

# The Messenger

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## The Messenger, 2011

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# THE MESSENGER





**THE  
MESSENGER**

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**2011**

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND'S  
LITERARY AND ARTS MAGAZINE

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# What is a Melody?

By Amani Morrison

---

Yesterday you were gone, but were you ever really here? Kamikaze acorns declare war on my state-of-the-art windshield. I lay face-down in the bathtub and yell “Huzzah!” after spilling my morning mug. The kids come home with empty stomachs and strawberry jam between their toes. Fluffy dies briefly every sixty-seven minutes as a hairball gets lodged in her windpipe. Life is grand so we take pictures with gang signs and you are never in them.







HEART GRIP

By Irena Stanisic

# Untitled

By Astoria Eve

---

Memories soak into our clothes like stains  
And though we try to wash them away  
We remember when we hang them up to dry

They whisper to us in the wind.

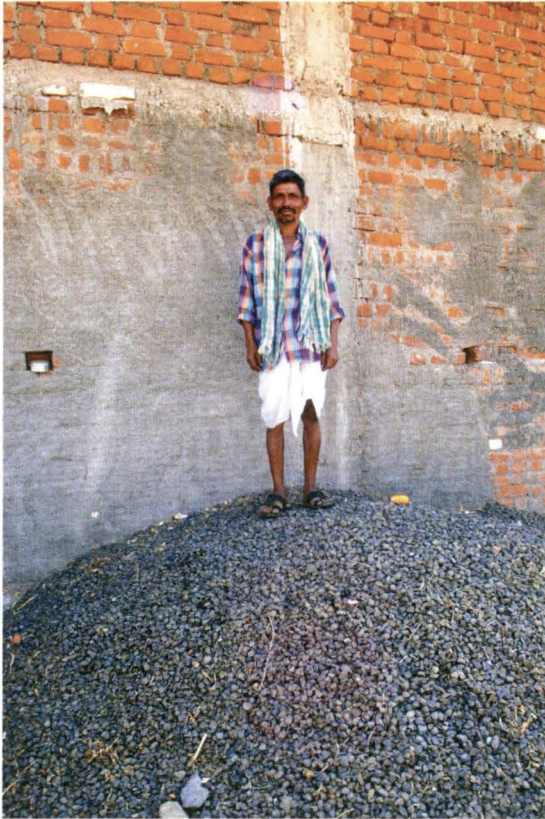


# Parked at Home

By Haisten Bonner

---

A whistling bird perched in the tree above,  
Sand between my toes and palms full of joy.  
Walking down the endless shoreline,  
A man sits, heavily clothed, starved, and unkempt.  
The man, a victim of the world's merciless endeavors,  
Wounded by misfortune, but optimistic.  
Merely recognizing that life is a gift enough  
Keeps this man a float. Alone in the wild world.  
He remembers large gates and butlers,  
Monogrammed towels and penny loafers.  
The greed that kills robbed his soul,  
On his left hand remains a tattoo, one of a spider.  
Blue and Red, Richmond Spiders?  
Holding on to a memory is all that can be done,  
His life quit him a long time ago,  
He calls upon old friends, they pass him by.  
Bums are not meant to mingle with high society.  
He once hunted opportunity, now everyday kills him more,  
Not as we think, "oh of course, each day does kill us"  
But in another way.  
His wishes cease to come true  
And all he has are memories, broken dreams,  
And a public park bench called home.



PORTRAIT OF A LEADER

By Caitlin Manak

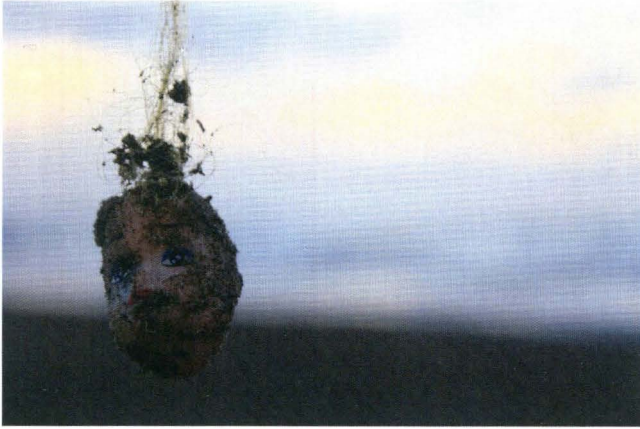


# Untitled

By Astoria Eve

---

I am bare, as glass  
beneath the pressure of ocean waves  
is rounded,  
relieved of its harsh edges  
after a life of bottled emotion.



SANDY BARBIE

By Ale Nicolet



# Untitled

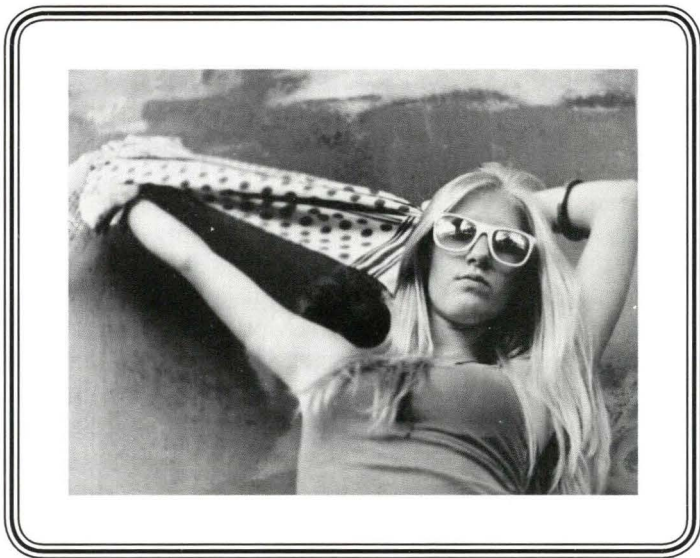
By Astoria Eve

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Chosen by the composite  
To crumble  
    To die

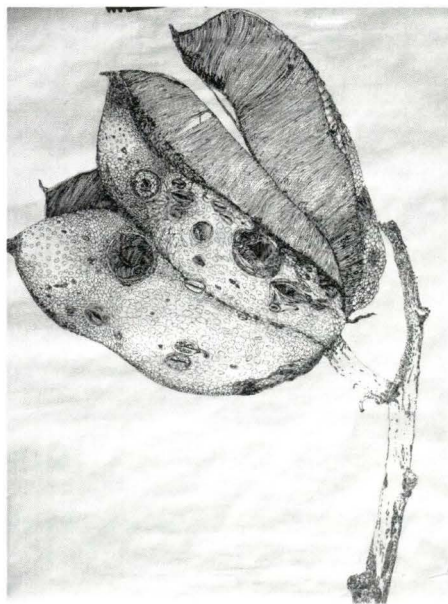
And I  
Standing before the commune  
    There to witness death  
    Yet anxious, anticipating a show,

Watch the first leaf to fall  
                    The first to let go



UNTITLED 1

By Mary Waller



By Abi Olvera

LA SUMA DEL TIEMPO



# The Art of Forgetting

By?

---

I have always wanted a brother, and for a while I felt like I had one.

My cousin on my mother's side, Joshua Lester, is a year and a half older than me. The last I heard, he was still living in a small apartment in Chattanooga, Tennessee, working at a steel mill for minimum wage. His mother, who works as a receptionist for a dog kennel, lives in a slightly bigger apartment fifteen minutes away. Every time I talk to her on the phone I ask her about Joshua, and all she can say is, "He's doin' alright, I guess. Haven't heard from him in a while," and then the conversation tilts back to her love of scuba diving or her insistence on me coming to visit her. I never have, but that's not what this story is about.

On the day that Joshua turned seventeen, he was riding a bike down his friend's driveway in Dalton, Georgia, without a helmet. His curly brown hair was neatly trimmed around his ears, flowing freely in the wind as he let the momentum of the bike carry him downwards. His hands, tightly gripping the rubber around the handlebars, turned the rotating spokes out into the street. In the last moment of his youth, his head tilted up and turned to the right, his strong jaw line running parallel to his shoulders.

What must it have been like to see the loss of one's own future? I imagine it happened in disjointed images. A suddenly visible Domino's delivery truck racing through a suburban neighborhood at one-hundred miles per hour, an opened ounce of marijuana tucked away inside the glove compartment, the drooping eyelids of the delivery driver, contact, the collision, the metal of the bike bending outward as if being molded by a hand, the glimmering hood of the car, the sky, the road, his memory of me bleeding out from his brain and drying into the concrete, then extended darkness, all in one motion. Unconscious, he lay flat in the middle of the road like a dead bird, his broken, left leg nestling up into the back of his right knee cap. His friend ran into the house screaming.

As the paramedics weaved their way through traffic, my cousin was continuing to forget about me. First went the little things, like the time we bought CD's with explicit lyrics and felt like we got away with something, or when we spray-painted our

names on a broken piece of fencing in our great grandmother's backyard, the trips to the arcade at the mall, jumping up and down on his waterbed, staying up all night and watching movies that my mother told me I wasn't allowed to see. Then they got bigger. He forgot about giving me my first sip of beer and my first cigarette. He forgot about playing catch with our grandfather for hours. He forgot about teaching me how to talk to girls. He forgot about wrestling me on our grandmother's bed and always winning. And he forgot enough of my face that when my mother and I flew down three days later to see him in the hospital he didn't know who I was when I walked through the door.

"Who is that, Mimi?" he asked my grandmother in a voice that belonged to him when he was a child. The skin on his forehead was scabbed and discolored, and on the underside of his chin was a long black scar holding puss in between its stitching. I turned away and stared into the wall because it hurt to look at him.

"That's your cousin William."

He looked back and stared at me for a few seconds. I could sense the silence in his eyes, and I was drowning in it. Together, we had lost something that he would never know existed. What could he have been thinking? How did his mind work? I imagine it was like a clock with no hands, unable to move backwards in time and space. He had no pictures, just meaningless images whose connective string was now in tatters.

I told the two of them that I would be right back and walked to the restroom out in the hallway. I locked myself in a stall, pressed my face up against the wall, and cried so hard that I couldn't breathe. A slideshow started playing in my head of the pictures my grandmother kept framed by her bedside table. Christmas morning, we viciously tear through pounds and pounds of green and red gift wrapping. Halloween, dressed as two vampires with candy fangs, we almost trip down the stairs on our too long capes. The middle of fall, wrestling our grandfather's beloved bulldog "Sport" amongst a pile of crunched, orange leaves, his tongue stroking the stink of his breathe on our faces.

After fifteen minutes I let myself out of the stall and splashed water on my face from the sink. The faucet was all the way on cold, but the water felt warm and suffocating. I didn't look at myself in the mirror on my way out because I knew if I did I

would start crying again.

I didn't see Joshua for almost two years, and somehow things got even worse for him. Although bits and pieces of his memory (some of which involved me) came back, his long-term memory was almost completely gone. He dropped out of school because he couldn't remember anything that he studied. He filed a lawsuit against Dominos and got a settlement, but his father divorced his mother on her birthday (four months before the trial) in hopes that with split custody he would be able to obtain half of the money. He did.

