

# Jet Fuel Review

Spring 2014 / Issue 7





*A High Octane Literary Journal*

*www.jetfuelreview.com*

*lewislitjournal.wordpress.com*

Artwork: Otha “Vakseen” Davis III’s “Eyes Wide”  
Cover Design: Ashley Castillo and Audrey Heiberger

## **Mission Statement**

We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

## **Spring 2014 Editorial Staff**

**Tim Fitzpatrick** Managing Editor

**Melissa Carrington** Assistant Managing Editor

**Michelle Staie** Submission Manager

**Sarah Ford** Fiction Editor; Art & Design Editor

**Stephanie Lipinski** Nonfiction Editor; Art & Design Editor;  
Assistant Fiction Editor

**Emily Lif** Poetry Editor

**Ashley Castillo** Layout Editor; Assistant Art & Design Editor

**Audrey Heiberger** Art & Design Editor; Assistant Layout Editor

**Stephanie Raga** Communications & Media Editor; Poetry Editor

**Tina McKee** Marketing & Development Editor

**Mary Egan** Founding Editor and Blog Editor

**Joe Block** Web Editor

**Dr. Jackie White** Chief Faculty Advisor

**Dr. Simone Muench** Faculty Advisor

**Dr. Ray Klump** Faculty Advisor



Table of Contents

Poetry

Michael Anania	De Un Mundo Raro	3
Lucas Boelter	Casket	5
	Mother Nature	6
	Pale Grass	7
Kevin Brown	After the Fact	8
	I'm a Very Good Driver, As Well	9
Clint Buffington	The Computer Comes from the Earth, Somehow	10
	Leaving for Work	11
Juliet Cook and Robert Cole	Blood Drenched Funnel Cake	12
	Another Inedible Funnel Cake	13
John Paul Davis	The Blank Yorke	14
Darren Demaree	Unfinished Murder Ballad: The Sea Naked	15
	Unfinished Murder Ballad: The Sober man is easily killed	16
Devon Gallant	Untouchable	17
	Paris	18
Gail Goepfert	In a Parched Time	19
Yvonne Higgins Leach	Changing Countries Series	20
Donald Illich	No Sound Could Save Me	25
	Average Bear	26
Lucas Jacob	Landlocked	27
Whittney Jones	The Punch Line	29
Theresa Marten	Pages	30
Molly McCormack	Coda	31



Brenda Nicholas	She, Artichoke	32
Namkyu Oh	Whiskey Steps	34
Darlene Pagan	Breath	36
	The Uses of Grief	37
	A Sage Advises How to Firewalk	39
Judith Roney	41°48’N 87°35.4’W to 28°21’28”N 80° 41’5”W (Coordinates for a human)	41
Shae Savoy	On the Murder of Michelle Tate when we were both 16	42
Maureen Seaton	Unsolvable	43
	Dune Buggy	44
	Bildungsroman	45
Diana Smith Bolton	A President Says Goodbye to Air Force One	46
Clint Smith	Of Restlessness	47
Crystal Stone	Ketoacidosis	48
	Writing around the Self	49
George Such	Opening	50

## Art

Chrystal Berche	Amethyst Falls	55
	Garden Glow	56
Otha “Vakseen” Davis III	Eyes wide	57
	Felinity	58
Clinton Inman	Elba in Blue	59
Dr. Ernest Williamson III	But I can’t dance	60
	Everybody in the Dark	61
	Stronger Together	62
Sherri Wright	Haunted	63
	On Edge	64

## Fiction

Sarah Collins Honenberger	Trading Up	69
	Crack of the Fruit	74
Cecilia Pinto	Jellyfish	75
Jennifer Porter	The Green Frog Publishing Company	78
Lisa Silverman	Mena’s Salvation	81

## Nonfiction

Delia Ercoli	Delia Ercoli and the Chamber of Paperbacks	87
Alice Lowe	Memento Mori: A Sketch	90
Thomas Mannella	Paper in the Wind	93

## Biographies

99

## Poetry



**De Un Mundo Raro**

*“stand up and look at me face to face”*  
*Sappho*

i.

hands, Toltec or Persian,  
it hardly matters; what is  
printed there, something

to be recited or read,  
spoken out in familiar  
company, a compact

witnessed, hand to  
hand and face to face—  
stars, the moon, night

music, one breath  
and then another, face to  
face or hand to face, once again

ii.

a dove's shadow  
ripples across paving  
stones, calligraphy

flexed from its wingtip  
to the first creases of  
your palms, *nastaliq*

inked across the whorls  
of self, swept like furling  
scarves or skeins of silk

over the deeper furrows  
clutch and grasp leave there,  
tracings of fortune and desire





### Casket

Out of the casket I broke  
a walking, talking thing.  
I stood upright, the hair of a gypsie  
undertaker asleep on a handful of  
silver. This is Dolly's graveyard,  
where she fell like a broken horse,  
and neighed "Übermensch" all the way down.

To keep a crystal frozen in blood, like a  
hard heart stuck awake in the night. Dolly  
came from Arkansas, and in the street curb  
sought a loneliness most enlightening. Dark,  
like a faraway ox, she saw a hell in protrusions,  
the curb symbolizing the outward nature of things  
forever at the bank of her river, an unsettling fish.

She was disgusted with the painters and mongers,  
to whom death blossomed forth the endless stroking  
of pale hands on watery faces. She looked at the tree  
and tried to stretch her neck around the top branch,  
for in stretching the neck the earth booms like a  
tunnel, and the fields break water and capture  
light on soothing knees—knees meant to touch  
fellow space-travelers, who spin about, shouting,  
"Life is alive! Life is alive!"

This casket, the back seat of a Pontiac,  
the roaring space between fingers, the  
dead neck on a thigh, it is a brain's  
sandy gulley, equipped with a man  
who likes throwing sand. Be without  
the dirt-ladies, gentlemen. Though, one  
wishes to suck the back of the moon and absorb  
a bit of heaven.

iii.

ceremony is, after all,  
purpose joined with place,  
harvest and weaving, gathering

sheaf and thread, colors, yarns  
spun between waxed fingers, texts  
veined as in a bright butterfly's wings;

song moves among smooth upland  
stones, *achiote* tinted lips, the blue  
agave spiked hillside, water falling

seaward, clamoring its own  
music under a canopy of pink  
flowers and broad green leaves

## Mother Nature

Several nights I have awoken  
afraid of the clouds, the eclipses, and  
the stars whom my body honors.  
I'll tell you this: my cells sometimes  
awaken in a daze, blue in the face  
and pouncing. There are no constraints.  
Nothing can be done.

The worst are the births. Each star  
finds its pore and I gain spots. Am  
sort of an inverted leopard. This is  
how the world turns, believe it or not.  
I could try to tear them away,  
but they're leaches, these stars.

You see, most things come from my skin.  
It is bloody. There is blood. I awaken,  
shrieking at the flagrant night, the cotton  
walls – they are my gauze. And, thereupon,  
in the morning, nestled at my side,

ripped like a slug, a beetle, a grasshopper,

is an angel, warm, wet, new-born—yes,  
I am mother to the mystical as well.

That is some nights. Others are head-banged  
on gauze, feeling for my throat, shaking at  
stars, at eclipses, at bulging clouds.

Then it's at my temples, at my sides,  
a pulse, a crick at the spine,  
and calm, dear, calm.

## The Pale Grass

After Heather Cristle's "The Actual Future"

you are a pendulum	I am the breed of necrophiliac
pale women cling to	before they utter ghost in the
muddy grass	then clouds want to tick
through dawns	for orange is their transfusion and I
touch no dark	so also I can't permeate green
fields	soon I'll lay aside the boughs
of their soaking lungs	the corporeal tick when I climb
into the dawn	and have to disembodied clouds to
flay into fields.	

## Kevin Brown



### After the Fact

You were wearing a dress, some shade of blue,  
the first time we met. Perhaps purple.  
Since it was summer, it was a sundress,  
I think; I don't distinguish types. It was  
not flattering. I later told you you looked chunky.

I didn't want to date you. The second time  
you wore a t-shirt and shorts, more fitting for you  
and me. You were standing in front of a theater,  
waiting for a group of us to see a movie  
we would not remember. That was when I knew

we would work. Perhaps. Scientists can cause  
people to remember wrong road signs.  
They show them pictures of intersections  
and ask them wrongly worded questions,

so people see a stop or yield sign where  
the other actually was. Perhaps you told me  
about the t-shirt or dress months later,  
when we used to talk about how and where  
we met, talked about the jokes you told

me after everyone had left the movie, how sweet  
tea tastes like dirty water, something Southerners  
would take issue with. You told them again,  
six months later, to another young man,

as I stood beside you both, unbelieving.  
I didn't laugh, that time. Neither did he.  
At least, that's how I remember it.

### I'm a Very Good Driver. As Well

We cannot remember everything,  
our cortexes regularly wiped  
clean of names and faces, phone  
numbers and addresses, days

we say we will never  
forget. We need room for new  
lives. But it seems I am  
some sort of idiot

savant of remembering,  
a Rainman of what once was  
in my life, so I know I kissed you

one thousand four hundred  
and twelve times. I told you  
*I love you* nine hundred  
eighty-six, and you said you wanted

to walk away six different  
ways on twelve different days.  
And you did once, while I

counted your steps, past the door  
you closed behind you until  
I could no longer hear you:  
forty-six, forty-seven, forty-eight.



## Clint Buffington

### This Computer Comes From the Earth, Somehow

This beet  
this exact beet  
bulls-eye and all  
huddled low  
in this farmer's  
this exact farmer  
his field

this carrot  
this exact carrot  
this precise pepper  
over and over  
they chase  
their own ghosts  
home

but somehow  
cradling this computer  
in my lap  
this very computer  
I cannot see  
what dirt  
or stone  
yielded

this cobalt  
this lanthanum  
this cerium  
what wrinkled hands  
lifted this terbium  
to peace

praise, o praise  
praseodymium  
praise the hands  
that harvest  
dysprosium

### leaving for Work

We are driftwood and seaweed   mingling awhile  
riven at dawn by the ruthless tide.  
We are crabs trapping prey on the bank

that is our bed   and we are prey   or the bed is a raft  
and we are castaways making what life we can  
in the damp heat of our struggle.

The reef around this house is sidewalk  
made with crushed fire coral  
and my feet burn with each step.

*Coffee at least* you say   *Yes* I say *coffee*  
roll to trap you  
*Good morning!* I say *Good morning!*

You push me   laugh   cover your face   raspberries  
on your bare stomach   five ecstatic seconds  
I forget the lonesome path I've worn across the reef.

What are we but strangers on a raft  
mumbling our stories  
into the backs of each other's necks at midnight?

## Juliet Cook and Robert Cole



### Blood Drenched Funnel Cake

When synapse brain and cardboard mask are one,  
it feels the bone marrow touching a porcelain plate.  
It's like bloody sawdust dripping out the mouth  
of a subcutaneous Sybil Nymph. Incomplete  
metamorphosis. Twisted wings, distorted face  
in a dream we had: Immanent sigil vibrations.

With melted scissor handles with red crayon legs  
where nothing bad will happen.  
Do you see what happens now?  
Thighs drip drip drip all the way down  
in some shady bathroom past. A fierce diagonal  
crash down the drain. What comes out of  
that mouth is the opposite of diaphanous.

### Another Inedible Funnel Cake

Treat them like magician's assistants  
fused with funnel cloud threshers;  
manhandle their many dank limbs.

But undergo due process.  
Do not create some potential blue  
goddess chained by all fours  
to the titanium floor  
refusing an ambulance ride.

Don't pin prick their solar plexus.  
Don't poke them with sticks until  
you're ready for that tinted gypsum

apparition to explode all the way down your gullet.

## John Paul Davis



### The Blank Yorke

*What's the point of instruments? Words are a sawed-off shotgun. — Radiohead*

Baby boy, the hound of heaven bathed you,  
mussing your hair to permanent cowlick.  
Born with one eye asleep & one open  
makes you king in the realm of waking dreams.  
Uncelebrity, tempt the piano's  
many teeth like a lion tamer, head  
between great jaws. You never wanted your  
voice to be a beauteous thing but here  
you are, cracked tenor & falsetto, false  
positives & bewitching punchdrunk blue  
oratorios. Choirboy & the whole  
choir. Wearing the brave face. Reprimanding  
daylight. Talking down the panic. Unsure  
if you're sign or signified. Signing or  
signifying. Baby, you've got the post  
modern blues. Hell on earth, it's hell on earth.  
A car crash, a tesla coil, a hanging  
chad. In arpeggios. Is this the Lord's  
extended dance mix or just a skipping  
compact disc? Either way all your hymns snap  
electroconvulsive. Either way all  
these words are mammal noises. Either way,  
close your dream eye & thresh stray cat  
rotgut rhythm from your six-string. Either  
way, this life's a no-code & you've always  
known it. So. When the cantankerous god  
of the stratosphere jostles the jet stream  
assume the crash position. A holy  
ghost will whisper pixels into your ear,  
a modem's stridulation & gurgle.  
Oh, demodulator, instigator,  
soothsayer. Fear not. This heat's also light.  
We will be shining when it swallows us.

## Darren Demaree



### Unfinished Murder Ballad: The Sea Naked

She wanted the desert. She wanted to shiver only at night. The fear she brought with her, to camp under so many heavenly witnesses, he fought back, baggy with the tequila she bought, he fought back wide, and not once did he strike her face. The three seconds between the bruising and the grand leak must have looked like a celebration of good bodies from so far away, must of reminded the fathers of what the sling-shot motion can do when enough explosions take place close to the heart of all sky. At least, for a little while, it must have resembled a creation tale...



### Unfinished Murder Ballad: The Sober Man is Easily Killed

Following the numbers, the display and arch of the numbers, the sober man's actions always revolve around the same nothing. An action taken is an action lost, but lost and still sober is the deal they make. He sits in the plastic chair, stolen from a motel during his drinking days, and he sits there alone. His wife is at the party. His children are at the party. All of his friends have forgotten about the motel chair. Nothing saved leaves without clawing at some eyes first, and one of those blind violent(s) knew exactly where he would be. Everyone knew already he was buried, but this time there was blood...

### Untouchable

if you(watching closely the maze of me)should say  
    "you are a puzzle i cannot ever piece together  
    you are a labrynth and i am lost                      forever  
    in the winding paths of your wandering way  
    through the strange magic of your spirit at play"

i would ask,dear heart,that you remember  
the secrets i have shared,the singing star,magical river,  
the deep quivering dance of the seas sway

for if i am weird strange untouchable unknown  
once i shared with you my lunatic dreams,  
once i took you by the hand  
to where all things are shown  
and said,"trust me,there is more than what seems"  
as we leapt the precipice into a far distant land



**Paris**

I wish  
I was with you in Paris  
and the rain(because it must be raining)  
and the beautiful wet leaves around us  
and the smell of love and rust on the wrought iron fence  
and the joy of wet benches  
and the old men and young children  
and the baying of proud car horns  
and the sweet jumble of the city all around us  
and the air heavy with romance and history  
and your eyes like mythology,  
eternal.

**In a Parched Time**

my body trembles with memory  
in its den of soft tissue.

How easily the old dearness  
and loneliness spiral—  
a leathery, mildewed tang  
pushing outward from an empty center,  
hollowed out by it, honeycombed with it,  
pulling my body through  
flexed and writhed—  
places the body never dreamed of.

It is the pain in painfully.  
Like a dark star  
somewhere in my body,  
it never stops.  
I go around pulling at the sky, unearthed.

## Yvonne Higgins Leach



### Changing Countries Series

#### Mother

How can I live  
                  through another day  
                  of waiting?  
Rain falls  
                  down the window  
                  slowly in drops  
that signal a harsh  
                  winter ahead.  
                  Too long alone  
knitting sweaters, sipping tea,  
                  dreaming my husband  
                  and children  
in my arms again. Faces  
                  rise in flickering candle  
                  light; in steam  
above boiling rice: visions  
                  of the day I leave  
                  this place forever.  
I wait for my oldest son  
                  to deny his birthplace,  
                  become another citizen.  
And for my husband  
                  who will also raise  
                  a hand, white palms  
shining, and pledge a new allegiance.

