve the phone, not because he preferred it over charging ahead and spilling the blood of the *Alawite* thugs, but because he knew Amar was determined to get it at any cost, and that he, Murhaf, was better equipped of the two to engage such risk.

“Stay here,” Murhaf said.

Amar did not challenge.

Murhaf took one last glance at the rooftop. He saw nothing. Then he took a deep breath, gripped the AK-47 tightly in his hand, and bolted into the street.

A single shot of a sniper’s rifle stopped Murhaf, mid-stride, like he’d been hit by a ghost or something. He staggered two more steps and dropped to the pavement.

“Murhaf!” Amar cried.

For a second, Murhaf tried to pull himself up. But he fell back down and he laid there flat on his back, facing up, his rifle an arm’s length away from his extended hand. And now, Amar could see blood coming from beneath him and pooling in the street.

“Murhaf!”

Amar impulsively leaped into the street. He fell to one knee beside his fallen friend and looked down at Murhaf’s lifeless face.

“Murhaf,” he cried.

My good friend, lost now too to this uprising? The pointlessness of it struck him suddenly.

The fatigue of hopelessness showed on Amar’s face. He felt himself shaking; he felt the emptiness that came from it all. *The rebellion is crumbling*, he thought.

The rattling of gunfire caused Amar’s hands to impulsively grab at Murhaf’s rifle. In an instant, he found himself standing alone in the street clenching an AK-47 in his hands.

A shot rang out and a bullet ricocheted off the pavement near him and when Amar looked up he saw the head again above the rooftop. Amar pulled the rifle up to his shoulder, leveled it and fired. The rifle recoiled violently, spattered out several rounds, and the head quickly dropped back down below the roofline.

The droning sound of on-coming tanks, once heard, it is not soon forgotten, and now Amar heard this sound, in columns, ten-fold. *It is the sound of doom*, Amar thought. *It is the sound of military might*. He felt the vibration of the earth; he could hear the slow, steady, creaking noise, the mechanized hum of powerful engines, the clacking of tracks against pavement.

Through the smoke and haze of gunfire and teargas, he saw the tanks emerging, rumbling down the street directly toward him. The last of the brave demonstrators were now scattering from the barricade in all directions.

He looked down at Murhaf, his beloved friend, brother in the rebellion no more, the blood still fresh on his lips. Beside him lay the iPhone 4, there within

the pictures that could paint a thousand words; images that could change the tide of the rebellion.

He felt his hands tighten on the wooden stock of the AK-47. He felt the blood welling-up in his head and the adrenaline pushing through his veins, he heard the sounds of rattling gunfire, and then he charged, into the haze, toward the advancing tanks.

~ Frank Scozzari



~ Zeng Yuan Yuan

RAVEN CAFÉ

too poor to travel, too many responsibilities
she sat in a café sipping lattes, a poor man's treat
there she read about others who traveled afar
were free and flew to the farthest stars

one day a shiny blue-black raven came
knocking on the window and whispered her name...
cra cra cra...silently he said
your darkest fears must be shed

soar with me to regions yet unknown, be bold
alight on my ebon wings, take hold of my strength, be born
and cra cra cra to your heart's content
in the gold glittering early morn

the ebon of the void beckoned me
while I was fitted for a raven's mask and dress
blue-black tresses fluttering in the breeze
facilitating my magical flight with ease

instantly transported to another café
one full of oracles and powerful omens
the raven, a protector of prophets and poets
sat peacefully awaiting me, sipping a Moets

he said, "go sit on a wire be like me, foot-loose and fancy free
fly swiftly towards your destiny..."
listening with my heart I knew my latte days had lapsed
opening a chapter on a story fitted with many magical maps

as I wait for more chapters to unfold...
cra cra cra cra cra cra cra cra cra
cra cra cra cra cra cra cra cra cra
cra cra cra cra cra cra cra cra cra

~ *Eva Lewarne*



~ Ronald Walker

PUTTING IT DOWN

The sound of one hand clapping can be a slap in the face
She lived encumbered with religious icons and clichés
their iconic voices screaming loudly to obey
buddha heads marching single file
plastered on large canvasses to beguile
the unwary artist, who doesn't trust her own icons
torn from a source unknown....the unborn.

and hung by the hem of their demands,
blind to who she is...who she is...
spinning useless words in her brain
all coiled into a spring of lies
waiting for a final demise.

