

PVR 14



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POMONA VALLEY REVIEW



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY | FICTION | ARTWORK

7	A Quiet Spring <i>Andrew Chan</i>	33	Banderitas <i>Daniel Spielberger</i>
8	Corona with Lime <i>Elizabeth Smillie</i>	37	Untitled <i>Charlotte Devitre</i>
9	The Spider Remembers <i>John Grey</i>	38	The Contract of Friendship <i>Rose Lopez</i>
10	Moth Minds IV <i>Saul Villegas</i>	39	Dance Class <i>Gillian Ebersole</i>
11	Adrift <i>Ivo Drury</i>	40	The Sunspot <i>Skylar Clark</i>
12	Fire <i>Konysha Wade</i>	41	Waves2 <i>Doina Ciobanu</i>
14	Salmon <i>James Croal Jackson</i>	42	Seventeen <i>Rose Lopez</i>
15	Untitled <i>Charlotte Devitre</i>	43	friday the thirteenth <i>Gillian Ebersole</i>
16	Laundry Daze <i>Ari FitzGibbon</i>	44	HAVE U EVER BEEN CRUEL <i>Cheri Mae Jocson</i>
21	Pieces of Me <i>Doina Ciobanu</i>	45	Untitled <i>Charlotte Devitre</i>
22	The Explanation <i>Peycho Kanev</i>	46	Dissolution of a Marriage <i>Nicole Neitzke</i>
23	Lexapro <i>Andrew Chan</i>	47	Ex at a Wedding <i>James Croal Jackson</i>
24	A Legacy <i>Kathryn Carlson</i>	48	Memory <i>Danise Kuang</i>
25	Presence of Afterlife <i>Amadi Greenstein</i>	49	For the Caged Bird Sings of Freedom (Cover) <i>Jannelly Herrera</i>
26	queering queer <i>Gillian Ebersole</i>	50	Amalgam <i>Sanjeev Sethi</i>
27	Exposed Only a Little <i>Skylar Clark</i>	51	Drifter <i>Skylar Clark</i>
31	Tommy Wiseau <i>James Croal Jackson</i>	53	The Heartache of the Open Door <i>Jan Niebrzydowski</i>
32	Secluded Silence <i>Amadi Greenstein</i>		

- 55 To Treasures
Fabrice Poussin
- 56 Curtains For Me
John Grey
- 57 Blame the Feud
Ace Boggess
- 66 Jump Up
Edward Supranowicz
- 67 The Good Evil
Psycho Kanev
- 68 Shadowland
Ivo Drury
- 69 A Percussion of Echoes
Jan Niebrzydowski
- 70 Ghost Girl of Depression
Amadi Greenstein
- 71 Salem
Nicole Neitzke
- 72 The Charlatan
Kalvin Madsen
- 84 A Bit Moody 4
Edward Supranowicz
- 85 For I Can Hear Life
Len Carber
- 86 SALTON SEA
Cheri Mae Jocson
- 89 The Village
Fabrice Poussin
- 90 "Destroyed"
Konysha Wade
- 93 Last Stand
Fabrice Poussin
- 94 E Lipogram for She and He, Who Settled
Somewhat Serene
Ashley Knowlton
- 95 At the Vent Haven Museum
Rikki Santer
- 96 A Lipogram for a Lank Man
Ashley Knowlton
- 97 Ephemerality of Life
Saul Villegas
- 98 Pastures Statues
Alfredo Arcilesi
- 102 The Sound of Music
Christian Hanz Lozada
- 103 City of Waves
Jarret Lin
- 104 A Cup of Morning
Jan Niebrzydowski
- 105 Conversing with Gods
Rikki Santer
- 106 From the Editors
- 128 Biographies

Dear Readers

2020 will always be known as the year of COVID-19, of Black Lives Matter taking to the streets, and of uprisings and unrest. We here at *Pomona Valley Review* are changing the way our editorial letter generally works to issue a statement. We stand with Black Lives Matter and with the uprisings. The arts are not immune to what's going on outside; rather, it is our job to document, through various mediums, the human experiences tied to these moments and these movements.

PVR 14 is an issue of unrest and loss. We do not curate our content ahead of submissions here at *PVR*; we let our submissions speak for our artistic community and put together a vision from the voices of the people submitting work. From these voices, we've heard cries of pain and loss, of fear and suffering, of police brutality and discrimination, of broken relationships and separations, of isolation and desolation, and of occasional happy moments tied to friendship and family.

While much of the work in the issue is reflective of the pandemic, BLM, uprisings, and interpersonal love and loss, we want to offer a word of hope that might not be found within these pages:

We are stronger when we are united. If the world seems bleak, if COVID-19 has you afraid, if the police seem too well armed, if your area seems void of people willing to rise and stand against racism, oppression, and tyranny, there is always hope. Social media, for all its flaws, can help us all connect to groups with similar views and the larger world. The best word of advice we can offer is to find your community and build networks of solidarity so you have support or can provide support for those in need during these times.

Finally, here's a list of resources for people nationally. For more localized offerings, try searching for mutual aid networks, groups

like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) or Food Not Bombs, and Black Lives Matter chapters on social media for your local area. There should also be alternative numbers found either on your city's website or through local activists for numbers to call for emergencies that aren't 911 or the police.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline:
1-800-273-8255

The National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-7233

Feeding America
(nationwide foodbank network):
FeedingAmerica.Org

The CDC
(accurate COVID-19 findings and news):
CDC.Gov

Planned Parenthood:
1-800-230-7526
PlannedParenthood.Org

We stand in solidarity with BLM, the uprisings, and for defunding the police.

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PVR

A QUIET SPRING

A thousand dead, making for a second day streak
Ice rinks converted into makeshift morgues
The homeless own the streets. Buildings stand
Vacant, the Five Boroughs are devastated
Bill Boroughs rolls over to write a verse with glee.
We all know a little too much and whisper solemnly
What can be said that hasn't already?
Words hardly seem enough. The president is predictably
Incoherent, the hospital beds are filling up
Entire nations halted, paralyzed within weeks.
The doomsayer on Sproul Plaza warned us
Swinging his unopened Bible with vengeance
My friend says I must remain positive, lacking
Specificity. They have devised ways
To fill the empty hours—what was once useful
Is now useless, while useless things occupy need.
The birds outside offer their evening notes
The bus driver completes his phantom routes
And the neighbor's wife lounges smoking carelessly
Tonight is like any other, almost. In the shower
I let the hot water soothe the numb me.
Closing my eyes, the brief aurora of
What could still be flashes
In the stream of history.

~ Andrew Chan

CORONA WITH LIME

Here comes the squirrel I named Paul,
We're friends now.
Prince is singing about loneliness
and grasshoppers are at my window.

We're friends now.
Italians are singing on balconies
and grasshoppers are at my window
because it's April.

Italians are singing on balconies
and I am too, probably to my neighbors' dismay.
Because it's April
I have a uniform of silky robes and roller skates

and I am too, probably to my neighbors' dismay,
wearing them around the apartment.
I have a uniform of silky robes and roller skates.
Which colored glasses today?

Wearing them around the apartment,
the floor is lava, but don't worry, I have plenty of pillows.
Which colored glasses today?
Rose. Or yellow?

The floor is lava, but don't worry, I have plenty of pillows.
The grocery stores are empty.
Rows of yellow
cases of corona are on sale, don't forget the limes.

The grocery stores are empty
so I'm getting familiar with my freckles.
Cases of corona are on sale. Don't forget the limes.
I feel like putty in the hands of fate and purell,

so I'm getting familiar with my freckles.
Prince is singing about loneliness.
I feel like putty in the hands of fate and purell
but here comes the squirrel I named Paul.

~ Elizabeth Smillie

THE SPIDER REMEMBERS

Before I scooped up the accidental prey
at the fringes of my trellis,
before I trapped the crisp beetle, the unwary fly,
in my grim shudder of a net,
I'd bask in the peach glow of dawn,
as if this web was the nerves
of a huge invisible body
and I was the quaking heart of it.

~ John Grey



“Moth Minds IV” ~ Saul Villegas

circumstances such
you anticipate an eruption

lifetimes lived under Vesuvius

will this be the summer
of ceaseless riots
or will we see drift instead
anger becalmed

lines of leaf-cutter ants
trail along the forest floor
each with their sail of green

~ Ivo Drury

FIRE

We are told never to question God.
We are told His ways are not like ours.
We're also told to find joy, in our battle scars.
But the fire still lingers.
I can rub where it burned.
The singe of the heat, I can touch where it hurts.
I can't smile...
I can't breathe.
Darkness overwhelms me.
My stomach hurts.
My head is spinning.
Lord do you really see me?
.....
We are told never to doubt.
For a double-minded person is unstable.
Yes, we are supposed to think, "I know He'll bring us out, I know He's able."
But in the midst of this cloud it seems there's no way out.
I have to fight. I'm tired.
Confusion seems to mount.
To hold on is...
To be strong is...
Who said that that's me?
I didn't sign up for this and I never agreed.
It hurts.
It burns.
It consumes.

It's Black life.

~ *Konysha Wade*

Chadwick
refused to shoot
until he had a salmon omelet.

I drove Hollywood Boulevard heat
asking restaurant to restaurant who would
cooperate

until finally a place
(since shut down)
said, *yeah, we'll*
put salmon

in an omelet
for thirty-five
dollars.

And now, my boss
demands salmon
with lunch.

When there's no salmon
at the nearby Giant Eagle he asks
Why are you in ghettosville?

I drive to the suburbs,
walk into the seafood section
and buy bags of pink flesh

hanging on a refrigerated
display for onlookers to ogle.

~ James Croal Jackson



"Untitled" ~ Charlotte Devitre

LAUNDRY DAZE

The shirt in the dryer isn't mine.

When I pull open the door to see it looking back at me, a glaring spot of color amid my load of darks, I feel for one disorienting second like I'm back in college. Almost every Sunday for four years, I wound up with someone else's sock or sports bra or pair of boxers in my load. But I've been out of college for six months, and doing laundry in the far nicer laundry room of my apartment complex for four months, and this shirt is still there.

It's a men's dress shirt, the fabric a pale blue that reminds me of the walls of my childhood bedroom. I pull it out gingerly and check the tag for a name, an instinct left over from a childhood of mixing up leotards at the dance studio; but all that tells me is that it's a size XL, 80% cotton and 20% polyester.

Pulling my phone out of the pocket of my jeans, I snap a few photos of the shirt, tilting it this way and that to try and catch the light. I'm not sure what good I expect it might do, exactly—like I'm going to stumble across someone in the lobby who's searching desperately for their lost shirt, but they won't believe I've actually seen it until I show them photographic evidence? Still, in the moment, it feels like it might be helpful to preserve this.

A text notification pops up on my screen as I'm angling for a clearer shot. I automatically swipe it away, so quickly that my eyes only register the contact name after it's disappeared. Guilt twinges faintly in my stomach like an out-of-tune guitar string, but I try to dismiss that, too. I'll respond to Molly's messages soon; she hasn't sent that many, so it can't be urgent. For now, I turn my attention back to the shirt.

I don't know of any policy for lost-and-found items in our building, so I deal with it the same way I did in college; leave the shirt folded as neatly as I can manage (which isn't very) atop the machine, hoping that will be enough.

It isn't.

Next week, the shirt is back in my usual dryer, perched innocently atop a pile of stretched-out Nike brand socks and my one cocktail dress, worn for the first time in months at a black-tie work party last Tuesday. When I go to pull it out, something else peeks out from under it, gleaming gold and blue.

Gently tugging this new foreign object out of the mass of clothing, I hold it up to the light. My eyebrows knit together as I study it. Who would put a bowtie through the wash?

Thankfully, this tie—cobalt blue and dotted with tiny golden hexagons—appears to have survived its trial by dryer unscathed, but still, how thoughtless do you have to be to do that to silk? That was one of the first things I learned from my mother when she taught me how to do my own laundry, even before how to get period blood out of clothing. Does someone this irresponsible even deserve to own this?

I frown at myself and squash that thought down. Just because some man out there is mildly careless with his clothes—well, moderately, given that he's forgotten them in the left-hand dryer multiple times—doesn't give me the right to steal them away to a better home. What would I even do with a man's clothing, anyway? It's a foolish impulse.

Regardless, though, it's clear my "leave it on top of the dryer and hope for the best" policy has not been as successful as I hoped. It may be time for something more extreme; something that actually involves talking to people.

Apparently, this apartment building does not have a lost-and-found. Not only that, but the building supervisor has no intention of ever putting in a lost-and-found and is, frankly, a little offended that I would suggest it, because how is it his fault if somebody can't be bothered to keep track of their personal items, huh? Don't I get that he's a busy person, that he's got a wife and three kids to feed and he's been up all night helping kid number two with her algebra homework and maybe he has more important things to do than worrying about the fact that I can't remember where I left my favorite shirt, so why don't I just run back to my apartment and order something new online like you millennials like to do because you can't stand talking to people, huh?

With a screech of its hinges, the window in front of the desk is unceremoniously closed in my face before I can clarify that I'm trying to be the 'found' side of the lost-and-found equation, or that I'm technically part of Generation Z, or add that maybe people like him are the reason I'd rather not talk to anyone most of the time. So I trudge back upstairs, my laundry basket knocking against my hip with every step, a dull ache spreading through the bone there. The shirt and tie lie atop my load, complementary shades of blue flickering into my peripheral vision every time the basket swings forward, a taunting reminder of my failure.

My phone buzzes harshly in my hip pocket, startling me so badly I nearly stumble into the stairway railing. With some effort, I shift the basket to my other hip and fumble to extricate the still-buzzing phone from my jeans.

Molly's face scowls up at me from the screen. Her contact photo is poorly cropped; you can see where my cheek and chin are squished against hers, and the tips of my fingers where my hand curls around her shoulder, keeping her in place. She spent days trying to steal my phone so she could delete it—she'd just royally screwed up a dye job, leaving her bob peppered with patches of a faded-looking asparagus green—but I batted her hands away every time, vowing I'd never get rid of it. It's still my favorite photo of us. I took it just two years ago, but we already look so young in it, so full of energy that I quite can't remember having.

I answer the phone.

"Zuckerman," Molly says in greeting before I can say a word, her voice warm and low in my ear. She's called me by my last name since the week we met. My parents hate hearing her say it—they think it's disrespectful, or some nonsense like that—but I like it much better than the frilly first name they saddled me with, even though I'd never say that to their faces.

"Molly," I say back. I feel like I should say something else—ask why she's calling, what she's been up to, crack a joke—but my tongue feels heavy and thick in my mouth, as if the few sentences I exchanged with the building supervisor earlier were already too much for today. When was the last time I said more than a few sentences to someone in a day, come to think of it? My job is heavier on emails than face-to-face conversation; outside of a handful of work and family events, I've barely had to talk to anyone since we graduated.

Molly saves me the trouble of asking why she's called. "You haven't answered my texts. Is something wrong?" Straight to the point, as always.

I laugh, startled; the sound creaks in my throat like a rusty door hinge—I'm out of practice at that, too. "What? No. Why would there be?"

"How would I know? You've barely talked to me in months." Her tone isn't accusatory; it's even, steady, like she's reminding me of something I might have forgotten. Something I was trying to forget, with every text I swiped away.

I bite my lip a little too hard, then hiss at the pain of it, the dry skin of my lips nearly tearing under my teeth. "I'm sorry, Molls. I meant to text you back, really, I just kept forgetting—why were you texting? Is something wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong with me. I just missed you." There's a slight husk to her voice; it takes me a second to register, another to parse it as the catch of tears in her throat.

A slight lump swells in my own throat, responsive. I was the one she cried on when she failed her French final, when she almost broke up with her girlfriend, when her grandma passed on three days before Thanksgiving. I'm not supposed to be the thing that she cries over. How could I have made her feel like this? And why don't I feel worse about it? I feel bad, of course I do—confused, saddened—but it's distant, somehow, hazy, like there's a layer of smoked glass between me and my emotions.

She clears her throat, her voice growing stronger. "You said graduating wouldn't change anything. Best friends forever, right?" There's a hint of a challenge to her voice as she repeats the promise we made.

"Right. Yes, right, of course." I mean it, but my voice sounds weak, somehow unconvincing. Setting the basket down, I lift a hand to rub at the faint ache growing in my temples; I always get headaches when the weather takes a turn, and the news said there's a storm front rolling in. "I'm really sorry, Molls. I've just been—busy."

"With what?"

Life, I want to say. Having a job. Being an adult. Those things are true, or they should be. But what do I spend most of my time doing, when you get down to it? Not paperwork, or taxes, or groceries, or any other adult thing. A good portion of it is spent laying in my queen bed, staring at the ceiling and trying not to think about how much better things were in college, when I was too busy with classes and clubs to realize the vastness of the future stretching out before me. Talking to Molly about those times—and she'll always, always bring up those times, eventually—just hurts too much, now.

"Just things," I say at last, wincing at the flimsiness of it. "I didn't mean to ghost you, Molly, honestly. I'll do better."

All that comes through the phone for a long moment is the soft huffs of her breathing, but I think I can still hear the second she decides to let it go. "I have a bus to catch right now. If I call you later, will you pick up?"

The husk in her voice bites into my heart. "Yeah, Molls, I will. I promise." I mean it, as much as I can. I want to mean it.

"Good." A brief pause. "I have homework for you."

I laugh again; it comes through my throat more easily this time. She'd say that to me almost every week in college, pressing a book she thought I should read or a CD I needed to listen to into my hands. I know the right answer for this question, at least. "Give it to me, teach."

“Go find something...” She pauses and hums for a moment, musing. “Something that can make you happy.”

That wasn’t what I was expecting her to say, but before I can ask for clarification, the dial tone sounds in my ear. I stow my phone in my pocket, haul the basket back onto my hip, and resume my climb up the stairs.

At first I tell myself I’ll do something happy-making once I get to the apartment; make a snack if there’s anything left in my fridge, or go pull an old book out from the shelves lining my bedroom. Probably one of the tropey, dramatic portal fantasies I loved as a kid—maybe even my all-time favorite *Eric versus the Forces of Evil*, the book that Molly and I bonded over in freshman seminar when I showed up wearing a T-shirt with Eric’s face on it. I used to do a yearly re-read of *Eric* and its sequels, but I can’t remember the last time I touched that book, or any of the others on those shelves. But I decide I need to fold my laundry before I can do anything else. When I try, though, I find myself sitting on my living room floor glaring at the shirt and tie like I could burn a hole in their owner’s head, my eyes watering from the force of my glare.

Who is this careless, well-dressed man? Someone tall and handsome, who never crops himself out of photos because sometimes catching sight of his face makes him nauseous. Someone who never feels like his skin and his name and his life don’t fit him right. Someone who doesn’t daydream about quitting his job only to realize there’s no other job he’d like better, or go months without talking to his best friend because he can’t get through a conversation with her without it feeling like a lie, or know deep down that he can’t go on with his future as the person he is but have absolutely no idea why.

My right hand shakes as it reaches out and curls around the shirt and bowtie. My feet are unsteady underneath me as they carry me across the room to the window, which the storm has already decorated with sleet. Chill hits my fingertips and penetrates through to the bone when I push the window open, reach out, and open my hand.

Before two seconds can pass, the shirt and tie vanish behind curtains of sleet.

Then my brain reboots, and I realize that I’ve just pitched someone’s expensive property into the street because of my own pointless, perplexing anger.

I’m halfway down the stairs before I can form my next conscious thought, pain ripping through my underused calf muscles, floor grit digging into the soles of my bare feet. Sucking in lungfuls of chill air, I lurch through the lobby, shove open the front doors of the building and stagger out onto the sidewalk. Sleet splatters against every inch of my skin, but I grit my teeth and try to ignore the dampness as my eyes sweep frantically over the ground.

It feels like hours before I trudge back through the doors, accepting that the clothes are nowhere to be found.

A poster on the corkboard in the downstairs lobby informs me that the laundry room is closed for repairs this week, so I haul my basket to the tiny laundromat across the street—remembering to put shoes on before I leave the building this time, thank god. For over an hour, I sit with my back to the machine, soaking up its warmth as it hums and thumps against my spine.

When the dryer shudders to a stop at last, I slowly stand up and pull it open, peeking inside trepidatiously.

Nothing inside but socks.

I breathe in and start shoveling the laundry back into the hamper. But as I get to the bottom, my hands slow.

They're there again, peeking through a scattering of socks. The shirt. The tie. Almost exactly the same—but not quite.

Something is fastened to the shirt this time. A nametag, laminated plastic. I lean closer to read it.

Eric Zuckerman.

The name of the boy whose books I loved so much I wanted to be him in middle school—and for longer, much, much longer than I wanted to admit. And my name. Together.

My hands are shaking again.

I scan through all the male relatives I can remember. No Eric.

Zuckerman isn't that uncommon of a name. And neither is Eric. But a voice inside of me still insists that this means something. And today, I listen to it.

I put the last few socks into my basket. And then on top of the clothes that I've bought in bulk, the ones that keep me from getting noticed or noticing myself, I place the shirt and tie, gleaming blue.

