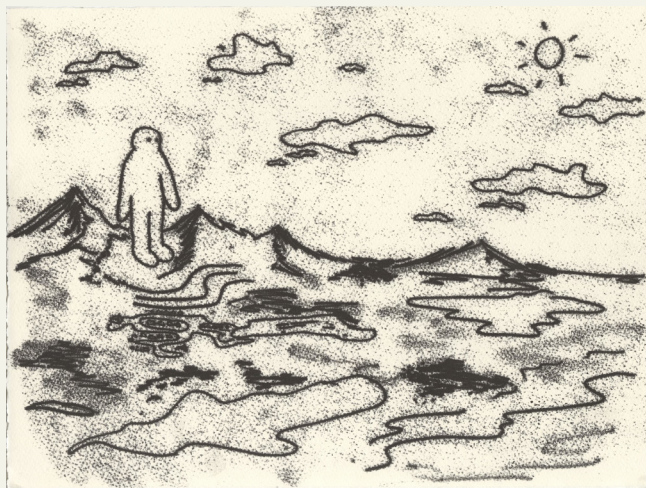


# LEAVINGS

MAGAZINE



ISSUE 4

SPRING / SUMMER 2023





LEAVINGS MAGAZINE

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# LEAVINGS

SPRING / SUMMER 2023

ISSUE 4

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Sunrays fall across the shoulders of fields like drenched locks, once again our bodies heavy with desire, and I wonder how gold enters the waving wheat.

You lick my wrist, the thin blue veins. Outside, the fields are bright like burning books, this Thursday hardened like last week's bread. Where does heat come from.

You laugh and wind the wet black bridle of my hair around your fist, as if between song and suffering there is only nimble weather, bodies wet

with meaning. Later, in sweat-soaked sheets, we eat chilled figs, their seedy hearts, and I worry about what lies on the other side

of survival. Babe. What comes after this.

We are Exotica, We are  
Political Scandal

Andrea Jurjević

It's raining bullwhips when I wake to the click of a cigarette lighter  
and this campy American. *So, where'd you say you were from?* he  
asks looking up at the unfurling petals of smoke.

The shadow of the oak outside the window is a dark river flowing  
into the tattoo inked across his chest.

*I've seen the Slavs, he goes on, they don't smile much. A primitive race.*

His room is crowded with Circassian artifacts, kindjals, Cossack  
mouton hats, airless antiquarian texts on semiotics and esoteric  
principles of rhythm.

Days bleed like wet charcoal. Every so often he barks, *Where do your  
people even come from? What's your*

*urheimat?* The words tumble out of his mouth like crazy cats. I spin  
around and say, *Where I come from, the birds fly for the winter and  
men are danced to death,*

and I dive into the dark river of the oak.

When the dusk quickened with doves

I swept the feathers into a pan and watched days darken into a bruise,  
words falling behind the horizon, one by one: cunt, country, the  
parliament of laments.

I swept, it didn't matter why.

Tomorrow I released me.

# Triptych of the Cracked Egg

Andrea Jurjević

Lines fine like down.

\*

For years the Easter egg lived in the vitrine, on the shelf behind the glass door. It had been cooked in onion skin, a pantyhose pressing a clover leaf pressed against its shell, and turned into a cosmic latte: the warm beige of the clover impression, Mars yellow and chrome, specks of titanium white, cadmium red. One day a line appeared, a thin eyelash. Perhaps there'd been a crack before, no one knew.

But the fact remains: the egg had lived on the shelf, behind the glass door.

\*

The story goes: A man hauls his wife, his dovecote, and his two children. The mud is slick, and eventually the man's grip weakens.

He lets go of the dovecote, the wife, and ever so slowly, of his children, hair by single hair.

Kurt Cobain, with  
Figurative Language

Matthew Tuckner

From my very first intake  
of breath on this planet  
I wished to know  
a brick to the face  
the wind of it  
its granular tough  
its pink clay love  
& when the rain  
found me horizontal  
in a field mottled with holly  
left fist wrapped around a forty  
right gripping a page  
from *Ham on Rye*  
I assumed my wish  
was granted  
I stood up  
trapped a squirrel  
in a shoebox  
stockpiled water  
from the drip  
of a drainage pipe  
& injected my legs  
with suet & protein  
just to get the muscles  
moving on their merry way  
among the puddled streets  
of Aberdeen  
waving hello  
to the dead salmon  
deep in the octagon  
they used to call a cannery  
waving goodbye

to the grand machinery  
that holds me aloft  
the dogged Gods  
& their puppet strings  
the malaprops  
plunked down  
in my voicebox I megaphone  
while I'm out & about  
*gesundheit* hollered  
at an idle broom  
in a doorway  
*come & get me,*  
muttered to  
the cantilevered  
air conditioners  
threatening to drop  
from above  
it's easy to forget  
with all of this ceaseless  
running off at the mouth  
that I begged for this peril  
the bricks that fall  
from the sky  
like so much hail  
the resplendent finches  
that leave me dosed  
& euphoric on my bed  
locks of blonde hair  
clasped in their beaks  
as they fly south  
for the winter  
you are so very *everything*  
I shout to them  
forgetting the word  
for beauty  
having never gathered  
firm footing as a human  
despite each day  
I unplug my nose  
with the fleshy scent of roses



a chemical fire in Yakima  
a tinge of vinegar  
when the powder  
bubbles in the center  
of the spoon  
despite each day I choose to  
unstick myself  
from the dried blood  
on the silk sheets  
further sullyng the few  
scattershot glimpses  
that remain of my native galaxy  
its doric columns  
its translucent starfishes  
the stray wafer of a comet  
that refuses  
to forfeit its orbit  
lodged forever  
in the purple sky  
like a third moon

## People, with Figurative Language

Matthew Tuckner

I've never seen the back of my head,  
but I'm sure it nearly resembles  
a planet, continents grown too old  
to stay together shattered into  
their constituent parts, some surging  
into grand mountain ranges, others  
crumbling into skinny sand-spits  
where something that looks like me,  
but not quite, once crawled from  
the water & discovered the supple  
vertebrae of its spine. A spine that,  
like the weather, ties me to the last  
reticulated giraffes in ways I can  
only scarcely begin to fathom.  
It's true, I've got some Emperor Hadrian  
in my decision-making, the liquified  
bones of a pterodactyl in my car engine,  
yet I still drag around boatloads of feeling—  
my arms notoriously goosebump from a hug,  
& the clacking of string in the belly  
of a piano can tug a tear from my eye.  
It's true, there's almost nothing  
I've seen, & yet I still grew bored  
in Rome, its endless one-point perspective,  
the brassy hats of its pope, the aqueduct  
I covered under, begging it for more aqueduct.  
It seems we've argued with ourselves  
for long enough in this watercolor of our  
being loomed over by cloudy angels,  
frozen in place by the heat, cubed off into cells  
of blood & skin, red & blue purpling  
only in the places where it counts.

What exactly is—ears, nose, & mouth—  
the use of all this? We've quartered our years  
into seasons like ham sandwiches,  
traded dead presidents for milky ways,  
strung mobiles of satellite in the night sky,  
loaded our arms with lead & yet  
I've still never seen the face I see out of.

She met her husband at the morgue. Death did not break but bound them. The sensation of his flesh, warm, pulsing, in a room full of bodies that never returned her touch, never gave her breath, never breathed into, never breathed out, still, preserved and motionless—the touch of his hand a reminder of life beyond the cement walls and fluorescent lights, traffic above ground, reminded her that not all bodies functioned in a state of pre-burial, the promise to be buried, wedding vows, her heart beating over the still body on the table, her eyes looking into those that gave nothing in return, like glass, a reflection, but unlike a mirror, a pool of cold coffee, of undigested bits, teeth to be polished and thread into a necklace, a mouth a cave, no longer able to chew. He brought her a sweater and he brought her a steaming mug of tea, and lotion for her hands, and a fresh pair of gloves to slip into, and he made her promise, sometimes, to love him in the sunlight. His eyes stayed open when they were awake, closed to blink on occasion, reopened, still searching, still taking her in, and in his eyes she could see a reflection of herself, what she knew he was seeing, flowers bursting open and her bleach-stained clothes. She felt sometimes as if she'd spent a lifetime fading, as if hers had been a lifetime of dissolution, of shattering, teeth grinding in her sleep, grinding as if into pieces of gravel, teeth smashing into dirt. When they kissed she understood the invention of the lightbulb. When they fucked she liked his mouth to be open, his hips to be gentle, his hands to be rough. She liked the blossom of blood beneath her skin to darken into purple, fade into yellow and brown and green. They liked to lie together after lovemaking and tell future ghost stories. They liked to imagine their future haunting grounds, the afterlife a second honeymoon. She asked him to let her unbury his body, if

he died first, to see how he faded into unliving beneath the dirt. She asked him to find her when he was a ghost, to haunt her, to kill her, to walk her down the aisle to another altar, to vow that *nothing will do us part* this time.

Her vow was to remain loyal to his living body. Her vow was to remain in the land of the living. But every day she went underground, every day she held the hands of corpses and wondered if somewhere their spirits were living on as ghosts. When he held her hand she wondered what he believed he was holding onto, she wondered if he would hold her hand as she died, if he would hold her dead hand, she wondered if it was possible to hold the hand of a ghost. She wanted to stop breathing, sometimes, just to see—a breath up to the top, held within the container of belly, chest, throat, she'd relax her shoulders around it instead of letting them creep up to her ears, she'd lose the feeling of desperation, the need to exhale, sink into loss of sensation, her vision would begin to blur—and he would always squeeze her hand, returning her to the fact of her body, returning her to body, to time, to himself, to life. Every time she tried to hold her breath into ever after, he'd coax her back to life.

In the beginning her body functioned differently when he was around, straying from its routine, the routine altered by having another body around. She couldn't shit. She never needed to. She didn't feel the fullness of bloating or the ache of building pressure, the gas, she just couldn't, didn't need to, didn't, and for the first time she thought she understood what it would feel like to no longer carry the burden of the need to release. A body without function. A body without rhythm, without process, a body without worry or weight or sensation—she thought this must be the only true experience of relief. And when she shit for the first time with him in the house she felt betrayed by it. She had been hoping a small part of her had discovered how to die.