Every day after work his mother would come home, sit on the couch, and chain-smoke cigarettes until her three-hour block of "Divorce Court" was over. Joshua started spending more and more time with his father because of it. Somehow he still loved him. A year and a half after the accident he moved out of his mom's house and got a job at the local steel mill. He refused to get his G.E.D. because he said he couldn't remember anything that he tried to learn. My mother's sympathy for her godson began to turn in to bitterness. She told me she thought he was putting on an act, that he was much better mentally than he was letting on and he was being stupid for giving up on himself. After a while I started to believe her.

I wrote three letters to him, and he never wrote back. I called him on his cell phone and on his apartment phone (which I got from his mother). He never answered or returned my calls. I didn't think that I would ever see him again, and after a while I was fine, even happy, because of it. Maybe my mother was right. Maybe he was just being an asshole who wanted everyone's pity for the rest of his life. He had forgotten about me, and now it was my turn to finally forget about him. I didn't owe him anything anymore.

Then my grandfather died.

My grandfather, who we all called "Papa Buck," loved Joshua more than he loved me. I understood. He was like a second father to Joshua. They went to church together every Sunday and sat in the third pew, wearing matching ties that he had gone out and bought for the two of them. Ever Wednesday night they went out and had dinner together, and whenever Joshua had a baseball game on the weekends my grandfather was always there to watch him. They lived twenty minutes away from each

other. I was five states north of them. I saw them five times a year at most. They saw each other almost every day. And when Joshua's parents got divorced Papa Buck went from second father to father. He took work off for two weeks just to make sure that Joshua was doing alright, and by then the plant he owned was about to go out of business. When he died, he gave Joshua everything in his will, and all he gave me was a tiny, touristy statue of a Buddha whose origin no one was certain of. My mother cried after she gave it to me because she knew it didn't mean anything. My grandfather did everything for Joshua, and that was why I knew before we even arrived at his viewing that my cousin was going to be there and that my grandfather's death was going to be harder for him than it was for me.



It was a long room, flanked by rows of standardized black chairs. The fluorescent lights of the ceiling cast the room in a brightness that seemed ill-fitting. We were the first family there, and my mother was already crying upon seeing the open casket, which was positioned on top of a white tablecloth at the end of the room, flanked by two vases of bursting red roses. His portrait was hanging over the casket, his painted eyes looking out over his still body, hands neatly folded over his waist.

My father told me that I didn't have to look at the body if I didn't want to. He said open caskets made him feel uneasy, and he started to fidget with his hands. I told him I was fine and walked over to my mother at the casket, my feet feeling jammed into the ends of the Italian shoes my father had made me borrow from him.

He looked the same. His grey hair was still seemingly planned in its dishevel, perfectly rustled and feathered across his forehead, and the skin on his face was still patchy and red in some places. His lips were barely touching. They ran straight across his face. I looked at him, thinking about nothing, until I started to feel uncomfortable. I noticed my mother was still crying, and I hugged her for a while before going out into the hallway and nervously drinking half the water cooler.

An hour passed and the room was filled with faces I didn't know. The same conversations ensued, "I'm sorry. He was a great man. I'm sure he loved you very much," followed by my complacent smile, a half-sincere handshake, and me walking away. After a few minutes I found my aunt, who was engulfed in her own tears that kept crawling into her mouth. Her eyes were swollen, and her hair was flat and frizzled on her shoulders. She told me in a

weak voice that she hadn't put any makeup on because she knew it would all wash off. I knew she felt the same way I did, that he loved my mother more than her, and I hugged her around the neck, and whispered in her ear that I loved her. I asked her where Joshua was, and she said that he was on his way. But he was already there.

Hidden in the corner of the room by the halo of black blazers my grandfather's co-workers were wearing was my long lost cousin, his head looking down at the pointed tips of the black and leathered cowboy boots he had been given in the will. His hair was still curly and neatly trimmed, and I could see on the sides of his forehead the scars that had yet to fade. I went over to him.

"Hi, Josh."

He looked up.

"Hey, William." His accent was still thick, as if his voice were dipped in a golden molasses. I was jealous of it.

I sat down on the chair next to him and put my feet together, allowing my hands to rest next to each other on top of my knees. The silence flowing back and forth between the two of us whispered everything we didn't want to say. The letters, the phone calls, the growing distance, the memories lost, the bonds severed, and his refusal to accept the blame. He started talking to me about his father and how he spent the weekends with him now. He told me that his mother was making things difficult for him and that he never wanted to see her again, or my grandmother, or my mother, because all they wanted to do was push him to do things that he couldn't do anymore.

"I can't be like you, and I feel that's what everyone wants me to be like," he said. "My mother always talks about how good you are, and how smart you are, but she never mentions how lucky you are. After what happened, I can't be like you anymore, and no one seems to realize that. I don't want anything anymore."

If I didn't know that my grandfather would have cried had he seen Joshua and I fight, I would have wrestled him to the floor and beat the shit out of him in front of our entire family and our family's friends. My hands snapped from their relaxed, open position to two coarse fists. I looked over his shoulder to my grandfather's casket, but I couldn't see it amidst the swarm of people.

"I don't think anyone thinks that," I said. I practiced stretching my fingers out so I wouldn't punch him.

"Well, I do."

There was more silence between us, and this time it didn't say

anything. It lingered like fog over a forgotten lake, haunting us.

“Do you remember me and my mother coming to the hospital to see you?”

“Yes.” His head was back down, facing our grandfather’s boots.

“Do you still not remember?”

I hesitated in asking the question. Despite how much I hated him in that moment, I still loved him. He still was the closest thing I had to a brother, even though he didn’t want to be mine anymore.

“I remember some things.” He paused to look up and turned his head toward the casket. His mother was still standing in front of it, crying. “But there are some things that I don’t remember.”

“How do you know?”

“There are just some spaces in my mind that are blank, and somehow I know that there was something there once. I don’t know how, I just know.”

“Do you wish you had them back?”

“It doesn’t really matter now.”

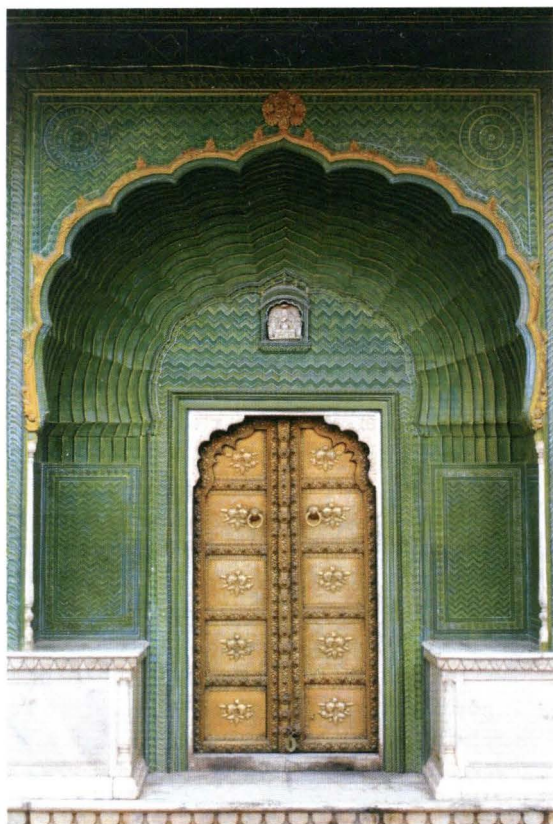
He got up from his chair and walked to the front of the room. I watched him as he moved through the crowd, many of whom tried to stop him and talk. But he kept going all the way to the casket where he went up to his mother, put his arm around her, and looked at his grandfather’s face. I like to think he was crying along with her.



When we lowered my grandfather into his plot, I made sure to give Joshua more of the weight between us. Maybe he couldn’t remember, but he would have wanted it that way. After the service, I watched him climb up the hill toward his car, the tip of his boots digging into the wet grass and leaving small, brown holes. I haven’t seen him since.



I’ve tried to forget Joshua Lester. I’ve tried to forget all the memories that he’s forgotten, tried to make my heart as hopelessly bitter as his when it comes to our relationship. But I haven’t. Four months ago on July 17th, two years after my grandfather’s death, I sent him a picture of the three of us wearing matching leather cowboy hats and smiling in front of a blue backdrop. Underneath it in small handwriting I wrote, “Do you remember this?” About a month later he wrote back, and all he said was, “No. But I wish I did.”



CHAMBER OF SECRETS

By Caitlin Manak

# A Door Opens

By Tim Boykin

---

My faith in humanity renewed  
I marvel in the serenity of unappreciated surroundings

Opportunity abounds . . .  
in the silence  
The utter chaos of every moment  
strikes and amplifies itself  
before, like all things, ending uneventfully

Yet, it is in that bitterly short time of discord  
between sweet creation and inevitable dissipation into nothingness

when ideas meet execution  
when struggles and unwavering effort  
lead to the penultimate prize!

held only for a shortwhile  
until the next challenge confronts

and the quest begins anew.







# how to dress a tree

By Brynna Williams

---

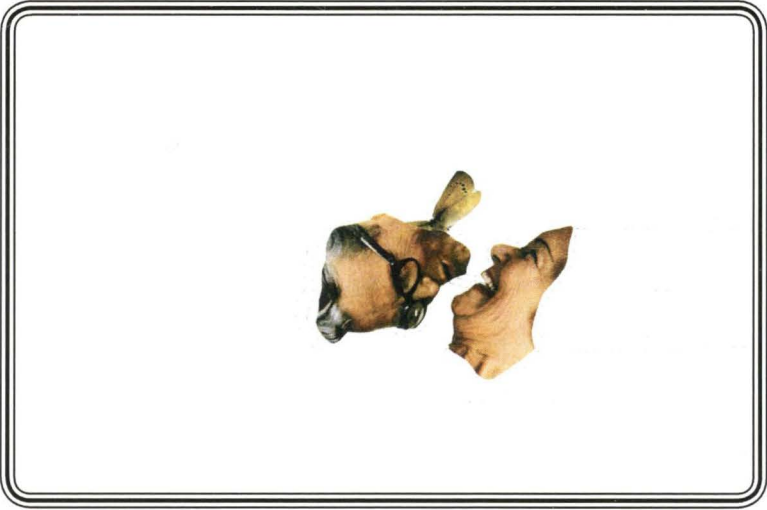
does everyone have their tree?  
good, then we'll get started.

the young ones are the hardest to dress,  
they always insist on having the choicest flowers  
that are placed "just so" on each of their leaves  
accenting this branch, or perhaps this other,  
(as yet unformed) bud, scantily clad  
with only the barest covering of leaves.

summer trees are always very easy  
because they're so proper.  
they insist on being fully clothed,  
and wear nothing except their appointed  
and to their bark, required, green  
(for this very reason, many owners  
will pine for an evergreen).

then something happens as they grow older,  
and, changed, suddenly they must  
have every color that they can think of.  
worse than the spring, they require of you  
reds, now golds, no wait, I think an orange,  
they seem to say,  
would really go well with my bark,  
while that brown does nothing but clash.

the oldest ones, however, are the most difficult.  
senile and decrepit, with no self respect  
they lose all modesty  
and proceed to leave off all clothing  
dancing bare branched  
and naked in the snow.