The fabric of the shirt slithers soft and cool over my skin. I watch three YouTube videos on "How to Tie a Bowtie" before I raise my hands to the strip of silk around my neck, but the knots and loops come to my fingers with only a little fumbling.

When I look at myself in the bathroom mirror, lights off, eyes half-closed, I don't look like the man who I pictured owning these clothes. But I look like someone who might become him, someday. I look like the first step towards someone that I could be happy with.

I dig my phone out of my jeans and hit the first name at the top of my recent call list.

"Molly?" My voice sounds more natural in my ears than it has in a while. "Hey. It's me. I, uh, did my homework. I think—I think I have something to tell you."

~ Ari FitzGibbon



"Pieces of Me" ~ Doina Ciobanu

1. The Poem

The mask you put on
when you want to see the real
world through the eyes of someone
else.

2. The Poet

Someone who rummages
in the refrigerator in midnight
with his eyes closed
for the bottle of vodka
and a ham sandwich.

~ *Psycho Kanev*

I take a pill each morning to keep
My head straight, without these measures
I am hard to bear. Elemental in the shower
I piece together who I am while the water
Rushes over me, like a stream rushing forward
Passing over present joys unconsciously.
I am starting to look more and more like
My father, and by his account I am not
Who I am supposed to be. He is confined
Resurrecting dead ends while his roommate,
Still deaf and blind, soils himself and calls
For Anna-Marie. The Inuit has twenty-seven
Words for snow, and maybe there is something
Untranslatable, unknowable in the ways
They have learned to see. Jets of water
Course down my neck, along my crossed arms
Dripping steadily. Even as I stand still
In my square my mind moves relentlessly
I find it harder to recall my father's face,
His voice, the eloquence that came before
The slurred speech. I wonder if the Inuit
Grows weary of his sheltered fate,
The repetition of cold and the landscape
Too blank to offer an epiphany.

~ Andrew Chan

A LEGACY

When I look at pictures of my mother
The resemblance is uncanny
We have the same cheekbones
Wavy hair
Warm smile
A sadness in our eyes we try to hide
A capacity for pain that neither one of us ever asked for
I wonder if this is what someone means
When they talk about a legacy

~ Kathryn Carlson



"Presence of Afterlife" ~ Amadi Greenstein

QUEERING QUEER

when I sat in cold metal desks under a crucifix, I read the vocabulary word *queer* defined as *strange; odd*. I never questioned what this word might mean – queer.

but marriage featured a young woman and a balding man. catholicism is the antithesis of *strange; odd* even though a god three persons in one love triangle is rather queer.

now, I laugh a little, thinking about high school theater, pastel-colored hair, and dating boys who became gay men. how we all felt safe in the backstage closet, a left-out definition of queer.

he held me so softly most days, and I wanted him to grab me and shove me into a wall and tell me that he needed me. it was so fucked up really. I came from relationships that weren't queer,

where bruises and black lips meant I love you, so when he kissed my forehead, I just knew he would leave me. I found a polaroid of him kissing another woman at the club. queer.

I remember those early nights leaning into the Paris air, drunk on wine and our own trauma. she stepped into our friendship gently, when we donned pixie cuts and pantsuits to look queer.

look, I never looked for her love. I thought the grocery store runs and failed recipes sprung from our mutual distaste for college men and our habit of collecting words for poetry, like queer.

when she told me she loved me, she stopped speaking, only alcohol would break her silence, making her lurch with slurred insults. she set fires and burned me for the way I wore queer.

she took one yes and made it origami, dumped a thousand paper cranes on my doorstep when I asked to be alone, stuffed me in the cardboard box that held the paper, made me the queer

she wanted. my roommate asks me which men I want to fuck and I vomit. she asks me which women I want to fuck and I vomit. I don't want to fuck anyone. I have been violenced by queer.

so many labels, with none that seem to fit quite right, trying to squeeze myself into an identity like an old pair of jeans but my genes always seem to lie to me. still, I like the fit of queer

~ Gillian Ebersole

EXPOSED ONLY A LITTLE

Exposed only a little.
I tell myself in summer,
in the unforgiving
scorches of August
where rusted boardwalk Ferris wheels
and impenetrable aquarium glass
are our last reprieve.
The final goodbye.
As I try to convince you
that the beach is
not a terrible place to be.
Even though I know
you hate the sand
that collects
in the webs of your toes,
the white pearl foam
soaking through
the cuffs of your jeans.
When you follow me to the water
you never listen to the curling waves.
Your mouth shapes
something thin like impatience
on my repeated apologies
that I never need to say.

Exposed only a little
in these yellow spirals,
these fuchsia splatters.
At the art museums I love
where acrylics
speak to me in tongues,
tongues that don't yield for anything
but purpose.
Where you stay
silent for what?
A little disinterest
A little disrespect
I wish you could pretend for me,
this painting is my joy of us.

Exposed only a little
on mattress tops,
under quilted covers.
With raw skin between us,
and yet so much more
comes between us.
I have a hard time remembering the feeling
that I get from the way you
love my love handles.
But remember
my phobia of scratching my skin,
my love
I want to be bitten
more than I want to be bruised.

Exposed only a little
when you play with my hair,
your chestnut coffee dream,
dripping down past my shoulders,
curling around your fingers.
You like it tied up.
But it isn't longer
than the photo strips
of two parted lips
that are plastered against
my bedroom door.
A two dimensional
temporary stand in.
They run on.
We run on.
Between the sheets
and down the streets
to the shores of Lake Michigan.
Remember it was
a glassy gray.
But you were my friend
who looked *alive*.
When I look down
I see the shape of your hand
squeezing across 2000 miles
so I don't feel hidden away.

Exposed only a little,
because I didn't even press the flowers.
Then plastic bags seal out the air
but don't really preserve anything.
To be sought after again
is a lovely thing,
but I won't give
my name away
until I know
what it is,
what I am to you.
Do you even remember
a time before the hurt?
When everyone was flawless, foolproof.
When, even with the ink
of their lies smeared
all over their faces,
you still believed in them.
Do you remember?
No, but I do remember that night
when the mattress was half-empty.
Your daisies slowly dying
on my nightstand.
It was a bouquet that only
beamed with good intentions.

Exposed only a little.
If the hands have
no boundaries,
I am my every day
in front of you.
I show the plaque on my teeth.
I love that you don't care
if I forget to brush.
Stay and move with me.
Even if part of me longs to
swing with the wind
or sway with the trees,
I'd rather have you.
But watch me channel
my rage into waves.
Ripples of doubt into
ripping downpours.
I have weathered the storm

that is myself
without you,
meshed it all into one
in my old-fashioned blender.
I find the colors go well together,
like you and me.

Exposed only a little.
You who are my mouth,
my eyes,
my lips,
and my greatest sorrow.
In you I etch my life,
I engrave my love and memory
into stone-like skin
with my fingernails
where it will never be forgotten.

~ Skylar Clark

What became apparent in the French Quarter–
what brought me there– wasn't shattered glass
bottles on Bourbon Street, but that all actors

must at some point visit, then become so
wasted everyone laughs before fearing what
they might do next. Still, I drank the days

then sang *Psycho Killer* at a karaoke bar
so dehydrated I collapsed from back spasms
because I wasn't enough myself,

and DJ Mud stopped the song when I fell
on the floor writhing. I told him to go
on and everyone howled as they

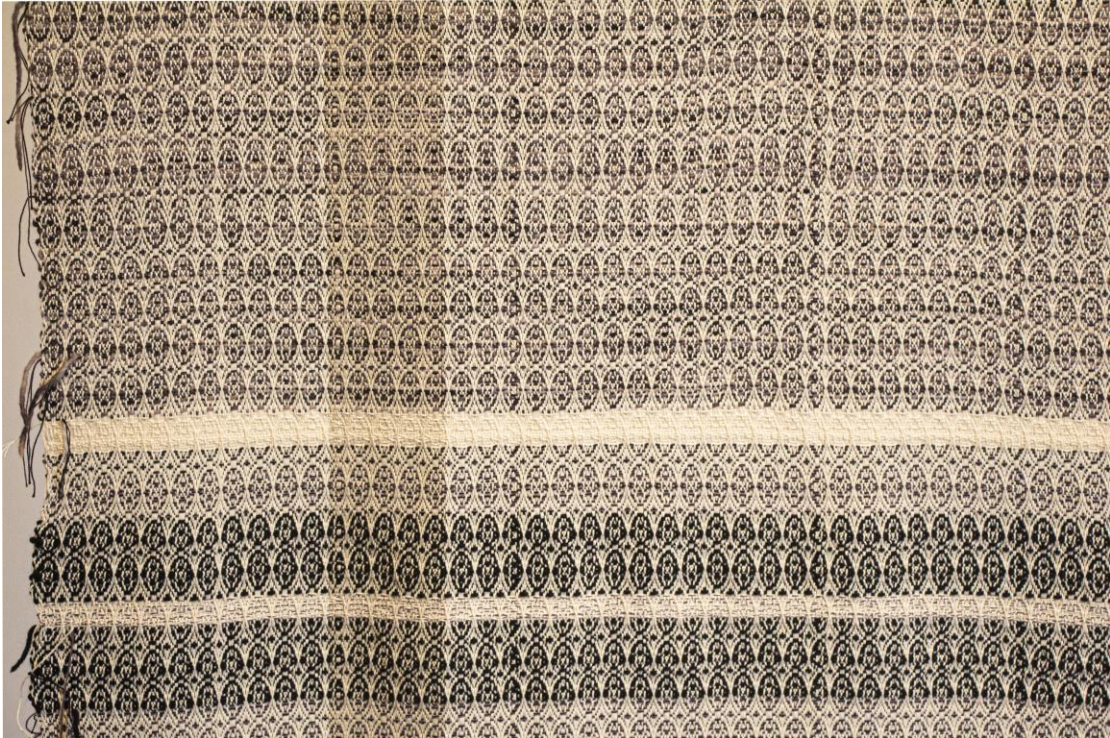
waited for me to stand on my own
and cheered when I did. Someone
bought me another drink

and I walked out through drunken
tourists and cops on horseback
into the middle of the street

near the end of a long road trip
that burned through my savings
to land me renting a room in a

house where each day I wake
still drifting and dreaming.

~ *James Croal Jackson*



"Secluded Silence" ~ Amadi Greenstein

1.

A mountain of cloth. A constant clatter of honking and screaming; angry drivers and venders notifying everyone in a two block vicinity of the latest bargains. Bootleg DVDs of Tom Cruise's finest work; knockoff Guess jeans; arepa stands. I am on the second floor, gazing down at it all. A table with a few sewing machines; two old Jewish ladies making flags for hours on end. Sitting on the mountain of the cloth, I felt like a king. And I was, in the fantasy land I made up with my brother and sister, both sitting cross-legged, a few feet lower than me, acting as my court servants. A phone call. Some yelling. Some haggling. My Abuela's poofy hair standing in place throughout the entirety of this spirited negotiation. A coworker, a lanky, middle-aged man, goes out to the streets of downtown Caracas to light up a cigarette. Abuela doesn't go downstairs with him. She quit; a couple of heart attacks; her two children were doctors who for decades, watched in horror as she ripped through carton after carton of Marlboro Reds.

2.

A two bedroom apartment; timeshare by the beachside. Going back and forth from the country club's pools to the Atlantic Ocean with my brother and sister, cross-pollinating chlorine and sand. A food court; pale white lighting; mosquitos orbiting lamps; everyone lining up: we all get two scoops of white rice, black beans, some carne mechada, and that beloved baked plantain with melted white cheese. The next morning, on one of those walks from the pools to the ocean, a couple kids befriend us and start speaking Spanish way too quickly for us to realize what was happening. They laugh as we walk away, I catch etchings of some insults that I would only properly learn later. It was all confusing because regardless of intentions, everyone on that beach was always laughing.

3.

Every subsequent summer there is less walking outside and more being handled. Less beachside trips and more afternoons spent inside in front of the television. *Las noticias. Mira el tonto Chávez está hablando otra vez.* We bring an empty suitcase. On the way back, it's packed to the brim: Cocossetes, Pirulin, Torontos, Nucitas and ironic mementos of *revolución* — Chavista cachuchas, banderitas.

4.

Señora X survived X traumatic event with X family member, so we will spend an afternoon in their cramped apartment, reminiscing about X period of time. Everyone gets a glass of freshly squeezed passionfruit juice. There is dessert and coffee too, an Eastern European cake that's dense and dry and thickly glazed with caramel. Sneaking off into the balcony; caged parrots, tropical plants, technicolor orchids with hanging roots. Hours of pleasantries. And then it's over. Cramped elevator. It's my turn to hold the gifted dessert. I have to; we are obliged to eat it later too. Wrapped in tinfoil, it feels like a brick.

5.

Eventually, that extra suitcase starts getting packed with goods: toilet paper, bottles of psychiatric medications, flour, shampoos, conditioners, clothes from Target and the GAP.

6.

All the cars are from the 90's or 80's and all the roads are bumpy and winding. Some members of the Jewish community get bulletproof glass for reassurance. We are picked up at the airport by my uncle; humidity and commotion. *Te van a robar.* Throughout the ride to Abuela's apartment building, I snap photos with my iPhone: posters of strongmen looking gleeful and optimistic; graffiti renderings of Obama as Satan; banderitas dangling from rainbow-colored slums. My dad screams, *te van a robar.* I throw my iPhone back

in my backpack. I explained that it was all fascinating to me because I had spent a semester studying Socialist Realist art — like a fast food chain’s menu, these aesthetics are imported with a unique, localized twist. In Japan, Burger King sells Kuro Burgers — black bun, black ketchup, black cheese, black onions; delicious, edible squid ink. In Venezuela, Socialist Realist posters sanctify Hugo Chávez by placing him next to Simón Bolívar; hammer and sickle; rojo, rojo, rojo; horses riding into an agricultural sunset; an eternal victory against an eternal enemy. I try to snap more photos — my favorite steakhouse now has a walk-through metal detector, an old hacienda juxtaposed with a TSA line. I get yelled at again, *te van a robar*.

7.

There are things that I was never meant to hear up close. They weren’t meant to be secrets, they just weren’t meant to be crystal-clear. No matter how many questions were asked, I was always left with an incomplete mosaic:

“Your uncle can’t move here because of Green Card issues...”

“In the 60’s, he was arrested for having weed when he was at boarding school in Nashville. Must be on his record...”

“The Jews that stay are all involved in some illegal money exchange...”

“They kidnapped your uncle... left him in some ditch... he’s okay though...”

“He got divorced — *ella se casó con un judío pensando que él sería rico... pero... no paso...*”

“Your abuela is going to come here for vacation... but hopefully she just stays here and never goes back *there...*”

8.

One day, most of la comunidad judía just gets up and leaves. They recreate their shtetl in the suburban outskirts of Miami — Brit Millahs, Bar Mitzvahs, bodas, and shivas, all taking place within a two mile radius. When I was reading Roberto Bolaño’s novels, I was fascinated by these German communities

scattered across South America: German villages in the midst of tropical rainforests; endearing tourist traps with 19th century German architecture, towers, churches, and restaurants serving sausage. Una comunidad alemana. Colonia Tovar; a few miles away from Caracas. A day trip with Abuela, back when she could drive and scream at motorcyclists to get out of her fucking way. When we get there, my younger brother is so exhausted he takes a nap in some cobblestone street corner. *Que te pasa!* A blanket of fog obscures the watchtower. The same story is retold: decades ago, my uncle ate so many sausages that they had to buy him a new pair of pants in the market. On the way back, my Abuela's car breaks down. A rusty 1988 Red Toyota on life support. Just as she opens up the hood, the fog transforms into a hard rain; we get drenched, screaming and crying. Abuela goes to her glove department and grabs a pack of emergency Marlboro Reds: she lights up, but only after giving us a stern warning not to tell anyone.

9.

She dies one night in an apartment in West Hollywood, surrounded by bookshelves of rooster chachkies and framed family photos. Shivas can test anyone's patience. For a week, family members are shoved in a few rooms together, talking endlessly. By the fifth day, I lose my marbles. At dinner, in front of a table of family friends and cousins, I do a performance art piece: I repeatedly slap my face with a plastic plate, reciting statistics about plastic waste — *each year, 8 million tons of plastic waste end up in the ocean*. My sister can't stop laughing. My cousins, three muscular siblings who look like the Pokémon evolution of a frat bro, stoically stare. At the end of the dinner, I approach everyone under the age of 30 — *between us, do you have a cigarette?*

~ *Daniel Spielberger*



“Untitled” ~ Charlotte Devitre

THE CONTRACT OF FRIENDSHIP

Two parties willing, intent:
selfish (to love and be loved).
There is no guarantee for that
precious, most fragile connection
which is stronger even than iron,
more precious than white gold.

Never shall you know the depth
of that pit of fears Inside my
chest. Sharing would hand you a
knife sharp—to carve my heart—
strong—to slice through bone—
and thin—to trace scars in brain.
Without a voice for the words, I
promise: my soul is mine,
whereas the rest you get to know.

Betrayal is knife I am unable to
twist between your shoulders—
you would surely break me after.
To scorn the moments ours, to
remove me from your life,
requires honey-tongue reason.
The action “abandonment” is
simply impossible.

Those special moments which
are yours I shall try to remember,
for mine are also to be shared.
Extraordinary and ever ordinary
coexist; memory may be flawed,
but our lungs are still breathing.

When it rains only on your head;
when the wind is mostly bitter;
when you fall and get up and are
shoved to the ground yet again:
I will be the distance of a text
call drive walk. Through freezing
rain and muggy heat I will come,

bear gifts of chocolate, a towel, a
joke. Make sure to see you smile.
Then, and only then, will I leave.
Physical boundaries matter little.

Hard though it is, my universe
will expand to share yours.
What I may want can never be
everything you give, and what
you share not always what I want
to hear. Our function is to try.

The times we overlap make up
for weariness. In my exhaustion,
a slow-drained Energizer bunny,
you are my source of electricity.
And in yours, I lift up until your
hands can brush stars from sky.

We eclipse for a time, and the
horizon s t r e t c h i n g might
allow a repeat in distant future.
Devotion between cannot be on-
call forever. Drifting on separate
tides, I'll look to my memory—
I quite solemnly swear to you.

Two parties commit despite fear.
They agree to take on the joys
and struggles of someone so
similarly selfish. They agree to
be bound for the rest of their
lives, no matter how thin the
bond becomes. In the case of a
total break they shall always
carry frayed ends— for a mental
substance rather than corporeal
blood binds them together so
closely, it is unable to be ignored.

They share this resolution.

~ Rose Lopez

DANCE CLASS

Kevin's favorite dance move is flossing.
He always wears a black sweatshirt
to class, even when I suggest
he will get hot. That's probably why
he complains every time we do situps.

The first time I taught a dance class,
it was a Friday in February. Two girls
in the back of the classroom gossiped
about their valentines – boys with shadow
beards on their faces and knees bigger
than their biceps. I felt lonely
until we started doing jumping jacks.

Kevin reviews last week's choreography,
stands in the front row, and shakes his hips
as well as any of the twenty-four
self-conscious teenage girls around him.

I have a deal with my students –
they agree to try whatever choreography
I propose, as long as I play music they like –
we do pliés to Beyoncé, try out jazz squares
around Lizzo's beats, waltz with Frank Ocean.

In this high-school-English-turned-dance-club
classroom, the dancers are all people of color.
I worry I can't teach anything without impressing
some part of my colonialist ballet training
on them. They much prefer hip hop anyway.

The first time Kevin wore a rainbow
bracelet, I didn't blink. He never asks
if I have a boyfriend. When I asked him
what he loves about dance, he put his hands
in the pocket of his black sweatshirt and smiled
I feel like myself for the first time.

~ Gillian Ebersole

THE SUNSPOT

For Shannon

The Sunspot: Inherently singular, phenomenal, and tragically temporary

A startling anomaly in the endless vacuum of space

The likeness of which can be characterized by no one

Better than yourself.

An ephemeral freckle on the face of a star

Irregular only by the sheer brightness of your blaze

By the shocking consistency

Of your smile.

That celestial split of your lips that stretches open and up like a valley, and reaches far further

Than the corners of your face.

Ebbing past the dimple, the wrinkle, the ears,

Seeping into all the cracked and broken places of me, of everyone.

Permeating the world with the sweet light immeasurable, warmth incalculable, and love unfathomable.

Giving away pieces yourself so freely, and yet somehow being all the more complete for it

Made whole by filling the mold of everybody's missing pieces.

You fit into the puzzle of our lives with utter grace,

and it was all the more beautiful for your addition.

You are the sunspot that reminded me how I ought to live

Brief but bravely extraordinary.

Added but exceedingly able.

Hindered but impossibly happy.

Like a butterfly, whose time on Earth is limited in length, but the scope of whose beauty knows no bounds.

But you were no wilting flower.

Not then, not now, nor ever

The vernacular of your spirit was not that of the weak hearted or shallow-tongued

In you bloomed the essence of strength, the indefatigable seeds of faith sewn deep into the earthen sinews of your soul.

