A High Octane Literary Journal

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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
compány, 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
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

---

*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 “Ubermensch” 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.
**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 they want to tick
through dawns for orange is their transfusion and I
touch no dark so also I can’t permeate green
fields
of their soaking lungs
into the dawn
flay into fields.

and have to disembody clouds to
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.
This Computer Comes From the Earth, Somehow

This beet
this exact beet
bolls-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?
**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.
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.

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 clawling 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 labyrinth 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.
Yvonee 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.
Dusty yellowed shelves hold novels foxing 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.

---

Y ou 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.
Brenda Nicholas

She, Artichoke

1598

Buttoned up to the top of her neck,
The 16th century woman reaches
for the artichoke. At the supper table,
hers 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 Connasseur

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.

Namkyu Oh

Swallow
Hold
Punch back
Slow
Kick
Hold
Exhale
Again
**Breath**

Saturday night and the hours spiral
like dominos 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.

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**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,

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.

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

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
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

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.

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**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.
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.

Diana Smith Bolton

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.

Clint Smith
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.
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

Clinton Inman
Dr. Ernest Williamson III

But I Can’t Dance

Everybody in the Dark
Strong Together

Haunted
On Edge
Sarah Collins Honenberger

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 perfume 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,”

“An old lady 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
woman would want what Rita had. It meant an immediate withdraw 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.

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?”

“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 policeman 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
she weighed 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 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.”

“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, insistently 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.”

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

Erin Flanagan

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.
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. 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 glop 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.
"That's how I finally got my bachelor's degree – online. I think all schools should be online.

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 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

"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.

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!!!

"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.

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, 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 missing 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 AGREEMENT. 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 "AGREEMENT" several times with the tip of her pen. 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.

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!!!
“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 AGREEMNT.

"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.

Lisa Silverman

**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—"

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
notions about Mena's salvation. They were unflagging crusaders, and Angela's excitement was infectious. Delia was a whirlwind 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.
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
that this is because they haven't found their way to understanding bills, bank statements, and office memos. I believe many people as possible. reading will ultimately serve a bigger goal of mine: to share the joys of reading with as many people as possible.

Since reading is happening inside your head… but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?”

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.

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.

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?”

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 lead 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”.

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.
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 snoozed 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 grimy 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.

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 spattered in a sink.

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 muddied 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.
"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. Cumulonimbus 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.
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 Boelter, 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
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 (online). 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

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 Arord. 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.

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Yvonne Higgins Leach

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.

Whitney Jones
Whitney 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, Illy’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 Pagán
Darlene Pagán 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 Latte. 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.

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. 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

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
**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 Lvlds: 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.

**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.

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.