#### Father

I saw a woman with dark eyes  
And dark hands like my wife's  
Squeeze a honeydew, then inspect  
The imported Japanese pears.  
  
Here, over-stacked oranges drop  
To the floor; avocados soften  
And rot underneath their bumpy skins.  
In Iran, my wife buys  
Sugar with ration coupons.  
  
She dies with her country  
A little every day, dreaming  
Of a life with her children  
In another. I wait for her.  
A foreigner at 53, I learn English  
In a class for refugees,  
Watch my daughter study history  
From a country not her own,  
Wait for my sons to come home tired  
From work, and think what can I do  
Once I learn the language?  
  
On these brisk fall mornings,  
I walk past a cemetery  
Beside an apple grove,  
Think hard for a new purpose,  
Think how short my history here  
When my bones lie in this land.



### **The First Son**

The streets are black currents of floating chadors,  
the radio is monotonous voices of propaganda,  
and the young are brainwashed into martyrdom  
in that country they call home.

Tomorrow

I will ask to bear arms  
for America. I will say  
Yes, meaning no, meaning never,  
because I do what I have to do.  
As the first son I must think of the future,  
sacrifice to my parent's sacrifices,  
decide on their lives here,  
my sister's life here,  
And I have a wife.

Whenever I go too far back in time  
to summer evenings with my family,  
to the flickering neons, the clicking high heels,  
the kebob-to-go shops of Pahvlavi Avenue,  
I am bruised with grief.

But what makes the immigrant spirit  
are dreams of a life to be,  
not one dead and gone.

### **The Second Son**

Being the second son for some  
Is a curse. He convinces himself  
He is loved no less,  
But knows if both brothers were starving  
Which one would receive his mother's food.  
A blessing for me, really:  
Freer of obligation,  
I can still choose Iran as home  
Though my family with by in America.

I cannot forget my country  
When some day the borders will heal  
From war and open to trade,  
When the streets will stream again  
In blues and yellows and oranges,  
When the painter will pain more  
Than just a mullah's face,  
And dancers will drown again  
In the swirling phrases of Hayideh.

\*Hayideh – a popular female singer in Iran



**Daughter**

I am incomplete in this country,  
without my mother, my cousins,  
without strangers who know  
my native tongue,  
without the familiar dark eyes  
and faces, like my own.

Fashion, and trends  
and items on the grocery store shelves  
are foreign, as are movie stars  
and TV shows,  
as are so many of the light eyes  
and white faces.

I am here by my parent's choice,  
by their determination  
"for a better life." So each day  
I learn more English words, and  
become the stronghold  
they need me to be.

**No Sound Could Save Me**

Here's how it was:  
singing my way to birth,  
cracking questions to my Mom,  
saying clever things  
I didn't know were wise.

My mouth opened  
for schoolmates, teachers,  
parents, releasing a tongue  
that defeated them all.

As time passed,  
nouns and verbs broke  
over education's rapids,  
learning how to be human.

I heard melodies in language  
I used to heal my wounds,  
rhythms I banged on the table  
when I wanted to be reborn.

At the end, no sound  
could truly save me.

I had to recognize salvation  
in silence, a room where I was  
and wasn't, a fly  
on my forehead,  
my skin cooling its feet.



## Average Bear

It lumbered toward picnics  
 with average speed, mauled  
 hitchhikers in a methodical way.  
 Inside the cave it hibernated  
 in the expected time, recovering  
 from inactivity like you'd expect.  
 It wanted one day to chase  
 a park ranger up a tall tree  
 or be a mother, raise cubs  
 that would be extraordinary.  
 Until then it was a basic bear,  
 predictable, each action shown  
 in a guide, with the numbers  
 fitting it like a silver cage,  
 one it couldn't escape, a life  
 where every bear was smarter  
 or dumber, and could not be trusted  
 to behave. Better to sleep, lay  
 in the yellow meadow of flowers  
 and weeds, where each make believe  
 image was the same as its living one,  
 but crisper, more awake, everyone  
 a tool of its fortune, to be eaten  
 or ignored, to be the unknown  
 lover, moving toward it, adequately.

## landlocked

She says she wants to go  
 sailing. It is a fine  
 day for it, the breeze bending  
 the thin-limbed ashes and stirring  
 in the larger oaks a liveliness like  
 thousands of fingers at play  
 on the instrument of pleasure.

That there is no body  
 of water sufficient to sustain  
 even the smallest craft  
 would not signify if to sail  
 meant to move over sun-cracked macadam  
 as if indifferent to need, as if borne not  
 on thin-soled rubber shoes but on the air

she might rather use to travel  
 than to breathe. But she means  
 to sail. If the trees were growing wild  
 deep in a wood in which she had found  
 herself on a whim, or had been planted  
 by her hand or that of a forebear,  
 this wish to be on water  
 might not beset her so.

Often it is that way: the wish  
 grows where it will not  
 long survive—how you loved  
 a girl when she was still a girl  
 and could not love but as a girl,  
 how a woman who tells you  
 she wants to go sailing is not



that girl grown, and perhaps  
is not any other, but simply is,  
and you must allow her that but do not  
know how, never having learned  
not to see all of the man-made  
boundaries, the blocks of roads  
of neighborhoods of cities, the ways  
we rein in everything wild  
of ourselves and tell the others  
that we alone are how to be.

**The Punch line**

*after Kim Addonizio's, "Ha."*

A man walks into a bar,  
but this is not a joke. I'm with him,

drunk, and we've come so he can buy  
me another, maybe to kiss me

or get me to bed. I'm in love,  
concentrating hard on what

he's saying, so I don't say it  
first, but he doesn't say it either.

Marriage is a three ring  
circus: engagement ring,  
wedding ring, suffering.

He laughs and next asks  
if I've heard the one about

the priest who drinks his Guinness  
with the hand that holds

his rosary. When we leave,  
it's snowing, and we're the two

losers on the corner asking  
why our affair was doomed to be

short-lived. Not that either of us  
knows we're in it, even then.

## Theresa Marten

### Pages

Dusty yellowed shelves hold novels fox-  
ing on old paper. Imagination casted out like a drift-  
net. Cultures of Kerouac, Warhol, Rock  
N' Roll and Wars are reborn. Readers sift

through what or who is wrong—well aware  
winners write history. Parallels of past like an emerald  
cut. Red victories stain time and declare  
independence. Fireworks unravel in blue and marigold.

Still, the present shows past mistakes' rust—  
learning and growing to protect the cradle  
of traditions—Thanksgiving dinners and must-  
have Christmas gifts. Hidden, reading by phlox candle

light, for “Bedtime is nine o'clock in this house.”  
Stories magnetize my compass needle, recalibrating south.

### Coda

You won't see your name here,  
won't read details about what

we shared. It wasn't you I loved,  
just your hands. Your right hand

to be exact, and really just  
the fingertips. The way you

held down fretted notes  
vibrating strings, sent me

to Elysium. Soft pads teasing  
tremolos, feather-strumming

adagissamo. I miss interpreted  
improvisations dolente. I don't

remember your face fermata,  
simply a single nocturne.

## Molly McCormack

**She. Artichoke**

1598

Buttoned up to the top of her neck,  
The 16th century woman reaches  
for the artichoke. At the supper table,  
her uncle slaps her hand away.  
“Artichokes are not for the ladies,”  
he warns her. Now she is certain  
she will faint. Flushed in her heavy dress,  
she falls to the floor and rolls over to her mother,  
who whispers that the artichoke is an aphrodisiac,  
inappropriate for women. They bow their heads  
back into their slight pieces of stale bread.

1947

Norma Jean flashes her big red smile  
and waves to the crowd on Main Street.  
Every eye in Castroville, California drinks  
up her strapless blue chiffon dress,  
tight around her waist and short  
enough to reveal her shapely legs.  
Her blonde hair blends into the sunny sky  
that surrounds her daisy-covered float.  
The parade ends at the Kiwanis Club parking lot  
where newspaper reporters swarm like flies  
around Norma Jean, where the mayor declares  
her Castroville’s First Artichoke Queen.  
He beams with pride and crowns her head  
with a handmade floral crown. In 1947,  
the Artichoke Capital of the World feeds  
Marilyn Monroe sautéed artichokes  
sprinkled liberally with sugar.

2012

Featured in *Food Fashion*, models  
pose wearing edible outfits.  
A blonde adorns a *Cream Puff*  
*Wedding ensemble*. Rows of airy pastry  
dangle from her, stacked in triangular form.  
She is a statue of dessert.  
She is her own wedding cake,  
ready for her groom to consume her.  
Another wears the *German Chocolate Bubble Dress*  
designed with perfectly molded chocolate that clings  
to the model’s body, billows out  
at her hips, suggests creamy delight  
underneath her chocolaty skirt.  
The model in the *Elegant Artichoke Heart Gown*  
is covered with pointed artichokes.  
She looks dangerous, like a porcupine, or  
protected with an armadillo’s armor,  
or as unreachable as a mermaid—  
but the outfit exposes her soft black bra,  
reveals touchable tenderness. The caption says:  
“Artichokes don’t always look good  
on a dinner plate.”

**Whiskey Steps – Notes by a Connoisseur**

Slow  
Always slow  
Pour  
Uncap and let a brown  
barrel child step into  
the glass  
Stop  
Slow  
Spoon a droplet  
of water with a metal finger  
and let it go.  
The drop is a clear-tailed comet  
diving into a muddy lake, only to be  
suspended by its own gravity.  
Five minutes and this rock will whisper  
into a million pieces. These pieces are  
small tadpoles swimming in every direction,  
scything the pool into newly fitted slivers.  
Smell  
Drag  
Pull  
Sinus  
Hold  
Once the water loosens the alcohol, the  
bitter fist will bloom a spiced caramel  
dipped in floral. There  
is a bed of vanilla waiting to be dreamt in it.  
Walk into it.  
Taste  
Slow  
Hold  
Gargle  
Your tongue is church floor. The taste  
buds are devout disciples, and this single  
malt is the first prayer of the night. Push,  
pull, and swirl until the pastor leaves the room.

Swallow  
Hold  
Punch back  
Slow  
Kick  
Hold  
Exhale  
Again



## Darlene Pagan

### Breath

Saturday night and the hours spiral  
like dominoes into a morning covered in

the same patchy fog as my new mother's brain.  
Something's wrong with the baby. Something

in the tight bee swarm cough, the fists  
each time I lay him down. Maybe

it's nothing, like these unsettling  
marine clouds the morning

will burn through. Probably  
it's nothing I hear in the voice

of my grandmother, my mother, the wind  
pushing leaves in the same small circles

in the street. Outside, a deer slinks up  
along the side of the house to chew

tulip bulbs between bars of soap  
a neighbor laid out to ward her off.

She used to come with a fawn  
but now she cocks one cyclopean

eye at me in the window. Her  
other, a singed divot on the side

of her face, pins me to that gaunt  
room. The baby's lip turns a deep

wormy purple. I whisper a prayer and hold  
my breath as if my breath were all I'd give.

### The Uses of Grief

No one will ask you to house sit or walk the dog  
while they frolic on the shores of Hawai'i—

most likely, they will never even tell you  
they are going. Friends will not resist

when you pull away from a hug but nearly squeeze  
you dry if you initiate. And whether it's for sex

or a carnival ride, no one will try to set  
the mood or coax you into going.

Neighbors will not expect you  
at the annual BBQ, but if you come,

they'll be delighted you didn't trouble yourself  
to cook something, and refill your drinks unasked

even as they count how many you suck down.  
No one will ask to borrow a cup of sugar

or a rake, much less expect you at book club,  
birthday parties, baby showers. People

you hardly know will pray for you,  
and though you have no idea what you believe,

when you growl about asking God to do something  
useful, like pulling weeds or laundry, you will

wake to find someone has pulled the weeds.  
Maybe it's only the fear that someone

like your mother will show up to do  
your laundry, but you finally stuff a pile

of clothes into the washer. Then, one day,  
a sorrow greater than yours sends you

to someone else's doorstep with your best lasagna  
and a bottle of whiskey, and you walk right in

because you know she will not protest, not  
when you rummage the cabinets or pour drinks,

not when you reheat the food, or set it down  
in front of her on a cracked orange plate.

### **A Sage Advises How to Firewalk**

First thing in the morning, start  
with a fire rolled out like a blazing  
carpet on the lawn, the spot you might  
put a garden in before summer's out

if you could get your act together.  
When the flames die down to embers,  
use a rake to spread them in a long pit.  
Don't measure or lay string. And if

you must know, the temperature  
of the coals reaches more than  
1200 degrees but that will mean  
little to you when, from ten feet

away, the heat singes your eyelids.  
You do not have to be a swami  
in a loincloth to get from one end  
to the other without toasting your heels.

And while interesting, it does not help  
to know that when two bodies of different  
temperatures meet, the hotter body  
will cool off, and the cooler body

will heat up until they are separated  
or meet at a temperature in between.  
And despite the testimonials, I swear  
you don't even need faith to carry you

safely across. Did you not dive into water  
you couldn't see into? Kiss a first time?  
Drive home after one too many and keep  
the car between the lines? Or swerve

to avoid the drunk? You buried  
a friend. You pulled the child back  
onto the curb. You did not strike back.  
You finally left that dizzy bitch. Despite

the new scar across your chest, you  
pulled that shirt off in broad daylight  
not knowing how he'd react. You said no.  
You said yes. You stayed. You quit.

And here I am now, hands gripping  
your shoulders to tell you, you've got this

**41°48'N 87°35.4'W to 28°21'28"N 80° 41'5"W**  
**(Coordinates for a human)**

A starting point fixes itself, arbitrary,  
but wait long enough and it carves words  
to the bone  
to the memory  
to the boxes you'll carry

Move east to the nearest meridian:  
(but you might be stalling)  
an unrewarded effort,  
smoky, waterless  
farmland—wasted

Create spherical tracks:  
lampblack, soot-filled prints, soles  
of the calloused foot pressed,  
indentation of the skittery shadow,  
a passage of the first, weary anniversary

We who eat myths  
take time to locate a gravity to hold us:  
a south-moon fish-  
camp, an island apart,  
a beach-line road where a dark horse feeds  
under approaching celestial globes

An unnamed event approaches:  
the foot stops shaking  
the story unfolds:  
the gods have left their mountain

## Shae Savoy

### On the Murder of Michelle Tate when we were both 16

kansas hawthorn  
tree of winterhearts  
bared, headless  
he chopped and tossed

her down a well  
fingers dozens  
clustered clutch  
burst the berries

at their flametips  
redstained throatbirds  
we've been forced  
to swallow

remaining trees  
scratch the sky  
wind hollows  
winterscreaming

through the branches  
floodlit plain  
pockmarked root  
sockets empty

where lithelimbed  
saplings once stood

## Maureen Seaton

### Unsolvable

*Hey kids, plug into the faithless  
Maybe they're blinded  
But Bennie makes them ageless  
We shall survive, let us take ourselves along*  
—Elton John & Bernie Taupin, "Bennie and the Jets"

I might be getting your funeral mixed up with Mom's, when an old stalker of Zoe's came to the cemetery and we told him to leave and he did. No drama, although we were prepared, in our grief, to kill him.

Not everything I say from now on will be true, but that is. I can't remember taking you to the cemetery in your green coffin, but I know Zoe wasn't there this time. You'd fucked up once too often, she said,

and off she went. Remember when I asked you if I could sit next to you and you checked out the chair that was occupied by one of your hallucinations? "Well, you COULD," you said, like a prizefighter

who'd been hit in the head too many times but hadn't lost his ability to make a fist. Without an autopsy, the facts are blurred and sloppy, monstrous or *c'est la vie*. Some days this matters. Others,

you're at ease behind the wheel of a yellow Pontiac convertible. Now you sit beside me and say, "Hey, kid." I think it was the end of all music that killed you, the din of departure, that solid wall of sound, dissolving.