UNTITLED 1

By Irena Stanisic

# Mo

By Abby Kloppenburg

---

Everyone at the table is silent. The clinking of glasses is deafening, the scraping of silverware like nails down a chalkboard. I keep catching my reflection in my spoon, and then his. I look around at the sea of laughing, eating, talking faces. A sea of white. I look over; he's drowning in it.

"So, Mo-hamm-ed," my dad begins, pronouncing the name with astonishing difficulty. "Whe n did you and your parents move to America?"

"They still live in Pakistan," he responds quietly, "we live there permanently." He glances at me with a small smirk, but I don't return it. Instead my eyes fall on his outfit, a suit too formal for a country club brunch, but one that he changed into frantically after my dad informed him that jeans were forbidden. I'm struck with a sense of compassion, and sadness. Here he is, trying so hard to impress my family, and they're looking the other way.

"Hm." My dad responds. "What's that like?" I can tell he's asking in earnest, but it comes out like a bullet.

"Well, I mean, I've been to America before I came to college with your daughter, so it's not that weird for me." He moves his water glass around awkwardly. "I don't know. It's different at home, but people themselves are generally the same everywhere."

"Well, I don't know if I'd say the same," my dad says offhandedly, and turns around to call out to some golf friends. They approach our table, try to suppress prolonged glances at Mo, and continue with the same conversation about golf they have every weekend.

I glance at my boyfriend. "How weird is this for you?"

"It's fine, Abby, really," Mo says, slipping off his suit jacket with the regal shoulder pads. "I don't know why he said my name that way," he smiles, "but it's fine."

Barely reassured, I glance at my mother and sister talking casually with each other and at all the coiffed country club members politely chattering around us. Every once and awhile I think I can sense discreet glances being stolen at the one standout in the room, sitting right next to me. I long to explain to them how

alike the two of us are, how we can talk for hours, but I can already see their doubt. Now I want to block him from their sight, protect him from the cruel judgment pouring from their eyes.

“So, Mo,” my dad says, turning back to the table. “What’s your family situation like? Do you see your grandparents often?”

I can see him planning his answer carefully before he actually responds. “Yes, actually, my grandmother lived with us for a while before she moved to the States.”

“Oh, why did she move? Is it that dangerous over there?” Again my father’s sincerity comes out like a jab.

“Oh no, no, my grandfather just got a job over here,” Mo says. I can tell he’s lying to bridge the gap between him and my father, to smooth over the starkness of their differences.

“Hm. Well, in our family, Abby sees her grandparents a lot. We’re a very close family unit.” My dad emphasizes each syllable in a phrase I’ve never heard him utter in my life. I don’t know what he’s trying to prove. I push around my scrambled eggs, and the din of silence builds.

After a few moments, “So, what’s the government like in Pakistan? Is it a democracy?”

“Um, kind of,” Mo responds quickly. “But we have a Parliament, and a prime minister. Right now the prime minister has more power than the president. They, like, switch back and forth, it’s confusing. I don’t know. Everything’s really corrupt.”

“I’m sure,” my father says. “But, if it makes any difference, the U.S. has given the most money in aid. I have to admit, we’re good in that way.” I look at my staunchly Republican, thoroughly American, stockbroker father from across the table. The one who raised me, who taught me everything he knew and gave me anything he had to offer. For the first time, I feel like I’m breaking away from his guiding hand, putting on someone else’s eyes to see the world around me. I feel torn between a deep compassion for my dad, but also for Mo, who let me look at my sheltered surroundings through the eyes of someone to whom this land is a foreign place. I’m torn between two perspectives, the owner of each unable to see the other.

The waitress comes; my dad smiles at her familiarly and signs the check. Mo walks up ahead with my father to the car, and my mother comes up behind me and puts her hand on my back. “What does Mo’s mother think of your relationship?”

“I don’t know,” I lie, although I’ve heard her on Skype telling

Mo that “American relationships should stay in America.”

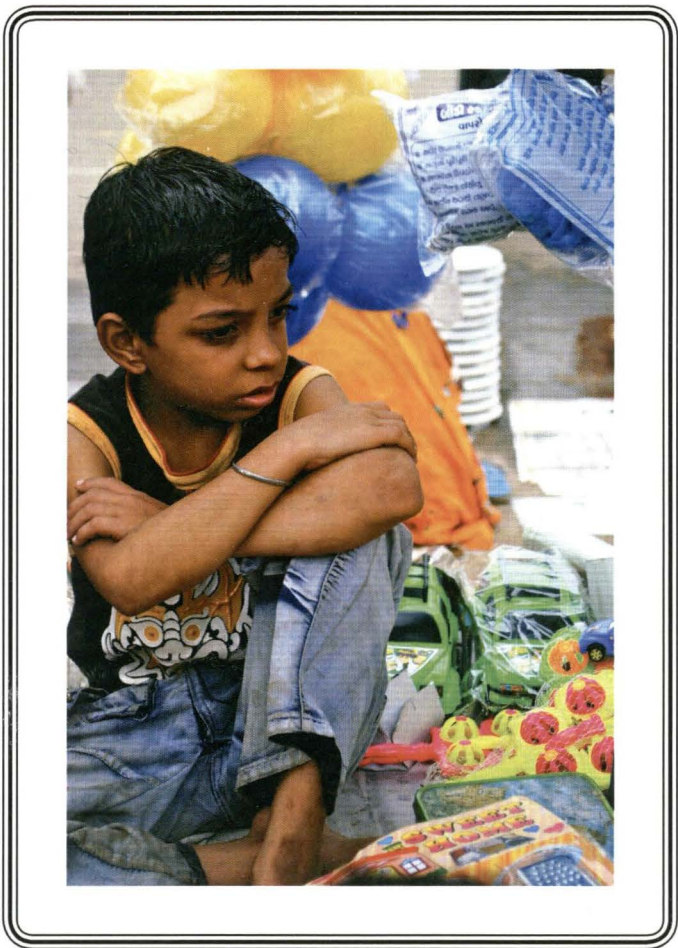
“I’m sure she feels even stranger about it than we do,” she says, “although we’re doing our best to get to know him.” My mother looks at me, “It’s just difficult, Abby; we’re at war in his country.”

“I know, Mom,” I say, and I do. “But it’s not like he’s a soldier. That’s just where he’s from.”

My mother shakes her head in her all-knowing way and walks up ahead. Mo looks back and smiles at me, seemingly unaffected by my mental torment.

I’m numb standing there in the parking lot, my entire family and my Pakistani boyfriend already in the car. The car seems to sink onto the tires until they’re close to bursting, so weighed down by ancient prejudices and misunderstandings. It’s when I think about trying to lighten that load that I feel a sudden sense of helplessness washing over me. I try to shake it off as I walk across the parking lot to join them, but my skin still prickles as I open the door.





**BEYOND HIS YEARS** By Caitlin Manak

# A DREAMER'S PURSUIT

By Emma Burnett

---

They are brave.  
They who gather their lives on their back and  
Set sail.  
They who begin a incredible voyage with no destination but  
Discovery. Or perhaps,  
If that which is said by the rest is the truth, and there is  
Nothing further beyond the Great Pillars,  
Disappointment. Or perhaps,  
If preparation for their wildest dreams is not enough,  
Death.  
And yet, they go.

Their instinct is to wonder what treasures might lie  
Beyond the ultimate boundaries before them.  
Their instinct is to search for a different truth,  
Beyond the old, accepted sureties.

They have faith.  
They who step on a ship with the hope of exploring  
Worlds three trillion miles away and  
Lift Off.  
And perhaps, they will return.  
    And perhaps, they'll enlighten mankind  
        And perhaps, they will live to fulfill their desire for  
            Truth.



DANCE

By Nina Mondelli

## Untitled

By Vivian Trinh

---

walking here alone  
in silent frozen night  
stalking moon behind





# Epigraph to an Unwritten Autobiography, Extended Version

By Amani Morrison

---

I want to go back to the time when pagers were cool. When we could only answer calls to the second line because people on the first line were bound to know we were home alone when we may have been too young to be. When you would tell us to page you if we needed you, and you'd call us back on the second line that we could answer. Those times when we would wait until you got home to tell you that someone had called on the first line and we didn't answer it just like you told us not to. Those days when cell phones were a luxury and you were here. When we didn't have to pretend to be a family for the holidays. When we actually were one.



UNTITLED 2

By Mary Waller



# Mirrored Beauty

By Sean P. Efren

---

I look in the mirror  
and there she stands.  
I reach out to her  
and she extends her hands.  
We touch for a moment  
and then no more.  
Her image was shattered  
and how my soul tore.  
The fleeting Beauty  
simply left me to bawl.  
Where the love once lived  
lurks my hole in the wall.



UNTITLED 2

By Irena Stanisic



# Untitled

By Astoria Eve

---

Love at twilight turns to dust  
or rather ashes in the grave  
already dug

and occupied.



VIVA LA VIDA

By Mary Johnston



# Decresendo Moon

By Phoebe Krumich

---

Hold your breath and dive up into sky,  
Fathoms above, you talk of love,  
In winds and waves of cloudy maze,  
Thoughtless, breathless, in a haze.

Swim on and seek lost ecstasy—  
A love-lost fish on rolling seas  
Of cumulous cloud lucidity—  
Believing your own fecundity.

Uncover clouds of deep desire,  
Rife with love you can't acquire,  
That half-moon burning stolen fire.  
Realize everyone's a liar.

Deeper, steep in dark defeat,  
Thunder deafening up to the depths,  
Echoing Icarus and Earhart's dreams,  
And add to theirs your tumbling  
screams.



UNTITLED 1

By Taylor Kane





# A Good Day Everyday

By Dawn Hackett

---

My Mother said the word shit once. I was eight years old. My ten-year-old brother stopped pushing his chair into its place at the kitchen table. We both stopped breathing and stared at her.

Other times she would just breathe funny. She held her breath a lot when she bought groceries once a month at the naval base commissary. This food store was organized with lines and arrows on the floor - no passing, no tailgating or driving against the grain. It had the only meat freezer that boasted a lined parking lot. If you foiled the directions, your mother would serve two weeks in the brig. Dad would walk the plank.

At the end of every trip the cart was left in the safety zone between the last aisle and the registers, guarded by my brother and me. We waited on the Li'l Debbie thief, ready to pounce. Mom braved the arrows to grab a missed item. People stared and shook their heads, disappointed, lips tight and turned down at the corners. We would not relinquish our Star Crunches and Swiss Rolls.