He was a surgical intern at the hospital when she met him. He wanted to do the saving, the resurrecting, mending hearts to

keep them beating, performing small miracles so the blood would continue to flow. There was something about his ambition she found impossibly charming, the way he could cut open a chest and see it as something pulsing, as something with years left, the battery in a car or a computer's hard drive—he was interested in maintenance, in maintaining a life, in repair. Her hands handled the already broken, the expired, the lifeless. She could dig into a heart if she wanted to, she could tear it to shreds or squeeze it with all her strength or throw it against a wall to see if it would bounce. She was not responsible for repair. She was not interested in maintenance. She only wanted to hold a dead organ in her hands and imagine the same model inside of her, the functioning organs, imagine them in total stillness, turned to nothing of value like the object in her hands. In their bed she made herself as small as possible, curling into the heat of him, as if on a rug before a fireplace. She vowed to love him more when the fire burned out.

*What happened to you? He always wanted to know.*

*Do you remember?*

*Did it hurt?*

*What happened to you, dear, oh, my dear, what happened to you?*

The truth was she'd never heard voices. Never felt the chill, never seen a shadowy figure or a sheet-covered apparition, never blinked to see a body before her she thought had been real had disappeared. Her encounters with the supernatural were nonexistent. Still, she believed in the world within her own, a next realm just beyond her heartbeat that remained inaccessible for now. She called it *forever*. She believed that what remained inaccessible to her was the rest of her life.

*Why do you keep holding your breath?*

*Why do you cover your face with the blanket when you sleep?*

*Why do you need to hear my heart is still beating?*

*I am here, you are here, I've got you, I've got you.*

*Can you hear me?*

She'd been collecting for years. Entire albums in the cedar chest, black and white photographs she'd found at antique stores, unnamed faces staring back. She knew they were dead now. She wondered if they were ghosts. She wondered if she kept looking at these images, if she memorized their features, if she traced the replication of their faces with her fingertips, would they become real to her then? Would they find her? She wondered if she kept staring into the dark corners of the house or could find herself in one of the places in the photographs, she wondered if she could go to them, or if she could bring them to her. She wondered if she could hear the loose cadences of voices, laughter, breath, make out the shape of a body within the shadows, enter into the darkness herself.

Her favorite was a photograph of a woman in a party dress. Her lips were painted and her hair was curled and her eyes sparkled; she was dancing, she was laughing, had danced, had laughed. She called this woman in the photograph *Mother*. She imagined this woman as the one who had carried her, pushed her out of her own body, the woman who had given her a name. She kept this photograph tucked in her mirror. She'd found it when she was sixteen. *Mother, may I?* She'd ask. She'd cock her head in imitation, paint her lips and pin her hair and reproduce the sound of the image's captured laugh. She'd cock her head. *Mother may I see you tonight?*

*Why are you crying?*

*Why won't you touch me?*

*What happened to you, dear, what happened to you?*

*Why are you crying?*

*Why do you keep holding your breath?*

She cut her own hair one night over the bathroom sink. She cut it with the kitchen scissors, haphazardly, leaving uneven strands falling just below her chin. The woman in the photograph stared back at her staring at her altered reflection. *It looks like shit, doesn't it, Mother?* She didn't care about the damage, didn't care

about the style, didn't care about the way her hair framed her face, didn't care about the mirror, didn't care about the mess. She considered it a test, the way she rested her head on her husband's chest at night to hear the familiar rhythm of his heart-beat, unchanging after all these years. She was reminding herself she would still be beautiful: she knew her hair would grow even after she was dead.

When she was thirteen years old her mother was dying. Her mother was dying and then she died. Her mother died and then she was dead. Since she was thirteen her mother had been dead. She remembered the body, the way it had walked to the kitchen in the morning and opened the fridge, the hands as they held a bowl of blueberries, the teeth and the tongue that were visible in the motion of the jaw as it chewed, the motion of the swallow, the implication of digestion, she remembered her mother in the morning, and the blueberries, the way she had said the word *antioxidants* as if it would save her. Her mother was dying but she still hated her, she wanted someone else to be her mother, she wanted a mother who wasn't going to die, a mother who wasn't going to leave her, she wanted a mother who was already dead. She wished her mother had been dead before she met her. She wished her mother had only been a ghost her whole life. She did not want to be haunted by this woman standing at the fridge, dying, she wanted to be left alone.

For their fifth anniversary, she took him to a showroom to pick out their future gravestones. He told her this was a morbid way to celebrate their life together. She told him it wasn't a celebration, it was an act of proactiveness, of productivity. But she could sense he was growing tired of their games; he did not tell her ghost stories anymore and left the room when she pulled out her photo albums. He seemed to bristle when she put her hand on his chest at night, as if it were going to reach inside of him, or squeeze too tightly around his neck, as if he could sense she couldn't love him as much as she wanted to while they were alive. He seemed to believe she wanted him to go first, that she



could not much longer stand to be the wife of a man in living flesh. He knew how good she knew she looked in black. He knew how solemnly she would draw all the curtains, check the boxes marked *widowed*, talk to his photograph, unbury his decaying body, look for him in corners, see him in dreams.

*When should I have seen it?*

*You're crazy.*

*You're not a ghost, you are crazy.*

*I should have known.*

*What happened to you? Stop crying. Goddamn it. What happened to you?*

When she was thirteen and her mother was buried, she filled her pockets with dirt. Back home standing in front of her mother's mirror, still dressed in black, she rubbed the dirt onto her face, she let it fall into her hair, she streaked her eyelids with it and squeezed it in fistfuls, dirtying the floor, she took it on her tongue. She watched herself in the mirror as she swallowed, then put on a deep purple shade of her mother's lipstick. *How funny*, she thought. The dirt kept the dead buried and the plants alive.

Sometimes she wondered if she was already a ghost, if the bodies around her were inconsequential and irrelevant to one another, if she was just a presence, if, because sometimes her hands grew so cold, she had transformed, over the years, into an iteration of the living dead. How could she know how much of her life was real? The way she dreamed of faces she did not recognize, the way she dreamed of communion with all of the faces in her photographs, the way she had entire conversations and experiences in her dreams with people she hardly knew upon waking, made her wonder if there were multiple ways to make distinctions between the boundaries of dead and alive. Perhaps she was only real when she was dreaming. Perhaps the disconnected images embodied her truest form. Perhaps she would only be real when her body stopped moving, when she was buried, when she came back to life as the ghost she'd always wanted to be, the spectral

matter rising from the grave, her spirit filling the air, her long-anticipated rebirth.

For her fifteenth birthday she tried to hold a *séance*. For her sixteenth birthday she bought herself a Ouija board. When she realized the equipment was of no use to her, she began collecting the photographs. She began focusing on the body in order to discover its spirit. She took anatomy courses to study the bones and the muscles, to learn all the systems of the body, she bought a copy of *Gray's* in college and drew diagrams on the wall. A word she found commonly associated with *anatomy* was *medicine*. A word she found commonly associated with *ailment* was *cure*. She was not learning the body to cure it of its failings, nor was she studying anatomy to study life, at least not this, her present one. She wanted to know: Why bones if they supported material primed for decomposition? Why the steadiness of a heartbeat if it would one day stop? Why a body at all if it could not step beyond the confines of the photograph? Only the image and the ghost of a body could remain.

He hadn't thought much of at first what seemed like a quiet fascination. He met her in the morgue; of course there were corpses on her mind, of course she knew dead bodies almost better than ones still alive, had held the object of future rot in her hands, had breathed next to the non-breathing, had acquainted herself with those who could no longer speak their names. What had been professional became personal and what was personal became private and her private life became mystifying, dreadful, unnerving. He had heard the way she said the word *mother*, walking down the hallway as she sat at the mirror with the door closed and locked. She had asked before their wedding if he believed in everlasting love. She had asked if he believed in ghosts. She had asked him a lot of questions he did know how to answer. She had asked him a lot of questions he had ignored. Their bedspread was the color of a wilted flower. He had thought she would be the one to want to die.



tether of the daily news.

But how would she do it? Pills or poison or knife or gun or her hands pushing down on the pillow pressed against his face in the night. Would she wound or disrupt or strangle or smother? Would he see it coming, a look in her eye, a suspicious behavior, something hidden behind her back, something covertly poured into his morning coffee, would he know? Would she let him? Would she gather his things and pack them in boxes, would she drift over the divide that marked his side of the bed, would she start taking pictures of him and make a new album, would she go off running secret errands, would she offer him tea, would she take him dancing, would she kiss him without closing her eyes? Would she watch him sleeping? Would she count his breaths? Would she dig a hole in the backyard, would she buy new sheets, would she draw x's to mark the days off on the calendar, would she pull out their vows, would she prepare his favorite meals, would she follow him in the morning when he went running in the park down the street? He began working longer hours at the hospital, he began working more nights. He slept in on-call rooms instead of their bed, he drove past the house to see if her car was in the driveway before he pulled in, he hid the kitchen scissors and the cleaning products under the sink. He ordered an x-ray just to see for himself that his bones remained unshattered, that nothing was visibly fractured yet.

*Nothing will do us part in part because we are no longer living this part in life only do we part, going partway together, we'll part ways together and what part are we afraid of, the squirrel falling from the tree?*

She dyed all the curtains so they matched the color of the skin of a plum. She dyed the bedsheets and bought new towels, painted her nails, rubbed her dead mother's lipstick onto her mouth, wrote her name on the glass of the mirror. And beneath her name she wrote the word *ghost*. And beneath the word *ghost*, the word *hungry*. She marveled at her reflection, her body's ability to expand and fill. She had promised herself she would be a corpse

by forty, but as the years ran together and closer, she began to make a different kind of preparation, she began to feed herself with relish, she was ravenous, she baked cookies and pies and devoured hearty soups and stews, she brined her own pickles and canned her own jams, she buttered stacks of toast and plucked olives into her mouth, one after the other, she finished entire wedges of cheese. She let herself sag and overflow, just enough to grow familiar with excess. Just enough excess to make her feel heavy, heavy enough to sink. When she was ready again to feel capable of floating, she stuck her finger down her throat. She wrote in the steam on the mirror, *don't look at me.*

*What's happened to you?*

*Stop screaming.*

*I'm not looking at you.*

*Stop screaming.*

*You are making me lose my mind.*

*What's happened to you?*

*You are out of your mind.*

*Goddamn it.*

*Stop screaming.*

*Stop screaming.*

*You are out of your mind.*

It wasn't a crisis so much as an unbinding. She was removing the tether, unspooling her promises, undoing the ritual that had made her feel closest to life.

It was this unanticipated possibility of another life growing inside of her that made her ill. It was the wreckage of her entire future, her future of dying, the miserable change in plans that would force her to think in terms of birth.