**Dune Buggy**

Two French sisters die on South Beach. One is napping, one is reading Proust.

**Bildungsroman**

- Chapter 1: Lucie went off to a dance in Connecticut where she met a boy who could slow it down just right. Lucie was boy-inspired.
- Chapter 2: More! she thought and went on meeting boys of different heights, hues, and dancing abilities, from New York and Connecticut, from Massachusetts and Vermont.
- Chapter 3: Once from Jersey.
- Chapter 4: Boys, she thought: fun but fidgety, graceful but slow on the uptake.
- Chapter 5: Lucie didn't give the two co-eds with rumors flying around their heads like sandflies, who remained nameless except for the name the other girls coughed into their hands, a second glance.
- Chapter 6: Why would I, she thought, appearing in her dancing shoes at the Ship Ahoy, the Barge, the Straw Hat, the Buckboard Inn.
- Chapter 7: She was just seventeen. (You know what I mean.)
- Chapter 8: Her options were as narrow as Scarlett O'Hara's waist, although some form of discontent was already brewing below the belt.
- Chapter 9: Thought Lucie: It will be years before I begin my search for meaningful existence within an unbending society.
- Chapter 10: What a long, arduous, and gradual journey! (She almost thought.)
- Chapter 11: Then she kissed the girl who had traveled all the way from Brooklyn to take her for a ride on her motorcycle.
- Chapter 12: The dim values of the social order failed to manifest in Lucie and she stood unaccommodated into such a silly, prehistoric, gender-bland society.
- Chapter 13: The Beginning.

## Diana Smith Bolton



### A President Says Goodbye to Air Force One

You, I might miss the most, with your abalone  
hulls and coffee pot. Briefing in the clouds,  
the pressure-regulating earplugs twist *diplomacy*  
into feathers and precipitation. In you, my spouse

shone; my shadow did not play across her hair  
when we ascended together. Cabin pressure  
thinned terrestrial pressures; the recycled air  
swam in my lungs. Earth, here, had no tether,

nothing stronger than the unfelt cresting  
of the jet stream. The blue beyond white befriends  
all within curved walls, behind curved desk,  
flying a curving trajectory. But now I descend,

a drooping duck, back to the mud and mundanity.  
In dreams, I no longer fall, but fly.

## Clint Smith



### Of Restlessness

Say “it’s something that goes away.” Say “you can’t explain fire.” I can’t draw a flat line,  
or sketch the dead outside of their habitat. Say “don’t think of trains as a way of escape.”  
The taken away is evocative. Cast about: something to do. Something to say, eat, smoke.  
Perhaps a variety of wasting disease in repose, yet the mind still putting children and  
roundabouts in dreams. Something eating away at the trunk. Don’t have to feel that there  
should be a destination. Casting out: tendrils, netting, a needle. Doesn’t find anything. Say  
“you leave your house, and don’t know where to go.” Wandering into I’m not sure it’s a  
place. It could be advertising, a drink, a color. Returning home, not fearing travel, what is  
close to the meetings of the walls, end of the room, purpose.

## Crystal Stone



### Ketoacidosis

With trash hammer-sloshed across the floor,  
the house burps stale people-breath  
where there are no husband tears, moans—  
young eyes look look away.

The house burps stale people-breath  
while the officer's radio buzzes.  
Young eyes look look away—  
virgin-unvirgin body in yellow-rum sheets.

While she buzzed, the officer radios.  
The husband watched silently, skin as mead—  
virgin-unvirgin body in yellow-rum sheets.  
Will he sound-sleep in their bed?

The mead watched silently, husband just skin;  
officers collect bottles, evidence—wondering,  
will he sound-sleep in their bed?  
Second wife now gone, lying in her waste.

Officers collect bottles, evidence. I wonder:  
where are the husband tears, moans—  
second wife now gone, lying in her waste  
with trash hammer-sloshed across the floor?

### Writing around the Self

There's a picture on the wall:  
a woman whose breast almost exposed  
winks a sure glance at a man behind her.  
He looks like he's going to kiss her.

The walls are green, though. The draft  
sighs, as if he knows it—knows the ending.  
But there is no ending or resolution,  
just the objects of an in-use room:

the unemptied can of white trash.  
A hamper of dirty laundry. Creased  
pillows. A ticking clock on a wooden desk.  
Outside the window, the base of the beech

tree looks like an elephant foot, stepping  
unbalanced—like the picture-woman and  
from the corner, a cello watches silently,  
brown-nosing, strings long out of tune.

NG  
I  
N  
E  
P  
O

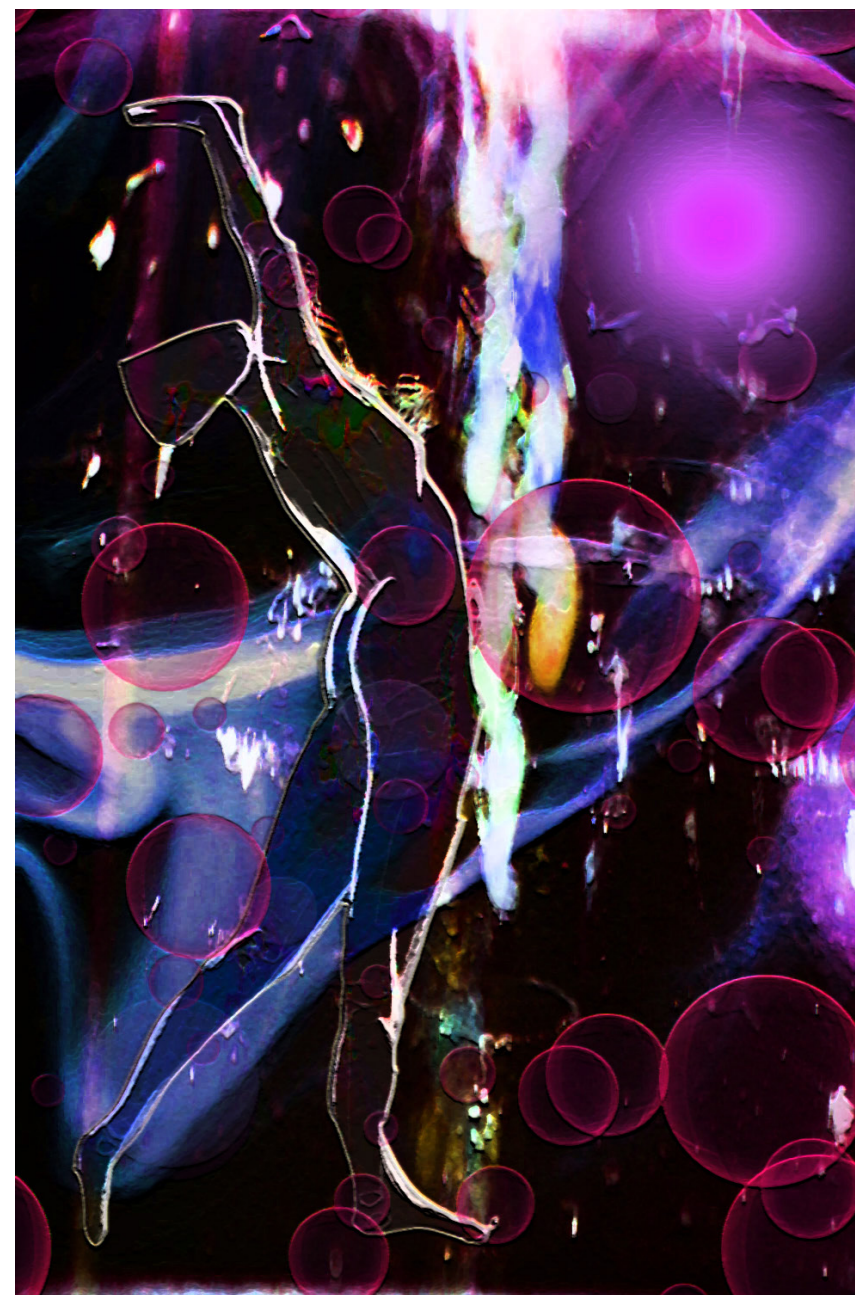
This flat piece  
of unfinished  
mahogany  
holds stories.  
There's a hole  
drilled on one  
end, where scratches  
cross the grain, which  
makes me think it once  
hung from a nail on a wall.  
Written in red ink on one face,  
the words *Hue, Vietnam, 10-1-2001*,  
and on the other side, *Lac Thien*, the  
name of the restaurant where my daughter  
Lyndsay and I sat and watched the owner open  
our soda and beer with flair. He placed the bolt-  
end of the wood tool over the bottle-cap, so the  
bolt's head hooked under the cap's edge and the  
length of the wood sloped downward. Then he  
gripped the bottle with his left hand and swung  
his right arm in a grand circle striking the free end  
of the mahogany with his up-swinging hand, send-  
ing the spinning tool high above his head as the  
bottle-cap chattered across the floor. He caught  
the bottle-opener with a swipe on its way down.  
I was so thrilled I clapped and asked if I could  
see the opener and how it worked (using sign  
language, since he was deaf.) After he showed  
me, he took out his red pen and wrote on the  
wood with a deft hand that was missing the  
end of its third finger. His young daughter,  
who was waiting on us, stood by the table  
watching, and in the pause after his gift,  
I took the thin gold hoop from my left  
ear and gave it to her. Her face, then  
the whole room, opened and fizzed.



## Art

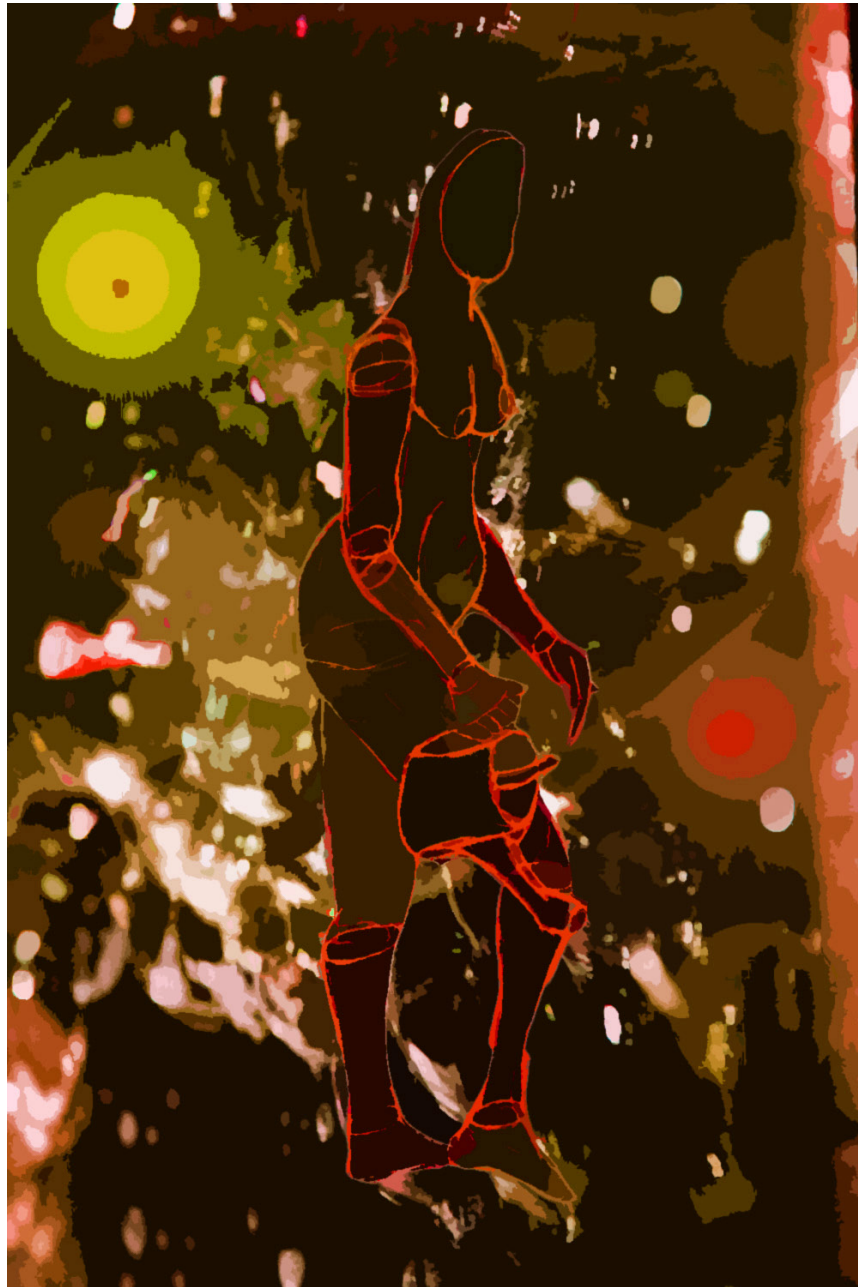


**Amethyst Falls**





**Garden Glow**



**Eyes Wide**





**felinity**



**Elba in Blue**





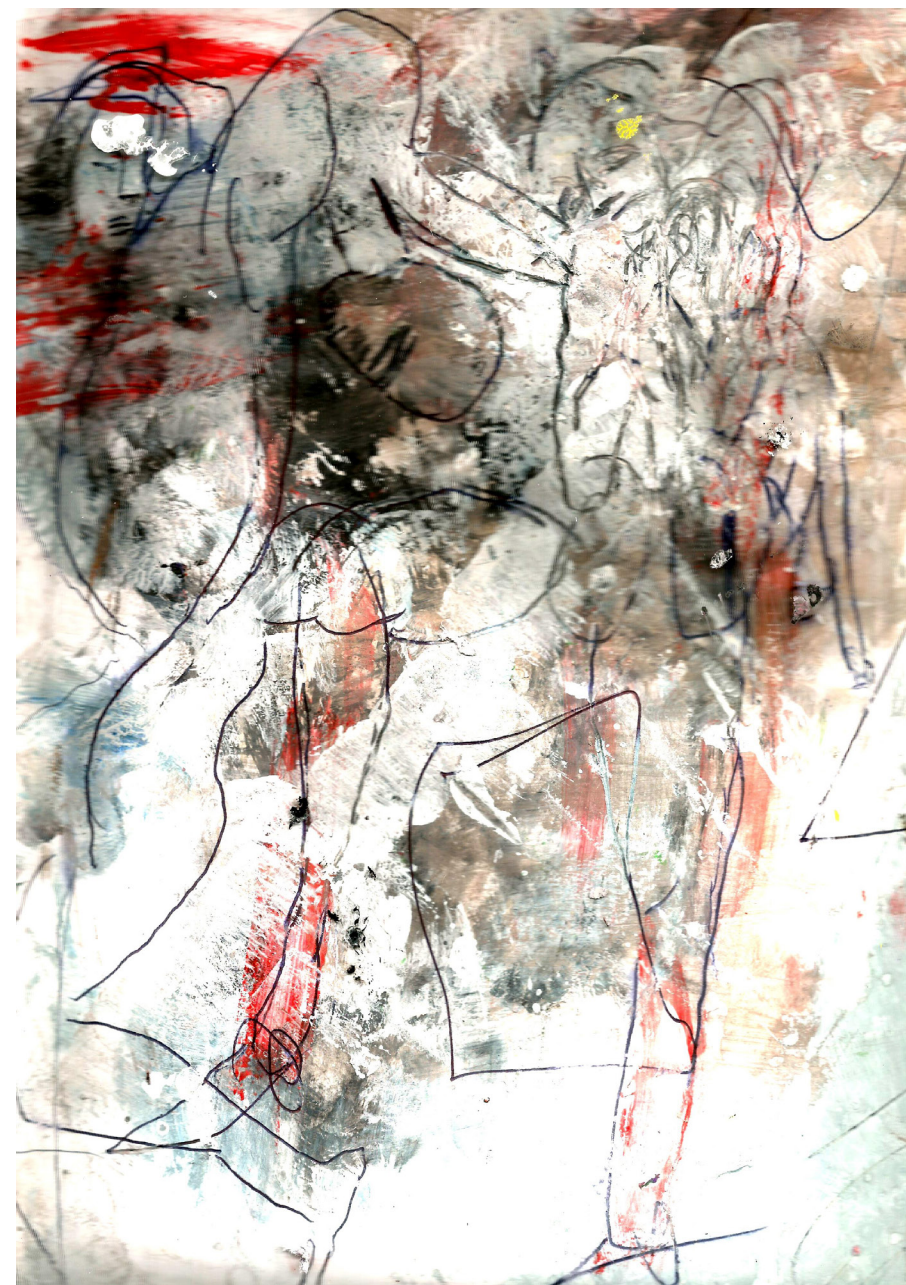
**Dr. Ernest Williamson III**

---

**But I Can't Dance**



**Everybody in the Dark**





**Strong Together**



**Haunted**





**On Edge**



## **fiction**







## **Trading Up**

Sometimes Sienna stood naked in front of the window that faced the empty lot. It made her feel liberated and bold, different from the everyday dirge of her ten years married to Gleason. Before he left, she never could have done anything so daring, so unconventional. Some shred of the satisfaction would have showed on her face and he would've called her on it, accused her of stealing his mad money or cheating with the mailman—a ridiculous threat since the poor mailman had such bad arthritis he could barely stretch from the front seat of his left-handed car to the mailbox. As if Gleason had ever made enough from the hardware store to have money left over for whims.