Art helped to ease the pain of her deadened heart
each thread unraveled one at a time, she learned to put it down
inching on like a blind caterpillar straining to hear her song
to see the light at the end of the tunnel, she forged on
before religion it was her mother who knew her better
then she knew herself and made her eternally grateful
for being a worm on a hook of no consequence or matter

the all-knowing fish-mother told her what to think and what to wear
until she didn't dare to have a voice of her own
for fear of unbridled wrath spewing from her fishy groin
later on religion become the omnipotent womb
sealing her lips into a closed tomb

Stubbornly for years she hung on not believing
she had a right to exist until one bright morn
she saw the error of her ways and got mighty pissed
she dreamt that finally the AGO gave her a small show
and lo and behold some art students marched in holding
large canvasses of buddha heads and hung them
obliterating her small feeble artistic attempts

she threw them out, saying that although her voice maybe small
it is hers and fine, maybe even divine from before she was born,
she remembered what a Zen Master once said,
“If you see a Buddha on the road, kill him.”
Which she did, and the students fled and she put it down.

~ *Eva Lewarne*



"Sonnet 12315: Pomona, CA" ~ Bruce Barton



"Sonnet 12283: El Cajon, CA" ~ Bruce Barton

SLEEPLESS IN LOS ANGELES

He wasn't much of a guy; there just wasn't a whole lot to him. In fact, Dave wasn't much of anybody. He essentially lived a life of monotony. He woke up, went to his crappy job, drove back to his crappy apartment where he had lived alone since he left his dad's house 8 years ago, ate his crappy TV dinners, and went to sleep in his crappy bed. He never ate at fancy restaurants, went on dates, or tried new things. Hell, he never even dreamed. The only thing that set him apart from others was an evil fit of night-terrors he had regularly. About once a week, usually in the middle, on schedule, always a Wednesday or Thursday night, he'd wake up around 3:30 a.m., screaming in absolute terror. He never remembered a thing about them, but he knew that they set him apart from his peers. He knew it was the one thing that made him *special*, even if it was disturbing to him. He did realize, however, that these night-terrors had caused him to struggle at work the next day, not being able to have a sound night's sleep and all, so he'd seen about a million different psychologists, therapists and doctors for it, but they never changed anything. The doctors always had the same old explanations:

"It's the repressed anger from your childhood." But he wasn't really angry about anything.

"Try to avoid anything eerie before bed." Dave never watched anything but Westerns with Clint Eastwood and John Wayne.

"Try quitting smoking." Smoking was one of the only things Dave actually felt any pleasure from.

"You're depressed. Take these pills." He'd tried them all—Lithium, Prozac, Xanax. They never made a difference.

None of their canonical responses ever led to any true resolution. It was as if they went to 100 years of graduate school to learn 10 phrases they kept written down on notecards and reviewed each day before coming in to work. Typical doctors.

It was Monday. Or, maybe it was Tuesday. It would be damn near impossible to tell the difference from day-to-day anyway, except for that one night a month when he was able to escape his worthless existence and was woken up by self-imagined screams, except for that one night a week when he would always know exactly what time it was, where he was, what day it was. But it wasn't that day today.

He got out of bed. He put on his slippers and walked to the table to eat a bowl of cereal for breakfast—crappy Cheerios to be exact, and then headed to his room to get dressed. He put on his mustard-yellow button up, put on his clip-on black tie, pulled up his black slacks (the only color he owned), and slipped his feet into his black loafers of no special mention. He got into his 2004 black Kia and drove the 6.6 miles to work in 11 and half minutes. Just another day.

He pulled into his spot that wasn't really *his* spot and got out of his car. As he strolled in the office of a company he had been working at since he was old enough to work, he overheard the daily watercooler talk from Jay and Barry.

"Did you see the paper today," Barry said.

"A bit, yeah. Angels won again," exclaimed Jay.

"Not that. Did you see that they found that principal from the local elementary in a ditch behind Flannagan's Pub? They think he died last week."

"I heard about that. I didn't pay much attention, though. What's the big deal," asked Jay.

Dave thought he recalled hearing about the murder of his childhood school's principal (surely a new principal since had left). He was positive that someone or something he had read mentioned it, but he couldn't be sure who or what. Either way, he couldn't care less about the daily watercooler chatter. He walked on by, made note of the news for the day, and essentially forgot about it. He sat down at his desk and began to file the 100's of pages-high stack of papers his boss had dropped on his desk the night before.