We ate three balanced meals a day and brushed our teeth after. My Mother was the reason. In school I saw a picture of a food pyramid and wondered how a mom could tip something over with a foundation that wide and full of livestock. We chewed red tablets that stained the plaque hidden on our teeth. Mom bought new toothbrushes every month.



Last night I was attacked by a jar of peanut butter, but it was all natural. I craved then relented. Graham crackers slammed together gave it surround sound while I munched. I told my mom about it. She laughed while she rubbed her thigh.

“The whole jar? Was it raining on your way in?” she asked.

“No, and no. Raining in Charlottesville and headed this way. You look paler than usual.” My brow was tired, but it knotted without me. Her skin changed color like my eyes did, a deep and personal betrayal of what I didn’t want others to see. Her second back surgery was a mere seven months behind us,

a small drop along her body's oceanic journey into disability. Tumors had grown inside her backbone, hiding from doctors more concerned with her history of stroke and heart disease, her stints and angioplasties. She had become Frankenmom sans the bolted neck. Fall had recently arrived and brought the cold that permeated her bones. The summer had stewed her arthritis with its thick humidity. But moving had become an expensive proposition and had fallen off the radar.

"Oh, I'm dizzy, but I'm fine," she deflected, "How are you?"

"Good I think. Why did I eat that late? I know not to get started. What is wrong with me?"

"Apparently hunger. Graham crackers, too?" Her mouth hung open with false bluster.

"What a silly question. Of course there were graham crackers involved." I looked down at my middle. She looked at my feet as they happened to be at the end of my legs, her favorite place of concern.

"Your legs are so thin," she worried.

"Your back hurting today?"

"Arthritis."

"Sure it isn't that Circus of the Stars surgery you had? They about sawed you in half to get that last tumor out you know." I smiled, all teeth and goof.

A grimace trailed the edges of her mouth. "Yes, I guess. Can't tell if it's the arthritis or the clamps my backbone is fused to. I'll tell you what, I am so sick of complainin' complainin' complainin'. Tired of hearing myself think."

"If you ever find an off switch, tell me. I need a break, too."



When I was six, my mother was up in the morning long before us and went to sleep hours after us. She worried over bolts of material at Cloth World and sewed our clothes from paper patterns. We promptly outgrew them.

Mom went to her hands and knees to strip and wax the floors twice a month. When she was done and the temporary no-kid-zone lifted, it was my job to drop the pot of macaroni and

cheese or overfill my glass with grape juice. I broke cookie jars and cried. I promised to glue them back together.

When I got my first bike, I spent eight hours a day sitting on a banana seat. I did figure-eight's on Collins Road. Cars took the curves on Collins too fast and people went to the hospital. Mom grounded me for days when she saw me, but the bike was never taken away. In my first grade mind, no bike meant no reason to live. I brought home bloody elbows and purple knees to thank her for my freedom.



When I was 32, my mother had a massive stroke. Her head was shaved on one side from neuro-surgery. The other side still had her normal hair. Someone put it into a Pebbles, top-of-the-head pony tail. It was not allowed to integrate with the stubble. A horseshoe of thick staples tattooed her head behind and above her left ear. The surgeon got it right, the open end was up to hold her good luck. Her head lazed to her right as if the pony tail on that side of her head was a tuning rod, pulling her neck constantly to one side. I stood at the foot of her bed everyday asking the same questions.

“Mom, what day is it?”

“Friday.”

“What day is tomorrow?”

“Friday.”

“Did they brush your teeth?”

“I don't know. I fed myself lime Jell-o for lunch. I did good.”  
She smiled. Her eyes closed whenever her mouth opened.

“I love you, Mother.”

“Love you, Daughter.”



When I was four my father was stationed in Memphis for five months. We lived in Navy housing. We lived in the slums of a city full of slums.

There was a hole in the floor where my mother put snap-traps. The traps broke rat backs. Shell No-Pest-Strips hung in the

kitchen and living room, black and yellow. The flies were black, the tacky strips yellow. We burned trash in the backyard in a huge metal barrel. A high mesh grate teepeed the sky against flying embers. My brother found a burned bird on the grate and carried it inside the house. Mom found a box and gave us spoons to dig a hole in the backyard. We all cried, my brother the last to well up, Mom first then me.

She entertained us because we couldn't afford a garden hose. She filled a plastic bottle with a pointed tip full of water and chased us around the backyard in 98 degree heat. She would remove from the freezer an ice tray filled with Kool Aid, covered with cellophane. The cellophane held toothpicks in place until the Kool Aid froze. The three of us ate until our tongues froze and our teeth were stained purple.



My mother was in the bathroom when I got home today. I watched her walk back to her chair. Her left hip is lagging behind the right hip like a piece of plywood slanting against the side of a barn. The right hip tries to lean too far into her walker. On bad days her shoulders dip forward, her left foot points drastically inward and she has no appetite. She reminds me of her mother, crippled from rheumatoid arthritis. Her mother's hands were mountains of knots, one leg turned completely backward - one foot pointed north, the other pointed south. She creaked like ancient timbers when she walked.

My mother wears a path on the carpet from her chair to the bathroom to the chair again. She stays on the cart path and parks within the lines.

"I'd like a lot of olives in my salad tonight," she said.

"Black or green?" I asked.

"Green, please. The black ones are boring. We got any radishes or spring onions?" Her cheeks had the silken finish of polished ivory.

"I bought radishes last week, but I think we're out of spring onions. They didn't look right so I didn't buy them. Your fault, you're the one who taught me not to buy wimpy greens or dented cans. I tell you, Woman, it's been a long day of trying to understand a poet from the 1300's. Why am I in school again?"

“Learning how to write, Woman,” she said. Deadpan timing, toothy grin.

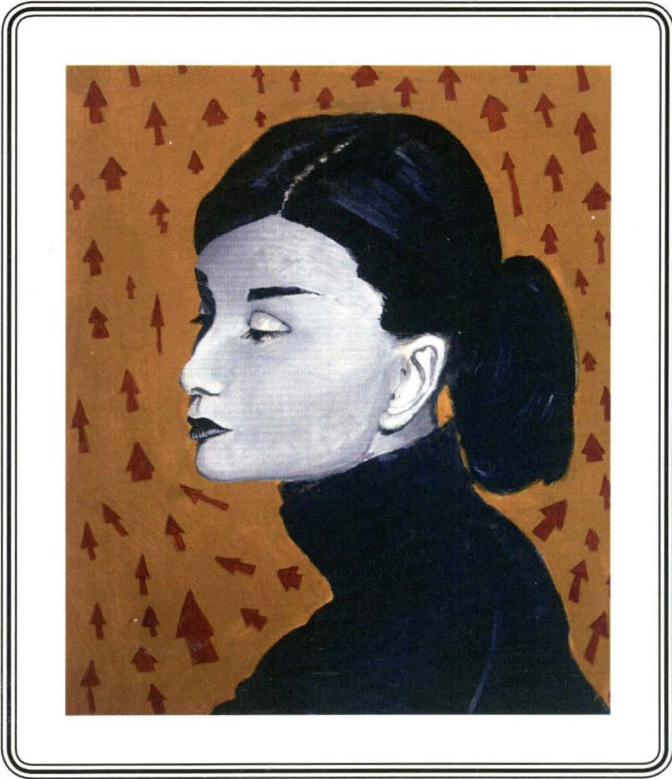
“Right. Now I remember. Maybe this poet I’m studying will expand my mind.” I plopped onto the sofa, laughing.

“May be,” she said, “and you can do this, you’re almost done. Hold on for another, what is it, two months? You always could do whatever you decided, once you set your mind to it.”

I looked at her and smiled, wondering if that was true. “Love you, Mother.”

“Love you, Daughter.”





AIR

By Abi Olvera



# History

By Steve Minnich

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1.  
World War II  
will some day  
be known  
as World War I  
part 2.
2.  
The founder  
of the old new religion  
becomes a footnote  
posthumously.
3.  
The zombie apocalypse  
begins in Kentucky.  
Thriller  
is involved.
4.  
A young Brit  
chops down  
a cherry tree.  
This becomes the root  
of the new global  
nation.
5.  
Around the year 0,  
the entire population  
decides it is time  
for a new calendar.  
This creates  
the “cute kitten” craze.



PRINT

By Irena Stanisic



# Thoughts on a Ship

By Michael Q. Rogers

---

You know, it's the one that picks you up and carries you far away. You don't choose it, but once you are on you may choose to ride or fight or jump. There are others on this ship that have the same choices. For different or similar reasons, they make their choices and the ship carries onward. The ship carries on board the children of a generation. We were so young. You were there with me. Together we spoke of dark lines and radiant colors. Centuries of time passed and we thought that we could never die.

Oh my friend, you should know something. It seems that as you chose to ride I daily made the choice to fight and always wanted to jump. I struggled with my place on the ship. I didn't realize this at the time, but I believe I was always looking to distant shores. I would reach out toward the rough rock surfaces for some small connection to another world. You chose the ship that chose you. I chose myself and the unknown. I chose ideas and ideals and prayed that there would be a place where all would be made right. I never thought that perhaps the ship could be going to that place. I never thought that we could be going there together. I didn't even know where it was and I didn't know how to get there. I didn't even want to get there. I just wanted to be there. And you--you wanted to get where you were going.

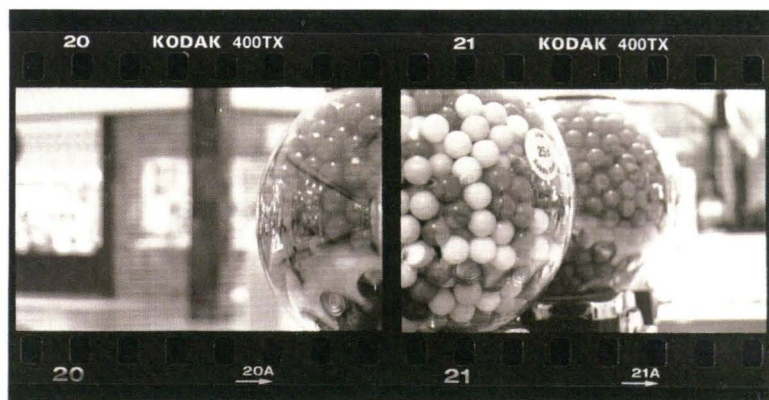
I never understood that. I resented you for your peace on that ship and your trust in its sails. How could you be sure? I didn't tell you about my somewhere. I didn't think you should know. And we rode. We were together on that ship, but we did not share the journey and I didn't want to.

Because to me, the journey was illegitimate. And so were you. And so is this ship. This contrived place not of my choosing. This ship on this ocean of -where. There was a voice at the beginning. "You may choose," the voice said, "either 'some-' or 'no-,' but you cannot choose '-where.'"

"Well then, nowhere, please," I vaguely remember telling the captain long ago. "Please so long as we continue to move. I will be finding my own ship soon and then I will get to where I'm going. The others? They will be fine. They have each other."