*My love.*

*Can you hear me?*

*Are you sleeping?*

*Oh, my dear. I am here.*

*Am I dreaming?*

*I am here, you are here, I've got you, I've got you.*

*What has happened to me?*

They were buried in bedsheets. They were buried in bubble bath. They were buried in hospital scrubs and disinfectant. They were buried in the backyard, a pile of leaves, a pile of snow, an unforgiving moonbeam. They were covered in stardust and the afterglow of kisses, he was covered with freckles, she was covered with ink. They were rolling on the picnic blanket, wrapping themselves into insignificance, wrapping their scents into cotton, into cavern, into secrecy, forever, and after, ever after, wrapping up what they would let go.

*What has happened to me?*

*Oh, my dear.*

*What has happened to me?*

*Please don't let go.*

She met her husband at the morgue. Death did not break but bound them, their names etched into the marble of their future gravestones, the headboard they rested against each night. And hers said *I am* and his said *yours*, because that was what she had wanted them to say, what she wanted to take with her if they never met again as ghosts. She used to think they would part with the word *until*, but now she felt more certain preparing herself for the word *if*. *If we meet again, if you find me, if you keep looking, if we die together, if we ever die at all.*



The Resolve  
Exquisitely

Jane Zwart

The aplomb on him! A utility pole's his coat rack;  
I do nothing as unfumblingly as this middle school boy  
readies himself to walk smaller kids across streets.

The aplomb on him! A utility pole's his coat rack;  
his patrol belt, electric yellow, is tucked into his jacket

neat as a pocket square; and he does not tangle—not at all—  
with its shoulder sash. I envy him his competence,

his steady hands. But not like I crave the resolve  
exquisitely suited to the simple steps of a fateful task.



*for the mothers*

All his life he'd wearied her with trials,  
the hours he made her  
chase him through the temple,  
the times she let him  
walk out through the wilderness,  
the times he made her  
lift his cross, his youth.  
But all of it  
has come to this, this stillness.  
*Waken*, she wants to tell him,  
*waken*.  
And when she wipes his hair  
from off his face  
of changes,  
when she leans down  
to his scent of groves  
and soldiers,  
she whispers him,  
in soft words  
earth has earned her,  
the one prayer  
of a queen, a love,  
a mother:  
Let me once more carry it for you.

# Migrations

Joseph Fasano

And now that you have nothing left  
but nothing,  
walk out  
through the rubble of your country  
and look up  
through the gnarled heart  
of the garden,  
the moon of youth  
like burnt nests  
in your branches,  
the farthest stars  
like antlers  
in the snow.  
Listen to them,  
the dark flocks  
in their drifting.  
And that one thing  
you must have known  
in the beginning,  
when you lay down  
in the burning of your first world,  
with your own hands  
that had hurt you  
into burning,  
and you felt it, then,  
that strange song  
moving through you,  
luminous and ruinous  
and moving,  
and you knew  
that it was no one's, wholly  
no one's,  
and you knew  
that wherever it was going,  
it would cast you out to where you had to go.

# Streetlight

Gabrielle Aboki

The golden glow of your eye opens  
once the sun takes its break  
saffron sockets blinking  
set fire to the night

You center for homicide memorial,  
flowers, pictures, goodbyes enshrined  
corral the crowd under your radiance

You extend my shadow and  
make me giant  
as I traverse these asphalt roads

You something to lean on from the sidelines  
the evening basketball game's sweat  
sliding on tanned flesh

You hard-bodied hollow cylinder  
metal arm outstretched  
warn me to race to the front door

## Mario's Last Dance

Gabrielle Aboki

The doors of the church swung open,  
and sunlight kissed our skin, welcomed us  
to the realities of the new world  
no more smile in my uncle's eyes.

That unholy morning, my aunt called  
to tell my grandmother she had lost  
her son on her birthday, Bible slipped  
from her fingers as she cursed into the open air.

My uncle, who surprised me with bright  
pink rolls of Bubble Tape gum and UNO,  
who was the first to jump on the dance floor  
at a wedding reception, a crowd always watching,

not unlike that night outside of The Gambler.  
The gunshots pierced the air, shattering  
through bone, his skull—a wine glass  
falling from careless hands.

How cold his body must have felt  
when the crowd scattered and left him  
alone on the 3 a.m. concrete to die  
in darkness, barely making it to Sunday.

A magnificent loneliness has opened  
its soft, gray legs to me  
& I, in the morning & in the swanny dark,  
have entered it  
like a particle of illness  
into a lion's most readily available  
golden opening.  
Now the river changes sides, it carries  
a carrying song.  
When I asked what I wanted if I wanted it  
what I wanted wanted  
to change the subject. I broke apart  
into a disarray of roses,  
which sounds nicer than it is, it is  
terminal & exhausting,  
like God, who appeared when we were not paying  
attention. Look, there God is,  
right at the beginning, the loneliness  
which is made beautiful by the loneliness  
it is different than. That one  
I have no more use for, I wanted it once  
& it wanted nothing,  
which I gave it, which it would have taken  
from me anyway, but which I am now  
saving for myself, hoarding  
in my nothingbox.  
My new & different loneliness, together  
we make an abysmal thief.  
The river gives itself to me. I give the river  
the river back.

It's realistic fiction. It's set in Brooklyn. First person, April 12. It starts with a mondegreen originating from a song that will be written soon, maybe in two weeks, or four. It's this: I keep mistaking the ornithologist for the ophthalmologist - the one the tales are told about; the bone-setter. The one who loves tango. *Oh, eyes, not birds*, I say to N. *Birds, not eyes*, she says back, which completes this particular agreeable exchange. There is a patch of sod in the canyon where we keep throwing the black dog's red bone. The black dog searches N.'s face every evening from 5 to 7:30 pm. Barks once or twice, waits, searches. The city birds zip between yards; they don't know that the yards are owned or that the fences are partitions. From here, I can see into the partitioned canyon. N's husband has limed the sod. Soon it will be green all over. Soon is when the song will be finished, the one about birds and eyes. Sitting around the table with the neighbors, the children, we all look at each other. But I, for one, am not consciously aware of eyes— the way mine fit inside my head, the way the others' fit inside theirs. At 8:30, the black dog takes my forearm gently between her teeth; she does not bite down. That moment lasts for the rest of the book.

It's a travelogue. The heroine manipulates her interior syntax with a variety of substances. She is "coming" of "age." She mans the radio. As she tweaks her interior, so does she dial in on the song with the best sound. She considers love as she plummets horizontally. The tug of the landscape as it catches. The little yank of leaving; and again; and again. This repetition becomes propulsion. She hopes hurtling will help her condense around a few disparate desires. To unify! To interact. She tweaks her sentence with a toke and suddenly her dead grandmother is reaching across the stick shift to stroke her face. She condenses towards the hand. Grandma delivers her sugar pie recipe in a stage whisper but the heroine understands it's only wind; nobody's hand could reach so far. She considers love. A chapter near the middle is called *Roadside Attractions*. In this one, we follow her into the u-pick peach orchard at dusk. Because dusk is stronger at the center of the grove, she walks in that direction, reading off the names of heirloom varieties from a brochure. This is where she begins to blur. The body fades before what she's saying. She's saying *clingstone, springflame, Desiree, frost*. At this rate, we'll soon lose track of her. We'll have to begin again.

No Nightmares During  
the Tornado Warning

CJ Scruton

All is well. I woke bloodlessly to the alarm  
this time. The storm came in the night  
and I slept through it—and I could have been  
in the basement, should have been hurt,

but my open secondfloor windows,  
the sirens, your call  
and the phone five inches from my ear  
couldn't take me there, there

is no danger, anymore. The cold front has moved in,  
darling—the downed branches  
will house ants and breeding mosquitoes again.  
The air always tastes like wet burning wood, when

the cool comes in this place—when I so often  
wake up having wept, and gone back to sleep.



On the Way to Church  
Camp You Miss the  
Border Between  
Nightmare and Memory

CJ Scruton

Blurred hindsight feels a lot like those movies,  
where it's all older counselors running around,  
twentysomethings styled to look  
like the brooding art goth, the ditz, the jock. You can't  
recall which one you are, are supposed to be. And something  
stalks, some delay pedal cough sounds  
in the floodlight forest as you run through it.

You're enough of a kid to be dumb,  
have reckless fun and get yourself killed  
for your genitals  
or unspeaking thoughts—but not  
so young anyone will feel bad for you  
being chopped down.

They bring their hands to their faces  
not for you, but for the saturated cornsyrup gore, the sight  
of what's on the inside.

You are not so young  
the audience can't flinch and then forget,  
remind themselves you deserved it—  
were asking for it, really, running off  
like that, hitching rides alone, walking the woods  
with strangers at night. Not so sinless  
the highschoolers at home can't make themselves forget  
your begging, your blood  
an hour after the tape stops and the party ends. No,  
everyone has moved on already.  
But they still have to walk together to their cars to feel safe  
in numbers, and they all remember  
what real life must feel like, watching their friends'  
dark warm breath cloud under the stars, stars  
they've never seen quite so clearly, they realize—  
they've never wandered out this far from town.

Every Night I Pray for My  
Father to Live Forever

Bertha Isabel Crombet

Or, at least, a very, very long time.  
At 88, he already has. I have no memory of him  
  
as a young man, just the yellowed photos  
shuffled recklessly through the roughed hands of time.  
  
There he is, wearing a navy suit with his baseball team,  
his ears long and prominent, drooping like  
  
the jowls of an animal. And one of him as a child,  
no older than eight— a true vintage gem from the '30s—  
  
his white button-down shirt crisp, his gaze  
only a veil of sternness, as if someone has just warned him  
  
against laughing. But this year, he has forgotten  
my sister's birthday. And always, the keys in the door.  
  
And he's begun using antiquated words  
from his youth in Cuba that I'd never heard before.  
  
Carro morphed into pisicorre. Tennis became popis.  
Chancletas, now, cutaras. Language was leaving him  
  
like a dream upon waking, words dissolving  
like the steam of a train hissing through snow.  
  
I think of Methuselah, white beard down to his navel,  
his skin etched and translucent, as he kneeled  
  
before his neighbors, supplicating them

to return to holiness before the flood.

How tired he must have been, nearly a millennium  
of stifling desire. I think of the Greenland shark

and its soft, oily bones, lonely, swimming for centuries  
beneath the ice, water black as a pupil.

This is not what I want for him, my father,  
already ancient and mysterious, every year

of his life coiled inside him like the numinous rings  
of a Great Basin bristlecone pine. God nods.