Cooler air filtered in through the open window and made her nipples tingle. She felt young again, though thirty-one was hardly old. Gracefully she swung her arms in great loopy circles as if she were exercising, in case anyone was actually looking, improbable with the state of the neighborhood. The lot across the street had been empty as long as she and Gleason had been living in the little brick ranch, as long as they had been play-acting at being married. Ten anniversaries, ten birthdays, ten Christmases, ten Fourth of Julys, all with Gleason parsing out a dollar at a time for curtain fabric or an azalea or gasoline for the mower. The place had never looked so good when he'd been around. And the shame of it was it could have, if only he'd let her get a job, be someone besides his wife. The waste of those ten years was her own personal tragedy.

Dancing here by herself wasn't exactly showing off. Still it made her smile. Any minute someone could look up and see her, bare-chested, knees kicking up above a dark blur of pubic hair. It made her feel as if she were thumbing her nose at Gleason wherever he was. Chicken-hearted worm. After ten years of rules and provisos and promises, he'd left her with the mortgage payment and the electric bill and a car that only worked half the time.

She'd had to take not one but two jobs, waitressing on weekends when she'd vowed never again once she had her degree. But the money was good and next spring she would refinance, lower the monthly payments, maybe borrow enough against the equity to get a reliable car. No matter what Gleason thought, she was quite capable of making plans and sticking to them.

Every day now when she rode the bus to the library where she catalogued new books, she analyzed the faces to see if anyone recognized her as the wild woman from Bedford Terrace who paraded nude. So far there were no furtive examinations or whispered finger pointings.

Without Gleason she did other things she'd never done before. She went to the movies alone and treated herself to the large popcorn with butter. If she felt like walking after dinner, she went without worrying about locking every door and window or doing the dishes first. If the sky was cloudy, she made a point not to take an umbrella. She'd gotten caught in the rain, but it didn't matter. Clothes dried. Hair curled. No one seemed to notice.

And there was no one at home to warn her she'd catch pneumonia or ruin a perfectly good pair of shoes. She actually did ruin one pair. Gleason had given them to her that last Christmas, a huge concession on his part to the whole idea of not buying anything that

wasn't a necessity. Later she realized he must have bought the shoes on sale at the end of the summer season and saved them until December. After they disintegrated from the puddles, throwing them in the trash had made her laugh out loud.

Other women she knew fell apart after their husbands left. Barb Rathbone had been hospitalized for depression. When Carleen Bell showed up at church on Sunday mornings—although it had been more than a year—she wore scotch like perfume. Sienna had to bite her thumb to keep from reminding the other parishioners about glass houses when they edged away from Carleen. It was sad to think neither Barb nor Carleen appreciated themselves enough to see the bright side of being on their own. And tragic that the people around them didn't encourage them to think otherwise.

Only one person had asked her about Gleason. She'd stared right back at Pastor Waltham's wife and explained how Gleason was like a used car, cheap and unreliable, and it had been time to trade him in.

"You traded him in for what?" Rita Miller had interrupted while Mrs. Waltham's jaw was still falling. "I don't see any new fellow sitting in your pew."

Sienna had grinned. "For me. I traded him in for me. I didn't want to take a chance on another clunker." She watched Rita blink. "Plus, I like to walk. Always have."

"And the city has such good public transportation," Polly Waltham said, patting Rita's hand, not Sienna's. Sienna liked Polly more in that instant than she ever had.

Of course Rita clutched her own husband's arm whenever Sienna was close. As if any single woman would want what Rita had. It meant an immediate withdrawal to the ladies room to save Sienna from embarrassing them all. She didn't want to hurt Rita's feelings, but Barr, Rita's husband, was as wide as a dumpster and almost as smelly.

Still Sienna conceded—only to herself—that she missed having someone to share her umbrella or to go out for ice cream. Some nights she lay on top of the bedspread, afraid to be alone in the cold sheets, and tried to remember their early life together. Had Gleason ever kissed her cheek as he left for work? Rested a hand on her shoulder while she chopped and stirred? She devoured movies about romance, analyzed the small ways lovers on the screen or in books communicated to each other. But when she tried to dredge up some part of those messages in her own married life, nothing came to her.

While Gleason had not enjoyed her craving for impromptu celebrations, he hadn't always refused point blank. It was the pall of gloom he cast on every occasion that gave her the sense of liberation she was relishing. For now it was enough.

She noticed the shoes, polished to a shine, before she realized the fellow in the library foyer was waiting to speak with her. She kept her voice low out of courtesy for the other patrons.

"Can I help you?" she asked in her most professional voice.

"I'm having trouble finding Carson."

"The essayist or the cowboy?"

"The one who writes about how to find happiness."

When she tilted her head, she noticed his overcoat had real brass buttons.

He bent his head to follow her eyes. "Rebecca, I think it is. Rebecca Carson?"

"Ah-hah. Rachel. Non-fiction, basement level, fourth row on your right, just beyond the water fountain." She returned to alphabetizing the books on the re-shelving cart.

"You're not going to show me?"

"Oh, well." Sienna stood. "Sure, I can show you."

Without speaking he followed her to the stairs and descended behind her. His expensive leather-soled shoes slapped against the metal steps in neat punctuation to her own practical rubber soles. They turned the corner in perfect symmetry like parade marchers, except that when she stopped at the water fountain, he pulled up so abruptly to avoid running into her that he had to grab the shelving to steady himself. She could smell the mint on his breath. Still, he didn't speak.

"It's right down here," she said, "Self-help."

"With Richard Simmons and *I'm Okay, You're Okay*?"

Sienna shrugged, allowing the humor to show in her smile, not unkindly. The stranger smiled too, but he didn't move forward or examine the shelf of 'C's' to find his book. He stared at her.

She pointed to the shelf. "Carson wasn't exactly a prolific writer. Which one were you looking for?"

This part is what Sienna later had difficulty recalling in the correct order. She told the police he opened his coat, one neatly manicured hand on each side, his watch glittered, and his bare skin shone slick and pale in the library's antiseptic fluorescence. But later, alone in her living room, when she relived the moment without being bombarded with questions—for time suddenly had ground to slow motion—she thought he must have unbuttoned the coat first while she, unsuspecting and eager to serve, scanned the shelves.

His body was rugged, handsome with its ebony curls of chest hair and the muscles of his abdomen straining. She stared in fascination. His face lost its puzzlement, as if the revelation of his bare skin explained everything that came before so that no further explanation was necessary. When she didn't scream, the color drained from his face as if he were the one who was surprised to find himself standing exposed before her. She explained it just that way to the officers.

"He was angry?" The first policeman on the scene had asked as he derailed her recitation with pointed official questions. He'd strong-armed her into the head librarian's office after arriving with enough lights and sirens for a bank robbery.

"No." She recalled the stranger's face, the first cautious smile, the droop of his shoulders. "I'd say disappointed. Like when you are expecting someone to get off the train and they don't. You look around with a fixed expression, pretending to smile, but your shoulders fall and you keep looking back where you expected the person to be. The person that was supposed to meet you there."

The policeman who was her father's age hadn't understood. "What person? He had an accomplice?"

"Don't be ridiculous. If he had any friends, he wouldn't be exposing himself now, would he?"

"Did he touch you?"

She shook her head, unable to shake the image of the man's eyes welling with tears when she had laughed. She hadn't meant to laugh, but the whole idea of his choosing someone who routinely paraded nude in front of open windows struck her funny bone. If she'd known how miserable he was, she never would have laughed.

Her memory was fuzzy on what happened next. "I touched him."

The policeman's turn to stare. "You sure he didn't reach for you first?"

"No. I mean, yes, I'm sure."

A second set of revolving lights spun wildly outside the library window and the circle

of faces, staff and library visitors, thickened on the other side of the glass office partition. The older officer was joined by two young ones in pressed uniforms.

“Any offensive touching is chargeable as a battery.” The senior deputy announced in an advisory tone, much like Gleason’s lectures on how to microwave leftovers to avoid overcooking.

“I didn’t mean to offend. He was crying. I . . . I’d made him cry. I felt terrible.” She worked at tucking her shirt back into her slacks to avoid their eyes.

“He broke the law,” the first officer said.

She didn’t know how to explain the wash of emotions that crashed against the carefully constructed devil-may-care attitude she’d curried since Gleason’s disappearance. In spite of the intensive scrutiny of the three officers and her conviction they considered her an unreliable witness, she was having trouble fighting back the tears.

One of the younger officers moved closer and spoke softly, his handkerchief extended. “Where, ah, exactly, did you touch him?”

Her head jerked up from where she had been analyzing her shoes to keep from letting the men see her cry. “Where?”

“You said you touched him?”

“On his shoulder. To let him know I understood how he felt.”

Their eyes burned into her skull.

“He was so sad. So lost . . .” Her voice trailed off into the chasm between what had happened and what they were making of it.

“You’ll need to come to the station and make a formal complaint.”

“Is that necessary?”

“The next girl might be thirteen.”

“How can you be so sure he’ll do it again?”

“These kind of people are sick. They can’t stop themselves.”

Sienna thought of the open window at home, the cool dampness that crept through the screen from outside and settled on her bare skin, the glow beyond the empty lot where the neighbor’s curtained lights reassured her she was invisible to them. Maybe it was an illness to yearn for more than you had.

She wished again that the stranger had just asked her to have a cup of coffee with him in the break room. They could have talked about Carson, about turning science into philosophy, the ocean, the future. There would have been no harm even in her inviting him. A simple courtesy. Two people talking in a public place.

What was there about her in particular that had encouraged him to step outside propriety and risk ridicule? Or worse, arrest.

The officers, pens and pads at the ready, shifted their feet, looked up at her and away. Her hesitation must have confused them. She weighed their possible reactions if she refused to cooperate. “If I won’t go?”

Three brows knotted. Three sets of eyes focused on her own.

“Without a written complaint, we can’t proceed. Plus he’s on the loose. And dangerous. You’d be partly responsible if he hurts someone.”

“If he wanted to hurt someone, he would’ve hurt me.”

“That’s not really your call, missy,” the older policeman said. “Some girl’s mother might feel otherwise if we find her daughter in the bushes.”

The three men in their steel gray uniforms blockaded the door, all but tapping their boots, insistent that she concede. Angry at their obvious bias, she faced them squarely.

“You didn’t see his face.”

The officer closest to her hit the doorframe with his fist. His muttered words of disgust that silted into the whispered conference between the other two. Heads together, their shoulders leaned away from where she stood her ground.

The youngest deputy handed her a card. “If you change your mind.”

The touching part came back to her in the middle of dinner. She was sitting on the sofa, eating couscous from one of the bins at the health food store by the metro station. She wished she’d thought to buy snap peas to add to it and maybe a bottle of wine. In the empty room she stretched out her hand and rested it gently on an invisible shoulder. The bones rose up ever so slightly at her touch as his had in the library basement.

Perhaps it had not been the wrong thing to do. Somewhere out there was a naked man, wandering about in an expensive overcoat, wishing someone would talk to him, aching for someone to love him. Or maybe just to see him, all of him.

Outside the wind had come up, typical early March. It hummed through the irregular gaps between windows and sills, a mournful kind of bass line in a third movement, the barest hint of a spectacular crescendo. Otherwise the neighborhood was silent, asleep. Heavy clouds hugged the rooflines of the next block. Sky and earth coalesced, purple to black in the moonless night. Standing in front of the window Sienna slipped off her shoes, peeled off the suit jacket, stripped out of her blouse and skirt, underwear and stockings, and let the clothes sink into a pile at her feet. Bare feet on polished wood, she stepped forward and lifted the window to let in the night.

**Crack of the fruit**

Candace pulls the charcoal and his hip appears. In three short lines he has a knee. She drops the charcoal on the easel's ledge and brushes her fingers on her pants. She has black smudges all over her clothes, remnants of these three hours, proof that she is here. Her teacher calls time and Jason's shoulders push toward his ears then roll back, his arms stretching behind his head. Candace wants to believe she is the only one who knows his name. Jason. Jason Jason Jason. She says his name as she draws him, his figure coming to life.

A year ago Candace was trapped in a mall bathroom, her body held prisoner by the narrow stall. She hasn't been to a movie since she was fifteen. She is fat. Specialty-store-shoes fat. What the doctors label as morbidly obese. But here, in this class, all of that disappears—the over-cooked gnocchi she consumed for dinner, the cream-filled doughnuts she ate in her car. All the way back to the butter and brown sugar bread she snuck as a child, the rice cereal her mother fed her as a baby. Gone. The foods disappear when she is drawing, as she connects to the canvas, as she connects to Jason, the man she draws.

Between twenty-minute poses Jason stands by the building's entrance and smoke two cigarettes, a piece of fruit in his hand. He alternates inhalations and bites wearing a plaid flannel bathrobe. The first night of class she went outside while the others headed to the basement vending machines. "Hey," he'd said to her and she stopped, startled, then said "hey" back. Over the weeks they have moved onto conversations about Candace's other courses which she has stopped attending—she doesn't have time, her whole life contained in this three-hour class—and Jason's job as a semi-pro golfer at a community course. He is a headless body on her easel now, and after break she will begin his face, the hollow of his eyes the most difficult part.

A girl walks by and smiles at Jason under the edge of her hair. She glances at Candace, her eyebrows pulling together, then quickens her pace. Jason scuffs an untied Chuck Taylor against the cement and exhales. "I wish people would stop staring," Jason says. "I'm on break." He looks at her knowingly. "People are so rude."

The comment is like a stab and Candace understands what she thinks has connected them, the drawing, isn't the connection at all, but the opposite: their physical bodies in the world. His thin perfect wrists jutting from the cuffs of his robe, her fingers dimpled like a baby's.

He bites into the pear and she can tell from the crunch it's out of season, not yet ripe. She hears the crack of the fruit as he takes the bite in his mouth, but for all her memory and all the food, she can't recall what a pear tastes like.

**Jellyfish**

Impossibly, Manning and his mother were having the same dream.

"The funniest thing," she said, "last night I dreamed that all anyone had to do was put their hands over their ears, bend their knees, and with a little push, float up into the air. It was marvelous."

Manning felt the hairs on his arm stand up.