The crackling fire of your vitality burned and burns still

Like the stars dotting the violet night and the rays bringing in the pale dawn,
you are ceaseless.

May the flare of you reach into all of the blackest places,

where I know I will always find you shining in the darkness.

Shine on.

~ Skylar Clark



"Waves2" ~ Doina Ciobanu

SEVENTEEN

I remember your summer pale skin
at the start of our last year together.

The polar sky pressing the desert
to our skin as we ate and we talked
and sunset marked the party's start

and incalescence inside as we swam
outside to music beating adobe walls

smelling chlorine and cherry and limes
slip of your arm on my leg underwater

—we missed our chance to dance.
I remember your summer pale skin

and incalescence inside as we swam
under the moon on a sweltry night
while sand stuck to our drying skin,

you and I under red stars and navy sky
with the taste of autumn on our tongues.

~ Rose Lopez

FRIDAY THE THIRTEENTH

the wind is howling and I'm crying. you pull the hair out of your face but it sticks to your lips anyway. I shake my fist at the sky as we stand six feet apart. you're sick and I'm in love. these are the facts. the goodbyes involve cake, wine, and paint by number kits. my best friend wears a rush beta shirt that I stole from the roommate I hate. her blonde hairs are in my laundry. we haven't had a piece of fruit in a week. I dance in my living room. five flights are cancelled before I get back to my parents' house. they still don't know I love you. they also don't know I have tattoos – three of them. I dream about blood and the last time you wore a baseball hat backward. I cry six times in one day. we make cookies out of old bananas and instant oatmeal. I listen to Patsy Cline for 56 hours. you post about me on Instagram and delete it ten minutes later. it's 12:01 am.

~ Gillian Ebersole

HAVE U EVER BEEN CRUEL

the guy who made this latte
is in love with me
i can taste it
he tried to spell out, 'i
love you' in the foam
it's because
i got it with oat milk
~~little does he know~~
~~i'm sinister~~

i am so good at falling in love
it can almost be considered
a hobby
who am i to
shut the door on experience
who am i to
say no to thrill
how can i raise a hand and say,
"that's enough"
to lust and wonder and excitement

perhaps
it's the fumbling for contact
or maybe it's just
an attempt to feel free

~ Cheri Mae Jocson



“Untitled” ~ Charlotte Devitre

DISSOLUTION OF A MARRIAGE

How appropriate.
We finally reach
the same page,
which is the last page
in the book of us.
We close the cover
and place ourselves
on the shelf,
each reaching
for a different book.

~ Nicole Neitzke

EX AT A WEDDING

the extinct wild roamed through the wildlands
of the heart, the beating paleozoic crust, topmost

plunge into the history books, into the unraveling
speech of lust, this lost connection (you were a great

friend) a moat afloat on limitless vodka- until
nothing left (was always nothing) I watched you

spit into a microphone forgotten music of a world
gone by, rocking a guitar, percussion at your side

~James Croal Jackson

MEMORY

My best friend hypothesized that you'd slip out of my mind in 9 months' time;
but your memory is here.

It is in the shoe aisles at every store.

It is at the diner where you picked me up after my grandma's funeral;
I remember.

~ Danise Kuang



“For the Caged Bird Sings of Freedom” ~ Jannelly Herrera
Cover Art

A million mute pieces
waddle on my inner circuitry
airing myriad connections:
of our reciprocity
now on the fritz.
This has me glassy-eyed.

Do we wean off? Is disaffectedness
in its purest form possible?
Playing with these thoughts
as takeaway, I inattentively
order your favorite dish,
relish it without remorse.

~ Sanjeev Sethi

DRIFTER

The quiet cannot reach me at this time of night,
when the world is disappeared
into deadly dreams of uncertain possibility.
Even the faintest footsteps
sound out like the measured hands of a clock,
drawing nearer as time draws closer
on my heavy brain.

Shadow clad eyes outside my window creeping,
keeping me awake and yet
the stars will not speak.
The moon will not guide me
to unremembered dreams,
but undresses my conscience.
Legs split and collars ripped,
every starkness of my body stripped.
Clothing strewn across bare floors,
and fabric dripping off bare shoulders.
With a fatal consistency it ripples
leaving only the most sacred
Unknown parts of myself
In perpetual wakefulness;
Exposed.

Tempered glass eyes open wide as I drift
blazing carried away in black tides of peace.
The pieces of dreams in secret boxes and chests.
Your chest, cresting and collapsing
like wind over waves, is the only sound
that may bring me calm.
That may conquer my rockslide
as I roll out of bed,
catch me before my consciousness
crashes onto hardwood floors.
Before I see those eyes
demanding absolute reality,
extracting absolute truth
with a voice that tremors.
And my voice which trembles
after nighttime cries are
reduced to whimpers over moons and stars.

Trouble boils and blisters
in the steep wells of my mind,
the canyons of my thoughts,
and the even deeper pits of my eyes;
a deadly give away
to the turmoil of my time.
As there is no hiding to be had
under bed sheets or around the
corners of sweeter smiles
when the Universe bears down upon me
in the vernacular of truth
of which I am forever unversed.

But I belong to the jaws of sleep,
which snap at my toes, like a scaly fish
before slipping away.
Piercing my skin in a thousand tiny slashes of pain
as your love cuts me to pieces stored away in the recesses of the aorta,
memories embedded in the fleshy walls of my heart valves,
pumping life through all my parts
until my time with you has ended.

~ Skylar Clark

THE HEARTACHE OF THE OPEN DOOR

The beauty of her silhouette
Standing there, so small, so fragile
It warmed me like embers of a fire
Filling my mind with light and strength
Gently so gently she slipped off the bed
My sister with trisomy 21 chromosome
Midnight, the bewitching hour of her late-night
Banana raid in the comforting kitchen
Another ritual carried out with perfect symmetry
Repeated in such perfection time could not detect
Slowly, quietly reaching the doorway, she turned
Like a ballerina in some sacred harmony
In pantomime, her index finger touched her chest
Then her childlike arms crossed over her heart
The index finger now moving to point to me
Lying awake in bed, waiting, like always for
My moment of Rembrandt
She then kissed her hand and blew the kiss to me
I caught it like a lion's prey between my teeth
As if it was life's sustenance, I would not give it up
Still, without a sound, the nighttime dove ever
So quietly closed the door
The silent "I love you" and flying kiss
Like a ripe berry on a tree, sweet, beautiful
And enjoyed fully from the warmth of the sun it brought
Landed upon me and I was at peace
A thousand times, a thousand times two
It went on and we went on

Those words, I'd heard but did not know them
Like steady rain, at first in drips
Like a leaky faucet, almost noiseless and slow
Then this Alzheimer's, like a tsunami—unstoppable
She turned and crossed her arms and on the rest
But no longer pointed to her heart
She turned, now just blew a kiss and on the rest
She closed the door and the scream inside my head
Begged, "Please, Deb, turn around, turn around."
But she gently closed the door
She did not stop, did not turn, the door did not close
I stared from my bed at the open door as if it
Was a catalyst to my new bed of nails
She could not move from the bed

Paralyzed now, she mouthed, "I love you."
And then no more
How can there be an open door?
It stands there, cold, wooden
No tiny fingers to bring it to heel
But I stare and stare, and still
See her silhouette there
And wait, and wait, and forever wait
For peace again
And my tears came, at first
Like steady rain, in drips
Then like a tsunami—unstoppable

~ Jan Niebrzydowski



"To Treasures" ~ Fabrice Poussin

CURTAINS FOR ME

Curtains flutter just so something can be happening
on a lazy, mid-summer afternoon.

My solar host sprinkles the floor with light.

A white spread covers the mattress
like a fresh fall of out-of-season snow.

It seems so long since this bed
was for anything other than sleep.

I doze, dream of the way your long brown hair
once fell across my chest like soft warm fur.

I'm not the kind to wipe the dust from photographs,
so the face on the dresser is too blurry, too indeterminate,
to break ranks and join me here.

And the past, sadly, is made of everything but flesh and bone.

The season sticks around
but everything else is leaving.

I long to be more like the curtains,
fluttering even when there's no breeze, no reason.

But I don't move, nor have I reason to.
If only I weren't so easily explained.

~ John Grey

BLAME THE FEUD

Larry Altizer threw the first punch. Must have been seventy people there, scattered like free-range hens among the graves. At least thirty of them saw it, and a third of that saw it coming, waited for it, psychically egged it on as if willing a field goal to curve wide right. Larry's thick bicep twitched, its hardness visible through the shiny gray of his sleeve. The suit coat inched up at the underarms. Larry leaned back with one shoulder, lunged forward with the other, his anvil of a fist cannonballing into Jonas Lowry's chin.

Lowry, the taller man, didn't go down. No one expected him to. Jonas hadn't been put on his back in a bar fight—he'd fought many—so what were a few rounds in the cemetery? His chin absorbed the blow and, though his head and eyes drifted, he came back brawling. He had the bigger wingspan. Both his long arms curved, darting in, his knuckles landing with the sound of baseballs shot from a pitching machine, crunching half a dozen times against Larry's temples.

Larry, squat and square-chested like all the Altizers, stood his ground too, although he wasn't prepared for the speed or ferocity of his opponent's blows. He leaned in close to mitigate the reach advantage, launching two heavy shots to Lowry's chest. He went for an uppercut but missed wildly, stumbling and finding himself back at a distance from which he couldn't protect his cracked, sunburned face.

Punches landed one right after another now. Jonas Lowry's shots sounded like fireworks: *crack crack crack*. The shorter man added bass drums with deep blows to the ribs: *whoom whoom*. It went on like that for minutes—*crack crack crack, whoom whoom, crack crack crack, whoom whoom*—building the percussion until some of Larry's kin intervened, pulling him away with his face bloody, eyes swelling, nose shifted in a radical bend to the left.

Nobody grabbed Jonas, but he lowered his arms and stood hunched forward as if leaning on an invisible wall. His face was a grinning mask of gore. One tooth poked through his lower lip. Red streaked down his white dress shirt as if he wore a power tie. He hadn't messed up *his* sport coat, though. He left it in the car as if he knew what would happen.

The Altizers and Lowrys hated each other for at least four generations. Someone's great-uncle impregnated someone else's great-aunt, then someone's grandpa as a

boy shot someone else's great-grandpa's heifer in a muddy field at night—details were a little fuzzy. Whatever the cause, both clans kept the grudge alive. As recently as last year, Lula Altizer smashed up Jimmy Dale Lowry's new Durango with a baseball bat. She never took credit for it, but in a town the size of Milton, West Virginia, everybody knew. She also refused to admit the romantic encounter that led to her assault on the vehicle. If anyone asked, she blamed the feud. *Whoever did it*, she said, *did it for revenge*.

One thing unexplainable about the Altizer/Lowry feud was why the two families couldn't stay away from each other. Not the fistfights—those were expected. It was the dating that seemed so strange. At any time, there might be a dozen couples going against family wishes as if crossing picket lines during a wildcat strike—not including the occasional gay couple which neither clan acknowledged. These weren't *Romeo and Juliet* romances. They were run-of-the-mill I-met-him-in-a-bar-and-now-I-love-him liaisons and my-online-dating-site-said-she's-my-perfect-match affairs. Few went far, and many ended with the words “shots fired” or the sound of a young man running for his life. Rare were the relationships that led to marriage as happened with Woody Altizer and Beth Lowry. They met later in life as they sat in the bleachers at an inter-church softball game—the First Baptist Lions versus the Milton Episcopal Lambs. Woody and Beth were in their fifties then, both divorced, both above reproach and loved by their families. No one on either side gave them grief about their decision, although everyone sighed a bit when the couple went before a justice of the peace rather than have a church wedding that might force the two families to interact. Woody and Beth were considerate like that, at least until they showed bad form by dying together—carbon-monoxide leak—peacefully in their sleep.

Woody Altizer was Larry's uncle, Beth Jonas's second cousin on his father's side. Both came to pay their respects, but also to stare each other down. The two had a history.

Larry used to work as a correctional officer at the regional jail over in Barboursville. He only stayed a couple years before the stress got to him, but during that span Jonas did time there while waiting to be tried for malicious assault, a felony he would later plead down to misdemeanor battery. Larry didn't go out of his way to give Jonas a hard time, but it seemed that way to the Lowry boy. It was always Larry who found an extra library book or a covered-up light in Jonas's cell, and it was Larry who found the USA Gold rolled up in the sleeve of Jonas's orange

jumpsuit during a routine pat-down after a visit. Larry didn't *want* to find these things, but it happened. He chalked it up to chance.

Jonas blamed the feud. As he sat in the dayroom of his POD, playing Spades and slamming cards onto the steel table while other inmates silently menaced one another or talked louder than the TV, Jonas would turn to his cellmate Red and say, "No surprise. Our kin have been at it forever."

"You think he's testing you?" Red would reply.

"Nah. It's straight meanness. Old boy's got it out for me."

"Shit fire. You gonna take that?"

"For now."

"You got a plan?"

Jonas would laugh and grin the same grin every time. "Can't do squat right now, but the day'll come. I won't be in this box forever."

Lena Marie Altizer, Larry's niece, dabbed at his face with a wad of tissues in her left hand while her right slipped him a silver flask, keeping it just out of sight.

Larry lifted it and swallowed, the taste of Dickel cauterizing his throat. He took care not to let the liquid touch fresh scrapes on the inside of his left cheek. "Goddamn him," he muttered.

"Let it go, Larry. You started it." Lena Marie—five-three and short-haired—looked like the family portrait of any Altizer woman. She had broad shoulders like speedbumps over the narrow lane of her frame, making her seem off-balance all the time. She had on the same black dress she wore to bars on Friday nights, but with a jacket over it this time to cover up her shoulders and tattoos.

"Didn't start it," Larry said.

"You threw the first punch. We all saw." She was twenty-three and had a practical way of stating things. "First punch means you started it."

"*Didn't* start it," Larry said again. "Busted him one, sure, but that didn't start it."

"What started it, then?" she said, still mopping blood from his face.

Larry took two more swigs from the flask. The second caught his cheek, and he winced. He leaned away from Lena Marie, spat blood and liquor on the gravel lot, then leaned back against her blue Camry. “Didn’t start it,” he said. “That’s all.”

Two years passed after Jonas made it out. Larry forgot about him and didn’t work at the jail anymore. He had a job in construction now and came home each evening with sore shoulders, sunburn, and a better disposition. His wife—ex now—Carrie greeted him with a smile, hugged him, fed him quick-and-easy meals and promised to love him forever.

“I’ll always love you,” she told him when she left a few months ago, “but I didn’t marry the feud.”

The feud circled Larry’s life like vultures in an old western, waiting to pick his carcass clean. It disappeared like a rabbit into the hedges, then reappeared later as a rattlesnake. Sometimes, it bit him. At first, Larry didn’t realize it was the feud. He awoke at six o’clock one morning, stepped outside to retrieve the newspaper, and saw the slight hillock of his lawn strewn with garbage. A river of it stretched from the fire hydrant at the edge of his driveway across to the neighbors’ fencepost, where it stopped as if by design. It looked like the wreckage from a crashed airplane if that plane had been made of brown beer bottles, rotten fruit, and wet coffee grounds. ‘Jesus H.,” he shouted at the sky—not a prayer, but the opposite.

How did it happen? he wondered. Vandals, maybe? It was probably a pack of miscreant teens. But hell, it was trash day, so it could’ve been a stray bag dragged along by the city truck. The debris field looked too perfect for that, though. *Probably kids*, he decided, then went inside to wake Carrie so the two could clean up the mess as a team.

Jonas Lowry sat on the stoop of his beat-up, primer-coated Chevy. The hole in his lip throbbed as if he were still taking punches. His blood had cooled, but he kept clenching his fists as if trying to rekindle the fire.

Uncle Terry, the sharpest-dressed man alive or dead in the cemetery that day—tailored silver suit, vest, gold watch on a chain, long black coat like a cloak—shook his wrinkled head and scolded his nephew. “What got into you, boy? This is Beth’s funeral, for Christ’s sake. Disrespectful. You’re a dumbass. My dumbass brother’s dumbass kid.”

Jonas shrugged and grunted, accepting this assessment without arguing.

His girlfriend Amber said, “That Altizer took the first swing. Jonas just gave him what for.” Amber was an outsider, not part of either clan. She had heard about the feud, but she didn’t *know* about it. Only twenty-two, she looked as though she couldn’t make up her mind between punk and Goth: black men’s tux shirt, black jeans, black lipstick, black hair shaved on one side. “You leave him be. He just defended hisself, that’s all.”

Jonas shrugged at that, too. “Prick’s always had it out for me. I did a month in ad-seg because of him. Wrote me up for having the torn-up cards we used for poker chips on the POD.”

“Dumb-dumb-dumbass,” said Uncle Terry.

One of the cousins—Jonas couldn’t tell which—said, “Altizer’ll get what’s coming. I think you’re ready for round two.”

“Just wait until after the funeral,” said Amber.

“After the funeral,” Uncle Terry agreed, adding under his breath, “you disrespectful dumbass.”

The first time it happened, Larry chalked it up to a prank or an accident. The second time, he cursed and shouted on the phone while a police officer took down his information and said the cops really couldn’t do anything unless someone saw it happen.

So, Larry waited for a third strike, staring out his window at every glint of sunlight when a vehicle passed in the afternoon or glare of headlights through his beige bedroom curtains at night. Still, no luck. He thought about having cameras installed, but knew he couldn’t afford it. He watched, waited, flinched at every flicker. Larry felt himself growing paranoid.

He saw the primer-gray pickup go by three or four times one day, but he couldn’t see the driver and never witnessed an act of littering or trespassing on his lawn. He missed Jonas entirely that night when the next lawn-bomb went off.

He told the police, but again they offered no promises and said the same things as before: no witness means no investigation and no further action to be taken. Larry needed answers at that point, so he decided to search the trash as he

gathered it up. He slipped on rubber gloves and examined every disgusting thing he collected before dumping it in a Hefty bag. He didn't find much, but at the bottom of a torn receipt he spotted Jonas Lowry's signature. Larry thought about calling the cops again, but decided against it. "You want to feud," he said to no one, "we'll feud all right. We'll feud like you shot my cow in the head."

Woody Jr. and Mary's two daughters, Alicia and Lana, all three of them children from previous marriages, were still in the limo when the fight broke out. They missed all of it. Now, they stood together near their parents' graves, watching as the clans split apart and clustered as if lining up for a game of Red Rover.

"Really?" Woody Jr. said to his stepsisters. "This is happening today?" He was the older of the three—thirty to Alicia's twenty-six and Lana's twenty-four. With his reddish-blond curls and sideburns, he looked like his daddy at that age, especially in his brown suit that seemed to recall another era. To the people on both sides, he shouted, "Get your goddamned shit together! We're burying our folks here. You all wanna kill each other, go do it somewhere else." Woody Jr. knew about the feud. He'd heard stories about his daddy chasing Lloyd Lowry with an ax handle after Lloyd threatened his Scottie with a pellet gun.

The girls understood none of it. They had been raised as Smiths, and their mama never talked about the feud before she married back into the middle of it. Now, Alicia cried, and Lana, red-faced, shook her fist at Lowry and Altizer alike.

"Blame the feud," said one of Woody's kin.

"Hell with the feud," said Woody Jr. "You all disturb this funeral again, I'll come after you with a shotgun. Don't care what your last name is."

Lana placed a palm on her stepbrother's shoulder.

Alicia cried harder and buried her face in her hands.

"You better hear me good," said Woody Jr.

Mutterings of "We're sorry" came from all directions as if movie-like echoes in a canyon.

Woody Jr. nodded. "That's all I'm gonna say about it."

Alicia hugged her sister from behind and sobbed through the rosy fabric of her dress.

Larry waited until Jonas left for work or his girlfriend's or the Red Vedder for morning drinks or wherever he went every day at a quarter to nine. On this day, once the primer-gray Chevy pulled away, Larry popped his trunk and hauled out the two full bags of garbage: Jonas's trash mixed with whatever mud, grass, and leaves came along for the ride. He lugged those bags across the gravel lot, dropping them briefly in front of Jonas's trailer. He climbed the three wooden stairs to the front door, eased down on one knee, and went to work picking the lock using a hex key and tiny screwdriver meant for eyeglasses—a trick he learned as a kid when his older brother Jack taught him how to do it for kicks. It was a felony, and Larry hadn't attempted it since he turned eighteen. Still, he knew Jonas wouldn't call the cops. Lowry had been locked up, so he wouldn't trust the uniforms. Besides, this was feud business. Sacred. Feuding Lowrys and Altizers dealt with one another directly. They didn't involve the law if they could help it. "Got you," said Larry as the lock clicked and the door slid outward. He collected the two bags and carried them inside.

The trailer had a good-sized living area with a love seat, thin TV on a stand, a mini kitchen table, stove, sink, and green carpet like one of those putting strips executives kept in their offices. At one end of the trailer was the bathroom, at the other, a sleeping nook with a twin bed that took up most of the space.