Our tourguide whispers to the mic:  
*Astrocytes are brain cells,*  
*secreting adenosine to make us sleep—*

Astro sites. I always knew:  
the stars sing us to sleep, sponsor this safari.  
So many species of *somnia slumbria* to check off my list.  
Hard to believe they share a common ancestor.

To my right, the napping of babies,  
curled cloth and powder-warm.  
To my left, the torpor of lovers  
in their rigid tangle of roots.  
A cat and dog doze in the sun,  
supine in a summer suburb.  
The pets are a pair of long matryoshka dolls,  
dreams within dreams, stretching back  
to grey winter wolves, golden fall lions.

It's a nice way to roll out, with a friendly tour,  
on a bus that takes its time.

Look: a meditation of toads, a-buzz with thoughts of flies.  
Edison, curled twitching in his inventor's basket,  
sleeping the short shifts of the compulsive dreamer.  
Narcoleptics, numb at their steering wheels,  
plough blissful paths through every picnic in the park.

We steer clear of that one  
giant figure stalking the horizon—Insomniac.  
Don't look at him directly, fizzing, blazing,

burning himself out with the sun.  
How long can you stay awake before you die?

Darker, as we enter the hibernation of bears—  
an abyss, deeper than ocean  
when there was nothing but ocean.  
Even the whale cathedrals are silent now.  
I can hear the adenosine lapping at the hull,  
our wheels spinning free.

In September the streets are still summer slick, heat and wrappers and ice cream in the gutters. I'm at the intersection of Broadway and 1<sup>st</sup>, there's a bowling alley to my right and hipsters glutting themselves on fancy pizza across the street. Between the two of us, the summer is winning, and I'm jean short sweat on my ass and sunburned shoulders. I sip a Pisco sour until my head spins, and we sit at the window at Leña eating chips and argue about the best way to relax. Should I cut my hair short? Is it too hot for long hair is it hot to have it short? Up the mountain a Steller's jay lands on a gum stuck rock in the parking lot and I'm spellbound by the elk. They are whistling at this time of year to stake their claim on one another. The park is yielding. Aspens at the turnpike at the summit at the edge are obliged to fall. At Broadway I enumerate this west, cowboy knitted and turquoise studs in my ears, wave a salted finger out at the early evening clouds and say *here it is babe, here it all is, couldn't you just cry? Couldn't you just eat it up?* And you don't say anything, but the block settles, a streetlight changes, I'm turning and I leave you behind. The bats are out now, glide and swoop through halos of bugs, consume it all open their wings to fold up the night.

Waiting in the crescent  
of an afternoon,  
I return to my latent admiration.  
There is so much canny light  
the mayflies look miraculous  
in concentric swarms over  
the murk. A swan's breast  
breaks the water, her feet obscured  
by turbid swill. I click my fingers  
at a loose dog to scare him  
off the shore, and remember  
you wry and amazed  
on a street corner in Chelsea,  
the docklands brick behind you,  
a rough catch in your voice  
on a too-cold day.  
What else is there in love?  
I untangle a fishing line,  
sweep the dock for dropped hooks.  
The dog is already in another  
rabbitless thicket,  
scouring the ground  
in lovesick reverie.



It was Tuesday so Don stopped at the funeral home. Szekely the undertaker was smoking a joint and sitting in his underwear and top hat in the dead room when Don came in with his wallet in his hand.

“Hello Don” said Szekely.

“Hello Szekely” Don said.

On top of a file cabinet in the corner a little camp television was playing a football game. Don didn’t recognize the teams. Szekely was drinking coffee and balancing his joint on the edge of the table when he wasn’t holding it.

“Coffee?” said Szekely.

“Looks like” Don said.

“Don how long have you been paying me to let you come here every Tuesday and look at the dead bodies?”

“Half a year maybe” said Don. Don was a flat-eyed plumber of gunmetal cheek and broadening tonsure. Szekely looked older but wasn’t. He had a thin face like a greyhound, and Don could see Szekely’s skull.

“Yeah that sounds about right.”

“I just look at them” said Don.

“I know that” Szekely said. “But you’ve got to admit it looks pretty bad.”

“You know it’s nothing low Szekely.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I just like to think about them.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Most people never do. It’s a public service.”

“And yesterday you thought about Miss Carbero for how long Don?” Szekely was projecting like Hamlet even though he

wasn't holding a skull, although there was one next to him on top of the television.

"Where's the camera?" Don said.

"I'm drowning in it Don. I had to sell the blue beast tires and all. I'm picking up shifts at the reservoir. I wouldn't have let you peep in the first place if I didn't need to. And it's only gotten worse."

"I've only got this week's cash on me. If I get more then Forces will find out and we'll both be in water."

"People aren't dying like they used to Don. What would you tell a fisherman if the seas dried up?"

"Stop fishing." Don turned the skull upside down to see if the camera was inside, but there was only a bag of marijuana and a set of boathouse keys.

"You wouldn't understand Don. People will always need toilets. Even if everyone stops dying forevermore. But in an ideal world I wouldn't even exist. How do you think that makes me feel Don?"

Don was opening and shutting the refrigerated drawers one by one but they were all empty or filled with household necessities like bar soap and paperclips. "Where did you say the camera was Szekely?"

"I've been re-burying the same body for a month. Another one before that until it was a xylophone. Eventually someone's going to notice."

"What if I killed someone? Then you could bury them." The pockets of Miss Carbero's yellow muumuu were empty but Don combed through her bushy white hair and mustache for bug microphones just to be on the safe side.

"Could work but I would never ask that of you Don. What do you think I'm doing at the reservoir? But people don't turn out in numbers for canoeing these days and most of them can swim anyway. It's a humiliation sitting there dumb and dripping while the prom king wades back to his car through two feet of mud just as alive as he started out. Just put the money on the table."

"What if I killed you?"

“You think I didn’t think of that? If I don’t enter a certain secret passcode on a certain keypad after you leave this room then the video automatically gets sent directly to the President of the United States and they pop you like popcorn.”

The skull winked at Szekely.

“Want a puff?”

\*\*\*

The next day Don sat in his car outside the hospital with a baby’s-breath blue surgeon’s mask and a needle full of air in his pocket. It was a cruel day and the windows were open. Don was feeling low and needed air to fill him with something, even if something was just air.

Everyone needs air. It’s like killing someone with love.

Don practiced on the upholstery of his sedan. For a moment he worried about sterilization. There was a rap on the door. It was Gruenwald who was a doctor. She had taken Don’s kidney and put it into his twin brother eighteen years ago.

“Hal” said Doctor Gruenwald.

“It’s Don. Hal’s dead” said Don.

Doctor Gruenwald was looking at the baby blue mask and the coat. “You’re a plumber Don. Isn’t that right?”

“You’re a doctor Doctor Gruenwald.”

They were both correct and they both knew it.

“What’s in the needle?”

Don showed her.

\*\*\*

The funeral parlor was in the shape of a gigantic granite headstone, which helped with advertising. In the dead room, which was underground, Szekely was dressing the body of Albert Einstein, the last person ever to die, in a clown costume for tomorrow’s service. He had already exhausted all of the outfits he owned and had resorted to plundering the costume shop across the street. Szekely had bought Albert at a celebrity

auction a month before and had soon found that he looked best in summery colors and bold patterns. Today he was inhabiting the role of Jud Sax, a justice of the peace currently on a fishing trip upstate. Szekely hoped that the Jud family liked clowns.

The skull, which was the skull of a very famous dead actor and which Szekely had bought at the same auction, continued to be.

The doorbell rang which was Bach's organ fugue in D minor which also helped with advertising.

"Hello Don" Szekely said.

"Don's dead" said Doctor Gruenwald. She was carrying something of a size wrapped in brown wax paper.

"You're thinking of Hal. Hal's dead. Don is a plumber."

"That is correct" said Doctor Gruenwald, "too."

"Oh." Szekely was also the pumphouse engineer for the County reservoir, which is why he was wearing the uniform of the pumphouse engineer for the County reservoir.

"The doctors are drowning too Szekely. People aren't getting sick like they used to."

"It's a global catastrophe" Szekely said.

"There is nothing at all we can do" Gruenwald said.

"Nothing" Szekely said. "At all" he agreed. "Nothing."

"But first I brought Don" Gruenwald said.

"Thank Jesus. I was running out of clothing to bury Al in. What's he wearing?"

"I burned his clothes at the hospital morgue." She handed Don to Szekely, who staggered like Atlas under the ex-plumber's paunch. She had wrapped him in wax paper from the rolls in the hospital canteen.

"Oh."

"I'm sorry. I'll bring some clothes tomorrow. Maybe some hospital gowns or scrubs."

"That would be nice" said Szekely. "Al isn't much more than a skeleton now but the hair is very famous."

"Meanwhile we might ruminate on each other's not unconnected dilemmas. This is an undetectable untraceable poison that only doctors know about. It is poisonous and

untraceable and undetectable.”

“How interesting in a purely scientific way” Szekely said.

Szekely took the burning cigarette from the mouth of the skull on the television where he had put it so he could talk to Gruenwald. “Would you like a joint? I mean like a joint cigarette and not like a bodypart from one of the dead bodies.”

Doctor Gruenwald flicked her eyes in disapproval. “You must not do things like that anymore if we are to be engaged professionally. It’s low.”

“All right” said the skull.

“Good” said Doctor Gruenwald.

“Yes.”

The newspaper headline made it clear—  
    you don't have to be sober to save  
a life—the story of an intoxicated man  
    booking an Uber to a rehabilitation center  
  
for the sole passenger: a dying goldfinch. By ways of induction  
    I didn't know were possible, I found  
myself wishing for a rescue of similar proportions—  
    sawdust in my shy mouth, diagonal flurries  
  
of blustery wind knocking my running face like a punching bag,  
    out of me rose a river of blue vomit  
littered with golden stars and vintage trinkets  
    making a profane sludge that flared amber  
  
and settled its bright dung right in front  
    the door of my future father-in-law's  
apartment. Determined to turn embarrassment  
    into bewilderment, I pretended to lie  
  
down, like only a creature in a pool of its own suffering  
    can. The performance of stupor, difficult  
to enjoy unless one really fell asleep. If my conscious  
    slumped over in this immersion, I don't  
  
know. In the hospital, the softest part of my body suffered  
    the injection of a hypodermic needle. In a more  
desirable state, the real question: why always subject softness  
    to such piercing impact? Anaesthetized, my throaty  
  
squawk: a roomy drawl. The circumstances

unpinnable, the dates of adversity always had  
the year missing. The day of my bachelor party, I woke  
up in a Moroccan lounge. Asked to improvise

a belly dance before I had even brushed my teeth,  
I lifted the veil off my face to apply some strawberry  
lip balm. The dense crowd of mannequins sizzled and spat  
a series of heavy metal laughs. Sensing

a rare chance for resonance, I hitched my cackle to the same  
pitch. The floorboards creaked with giggly  
pleasure, as beside me an urn toppled. I hardly flinched  
when it rolled over to my bare feet.