His mother spoke while rearranging two needlepoint pillows so that the one that had been in front was now behind. "The only thing was that while everyone's head looked perfectly normal, mine felt as if it was huge, like," she paused, staring at the pillows.

"Like a pumpkin?" Manning asked.

"Yes, like a big pumpkin, a carving pumpkin."

Manning didn't tell his mother that he'd had the same dream. He told his sister.

"That is so typical," Alice said, embroidering furiously. "Of course Mom would be dreaming about you."

"She wasn't dreaming about me, we had the same dream."

"Well, she's never had the same dream as me," Alice said.

"She didn't mention the shoes," Manning said, "so maybe it wasn't exactly the same."

"What about the shoes?"

"It felt as if I was wearing heavy shoes, like the hooves of a cartoon cow. I couldn't see them. It's hard to move your head." He spoke more to himself now. "I think you need to keep your hands on your ears."

"What happens if you don't?" Alice asked.

It turned out if you took your hands off your ears, you floated up. If you looked down at your feet, which appeared to be perfectly normal, despite the weighty feeling, you fell. Manning discovered this tumbling down and out of sleep one morning.

He limped into the kitchen. His mother said, "I had that dream again."

"What dream?" Manning's father appeared in the kitchen, his bathrobe belt trailing behind him.

"Mom flies around with a pumpkin head." Alice said. "He does too." She jerked her thimbled thumb at Manning.

"You do?" Manning's mother said. "I've never seen you there."

"There are other people there?" Alice was beside herself. "Who else is there?"

"Oh, I don't know. Everyone seems occupied with whatever they're doing. I don't want to interrupt."

"What are they doing?" Alice appeared as if her own head might grow larger. It was at the very least, changing color.

"I've had lots of flying dreams," Manning's father said, "strange bicycle contraptions



with wings, great fun.”

Manning and his mother looked at each other. Whatever he was talking about they both knew that Manning’s father was not experiencing what they were experiencing. There were no machines; everyone was self-propelled through the vast, lavender space.

Manning recognized some of the other people floating there; a life guard from the pool, a substitute teacher he’d had in fifth grade. No one spoke to anyone else. He tried acknowledging people as they passed, but everyone seemed, as his mother had said, occupied in something.

He saw a friend of his mother’s, Nora Wooley. She smiled pleasantly as they passed each other but didn’t seem to see him. He began to wonder about his mother.

He asked her, “Do you see people you know?”

“Oh yes,” she said, scraping carrot skins into the sink. “Remember Doctor Lieberman? You had that odd rash. And that heavy-set man that sat in the back row at church.”

“Have you ever seen me?”

She apologized, “No darling, I never have.”

And this began to bother Manning. Why hadn’t his mother seen him?

Alice squinted as she threaded a needle. “Well do you see her?”

“I saw Nora Wooley.”

“What? What was she doing?” And then before he could respond, Alice added, “Oh my God, that is hysterical. You know,” she said point her needle at him, “I’m beginning to think you are experiencing a shared psychosis.”

Manning felt reasonably sure it was not psychosis. The more nights he floated, the more people appeared. Some nights it was almost impossible to move in any way but in unison with everyone else. People were vaguely familiar but he never saw anyone he really knew. He began to wonder how he looked to other floaters. Was his face as placid, as serene as theirs, or did it look how he felt, increasingly panicked, claustrophobic?

“It’s like this,” Manning’s mother was showing Alice a photograph from a magazine. The caption read, *A Smack of Jellyfish in the Pacific*.

“A smack?” Alice asked.

“That’s what they’re called, a smack of jellyfish,” Manning’s mother said. “You know, like a gaggle of geese, a mischief of mice.”

“But a smack?” Alice said. “A slime would be better, a slime of jellyfish. Ooh, they give me the heebie-jeebies.”

The creatures pictured were a gelatinous mass of pink and purple tentacles dangling. It was obvious to Manning that none of them were thinking about anything. He became mildly nauseous wondering if somewhere in that smack was a jellyfish like himself, striving to connect in some meaningful way with other jellyfish. He investigated the

picture closely imagining that he might find one jellyfish staring at the photographer. “Do they have eyes?” He asked.

“Jellyfish do not have eyes; they have ocelli, or eye pits,” said Manning’s father. He read from the magazine article while scratching his head. “No eyes and no brain,” he added.

Manning decided to confide in his friend Arby as they sat in a fast food restaurant eating spicy chicken fingers. Arby was philosophical. “Dude, it’s like when I found my dad’s porn.”

“No it’s not. How is it like that?”

“That time my dad got fired? He didn’t want to go back because of what he’d said and shit. He sent me to clean out his locker and there were magazines with pictures of Asian chicks. And first I was like, whoa, and then I was like, dude!”

“How is that like my dream?”

“You and your mom are the same. You have the same hobby or whatnot.”

“It’s not a hobby and I don’t have a choice.”

Arby shook his head, “Dude, who does?”

Manning poked some fries into a glob of red, gelatinous ketchup but then left them there.

Maybe he did have a choice. He tried staying awake but failed. He took cold medicine in an effort to knock himself beyond dreaming but that didn’t work.

One night when the group swooshed pleasantly up or around, he tried to move in the other direction which sometimes meant just not moving at all. It required great concentration but his efforts began to have some effect. If he removed his hands from his ears, then looked at his feet, then replaced his hands quickly he shifted in a herky jerky way.

He was in the kitchen with a slice of orange in his mouth when he felt his mother standing in the doorway staring at him. Alice sat at the table sorting embroidery threads.

“Something very strange,” his mother said.

“What,” said Alice, “what?”

“Your brother,” Manning’s mother said. “Your brother is up to something.”

Manning grinned an orange rind grin.

That night he again was effective in not moving with the group and for the first time he heard a sound in the silent, velvet world. A voice called, “Stop it, stop it, stop it.”

He kept going, away from the group, away into something else.

## The Green Frog Publishing Company

"If that frog's DNA would mix with mine, I'd do him," I say. After two and a half hours of spilling my guts to my interviewee I decide to tell her about my obsession with Kermit. Brag about the letter I got from his creator over thirty years ago when I wrote and begged him for an unpaid internship on the Muppet movie he was making and the only reason I didn't get the job was they were filming in Canada and he couldn't take on any more Americans. I framed that letter and it hangs over my desk and reminds me of my unfulfilled fantasies. When I close my eyes at night, I can feel Kermit's mound of felt against my nether parts and it is a warm, satisfying experience.

I know every Muppet movie better than I know my own son. When Henson died, I mourned for seven months and wore my black Animal shirt to stiffened shreds. I had to leave the movie theater when the next movie came out and Henson's son had done Kermit's voice. He just didn't get it right and I couldn't handle it. Finally they hired the guy who does Rizzo the Rat and he nailed it. My Kermie was back.

I tell the job candidate all this and she stares back with a blank look. So I think maybe this is the time to give her the offer. I want her to join my army (that's what I call my employees) at the Green Frog Publishing Company as an editor. It is a phenomenal opportunity. My publishing company is bursting at the seams. I have authors from all over the world willing to pay me 1,000 dollars to get their book published, but I do have my standards.

She passed the on-the-spot editing test. I shoved a red pen into her hand and told her to read a ten-page story and line edit. She passed when she told me there were too many grammatical mistakes to mark them all but I didn't like it when she questioned how the glass of the lighthouse's lantern room could be smashed by a broken off in-a-storm tree limb, something about lighthouses being significantly taller than trees. Then she had the nerve to question the phenomenal ending. The keeper re-lights the lantern with a small mason jar of fireflies and the Great Lakes ship does not crash into the coast. She didn't think an *entire* jar of fireflies could give off enough light for a ship to see in the midst of a raging storm and I chastised her for not honoring the author's vision. That story is already published, I said. I like it, I said.

Speaking of artistic visions, I said and I gave a lengthy synopsis of every single book I've ever written (five now) and self-published plus my three works-in-progress. One of which is a dystopian science fiction novel that I didn't want her to label dystopian, because there are a lot of those now. See, I can't decide which kind of writer I want to be so I write it all – memoir, science fiction, romance, poetry. I'm not really sure what she's writing, there wasn't enough time. Literary mumbo jumbo of some sort, you know, the hoity-toity kind where nothing ever happens and no one ever gets laid.

Once I tried to go to a literary writer's group and everyone disparaged writers with MFAs. I made sure to tell her this. See, she just got her MFA from some school on the East Coast, I can't remember which, and I want to get my MFA too and while she tried to tell me about her school I interrupted because I like all my schools to be online and hers isn't. That's how I finally got my bachelor's degree – online. I think all schools should be online

but she said that online doesn't work for everyone. I guess she might be right about that, but anyway, getting back to me. If she's going to be a Green Frog tadpole she needs to know about *me*.

I already know she *can* write. She sent me some samples and I was so nervous meeting her that I told her right away about all the times my ex-husband moved when he went to the University of Michigan. Every semester he would move to another apartment. I think she went to Michigan too, but I can't remember. She's a literary writer but she needs to know that I am a writer with a far more promising future. I started a publishing company and published all my own books. She was kind enough to tell me that Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard did the same thing, but I had no idea who she was talking about. Probably some literary writer with an MFA from an East Coast school who didn't do online.

I think she's very much hoping for a job, something about student loan payments due soon. I even ask if she thinks I can break into the literary end of the publishing world and she thinks so yes, but I might need to create a separate division from the self-publishing one. I think she's dissing me, but I can't be sure. So I hand her a copy of our latest literary journal. It is the spring edition so all of the poems, essays and stories have to have spring in them or be about spring. I go on to tell her that fall will have to be about fall and winter about winter and before I get to summer, she tells me she gets it. I ask her to look at it, right then and there, and give me her first impressions. Does she really care about the writers and their artistic voices or is she just obsessed with literary acclaim? That's what I need to know.

She takes a minute and browses through the journal that is thick enough to be an excellent door stop then looks at me and says, "Next time, I'd suggest that in the table of contents, you note whether prose is fiction or non-fiction." This leaves a very bad taste in my mouth, like the taste I had when Henson's son did Kermit's voice but I can't quite put my finger on what it is I don't like about her because she has hardly said a word. I'm getting the sneaking suspicion she's stuck-up, even though she doesn't have a single book published. You know how those literary types are. I mean, she even put it in her cover letter that she writes literary fiction. Woop de doo.

Anyway, I'm excited that she might work for me, so I slide across the table an AGREEEMNT. She pauses for a second, staring at the top of the contract as if she has a bug in her eye, and then she lightly taps "AGREEEMNT" several times with the tip of her finger and just looks at me, again with that strange, blank look.

She reads the five page contract, sits back (it's way past lunch and I'm hungry) and says, "This is an Independent Contractor arrangement?" I nod. It is an excellent offer. I know, I know, I told her I had an editor's position open with my company, but Independent Contractor is the way to go. No payroll taxes. No unemployment insurance. No Obamacare.

I already explained to her that she will edit each manuscript four times. I reminded her that the manuscript must be brought up to my standards before I will publish it. The first two times will be line by line working with the author and she asked if the manuscripts are in the same condition as the lighthouse story and I said, "Yes, of course." And the final two times will be going over galley proofs. She nodded. I thought she fully understood.

She slides the contract back at me. Can you believe it? Three hundred dollars per manuscript beginning to end and she has to think about it!!!



## **Mena's Salvation**

The ten-year-old rested her stubby toes on the cool concrete of her grandmother's basement floor. She sat down on the sofa and poked her fingers through an orange yarn afghan while her grandmother turned the dial on the television.

"Ahh! There it is, Delia! I told you we'd find it! Oh thank you Jesus!" Her grandmother crossed herself and looked up at the drop ceiling. Delia looked up, too, but only saw patchy bronze watermarks from a leaky kitchen faucet in the tile above her grandmother's head.

Delia looked up from her fingers perforating the blanket and gazed at the screen with skeptical curiosity. Her grandmother, Angela Venzetti, was beaming. Televangelism had reached out to its viewership and seized Angela's spiritual imagination when Angela called the prayer line six months prior and won fifty dollars on the daily numbers that same day. Now she turned to the prayer line once more for her oldest daughter's salvation. Working the odds in her head, Angela knew she wouldn't be blessed twice in a year, so she asked her granddaughter Delia to make the call.

Angela knew it was all a part of God's plan that Delia had been staying with her that particular weekend. Little Delia had asked Angela what an atheist was that morning over breakfast. When Angela discovered that her oldest daughter, Mena, was a self-professed atheist with the potential to destroy her granddaughter's soul, Angela turned instant missionary. With a selfless singleness of purpose, she pursued the complicated but gratifying work of both protecting her Delia from further corruption and saving Mena's soul from eternal damnation.

"My GOD, Delia! If you don't take Jesus as your savior, you'll go right into the fiery pits of hell! Forever! Atheists don't believe in God. God will turn His back on her forever if we don't help her right now!"

Angela scurried away to her room and retrieved a small, white, hourglass-shaped trinket. Dust caked its surface and inside it was a small vial with a white cap. She explained, "Here, Delia. I want you to have this. It's holy oil from Jerusalem. You know about Jerusalem, right?" Delia nodded, wide-eyed. "This holy oil has been blessed by the pope, himself, Delia. I bought it mail order all the way from Rome, Italy, and haven't had to use it until now. You take this to your mother some time when she's taking a nap and anoint her on the—"

Delia looked puzzled. "What's a 'noint,' Grandma?"

"Oh, anoint, well, uh, it's when you put something on someone in a holy way. Anyway, take the vial out and put a little on your finger and make the sign of the cross on her forehead while she's sleeping. She'll never let you do it when she's awake. The devil is pulling on her. We're fighting with the devil. We have to do what we can." Angela paused and thought for a moment. Delia continued to munch her chocolate Pop Tart—crust before middle—and sipped her Tang orange-flavored drink.

"You know what else will work, Delia? Finish up eating there and let's go downstairs. We're gonna call the prayer line. They'll know what to do."

Now they sat in the cool basement, grandmother and granddaughter, swept up with

"What is there to think about?" I confront her.

A dark look passes over her face. I've not seen this look before and I don't like it. She says something about how many hours does it take to edit four times a three hundred page manuscript. And I remind her of two things, one - that some of the manuscripts may only be one-hundred forty-nine pages and two - I pay an additional dollar for all pages over three hundred. She raises her eyebrows.

So I throw in the kicker to seal the deal. What I know she's really hoping to hear.

I do a little drum roll on the table. "Plus! I will publish one of your books. At NO cost to you, unless it is a children's book and then the pictures will cost you three hundred dollars. You could be an author with Green Frog Publishing Company. Just like me!"

Her mouth starts twitching at the corners a little and she does this funny thing with her eyes, not squinting really and not the dark look, but like she might be very tired. Her hand trembles as she pulls a tissue out of her purse and wipes her nose.

"I know right, a very exciting offer. I just made it worth the long drive!"

She looks at her watch and says she has to get going, that long drive, and she slides my literary journal back to me and my AGREEEMNT.

"Those are for you to keep," I say but she won't take them back and she can't answer. Overwhelmed probably. "I can get you a Green Frog t-shirt too. Next year, I'm going to have sweatshirts."

The way she shakes her head back and forth, slow and lost makes me feel kinda sad. Whenever I feel like this, I throw a Muppets movie in the DVD player and Kermit makes it all go away.

I try to tell her this but she's already out the door.



notions about Mena's salvation. They were unfaltering crusaders, and Angela's excitement was infectious. Delia was a whirlbird behind a strong breeze, awkwardly spinning but pursuing the tailwind that was her grandmother.

"Delia, you're a child, and your prayer will be stronger. The Bible says, 'And a child shall lead them.' That's you. God can't ignore children. They're His favorite. Now I'll go upstairs and dial the phone while you tell me the numbers. They'll put your call on TV and then everyone will pray for Mena!"