Larry headed toward the bed, already untying a bag. "Don't mess with an Altizer," he said. No one was around to hear him, but the message would be delivered just the same.

"Shake hands," said Uncle Terry. He had *his* hands in the pockets of his suit coat, the thumbs sticking out. This gave him a menacing aspect like a mafia don. "I mean it, boys. Don't make me tell you twice."

Jonas and Larry stood two feet apart, glaring at each other like boxers biding their time while the referee told them the rules. Blood had been cleaned from both their faces. Now they looked swollen and bruised. Jonas bore a crystalline lump on his lip where someone patched the hole with a drop of Super Glue. Someone else had found a Band-Aid for the cut on Larry's temple. It was pink with *Hello Kitty* on it.

Around them, the other family members gathered like street gangs waiting to join the rumble if one broke out. Many quietly hoped one would.

"Jonas," said Uncle Terry, "You're ticking me off, boy. You shake that man's hand or don't come to me next time you need money for bail."

Jonas side-eyed him. He groaned, nodded.

“And you, Altizer, I don’t know what your issue with my nephew is, and I don’t care. Don’t blame the feud. Whatever you all got going, this is personal. I hope you solved it. Maybe you didn’t. Either way, shake the man’s hand and sleep a little easier tonight. This here today wasn’t the feud, no matter what my dumbass nephew says. But it *can* be, and if you invite the feud into your house, you’ll never rest again. Trust me. I’ve seen it. My cousin Joe drove himself batty worrying you Altizers were after him. Nobody laid a finger on him, mind you, but that didn’t stop him from boarding up his house from the inside and keeping a Remington near every window like he was ready to fight off a posse. When the city cops finally broke down his door, he had lost a hundred pounds and couldn’t speak a whole sentence. That’s what the feud did to him. You want that kind of life?”

Larry grunted an acknowledgment but didn’t break eye contact with the taller man. “No, sir. No, sir, I don’t.”

“Fine. You boys shake. Right now.”

“Do it,” said Amber.

“Go on,” said Lena Marie.

A chorus of “Shake!” followed, half the attendees joining the choir. The other half still wanted violence.

Both men reached out at the same time as though of one mind.

“We good?” said Uncle Terry.

“We’re good,” said Jonas.

“Uh huh,” said Larry.

“Good,” said Uncle Terry. “Now, we have a funeral to get back to and a preacher waiting patiently to say a goddamned prayer and share the Word of the Lord.” He turned and waved his arms, motioning everyone back toward the open graves. “Show’s over. Let’s get ’em sanctified.”

Jonas backed away, not wanting to be sucker-punched. He spat on the grass and said, “I’ll be at the Red Vedder tonight at ten if this ain’t over.”

Larry spat, too. “I’ll be there either way, and you can tell *me* if it’s over.”

Jonas Lowry grinned as if he had stolen a pie. “We’ll see,” he said.

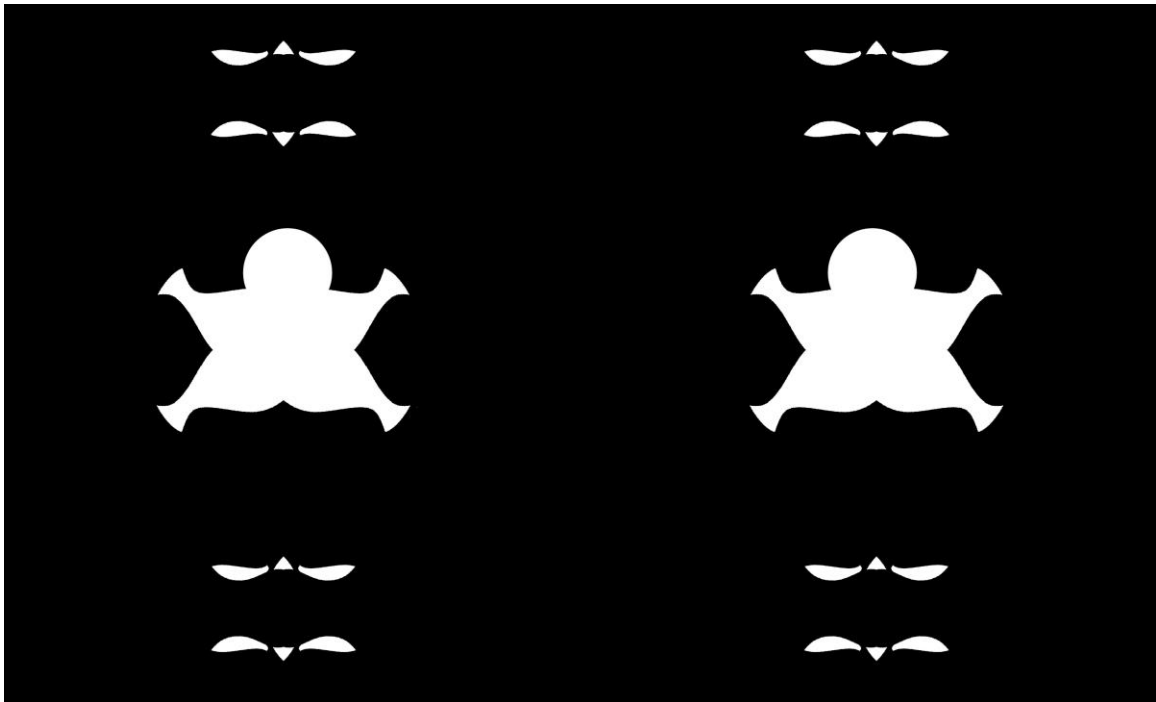
“We’ll see,” Larry Altizer agreed. He’d go to the Red Vedder on principle, but he hoped one of them would have the decency to buy the other a drink.

Both families claimed the great-granddad who had lost his heifer to a rifle shot. There was some confusion about it. It seemed as if he were an Altizer and a Lowry at once, the impossible patriarch of both dynasties.

The cow as well had become a sort of mythical beast. It was said to have been less livestock and more a beloved family pet. The cow’s head supposedly still existed, though lost—stuffed away in some Altizer attic or Lowry basement among the spiderwebs, rotting chests, and damp pink insulation. According to legends of both families, Great-granddad had it mounted like a twelve-point buck, bullet hole and all, preserving it as a reminder ... or an accusation. It said: *This is why we hate you. This is what you did to us. This is why we fight.*

From time to time, some genius from one clan or the other went searching for that head. Oral histories were contemplated, maps drawn up, outbuildings searched. These scholars of the cow were called fools by their relatives much like fortune hunters seeking the missing remains of Alexander the Great. All failed. The head stayed hidden, the heifer a symbol of some distant wrong committed by an unknown villain against an unknown farmer’s unknown cow in the middle of an unknown, mostly indifferent night.

~ *Ace Boggess*



"Jump Up" ~ Edward Supranowicz

THE GOOD EVIL

She sat by the window
and looked up
without saying anything
for a very long time.
The sun crawled toward
the razor-edged horizon
dragging the clouds on its back.
Then she turned and looked at me
and said:
“Beyond good and evil, the sky
is blue over Hiroshima”.

And then I looked up.

~ Peycho Kanev

SHADOWLAND

is where modest is real
it is put upon not a put on
where birth order or name
gender or sexuality
reader add any other
smother

it is a failure of emergence
in existence prior to entropy
it is destiny
think understory tree

~ Ivo Drury

A PERCUSSION OF ECHOES

The chattering of ghosts within
The hollowed empty chambers
Pound the atrophied muscles
Of the heart's sinewy violin strings
No longer singing, just a jarring
Sounding stiletto-heeled jab
The reverberation of your life
Bouncing, crashing, passing
Through sifted body yearning
Always yearning for a moment's calm
The Earth no longer holds you here
But I am held by destiny to wait
Within these darkened caverns
To walk within the rain until
Until it passes into the light

~ Jan Niebrzydowski



"Ghost Girl of Depression" ~ Amadi Greenstein

I am born from women
who breathed fire in their lungs
as their spell-casting fingers
became ash.
With each generation that follows,
an ember is left in our bellies
that burns like passion.
We are given the moon,
her cycles matching our own,
and we stretch our fingers out
threatening to shake the stars
from their nests.

~ *Nicole Neitzke*

THE CHARLATAN

On a cloudy morning, a young boy named Lukas hopped down from his bed and rubbed at his eyes on his way to look out the window. He could see the streets below beginning to swell with his waking neighbors taking themselves to church. He stripped naked and dressed himself in front of the mirror, making sure he looked appropriate for the day. He combed his black hair as best as he could and made for the door. With his hand on the doorknob, he began to feel tired, almost sick, but the strict rules on worship in his town always demanded respect. He grudgingly walked down the stairs thinking of a time where an older woman had become deathly ill, but her family wheeled her to church anyway. Midway through the service, he remembered seeing her lying limp in her chair, and after that, never seeing her again.

He entered the kitchen expecting food waiting, but his mother and father were both standing there dressed, with one foot out the door.

“What about breakfast?”

Lukas asked.

His tall and angry father said

“The Lord cannot wait for you to eat breakfast - or to be prepared in the morning.”

His mother studied his father disapprovingly.

“We have a slice of bacon left dear, it is there,” his mother directed him to a plate covered with a towel, and he retrieved the food. He ate as they left the aging home, stepping out into the street.

Outside, the air was thick with yellow/brown clouds that slid over the country like an invading army. While the town may be free from the pollution of sin, the walls could not hold back that air. Beyond the walls of his town, smokestacks grew tall and robust in the shape of a cone, like massive black tornados tearing through the ruins. There weren't many kids in the town, not many people at all. There was steadily seven to eight families at a time within the walls of the town that was semi self-sufficient in producing food and water for its people. They had a farm that took up half of the land within the walls. They had a bakery, as well as a daytime restaurant that mainly served watered-down soup. They even had a small

toy store where a man named Helmberg spent his days sewing dolls together for the children.

Though the strict attitude of the town rarely invites one to play, there were some things Lukas liked about it. He enjoyed working on the farmland, especially during harvest. He enjoyed guard duty, but only during the day because the short list of incidents at the gate all occurred at night.

The family found their way to the beautifully built church, which towered over their homes. You would think it was the tallest building in existence if you had never left the walls of the town, which was the case for many of the townspeople. It was the first building constructed after they built the walls. The first families built and designed the church with care while living out of tents. It has a solidly built stone foundation with cobblestone stairs leading up to the entrance, where the entire town shuffled in.

Lukas's family sat down on their bench a few rows back from the front. Shortly after they settled, the other seats filled. The entrance to the town could be seen from a window in the church. So even the guard had to attend. He would stand at the window and watch the entrance to achieve twenty-four hour security.

A priest came to the altar and, with raised palms, initiated the solemn moment of silence. After breaking that silence with an "Amen," he thanked the townspeople and began a prayer in which the whole congregation participated.

The room smells of candles and damp wood like a basement seance. The floors would creak whenever one placed any weight on them. During those first few moments of silence in the church ceremony, if you were to make the floorboard creak, you would be put in the town jail for the day. The priest droned on about sins, labor, family, and just about anything and everything attributed to a higher power. At a point, the leader of the prayer prompted everyone to think of their most desired wish and to empty their mind apart from what they had chosen.

"Think long and intelligently if this is truly your most important dream, and allow Her to make it possible."

The priest said, his voice thundering through the densely occupied room.

Lukas thought of his brother, Simon. It is what he thought of every time during the ceremony. He knew he had a brother born at nearly the same time as him, only a quarter-hour apart, a twin. The town saw this as an ungodly occurrence

and left Simon outside of the town where a stranger received him. The birth of twins painted his parent's relationship as dangerous to the community, so they forcibly split them and arranged them in new marriages specially directed by the church. The town ordered Lukas to stay with his birth mother and his new stepfather. As Lukas grew to an age of reasonable recollection and awareness, he learned to look to his new father as his own.

He often wondered why they chose to keep him over his brother. His mother told him it was a random choice because it had to be random, but that never settled with him. Though it was never disclosed to him directly, Simon was chosen for exile because of a cashew shaped birthmark on his forehead that was deemed satanic by the church.

Lukas wished in his mind to meet his brother again, to see him and see if they were similar, to play with one another before they grew too old to play. He wished to harvest with him, contesting who would yield a more substantial haul. Though, of course, these were only fantasies, he couldn't help but imagine them at every church ceremony. The priest leading the ceremony said:

"Now, close all of your eyes and picture this wish coming true. Take your time to fully see it and see that it is, in fact, a dream, but that isn't all it must be."

Lukas imagined his brother in his head. Though this time, he came to realize he could not put a face to his brother, but only saw a body like his, with a blurred face, like an unfinished painting. He saw himself walking the streets with this strange boy and hiding in the cornfield to play cards with him. The image began to upset him around the same time the priest ended the ceremony. Speaking gravely, he cautioned those before him:

"I will see you all before dark. Be well and untempted."

The room cleared out, and Lukas was reminded to head to the schoolhouse. He walked down the suddenly crowded road to the school house. It was the only building in the town wholly made of wood logs. The rest of the buildings were made of stone dressed with lush green ivy that draped the walls. Inside the schoolhouse, his teacher instructed the students out of an old, withered history textbook that had been scavenged from outside the walls. The school hours flew by, and before Lukas knew, he was out in the field watering corn.

He finished up at the field and headed for home, pushing aside the high, yellow corn stalks, sinking his shoes into the mud without thought. As he came through the door, his mother shouted:

“Dear! What have you done to your trousers? And your shoes? Why I can barely see them. You must have made a trail of mud straight to our doorstep. Get out of those now, before your father sees you.”

He unbuckled his pants, pushed them to the ground and stepped out, letting his feet slide from his shoes. Lukas apologized as he made his way up to his room.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, just get a towel and help me with this floor. I’ll run a bath for you.”

Lukas put on another pair of pants and cleaned the floor with his mother, then got in the bath and scrubbed himself before his father returned home. When he arrived, he was with Mr. Colin, head of security. His mother cheerfully asked:

“Mr. Colin, what a surprise. Should I prepare another dinner plate for tonight?”

Colin smelled like wine and had a terrible burn scar around his neck. He pulled off his wool coat, which wafted an even stranger smell at the family.

“No, that is quite alright. I am only here with some news for your boy.”

Mr. Colin looked down at Lukas with a smile and announced:

“He is to report for Sentry duty at midnight. I will be waiting at your door at that time to brief him. It should be an easy night. A good night for your boy to get some experience.”

Lukas’ mother wondered aloud,

“I don’t understand. He is quite young. Are you sure?”

“I am sure. We are starting a program of having youths be brought into the workforce far sooner, in response to our lack of able bodies recently. He will be checked every few hours, so you mustn’t worry about his safety.”

The family was reminded of the sickness that tore through the town only a few months prior. It had taken the lives of ten elderly people and a half dozen young men and women. An entire family had been killed. It was a hard time for everyone.

They would not soon forget the putrid smell of piled nude bodies burning near the gallows.

Like all good residents, Lukas' parents accepted Mr. Collin's proposal.

They all attended the evening church session, walking home in the oil burning lamplight. Lukas ate his dinner slowly and crawled into bed, wishing only that he could spend the night there instead of outside sitting by the entrance. He tried to rest, but he was anxious. He knew it would hurt him not to sleep because he wouldn't get a chance during his watch, and he wouldn't get a chance in the morning. Feeling trapped, he decided he might as well comfort himself with a book.

Midnight came.

Lukas heard a firm knock at the front door. He didn't want the knocking to rouse his parents, so he answered the door swiftly. Mr. Colin waited for him outside.

"Are you ready, boy? Walk with me."

They began walking toward the entrance.

"Is this going to be any different than day watch? I have only been on watch during the day."

"Your job is a simple one. You must stand by the gate and prevent any infiltrations."

"What does that mean?"

Lukas asked.

"Only residents leaving to scavenge in the day, or guards are allowed to come and go through this gate. There may be someone out this late, and they will come through, and it is your job to make sure they live here."

"What if they don't?"

"Well, tell them to leave."

"What if they don't listen?"

"Then you'll have failed your job," Mr. Colin mocked.

They arrived at the gate. Mr. Colin handed Lukas a booklet of the town people's names and a wooden club. He wished him good luck and left for home, leaving Lukas sinking into the guard chair at night to cover Mr. Colin's shift. Colin wandered away to a neglected corner of the village to drink.

Nothing happened for some time. All there was to see was the blue cover of the night. All there was to hear was the whistling wind playing a song to keep him awake, and the occasional dog barking. He was near falling asleep in his chair when he heard a light knock on the gate. Lukas responded:

"Who's there?"

A small voice called out from behind the gate:

"Please, I want to go home. Let me in I'm scared."

"Okay, I need to ask you a couple of questions."

Lukas said, unlatching and opening the gate.

He was confronted by a boy about his age. He looked uncannily familiar, though he couldn't put it a name to the face.

"So, you live here?"

Lukas asked.

"I want to see my mother. It's dark. Please, I don't want to be out here."

"It's my job to find out who is coming in. I'll be punished if you don't tell me."

The boy glanced beyond Lukas and scanned nervously. He looked up at him, and their eyes met before the boy suddenly broke into a sprint, and Lukas made chase. He rounded a corner and disappeared without a sound.

Lukas's heart began to race. He stood in the center of the walk, circling quickly like a ceiling fan. He contemplated calling out for the boy, or seeking help, but feared whatever unknown consequences might come to him. He comforted himself in the thought that it had only been a boy.

What harm would a boy do?

Lukas headed back to the gate. He knew if his father found out he would belt him for making a bad example of the family. Feeling alone and scared, much like that boy, he decided he would not mention it. He likely did live here, and no one would find out.

Later that night, Mr. Colin made his first visit. He was four hours late and drunk.

“Any news?” He slurred.

“No, Sir.”

“Good. I’m going to bed. Goodnight, boy.”

Day crept over the sky, becoming a progressively lighter shade of blue. A few white clouds floated by in the early morning, but the sky cleared, and Lukas was officially relieved at seven o’ clock. Just in time to fall asleep at church.

His feet dragged across the cobblestone road. He met his family at their seats and collapsed next to them. His father was annoyed,

“Where is your posture? Why in the world are you presenting such disrespect.”

“I’m sorry, father. I haven’t gotten any sleep. I was on guard all night.”

“Tell that to God!”

His mother pulled Lukas to her side and allowed him to lay his head on her shoulder. He felt warm and almost entirely better, but then he thought of that boy. Would he be at church? He wanted another look at him in the light.

The church service began. Lukas searched the crowd the best he could with his fatigued, slack-eyed vision. He couldn’t find the boy anywhere. Didn’t see the boy at school either. He fell asleep at his desk and was slapped awake by his teacher.

When he got home, he collapsed in his bunk but was shook awake only an hour later by his mother, telling him he had to tend the field. Feeling that it was not possible for anyone to feel more fatigued than he felt at that point, he pulled out an

old pair of overalls and left home on his way to the cornfield. It was still the middle of the day. He lazily threw water on the mud like the last shovels of dirt onto a grave.

Halfway done with his work, he collapsed in the field, his body hidden in the crops. As time passed in the world around him, he was absent, lying asleep in the field. It was not until the sun had crept low, hovering just above the horizon, that he was roused awake by a rodent crawling onto his body, thinking the boy was just more mud.

He shot up quickly in the realization that he had been missing the entire day. He wondered if they were searching for him, and how they haven't found him yet, considering they knew his last location and he was relatively close to the trail that ran through the field. As he tried to stand, he found his leg was bound by a rope to stake in the ground. He positioned himself and tried to untie the knot. When that proved too complicated, he tugged on the stake, but it would not budge. He pushed and pulled the stake back and forth, to loosen the mud surrounding it. Once again he tugged upward, and this time the stake was freed. "Who did this?"

He came walking out of the field covered in mud, with the stake held in his trembling cold hands so it would not drag. The streets were still and silent, typical for this hour. A fog had rolled into the town. Street lamps burned, infecting the mist around it with an aura of golden light. Alone, he walked toward his house. His steps echoed in the corridor of buildings up until he reached his front door. Considering it was late, he hesitated to knock. He pulled himself up beside the window and peered in, imagining he would see his parents pacing around wondering where he was, but that was not the case. Inside, the lights were out. It seemed the house was asleep. He twisted open the front door handle gently, and it crept open with a terrible squeaking, like a mouse being eaten by a hawk. The interior of his home still held the smell of the fire they had been burning. They had a fire? Were they relaxing? He wondered why his parents were not worried.

The wooden floorboards spoke as he stepped on them toward the stairs. He climbed the stairs slowly with his hand steadied on the railing, passed the door to his parent's room, and came to his own. Placing his hand on the chilled doorknob, he almost retreated. But he stood firm, twisted the knob, and opened the door quickly to get it over with. Inside, the room was as dark and silent as the street. The burning lamps bled through the windows, and in that faint light, he could see a form in his bed. At first, he believed it only to be jumbled bedding, but upon closer inspection, he found another boy was lying asleep in his bed.