Dave was just a clerk for a law firm. He didn't do much more than file papers and answer calls. He'd file claims here, stack legal documents there, mail out letters to this guy, answer calls and transfer them to that guy. He had a list laminated and taped to his desk that showed everyone's extension. He'd been there over 10 years, met face-to-face with almost every lawyer, administrator, clerk, writer, and every other kind of employee, but couldn't remember a single damn extension for any of them—not even for his boss, to whom he transferred no less than 10 calls a day.

He finished his work for the day and headed home. He took a shower, ate dinner, watched *A Fist Full of Dollars*, went outside to smoke his nightly just-before-bed cigarette, and got ready for bed. He crept into bed as he did every other weeknight and quickly fell asleep.

3:30 am Wednesday night hit him like a freight train headed for a cement wall. He woke up sweating bowling balls. His bed was drenched in his body odor. He

wasn't sure if the soft wetness on his face was sweat or tears, but he remembered the terror vividly. See, Dave's night-terrors were never the same recurring dream. He always woke to the memory of a new nightmare—whether it be watching some faceless, nameless man dressed in black raid someone's lofty mansion that reminded him of the neighborhood up in the hills of Hollywood, or the same shadowy figure cutting up body parts from a man he didn't quite recognize at the butcher shop he visited twice a month for pastrami.

This night, though, was particularly vivid. He recalled the figure breaking into a storage unit at the U-Haul about seven blocks from his house. He had visited the location a few times when he was clearing out a locker for his father. His dad wasn't in the best of condition for his young age of 57, so he had spent about several weekends in a row cleaning out the garage first and then the storage locker.

He could see the ever-present shadowy figure open the door softly to find a homeless man sleeping on the ground, surrounded by wrappers from McDonald's and empty bottles of tequila. The room was filled with empty, broken down boxes. It was evident this man had been staying here for more than a few nights. The foul stench of urine was as present in Dave's nose at the moment he awoke as it would have been had he *actually* been there. He recalled the figure pulling out a knife Dave had seen once or twice on the Home Shopping Network, something he often left on the TV as he lulled to sleep at night. As the transient awoke, the figure charged him and thrust the knife into his jugular. The man gasped and choked on his own blood as he began to fall limp in the arms of the figure. Although Dave couldn't actually see the figure's face, he felt a small grin crack at the corners of his mouth. Not the devious kind of grin, but the kind of an ever-so-gentle satisfaction. Dave could feel the grinning man's sense of relief in his own body. That was the last moment Dave could recall from his night terror.

The rest of the night went as usual after the night terrors: he tossed and turned, tried to not think about what he had dreamt of, and attempted to fall back asleep. But, as expected, he didn't sleep a wink after 3:30 am.

The next morning, Dave got out of bed with bloodshot eyes, as he did once a week, and had a bowl of cereal for breakfast. He had a glass milk with his cereal, headed to his room to get dressed, put on his mustard-yellow button up, his clip-on black tie, pulled up his black slacks (the only color he owned), and slipped his feet into his black loafers of no special mention. He got into his 2004 black Kia and drove the 6.6 miles to work in 11 and half minutes. Just another typical day.

There was, however, one particularly different thing about this day. He couldn't erase the memory of what had happened the night before. He contemplated on it

the entire morning while he was getting ready. He couldn't help but replay the images in his mind as he drove to work. Maybe some people would find it strange, but he felt a sense of accomplishment after his night-terrors, especially this one. For some reason, even though he lost sleep and often found himself disturbed by the nightmares, he was well aware of his barren existence. He knew that he was just another guy, doing just another job with no real meaning to his life. But this one thing, this evilness that haunted his once-a-week dreams allowed him to feel his own heartbeat; it allowed him to remember that he was more—even if it was just by a little—than the average, uninterested guy.

At least there's something special about me, he thought, as he passed the water cooler where Barry and Jay were talking about the body of Homeless Harry—a man the community had come to love for his carefree attitude about his dire situation—found in the local storage lot.

Sigh, just another day, Dave thought.

~ Chris Baarstad

COLLECTING NAILS AT CORTE GRANADA

Summers were longer then,
days blooming as you knocked on
my door and we ran into the yard
to put nails in buckets.

The streets were clear of noise,
a lone car droning by at times,
the cul-de-sac a road winding with
thoughts in late afternoons,
dying soon.