Angela had bought the longest coil of telephone line that the department store had to offer. Her only phone in the house hung from a wall in the kitchen, and the extra cord allowed her to move freely while talking to her sisters or her friends. Sometimes Angela would wrap herself up like a mummy in the cord and then unwrap herself over and over during a phone call. Other times she would get animated over some gossip and twirl that coil like a jump rope or snap it like a lasso. Delia loved watching Angela and the motions of that phone line. She imagined herself a gypsy reading her grandmother's palms through the lines of the cord. She could tell whether her grandmother was lying, elated, or angry just by the way the line sagged or skipped. Angela brought the receiver downstairs on that long, coiled line and Delia held it to her ear while listening to the other prayer requests on the television.

Presently, a man was telling the host about his mother's bout with cancer. The host, a young man in his thirties, intermittently flashed a smile out into the television audience or adopted a more pensive look in response to the caller's story. He wore a crisp, pin-striped suit with gold crucifix cufflinks and a large gold watch. His teeth were holy white, and the sheen of his perfectly coiffed golden hair glowed like a halo under the studio lights. He was assisted by a lovely, blonde and busty supermodel, who alternately nodded and looked sympathetic as the caller told his story. She smiled approvingly at the host whenever he spoke and chimed in with a perfunctory "amen" whenever the host said "God" or "Jesus." Delia could not take her eyes off of the woman's red nails. Delia looked down at her own stubby hands and wondered if they'd ever grow long and slender like the woman's on the television. Her grandmother ruptured her thoughts from the kitchen at the top of the stairs. "Okay, Dee, give me the numbers." Delia called them up to Angela as they appeared on the screen, and she awaited the host on the line with nervous anticipation. Her mother's salvation was a serious endeavor, and she wanted to get the message right.

A man answered after the second ring, "Hello! Jesus Saves Prayer Line! What is your request?" Delia closed her eyes, inhaled through her nose like she'd been taught, and relaxed her shoulders before conversing with the man, who was already impatiently barking, "Hello? Hello?" on the other line.

"Hello. Umm... my mom doesn't believe in God and I was hoping to send out a prayer for you—I mean for her—can you do that? I don't want her to go to hell." She looked up at the television show where she thought the golden host with the cufflinks would answer her prayer, but a used car commercial flashed across the screen. She quickly realized that this was not the man she wanted to talk to, but she stayed on the line.

"Oh, honey, that's terrible. Now how much do you want to pledge?"

"Pledge?"

"Yeah, how much money do you want to send in? You can do ten, twenty or whatever suits your income. I have to tell you, though, for fifty you can get your prayer listed in the Jesus Saves monthly and get a free year's subscription to the magazine. I think that's our best bargain."

Delia stammered. "I... I'm sorry; I think I got the wrong number. I thought this was the prayer line."

"Well it is, but if you want your prayer read on television, you need to make a pledge."

"Why would I do that? Can't I just tell you the prayer?"

"You can, sugar, but if it goes on television, the entire viewing audience will pray for you and you'll get more bang for your buck, see? Is there a grown-up in the house who could help you?"

Delia called up to her grandmother, "Grandma! They want a pledge!"

Angela pushed her finger down on the phone upstairs. Delia heard the click on the line. Quietness suffocated the room for a few moments before her grandmother broke it with "Bring me the phone, Delia." Angela placed the receiver back in its cradle. "Aww to hell with them! We'll figure something else out. A pledge for prayers! From a little girl calling about her mother's salvation! What the hell is wrong with them? They didn't ask for a pledge when I asked for money to make my electric bill six months ago!" The revelation of her last statement hit Angela with the same force as a thurible of frankincense that was once carelessly swung too wide in the church aisle by a novice priest. As when that ball of incense struck her in the face at that midnight mass so many years ago, Angela seethed in silence.

Delia shut the television off and trudged upstairs to the kitchen. She grabbed the talisman of holy oil. Holding it in her hand, she rubbed her thumb over the smooth curves of its bottle for a few moments before slipping it delicately into her overnight bag. Her mother's salvation would have to wait. That was enough praying for one day.



**Nonfiction**



## Delia Ercoli and the Chamber of Paperbacks

I can't tell you what I had for lunch yesterday. This might sound hyperbolic, but I honestly and truly couldn't tell you what I had unless I sat down and thought about it for a bit. With that in mind, I can tell you the first sentence to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, "Mr. and Mrs. Dursley of Number Four Privet Drive were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much," without so much as a reference to my battered copy (though I of course double checked—I wouldn't want to embarrass myself). If you shout my name within twenty feet of me, there's about a 50/50 chance that I'll hear you, yet I can hear someone whisper "Hogwarts" from a mile away (that one was hyperbolic). I love the *Harry Potter* book series for many reasons. It's brought me friendships. It's taught me lessons. But the main reason I love *Harry Potter* is because it got me to fall in love for the first time, and I haven't fallen out yet. I have fallen in love with reading and I believe I have J.K. Rowling to thank.

When I was a child, I was always good with word comprehension and spelling. In kindergarten, I was in a pull-out program because I was reading at an eighth grade level. My instructor jokingly recommended that I read *War and Peace* because I was so adept at reading. I didn't, and haven't yet, but my mom still has that feedback sheet in a box of report cards and school-age memorabilia. Reading has always been the thing that I've been good at, and luckily for me, what I enjoy and what I'm good at overlap. However, my enjoyment of reading really didn't take off until second grade when I was introduced to something that would shape my life for years to come.

It was a dark autumn night in 2001 when I first got my hands on *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. My mother, an avid reader herself, had heard the hype over the series in magazines and newspapers and gave it a read. She then proceeded to force everyone else in my family to read it, leaving me for last. Though it was technically a "children's" book, it was a longer book for a seven year old and she thought it would take me a while. She thought wrong. It took me about four days to get through the 309 page novel and that was only because I had to do silly things like go to school and eat dinner. At the time that I read *Sorcerer's Stone*, the first four installments to the seven-book series had been published. It took me quite a bit longer to get through the remaining three, especially since the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* has 734 pages. I was willing to put in the time and read these books because *Sorcerer's Stone* made me realize that I would get enjoyment as a reward. Beyond enjoyment, I was taught valuable lessons that I keep with me to this day such as, "it does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live," (*Sorcerer's Stone*) and "if you want to know what a man's like take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals," (*Goblet of Fire*). These words have left their mark on me and I don't believe it will ever be erased.

Once I had finished reading the *Harry Potter* series for the first time, I wanted to feel what I felt during my first tour of Hogwarts again from another book. I then began to read anything and everything in sight. I devoured books I liked and books I hated, but there was never a time I enjoyed more than when I had my nose in a book. I prayed for indoor recess. I lived for long car rides. In fact I will now admit—since no retribution can come

from it nearly ten years after the fact—that I completely guessed on the science part of my standardized testing in fifth grade because I had just ended my chapter on a cliffhanger and *had* to know what happened next. Though this probably wasn't the best choice, I had no sense of a bigger picture as a child. Ultimately, though, this reading obsession led me to high English grades and proficiency.

During high school, my literacy went downhill. I stopped reading things that were assigned and rarely read things that weren't, because I was too busy trying to be a cool teenager. I had made new friends who I thought I had to spend all my time socializing with. When I wasn't with my friends, the only things I read were texts and instant messages from them. In distancing myself from really *reading*, I had suspended the existence of a very crucial part of myself. Later, in my first semester of college, reading for pleasure completely disappeared. I was so overwhelmed with courses and adjusting to life away from home that I felt I had no time to flip through a book "just because".

At the end of a long and terrifying first semester away, I came home for winter break to enjoy the holidays with my family. After receiving a Barnes and Noble gift card for Christmas, I used my Nook e-reader to pre-order a book called *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. I had read his previous books and was anxious to read his next novel. Little did I know how much that book would impact me. So I woke up on the morning of January 10th, 2012 and began to read a book that would change my outlook on life. I was so compelled throughout the book that I did not stop at all until I found out how it ended. After I finished the novel (and cried for several minutes) I forced everyone I knew to read it. This was the first time in over ten years that I had been this *obsessed* with a book.

In this book Hazel Grace Lancaster is a sixteen year old living with terminal cancer when she meets Augustus Waters, a teen in remission after an amputation due to osteosarcoma. As you go on the adventure with these two teens, you fall in love with their story and feel the unjustness that's associated with dying young. Yet, Hazel and Augustus teach that, "the world is not a wish-granting factory," "love is keeping the promise anyway," and "pain demands to be felt." These lessons, along with many others, have left me thinking about what it means to be alive and what it means to suffer. Hazel at one point when talking about her favorite book says, "Sometimes you read a book and it fills you with this weird evangelical zeal and you become convinced that the shattered world will never be put back together unless and until all living humans read the book." I believe this sums up my feelings towards this book flawlessly and I hope to help this shattered world by encouraging everyone I can to read this beautiful, riveting book.

Since reading *The Fault in Our Stars*, I have returned to reading on a more-regular basis. Though it is difficult to make time balancing a full schedule of classes and a part-time job, as well as a social life, I make time to enjoy books by turning off my computer and television and reading for at least half an hour a day. I've experienced so many new books because of this, and my list just keeps growing. In the words of author Lemony Snicket, "It is likely I will die next to a pile of things I was meaning to read." I've made it my goal for 2013 to read fifty books and with thirty-seven books completed, I still have a ways to go. I hope to complete my goal, but even if I don't, I know that the time I spend reading will ultimately serve a bigger goal of mine: to share the joys of reading with as many people as possible.

To many people, reading is something that loses its fun after *The Cat in the Hat* and becomes the avenue to understanding bills, bank statements, and office memos. I believe that this is because they haven't found their *Harry Potter* or *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Reading shouldn't be a chore, but when entertainment can come from so many other places, convincing anyone to read in this day and age is a difficult task. What I've learned through my experience with literacy is that when you find the *right* book to open you up to reading, you will find many more books that you'll like along the way. As an educator, I hope to help my students find a book that helps them begin their own literacy journeys. I am not foolish enough to think that every student I teach will be a reader or will be open to the idea of becoming a reader. However, with the variation of styles, narrators, and genres, I hope that at least one student will find the book that makes them fall in love with reading as I did. I also hope that the books I introduce to my students will help them better understand the world around them as both the *Harry Potter* series and *The Fault in Our Stars* did for me.

That, ultimately, is the whole point of reading: to understand how to make the most out of life on this planet. Though it may be hard to convince some, I've found that the experience and knowledge gained through books can be as helpful and formative as those learned through lived life experience. For in the words of Albus Dumbledore, "Of course it is happening inside your head...but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?"

## Memento Mori: A Sketch

*Everything founders in the sea of what might have been. – James Baldwin*

“Bay Woman Slain in Utah.” My cousin Pat was that “bay woman,” reduced to a 1999 headline by a random bullet. She was 55. So was I. Now every October when I mark my birthday, she’s on my mind. I consider the latest number on the ascending scale: here I am at 60, 62, 66. That’s how old Pat would have been too. We were born ten days apart—twins born to different parents, we used to say.

When I was six—when Patty and I were six—my family moved from New York to California, following the westward migration of my father’s parents and his older brother, Pat’s father. We rented a house around the corner from my uncle’s family in San Francisco’s Bernal Heights, and for the next two years Patty and I were inseparable. Kissin’ cousins, they called us. Yin and yang. One dark and the other fair, both of us skinny and toothy, the same awkward limbs, the same mouths and lopsided grins. A boy on a bicycle crashed into me on the sidewalk one day during our first year there, knocking a diagonal chunk off my protruding front tooth. Not long afterwards Patty fell and chipped the same tooth. Yin and yang—we brought out the mischief in each other, though she was brash and fearless while I was shy and cautious. Once after the Saturday matinee at the neighborhood Cortland Theatre, Patty made a sassy remark to a couple of older girls—tough ten-year-olds—and they chased after us. Patty sprinted one way, I another; they caught me, gave me a split lip and a bloody nose. I wailed and dripped blood all the way home, where Pat was waiting, grinning. We used to race each other in the schoolyard—I often beat her so this time she was eager to claim her victory.

After two years my family moved again, to Solana Beach, a small coastal town in San Diego County, where another of my father’s siblings had settled. Each summer we would make the two-day 500-mile drive to visit the Bay Area relations, and Patty and I would pick up where we left off. She was still more daring and worldly, maybe from the influence of an older sister; I excelled at stealth and lies. Rather than shrink into her shadow, I exaggerated my exploits and feigned a beyond-my-years sophistication. Once we went to a restaurant in Marin with our parents, and while they were finishing their after-dinner coffee and cigarettes we slipped away and snooped around some back rooms, sharing a pilfered smoke. We found a storage area filled with racks and racks of wine, and we snatched a bottle, not knowing one from another. Pat hid it at her house, and we opened it one night in the basement “rec room” when some boys came over. It turned out to be dry sherry, awful, medicinal tasting, I thought; it was decades before I developed a liking for the stuff. But no one seemed to mind—at least no one would admit it—as we sipped and giggled, danced and necked. Not so wild by today’s standards, but this was the ‘50s, and we thought ourselves so cool.

The vacation trips stopped when we were 14 or 15, and we didn’t see each other much after that. I have a photo dated 1963. She’s in powder blue satin and net with a veil, obviously a bridesmaid, maybe her sister’s wedding? I’m in black with too much makeup and jewelry. I’m pretty sure we didn’t attend each other’s weddings, hers at 20, mine at

22—I would remember, wouldn’t I? Babies followed a couple of years later—Pat’s oldest was two when my Jennifer was born. We stayed loosely connected, but our lives were taking different directions. She had two more children and was an active stay-at-home mom, absorbed in domesticity; I was divorced when Jennifer was two, a single mother of an only child, busy in my work and social worlds.

In 1980 Pat and her husband, Jack, were coming to town to visit her mother, who now lived in San Diego. I was going to be away, so I invited them to stay at my house; we would overlap for a couple of days on my return. Friction set in when I came home. Still the assertive one, Pat had taken over. I felt in the way, unwelcome in my own home. She’d washed my kitchen curtains, cleaned in places I’d never touched. Instead of thanking her, I took offense. What kind of slob did Super-Hausfrau think I was? They left the next day.

The last time I saw her was in 1997 or ‘98. I’d recently remarried, and my husband, Don, had never met Pat. We joined her and Jack with Pat’s sister, Carol, for dinner at George’s in La Jolla. Pat was wearing a cobalt blue dress (I see it vividly so don’t tell me if I’m wrong), her hair longish, a warm auburn. I remember our hug—we clung a bit, stared into each other’s eyes and beamed, strays reunited. Don recalls “looking at her, looking at you, then her again, you again.” He found the physical resemblance startling, much more so than between her and Carol. “You looked more like sisters than the sisters,” he told me afterwards.

Pat and Carol had been, for some years then, exploring their family genealogy. Before so much was accessible online it was a challenging and absorbing pursuit involving letter writing and phone calls to strangers, travel to dig up obscure data. Carol tried to draw me in and would send me documents pertaining to our fathers’ family tree. It was fascinating, but not compelling enough to get me involved. When Don and I went to Scotland, she asked me to check on possible ancestors. It seems the Glasgow Airport was built over a cemetery, and some of the grave markers remain at the end of one of the runways. I disappointed her when I declined to spend my one day in Glasgow looking for ancestral remnants.

In April 1999, Pat went to Salt Lake City to visit the renowned Mormon Family History Library with its two million rolls of microfilmed census records and other genealogical documents. The rest of her story survives in newspaper archives and on grizzly websites like Murderpedia and Second Amendment Sacrifices. On April 15, a Thursday, Sergei Babarin—a 71-year-old Russian immigrant, a schizophrenic off his meds—walked into the library and wandered through the building shooting. He even stopped once to reload. Before he was shot and killed by police, he left four people wounded and two dead, a 62-year-old security guard and my cousin Pat.

I wonder about the moments right before it happened. Did she hear gunshots, see him come through the door? Or was it sudden, was she taken by surprise, absorbed in her search? Was she thinking how stuffy it was in the crowded room and how she looked forward to getting back out into the fresh air, meeting up with Jack for a quiet dinner, going home?