Completely bewildered and afraid, he could not decide the right thing to do. He wanted to shake the boy awake and tell him to leave, but perhaps he was a guest. In the spirit of getting rid of the wooden stake, he got out his knife and cut the rope at his ankle. Then he inspected the boy slightly closer, noticing a strange stain on the boy's head and heard his light breathing. It was then that the boy woke up, and began screaming almost immediately upon sight of the mud-covered, knife-wielding Lukas. The boy's scream reached his parent's room, and soon their footsteps came right up to the door as the boy took a wool cap out from within his blankets and pulled it over his head, covering the stain Lukas saw.

"Everything okay?" his father asked through the door.

"No! No! Help!" the boy screamed.

His parents burst into the room and were equally shocked by Lukas.

"Who in the hell are you, boy?" his father asked.

Lukas attempted to say something to his father, but the boy shouted over him.

"It's the boy I told you about papa! The one that ran past me at the gate. He is mad! He has a knife!"

At that instant, Lukas turned to look at the boy, and now that he had sat up into the beams of light radiating in from the street, he could see that he and the boy were identical in appearance. Twins, Lukas thought to himself.

"He has a knife papa!"

The father then pounced on his son, prying the knife from his shaking, confused hand and throwing it across the room, asking excitedly:

"What are you doing here, you evil boy. What were you planning on doing with that knife?"

"Father..." Lukas began.

"Looks like he just crawled out of a grave," his mother suggested, looking over his muddy clothes and face.

"Get the police over here." His father demanded.

“Wait, look at that.” Lukas’ mother said while stepping in to inspect his head closer.

“It can’t be...”

She leaned in like a doctor looking at an infection, then took a licked thumb and attempted to wipe away the mud mark from Lukas’ forehead. A few dried crumbs of mud fall from his face. But to his misfortune, much of the mud in their area has been contaminated, and a thick black tar had stained his forehead. The mark would not be possible to be wiped clean without a cleaning agent. So it stuck to him like tar no matter how hard his mother scrubbed with her thumb.

“Dear...”

“What is it?”

Lukas’ mother pulled his hair back to fully unveil the stain in the moonlit room.

“Do you see the birthmark? It is the twin.”

“The twin?” the father asked, having not thought about the twin for many years.

“Lukas’ twin! Remember? The exile?” his mother said.

“No! I am Lukas!”

“Shut your mouth, devil-boy.”

The father said, now remembering what had happened all those years ago.

“How did you survive?” his mother asked.

“Let me go!”

Lukas yelled, fighting his father’s grip around his arm while the Charlatan tucked himself into Lukas’s bed, doing all he can to resist a creeping smile.

“That boy is an imposter! I am your son!”

In a desperate moment, Lukas broke out of his father’s grip, slipped out the bedroom door, and ran down the stairs at full sprint. Behind him, the father followed as he left the threshold of the house and bounded into the street, violating

its silence. The chase proceeded down the cobblestone road and into the darkness where the father eventually lost sight of Lukas when he ran into the cornfield.

Lukas stumbled through the crops, falling helplessly and fearfully into the mud, tripping as he tried to extend the distance between him and his father, who shouted in the distance:

“Can’t hide for long devil boy!”

Lukas laid in the field looking toward the yellow lamplight of the town, he could see the shadowy figures of the security guards and his father pacing outside the cornfield. In many of the windows, he could see people lighting their candles, attempting to figure out what all the commotion was. After a while, most people went back to bed. Even the guard, who stood to watch the field while waiting for the boy, walked off.

Lukas evaded the law for several hours in that field before he was finally gripped firmly ‘round the back of his neck by a guard while trying to sneak out. He swung his arms savagely, yelled and cursed. In the cold night air, they cuffed his hands too tight. He brought in the air heavily through his nose, feeling a sort of temptation building in his chest and escaping through his bound wrists. The smoke smell in the air had been substantial. Lukas yelled at the officer, asking what he had done and shouting:

“There is a charlatan! He tricked my parents!”

The guard ignored anything Lukas had to say. Summoning the whole town was easy. They simply rung a bell that hung from a wooden support in the town’s center. Lukas was escorted to the town’s gallows, which they deliberately built out of sight behind some short, thickly leafed trees. The people followed the guard as he guided Lukas down the walk.

He stood on the wooden platform of the gallows and looked at his neighbors approaching down the walk. A plump guard walked along the pathway with his long-handled lamplighter, lighting all the guide lamps that had been arranged for such an occasion. The gallows had been situated by the thick concrete wall. The boy studied it, and when he turned back to people-watch, he noticed his father’s head,

standing taller than most of the crowd around him. He saw his mother walking close beside him and holding the hand of the Charlatan.

The Charlatan looked sinister in the lamplight. His head bowed, so his forehead shadowed his eyes, eyes that longed to see one thing. It is what all the townspeople had crept from their slumber to attend. By then, the officer lit the torches a few laborers had erected on the stage.

Lukas had never seen an execution and had never been informed of the concept. In his ignorance, he happily slid his head through the noose that the cloaked executioner brought to his attention. As the black-gloved hand of his killer positioned him on the trap door, he had been thinking how foolish he must look. This public spectacle and this strange necklace are the punishment; that he was to be laughed at by the town for atonement.

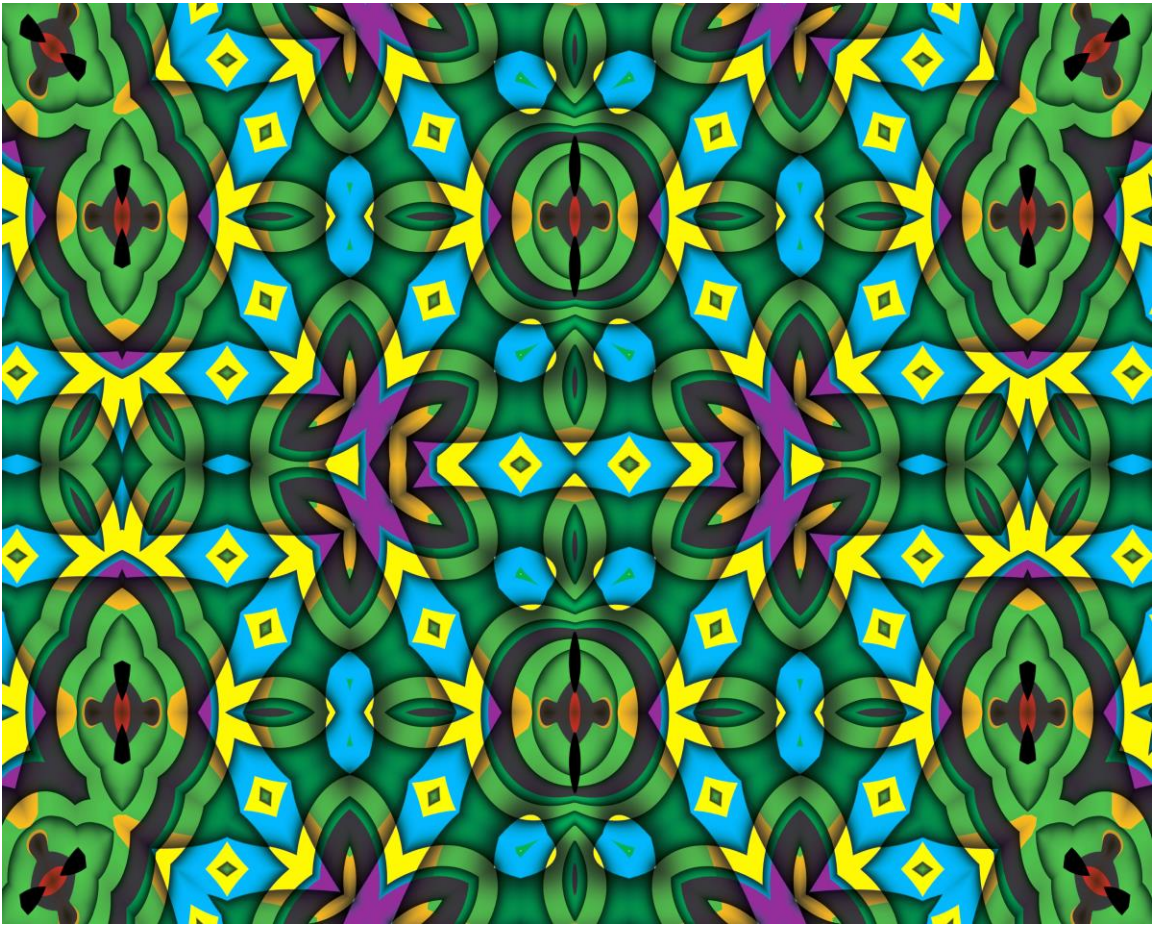
His mother had gone to the church and reported that the devil-marked twin had come back from whatever outside community raised him, and the church quickly deemed him to be a pawn of the Antichrist.

With a hollow, muffled sound of the wooden lever, the trap door cracked open. The boy thought he had stepped on a weathered plank and had fallen through. This, of course, was his last thought before the knot effectively broke his neck. The town watched him swing there, his body hidden halfway through the platform. His neck appeared elongated, and his head turned purple as most of the people left. The lingering crowd stood and watched as the body was removed from the trap.

Lukas's mother glanced down at the boy as a guard approaches to extinguish the lamps that light the walk. She knelt down and smiled, looking into the boy's eyes. The boy smiled back just as the guard prepared to extinguish the last lamp. He had been wearing his wool cap, and she pulled it off his head. She brushed the boy's hair aside and became confused while looking. She wiped the hair back again feverishly, inspecting the boy's forehead. Her hand shivered as she tried to wipe away his birthmark. Then, like a splitting atom she asked:

"What is this mark?"

~ Calvin Madsen



"A Bit Moody 4" ~ Edward Supranowicz

FOR I CAN HEAR LIFE

When our once young selves
turn stale
And old and old and old,
then,
in that beauty
I still see,
I can hear life--
I can hear life
as it calls out
its love song,
its plaintive plea
to my ageless soul....

And when Death makes
its awkward entrance,
my soul--
sudden cut adrift
from its moorings--
will carry that beauty,
that beauty of a life lived,
with all its loves,
with all its joy
and all its tears,
to the next world,
to the next beautiful dream.

~ Len Carber

SALTON SEA

I have never seen the Salton Sea with my own eyes
this is what I see in my constructed reality of
what it is
or can be
The Salton Sea is located by Indio, CA
an hour and forty minute drive from where I live
it used to be commercially beautiful
there is a swing set, a singular swing set, one swing
about two feet deep into the Salton Sea
detailing the perimeter of the shores stand
decrepit
forgotten art pieces
that stand now as a form entirely separate
from what was meant at conception
the Salton Sea does not smell pleasant
it smells of sewage and salt and piss
people still come and visit
it has to be in the name of fond memories of its ghost
the Salton Sea is less sea and more salt
observationally, theoretically,
this sea will see the end of its existence
before i see the end of mine
we'll race against each other
ONTHEMARKOF3
123GO

~ Cheri Mae Jocson



"The Village" ~ Fabrice Poussin

Introduction

“The basic rule is that there are no rules.” I took this statement in a literal sense. As I sat ruminating, writing an outline, then ripping it up, I decided I would rip off limitations. In the story I have written below, I have allowed myself to go beyond my set boundaries: in format, in storyline, and in style. I am utilizing the element of fragmentation. In this experiment, I sought to be unconventional and eccentric, opposite of what is considered “good writing” in academia.

The story is about a nation destroyed by hate. I will be using Scotland, though this is simply a country that I picked because of its piobaireachd origin. In this story, Scotland serves as a representation of ideologies. The narrator is anyone; it is just a voice telling the story; kind of like a bard, but with no name. At some point, it seems as if the girl is telling the story, but the narrator is just providing insight into her thoughts. The story seems to be one of familiarity. Somehow, it correlates with this modern day. Of course, not in regard to the battle that transpires in the story, but regarding the racism that is now blatantly manifested; a result of a presidential election. A current state in a certain nation.

Read Slowly. Digest the words!

I. Dark.

Gloomy. Foggy. Grey. The sky cries. Inarticulate sounds, with momentary pauses. Pauses of nostalgia; of yearning. Pauses, searching for a moment in which it can pull away from the grief bound in the environment; an escape from the sorrow that fills the land... a break from the lamentation.

The forest is spread out in dark green shadows. Dark. The trees different shapes, different sizes, occupying different spaces. Looking out into the trees, obscurity and haziness shadow... emits from the earth. Darkness.

II. The Blood

Out from the doors of the house that stands alone, she comes running. In distress, she runs through the field with tears strolling from her eyes. She sprints, her tears dropping to the same rhythm as the rain falling from the sky; in the same tone, in the same voice. As she scampers, her legs become strained, and her breathing deepens. Something is hindering her. She looks down, startled by the blood surrounding her feet, rising to her knees. She looks deep into the blood. She feels the pain of the people, and she sees their brokenness. There is a brokenness, in a literal sense, of their bones... but also in a sense beyond the physical, intangible. A brokenness in their rationale, their ethics, their emotions... A brokenness that, juxtaposed to their nation, is a direct reflection; a mirror.

As she stares into the blood, knee deep, she is taken back to a time in which she sat in college. Her professor read aloud a quote about a nation that had been destroyed. She escapes the blood for a second, and sits in the class as if it were happening, at that moment, in the present. In a monotone voice the professor speaks, "America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves." The classroom immediately grew silent, cold. The girl stared blankly at the words. The words, floating in the air.

This quote defined her nation. As she is thrown back into reality, she hears the word *Destroyed*, echoing. *Destroyed... Destroyed... Destroyed*. The word comes alive. Destroyed encompasses her, dancing around her head tauntingly. The word speaks. "It happened... from the inside."

Destroyed.

The blood, twisting around her feet and legs, *Destroyed* encircling her, she looks to the sky, throwing her head back, attempting to scream. She opens her mouth, but there is no sound.

She cries. They cry. Her and the sky.

Her tears drip down into the blood. She hears the drops. She looks down and in the blood she sees the story of the people of the nation. She begins to hear their voices, not audibly, but internally. She jumps back with trepidation, seeking to alleviate her anxiety, and eradicate the horror. A dream? She covers her ears, trying to disconnect herself from their stories; from the nation. But... the voices grow *louder*. So loud, that it is the only sound she hears. She becomes one with the sound, it becomes her. She no longer feels herself. The people become her; their stories. She lays down, joining them, the blood covering her body. A story now shared.

III. A Nation Destroyed by Hate

The blood on the ground has a story. It tells the story of the people. The blood cries out in despair, in regret. From one blood, were we not all created (Acts 17:26)? The blood of the Scottish, black, white... Aren't we all the same...?

Preconceived notions lingered. Stereotypes attributed to a race of people. Prejudice. Discrimination. An illusion of progress. A lie. Hate, the cause of death. Dark.

IV. The People of the Nation

The town was silent... desolate... Dark. People hadn't come out of their houses in weeks. They peeked through their windows... occasionally. Trash tumbled the streets with no destination. Crows squeaked. Dogs chased cats, that chased mice. Hunt. A foreshadowing of the future. The people sat in their houses quietly, no one talking, no one expressing their fears or failures, their desires or prejudices, nor their sadness or sorrow. Nothing.

They listened to the radio. The speaker, an unknown entity. A person perhaps, but who and where... who knows. It could be their son/daughter, husband/wife, mother, father, neighbor. The voice, masked, disguised by static, by the desire to remain unknown. The speaker asks faintly, "Can this nation be reconciled? Can we be restored? Are we completely *Destroyed*?" Destroyed, the word skips like a scratched cd as a car hits a bump in the road,

lingering in the air, suffocating the inhabitants. The people look around without focusing on any particular thing. Expressionless. Not showing any comprehension, no reaction given. Making sure to keep distance, hoping to cut off any potential intimacy amongst one another. The fragmented family, the single individual, the so-called friends. Nothing more than people sharing a space; sharing it, without occupying it. The distance... created because of hate. No one to trust. No one...

good.

The people look to their tables, on their nightstands, on their porches through windows, at newspapers with headlines such as: “60 Scottish Children Stolen from Their Houses; Tortured, Dismembered, Maimed” ... “A Retaliation of the Murdered Children, 150 Killed” ... “A Whole Race Relocated: Deported” ... “The Wall is Built” ... “Refugees Flee Scotland; In Search for a Safer Nation.” The people of the house blink, long, s-l-o-w-l-y.

From her house, the girl, alone because her family had been killed in other hate-filled attacks, stares out the window in disbelief. She questions how they’ve come to this point. She walks to her bed, moving slowly because she knows that any sudden movement could cause the inevitable... The Big Battle. But could they hear her steps? No. Yet, they all moved about slowly, hesitantly. Maybe their movement resonated in the earth. She glides to a room in the back of her house, sitting down in the middle of the floor. In a fetal position. Hoping for the rebirth of her nation. She does not move.

V. The Battle

At 3 pm, darkness fills the nation. A heaviness emits from the earth. The nation is compressed by this heaviness, and the breath of the people become shallow. Suddenly, the earth begins to shake. The people run out from their houses, heartless, without souls. In the streets, they look upon one another with hate. Blacks versus Whites, a few other races in between. One person steps too quickly, and the people become frantic. It starts. They move about as if in *Purge*, striking whomever they come in contact with; strangers, neighbors, old friends, relatives. Some run about gaily, as characters in a video game seeking to defeat opponents, some vigorously, with the mindset and purpose of destruction, while others run around calmly, waiting to be killed.

A loud noise fills the streets. The people look to the left, and to the right. Bombs roll down the street, bearing the words **Hate: The Nation Destroyed**. Instantaneously they detonate. An act of the people, a plan to kill the remaining... everyone... set up by the government because the nation could never be restored?

All but one adheres to this plan. The lone survivor. She lay in the blood. In her final moment, she thinks of her nation... once a great nation. Big. Bad. Beautiful. She lays in the voices. What did we do to ourselves? She drifts...

An election gone wrong.

No one thought the nation would be destroyed.

...She closes her eyes.

...She opens her eyes.

...A Nightmare.

~ *Konysha Wade*



"Last Stand" ~ Fabrice Poussin

The settlement sets level between weepy needle trees.
 "Wretched needles; where's the Zyrtec?" she sneezed.
 Her sneeze peeves the tremble bees. "The nerve," they wheeze.
 The tremble bees flee where the fresh breeze herds
 the evergreen trees. When the trees stretch, they see the stern
 elk trek where the berry weeds creep the feeble fence.
 Teathy meddle nettles, these berry weeds everywhere extend.
 Dense, they creep the fence, the deck, the shelter cement.
 She begs, "Wrench these meddle nettles; sever these creepy
 berry weeds; schlepp them hell ere elsewhere!" Her decree.
 He bends then besets; defends the fence, the deck, the shelter cement.
 Grey eyes prefer rest, yet he severs every weed, hell-bent,
 he heeds her every deed. He's sweet, ever deems her the bee's knees.
 She heeds the vehement breeze; keen breeze reddens her cheeks.
 She sweeps the deck where weepy needle trees shed;
 sweeps the deck's severed berry weed shreds. Well-kept.
 Elsewhere, her slender feet press, they descend the deck steps.
 Slender feet gently edge the new seed beds. Fresh dredge.
 Here, she tells the wrens secrets; pretends they'll never peep.
 She tells them tender, *Shhh*. Speechless cheeps. The wrens teeter
 the weepy trees; leer the new bed seeds. *Tsk tsk*, greedy cheeps.
 When then, she sees, he emerges between the trees. Vexed, he's spent.
 Deep kerfs; teathy nettle etches swelled, bled, festered red; yet,
 he greets her gentle, pecks her cheek. Reverent, she's nestled sweet,
 feels esteemed. Berry weeds temp cede. They heckle then recede; yet,
 bet next week, nevertheless, they'll creep. Ever pledged ensemble they be.

~ Ashley Knowlton

Ventriloquist

Fort Mitchell, Kentucky

Your gasp careens as hundreds of goggle eyes & frankfurter lips lure you into this side of toon. Gawking from schoolmarm rows for a lap & a hand to revive them, they seem anxious & awkward. Still they teleport a nattering rustle of prickly jests that circle the wagon of your solar plexus. This odditorium, this maverick mix of culture detritus—painted make-up flaking, leather skin sagging, repairs improvised & raw. They listen as they fetishize us—slashes of eye shadow, caterpillar brows, boobs that surprise in their shifting. So many heroes that lived useful lives, eyes sunburst mandalas.