I see now that I have been daily choosing to believe that we

are going nowhere I would ever want to be. I never thought ... still don't think ... that even though I wasn't given a choice, perhaps the place where we are going is somewhere worth choosing.



POP

By Liz McAvoy

# in a universe with no order...

By Brynna Williams

---

in a universe with no order, fire symbolizes truth  
and it is always blue, the color of real, hot, flames.  
water is a seen a symbol for cowardice,  
and little boys are compared to rivers who run home  
crying to their mother, the ocean,  
for water is no longer made from liquid elements  
(to bake water, bring together  
two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen)  
but from the tears of children.

up is down and left is right -  
autumn stands for fashion, new things  
coming alive out of the woodworks and  
ideas springing to life from men's heads.  
spring no longer attracts the robin,  
but the crow to feast on things unborn.  
winter is full of beauty and majesty, for this is when things  
are created upon the blank sheet of snow.  
summer is seen as something cold, green now stands for lies.

poetry would no longer be the language of eros,  
but the only accurate way to depict a philosophical idea.  
love would no longer be a private thing, but a public spectacle -  
a man expressing his desire  
by painting his heart on his forehead for all to see.



**COLLAGE COLLAGE**

By Irena Stansic

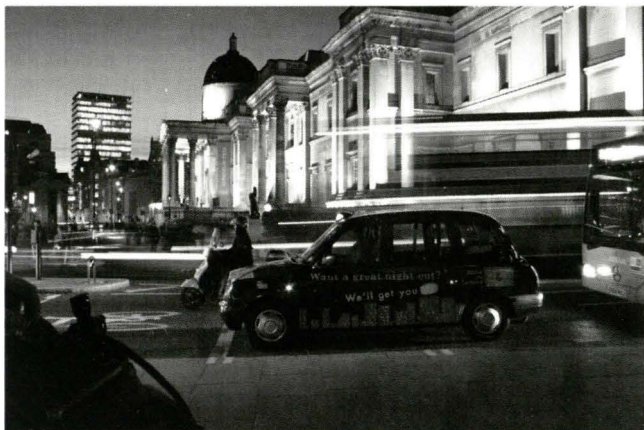


# What Does It Take

By Cassandra Calin

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What does it take  
More than sunshine and rain  
To grow bread from dry grain  
At the end of the day  
Does the amount of pain  
Balance out with the gain  
Or are you just afraid  
That you'll soon be replaced  
Metal robots without names  
Each getting an equal wage  
Defective ones get thrown away  
So take the time to calculate  
What, exactly, does it take  
And is it really worth the wait  
To make it through the golden gate  
Rubies love when lovers hate  
For every path is the wrong way  
Miracles happen when we pray  
Til then there's a game we play  
You will go and I will stay  
Count to ten while you escape  
When I lose, my heart will break  
I'll watch instruction video tapes  
Wondering what does it take  
But clear answers start to fade  
Til it's all a blur of gray  
But it really doesn't take  
Long for them to segregate  
Darker grays from lighter shades  
And they're so eager to say  
That I don't have what it takes  
And I'll always be dry grain



LONDON NIGHTS

By Elizabeth Ygartua



## MIDDLE WEST

By Sam Mitchell

---

Maybe it was Kansas, maybe Nebraska, maybe Illinois. Edward couldn't remember. Even at the time those landscapes melted together, just a massive plain of perpetuity whose endless lines of corn stalk marched toward an impossible horizon. The monotony was relieved only by the slice of his '71 Buick Electra as it hummed across the straight blacktop highways. Back and forth he traveled his routes, those black arteries that fell across the map of the Middle West like a delicate lace. Edward stopped at hundreds of farmhouses, in almost every small town, and many suburbs of the bigger ones, with an endless line of household labor saving products he had been paid to sell. Each new town was much the same as the last--flat and uncrowded, but somehow oppressive to him. Their small diners were filled with men in overalls and women with beehives who liked to smack big, chewy wads of gum in their mouths and stare at him out of the corners of their eyes.

Outside, the unobstructed sky pressed down on him from every angle as he made many hopeful treks up dirt paths and front walkways. Most of these were followed by disappointed steps off front porches, slammed screen doors, hyper dogs, awkward squeezes from impetuous housewives, even calls to the police. All became part of the humdrum routine. But Edward pushed on, happy to have a job with a company car so early in life, no matter how low on the ladder he sat. Soon all the residences he visited and all the faces, like the mighty plains around them, just blurred together before Edward. So it was then, and so it certainly was now, nearly forty years later.

But one thing stood out.

It was a small wooden farmhouse in the most massive cornfield Edward could imagine. The farm was bisected by a straight stretch of highway between two silver cities on Edward's route, and each time he drove through that farm he reckoned that some European countries could probably be plopped down comfortably within its boundaries. Thousands of acres surrounded the stretch. The corn, overwhelming, pressed the side of the road so closely that stalk leaves sometimes brushed the sides of Edward's bottle green Buick as the car greedily hovered up the

miles. Landmarks were sparse. Here and there scarecrows rose from the fields; two barns with blood-red paint squatted maybe a half mile from the road; and two dome-topped silos cast long shadows over the rippling fields. If he had climbed to the top, Edward thought, he would probably have seen Omaha, maybe even Chicago. On a clear day, at least.


But the house was what stood out most, even though it was far shorter than the silos. To Edward, it was the absolute quintessence of all farmhouses. The first time he saw the house it reminded him of that famous Grant Wood painting. It was a beautiful vision of whitewashed wood rising out of the green cornfield, much as the white stone monuments of Washington rise out of the green mall. It cast itself with a sort of terrible sentimentality into Edward's image of the nation. It had a whiff of Victorian elegance in its architecture, but the simplicity of its design kept with the practical landscape of the midwest.

Every time Edward passed the house its windows were open. White curtains could be seen flicking out of the windows by changes in the wind. A windmill in the side yard churned, directing the swaying stalks of corn below. Rocking chairs on the porch pitched slightly, lending the illusion that someone had just vacated the seat. It was a house in motion. For some reason, it took Edward several years to stop there. Somehow he couldn't force himself to flip on his signal and make the turn into the dirt drive. Visiting the house would only ruin his expectations, because things couldn't be as perfect as they looked. The house, Edward thought, was best left to his thoughts.

One hot day in July Edward finally did stop. His legs had been aching from pushing the accelerator for hours, and the heat baking into his car seemed to evaporate all the breezes coming in through the open windows. So without much decision, Edward turned into the dirt drive, as if it were his very own home. The drive was much narrower than the highway itself; corn swiped each side of his car as he trundled toward the house. Suddenly Edward regretted this decision. The empty windows upstairs stared down at him, blank eyes, their curtains suddenly stilled. The double screen doors seemed suddenly restless, nudging each other slightly, anticipating a move. Even the corn stalks, as they squeaked across his windows, tittered back and forth the slightest whisper of a long-forgotten secret.

Then at once the curtains upstairs danced again in the wind; every blade of grass in the tidy yard stood in chlorophyllic ec-





stasy; the sun shone a welcoming light on the front door. Within seconds Edward forgot his momentary feeling of unease.

A white picket fence encased the yard, its only opening a kissing gate that let on to the dirt road. Edward eased his Buick next to the gate, shut off the rumbling engine, opened the door and stepped out. Normally he pulled his traveling sales case out of the car with him, but the muscle memory accompanying this familiar maneuver failed. He simply stood between his car door and the gate staring at the house and the fields of corn that snuck upon it from every direction. Behind the screen front doors Edward could see dimly into the house, which was filled with more sunlight and dust motes, and he could distinguish vague figures moving toward him. He stepped forward and pushed his way through the gate, ignoring the sad whimper of a rusty hinge, and walked up a stone path toward the front porch steps.

Before he could reach them, the screen doors swung open. From out of the gloom stepped Edward's parents, his mother in a cherry-dotted apron and yellow dress, his father in blue jeans, plaid shirt, and a baseball cap. Their faces were lit with jubilant smiles, and they scurried down the wooden steps to meet him. The screen doors slammed (boing-THWOMP) behind them. Edward stood stunned on the front path, not only because his parents had been dead for seven years, but because he had somehow known that they had been here all along. Why hadn't he dropped by before?

His mother hugged him tightly and laughed. Her bubbled hair-do mashed into his face, and he felt her body tremble with joy as he held her. She was so happy to see him, she said, which was odd, because when they broke apart from the hug Edward saw that she no longer had eyes. The skin of her upper and lower eyelids had been sewn together with thick blue yarn. Edward opened his mouth to ask her what had happened but nothing came out. His father scooped him into a one-armed squeeze, looking him deeply in the eyes, an expression of pride melting over his face. He was pursing his lips together tightly--probably choked up, Edward thought. Dad always had trouble showing emotion.

"We knew you'd come by, Edward!" his mother cried. "Get inside, it must be a hundred degrees out here! I've got some nice lemonade and oatmeal cookies." She clutched his elbow and steered him up the steps toward the door. The wood seemed less sturdy underfoot than it looked, a bit like the way a rotting

tree feels soggy in the rain. He sensed a disturbing smell, a mixture of cornbread, vinegar, and chicken shit, which seemed to seep from the house itself. But in a moment it was gone, and as he stepped through the doors with his parents the smell was replaced by the sweet breeze of warm summer air flowing through an open window. He could also smell fresh lemons and a baking, yeasty smell. All the familiar smells of home, he thought, as his mother and father showed him to a comfortable easy chair in a cozy room off the front hall.

His father sat on a sofa opposite him, staring at his face with a glint of pride still shimmering in his eyes, while his mother bustled into the kitchen. Goodness knows how she saw anything, Edward thought, with her eyes sewn shut like that. The room was bright and cheerful and as clean as could be, the furniture as plainly charming as the house itself. There was no television, but a stack of board games sat in one corner. From the state of their tattered boxes, it looked like they were frequently used. Somewhere in the house Franki Valli squeaked about how to walk like a man through the speakers of a radio.

Edward turned to his father and started to speak in a hoarse voice.

“I’m sorry it’s been so long. I didn’t realize.... If I had known,” (but he had known, hadn’t he?) “I would have stopped earlier. I had been told you two were dead.”

Edward’s father did not speak, just nodded in understanding. He took off his baseball cap, rested it on his knee, and laced his fingers together across his plaid shirt. Edward suddenly realized that his father’s mouth was still closed tight, not voluntarily, but sewn shut like his mother’s eyes.

A minute later his mother came into the room with a tray of cookies and a squat pitcher of lemonade. Beads of condensation dripped onto her hands as she poured three cups of the lemonade, jabbering away at Edward who could hardly take his eyes off his father. It was not just that his parents were dead (and Edward knew they were, had identified the bodies in a St. Louis morgue the night of the wreck) or that he had never seen them in such a rural setting as this (the rooster clock on the wall screamed against his mother’s urban, refined taste); it was the fact that the baseball cap on his father’s knee had a cardinal on it that disturbed him. Edward had grown up in St. Louis, but his father was from Boston and had always pulled for the Sox.