We skated across the street,
potholes slowing our speed,
our mothers in the backyard
chatting on the patio,
kids not all grown up.

Corte Granada was still then,
a land of not getting older,
all things suspended like
the blue sky, neighbors greeting
each other on driveways.

We searched for spiders in the yard,
the dog barking coarsely,
sensing danger, our bucket
of nails to the side, now an empty
jar in my hand awaiting a
black widow, but we find none.

Inside we played Nintendo,
jumping on the couch,
mindful of nothing, an impervious
childhood, back on the streets
in time, whispering secrets.

When our parents all met
one last time in Myrna's yard
by the pool and slide and barbecue,
the radio blasted tunes that
gave them youth. Smoke rose
from steaks and shish kabobs,
pool lights illuminating our aging
faces, all in time.

We watched as my dad held his
breath under water, minutes
passing in quiet amazement,
the moon's radiating ambience
like the light of God,
and finally he emerged.

Our fathers shared old stories
from before we were born,
our mothers chattering away,
Andrew and you and I
splashing and making eddies
in the hot tub under the gazebo,
covering the pool lights
with our feet and giggling.

I couldn't bear to part,
and times that felt eternal ended
there instantly as the coals on
the barbecue gave their last
waves of warmth and subsided
in the cold dark night.

We sat on lawn chairs,
towels across our chests and legs,
the last drops of water evaporating
and returning to the sky,
the street quiet in reflection.

Plans, to return to this yard,
to listen to youthful tunes,
to cover ourselves in towels to
shield us from the outside world,
to repeat all of this.

Smiles fading gradually stretch
onward into myths of endless
block parties, into songs
of the sublime captured in this
rapture, this bliss of togetherness
burning like a last ember.
It goes out.

If you are ever near the street
where the lone car passes,
where trees grow strong and limber,
where houses grow close for warmth,
I will meet you there where
we gathered nails in the afternoons,
for my bucket has been empty.

~ Ryan David Leack

BIOGRAPHIES

ALEX BRONDARBIT

Alex Brondarbit completed his BA in English Literature at Cal Poly Pomona in 2008. After dropping out of Cal Poly's grad program on a whim, he fled to England where he currently pursues an MA at King's College London in Medieval Studies. His previous work includes articles for *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Poly Post*, as well as several poems in US and UK poetry journals. He is currently writing a humorous novel about love, sex, and friendship entitled, *Off-Kilter*.

ANAKAREN MUNOZ

My name is Anakaren Munoz and I am a fine art student at Cal Poly Pomona. My art work varies from raising awareness, to allowing the media to take over, and create the image. There are times when art is not supposed to be beautiful; it just needs to be honest...

ANTHONY ROJAS

My name is Anthony Rojas, a student at California Polytechnic University, Pomona, majoring in graphic design. Still finding my way through the art world, I've recently taken to exploring expressive, mixed-media drawings. Many aspects of this work I've purposely kept simplistic, raw, maybe even pathetic looking. I don't feel the need to always depict things that people will easily recognize and be comfortable with. Creating and refining my own strange

worlds, stories, and aesthetics is what I'm more interested in at the moment. Even though it's not everyone's "cup of tea", I like that aspect of challenge and would rather stay true to myself and try to keep creative. That goes for any art or hobby I do really, whether it be drawing, making electronic and experimental music, or traveling the world competing in yoyo competitions.

BENJAMIN HERSH

Benjamin Hersh is an artist and designer, native to Los Angeles, and currently residing in San Francisco's Mission District. His work reinterprets classic themes and techniques with modern media, with a focus on narrative action and dry humor.

BRUCE BARTON

A graduate of the San Francisco Art Institute, Bruce Barton has functioned in Corporate Communication as well as Fine Arts. His personal publications include *The Tree at the Center of the World*, about the traditions in the Franciscan Missions of California, and *The Mission Event*, a 90-minute PBS presentation of the roots of cultural pluralism in the Great Plains. He has exhibited internationally, and his work can be seen on the websites of New York City gallery Susan L. Halper Fine Art, Inc., and Art Dimensions, Inc. in Los Angeles. He teaches at Cal State University, Fullerton.

CATHERINE KELLY

Catherine Kelly is a Ph.D. candidate, studying composition and TESOL at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests include critical discourse analysis, technology and literacy, and media studies. She has taught English and communication courses in various colleges in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and when Catherine is not busy with her scholarly pursuits, she likes to read science fiction and fantasy.