~ *Rikki Santer*

A LIPOGRAM FOR A LANK MAN

A wayward barn and shack sat far apart.
Lay at vast patch grass and sap stalks that
snag pant frays. That barn and shack had
wash-tan planks that warp and crack. Hang gap.
Planks sag and sank at flat hard clay,
stark land that can't plant and wax jack.
Dawn at flat land can carry a sharp draft, can
hack a tall lank man's bark raw. Spasm jaw.
That jaw all day drags half a damp Pall Mall.
A ragtag cat claws at vacant cans
and lank man's shaky barn hands, and
bawls calls at black-cap mallards that pass
and swats at shad that had swam away.
Day falls dark, halts clammy dally-days that lag.
Bar and latch that shack hatch; snap that draft.
Lank man grasps a swash malt glass and
drags away at that Pall Mall half. Drank crass.
"Hark that damn draft that wafts brash jabs at
slapdash tar warp-walls," spasm jaw spat.
Dark nags at sharp scars that stab, can
rasp a lank man's gasp bad. Harsh gag.
Mark that damn past, a yarn that gnaws and cracks
calm. Aghast, lank man can't hack, slams
back. That scrawny mass sat slack.
Ragtag cat paws at that swash malt
glass that haphazardly sways.
Lank man's grasp falls lax.
A wham, crash, and small clangs.
All tar, ash, and raw clay,
that tall lank man wafts far away.
Lacks want and far astray.

~ *Ashley Knowlton*



“Ephemerality of Life” ~ Saul Villegas

Millie mooed.

Cate mooed with her.

The cow stared at them.

Millie giggled at the old joke, a pure, authentic song.

Cate giggled with her, exaggerated, trembling notes.

The cow stared at them.

Millie continued to pet the cow's cheek. Cate stroked the other, looking for signs of impatience in the otherwise stoic animal, searching its blank yet somehow knowing eyes for knowledge of her charade. What made her want to release the scream that had been lodged in her throat for inconceivable minutes was how Millie, sitting comfortably in her numb arms, was so far away from screaming; Millie, who had every justification for adding her shrill voice to the one behind them.

She hadn't asked Millie if she was all right; doing so would have given her the impression something was wrong. She hadn't asked Millie her actual name; as far as the little girl's amiable behaviour indicated, they had known each other all their lives, and names didn't matter. She hadn't asked Millie her age; from the moment she took the little girl into her arms, she could tell the small human being was no older than her career.

Three-years-old, Cate mused again, as she transferred Millie from one desensitized arm to the other, careful not to break contact with the cow. *Three years*, and once again she imagined the retirement banner, growing longer and larger as the idea cooked in her mind, advertising the pitiful number.

Cate was grateful for the brown-and-white animal's presence. Moreover, she was grateful that the cow was the first thing Millie had noticed. She wouldn't have thought to mosey on over to the cow; instinct—training—would have told her to immediately transport the dishevelled little girl to her car; and there they would have waited for the next routine steps. *And then she would've known something was wrong*, she thought. *And then she would've started screaming*.

A scream perforated the ambience, a cocktail of pain, fear... and perhaps a note of anger.

"Mooooo!" Cate issued her loudest impersonation yet. Millie echoed her sentiments, prolonging and exaggerating the bovine language until it devolved into more giggling.

Another scream smothered the laughter, and, for a terrible moment, Cate thought she felt Millie stiffen; thought she saw registration on the little girl's suddenly sagging face.

“Moo mooooo moo moo moo mooooo moo,” Cate interjected, the single word spoken in the rhythm of conversation. She fixed upon Millie's eyes, hoping the little girl would take the bait, ready to shift her little body should she decide to go peeking behind her back, toward the scream.

Millie's bowed lips glistened, saliva pooling as she gathered her thoughts about the conflicting sounds. Cate readied her own lips with another string of nonsensical cow-speak, when Millie broke out of her trance, and fired off a meaningless statement of her own: “Mooooo mooooo mooooo”—laughter—“mooooo moo moo moo.”

Relieved, Cate kept the dialogue flowing for as long and as loud as was necessary to beat the intermittent screaming from Millie's ears. As their banter rose and fell with the outbursts behind them, she imagined how the others must have seen them: vulnerable backs; a revolving red light highlighting Millie's arms wrapped comfortably—*Or is she in shock?* Cate couldn't decide—around her neck; mooing from unseen lips; the cow itself unseen, blocked by their combined bodies. How unreal it must have appeared to them.

How grotesquely real it was to her.

How beautifully real it was to Millie.

A terrible thought returned Cate to their cozy huddle: *This is your first time, isn't it?* The scream she struggled to keep deep down in her gorge threatened to erupt. It occurred to her that *this* cow—not the pair grazing further down the fence, dangerously close to the break; not the calf flanked by several adults; not the others standing nonchalantly, laying nonchalantly, living nonchalantly; not the countless others that might have been a blur in Millie's passenger window—but *this* cow might very well have been the *very first* cow Millie had ever seen.

Cate mused, and wondered if Millie could detect the underlying melancholy. *You don't need to meet a cow*, she desperately wanted to assure the little girl. *Not now. Not like this.* She was certain that when Millie was one day no longer a size fit for one's arms—*There's no guarantee of that*, Cate sadly reminded herself—she might learn to hate the cow. *All cows.* The way Cate hated them for what they had done to Millie. To her.

To Millie's mother.

The human sounds behind them were less frequent now, quieter, the pain, the fear, the anger—if ever there was—giving themselves to realization. Cate hoped Millie's mother would soon forget how to scream; hoped her mother forgot her daughter's name. This line of thinking was drenched in

selfishness, but Cate had accepted it... for now; may guilt torment her later. It was just that she and, more importantly, the cow had worked so damned hard to keep Millie occupied.

Or are we keeping the cow occupied? Cate thought for the first time.

She looked into the animal's eyes, glossy black islands surrounded by thin halos of bloodshot white. Pulses of red light, rotating like an angry lighthouse—an eye of its own—searched those eyes, much as Cate was doing now, for knowledge.

Do you see the red light? she mentally transmitted to the cow. *Do you understand it? Did you see what happened before the red light? Do you understand what happened?*

The cow stared.

Do you understand that this little girl I'm holding, the one mooing at you, the one petting your face... do you understand that her mother is the one who killed your calf?

Based on its indifference, she couldn't tell if the calf was blood-related to the cow. Would he or she—Cate couldn't tell which—bite Millie if it understood the situation behind them? Would he or she reconsider biting if it understood the whole thing had merely been a matter of a broken fence? Would he or she refrain from seeking revenge upon Millie if it understood that the calf had wandered through the broken fence, onto the asphalt, and before Millie's mother's car? Would he or she rethink their potential bite if it understood that Millie's mother had, from the looks of the finale, done her best to avoid the calf, but instead clipped its behind, sending her speeding vehicle into the ditch? Would he or she accept that the calf had been mercifully put down, quickly and painlessly, unlike Millie's mother, who found herself wrapped deep within her metal womb, gasoline-for-placenta everywhere, unable to be reached or moved, lest she perish sooner?

The cow stared.

Cate focused on Millie's silhouette within the animal's sheeny eye: *Do you understand?*

A voice answered the question. Cate couldn't make out the words, only the harshness of the voice. She sensed an approaching presence, and immediately understood what was happening. In a voice tailored for Millie's benefit, Cate said, "Please, don't come any closer," and resumed mooing along with Millie.

"Officer?" The voice didn't sound so harsh. Perhaps it hadn't been at all. Perhaps, Cate decided, she was prejudiced against voices outside of she and Millie's precious bubble.

Cate sensed the intruder take another step forward.

"I said don't," Cate said in her rosiest voice.

“Officer, I need to examine the little girl,” the soft voice said.

The well-meaning plea incensed Cate. *She's fine. I checked her when I pulled her out of the car. Some scratches, a few bruises, but she's fine. I checked her. And I named her.* She knew someone close to Millie must have known her real name, but for tonight, in her arms, the little girl would take the name of the first girl Cate had lost on the job.

Footsteps crunched behind them.

“Don't,” Cate emphasized, momentarily breaking her character of utter serenity. Before the intruder could interject, she added: “I... just give us a few minutes, okay?”

And then what? she thought.

Once again, she caught Millie's silhouette in the cow's eye. *Do you have a father? Grandmother? Grandfather? Uncles? Aunts? Anybody? Do you know your name?*

What would become of Millie when Cate decided enough “few minutes” had elapsed?

What would become of the little girl when the cow was gone?

The intruder's footsteps—a paramedic just trying to do her job—retreated, but Cate sensed she hadn't gone far; Millie *did* need to be examined.

She realized the screaming had died. It made sense to her, not because the outcome was inevitable, but because the paramedic now had time to check on the only survivor.

But they still had a few minutes.

And so Millie moored.

Cate moored with her.

The cow stared at them.

~ *Alfredo Arcilesi*

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

After my sister-in-law forced me to watch it,
 in trade for her watching all of Star Wars,
I said, "I expected it to be the prequel to Schindler's List.
In fact, the musical I would've loved
would be about the joy before tragedy."
I said, "That's worth singing about."
She frowned.
I laughed.

But part of me
is always a fat teen
who sees in musicals
impossible love
and loves it
and is embarrassed
 like accidentally seeing private parts
for his feelings.

~ *Christian Hanz Lozada*



“City of Waves” ~ Jarret Lin

A CUP OF MORNING

Blueberry pancakes, Jamaican coffee
The sunrise is awaking with arms out for me
The flowers were drunk on potent amethyst
Kissed by sunlight and raindrops
Budding on the petals of the moonlight phase
They gently open their hearts to our gaze
Twisting and bending to whispering winds
Washing away guilt and all matter of sins
Delicious reds and sugary yellows
Pucker pinks and cinnamon fellows
The butterflies scurry to caress them and hover
They call them to come like a beckoning lover
In the morning mist, all starts anew again
Another chance to make it right, to win
Missing the faces who once brought the sun
Missing the traces of frolicking fun
Seeking purpose and light with all fervor
Sweet, beautiful flowers they do not murmur
They just parade their beauty for me to see
That's enough of a miracle, a silent decree
Let the colors of life shimmer a bright array
Remembering only good on this lovely day

~ Jan Niebrzydowski

CONVERSING WITH GODS

After Jericho Brown

Pit perception against cognition.
Keep your ears out for the invisible voice.

Keep your ears out to the invisible voice.
Spectral whistling may get you closer.

Spectral whistling will ease you closer.
Talking Bibles with velour tongues.

Talking Bibles with felted tongues.
Gospel ventriloquists fortify the Script.

Gospel ventriloquists seduce the Script.
Ancestor belly prophets made anything talk.

Ancestor belly prophets coaxed everything to talk.
Testament in statues, streams, perky vulvas.

Testimony in statues, streams, perky vulvas.
Against cognition, pit eavesdropping & perception.

~ Rikki Santer

THE POETRY OF PRODUCTION

my grandmother grew
with twelve siblings
in a one-room house
on a farm up in oregon.

she learned to love the land
she learned to work the land
probably better than i work my computer
or pen to write this poem.

she tilled the soil
that would be home to her blackberries
gently planted their seeds
collaborated with the sun
cultivated the streams
captured sticks to support their stems
and watched them grow
into maturity.

she harvested, avoiding their thorns,
and with one yield
taught me how to make jam
on her stovetop, with sugar
and pectin, to be put in glass mason jars
when i was a small girl
visiting her farm in oregon.

we cleaned a large metal pot
added her harvest
measured the sugar
stirred in the pectin
then watched the berries melt
into a bubbling indigo
their seeds separating
from their bodies.

once strained, carefully,
through a fine-metal mesh
the indigo cooled into a
deep sweet blackness
that resembled the darkest night
or the deepest sea
with speckles of starlight
or glowing jellyfish shimmering
when the jam was put
into jars and held up
to the sunlight.

now i sip my morning coffee
from a mason jar
and eat my bread
with jam that wasn't made
by my hands or hers.

who blew the glass
i drink from now?
who grew these berries
and watched them get kissed
by the sun and covered them
in a blanket of rain?

what history, blood, sweat,
tears, pain, burns, and toil
went into what is in my hands?

every fabrication, a story.
every product, a character.
every laborer, a poem.

~ Amanda Riggle

PRELUDE TO TIME

We once had time.
Years back, suns
rose slowly,

moving through slats
in fences, land behind
unmarked, open.

Come autumn,
maple leaves scraped
cement, dry and broken,
tough bark chipped
and cut.

Slowly, on the
backs of shadows,
we played,
minds swollen,
eyes small,

time dragging as
our feet across
branches,

sweeping ants
in our wake.

Whatever happened to
that kaleidoscope,
through which we
saw clearly,

radiant colors
tumbling through
each other intact,

world of sharp shapes
spinning and twirling?

~ Ryan Leack

MAKING GOOD TIME

Country closed, I cultivate home,
carry out each task slowly.

Red roses in bloom, I've hardly watched
their color. Bird feeder empty, covered

in the rust of how many suns, chicken
fence warped by wind of how many

seasons, chasing each other away.
Your carrots grow, dark soil rippling

through shade and light, chairs to my
left and right empty, mind chasing

no-mind, watching sun scale rooftops.
Of light, day turns like this,

scatters rose petals, brushes palms,
uplifting. I see myself in shadows

dancing, only to fall back into place,
in planes departing, only to return.

See myself in the mockingbird's varied
song, trying to impress, in the palm

leaves' artful sway, moving with change.
How long will it last—this season

one long lateral drift, your dianthus
in bloom once more.

~ Ryan Leack

BROADFIRE EXCERPT

*Your grave tended,
your memory kept,
and your soul's pang embraced;
fear not death's fiendish laughter.*

- A proverb of the Karím, typically recited at funerals between a eulogy and a dirge

...: Prologue of *Broadfire*

Deliberately spilled, a heavy laden Karí-Mard stood in the center of a ring of dirt. He occupied a dimly lit room, an anxious cry tearing through the throat of a baby swaddled in his right arm. The babe was wrapped in a light blue blanket depicting grapes and apricots. Her persistent shriek practically possessed the arrhythmic cackle of candle lights arranged in the room's four corners. Though sparse, the room also contained a cabinet with surgical equipment and a bed with a bundle of red cloth by the edge.

The 'Mard swiveled on his back foot several times, never moving from the center, checking the walls. On one: a faded painting of a Karí-Geen, her headwear tall, hands on her hips looking at the painter. Something in her eyes, which really amounted to nothing more than darkened blotches on the canvas, looked annoyed or more likely exhausted. The other walls were blank save for a horizontal rack to which a midwife's apron belonged.

Soon the babe's shrieking came to a stop and turned to a snuffle; her wide eyes stared up at a particular corner where walls met the ceiling. She made an uncertain and uneasy sound.

"Speak your name, priest, so that the Idols know of your coming" came an ashen voice from above.

...

One by one, Nerses turned the onyx stones of a prayer rope over in his right hand. Thirty-three beads, that in any other circumstance would have been fingered subconsciously, Nerses moved manually. Three from that sum were slightly larger, born of more precious material, and in each cycle between his thumb and index finger, Nerses paused at the ruby among them. His teeth were clenched, though he rattled them to hear his bones click and clack. His thumb rubbed along the ruby's smooth cut each time before it moved on.

For your people, Nerses; you do this for Sev-Yeghūnk, the 'Mard thought to himself. Nerses paced along the diameter of a tiny, cold room with naught but a chair for his benefit. Rather than a door into the adjacent chamber, there hung a

curtain, and through it he heard the sounds of wailing newborns, sobbing mothers, proud fathers, midwives both relieved and forlorn... none of this cacophony broke the back and forth of his body and his mind.

Nerses put both hands behind him, but his check fell on the ruby each time still. He glanced at the curtain, then down to his feet, then ahead at the lonely stone wall. A complete stop. A deep breath.

A set of cautious steps propelled him forward.

He parted the curtain, striding into Vanadur's Belfry proper - an infirmary so named after the Karím god of hospitality, the "bearer of new fruits." Banners across the stone walls punctuated Vanadur's colloquial description, each one illustrated with two open palms holding a pomegranate cracked at the top with its seeds spilling out across the digits. Nerses licked his lips, tasting something sour.

Fevered chimes from the infirm suffered through his ears, bed after bed, rung by the slightest movements. The stone walls shivered like strained lungs, and the floor felt a faint pulse every few seconds, as if Vanadur's distant heart were beating.

Nerses picked up his pace, passing by each person and their ailment.

...

The so-called priest turned his eyes upward, only half prepared for what he saw.

Lurking against the upper corner where the light barely touched, an alien creature clung. Its eyes a smoldering blackish gray, flesh an off-color brown like old, battered leather emphasized by sagging breasts. It bore a twisted grin, each tooth sharpened to a rogue's point, with a jawline reminiscent of a wild boar. Its right hand remained on the ceiling's surface, copper claws ceaselessly drug against the stonework in idle dread. The creature's left hand was a misshapen mess; like the branches of a tree gnarled and twisted into the cracks of an old, decaying wall, it had held a bastard sword for so long that its skin stretched over the hilt - kept in place by grime, mold, blood, and webbing. The blade was barbed and appeared forged of iron.

"Spending your last moments in silence?" it taunted, lapping an ulcerated tongue out across the length of its blade.

The 'Mard shook his head; the infant in his arms had gone deathly quiet. He turned to face her away from the alien creature.

"We will have the newborn, priest," it boasted, gaining confidence enough to slink off the ceiling and drag itself onto the ground. The alien landed with a heavy stomp and swiped its sword across the stones beneath it, trudging forward, battered flesh stretching and straining. Gaining a surprising speed, it breached the ring of dirt in the room's center and slashed its bastard sword across the priest's neck.

His eyes went wide, and his form crumbled into dirt. The babe in his arm made that same uneasy sound from before, its skin breaking apart and likewise turning to dirt within that blue blanket of grapes and apricots. The blanket fell to the ground on the newly formed pile of earth, losing all its texture.

“WHAT IS THIS?” bellowed the demon, swinging its swine-like head left and right, swiveling on its bulbous black foot, misshapen nose snorting and snotting.

A jeweled hand thrust out of the bundled, red cloth on the bed, and from within a voice:

“*K’ots!*” came the cry, that very hand snapping into a fist that almost shuttered the air around it.

•••

A few patients stared expectantly as Nerses strode past, catching sight of the red, priestly cloak dragging behind him and the symbol upon it - the *areva’khach*, what many devotees knew as the sun cross, stitched ornately against the silk. Eighteen yellow flowers were embroidered as the outer edge to a large circle, their black stems curled around the petals and all spiraling in towards a decagrammic nucleus enclosed within a smaller ring. Perfectly rounded obsidian stones had been embedded between each curling stem, equidistant to both the inner and outer circles to form a third.

The ten-pointed star in the center, that distinctly designed nucleus, was stitched in a reddish-gold that captured the eye of a bed-ridden child, flesh hugging bone. He pointed meekly and looked to his mother, questioningly.

“*Balas,*” she started affectionately, taking the boy’s hand to place back down and hold in her own, “he’s a high cleric; the star means he’s been anointed by our King.”

“Our King? *Takavor Tr’asdamat?*” asked the child. His mother nodded.

“Bravo, you know!”

“I saw him in my dream, mama.”

“Who?”

“The King.”

“In your dream?” she asked.

“*Yerazus,*” he replied, practicing his Old Tongue. “He came back to Sev-Yeghūnk from far away. He was on a flying lizard, but the lizard was blind. There was a bloody cloth...” the boy squinted, trying to recall the word, “a bloody *tashnag* over the lizard’s eyes. I felt bad, mama, it looked like it was in pain.”

His mother listened with extraordinary patience, though as soon as her son closed his eyes, she frowned and squeezed his hand.

“Shh, shh, it’s ok, *balas*. It was only a dream. You’re such a kind boy, you know that?”

Her voice broke a little as she said so.

He coughed a little and drifted off to sleep. When she looked up, hoping to spot Nerses, he had long since passed.

•••

The demon swiveled again and out came a snarl. Specks of dirt rose from the ring around the rosie, floating along the perimeter in an easy ebb. The bewildered demon thrust itself forward, but it could not take a step. The newly piled dirt at its feet shifted and shaped into the same clenched fist as the one extended from the bundle of red, grabbing the creature's swollen ankle. It growled and tried a slash of its sword at the speckled barrier, but the bits of dirt there shifted too, tracing the sword's momentum to catch and hold its blade with a second earthen hand.

The demon glared then as two arms had stretched free of the red bundle, both fists enclosed. It howled, held in place by ankle and arm, its demented cry crashing against stone after stone after stone, indicating in no uncertain terms that it was **trapped**.

The bundle of red rustled, and the demon briefly caught sight of a 10-pronged star along its fabric. Within seconds, Nerses emerged from beneath his own cloak, a sniffling babe swaddled upon the bed's white sheets also coming into view. The demon growled and jerked forward, but Nerses held true. As he stood, he swiped his right arm to the side and unclenched his fist, the dirt too doing the same and disarming the demon of its sword by tearing it from the arm it had been fused with. The sound of the demon's ripping flesh accompanied its shriek, giving the priest occasion to wince, followed by another echoing sound as the blade slammed and slid against the ground afar.

Nerses strode forward, coming into clearer view. His head was rounded and bald, but his unibrow was bushy and his beard dense. Both blonde, his beard was braided with two woven strands like pendulums down to his chest. Each hand, one still outstretched in a fist, were wrapped in beads of silver and gold, held in place by clasps and thin chains that hooked into the sleeves like wires to his robe.

He approached the monstrosity, exceeding its height but a fraction of its mass, careful to remain outside of the dirt circle with one earth-shaped hand holding it by the ankle.