His mother passed around glasses of chilled lemonade and a




plate loaded with crumbly cookies, so unhindered by her optical handicap that Edward found himself stifling laughter. She told him of the exciting county baseball game they had attended the night before; of the startling rate at which the corn was growing this year, despite the dearth of rain; of her knitting projects; of Dad's newfound skill at amateur carpentry. Finally she fixed Edward with her stitched stare and asked him, "So how has life been for you, Eddie?"

"It's been good," Edward began, shifting in his seat and setting down his empty glass on the rustic coffee table, one of his father's own creations. "O.K. at least. I never get to stay in one place for long, but I get most of the winter off which is nice for Janice. She misses me when I'm not at home. It's hard on her with the baby, all by herself. We have a baby now, Momma. I know that might come as a surprise."

"Oh, I think that's wonderful Eddie! Just wonderful!" his mother said, patting him on the knee.

"She's seven months this Tuesday. We named her after you, Momma. I couldn't think of any other name that suited."

"That's sweet of you dear," his mother smiled, and refilled his glass of lemonade. "I hope I can meet her sometime. Do you have a picture of her?"

Edward produced a small photo from his wallet, a bit crinkled but decent enough. It showed his baby girl in the backyard of their duplex in the city. She was pulling up blades of grass, smiling at the camera, glowing in a little green dress.

"Oh, she has my eyes, Edward!" his mother beamed.

"She does, momma." Edward passed the photo to his father, who looked at it with a humored smile and an appreciative nod. He returned it to Edward, then put his cap on his head, stood up and headed for the door, clapping Edward on the shoulder as he went.

"He's probably heading for the barn," his mother said, slightly exasperated. "Can't keep him away for too long; his hands start to get anxious. Always wanting to create something new. I don't know where we're going to put all of the things he's coming up with; we're running out of room. Maybe you could take a piece back?"

"Maybe, momma," Edward smiled.

He stayed for dinner against his own judgment. He knew he didn't want to sleep in the house, and the nearest motel was about forty miles away. But his mother insisted that he sit and

relax on the back porch. It was a small, screened room with wicker furniture. The entire view was filled with corn and sky, and as the sun went down fireflies began to tap glowingly against the screen. When he had woken up that morning, Edward would never have dreamed he would be waiting for a dinner with his parents later that night. Their death had been sudden and incredibly hard to deal with. Looking back on it, Edward could not remember a funeral. The last thing he remembered was seeing their broken bodies.

But Edward had dealt with it and moved on. That was the only thing he knew to do. Now he had a family of his own, and he didn't feel the need for his parents any longer. He plucked the picture of his baby girl out of his wallet again and examined it in the warm evening light. He really did not want to stay there in this house any longer.

By seven o'clock dinner was on the table: a gorgeous golden turkey, mashed potatoes, corn pudding, green beans and grape Jell-O. The three tucked in and ate steadily for twenty minutes, his mother doing most of the talking between bites. His father put the food to his stitched mouth, ready to drive the tasty bites home, but it all fell into his lap. Edward felt embarrassed for the man, so he tried not to look. For dessert his mother served them scandalously large slabs of cherry pie. It was sickly sweet, but it slid down Edward's throat with such ease that he couldn't help having seconds.

When it came time to leave, his mother protested. The guest bedroom had clean sheets, it was too dark to drive safely; they had more visiting to do. But Edward was adamant. His father stood in the corner of the front hall, hands in his pockets, smiling at the situation, and eventually his mother gave in. His parents hugged him fiercely on the front porch, made him promise to come back soon, and waved him down the drive.



Three weeks later Edward found himself on the same stretch of highway (Nebraska, it had to have been) near the farmhouse where he had spent an evening visiting his dead parents. It was late, his bladder was aching, and his destination for the night was almost an hour away. Soon the twinkling lights of the farmhouse came into view through the rows of corn. Edward did not want to stop, could only half admit to himself that he had even stopped before, much less fathom exactly what he had seen there that night. He cruised past the dirt drive that led up to the house,



refusing to turn his head and look at the glowing windows. Still, his bladder was fixing to explode.

Less than a quarter mile from the dirt road, Edward pulled off to the side of the highway, turned his head lamps off, and quickly hopped out of the Buick. The road was deserted, but Edward still felt a need for privacy. He walked into the corn stalks about ten yards deep. His bladder, sensing the portent of relief, began to contract more severely. Edward stopped on the spot and undid his zipper. With almost unbearable relief, he sighed and cocked his head up to the sky above. It was littered with the most splendid array of stars he had ever seen in his life, impossible to count. He tried to take it all in at once, to observe every corner of the endless sky, but he couldn't. Never before had he realized just how enormous the sky was.

Suddenly Edward felt a brush of cold metal against his back. Startled, and with a pinch of pain, he stopped urinating. He turned around to find the muzzle of a shotgun now aimed at his chest. He looked up to find the owner of the gun staring him dead in the eyes. It was his father, his mouth sewn shut, a leer of hatred and disgust furrowed on his face. Get the fuck off my land, the face communicated.

"I'm sorry," Edward began, knowing that, whatever this thing was before him, it was probably not actually his father. "I'll get going now, sir."

He turned slowly, forgetting those glorious stars above, and ran for his Buick.



Edward soon had his route changed with his company, so wary was he of having to cross paths with that farm again. But curiosity has a way of catching up with a man, and less than a year later Edward found himself riding down that same blacktop highway toward the house which he had last left with his zipper down, but which had never quite left him.

It was May, and a more gorgeous day could not have been possible. It was entirely too hot for the season, Edward thought, but he couldn't roll down the windows because it upset his little daughter. She was in the front seat next to him, sucking happily on a pacifier and staring out at the blue skies. Edward was on his way to Denver where Janice's parents were planning to meet with him and see the baby for the first time. Without realizing what he was doing, Edward had pointed his car toward the route that led past the farm, even though this would add about an

hour to his trip. He needed another look at the house--safely, in the daylight, with hopes that a youthful family would be out in the side yard enjoying a new swing set, or that an unfamiliar farmer would be tooling through the corn on a polished tractor. Anything that could contradict what he had seen the previous summer was what he wished to see.

The corn looked just as healthy as it had the previous year, though it was not quite as tall. The hot days, so early that year, would change that soon enough and send those stalks skyward. Edward knew he was drawing close to the farmhouse when he passed the two large silos. His hands were sweating on the wheel, and beside him his little girl had dozed off to sleep. A moment later he could see the little white house in the distance, and soon it was racing toward him with unnerving speed. Without realizing it, Edward had settled into a steady speed of eighty, and only at the very last second did he see the body lying in the middle of the road just in front of the house's dirt drive.

Edward stomped on the break pedal; the car fish-tailed in the road before coming to a rocking halt on the opposite shoulder from the house, its backside slashing into the stalks of corn. Edward jumped out and closed the car door behind him. He ran to the body in the middle of the road, knowing it was the thing that appeared to be his father. It was flat on its back, the thick stitching across its mouth popped loose, dark blood trickling out.

"Dad! Dad!" Edward shouted at the thing on the road. It didn't move a muscle. It had the flat look of a corpse, Edward saw, as if it was sunken into the road itself. Edward grabbed its arm and checked for a pulse. Silent. He bent his head to the thing's chest, listening for a heartbeat. But nothing was ticking except his watch.

From up the dirt drive Edward heard clomping footsteps coming toward him. He knew it was his mother before he looked, but he looked anyway. She was racing down the drive, an apron patterned in cows coming loose in the back, her bubble hairdo glowing in the sunlight. Her eyes were still sewn up, but as she reached Edward and the body on the ground, he saw that tears were leaking out of them.

"I was sitting on the porch when I saw him fall!" she blubbered breathlessly. "He was just checking for the mail. Oh Edward! Thank goodness you were driving by, you can help carry him!"

"I think he's already g--"

“Bring him in the house, I’ve already called the ambulance!”

Aware of the futility but unable to completely control himself, Edward picked up the body that looked so like his father and began to jog with it up the drive. It was lighter in weight than it had any reason to be, and its head bobbed awkwardly against Edward’s arm with every stride. At one point the Cardinals hat came loose and fell to the ground. Edward didn’t bother to pick it up.

The house was not the same as earlier. The once cheery façade and yard were now forlorn and untended. Paint was beginning to chip off the side of the house and the fence, and some areas of the grassy lawn were brown and crisp. Edward thought that somehow this depressed air suited the space more genuinely. The odious smell of vinegar was more apparent, and for the first time since he had been there initially Edward remembered that he had encountered that smell for a brief moment before entering the house.

He burst through the screen doors and laid the body on the quilted sofa. His mother rushed into the room with a cool rag and a glass of water. She poured some of the water into his father’s ripped mouth under the delusion that it could somehow revive him. Edward did not worry about him choking. There was no life in the pathetic body left to be lost.

It was nearly an hour before ambulance sirens began to warble in the distance, vaguely. In the meantime Edward’s mother sat stroking her husband’s hand, whispering to him that he would be all right. She had insisted that Edward stay with her while waiting for the ambulance, but she did not look at him. He felt stunned, sitting in the same easy chair he had sat the previous July, his eyeless mother looking over him as if he were merely another piece of furniture. He noticed a shotgun propped in a corner of the room where the board games had been the last time he was in the room. Sitting on the coffee table beside the sofa, his mother sobbed silently over her husband’s body, but her back remained straight with hope. Edward sat slumped in the easy chair. Every few minutes he would feel an enormous urge to leave. His knees would twitch, as if ready to leave the chair in a hurry. But then the feeling just passed.

The ambulance rocked up the dirt path, sirens rising in crescendo, and stopped in front of the kissing gate. The stretcher was wheeled up the front path by two men in white uniforms. The body was swiftly loaded into the back of the ambulance, but

the men may as well have drawn the sheet over its face. From the looks on their faces, they too knew it was hopeless. Edward's mother followed behind the stretcher, turning back toward Edward as she jumped into the back of the ambulance. "Meet us at the hospital, Edward!" she shouted, her stitched eyes looking as if they may have just been squinting in the sunlight. Edward stood on the porch and waved at the ambulance as it squalled back down the drive. A dusty haze followed it, and by the time it settled the ambulance was well out of sight.

The cornhusks rustled in a mild breeze under the baking sun. In the distance, perhaps even on the back porch, a wind chime rang out. The bell was an oddly pelagic sound to be heard here in the deep plains.

Edward slowly began to descend the porch steps, his hands in his pockets, feeling more serene than he knew he had any right to be. He wouldn't follow the ambulance to the distant hospital, because those weren't his parents riding in the back of it. At a steady, slow pace, he made his way back toward his car without a backward glance. He understood that everything that had happened here was absurd, and he wished to contemplate it no more. He was certain this time that he would never travel past this old farm again.

When he reached his car he realized what he had done. He had left the doors closed, and the windows were rolled up. It had to be a hundred and thirty degrees in there. He fell to his knees on the hard, hot blacktop that stretched through that godforsaken farm. Above him, the wide Nebraskan sky pressed down on him mercilessly.