The Globe Reports:  
“A Lover of Pigeons, a  
Hidden Past,” or Take  
the Money and Run

Juliana Roth

What does the eye see in the man feeding park pigeons? Imagine shit-stained coveralls, grey-stranded body perfect for nesting. My mother told me to be shit on by a bird meant good luck in the same breath as learning her golden hair was once a landing spot. In Boston, John Kidd qualified to edit *Ulysses* after making 5,000 adjustments to current circulations. He wished for original patterns to be preserved. What hurt Kidd most was an editor's assertion that “the word known to all men” was “love.” An oversized period intended by Joyce went missing *Earth-mound, portal door, godly entrance—where have you gone?* Kidd spent his mornings searching with birdseed and symbols, perching in Marsh Plaza among the pigeons. Maybe Kidd thought love was presumed in silence and absence and what angered him was that the editor thought love was identifiable. Did Kidd know Tesla also loved a bird? “As long as I had her, there was a purpose to my life,” he said of the pigeon he nursed in a hotel room. Compassion might be brief like this, like a finger extended between bites of baloney on rye. Cities too have loved a bird. New York dimmed high-rises so migrating birds could interpret the light. Bird flight is guided by photoclock. You can't undo the deeply written. Kidd must have known Joyce believed errors were proof of magic.

Broodless, a Hawaiian-shirted migrator, Kidd hides in a Brazilian cubicle learning Portuguese to translate a novel about an enslaved girl using a handmade English dictionary. Birds are also named for their colonizers. Who claimed the white-rumped sandpiper? Called peeps like yellow grained marshmallows they breed in mudflats and northern grassy tundra. They too fly south



to Rio. Long-billed to pick apart tiny things, probe the shallow waters. A researcher unearthing a new disease in sandpipers called ~~discovery~~ “a stroke of luck.” The virus could kill ~~poultry~~ chickens before farmers. Is luck then the result of chance and does chance compose fortune? Kidd liked to show reporters his on bank account slips, ~~proof~~ he was a valued madness, wanting his balances published ~~bird-riddled~~ as though this were a language readers could better understand. Tesla craved all energy to operate ~~together~~ in the universe. Perhaps that’s why ~~wounded~~ birds went his hand.

*call to beg and warn  
vocal rattles, earnest tease  
see, birdsong repeats*

Isn't this what techies  
call decay?

Juliana Roth

torn screen, left to pixelate  
unraveled image, already apart  
hold onto life as if it were a thing to do  
start panting yesterday  
thinking soil was beautiful  
like a dumb Romantic  
aliens seem a better cure  
for loneliness than this upload  
they might even love me back  
a bird going right for my eye  
could kill me, I am in love  
with the Earth again  
especially for its destruction  
and that I cannot avoid  
my own, I confess: I've hit  
and scolded and crushed  
a cockroach, live streamed  
from my shower head  
I did not press record

there is nothing ancient about water  
it is the newest thing on Earth

I'm holding the limb of a lilac tree  
like a severed arm, shaking the shit

out of it so the light-colored petals leap off

and spin away. All my friends are yuk  
yukking it up, pumping air trombones.

I'm counting the hairs on Iceman's head  
because he's all I've got.

Marcella brought her loving horns  
to the river park, but I can't lift my feet.

New black mud on a slack water bay  
at the end of the world. Ice leaves

his clothes torn off by tire shreds  
and yellowed bottles and the wings

of black water bugs. Beneath Memphis

the stony bones of hippos, the chips  
of chicken, hog, and steer. This city

and its water; how it lordy lords it,  
like a giant's vault of clear, sweet wine.

First the west bank, next the pyramid  
will slump away. I'm drunk

now glaring at the tugboats  
with smiles painted on their bows.

I can hear his teeth clicking in the dark.  
Take that stick out your ass he says. It's true.

All the flowers have been sucked away.  
Swim in, Ice. He does as I say.  
Marcella's horns play. In the unreal,  
my brother comes back.

Deer crowd the chalk slicks  
to drink the washout after a blast,  
the potter's glaze, mineral bilge,  
anything for the tannic burn

of an acorn. The white dirt. I ate it all the time,  
just to get a rise out of you. In Georgia,  
hot sheeting rain and a big hydraulic pump  
make bore hole pools that are blue in the day.

They drown fawns, but the coyotes  
will drag them out. You could hang  
from your elbows with your chin above the water.  
Your hips kept floating up. In the winter

I broke a lock to back the Civic in  
and warm the pool  
with a fixer-tailpipe. We came  
for weeks. No one in Dublin knew.

You worried it was too much.  
You're becoming like the deer,  
half-sunk and silent. Desperate.  
We see them watching even now.

Vicky did karate. Vicky did taekwondo. At thirteen, we made her president because she had a plan. For cancer, for the mission, every Friday, barefoot Vicky blew up apples perched on the lips of her boyfriend while his hands hung dead at his side. She started calling herself Vicky Rae and wearing eggplant lipstick.

Over the intercom, at the varsity meets. Vicky Rae. Vichy Vich. Her thighs broke boyish ribs at the County Invitational. Skull on skull, the skin of her forehead cracked and bled from the scratch of the harness and the jaw hairs of her rivals while she bore them into the mat with the authority of her neck. Bulldogging. She wore the medal to school.

Then it was August. Vicky said, I forgot the most important thing. She did karate at the job fair and missed the kick. She grew distant. She left her boyfriend at the blood drive. She was seen to cry. Vicky like a viceroy, in kindergarten I kissed her hand. Vicky, it's fine. She was only afraid to die.

End of summer carnival, in the donkey's tent, I made my play. I closed my arms around Vicky's shoulders. She laid her head against my cheek. She was crying, and it embarrassed me. I slipped the apple from my pocket and held the stem with my teeth. I made my lips a pedestal. Vicky said, I could have been anything. I waggled my hips and the apple bobbed. I hoped she'd get on with the thing.

spider on a cold expanse of glass: your padded claws, tiny  
to the human eye, never misstep: your leg-hairs hear  
the beat of winter's wings—

find my window's crack

and crawl in: my home's dark  
corners do not hide a broom: make my room  
your own: spin filaments as sanctuary, silk strong enough  
to catch the light—

cold-blooded spider: I know you  
do not fear winter's beak: nature has made you predator  
and prey: stay

of execution is my offering: all I seek  
is fractal consolation from the corner of my eye.

a city of bulwarks, home to pent up water-gazers: side streets  
a dreamy seaward throw: glimpses  
of fixed rigging: rain-washed benches clinched to deliberate  
land: a very nearly world, a city philosophical

whenever November: sea growing grim, I strive to find  
counter reveries: breezes pistol the ocean: wharves  
are silent sentinels: nothing surprises

seated northward, I lean into spume: my mind slips  
by degrees: my gaze conjures ships of mortal sight: all old hats  
hooked, each false step nailed, I drive off other waves—

elsewhere in the city philosophical, a siren sounds: at the coffin  
warehouse thousands stand, crowds like green fields, each  
little mouth a watery part: torn bills posted years ago weep red

in some damp city, each drowned bulwark a bloated hope: each  
buoy a substitute head.



*for Aimee*

How is it  
that you exist  
so far  
inside me?  
The pink  
of your nails  
glowing  
like fairy dust.  
I lined shells  
down your chest  
and they grew  
from your  
body like sweat.  
Sticky with sunblock  
and salt water,  
I kissed you  
and thought  
about the softness  
in your thighs.  
I want one moment.  
I want it to be that one.  
Lying on your  
big blanket,  
almost wishing  
you had brought  
the one your grandma  
made you—  
stained  
with period blood.

Covered in air,  
I lay  
swallowing  
every piece of you  
the sun allows.  
I hope the wind  
can forgive me  
for wanting it  
to stop.  
Wanting to be  
ever present  
in the staleness  
of our breath  
and the sand  
stuck to your  
almost  
damp legs.  
Maybe I want  
another moment.  
The one right before.  
When we walked  
into the water  
together and your  
body was stronger  
than mine.  
I applied  
my sunscreen  
touching myself  
the way you  
did in the morning,  
with hands of  
almost heat.  
I watched you  
disappear into  
the wet.  
You were  
holding yourself.

community garden  
winter

Zach Savich

this is how you keep talking to someone who's crying and cry there  
was  
that dog that only children see it's a corgi places fire feeds on  
rain  
colorless rainbows

just ask them to stand on the stage during the hard speech and  
look  
at the harp this way of swimming works only in currents you  
look  
for a fact and find a phrase

walk under the dry bouquet a kite must be one of several shapes  
to fly

bees vanish but also hive in more spots   sunglasses in grasses a  
billowing tarp   plain air evidence of their going   rust prevents  
corrosion   you're trying to make a place   more than to make it to a  
place   vegetal rust

wrens campari-rinsed   it serves   she said the tumors must be holy  
bringing you   as they do   so close   clothesline cloudburst and  
clovers

the mind's more wax than wick   posts abraded soft   a psalm that  
starts  
*perhaps*   perhaps try this same piece of the puzzle   in the same gap  
next month

*for Miss Ohio*

The first thing I want to say is  
I want to do right but not right now...  
—I want to beg you, dear sir...<sup>1 2 3</sup>

People are always saying, *I want to know you.*  
I don't want that kind of power,  
is there anything you want to say?<sup>4 5 6</sup>

—What do you want? You want me to make you.  
I want you to leave, now.  
—I want to beg you, dear sir, to be patient...<sup>7 8 9</sup>

I don't want to lose you, I'm not ready...  
—I want you to stop being a coward.  
Here is the thing I want to say, loudest of all:<sup>9 10 11</sup>

I know you always wanna know the truth  
but I don't—I want to destroy every ~~good~~ thing...  
—I want to beg you, dear sir, to be patient<sup>12 13 14</sup>

(toward all that is unresolved...)