How do you process something so arbitrary, a senseless death, all those lost years? Our childhood bonds had slackened over time, but she was and is still part of me. Her brutal slaying was an assault to my senses, and even now it continues to seep into my consciousness like leaking battery acid. I’ve asked myself why I’m writing about her and why now. Why her death haunts me more and more as time goes by. Something has brought it to the forefront, maybe something I’m trying to work out for myself. The



answer I've come up with: mortality, of course. The fragility of life. *Memento mori* means "remember that you will die." It could have been anyone; it could have been me. But it wasn't. And ultimately this is about me. I get older and she doesn't. The fact rubs on my consciousness like gritty sandpaper.

I recently reconnected with Jack; we had lost touch after Pat's death, after the initial condolences. He hasn't moved, hasn't remarried. He retired a few years ago and opened a barbecue restaurant with his kids. He sent a photo of himself with his adult children and the four grandchildren Pat never knew. I told him I was planning to write about her, and he seemed eager to help with background and details. So while I could verify some of my memories, fill in the gaps, I don't. Because this is my account, my recollections I'm after, not accuracy. I have the facts—names and dates, outcomes—the rest I pull out of the dusty overstuffed closet of my mind.

On a recent trip to San Francisco, I took Don to the old neighborhood. In spite of the passage of time and rampant gentrification, Bernal Heights retains recognizable landmarks. While I couldn't recall the exact space occupied by our rickety old house on Banks Street—most of the block had been torn down to make way for condos and townhouses—the sense memories came rushing back. I showed him our childhood hangouts—the elementary school, the library and adjacent playground, the old movie house (now a church). As we walked away, I thought I saw two scrawny girls, matching corners missing from their oversized front teeth, one fair and the other dark, chasing each other around the schoolyard, shouting with wild abandon, both believing their lives would be long and happy.

## Paper in the Wind

In kindergarten, I had a massive crush on Dorothy, of the *Wizard of Oz*. That gingham dress. Those pigtails. Her blood-red lips and lilting voice. Who better to free her from the red sand gushing through the hourglass than me, someone who *loved her* loved her, I thought. I believed I could protect her against time.

Time had been pouring through the hourglass of my life, too. I had massive nosebleeds, the most recent requiring emergency room treatment. I remember a plastic bag of ice on my neck and metallic slickness on my tongue. My legs dangled over the gurney, beating time in the air, and the towel against my nose was sopping with blood. But it was not just blood flowing out of me. Rushing away like rain after a storm was the feeling that bad things could never happen to me. My nose gushed away my parents' perceptions of healthy children. It gushed away safety and security. Carrying off pieces of my innocence in a flash like debris up the funnel of a tornado, the nosebleed deposited my naiveté haphazardly in places too impossible to retrieve. Feeling the hot blood flow into the towel I got a little bit older a little bit quicker. I got a little bit scared.

This moment is a vestigial memory preceding my first hospital stay. I attempt to grasp it now like a squirmy puppy that I cannot keep in my arms, cozy and safe and real against my chest.

I was diagnosed with an aortic coarctation. A portion of my aorta – the main trunk of the arterial system, conveying blood from the left ventricle of the heart to all of the body except the lungs – was constricted. The narrowing increased the blood pressure in my upper body, which caused blood to funnel out of my nose while I ate a Happy Meal. I needed surgery.

At the pre-operation appointment, my arm was stabbed with needles and my parents signed paperwork, some of which acknowledged there was a chance I might die.

"Highly unlikely, of course," the doctor said, but that was little reassurance to us. He used blue and red ink to draw a tornado of arrows on diagrams of the heart. He charted normal and abnormal blood flow through the chambers, before-and-after pictures, me now and me later. The narrow piece of my aorta would be removed and the two ends of the tube spliced together.

"The scar, will it eventually go away?" Dad asked. "I mean, will it fade?"

"No," the doctor said. "It might fade a little, but a scar will be there forever."

I spent the night prior to surgery in the hospital. I was no longer inviolable so Mom, who allowed me to experience measures of independence whenever possible, slept in my room. I imagine her squinting at me through the dark. Surely my parents had explained to me the reason for my visit, but how could I comprehend the severity of the situation? This burden they carried for me, as only parents can.

The next morning Dad helped me dress in a papery hospital gown while Mom combed her blonde Glinda hair. The minutes burned fast, like fire eating straw. I wanted another cartoon. Another night to sleep. Another hug. I was soon wheeling along the bright hallways, my parents walking alongside my gurney. I felt a lumpy heat on the back of my throat and that if I moved under the blanket I might cry. I took a deep breath to push away my tears. No matter how easily Dad smiled his squinty-eyed smile or Mom ran

her hand against my cheek, I was aware of the forthcoming separation. I didn't know the word at the time, but traveling to the OR felt like an abduction, like I was being torn from safety. I was helpless. I wanted my mom. She was an arm's length away but she might as well have been in Oz. I knew she wanted to make me feel better, too, to pick me up in that mom way like I was a little baby, which to her I still was, and to hold me. She walked next to the rolling bed and I knew that wasn't close enough. I'm sure she knew this, too. I wanted to hit the brakes but there was no stopping time.

The OR was behind schedule. All of the proper waiting rooms were occupied so the bed-driver ushered us into a supply closet. This raised my hopes that the whole deal was off. Instead, we endured the angst like storm-dodgers, hunkered in our root cellar and temporarily protected from the gales and erratic electricity above.

Like a sudden clap of thunder a nurse knocked on the door.

"Time to go."

We said goodbye. Then I was on the move alone.

In the OR I didn't have time to cry. "We don't want you to be the only one who doesn't look silly in there," a nurse said adjusting a hairnet on my head.

*Why not?* I wondered. I was already wearing a gown, after all.

The transportation team parked my bed against the operating table and lowered the side rails. I squinted in the brightness. Machines hummed. Water splattered in a sink. I heard beeps of various volumes and frequencies and I heard laughter. The hairnet, I thought.

"You just hold still, honey," another attendee said in a voice muffled by a paper mask. Scrubbed arms rolled me on my side, scooted me to the edge of the bed, rolled me on my back, this time onto the operating table. I felt stiff and cold. Nylon straps crossed my legs and waist and two buckles clicked. A blanket settled over me. I shivered as a woman holding a large Q-tip painted the left half of my chest the color of water poured from a rusty can.

"What's up?" A man the size and shape of a lion – all neck and chest – appeared overhead. "Going to help you take a nap. What flavor gas you want: bubblegum, cherry, or grape?"

His question paralyzed me in the way of a child deciding something that seemed crucial yet impossible to narrow down under the circumstances. I said nothing. I was scared.

"Bubblegum's what most people choose."

"Okay."

"All you have to do is breathe." He fitted a plastic mask over my mouth and nose. The soporific air did taste like bubblegum and before I could wonder how long it would take to work I was in the dark. The Emerald City was on the horizon of my subconscious and Dorothy wilted onto a quilt of poppies, the narcotic pollen pulsing through my imagination, the red sand pouring time away. Together we drifted off under the spells of science and sorcery.

The nurses updated my family in the waiting room. Then the surgeon himself appeared. Before he spoke a word my parents began sobbing. They assumed the hourglass had emptied and I was dead; for what other reason would this great and powerful man come forth? He hastily explained that the smoothness of the procedure

allowed him to visit.

The operation took all day and when the bubblegum spigot dried up I found familiar voices wobbling through my mind. Each waking glimpse revealed flashes of brightness as my bed clipped along under the corridor lights, my world framed by talking heads and IV bags on poles. I was desperately parched.

Finding my lips and tongue, I murmured, "Thirsty."

"We'll get you some ice chips in a short while, honey," a nurse said, apparently oblivious to my dehydration. Her cheerfulness conveyed understanding, though I doubt she understood. My groggy mind was unable to convey to her that my visit to Oz was indescribably arduous. I required not only liquid refreshment but gallons of it. So thirsty was I that I would have licked condensation off a toilet tank.

In a swirl I arrived in ICU and the attendees left our family alone. The intravenous pain medication and time have muddled my memories. I know the sun flooded through a window. This light teased me with dreams of the neighborhood fun I was missing. I chewed ice chips served in plastic cups, which did little to stifle my thirst or hunger. In the way of scared children who recognize their dependence on adults, I was all *yes, please* and *no, thank you* during my stay. My manners bought me extra attention and empathy; somebody made me a puppet out of a latex glove that looked like a ghost rooster. Memory has an interesting way of compressing time, these images an inadequate measure of the cruelty of early recovery, the limitations of my recollections truly a blessing.

I transferred to the pediatric cardiology ward after a few days.

Perhaps it is appropriate to mention one of Mom's most loving qualities. In her bid to document my childhood she became a devoted photographer and heart surgery was a prime opportunity. Whenever I complained, Mom would say, "They're for the museum – you know, after you become President."

Among the photos from this time is a shot of Dad in bed with me. His hair is black, his polo shirt is pink, his body is muscularly slender. His feet overreach the end of the bed and his presence all but swallows me. I was responsible for the large splotches of perspiration under his arms. That morning the bandages covering my incision were removed.

"This might be a little painful," the nurse had said to me, "so if you need to rest, just say, 'Rest.'"

If by "say" she meant "scream with the ferocity of someone being lowered into a vat of boiling oil with the intention of causing unspeakable pain that brings the suffering party to the brink of unconsciousness without causing death," then I followed her instructions perfectly.

"REST!" I howled, again and again.

The nurse paused in her torture and spoke softly to me.

"Oh, honey, you're doing great."

"REST!"

"I know it hurts."

"REST!"

"I'm so, so sorry."

"REST! REST! REEEEEEST!"

The sweat poured off Dad. He listened helplessly, pacing back and forth, rubbing his face in his hands. Every inch he reminded me things would be okay, at which point I resumed screaming before the wicked nurse even grasped the edge of the bandage. One

could presumably pick up an airplane with a small square of the tape that encased my left side. Its adhesive qualities acted like trillions of microscopic sutures bonding bandage to skin. My mind was on fire. Dad was melting.

I remember the moment the nurse finished. She snipped the knot at the end of the thread used to stitch me together and, from nipple to spine, I felt the line slip through my skin in a fluid tickle. It is truly amazing how vividly I recall this, something I have only felt once in my life.

“You’re a member of the zipper club now,” she said. Mom taped this thread in a scrapbook for the museum.

Mr. Flaherty, the principal of my elementary school where Mom also taught second grade, delivered the first truckload of gifts. After half a dozen bags of material sympathy I let go of the bandage fiasco.

For exercise I walked around the nurses’ station. To soften the violence of coughing or laughing or sneezing, which strained the incision, I held a bundled towel to my side. There was also a breathing device to expand my lungs – a plastic cylinder with a ball inside attached to a tube that I sucked on, trying to lift the ball as high and for as long as I could. I walked a yellowish strip of tape on the wall with the fingers of my left hand, stretching the tightness from my side, reaching higher and higher to my family’s praise. They marked each new apex with a black pen. This progress was observable from my bed like the bricks of a road. I counted the bricks and began to understand that I was returning to myself and that was a priceless knowledge.

One day my friend, Clay, paid a visit. There was something important he had to tell me.

“You missed it,” he said.

I knew this would happen.

“What?”

“The storm.”

I didn’t even know what he was talking about, but I was crushed.

“It’s called hail. I saved you some in my freezer.” Mom filled in the details of the falling ice.

“Some were the size of golf balls,” she said, the biggest anybody in Naples had ever heard of or seen. With the sky so dark and the hail so bright, it appeared as if somebody had unscrewed the stars and let them drop. The language of the storm was the language of destruction and the language of the exotic places of imagination. Cumulonimbi clouds. Super-cooled water droplets combined with the dirt and dust. The storm like a tornado. Turbulent air churning, suspending the chunks, contributing layer after layer of ice to the stones with each updraft, some stones clumping together, over and over in the blowing wind before becoming too heavy to float. Falling, falling, falling to earth like waking from a dream.

I imagined Clay in his family’s car as the hailstones thundered the metal with the power Mom described, windows breaking all over town. “It was very scary,” she said. I couldn’t wait to touch my piece of the sky.

Mom reached for her camera and nodded toward Clay saying, “Put your arm around your friend and smile like you love each other.

Then it was time for everyone to leave. I felt small in the bed. Mom tucked the

blankets under my legs the way she did at home, tightly, so that my heels touched together. The curtain dividing the room glowed green in the light of my roommate’s TV and even though I knew I would be discharged the next morning, I felt lonesomeness rolling in like a thundercloud. More than I wanted her to stay, I wanted to go home with Mom. To sit beside Dad in his rocking chair, holding half a book with my left hand, the other half in his right. To hear my grandma tell me, “You have a face only a mother could love.” To exercise whatever newfound strength I had gained to rescue Dorothy, to flip over our hourglasses another time.

Mom kissed my forehead and each of my eyes and was gone.

I had never felt so alone.

I closed my eyes. I listened to the laughter on my roommate’s TV. I held tightly to my coughing pillow and waited for the dreaming sleep that would carry me like paper in the wind to tomorrow and all that I loved.

**Biographies**





## Poetry

### Michael Anania

Michael Anania has published more than a dozen books of poetry, including *Riversongs*, *Selected Poems*, *In Natural Light*, and *Heat Lines*, a novel, *The Red Menace*, and a collection of essays, *In Plain Sight*. His work as a poet, fiction writer, and essayist is widely anthologized and has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Italian, and Czech. He is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago and is a member of the faculty in writing at Northwestern University.

### Lucas Bolter

Lucas Bolter, an alumn of Lewis University, hates religion and capitalism more than anything, and feels his poetry works to undermine the social, moral, and intellectual constructs that enslave and alienate us. His personal ambition is to spread the teachings of Marx and to elevate the human-being to his and her proper place above abstract measures of worth, namely the dollar. To emancipate ourselves from the bounds of our fabrications, to bring about a proletariat revolution that will ultimately result in humanity's full realization of itself -- these are the paramount goals of our age, and we must each one of us strive to eliminate all that obstructs our path to them. "Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains." Let live the revolution!

### Kevin Brown

Kevin Brown is a Professor at Lee University. He has published two books of poetry--*A Lexicon of Lost Words* (winner of the Violet Reed Haas Prize for Poetry, Snake Nation Press) and *Exit Lines* (Plain View Press, 2009)--and two chapbooks: *Abecedarium* (Finishing Line Press, 2011) and *Holy Days: Poems* (winner of Split Oak Press Chapbook Contest, 2011). He also has a memoir, *Another Way: Finding Faith, Then Finding It Again* (Wipf and Stock, 2012), and a book of scholarship, *They Love to Tell the Stories: Five Contemporary Novelists Take on the Gospels* (Kennesaw State University Press, 2012). He received his MFA from Murray State University.

### Clint Buffington

Clint Buffington is a college writing teacher, blogger, musician, and farmer in Salt Lake City, UT. His poetry has appeared in *Slow Trains Literary Journal* and *Jelly Bucket*, and his blog, Message in a Bottle Hunter, has been featured by a variety of newspapers, as well as television and radio news programs worldwide.

### Juliet Cook and Robert Cole

Juliet Cook's poetry has appeared in a peculiar multitude of literary publications, most recently including *Arsenic Lobster*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Mojave River Review*, and *Tarpaulin Sky Press*. She is the author of more than thirteen published poetry chapbooks, most recently including *FONDANT PIG ANGST* (Slash Pine Press), *Tongue Like a Stinger*

(Wheelhouse), *POST-STROKE* (Blood Pudding Press for Dusie Kollektiv 5), *Thirteen Designer Vaginas* (Hyacinth Girl Press), and *POISONOUS BEAUTYSKULL LOLLIPOP* (Grey Book Press). A new collaborative poetry chapbook created by Juliet Cook and Robert Cole, *MUTANT NEURON CODEX SWARM*, is forthcoming from Hyacinth Girl Press in 2014. Cook's first full-length poetry book, *Horrific Confection*, was published by BlazeVOX. In addition to her own writing, Cook is the editor/publisher of *Blood Pudding Press* (print) and *Thirteen Myna Birds* (online). You can find out more at [www.JulietCook.weebly.com](http://www.JulietCook.weebly.com).