CHRISTIAN KECK

I graduated from Lake Forest College with B.A. degrees in Music and Communications where I wrote news articles for the college paper and produced music independently. I perform my poetry-infused songs at famous venues like The Double Door, The Subterranean, and The Whistler. I have opened for national acts like Maps and Atlases, and Julie Meckler.

CLAUDIA MORALES MCCAIN

Claudia Morales McCain was born in El Salvador. She and her family immigrated to the United States during civil war in her country. Claudia draws inspiration from this bicultural experience. She uses appropriated photographs combined with personal memory to build make-shift structures of identity. These intuitively built shelters, rafts, boats, decorated trees, and bodies become stand-ins for the artist's life journey. Claudia's paintings aim to suspend time and capture an emotional terrain through the absence of character and the

use of color and light. The viewer's body is invited to become the absent character.

CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ

Claudia Rodriguez is a community scholar, educator, creative writer, and performer. Her work has appeared in *Blithe House Quarterly* Fall 2005; *Chicana/Latina Studies: the journal of MALCS* Fall 2004 Issue; *Trepan, Tongues Magazine*, *The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Latino Arts Anthology*, and *Westwind: a Journal of Critical Studies out of UCLA*. She has facilitated a number of writing workshops, which incorporated the literature of Chicana/o African-American and Asian American as a means of filling in historical, social and cultural information not included in many public school's history books.

CLINTON BRYANT

Clinton Bryant is a writer and editor for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Over the past eight years, he has produced textbooks for use throughout the state of Florida. Clinton attended Stetson University, earning a BA in English. Here, he was awarded The Sullivan Award in Creative Writing (Fiction) and First Place for Creative Writing in the Ann R. Morris Women and Gender Studies Essay and Creative Writing Contest. His work was also published in the literary magazine, *Touchstone*. He is currently finishing work on his first novel, which he hopes to submit for publication by the end of the year. Clinton lives in Tallahassee, Florida with his wife, Katheryn, and dog, Ella.

CRISTINA FUCALORO

Cristina Fucaloro is currently studying for her M.A. in English at Cal Poly Pomona, focusing on Literature and Rhetoric and Composition. Cristina has a strong passion for the arts, especially film, writing and painting. In her free time, she enjoys writing poetry and screenplays. She currently has an article published in *Skinnie Magazine* and is looking forward to publishing more of her works.

DAHYON LEE

Born in Korea, I moved to Glendale, CA, where I completed my high school education. I entered New York University and graduated from Tyler School of Art, Temple University with a BFA degree in Painting. I received an MFA in Painting from Seoul National University in Seoul, Korea. My primary focus is on painting, but my interests span a wide range of genres including poetry, film, and photography. Currently I live and work in Fresno, CA.

DAMIR SIMIC

I have always been a huge admirer of classical realism and a tradition devotee. We live in times in which we have simply forgotten how to pause and observe anymore; everything boils down to the moment, quick impressions, like we're shooting through life, and that makes me sad. I am interested in something totally different: to summarize lots of moments on canvas or paper, duration, therefore classical, timeless beauty.

DANIEL GONZALEZ

Daniel Gonzalez is a student majoring in Fine Arts at Cal Poly Pomona who has taken the opportunity through expressive drawing to seek dissemination of his work.

DEVON HACKELTON

Devon Hackelton currently teaches Freshman English classes across the greater Pomona Valley. He also plays ToonTown Online and enjoys one of these activities much more than the other.

EMILY HOSTUTLER

Emily moved to the Left Coast several years ago from Philadelphia bringing her East Coast pride and edge. She lives with her husband, her curious son and a little brown dachsie known as Stubbs. She has also shown work in other mediums at several galleries in Philadelphia including, The Painted Bride and Minima. Emily's poetry is most recently published in *Zaum* magazine. In addition to being a poet and fiction writer, Emily has also been known to pose as an installation artist, filmmaker, collage and ephemera junkie and even once as a glass sculptress.

EVA LEWARNE

Born in Poland but having spent most of my teenage and adult life in Toronto Canada, I filled my mind with daydreams and rhyme. Poetry came with ease especially when any life angst overtook me. I studied English at the University of Toronto and then visual arts at the Ontario College of Art and Design; never able to decide which media I

loved more. Painting and poetry seem to be entwined in my life, one augmenting the other. My paintings inspire my poetry and poetry my art.