I want to return this white ~~hour~~ [page] to you.  
—Yeah, you want to do right but not right now.  
The last thing I want to say is this:  
I want to beg you, dear sir, to be patient<sup>15 16 17 18</sup>

(toward all that is unresolved in ~~your~~ [our] heart[s])

—I do not want to be loved. <sup>19</sup>

—I want you to stop being a coward. <sup>20</sup>

—I don't want to draw this into an either-or argument. <sup>21</sup>

—I want what you want. <sup>22</sup>

—I want to destroy every good thing that has happened to me; I'm  
a piece a shit, I'm a liar. <sup>25</sup>

—I want *you* to relax. <sup>24</sup>

—I just want to relax. <sup>25</sup>

—I just want you to listen. I don't want you to say a word, just listen. <sup>26</sup>

<sup>27</sup>

—I want us to work. <sup>28</sup>

—I want to stay. I can make it. <sup>29</sup>

—I just want to stay here with you. <sup>30</sup>

—I want to turn my back on you. <sup>31</sup>

—I don't want to be one of those people who are getting divorced  
at 52 and falling down into tears, admitting they never really  
loved their spouse and they feel their life has been sucked up  
into a vacuum cleaner. <sup>32</sup>

—I want to visit my family. <sup>33</sup>

- I want to get away from our families.<sup>54</sup>
- I want you to understand that you do not have to be loyal to them.<sup>55</sup>
- I want to know where the money went. I really want to know.<sup>56</sup>
- I don't want to know where the money went.<sup>57</sup>
- I want you to stop loaning your family money!<sup>58</sup>
- I will never want for money.<sup>59</sup>
- I want to forget that *I'm poor*.<sup>40</sup>
- I want you to stop *acting poor*.<sup>41</sup>
- I want to be emotionally intimate with you and I want to be in love with you, but not in that way.<sup>42</sup>
- There are people I want to sleep with, and I don't want to sleep with you, so it's only platonic.<sup>43</sup>
- I want a platonic relationship.<sup>44</sup>
- I want a perfect relationship.<sup>45</sup>
- I want to feel it all every time we kiss.<sup>46</sup>
- I just want to talk about it. Can you be my friend for like two seconds so we can talk?<sup>47</sup>
- Is it okay that I want you to be my best friend?<sup>48</sup>

- I just want you to look at me the way you used to.<sup>49</sup>
- I want to turn my back on you.<sup>50</sup>
- I want to change the subject for a second.<sup>51</sup>
- I don't want to live behind a strip club.<sup>52</sup>
- I want to become a stripper.<sup>53</sup>
- I *want* the money, we *need* the money.<sup>54</sup>
- I want to live close to the city.<sup>55</sup>
- I want to live out in the country.<sup>56</sup>
- I want to make sure we are able to find a nice house and I can sew the drapes and pick matching bed covers.<sup>57</sup>
- I want to feel free!<sup>58</sup>
- I want to push back here: I want to suggest that neoliberal reason has returned us back to Plato with a vengeance.<sup>59 60</sup>
- I want to feel free!<sup>61</sup>
- I simply want to suggest that future forms of the politics of emancipation must be inscribed in a resurrection, a re-affirmation, of the Communist idea...<sup>62</sup>
- I want you to be quiet.<sup>63</sup>
- I want some peace and quiet.<sup>64</sup>



- I want to live in a world capital or the howling wilderness.<sup>65</sup>
- I want to obliterate that flowered field, to obliterate my need for the field.<sup>66</sup>
- I just don't want to feel so bad anymore.<sup>67</sup>
- I want to be beautiful again.<sup>68</sup>
- I don't want to be the tremulous coot you barely remember.<sup>69</sup>
- I want sausage and pepperoni pizza.<sup>70</sup>
- I want tacos.<sup>71</sup>
- I think I want to lose weight.<sup>72</sup>
- I want a cigarette. I want a hit.<sup>73 74</sup>
- I want you to want to do the dishes.<sup>75</sup>
- I want to know how come you haven't done the dishes like I told you?<sup>76</sup>
- I want your help.<sup>77</sup>
- I want you to take better care of yourself.<sup>78</sup>
- I want you to take care of yourself!<sup>79</sup>
- Well, I don't know that I want to be looked after..<sup>80</sup>
- I want you to talk to me!<sup>81</sup>
- I know what I want to say clearly enough; the problem is how to

embody the ideas. <sup>82</sup>

—I want us to work. <sup>83</sup>

—I want us to work. <sup>84</sup>

—I want us to work. <sup>85</sup>

—I want to love you, baby. <sup>86</sup>

—I want you to try and be the ■■■ I used to know. The old ■■■. <sup>87</sup>

—I want to be your clean boyfriend someday. <sup>88</sup>

—I want to go to church. <sup>89</sup>

—I want your help. <sup>90</sup>

—I want to apply for this loan. <sup>91</sup>

—I don't want to talk about money with you! <sup>92</sup>

—I don't want to just get laid. I want to build a life with you. <sup>93</sup>

—I don't want to offend you but you don't want a life. <sup>94</sup>

—I want you to tell me what being with me makes you feel. <sup>95</sup>

—I want to be independent. <sup>96</sup>

—I want to live on my own. <sup>97</sup>

—I do not want to keep to myself, but none see the brand on my forehead save you and the few who can look me in the face. <sup>98</sup>

—I want you to be quiet. <sup>99</sup>

- I want stability in my life, sure, but on my own terms. <sup>100</sup>
- I want to suggest, however, that no one stands on one's own; strictly speaking, no one feeds oneself. <sup>101</sup>
- I don't want you to leave me, I'm not ready. <sup>102</sup>
- I never want to see your face again. I'll never forgive you for this, you crazy bitch. <sup>105</sup>
- I want your mother to stay friends with mine. <sup>104</sup>
- I want you to leave, now. <sup>105</sup>
- I want to get married. <sup>106</sup>
- I want to study god and never get married. <sup>107</sup>
- I want to suggest a concept of love that is less miraculous and more hard work, namely a construction of eternity within time, of the experience of the Two, point by point. <sup>108</sup>
- I just want you to *get* to the point! <sup>109</sup>

(I just want to be held, but contingently,  
the way the mind holds a trauma  
that failed to take place...

\*

(S (NP I)  
(VP (ADVP **just**)  
**want**  
(S (VP **to**  
(VP **be**  
(VP **held**  
(ADVP , **but contingently** ,)  
(ADVP **the way**  
(SBAR (S (NP **the mind**)  
(VP **holds**  
(NP (NP **a trauma**)  
(SBAR (WHNP **that**)  
(S (VP **failed**  
(S (VP **to**  
(VP **take-**  
**place**))))))))))))))))))  
.)<sup>110</sup>

\*

(Ijustwanttobeheld,butcontingently ,thewaymind-  
holdsatraumathatfailed  
totakeplace.)<sup>111</sup>

where Man & Woman have no need to leave a will. Breaking some unwieldy seal, XX & XY surpass sexes & become *The Speed Of Light*—succeeding ceaseless—beyond the bondage of body land. Senses will themselves to be self-willed, no longer tethered in all direction to stitched stretched leather & whether or not 2B or not 2B distills to Descartes. *I think data, therefore I am data*. Where the *World of Tomorrow* is today, all uncles have taken noses and put them in iPhones, along with the opposable thumb. Nothing opposes the earnest of our human furnace. The *Us of Tomorrow* is at hand! Our eyes are asterisks or asteroids: windows punctuated by stars of fire. Our mouth is smile or frown: 1 of 2 option parentheses up or down. Our voices are prerecorded. Together we are 1 voice of a man once named Black Hole, & thankfully we don't know what the word *name* or *black* or *hole* or *word* means anymore. Today we see speechless. Today we speak insignia. Today we seek emblem. Our name is Emogi 1, 2, 3, & to infinity! & beyond, our expressions send messages along side pockets—silent but for a single tintinnabulation. & as for sentiment, Love is no longer continuous feeling, because luckily feeling has been discontinued—all but for the ultimate emoticon: an empty outline of the symbol once known as the heart now toppled over on the side of forgotten, long forgotten it's actually the silhouette of a prostitute's ass—propped, perched & primed for man mounting. & thankfully, Man has been discontinued. *The Last Man*—saved for posterity—is now on display. The rest have been repurposed & uploaded to *The Social Network*—where hyperlinked tweets advertise 1 request cloned ad infinitum: 1+1 mainframe seeks another 1 for artificial copulation. A lick on the bit is a click on the link. A suck on the stuck key is a grip on the last external drive. Inserting the C into the V, or the C into the A, or the V into the V is replaced with

technology so cutting edge, one must be careful not to esc, as keys  
press Hard pound Enter delete Enter shift Control F. ALL CAPS  
data ENTRY sent AGAIN and AGAIN and AND COMING—is  
a call dial tone outmoded. No one picks up. No one answers on  
the other end of bodies. No one calls for the other end of flesh.  
Success. We are left with progress. The culmination culled from  
what was once us under skin is now kept in glass screens—some  
cracked, some pristine. And every heart is a cursor—...

... ..cycling... .. ..cycling... ..

The Characteristic  
Frequency of Feedback  
Loops

Lauren Camp

Sweat waltzes the top of his head and I love it!  
On the main floor, thirty wheelchairs blunt a sequence of slow  
escapes  
A retired podiatrist is bent left in a black bicycle helmet and keeps  
circling (fart fart)  
All of this happens on white linoleum, all the shuffling  
Into eternity and the salacious sun  
The day is ripped open and soft  
Dad scoops his soup with a fork, finds carrots, a crown  
How can there be so much to chew and slurp  
On this day margarine was patented, made first from beef fat and  
colored yellow  
To seem rich with flavor but I prefer butter  
I am in Florida where it is moody July, all reason emptied to a melting  
point  
My father has gained weight and is bigger and does not exist, I  
mean  
Crows trot out from leaves with their ordinary violence and it is  
impossible  
To carry on a conversation in this room  
My father opens his hand his mouth  
Looks at the light in his hand  
I go on, welcoming the last thing or next thing  
What if this work is limitless?  
This is the best moment, or so we say as the window glass  
trembles  
With its own echo                      and simply                      disappears

In those six days as he was  
an innocent tenant. As this incarnate form.

Outside, the sun fanned the grass. Bore down  
on tree line: ash, maple.

We cleaned his house of panic.  
Produced absolution with confidence, or wanted to.

Into his ear, I named two places:  
here and there, though I was alarmed by the oncoming

travel. It had been a weeping spring  
and would go on. Tulips straight

on tiny stems. Neighbors building what becomes them.  
My heart those days was made of time,

by which I mean distraction. Every word  
a sip, a pause, a story granted

all its spilling. The nurse checked his pulse.  
His face. Slowly, a latchet of movement.

I remained in the middle  
of a sentence, wanting nothing

more than for the light  
to make its spaces, halving everything left.