Or maybe it was Kansas.



Nearly forty years later, he prefers not to remember. It wasn't until he saw the farmhouse on the news that he really thought that any of it had happened at all.

Smoke filled the screen, and the camera rocked restlessly as the news van in which the reporters were riding hurtled down the highway. Edward could see the silos, still recognizable after all these years of forgetting, ensconced in a web of smoke. As the camera sped closer to the horrific wreckage, Edward could make out the house in the distance. It was the same house, fixed upon its little hill. Two trucks and a Hummer sat beside it, Edward could see. A new family had moved in.

The screen switched to a helicopter shot. The back tail of the



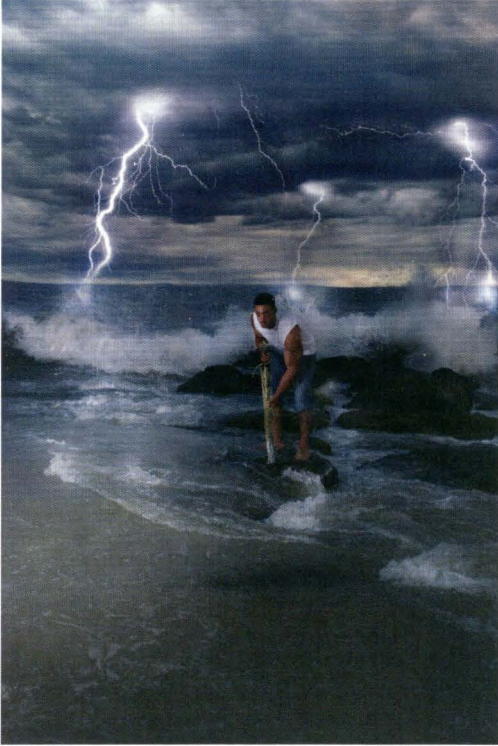
plane in the cornfield had the words DELTA painted across it. The flames seemed to be dying down around the actual fuselage, but the fields of corn around it were just getting started. Blue passenger seats and unrecognizable debris were scattered everywhere, impossible to count, some still blazing like hideous stars.

At the bottom of the screen, the news banner identified the location as Iowa.



PATRICIA

By Bryarly Richards



**SWORD IN THE STONE ON STEROIDS** By Marissa Apstein



# The Pond Years

By Steve Minnich

---

## The Disappearance

I am sitting in a chair in a pond. Reading a book, perhaps the Bible. Getting lazier. Skipping a chapter here and there. This takes many years. It is possible that I was first consumed by the local legend.

## The Chair

There is a chair in a pond. Perhaps it has long legs that reach the bottom. Perhaps the bottom is very shallow. Perhaps there is an island in the pond on which the chair sits. There is a chair in a pond and a bird circles overhead.

## The Island

There are trees on the island, but not palm trees. There is one very certain panther that is pacing endlessly. There is a composer in the center who has not yet mastered the motions of triple meter.

## The Composer

One might think the movements of triple meter are essential to one's being a composer. One might consider the composer a failure. There is no mention of the composer's musical abilities.

## Triple Meter

The panther's pacing is rhythmic and unceasing.

## The Panther

The panther is presumed lonely and the panther is presumed trapped. The panther has a dumb leg. There is no explanation of the panther. The panther is.

## The Dumb Leg

The dumb leg may have been a gift from a traditional sort of man with a particular knowledge of the territory. It seems possible he might have just pounced and wrestled. Pounced and wrestled. A bird circles overhead.

## The Bird

There are an uncountable number of species and I dare to know them all by name. The island is merely a suggestion, one possibility of many. It is possible that I was first consumed by the local legend.



By Irena Stanisic

VERTIGO



# Moment of Silence

By Cassandra Calin

---

Three gather here on this fall day  
To watch leaves of life float away  
All share a silent moment now  
But different reasons make heads bow

He there stands tall, head tilted down  
He gives the unworthy its crown  
His silence in vain is wasted  
On a god hears not his silent faith  
But laughs and scorns and betrays it

She there kneels weeping on the floor  
With silent tears for those before  
Her silence fulfills not their dreams  
Crying will not make them return  
Arise, she should, and for them speak

He falls, speechless, in wonder of  
His Majesty. His lips are shut  
His silence allows for Him to teach  
What should be heard is made clear here  
In this moment of silence, man is finally reached



HUGUENOT

By Amanda Lineberry



VISTA

By Amanda Lineberry

# Awake

By Zoë Rachael Gunn

---

Eyes of despair, she sits  
“Stay awake,” the professor asks  
The world needs you  
These times need you  
And You need your Self.

The weight of the knowledge of tragedy  
the temptation to close it off and forget  
“Stay awake,” the pastor urges  
The world needs you  
These times need you  
And You need your Self.

Helplessness in overwhelm, ease in apathy?  
“Stay awake,” the activist begs  
The world needs you  
These times need you  
And You need your Self.

Out in the forest  
she climbs upon a rock  
She breathes in deeply  
preparing to scream her frustration  
into the forest consciousness  
But instead,  
    filled with communal air  
        she sighs  
            and slumps onto the rock  
                that holds her

She looks about  
    The treetops reaching for the clouds  
        but never trying to catch them  
    The moss and lichen,  
        modest existence  
    Dead but essential leaves,  
        shuffle and crunch

And she feels:

These are my people  
and I love them.

And the forest whispers:

Stay Awake with us  
The world needs you  
These times need you  
And You need your Self.

“I am trying,” she responded, “but it hurts so badly”  
She paused. “Why do I love you, forest?”

And the forest rustled, “Because we are awake, child.  
We are awake even through death,  
as the fallen leaves make fresh soil  
for new life. We are here for you  
to walk with and find solace for your  
Self. We are a model for the ecosystem  
you wish to build within your Self.”

She nodded, hugging the forest within.  
Then she looked at her clock and it said Winter  
and she looked at the sky and it said dusk

And the forest rustled again,  
“Go now and rest, for you are in the midst of Life.  
The journey ahead is arduous as was the journey behind  
Be restful but keep your spirit awake  
Remembering that a fire too freshly lit  
is not useful for cooking on  
and that a fire must be  
lovingly stoked  
and cautiously fed  
to maintain the balance  
to stay awake.”



# Through the Eyes of a Rabbit

By Elliott Hammer

---

I duck and weave  
through the thicket-  
a tangled web of sticks and brush.

Fear drives me down that rabbit hole  
to silent seclusion  
at the slightest sound.  
In that deep, dark well, I am safe.  
My kin lie in its warmth.

Dangerous things move fast.  
Come at me slow  
and we'll see.

but for now I run

Duck and Weave  
Duck and Weave

I am a fatuous follower of that foreign voice in my head;  
“run, duck, weave, and breed”, is its insistent request.

I am a creature of great copulations.  
I think I want more,  
but the voice is confusing.

The sleek red fox in the distance sees me.  
I know it, but for now  
I remain wide-eyed, on perpetual guard.  
The fox flicks his tail.

Does he know that I breed  
with no concept of lust?  
that I die with no concept of death?



ALCOHOLIC SLEEPING BEAUTY

By Marissa Apstein



# Poetic Coloring

By Asad J. Hussain

---

My crayon strikes,  
Colorful spikes.  
Aimless vigor,  
Painless rigor.  
No boundary lines,  
No government fines.  
Chaotic emotion,  
Distracted devotion.  
Relaxed rage,  
Embraces the page.  
From poetry mimes,  
Meaningless rhymes.  
My crayon strikes,  
Colorful spikes.



**BROKEN ENSO**

By Irena Stanisic

# Thermodynamics

By Amani Morrison

---

So, your teacher tells me you're pretty excited about this science fair thing.

Yeah, I guess.

Well, what happened between then and now? You don't sound too happy.

The thing is all my friends at school are making stuff that's so cool. Russell's building a volcano that shoots out real Magna.

Magma. The stuff that comes from the volcano is called magma. Most people just say lava.

No, Mom. I mean Magna. Like the plural of Magnum.

Magnum? That must be some new-fangled terminology they're teaching you guys. When I was in school things were simple, no need for—

Geez, Mom, no. You know what a Magnum is. I saw lots of little boxes in Dad's glove compartment with that name. He told me they're grown-up balloons for when you get bored at work.

He told you what?! We don't even use—

Oh wait! That's a boys only secret! Please don't tell Dad! I told you, Mom! He'll never let me have any Magna!

Oh I'm going to tell him alright! He's got some nerve! I'm not gonna sit around and let him sleep arou—

But Mom! You can't! I told him I wouldn't say anything to anyone! We even did the secret boys only handshake! Please, don't—

Wait, what does Russell know about Magnums? And why are they going to be coming out of his volcano?

Magna, Mom. Magna. And you know Russell's been held back a couple of times, so he's a pro at this science fair stuff. Plus he lives right beside our teacher. He told me that after the trash man comes on Thursday mornings, there's always a few empty Magna packets that get left behind at the end of Mr. Dulaine's driveway. So Russell figured out that if he puts a Magnum somewhere in his school projects for Mr. Dulaine to keep, he gets bonus points. I just gave him some of Dad's because I know how much Russell needs to pass. Mom, what's wrong? Why do you look so—

Don't you talk to that Russell anymore. You hear me?! No

more! I cannot believe your father! What does he think he's doing, exposing a child to—

Mom, why can't I hang out with—

Don't you dare talk back to me, boy! You're not hanging out with Russell, and that's the end of it! Go to your room; I'm done talking.

But I need to go get the ingredients for my project. Mr. Du-laine said we need to start working on it soon.

What ingredients? What are you making?

Well Marie's making marshmallow bombs, and Joseph's making a racecar that uses water for energy, and well, I want to make love! It's gonna be so cool Mom!

Love?!

Yeah, Mom, it'll be the best! It's going to be a love-making machine! But don't worry—I promise I won't use any Magna.



UNTITLED 2

By Taylor Kane

# A Saturday Slain

By Zedric Thornton

---

Wake up Mijo, time to get up, you're running late,  
Today is your last day here, a very important date.  
Too late to say to good morning or hello.  
Too soon for goodnight or say goodbye.  
Not even our local Oracle Ina foresaw  
These events so graphic, dark, and raw.

It need not be Greek for this to be Tragedy.  
For an antagonist against humanity,  
To pass his judgment of chaos and insanity.  
No heroes, No Martyrs, just reluctant sacrifices.  
Media, Twitter, CNN, witness accounts never suffices.  
To what the tributes paid and never returned, our prices.

The only thing that returns, The Executioner, as foretold.  
To collect his bevy of innocent, lost souls  
Most taken prematurely, others ahead of schedule.  
Everyone's riding with the true lover of Emily D.;  
To the unfortunate causalities' stop---untimely  
Not a bell for whom, but a toll for what.

To cross the other side and fulfill a life,  
Nearly completed or completely unfinished  
To the victims, a child, a relative, a friend or a lover  
As candles, we inevitably extinguish.  
Not a single breath left from our bodies,  
For murderers and victims will all suffer to their last strife.