Robert Cole is fiction editor for *Similar Peaks* and his writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Menacing Hedge*, *THIS Literary Magazine*, *Thirteen Myna Birds*, *Sein und Werden* and elsewhere. His collaborative chapbook with Juliet Cook will be published later this year by Hyacinth Girl Press. He currently lives and works in Oklahoma City.

### John Paul Davis

John Paul Davis is a curator of Page Meets Stage. He was a founding member of *Real Talk Avenue*, and is the former editor of *Bestiary Magazine* and *Em Literary*. He currently lives in Brooklyn. His website is [www.johnpauldavis.org](http://www.johnpauldavis.org)

### Darren Demaree

Darren C. Demaree is the author of “As We Refer to Our Bodies” (2013, 8th House), “Temporary Champions” (2014, Main Street Rag), and “Not For Art Nor Prayer” (2015, 8th House). He is the recipient of three Pushcart Prize nominations and a Best of the Net nomination. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

### Devon Gallant

Devon Gallant is a shaman. His magical spells have been conjured in such grimoires as *Bitterzoet Magazine*, *Misunderstandings Magazine*, *Carousel* and *Beyond Borderlands*. His forthcoming collection *S(tars) & M(agnets)* is a blend of chaos magick, pronoia, concrete poetry, and rhyme and will be available through Cactus Press in the summer.

### Gail Goepfert

Gail Goepfert is a Midwest teacher, poet, and nature photographer. Currently, she serves as an associate editor for Chicago-based *RHINO*. She is published in a number of anthologies and journals including *Avocet*, *Off Channel*, *After Hours*, *Caesura*, *Florida English*, *Poetic License Press*, and *Examined Life Journal* and online at *Ardor*, *Brevity Poetry Review*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Blue Hour Magazine* and *Bolts of Silk*. She was a Poet of the Month for YourDailyPoem.com. Two of her poems rode PACE buses in the annual Poetry That Moves contest, Highland Park, Illinois. She's been a runner-up for Journal of Modern Poetry and Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest, and she was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2013.

**Cento Acknowledgments:** “In a parched time” : Rachel Wetzsteon, Bianca Stone, Nancy Shih-Krodel, Jane Hirshfield, Andrew Hudgins, Alan Michael Parker, Kate Colby, Robert Haas, Elizabeth Arnold, Michael Bazzett, Sharon Bryan, James Schuyler, Matthew Dickman, Anis Mojani, Michelle Ornat, Sophie Klahr

### Yvonne Higgins Leach

Yvonne Higgins Leach earned her Bachelor of Arts in English from Washington State University and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Poetry from Eastern Washington University. Over the years, she has been published in literary magazines and anthologies in the United States. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Blue Lake Review*, *Breakwater Review*, *Carquinez Poetry Review*, *Chaffin Journal*, *Cimarron Review*, *CQ (California Quarterly)*, *The Distillery*, *Eureka Literary Magazine*, *Evansville Review*, *Hazmat Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *The Louisville Review*, *Lullwater Review*, *Nassau Review*, *Owen Wister Review*, *Pearl*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Phantasmagoria*, *Phoebe*, *Pig Iron Press*, *Poem*, *Quercus Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *RiverSedge*, *The South Carolina Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Talking River Review*, *Westview*, *Willow Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, and *Zillah*. Her first book will be forthcoming from WordTech Editions in June 2014.

### Donald Illich

Donald Illich's work has appeared in journals such as *The Iowa Review*, *LIT*, *Nimrod*, *Passages North*, *Rattle*, *Sixth Finch*, *Memoir(and)*, *West Wind Review*, *failbetter*, *Del Sol Review*, *Roanoke Review*, and *Anti-*. He's been nominated four times for the Pushcart Prize and received a scholarship from the Nebraska Summer Writers Conference.

### Lucas Jacob

Lucas Jacob's work has appeared in a few dozen journals, including *Southwest Review*, *Barrow Street*, and *Evansville Review*, and is forthcoming in various others. A native of Chicago, he now lives, writes, and teaches in Fort Worth, Texas, where he is humbled on a daily basis by his students' writings.

### Whittney Jones

Whittney Jones is completing her MFA at Murray State University. She lives in a small town in Illinois, where she works as a Project Next Generation mentor at a local library. She has work published or forthcoming in *Revolution House*, *Zone 3*, the *Minnesota Review*, and *Parable Press*.

### Theresa Marten

Theresa Marten is a junior at Lewis University studying English and Theology. This is her first poem published but she has had essays published in the Sigma Tau Delta literary magazine, *Voices*. Along with participating and leading retreats, she is on the dance team, a Peer Minister, and Religion Editor for *The Flyer*. Other favorite activities include eating ice cream, watching The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, and drinking coffee while reading a book.

### Molly McCormack

Molly McCormack is the Managing Editor of *A NARROW FELLOW Journal of Poetry*. Her poems have been published in several journals. She is also an accomplished blues and folk musician, performing and teaching both mountain and hammered dulcimer at numerous venues across the country.

### **Brenda Nicholas**

Brenda Nicholas teaches English classes at a local community college and is an MFA candidate at UNCW in poetry. She feels lucky to be writing at the beach. Her work has appeared in *Rumble: Micro Fiction Magazine*, *Main Channel Voices*, *Red River Review*, *Illya's Honey*, *Menacing Hedge*, and forthcoming in *The Helix Magazine*.

### **Namkyu Oh**

Namkyu Oh is a Korean-born New Jersey native currently studying politics and poetry at Princeton University, where he is a member of the Songline Slam Poetry group. His work has been recently featured in publications such as *GRAVEL* and *Crack the Spine*.

### **Darlene Pagan**

Darlene Pagan teaches writing and literature at Pacific University in Oregon. She has a chapbook, *Blue Ghosts* (Finishing Line Press), and a full-length collection forthcoming from Airlie Press called *Setting the Fire*. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Field*, *Calyx*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Lake Effect*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*. Her essays have earned national awards and appeared in venues such as *Memoir(and)*, *Brevity*, *The Nebraska Review*, and *Literal Latté*. She is a member of the writer's group Broads on the Side, and enjoys hiking, biking, the beach, the rain, and carnival rides now that her sons are just tall enough to ride.

### **Judith Roney**

Judith Roney is currently winding up her second semester of the University of Central Florida's MFA program. While her focus of writing is poetry, she writes fiction and non-fiction pieces as well. As a GTA she currently teaches creative writing workshops to adults challenged by mental illness. Judith was selected by UCF for the "Outstanding Senior Undergraduate Poetry Award," in 2012, and as a graduate student for the 2013 AWP Intro Journals Award. Her fiction and poetry have appeared or is forthcoming in *Steam Ticket*, *Foothill: A Journal of Poetry*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *Zaum*, and *Third Wednesday* as well as other publications. She confesses to having a obsession with Ireland, dead relatives, the possibilities of haunted sites, and vintage religious relics.

### **Shae Savoy**

Shae Savoy is a Seattle poet and water cartographer whose roots tap back toward Kansas. She has published five chapbooks and her work has most recently appeared in *J Journal: New Writing on Justice*; *Sinister Wisdom*; *WomenArts Quarterly*; *Pocket Guide*; *Paper Nautilus*; *Common Ground Review* and *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*. She blogs at [www.shaesavoy.wordpress.com](http://www.shaesavoy.wordpress.com).

### **Maureen Seaton**

Maureen Seaton has authored numerous poetry collections, both solo and collaborative—most recently, *Fibonacci Batman: New & Selected Poems* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2013) Her awards include the Iowa Poetry Prize, an Illinois Arts Council Grant, The Society of Midland Authors Award, the Audre Lorde Award, the Lambda Literary Award, an NEA fellowship, and the Pushcart Prize. She is Professor of English/Creative Writing at the University of Miami.

### **Diana Smith Bolton**

Diana Smith Bolton is the founding editor of *District Lit*, an online journal of fiction, poetry, and visual art. Her poems have appeared in *32 Poems*, *anderbo*, *Magic Lantern Review*, *elimae*, *Cartography from Imagination & Place Press*, and elsewhere. She lives in northern Virginia.

### **Clint Smith**

Clint Smith is a jazz musician, poet, and fiction writer who is at his best when improvising and writing in boisterous public spaces. A graduate of New York University, his poems have appeared previously in *Full of Crow Magazine*, *The Petrichor Review*, and on the online cultural portal [turbula.net](http://turbula.net). Further works can be found online at <https://clintsmithpoetry.wordpress.com>.

### **Crystal Stone**

Crystal Stone is a junior at Allegheny College studying English, with a creative writing focus. Her poetry is forthcoming in *Badlands Literary Journal*, *The Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*, and *Green Blotter*. Her poetry previously appeared in *Dylan Days*. She serves as a Student Representative for the Eastern region of Sigma Tau Delta (the International English Honor Society) and tutors an adult learner for a local literacy program in her free time.

### **George Such**

George Such is an English Ph.D. student at University of Louisiana in Lafayette, where he has been awarded a University Fellowship. In a previous incarnation he was a chiropractor for twenty-seven years in the state of Washington. His poetry has appeared in *Arroyo Literary Review*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Dislocate*, and many other literary journals; his nonfiction has appeared in *Phoebe*. His collection of poems, *Where the Body Lives*, was selected as winner of the 2012 Tiger's Eye Chapbook Contest and is forthcoming.

## **Art**

### **Chrystal Berche**

### **Otha "Vakseen" Davis III**

While music has played the driving force in his business career, Otha "Vakseen" Davis III's passion for the arts has served as his key to sanity in the fast paced entertainment industry. Drawing inspiration from women, emotions, and popular culture, his mixed medium paintings have been sold to collectors and art enthusiasts throughout Los Angeles and the Southeast region of the U.S. While he's only been on the art scene at a professional level since January 2012, Otha has been selected for 13 solo exhibitions and over 15 group exhibitions in venues like Art Share LA, Noho Art Gallery, Santa Clarita City Hall, Norbertellen Gallery, Larrabee Sound Studios, Aquarium of the Pacific and Atlanta's



Emerging Art Scene Gallery, amongst others. His work has also been selected and featured in over 30 art and literary magazines. To view more of Otha's work, visit Vakseen.com

## Clinton Inman

### Dr. Ernest Williamson III

Dr. Ernest Williamson III has published poetry and visual art in over 450 national and international online and print journals. Some of Dr. Williamson's visual art and/or poetry has been published in journals representing over 50 colleges and universities around the world. Dr. Williamson is an Assistant Professor of English at Allen University, self-taught pianist, editor, poet, singer, composer, social scientist, private tutor, and a self-taught painter. His poetry has been nominated three times for the Best of the Net Anthology. He holds the B.A. and the M.A. in English/Creative Writing/Literature from the University of Memphis and the PhD in Higher Education Leadership from Seton Hall University.

**Artist Statement:** I am not a multifarious artist by choice. I create because I have to. With reference to my visual artwork, my approach is a process of spontaneity and deep concentration imbued with a sort of loud silence that calms me. The works of Picasso and Dali humble me and they inspire me on a continual basis. Dali takes what he holds in imagination and puts it on canvas. I admire his ability to do just that. Picasso, forces the viewer to accept and deny conventional perception. I began painting and composing piano music at the age of 19. My visual artwork is a reflection of what is contained in my unconscious mind. My poetry is also a reflection of what is observed via the senses. The artist soaks up what he or she observes and then he or she gives birth to what the reader or viewer of the artwork sees and perceives. We as lovers of humanity must find a way to decrease the violence there and around the world. My work, in part, is an advocacy of world peace. Hopefully the actuality of love and peace with convict persons of influence and people in general to perpetuate peace forevermore.

### Sheri Wright

Two-time Pushcart Prize and Kentucky Poet Laureate nominee, Sheri L. Wright is the author of six books of poetry, including the most recent, *The Feast of Erasure*. Wright's visual work has appeared in numerous journals, including *Blood Orange Review*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Blood Lotus Journal* and *Subliminal Interiors*. In 2012, Ms. Wright was a contributor to the Sister Cities Project Lvds: Creatively Linking Leeds and Louisville. Her photography has been shown across the Ohio Valley region and abroad. Currently, she is working on her first documentary film, *Tracking Fire*.

**Artist Statement:** What is aged or overlooked can often be a source of beauty, if approached from a different perspective, one from a desire to find stories. Ms. Wright seeks out visual tales that lay hidden among rust, abandoned places and the unique. She feels that characters develop only through weathering, that the patina of rust emotes stories and that textures are like words on the page we can feel through our eyes.

## Fiction

### Sarah Collins Honenberger

Sarah Collins Honenberger's novel *Catcher, Caught* is a Pen/Faulkner Foundation selection for its Writers-in-Schools program. Audio, German and Korean editions have been released. With numerous short fiction awards and a fellowship from the Virginia Creative Arts Center, she appears regularly on literary panels and at book festivals. Her other novels include *Waltzing Cowboys* (2009) and *White Lies: A Tale of Babies, Vaccines and Deception* (2006), and *Minding Henry Lewis* (2014).

### Erin Flanagan

Erin Flanagan is the author of two short story collections—*The Usual Mistakes* and *It's Not Going to Kill You, and Other Stories*—both published by the University of Nebraska Press. Her work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Missouri Review*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere, and she has held fellowships to The MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the Sewanee and Bread Loaf Writers' Conferences. She is an associate professor of English at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

### Cecilia Pinto

Cecilia Pinto's fiction and poetry have appeared in various magazines and journals, including *Esquire*, *Fence*, *Quarter After Eight*, and *TriQuarterly*. A poetry chapbook, entitled *A Small Woman*, is coming this year from Dancing Girl Press. She works for a major retailer.

### Jennifer Porter

Jennifer holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars and her fiction has appeared in the *Apeiron Review*. She recently joined the staff of the *Riding Light Review* as an associate editor. She lives in Ortonville, Michigan - a small town sandwiched between Detroit and Flint.

### Lisa Silverman

Lisa Silverman lives in Pittsburgh where she teaches at an urban high school and lives with her husband and three sons. Her current goal is to find a Woolfian "room of her own" in a house—and life—filled with chaos, friends, family, and love. She writes about the working class experience and blogs at [feralwhitetrash.wordpress.com](http://feralwhitetrash.wordpress.com).

## Nonfiction

### Delia Ercoli

Delia Ercoli is a junior English and Secondary Education major at Lewis University. She is involved throughout campus as a tutor in the Writing Center, a member of Sigma Tau Delta, and as one of the editors-in-chief of the 2014 issue of *Voices*, a Sigma Tau Delta magazine. Delia spends her free time reading Young Adult literature and abusing her Netflix account.

**Alice Lowe**

Alice Lowe reads and writes about food and family, Virginia Woolf, and life. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in a number of literary journals, including *Upstreet*, *Hippocampus*, *Switchback*, *Prime Number*, *Phoebe*, and *Hobart*. She was the 2013 national award winner at City Works Journal and winner of a 2011 essay contest at Writing It Real. A monograph, “Beyond the Icon: Virginia Woolf in Contemporary Fiction” was published by Cecil Woolf Publishers in London. Alice lives in San Diego, California and blogs at [www.aliceloweblogs.wordpress.com](http://www.aliceloweblogs.wordpress.com).

**Thomas Mannella**

Thomas N. Mannella III earned a B.A. in writing from St. Lawrence University and a Masters from St. John Fisher College, both in New York. His writing and photography have previously appeared in various other magazines and journals. Currently, he teaches English and Environmental Literature in Naples, NY, where he lives with his wife and sons around the corner from the house he grew up in.

**Allison Rios**

Allie Rios is Director of Advancement Communications at Lewis University. She has written both as a hobby and professionally for many years, spanning many different forms and aspects of writing.