Rereading East of Eden  
After a Tour of the  
Reconciliation Village

Gabrielle Spear

*...the Hebrew word, the word timshel—  
'Thou mayest'—that gives a choice...Why,  
that makes a man great...for in his...murder  
of his brother he...can choose his course...  
—Chapter 24*

But what of the glittering instrument  
without a choice to begin with?

What of the ladder to the stars  
if the ladder is pulled from beneath your feet?

In my country, another Black mother mourns  
her child slain by the state and the Black president mandates

reconciliation. Here, the Tutsi king fashions himself  
a crown from the plucked bones of his conquest.

Dictates the living dead harvest a feast  
of forgiveness in his honor.

Find me a land that is not a peace memorial  
in the making.

Who am I to prescribe mercy  
when I can barely touch myself?



“You take it,” I said.

“No, you.”

Ardash knelt closer to the straw bed the plastic baby was nestled in. “It looks less real close-up,” he observed. “You take it,” he insisted again.

“What am I supposed to do with it?” I asked, imagining the car ride home with my father driving, his *kyooghatsee*<sup>1</sup> wife in the passenger seat and my grandmother, my sister Lucine and me sitting in the back. “I can’t even hide it.”

“Go in there,” Ardash suggested, jerking his thumb towards the entrance of the church, which lead upstairs to where the church board members were having a meeting. “Ask your dad for the car keys—make some shit up—and put it in the trunk.”

“And then what?” I asked.

“And then what?”—who gives a shit!” he muttered, running his hand over his face. “*Jesus*,” he said.

I snorted, catching a joke he hadn’t made. And then, realizing what he had said, Ardash let out a chuckle. “*Jesus*,” he said.

I looked over my shoulder and started for a second; despite the musty, psychedelic frankincense that lingered, the glossy pews and stain-glassed windows that now glowed like slabs of gem in the late afternoon sunlight, I had forgotten that Ardash and I were in church.

An hour before, Ardash and I had been sitting upstairs at the end of the long corridor, cross-legged on the maroon carpeting that was thin from wear, waiting for our fathers to emerge from another drawn out board meeting. My grandmother was visiting a friend who lived, conveniently, several blocks away from

<sup>1</sup> A derogatory word in Armenian for a low-class peasant or villager

church and had taken my sister Lucine with her. When mass had ended my father had dropped off his wife at some local salon minutes away, where we would pick her up after the meeting. And I was stuck, once again, waiting with agonizing boredom for the meeting to end.

“What do they even talk about in there?” Ardash said, not expecting an answer. There was a mound of gravel he had gathered from the parking lot and had positioned a trash can several feet away. He was aiming bits of gravel with little effort, his voice dulling with each throw.

“I don’t know,” I said.

I tried to sit primly on the dirty carpet, careful to keep the skirt of my dress smoothed over my knees, aware that if my father suddenly appeared I would have to jump to my feet before he saw me.

“I don’t know how he can sit for two whole hours when he doesn’t do that at church,” I said. Ardash grinned and said nothing. Encouraged, I continued. “I literally sit there for the entire service—over two hours—with my grandmother and his stupid wife and he’s nowhere to be seen.”

As I spoke the words aloud, I could feel within me an anger blooming so steadily that I grew quiet. Ardash continued chucking the gravel, still not aiming.

Every Sunday morning, we went to church. The Armenian Christian Orthodox mass began at nine in the morning and ended a quarter before noon. When I asked my mother why our services were so long, she told me it had been explained at a lecture she had attended recently, outlining the precious history of our hymns and how it would denounce tradition to take out elemental parts of the mass all in the name of time efficiency. She made it sound crass, practically, the ugliness of curtailing holiness all in the name of reclaiming a few stray hours of our day. But while she took a break from us for the weekend, we were stuck waking up at eight o’clock in the morning and squeezing ourselves into our pantyhose, our wrinkled, outdated dresses and wasting the best part of a Sunday.

“He’s probably hanging out with my dad,” Ardash guessed,

“with all the other dads outside of the church. They slip back in before the sermon. And then in the car ride it’s like a fucking quiz show—drilling me and my brother about what the priest said. Then we get home and he’s a total dick for the rest of the day.”

I had never actually spoken to Ardash’s father. He was one of those quiet, serious characters. He wore a heavy mustache and had large, overbearing brown eyes that seemed to penetrate a person, as if assessing what ill-intended act they had carried out or were about to.

“My dad’s not a dick,” I said, trying out the word for the first time. It felt like slipping my foot into a new pair of shoes that felt immediately and surprisingly comfortable. As if made specially to fit my feet. I almost wished my father was a dick so I could say it again without it sounding forced.

“Tell me about your stepmom,” Ardash said, though I knew he wasn’t interested and just bored.

“She’s not my stepmom,” I said. “I have a mother.”

“Your dad’s wife—whatever,” he clarified impatiently.

“She’s stupid,” I said, not bothering to search for a more accurate and fitting word. I didn’t feel like talking about her. “She barely speaks to me or Lucine,” I said. “It’s like we were a package deal and she has to put up with us because she married our father. Last week she made chicken liver,” I said, as if that summed it all up. “She sucks.”

As a game, I started making a list of devious pranks I could play on her that would shut her up for a while. I envisioned dumping Nair into her conditioner, and I had to suppress a spontaneous cackle at the image of her head covered in bald patches, resembling a diseased feline. Maybe sneaking her mink coat out of the closet for a dose of spray paint and then hanging it back in place for her to discover on a Sunday morning.

“I could be home playing video games *right now*,” Ardash said through his gritted teeth as he grabbed a fistful of gravel and threw it against the wall, nowhere near the trashcan. I was glad I hadn’t wasted the time on him with a well-worded description of my father’s wife.

“I don’t know what I could be doing,” I said, “but I hate church.

When I get older, I'm not coming here anymore.”

I tolerated mass by daydreaming about and envying how American children spent their Sundays: an afternoon of cartoon-watching and eating a pile of Ego waffles smothered in Aunt Jemima syrup. Then, perhaps, taking in a late afternoon movie followed by a Chinese buffet dinner and an ice cream Sunday for dessert. Instead, we endured a long car ride back from church with two of my grandmother's elderly friends who we deposited to their homes along the way, listening to my father's wife speaking to him in Romanian (coincidentally, both their families had fled there during the Genocide), unconcerned that my sister and I did not speak or understand the language. When we finally got home, we would burst through the door and race to our bedrooms, change out of our clothes with the frantic urgency of two individuals who had been forced to roll around in nuclear waste.

I don't remember when they met or how. After having taken her out on a handful of dates, my father had allowed her to move into the house and unpack her life as if she was a long-lost relative who had been deserted in a foreign country. Despite her shellacked red fingers and stiffly quaffed helmet of hair, I only regarded her for what I thought she truly was: a *kyooghatsee*. A common villager. She always wore the same orange slippers around the house, a garish, gold-embroidered, made-in-China cheapness embossed at the top of the foot. I imagined that if she ever removed those slippers, before stepping into the shower maybe, the fine dust from whatever the hell village she left still powdered her feet and the crevasses between her toes. Nothing could temper the sheer and absolute loathing I felt for her.

Their wedding had been an unceremonious affair that my father had informed us about over the phone, advising Lucine and I to arrive at the house wearing our best dresses. My doting grandmother, who had hen-pecked my father to remarry after my mother had left him, stood by his side as the priest married them in the presence of all the family members and friends that could fit into the house. As my father slipped the ring on her finger, I took a hard look at her, absorbing her cartoonishly lipstick-y

smile and Geisha-matted face, her desperate and unconvincing feat of emulating perfection.

In the past several months she was sounding increasingly aggravated, telling my father (in Armenian during these conversations) how she didn't understand, that she was trying everything her doctor had recommended. I noticed also, her frequent trips to the pharmacy, where she would return with her purchase in a brown paper bag and go straight to the bathroom. Just this morning she had disappeared into the bathroom for well over ten minutes and stomped out, beelining into the bedroom. Lucine and I had heard her voice blistering through the wall.

She began her usual rant. "I can't take this anymore! And the doctor keeps telling me the same thing: don't think about it so much and it will happen. It's been months now! Months!" I relished hearing her reach irrational heights of near-hysteria.

"She's been upset lately," I said. A prolonged silence had set in. We were both sitting on the floor next to each other with our eyes half open, our boredom having lulled us into a physiological coma.

"The wife?" Ardash practically mumbled.

"Yeah. Every time we get home from church, she's complaining to my father about how something is not happening although she's been listening to the doctor." I detailed the conversations I had been overhearing.

"Ah," Ardash commented, the 'aaaah' part drawn out, as if it made sense to him.

"What?" I asked.

"She's trying to get pregnant," he said.

"No," I said right away. "It's not that."

"Why?" Ardash asked, his eyes now fully open. "How old is she?"

"I don't know," I said. "Like thirty-six or something. It's hard to tell with all that makeup."

"She's trying to get pregnant," Ardash said again. "Trust me."

"Why?" I asked. Now that he had imparted a startling insight, I wondered what else he was able to put together.

"Why?" Ardash asked, his face contorted in disgust. "I don't know why. I don't know why anyone has kids when they barely spend time with them. Like my dad, for example."

“What about him?” I was all too glad to shift topics and not think about the dreadfulness of my father and this *kadz*, this bitch. Yet, the very idea of my father having a baby with this woman left me utterly distracted. I was barely listening to Ardash’s tirade.

“.... summer he sends me to Camp Hayastan. On Saturdays I go to stupid ACYOA meetings. Sundays was Sunday school, obviously, but since I’m too old now—like you—I’m stuck here waiting for him while my mother’s downstairs with her group of Armenian mothers talking about next Sunday’s bake sale,” he said. Before I could add that my mother hated dealing with all those women when she was married to my dad, Ardash continued. “Like, if something has nothing to do with being Armenian or Armenia or whatever, he has no interest. He barely talks to me. I’d have to memorize a Silva Kaputikyan poem and recite it for him to get his attention.”

My spirits slightly lifted, I decided to show off a little. “Ooh des, vortees, oor er leenes / Ays loosnee dag oor el kunas,” I began reciting and Ardash’s face flickering with recognition, joined me in the last couplet of the stanza, “Teh moruht ankam mutkeet hanes / Koh mayr lezoon chee moranas.”

We both laughed. It was a well-known Kaputikyan poem we had all been made to memorize growing up.

“He sucks,” Ardash concluded.

“My dad is okay,” I said, not completely convinced.