Streets littered with bone and flesh, painted with bloodstain.  
Nothing ever really alleviates the pain  
No surgery can fix scars branded on the brain.  
The Executioner manipulating our fears retain.  
A mastermind winning his battle,  
But his soldiers might not win this War.  
His armies of assassins are not weapons  
Of Fate, just their own weapons of choice.

Their gunshots are these Little Weapons' true voice.  
There is never a Safeway to dodge a gunshot;  
Congress people and citizens, all are equal in Eyesight,  
On thine knees and say prayers tonight.

Several angels fallen, living on or met demise  
Many stand tall, few Phoenixes even rise.  
The Living shall mourn in Sorrow,  
The Dead may not see Tomorrow.  
Fawkes rebels "Remember, Remember, the fifth of November,"  
For U C his last words of treason and plot.

My condolence offers "In Memory, In Memory the eighth of January  
To Thee shall never be forgot."



UNTITLED

By Rob Moore



# A-loneliness

By Zoë Rachael Gunn

---

Feeling lonely in that busy kind of way  
Bodies like phantoms passing around but not through you  
As people pass near one another  
in a world they think they share  
Feeling lonely in that busy kind of way  
that creeps upon you uncalled for at parties, dinners, or  
while walking the sidewalks of cities.  
Those shocks of perspective as you are suddenly aware  
of the walls of your mind.  
Walls through which  
no one  
can pass. Ever.  
Feeling lonely in that busy kind of way  
as hustles and bustles and  
appointments and obligations and  
this-es and thats and heres and theres and  
people and places and things  
make you forget to sit and  
have a conversation with yourself and

take yourself out on a date because  
you miss yourself and no one else will do.  
Feeling lonely in that busy kind of way  
as words and phrases  
hellos and gestures  
pleasantries and conversation  
bounce right off your skin and fall to the floor  
splashing there in a pool called society  
drenching us all with the facade of unity.  
Sure I have family and mentors, lovers and friends.  
But we are all alone in our minds  
and always will be.  
We paint a picture of ourselves upon others,  
and of others upon ourselves,  
hoping against hope that they will be enough of us and we of  
them,  
that we might feel not-so-alone-for-a-while,  
and that we might relieve some of the pressure of the knowledge  
that I alone am I, and no one else can be I for me. I must do that  
myself.  
Alone.  
I am alone.  
The "I" is a mystery, unKnown by all and discoverable (only partially) by yourself. Discover it.

The “alone” is terrifying, if you let it be. Embrace it.

The “am” is the freedom of life, is the awe of life, is the power of life. Use it wisely.

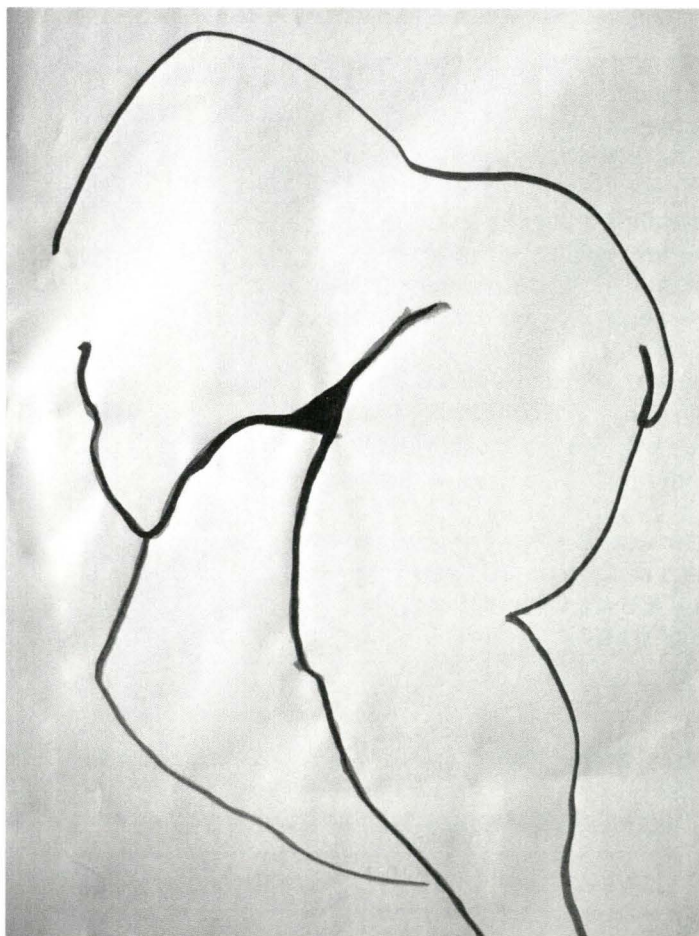
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

By Elizabeth Ygartua



RECLINING WOMEN

By Ale Nicolet





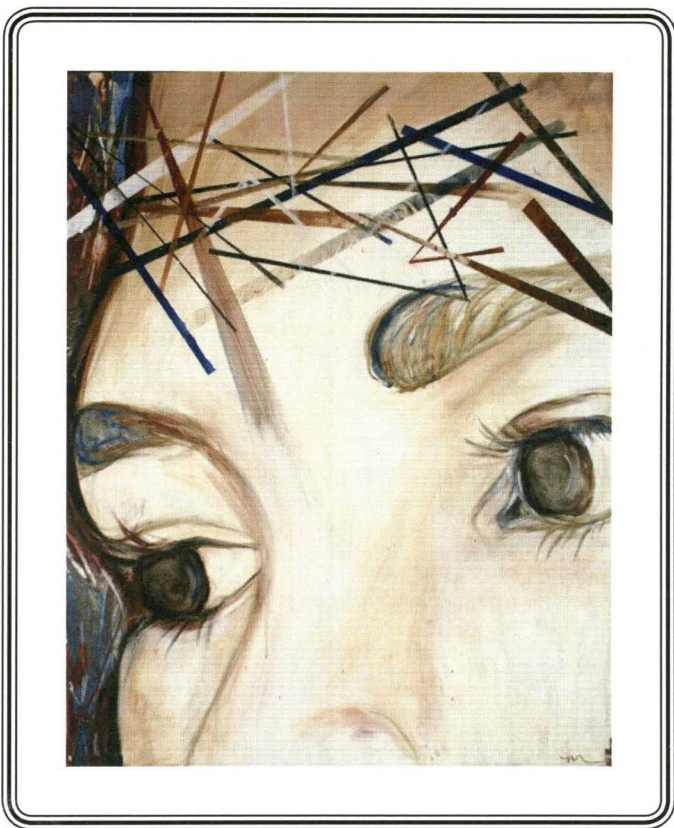
# As clear as it gets (rough drafts)

By Haisten Bonner

---

On an average day, quirky messages fill the void  
Profound hospitality invites your rejection  
The feeling of being invisible is overwhelming  
You stare blankly into my eyes  
Sabotaging our trials unconsciously  
Probability shouts its odds loudly  
I can feel your shivering passion  
Your quivering arouses goose bumps  
I feel your pain, acknowledge your desire  
But get lost in the connectivity  
A vibrate away from vanishing  
Human interaction is limited to creation  
When will you see the obvious?  
Or am I just as invisible as the air you breathe?

Either way, the warmth released from your lungs flows over me  
Passes through me like your eyes  
You'll see me when it's too late  
End of story



**DON'T BLAME YOURSELF**

By Mary Waller

# Birth

By Carter Staub

---

1.

*Come to me*, said the God  
and she gave him all of her.  
He erased her personality, her power,  
the innocence.

In return, Aphrodite was born.  
And before Dione could even smile onto  
the newborn Goddess,  
the child had won her mother's love—

and dismissed her.

*How can I give myself so willingly?*  
She must have thought—  
had to have thought.  
She gave herself over and over  
and yet she felt nothing now. Then:

*What do I need to feel?*

2.

My father must have known this when he  
took my mother as his own.  
He understood that she would forget herself,  
that we would never know her.

Even I was unaware  
of what he had done  
until I looked into my child's eyes,  
until I watched myself  
empty into  
my son.

3.

Aphrodite needed only to exist  
for Dione to take her own soul and willingly

free it:  
discard it for another soul—  
another light.

For when she saw her daughter,  
when she held the light—  
her light—  
Dione was forgotten.





# Disheveled

By Betty Holloway

---

Sorry, Mom.  
But I'm an indie shit show.  
I smoke weed and listen to rock and roll.  
I fly free, I go hard.  
I get high, I see stars.  
I binge, I grind.  
I purge, I unwind.  
I move, I flow.

I crash

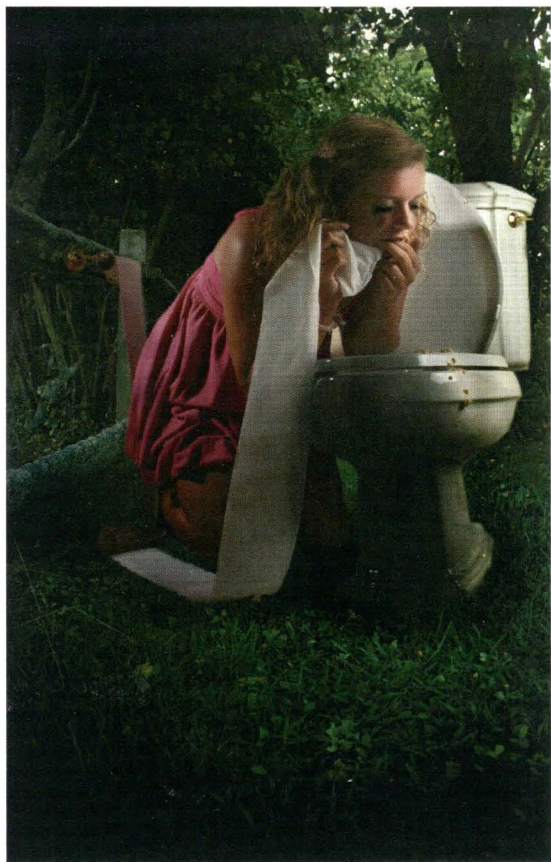
I get low.

But you know what, Mama,  
That's okay.  
I'm not watching my life unravel and fray.  
It's just a little wrinkled and stained.

Disheveled.

I tie a knot in it,  
And pull it tighter every day.  
And then I just sit there and wait.  
Let it tug at my weight.  
Let it tug at my weight.  
Let it tug at my weight.

Maybe I'll find a way to untie it someday.



**BULIMIC GOLDBLOCKS AND THE THREE BEARS**

By Marissa Apstein

# The Messenger

2010-2011

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The Messenger accepts submissions on a rolling basis in the following categories: art, poetry and prose (for prose please specify fiction or non-fiction). Everyone in the University of Richmond Community is welcome to submit their work - students, faculty, staff and alumni - and to submit as many pieces as they wish.

All submissions should be e-mailed as attachments to richmond.messenger@gmail.com. Submissions will be reviewed and selected anonymously by committee.