FRANK SCOZZARI

My fiction has appeared in various literary magazines, including *The Kenyon Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Foliage Oak Journal*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, and many others. Writing awards include Winner of the National Writer's Association Short Story Contest and two publisher nominations for the Pushcart Prize of Short Stories.

GIL ARREOLA

I am an emerging artist based in the Inland Empire, trying to expose my art to a wider audience. My art focuses on things and people around me that are affected by our environment.

GRACE ZHANG

My name is Grace Zhang. I am a junior at Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, California. I have had a passion for art since elementary school. In the past I have mainly focused on technical drawing in graphite and some charcoal, I am ready to expand to more challenging mediums such as painting and sculpture. While I have passion for other things such as literature and music, art speaks to me, allows me to express myself and feel emotions.

HARLEY MAE

Harley Mae was born in Vineland, New Jersey. She started interning at a family friend's gallery when she entered her senior year of high school and has continued working there up until November of 2011. Harley moved to Lakeland, Florida to live with her life partner on 34 acres of land and to dedicate more of her time to her artwork and interest in photography. She spends most of her time at a nearby park in Lake Wales, Florida, where she found true inspiration for her current work in photography. She is always looking for new subjects that will inspire future works in both painting and photography.

JACK FOSTER

Jack Foster is the Production Editor of *A Few Lines Magazine* and the Lead Editor of *Wormwood Chapbooks*. He is also a soon-to-be graduate student at Cal Poly Pomona. His work can be found in various journals such as *Kudzu Review*, *The Rusty Nail*, *Eunoia Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, and *Yes, Poetry*. He occasionally blogs at www.jackfosterpoetry.blogspot.com.

JANET NEUWALDER

Neuwaldner has been exhibiting nationally since 1984. Her work has been exhibited at a variety of venues. Several highlights include: The Everson Museum of Art, Nelson Atkins Museum, American Craft Museum, South Carolina State Museum, Holter Museum of Art and the Headley-Whitney Museum. Other venues include: Michael John Kohler Museum, Arrowmount

School of Arts and Crafts, Greenwich House Pottery, and Barnsdall Park, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Her work is included in the collections at the Mint Museum of Art and Design, Charlotte and the Long Beach Art Museum, in Long Beach, CA.

JERRY ADAMS

Jerry was born in Oakland, California in 1985 and grew up in Manteca, California. After moving to San Francisco in 2010, he decided to continue his education at San Francisco State University studying Studio Art in the photography department. As well as playing music, he has produced live visuals for bands, as well as exhibiting gallery work. Work by the artist is on view at The Nancy Adams Refrigerator Gallery in Manteca, California.

JOANNA LEACK

I am a Statistics major at California State University, Long Beach who has had a huge passion for art since I was little. It started with small household crafts, such as making snowflakes out of printer paper or crafting caterpillars out of multicolored puffballs. Not long ago, I began taking art classes at a local community college which helped me branch out into charcoal and oil pastels. From the first day I held a paintbrush in hand with a palette covered in oil paint, I immediately fell in love. Since then, I have created many different styles of paintings. I enjoy doing pieces with modern inspiration mixed with a splash of color. I'm also a fan of using different techniques to give interesting textures to my paintings.

JOE MILLS

A faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, I have published three books of poetry, including *Love and Other Collisions*.

JULIAN JASON HALADYN

I am a Canadian writer living in London, Ontario. I am the author of *17/13* (Blue Medium Press, 2007), the chapbook *Convulsive Hotel Dreams* (Trainwreck Press, 2008) and *12 Bulls* (Blue Medium Press, 2010). My poems have been included in the collections *Nuit Blanche: Poetry for Late Nights* (2007) and *Crave It: Writers and Arts Food Anthology* (2011) and have recently appeared in numerous journals.

KANAYOCHUKWU NWORJI SR.

I am a student at Cal Poly Pomona and do most of my creative works on wood. I have artwork on cloth, as well as graphic arts.

LIAM CORLEY

Liam Corley teaches American literature at Cal Poly Pomona. He recently paid off the last of his student loans and is relieved to have finally escaped the threat of mental foreclosure.