With a dissonant cackle, it said: "You cannot castrate that which cannot consummate, priest. This one only consumes."

"I will have none of it, *Alk*. Forced to wander forever's empty gorge in an envy without relief, there is nothing for you here," said the priest, stoic.

"Oho," the twisted grin returned. "In fact, there is something for us here."

Nerses watched the *Alk*'s glower tear itself from him and fix at the newborn staring in pale, unintelligible fear.

"Never forget, you are an exiled spawn of Sandaramet's seed, that which can no longer tread upon *or* through Her earth by primordial decree. Her body is denied you," the priest proclaimed.

Nerses clenched his fist even tighter; the dirt grip squeezed at the *Alk*'s ankle. It groaned but maintained a perverse look.

"So... close. And not a Nymph in sight. Instead, a lowly 'Mard stands between us and that which is our right."

“Where pools of water dwell, from the other half of epicene Grace, you will find your intended foe the Nymph. In this realm of sundered stone, the Star instead shall be the knife.”

The Alk jerked again; Nerses tightened his clench and so, too, did the dirt. A strained grunt escaped him.

“And who wields this ten-pointed knife?” asked the Alk, relaxing slightly despite its leg.

“Nerses Moonbeard,” he said through grit teeth.

•••

Indeed, the main chamber bearing most of the patients gave way to a corridor that broke off into several spindly hallways, each with their own host of rooms for more private care. Nerses turned down one of the hallways, its entrance sign reading “Maternity.” His pace slowed considerably, almost down to a stalk. The priest made his way like a snake in tall grass; some rooms were quiet, others filled with subdued conversation, others still with a crying babe or even a crying mother.

How had he heard a more unorganized orchestra in that original waiting room? It hadn’t been connected to the maternity ward... he’d been forced to wade through the sick to reach the expectant, something that he suddenly found absurd.

Not until he heard the groans and shrieks of a ‘Geen in labor, a midwife and a nurse urging her onward, did Nerses stop in his tracks and his thoughts. He steeled himself and with a breath entered the room.

Brought together by fateful union, an infant too entered the room and the world. Its head was clear of the mother’s groin, deathly quiet, its body yet to part from her.

“Aaaaah... haaaa... fuck... f-aaaaah,” the new mother panted.

“That’s it, just one final push, Arsha’luys.” The midwife egged her on.

With a set of groans, each one feeling more final than the last, Arsha’luys bore new fruit - connected to her by a long, thin cord. It came quiet, curious, unassuming - opposite Nerses, whose boots scuffed the ground, whose swish of the beaded curtain caused clicks and clacks like nervous teeth. He strode in with purpose and assumption, bearing both upon his visage.

“O Bearer,” and how the mother uttered - a mix of sweet relief and pleading. She repeated the phrase two more times, turning her head and touching her cheek to the pillow. Her skin shone with a bitter glow, the curls in her hair understandably disheveled, breast rising and falling with a heavy breath.

The midwife and nurse both looked to Nerses but seeing his vestments nodded their heads in respect and worked to both cut the ‘Geen of her physical connection to the newborn and clean between her legs.

The last of some labored breathing, the newborn still silent. While the nurse finished treating the new mother, the midwife took her babe across his shoulder and gently started patting her back to coax cries out of the tiny frame. He paced back and forth in the room, but no matter what angle, the newborn held Nerses’ gaze. The

priest frowned and the babe began to cry, her wail breaching the mother's senses. She looked to the priest.

"O Bearer, have you brought a priest to bless this widow's child?" she asked, high-cheeks gleaning with sweat, eyes half-lidded and fluttering up.

"You are a widow?" Nerses asked, moving toward the bed to sit at its side. He cupped the mother's hand in his own and got a good look at her. Young, dark eyes. Beautiful, sad.

"Is that so surprising to hear, in this time? My husband was recently in battle with the second regiment, Gur'wazan Wild-Iron's. Only few of them returned; he was not among them."

"The ongoing hostilities with Kabasum exact a heavy toll on the 'Geen of Sev-Yeghunk."

"Not just the women," Arsha'luy's sighed. "Its 'Mard, its boys... dreaming another of the Kar' into this life was selfishness on our part."

Nerses frowned; he lowered his head and squeezed the widow's hand. An utterance of prayer escaped his lips, but she interrupted him.

"Save your words, I have exhausted enough for two lifetimes. Please, for the child... for my dear An'taram."

The newborn, An'taram, almost unnaturally stopped her crying for several moments, not even a sniffle in transition. The candle lights in the room's corners flickered and dimmed.

Nerses shot up; both the midwife and nurse looked to him.

"The mother must be moved," he said, urgently. "Here, hand me the babe," ushering the midwife over to give up An'taram.

"Wh- what's going on?" Arsha'luy's asked, sitting up slightly. The nurse and midwife both rushed to her, both ready to lift. She resisted their touch, "What's going on?" she cried again, fear flirting with her voice, eyeing her babe in the priest's arms, watching him swaddle her in a white sheet.

"We must go," said the nurse, almost cold.

The two caretakers hoisted Arsha'luy's out from the bed, carefully. Her groan broke out into another cry, "Where are you taking me? An'taram, An'taram!" Her hands both outstretched, body writhing to be free. "My baby! Let her go! Let me go!"

Kicking, screaming, much like a babe herself, Arsha'luy's was taken from the room, taken from her newborn child. An'taram resumed her cries, steeped in a justified confusion. Nerses set the newly swaddled babe upon the bed and unclasped his long, red cloak. He bundled it at one corner of the bed, concealing An'taram in its dark warmth. Her cries were muffled but persistent.

With a groan, a grunt, and a stress of his muscles, Nerses dragged the bed to the side of the room, clearing the middle. The two long braids of his beard swung to and fro as he moved with haste. With the middle clear, Nerses dug through a large satchel at his waist and produced a jar of dirt. He uncorked it and began spilling the dirt in a large, even circle around where the bed had previously been. Upon closing the circle, he uttered the word "*H'ogh*" and the dirt trembled, briefly.

He stuffed the jar away and dug for another, this dirt darker and coarser, sealed more tightly. Nerses applied his grip to the cork and tugged with as much stress as he had exerted on the bed, eventually undoing the plug. Pocketing it, he stepped outside of the circle and motioned ahead with a free hand.

“Baht’rank!”

The coarse dirt in the open jar began to drain itself, practically vanishing, and sure enough an illusory recreation of Nerses and An’taram began to form in the circle’s center, as if molded from dirt and clay. The earthen images took on the colors, textures, dimensions, and (in An’taram’s case) the sounds of their real counterparts. The real priest trembled slightly upon the spell’s completion, moving back to sit on the bed and catch his breath. He leaned forward and dug the jar’s seal out; it sat at three-quarters empty. Re-sealing the jar, the priest huddled underneath his own cloak with the real An’taram, who had gone deathly quiet in the darkness, and they waited.

•••

“You speak of our Mother, Moonbeard, but you know naught,” the Alk claimed, standing straighter. Although it spoke to the priest, its smoldering eyes remained on the newborn.

It realizes the situation; it is buying time, Nerses thought to himself. He glanced back at An’taram; she was petrified and could not break her gaze from the fiend, her only sound an occasional sniff.

“Your Star, it had ten points... and yet of you, there is but one. Of us? Infinite,” the Alk motioned widely with its hand, the one that had previously held onto the bastard sword.

“And yet, these eyes behold only one such craven creature,” came the reply.

A loud cackle erupted from the swine’s-jaw, and as the sound bounced from stone to stone, An’taram began her wail again. Nerses flinched, and he too felt quite trapped.

“The Idols have turned their backs on you, Moonbeard. Our Mother will not protect this newborn - **any newborn** - as long as the Karím remain shut up in this mountain, far from running rivers. The Bearer is a myth, his pomegranate-stained knuckles more a blood drenched fist trying to shatter the stone boundaries you believe grant you safety. You, a thrall to a star that is quickly fading...”

For your people, Nerses; you do this for Sev-Yeghūnk, the priest repeated in his head. His teeth were grit, and his body felt a slight tremble. He closed his eyes for but a moment to steel himself, clutching the beads that seemed to grant him safety.

The Alk sprung forward with an inorganic momentum and felt the tug of the earthen shackle at his feet. It growled and howled, overtaking An’taram’s wail. Nerses opened his eyes, but a nervous pain shot from his wrist up to his shoulder. He cried in pain and unclenched his fist, arm falling limp.

You underestimated its power, damnit!

The dirt holding the fiend's ankle crumbled, and it barreled toward the speckled barrier that rose from the ring on the ground. Nerses grunted and used his other hand, palm facing flat and out, silver and gold chattering as he did so.

"*B'ahd!*" was the word that came from his lips, and the dirt arranged itself more densely to form a kind of wall between the Alk and An'taram, still within the circle's confines. The fiend tore at the dirt with its claws. Wild, ravenous. The blackish-gray of its eyes bore through any barrier, centered solely on the wailing babe. Nerses shuffled slowly, at first placing himself in front of An'taram. He bore a great, throbbing pain across his limp arm - a few times wishing he could cut it right off then and there to spare himself the agony.

"What know ye of Their backs, Alk?" Nerses asked through a growl. "You and your kind descended from the groin; burned-out eyes proof that *Mayrig* Sandaramet never wished your gaze upon her."

The Alk scowled, further trying to dig at the dirt wall, "Her rightful name is Spandaramet, 'Mard."

Nerses ignored the fiend's protest and continued:

"Heed with what ease you are stopped. Were you a legitimate force of nature, an infinity to endure all time, a simple priest would stand for nothing in your path. Can you even take this newborn from me, I wonder?"

A deep rumble bubbled up out of the swine's-jaw, and the Alk shifted its attention away from An'taram - whose wail had quieted just slightly - to Nerses, who had since moved slightly off to the side of the newborn.

"You overstate your significance, Moonbeard," it said, as it began to back up, preparing to rush at the priest. "Fate is not your friend."

...

The midwife and nurse both carried Arsha'luy's out of the birthing room to re-enter the hallway. She continued to kick and scream, so much so that a few heads popped out of the adjacent rooms in alarm and curiosity.

"Let me back in! Where are you taking me!? An'taram, An'taram!" was her battle cry, hands flying in the face of her abductors and caretakers. She managed to kick the nurse in the stomach, the nurse dropping her feet shortly after. Arsha'luy's tried to walk, still held beneath her arms by the midwife. Blood stained the maternity gown, some of it dripping on the stonework beneath. She collapsed before her first step, feeling weak, delirious. The last few things she heard before dipping out of consciousness was the midwife instructing the nurse and a few other staff members to do something...

...when she awoke, uncertain of how much time had passed, she found herself sitting up, strapped to a bed by the wrists, room unfamiliar. She tugged at the straps, but they were done in tight. Someone had cleaned her up, replaced her gown. Suddenly, she was overcome by a feeling of pain in her chest and her hips. Arsha'luy's groaned, which caught someone's attention outside. 'Twas the nurse that came in, frowning.

"Ya should stop movin', Arsha'luy's. That's tha quickest way ta fall back ta sleep. Want water?" Her words came off as if rehearsed. The nurse held her own stomach, pouring cold water from a glass pitcher, the handle of which was modeled in the likeness of a hand holding grapes. Arsha'luy's watched and tried to tug at her wrist-straps again.

"Where is my baby? Why am I here?"

The nurse remained quiet, taking the water over, giving the widow's legs a wide berth. She put the glass to Arsha'luy's lips, but she jerked her head and knocked the water off to the side, shattering the glass.

"I HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW!"

"Yes, yes you do," the midwife said, walking in just then. The nurse scowled and left the room, caring little for the mess made on the ground.

"But first, I need you to remain calm and listen. Can you do that for me, Arsha'luy's?"

"Do not patronize me!" she exclaimed, frustrated. Tears welled up in her eyes and she tugged on the straps again before sighing and slumping back. In a sob, she said, "What's going on? Please, tell me."

"The man you saw enter... he is a high cleric, anointed by our King. We've gotten such priests, though none of his *kind*, often in the Belfry."

"Why? If he simply needed to administer prayer, why remove me so forcefully?"

The midwife held up a hand and went on.

"He is here as proxy for the Wild Mother, I believe. Do you know much of her?"

Arsha'luy's shook her head.

"It is no wonder," the midwife sighed. "Born here, in this Mountain, Her presence has waned. Our people were not always of The Spine, Arsha'luy's. Once, we were plentiful in the world - in the fields, the highlands, the plains. By rivers and beautiful lakes."

"An'taram!" the widow cried, aggrieved. The midwife sat beside her on the bed, pressing a hand to Arsha'luy's shoulder.

"Centuries ago, a deity called Spandaramet climbed out from a dark, twisted womb. Spandaramet was beset with both genitals, and this split its mind in two - one side, vile, malicious, resentful for the life that our people were just beginning to behold. It climbed the mountains like a spider, preferring the hardness of land. The other side preferred swimming in the waters, a beautiful trout - it was kinder, gentler, nurturing. It is that side we know as the Wild Mother, *Mayrig Sandaramet*."

"What does any of this have to do with my baby? My dear An'taram!" The widow tugged again at her straps, screaming and kicking. She groaned in pain, again of the chest and hips.

"I am getting to that, Arsha'luy's! Please, please, listen! Spandaramet's resentment knew no bounds, and so from its heavy seed, it bore what we call *Spandarametakans* - evil spirits that still, to this day, plague our land. One such spirit is the Alk, a creature with incredibly poor vision but a keen sense of smell and

sound. It exists by feasting on newborns. *Mayrig* Sandaramet sought to balance out her more resentful, malicious inclinations - and so, just as you bore An'taram, she passed kinder spirits - *H'reshatakans* - into the world. Nymphs, water spirits, dwelt in our rivers and lakes, protecting mothers like yourselves and their newborns from the Alk. Tell me, Arsha'luy, are there any rivers inside of this mountain? Any lakes?"

"N-no.. there are not."

"And while the mountain is difficult for the Alk to navigate, some *do* make it through - those of strong will and drive to survive. The war has opened new channels for them..."

"My...my An'taram?" Arsha'luy slumped back, an uncomely dread befalling her.

"That is why the high cleric came, no doubt. To protect your child from an Alk. Only he would know how, having mastery over *tarr* - the elements. You can trust him, he will prevail."

The widow's eyes began to flutter.

"It is a good thing you named your daughter An'taram," said the midwife. "Unfading, in the Old Tongue."

"It.. it was my husband's wish. Oh, An'taram! AN'TARAM!" she cried, repeating the name of her newborn several times over, wailing so much that she began to cough.

Her voice grew hoarse, another broken chime in the Belfry.

...

Nurses started breathing heavily; it was clear to the two adversaries that the dirt wall would not hold against the Alk's full charge. The priest closed his eyes again. An'taram's cry faded in the background, as time felt a crease. The walls like strained lungs, the floor its faint pulse.

"WITNESS WHAT NATURE HAS WROUGHT, PRIEST!" and the Alk shouted, screaming as it ran ahead.

Just then, Nereses dropped his hand entirely, and all the earth that he had gathered fell to the ground once again. The Alk's charge was too fast, it thrust itself out into the room with no way to stop. Nereses rushed toward the bastard sword he had earlier flung across, taking it in his only remaining grip with some damned effort to avoid the grime and webs at the hilt. He struggled to pick it off the ground with a strain and a groan, unable to hold it in both hands. The Alk had crashed into the stone wall, leaving in its wake a crater of rubble; intense speed had denied its ability to turn in time. As it heard the *shhhlk* of its blade in the priest's care, the Alk realized its folly and growled. An'taram grew startled, making uneasy noises. The fiend turned its head in the newborn's direction and stalked towards her once and for all.

Its prey within reach, heavy steps depressed the ground in the Alk's gait. Snorting, sniffing, it drew near, lurching over the newborn, ready to feast - slobber, spittle, and blood dripped from a fiendish, bulbous jaw. It edged back its head,

opened its mouth wide. An'taram cried again at the sight of its crooked, layered, razor-sharp teeth. A deep rumble came from the belly of the beast, rising as a triumphant howl from its throat.

Before it could bring its monstrous visage down upon the babe like a guillotine, a bastard sword came flying in a clumsy spin, the aim just barely true - lopping the Alk's head clean from its shoulders by way of the neck, the sound of its triumph cut short and replaced with the guttural gurgling of black-blood rushing out of its collapsing body, drenching the sheets around and under An'taram.

Nerses was on the ground, holding his chest tightly, as he had fallen from the momentous spin that had sent the sword flying. He breathed heavy, unsure if his gambit had paid off... until he heard, once again, that familiar wail of a newborn child. A relieved sigh.

After several minutes had passed, he stood on shaky feet and dusted off his robes with one hand. He hummed bitterly to himself as he walked slowly to the bed. Upon reaching the Alk's corpse, one that would - like all fiends uninvited to this world - crumble soon, he reached down to take one of its clawed fingers in hand. Applying his foot to the thing's wrist, Nerses pulled with a loud, long groan until he tore its leathery finger clear off.

He practically collapsed on the bed behind him, beside the newborn, whose cries then died down once again and whose gaze was fixed upon the priest.

They stared at one another, both with moistened eyes.

The priest finally sat up and pulled An'taram onto his lap with a grunt. He started to move his limp arm, sucking in a deep breath as the pain shot through. *For your people, Nerses; you do this for Sev-Yeghūnk.* He reached into his pocket to produce the prayer rope he had been holding in that far simpler, more peaceful room adjacent to the infirm. He held it shakily, grinding his teeth to bear the pain, and ran his thumb along each bead until it reached the ruby again. Nerses' free hand set to unwrap the stained bundle he'd enclosed An'taram in; much of the Alk's blood soaked through to get into and on the baby's flesh. Immediately, the newborn began to reach out, stretch, explore with her little hands and her little feet. She tugged idly at one of the priest's long braids, making - for once - a pleasant, amused sound.

For your people, Nerses; you do this for Sev-Yeghūnk.

For your people, Nerses; you do this for Sev-Yeghūnk.

For your people, Nerses; you do this for Sev-Yeghūnk.

The high cleric, appointed a ten-pronged star by *Takavor* Tr'asdamat, took the Alk's copper claw in his free hand, trembling with the rubied prayer-rope in the other. Tears fell from his eyes and onto the newborn, and he set the claw to her neck, slitting softly. Her blood began to run, mixing with the black of the Alk, touched by the priest's tears. He pressed the ruby into An'taram's newly opened throat, and as her life slowly faded, her grip on his braid loosened. Her arms and her body went limp, and the ruby in her throat grew cloudier and cloudier until it no longer resembled a gem.

Just as she had entered the world, the newborn was silent as she faded from it. Only Nerses Moonbeard made sounds. His maddened sobs bounced against the

stonework and entrapped him. They were intermingled with the prayerful words Arsha'luys had asked be spared for her babe, a broken chorus.

The exhausted woman in the painting beheld it all, every moment, through dark blotched eyes - her judgement of this and so much else held forever secret in the brush strokes that had once composed her.

Fate was indeed no friend.

~ John Danho

“That’s what death feels like. It starts like a sore on the roof of the mouth and spreads. The bristles of a toothbrush cause pain,” Ziggy thought to himself. “It’s not that I fear death. I really don’t. I fear injuries more than I fear death. Broken bones, burned flesh, dismembered limb, the ensemble of the human body never fails to impress me.” Ziggy walks to the kitchen from the rest room. “Of course, the times I think of dying are times that consume my time. Repetitions of violence and horror, images of slaughtered soldiers, dead doctors and medical workers; meanwhile, some live-in grand houses with plentiful gardens and the ability to store food in shelves. The world in turmoil burns on the end of a stick like a marshmallow darkening the outer skin into a crispy coal black coat.” Ziggy looks out the window. “The animal in the house of the nation lies to the people every day, and the people believe every word because their normality depend on the words of a lying obese orange stretched out-dermis of a man. Yes, he gives me money, but I don’t believe a word he says. Nothing should be able to buy a person’s adherence or tip political scales, but they do. They definitely do. Amazing how the world becomes like television.” Ziggy closes the blinds. “It’s time to go to sleep. It’s seven o’clock, and the sun is setting.” Ziggy closes his eyes and remembers coming across a man who burned his right arm. The deformed arm is blue and black with bandages hanging off his upper forearm exposing his destroyed fingers. Ziggy just thinks about whether the man was right-handed or not.

~ *Ivan Rios*

MESTIZA

Before DNA tests were popularized
my sister insisted *WE'RE SPANISH*
while I wondered what's wrong with being Mexican?
I saw the shame weigh on her back so much
she seemed hunched beyond her years.

In some ways, my parents were white supremacists.
When I was six, my dad moved us to Orange County
To get away from the Mexicans, my mom explains
To get away from ourselves? I wonder.
All my friends were white because
I was too white for the Latinos.
They had blonde hair and blue eyes and
they would ask me *What are you*
I knew what they meant
because I wasn't like them
not exactly.

So twenty years later
when I'm reading Gloria Anzaldua's poetry
aloud to my class
I stumble over the lines
you are neither hispana india negra espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza,
mulata, half-breed
but a student tells me *Your accent is good*
and I feel a rush of pride in my bones
in my diluted, indigenous blood.