MELISSA MARIE VINCELET

Melissa Marie Vincelet was born in Virginia Beach and grew up in Los Angeles. She attended Cal Poly before receiving her B.S. from Cal State East Bay in Northern California. Her poem *Lentz* was published in the inaugural *Pomona Valley Review* in

2002. She has been writing poetry for the last twenty years and using it to help teach basic literacy skills and GED preparation to young adults. She is currently working on her first self-publishing poetry project titled *Paperscape* and resides in the Bay Area.

NANCY ANDERSON

Painting is my passion. Perhaps what I enjoy most is transforming a blank canvas to one that, when finished, speaks differently to all who view it. I use mixed media -- sometimes adding sand, glue, or tissue -- to create fascinating images, and I work with various tools for the desired effect. An intriguing interplay of shadows and trails is often a part of my work. My studio is in Plano, Texas; it's a calming release from my full-time job as a salon/spa owner to work there in my free time. My paintings have been displayed in several venues in the Dallas area.

NAOMI QUERUBIN-ABESAMIS

Naomi Querubin-Abesamis is a Filipina American poet and writer, and a graduate student at California Polytechnic University, Pomona in the M.A. program in English, with concentrations in Literature and Rhetoric and Composition. She is the author of "Inner Victory, A Collection of Filipina American Poetry" and founder of Diwa Press. Her poems have been published by *Pomona Valley Review*, *Shadow Poetry*, *San Gabriel Valley Poetry Quarterly*, Cal Poly Pomona's 2004 *Harvest International Anthology*, and Mt. San Antonio College's *MoSAIC Literary Magazine*. She resides in southern California with her husband

Romeo, their two children, Rianna and Noah, and their golden retriever, Snowball. Her favorite poets are Rumi and Jayadeva.

OCEANNA BURKE

I make art for community; sharing, and curing. Formalism, surrealism, nouveau, objectivity, subjectivity, guerrilla performance, non-violent direct action, racial and gender equality, social justice, humanism, Transcendentalism, and environmental preservation all inform my work. Water, plant life, air, fog, karaoke, tunnels, swings, carousels, opal, indigo, orange, laughter, whispering, storytelling, tribes, flamingos, sea horse, octopus, eco-systems, bike travel, freshly ground nutmeg, coconut, quenepa, guira, tango, Fado, piano, disco, banjo, July, Autumn, silkworms, improvisation, sunset, the ancient and archived: these are the elements embedded in my true essence.

PAMYLLA MARSH

I am a Pomona resident interested in art, history, photography, and writing.

RONALD WALKER

My name is Ronald Walker and I am a former Southern Californian artist who is living in the Sacramento area.

RYAN DAVID LEACK

Ryan David Leack is a graduate student and teaching associate of English at Cal Poly Pomona. His work has been published in journals such as *Pif*, *RipRap*, *Contemporary World Literature*, and *Wilderness House*

Literary Review. In spare time, he writes music for independent films which have won awards at the Phoenix International Film Festival, Fargo Film Festival, Sonoma Valley International Film Festival, and others. His music can be heard on Netflix and Amazon. He lives a quiet life with his wife in Pomona seeking Thoreauvian tranquility and harmony with words.

SALMA RUTH BRATT

A professor of English and pedagogy, Salma Ruth Bratt is a second generation American with an interest in the literature and linguistics of immigrants. She loves her sweet and thoughtful family, traveling abroad, passionate readers and writers, the theater of complex and interesting playwrights, the music of good listeners. Her work is often completed in collaboration with Moulay Youness Elbousty, for whom she is exceedingly grateful.

SARAH BRYSKI

Sarah Bryski is an undergraduate student from Ashley, Pennsylvania. She is currently majoring in English – Secondary Education and minoring in Psychology at Susquehanna University, where she is secretary of the Theta Chi chapter of Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society and co-founder of Film-Making Club.

SEAN ST. ONGE

Sean St. Onge is a young aspiring author currently enrolled in his first year at Cal Poly Pomona pursuing a degree in English with

an emphasis in Language and Literature. This is his first publishing with the hope of many more to come as he aspires to become a full time author. He resides in the quaint town of Covina within the San Gabriel Valley where he enjoys playing basketball and being an older brother.

YING XIONG

Ying Xiong is a Ph.D. candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon whose work has appeared in *Literature Education*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Culture and Translation Studies*, and in other publications. She specializes in poetry and poetics, translation, culture, representation, and especially the influence of rewriting and re-interpretation across linguistic and cultural boundaries.



Thank you for reading