~ *Natalie Peterkin*

A NECESSARY SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

first, gather your things and the baby's things and change the baby before you leave because grandma always said *leave the house with clean underwear in case you get into a car accident* and now that the baby is changed put socks on him so strangers can't leer at his adorable toes and a hat too because the sun is so bright it makes him sneeze and get a bottle ready in case he gets hungry while you're out because you can't just whip a tit out in the middle of Ralph's even though it's the best thing for him and put the baby in the stroller but make sure he has something to hold and chew on because he's teething and how would you feel if your front teeth were fighting to bust through your gums all at once so now you can finally leave the apartment and have a few moments of peace as you stroll to your car and you think *I can do this again I should have another baby I wish I was pregnant right now* but as soon as you stop walking, the baby starts whining because he hates his carseat and being confined in general since all he wants to do is crawl it's a primal instinct in his bones but you're prepared with a bottle and he sucks it down as you buckle him in and put the stroller in the trunk and start driving to the store making a mental list of oatmilk coffee cucumbers beer *yes my god beer i could never do this again thank god it wasn't twins* but then you look back in the rear view and the baby is sucking on his toes *where the hell are his socks?* and he's so sweet and innocent and perfect you think well maybe another wouldn't be so bad

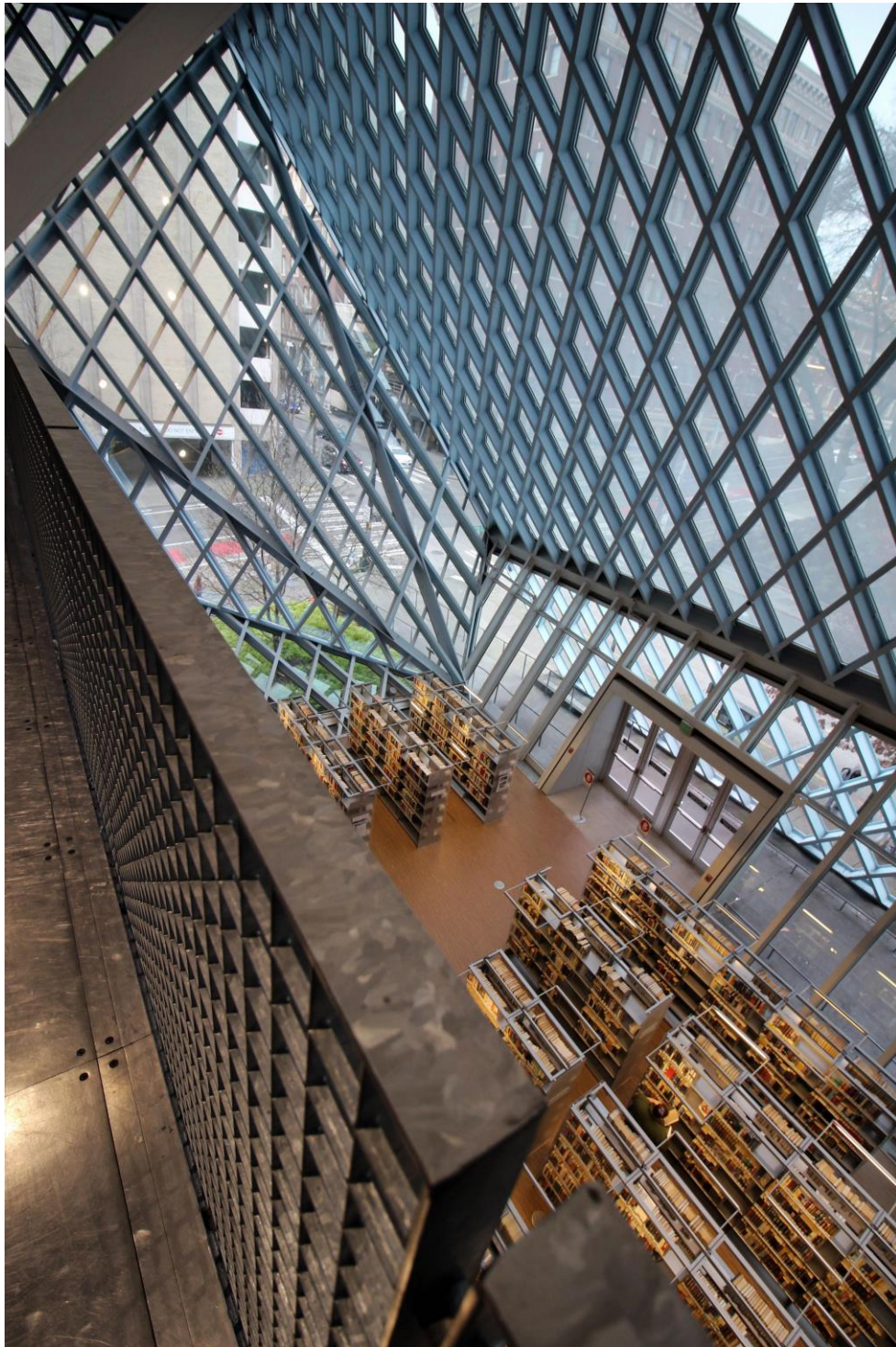
~ Natalie Peterkin



“Liminal” ~ Amanda White



“Rise from the Tides” ~ Amanda White



“the only thing more terrifying than blindness is being the only one who can see” ~ Amanda White

BIOGRAPHIES

ALFREDO ARCILESI

Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi has spent a decade penning award-winning short- and feature-length screenplays, while working as a full-time artisan baker. His prose work explores the trials and tribulations of ordinary people, slice-of-life examinations anchored in real and surreal settings. His short stories have appeared in over a dozen literary journals, including *Raconteur Literary Magazine*, *Scrittura Magazine*, and *The Helix Magazine*.

ACE BOGCESS

Ace Boggess is author of five books of poetry—*Misadventure*, *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, *Ultra Deep Field*, *The Prisoners*, and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled*—as well the novels *States of Mercy* and *A Song Without a Melody*. His writing appears in *Notre Dame Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *River Styx*, *Rhino*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

LEN CARBER

I stopped writing poetry for over 30 years--don't know why. Nor do I know why I began again, but in the last 5 years I've had poems published online/in print by *Boston Poetry Magazine*, *Bolts of Silk*, *Freeman Magazine*,

Dual Coast Magazine, *Poesis*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Foxtrot Uniform*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *The Hungry Chimera*, *Haiku Journal*, *The Phoenix*, *Taj Mahal Review*, and in an anthology, *Sometimes Anyways* under both my real name and pen name, Nolo Segundo.

KATHERYN CARLSON

Kathryn Carlson is a writer and current student at Antioch University Los Angeles, getting her second master's in psychology with an emphasis on LGBTQ+ affirmative therapy. Her first master's is from Cal Poly Pomona in English literature. She has been writing fiction and nonfiction since she was a teenager and has been previously published in the Pomona Valley Review.

ANDREW CHAN

Andrew Chan is a junior studying English at UC Berkeley. In his free time, he enjoys hiking, painting, and wondering about the meaning of life.

DOINA CIOBANU

I am a Southern California painter favoring landscape and abstract art. You can see symbolic references to prominent impressionistic painters of the 19th century like Monet, Manet, Matisse and others and their artistic vision in my own art. Most of my paintings are mixed acrylic/oil. Capturing the California light is extremely

important to me, as I think that it is only here that you can find all these shades of green and blue that I try to render. Other paintings can be seen on my website at: <http://doinaciobanu.weebly.com/>.

SKYLAR CLARK

Skylar Clark is a 21 year old third year undergraduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, where she studies both English and Comparative Literature. From a young age she has used poetry as a form of emotional expression, but as time passed poetry evolved into a vehicle for both self-reflection and on the world at large. In her free time, she also enjoys creative non-fiction writing, figure skating, and singing. Ultimately, after completing her bachelors degree, she hopes to pursue a literature-related teaching career in higher education.

JOHN DANHO

John Danho is the Managing Editor for *Pomona Valley Review* and also a Poetry Editor for *HyeBred Magazine*. He has been an Adjunct English Professor at Mt. San Antonio College for 2 years now. When he isn't working on the journals or on his career, John is researching Armenian history, culture, and myth to use as the basis for the composition of a novel. He writes poetry and plays with his dog Mimi.

CHARLOTTE DEVITRE

Respect for others comes from within. Born in an intensely hybridized family, to an

Indian father and a French mother born in Morocco, Charlotte Devitre was always fascinated by cultures, languages, people and nature. She grew up in Costa Rica, with volcanoes all around. Her love for photography came from her mother and taking photos always constituted a form of silent bonding between them. She offered her first small camera which she kept for years and to this day. Candid portraits have always been the closest to her heart, since emotions flow off of us when simply live life as we are. Humans are filled with them, though some of us like to pretend we are not. She is now a PhD student in Earth Sciences at Cornell University researching volcanoes and their interaction with human populations.

IVO DRURY

A native of Ireland, Ivo Drury lives along the California Coast. Poetry published in 2020 featured in *Red Eft Review*, *Rockvale Review* and *Avalon Literary Review* among others.

GILLIAN EBERSOLE

Gillian Ebersole is a graduating Dance and English dual degree candidate at Loyola Marymount University. She fits word and movement together in her poetry, dance research, and choreography. Her poetic and choreographic theses explore feminism and queerness in relationship to the patriarchal and homophobic structures of her religious upbringing. She has published poetry in the Honors Interdisciplinary Journal *Attic Salt*, created a poetry installation for the Thomas

P. Kelly Art Gallery, and performed her spoken word at various open mic nights. In addition, she has published multiple dance research papers and is a dance critic for the online arts collective, Bachtrack. In her free time, Gillian can be found drinking tea and reading the nearest book. She is a sunset fanatic and paints all her bedrooms yellow. Inspired by bodies and brokenness, Gillian loves exploring what makes us human. She wrote these poems as part of her capstone, an exploration of identity, specifically looking at her experience as a queer woman in the 21st century. Drawing on her background as a dancer, she writes about the intersection of the personal and political, touching on the embodied experience of queerness.

ARI FITZGIBBON

Ari FitzGibbon is an undergraduate English major at Mills College, a winner of the 2019 Harmony Ink Young Author Challenge, a lifelong inhabitant of Alaska, and a lover of cats.

AMADI GREENSTEIN

A passionate textile artist and recent graduate from California College of the Arts, who creates original pieces of works that explain the narrative of my cultural identities and personal memories, along with discoveries of narratives from other identities with the use found materials. I was originally born and raised in the Northern Virginia area but currently living in the San Francisco Bay Area. My work is

executed thorough a variety of techniques such as natural dying, weaving, and embroidery. Along with background experience and education in fashion design and photography, much of my inspiration is referenced from variations of my own photography. Weaving is a primarily practice involved in my collection of work, which has allowed me the opportunity to experiment with color, texture, and processes from both fine art and design perspectives.

JOHN GREY

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *That, Dalhousie Review* and *Qwerty* with work upcoming in *Blueline, Chronogram* and *Clade Song*.

JANNELLY HERRERA

Jannelly Herrera is a Southern California based artist as well as a high school educator. Her focus remains on fighting for the arts in schools and around our communities. In order to spread the importance of the arts in our adult communities, Jannelly hosts free virtual art classes for adults. Her portfolio provides a wide range of styles. She enjoys painting surrealistic landscapes and art that reflects current social topics.

JAMES CROAL JACKSON

James Croal Jackson (he/him) is a Filipino-American poet. He has a chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights

Press, 2017), and poems in *DASH*, *Sampsonia Way*, and *The Green Light*. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* (themantlepoetry.com). He works in film production in Pittsburgh, PA. (jamescroaljackson.com).

CHERI MAE JOCSON

I'm one of the editors of *MUSE*, a Riverside literary journal based in RCC. My first work is to be published in this upcoming issue of *MUSE*, set to launch early summer.

PEYCHO KANEV

Peycho Kanev is the author of 6 poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: *Rattle*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Cleveland Review* and many others. His new chapbook titled *Under Half-Empty Heaven* was published in 2019 by Grey Book Press.

ASHLEY KNOWLTON

Ashley C Knowlton is a mom and a full-time English instructor in the farthest northern coastal pocket of California. She writes for enjoyment and is considered to be relatively put together, for the most part.

DANISE KUANG

My name is Danise Kuang and I was born and raised in Oakland, CA to Chinese immigrant parents. I hold a strong interest in social justice, literature, music, theatre, and film. My works were inspired by the anguish that comes from heartbreak unintentionally caused by my family, friends. Regardless, I still appreciate the love and attention they bathe me in. I am also an insecure undergraduate at Cal Poly Pomona, majoring in Literary Studies and minoring in Theatre.

JARRET LIN

Born and raised in Honolulu, HI, Jarret is a multimedia designer, musician, and artist. His interest areas are in creating new methods of communicating design through the juxtaposition of sonic space and ambient media. Jarret received a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University where he studied Music Performance (Saxophone) and Human-Computer Interaction. He later received a MFA from ArtCenter College of Design where he studied Media Design Practices. His work explores a spectrum of sonic micro interactions on everyday objects as a means of playful design and how it creates speculative futures.

RYAN LEACK

Ryan David Leack teaches in the Writing Program at the University of Southern California, and received his Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Riverside, where he studied the productive intersections between rhetoric, quantum mechanics, philosophy, composition, and poetry. Ryan's creative work has appeared in *Pif*, *Westwind*, *RipRap*, *Contemporary World Literature*, *Strong Verse*, and *Pomona Valley Review*, where he served as Editor-in-Chief for seven years. He leads a quiet life in Los Angeles seeking Thoreauvian tranquility and harmony with words.

ROSE LOPEZ

Rose Lopez is a teacher and writer, born and raised in a desert town one hour north of Los Angeles. She attended Mills College, where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing and her Master's Degree in Education. She has been published in the Mills College publications *The Walrus* (2011) and *The Womanist: A Women of Color Journal* (2011), and in Northern Michigan University's Center for Native American Studies quarterly publication *Anishinaabe News* (2014). In 2012, she constructed a limited-edition chapbook, *Guide to the Waterways of the Desert*, a collection of reflections on her hometown. Ms. Lopez's day job as a public-school teacher provides endless inspiration, entertainment, and motivation as she educates today's youth in the hopes of creating a better future. She loves llamas, has a weakness for YA books,

and finds great joy in the combination of a rainy day and a mug of hot chocolate.

CHRISTIAN HANZ LOZADA

I am the product of an immigrant Filipino and Daughter of the American Revolution and have co-written the poetry book *Leave with More Than You Came With*, published by Arroyo Secco Press and a photographic history book *Hawaiians in Los Angeles*. My poetry has been anthologized in *Gutters and Alleyways: Poems on Poverty*, *Cadence Collective*, and my poems and stories have appeared in *Hawaii Pacific Review* (Forthcoming), *Dryland: A Literary Journal*, *A&U Magazine*, *Spot Literary Journal*, *Blue Collar Review* and various other journals. I have hosted the *Read on till Morning* literary series and Harbor College Poetry Night, and have been invited to read or speak at the Autry Museum, the Twin Towers Correctional Facility, and other places throughout Southern California.

KALVIN MADSEN

Kalvin Madsen is from Los Angeles, CA and has one story published in a short story collection book called *Nation of Dirty Assholes* by Brent L. Smith.

NICOLE NEITZKE

Having received her master's in English, with a professional certificate in teaching and writing, Nicole is currently an adjunct English instructor at various community colleges. Aspiring to be more than just a

teacher, she likes to say she is a "storyteller in training." She longs to finally sit down and pen the many stories bouncing around in her head, ranging from a collection of mythical "creature features" to an intensely personal, yet fictional, story about ghosts and clairvoyance.

In her spare time, which happens to be very little, she absorbs anything pop culture, often jumping into new fandoms with reckless abandon.

JAN NIEBRZYDOWSKI

Jan Niebrzydowski is the author of the *Madeline Donovan Mystery* series which now includes nine novels. She is currently working on the tenth. She is also a poetry contributor to *Pomona Valley Review* #7, and 8, *The Voices Project*, *The UK Poetry Library*, *Creations Magazine* and *Prose and Rhyme*; short stories to *Prose and Rose* and *The Book Patch*.

In addition to her love of writing and oil painting, her greatest joy in life was caring for her sister, Debbie, who was a special needs child born with Downs syndrome.

NATALIE PETERKIN

Natalie Peterkin is a dedicated community college professor, writer, and mother of both cats and one human. She has been with *Pomona Valley Review* since 2016 when she graduated from Cal Poly Pomona.

FABRICE POUSSIN

Fabrice Poussin teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and many other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *the San Pedro River Review* as well as other publications.

AMANDA RIGGLE

Amanda Riggle is the current Editor-in-Chief of *Pomona Valley Review*. Her work mostly focuses on the personal and the political, often finding a bridge between both worlds. She has been published in previous editions of *Pomona Valley Review* before joining the editorial team as well as political journals like *The Socialist*. When she's not running a literary arts journal, she's studying for her PhD in English at the University of California, Riverside.

IVAN RIOS

Ivan Rios graduated from Cal Poly Pomona with a Masters in Rhetoric Composition. *The Violent Femme*: is a short novel that Ivan is working on, and one of the chapters is included in this issue of *PVR*. On their free time, Ivan enjoys playing competitive pinball and Super Smash Brothers Ultimate. They currently teach English and Critical Thinking at Mount San Antonio College and Riverside City College.

RIKKI SANTER

My work has appeared in various publications including *Ms. Magazine*, *Poetry East*, *Margie*, *Hotel Amerika*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Slab*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *RHINO*, *Grimm*, *Slipstream*, *Midwest Review* and *The Main Street Rag*. My seventh poetry collection, *In Pearl Broth*, was published this past spring by Stubborn Mule Press.

SANJEEV SETHI

Sanjeev Sethi is published in over 30 countries. He has more than 1250 poems printed or posted in literary venues. He is joint-winner of *Full Fat Collection Competition-Deux* organized by the Hedgehog Poetry Press. His poem, *A Factory of Feelings* was voted Poem of Month March 2020 at *Ink Sweat and Tears*. He lives in Mumbai, India.

ELIZABETH SMILLIE

Elizabeth Smillie is a rising Senior at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, CA. After growing up in San Diego until an abrupt transcontinental move, she returned to the Golden State to study English and Studio Arts. She is finding her poetic voice and playing around with new forms of expression beyond writing, such as ceramics, watercolors, and photography. Preparing to enter the world with a Bachelor's degree and no future plans as of yet, she is looking for baskets for all her eggs.

DANIEL SPIELBERGER

I am a writer based in Los Angeles. In 2015, I graduated from Reed College with a BA in History. I have been published in numerous outlets including *Interview Magazine*, *Insider*, *The Outline*, *Broadly*, *Vice*, *Playboy*, *The Face*, and *BuzzFeed*. I am currently an MFA candidate at CalArts and I specialize in creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry.

EDWARD SUPRANOWICZ

Edward Michael Supranowicz has had artwork and poems published in the US and other countries. Both sides of his family worked in the coalmines and steel mills of Appalachia.

SAUL VILLEGAS

Saul Villegas grew in a rural town in Avenal, California. He studied his artistic amateur style in school being oblivious to other subjects. Since his early years he found art fascinating and devoted his entire time to sketching, drawing, and painting. When asked, what is your style of painting? Saul replied, "I feel art is an ongoing study of different styles, cultures, and conception. I don't like to become labeled as any specific type of artist; other than to be considered one. Life is too short to settle down in one specific style. The World is full of surprises and everyone and everything you see makes an impression on you as an artist, therefore always making you morph. Showing my view in whatever style I wish to Interpret it gives me the freedom as an artist. Being able to connect and communicate with different mind sets is

and always will be my ultimate goal as an artist.”

His combined skill of the traditional application of art in painting and in graphic design have been the vehicle in which Saul's creative versatility has demonstrated his intense imagery in his portfolio called MODERNO. He has utilized the label for his entire works to advocate his Latino roots through the visual arts and philanthropy.

He has attended College of the Sequoias and is studying to receive his degree in both art and graphic design. His goal is to share his artistic knowledge and continue on to a higher education. His most recent endeavor is in the acceptance into the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) where he studied painting in 2014-15. He will be attending UC Merced in Spring '19 to major in the Global Arts Studies Program (GASP).

KONYSHA WADE

Konysha Wade received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of California Riverside. She currently attends California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, where she is in pursuit of acquiring a master's in Rhetoric and Composition. Wade has been published in student journals including *Enjambed*, at California State University Dominguez Hills. Her desire in writing is to produce texts that incorporate marginalized voices and their experience, and to write texts that she herself wants to read and wants to be read.

AMANDA WHITE

Amanda White received her BA from Azusa Pacific University & her MA at Cal Poly Pomona University. She now teaches composition & literature at three universities. While doing so, she practices her writing, editing, and photography. She has a particular affinity for postmodernism and bio-political rhetoric in both literature and photography.



Thank you for reading