I thought about the first weekend of December when my father had picked up Lucine and I that Saturday morning. We had decided on the way to his house that we would look through the storage room in the basement to find our skates and see if they still fit so my father could take us ice skating. His wife was on the other side of the house, probably tweezing her eyebrows in front of her ridiculous light-up makeup mirror from 1979 or walking around in the dead animal coat she had appeared in one Sunday morning after her birthday in May. Lucine and I could hear her voice coming from the kitchen as we scrambled down the stairs on a clear mission.

Although it was a storage room it had served for many years



as a small space where Lucine and I played when we were younger. There was the oversized Barbie doll house, the main attraction being the elevator, which we played with, but without the actual Barbie doll. Lucine had her collection of Strawberry Shortcake figures displayed on one of the higher shelves, which my grandmother had given her as gifts for her birthdays and Christmases. But what I looked forward to most of all, despite having outgrown them, was an encyclopedia set for children. Their hard cover exterior seemed deceptively like an old textbook, their simple, straight-forward titles holding my attention every time: *Stories and Fables*, *Holidays from Around the World*, *Green Kingdom*, *How Things Work* and at least six others. The room itself was a pastime for Lucine and I, especially after our parents' divorce; a small, treasured corner of the basement where we excavated through boxes of old books and filled-up marble notebooks from grade school, toys we had once loved and forgotten, all mysteriously stored away once they were worn from use.

"Where are you going?" we heard my father's wife calling from the foot of the stairs as we headed to the storage room. "Antranig—why are they in the basement?" she called out to my father. As if we didn't have permission to play in our own basement.

We were too dumbstruck to reply as we stood in front of the storage room that was suddenly empty. As if someone had taken the hose of a monstrous power vacuum and sucked up the contents of the room. The shelves, with none of Lucine's dolls, seemed odd-looking, as if they were part of her doll collection and should have been removed along with them. The only item in the room, which I didn't even recognize as familiar upon first glance, was a highchair propped up against the wall. It was Lucine's from when she was a baby.

Lucine, with her wide-eyed nine-year-old innocence looked at me and asked, "Where did they move everything?"

At first, I wanted to believe that it had all been relocated, trying not to succumb to my recent disenchantment of life that came soon after my parents' divorce, followed by my father's impulsive marriage, while I stood on the diving board of puberty

holding my nose.

"It's gone," I said.

"What? Gone? Where?" With pause, Lucine wheeled around and stormed up the stairs.

I stayed in the basement listening as she began a full-throttle investigation, berating my father and his wife with questions.

"But where is everything?" she kept asking.

Although I couldn't hear what they were saying, I could tell from their tone that they were trying to placate her with empty explanations. After a few moments I couldn't hear anything else except Lucine screaming. "You're not telling me where it is. Where is it? Where is all our *stuff*!?"

By then my grandmother came to the kitchen and pulled Lucine into her bedroom. Had it been a few years ago, she would have been dragged away kicking. That was Lucine.

I crept halfway up the stairs, hoping to overhear the conversation. And of course, they were speaking Romanian again. All my life we had grown up hearing *hayeren khoseer*, speak Armenian, but this bitch could do whatever she wanted. It was only from their inflections and the stray phrases I understood that I was able to piece together that my father's wife had taken it upon herself to throw our belongings into the trash because she thought it was old stuff that was taking up space in the house. Although my father replied evenly, his voice reasoning with her indignation, there was a growing edge of irritation that I predicted would lead to a violent outburst, one of many I had experienced growing up.

"*Lasa-ma in pace*," she said finally. *Leave me alone*. My grandmother had taught me that phrase years ago, when I told her a boy in my third-grade class who happened to speak Romanian, was teasing me. She always laughed when I said it.

"Antranig, *destul*," she said. *Enough*.

Now perched two steps from the top of the landing, I hunkered down, as if I was in a bomb shelter, waiting for the storm to begin. All I heard was the scraping sound of the chair against the kitchen tile floor—my father leaving his seat, and a strained, lagging silence. I stood up and inched into the room,

surprised to find his wife still sitting at the kitchen table. She was wearing a waffle-pattered beige house dress and the stupid slippers, her brown helmet hair and her nails, a Pepto-Bismol pink.

Hot-faced, I stared at her for a moment. Her little mole eyes held my gaze, neither of us willing to break away.

“You’re a fucking bitch,” I said to her, the shame of saying the words out loud for the first time burning my face. My voice trembled. “You don’t belong here,” I said.

Unruffled, she said nothing, cocking her eyebrow as if unable to contain her amusement.

In the end, my father did nothing. I don’t know if my grandmother had even known about our things being thrown away, but however she explained it to Lucine must have been convincing enough that she didn’t bring it up to me afterwards. And for Lucine’s sake, I wanted to let it go. I hoped that my father would have mentioned it on the way home, maybe made an excuse for his wife for having done what she did, but like every other Sunday, he dropped us off in front of my mother’s apartment building, waited for her to buzz us in from the lobby and drove off in his Cadillac.

“You know what would be funny?” Ardash asked, interrupting my thoughts.

“What?” I asked, feeling grim.

“Imagine next Sunday when Der Hayr and the altar boys and those guys show up for the Christmas badarak and the baby Jesus is missing?” he said. “How funny would that be? How fucked up!”

“That would be funny,” I said, as if he had suggested we fly to Mars for the afternoon.

“We should do it,” Ardash said, now standing up and brushing off loose gravel from his slacks.

“What?” I asked.

“The baby Jesus. Take it. Imagine their faces!”

I searched his face, waiting for him to cut the joke. “What? No,” I said. “That’s stupid. We’d get caught.”

“What—stealing it? *Whose* catching us?” To prove his point, he held a finger in the air, commanding silence. He paused for a

few tidy seconds, and satisfied, gave me a smug smile.

“There’s no pulse in the air. Let’s go.”

Before I could protest, I saw him head towards the church entrance and disappear around the corridor.

“How about I just steal one of the three wise men?” I bargained, once I realized he was serious. “Say, Baghdasar or Melkon?” I only remembered two of the three names I had learned in Armenian Sunday school.

“As if,” Ardash spoke, replying so quickly that it wasn’t even a consideration. “How do you think you’re fitting one of *those* guys in your car? They’re practically life-size.”

He was right, I knew. “No,” he said. “You have to take the baby.”

“Can’t I just hide it somewhere in the building? Instead of stealing it?” I asked, wondering for the first time why there was any negotiating to begin with, and how Ardash wielded a position of authority when only moments ago we were just two bored twelve-year-olds and it had been his idea.

“You know what? Do whatever the fuck you want,” Ardash sputtered, standing up. “The plan was to steal the baby Jesus. Between today and next Sunday they won’t have enough time to find a replacement. It would have been the best Christmas badarak. Ever.”

He turned on his heels and flounced off the steeple.

“Why can’t *you* steal it?” I called out, my voice small and unheard in the expanse of emptiness.

I stood on the altar alone now, regarding the statues more closely. Mary was kneeling next to the crib with her hands reposed in prayer while Joseph stood over them, his role in the whole business reduced to that of an onlooker. The donkey, the sheep and the goat seemed purposeless, yet vital to the evening, lending a more manger-iness atmosphere alongside the three wise men who each held a mysterious offering in their hands. Melkon was wearing a modest crown that was nestled neatly into a turban-like head scarf while next to him Baghdasar’s headpiece was shaped more similarly like a Catholic cardinal’s with gold embellishments. The other guy, the wise man whose name I had forgotten, seemed less distinguished in a long brown robe and a

towel, really, draped over his head. The scene itself was wholesome in its earthy vibrancy of forest green and gold and mud red, the sheen of holiness less holy now that I wasn't sitting in a pew. Closeup, one could admire the artistry of the statues and less the universal import it carried.

Then a thought occurred to me so sinister, so impossible, that I knew I had to carry it out. Like puzzle pieces that fit too obviously and had been overlooked.

As if in tandem with my revelation, I heard the shuffle of tassel leather loafers steadying down the staircase; the clansmen had concluded their meeting. I couldn't waste a moment. I lifted the baby Jesus from the bed of plastic straw, easing it into my arms. Although it wasn't real, it was the son of God and I supposed it deserved to be held with a modicum of reverence or tenderness or something. Who the hell knew, really, how to hold a statue of baby Jesus? I picked off the stray fibers of plastic straw that clung onto my dress and threw my coat over the statue. It wasn't the weight of the baby that was difficult to manage, but the fact that my coat kept slipping off of it; like the rest of the figures in the Nativity, it had a slick veneer of polish that seemed repellent to fabric. I hoisted it under my arm like a football and threw my coat over it again, gripping the baby's waist as I stepped out of the church and waited at the top of the steps that led to the street.

My father was speaking to Ardash's father when I saw him by the entrance and a queasy warmth spread through my chest as I slipped past him outside, waiting for him to see me. Ardash, who had essentially abandoned me, was already on the sidewalk facing the direction of the parking lot. I hoped he would look up and see me, notice what I was holding underneath the coat. Yet the part of me that had treaded past what he himself had been too chicken to carry out, the rogue in me that felt dangerous and detached now, decided I would walk right past him with my father, not caring either way if he knew what I had done.

"Kohar, let's go," my father finally said, breaking away from his conversation with Ardash's father, knowing I had been waiting patiently to leave.

I followed him down the steps and walked behind him towards the parking lot, gripping the baby's torso despite the sudden onset of perspiration that made it difficult to keep a tight grip with my moist hands. As I climbed into the backseat I sat on the far right and rested the baby to the right side of my hip, keeping it covered with my coat.

My father would never ask me what I did during his long board meetings. It was as if during that span of time I did not exist. The feeling of that thought came over me as he pulled up to the front of the house where my grandmother was visiting her friend. I looked through the window with detachment as my father left the car to ring the bell and saw my sister and grandmother emerge onto the sidewalk and walk towards the car.

As my father put the car back in gear, I felt Lucine's elbow nudge me.

"Hi," she said.

I hadn't considered whether or not I was going to tell her about the baby Jesus. There was a singular and powerful feeling about keeping it all a secret, and less a betrayal of our closeness.

"Hi," I said.

"Dad's taking us back to Mom's early," she said, "because they have plans to visit the Baghdassarian's for dinner."

"On a Sunday?" I asked. "That's weird. Okay."

I was all too glad not to endure his wife longer than I would have to.

Now making his second stop before heading home, my father double-parked in front of the salon and left the car only to return a moment later saying that we had to wait a little bit.

"How long?" I asked, which was not characteristic of me.

"A few minutes," he said, a strange terseness to his tone that I knew had nothing to do with me.

"I guess they have to work extra-hard since it's her," I said to Lucine, but loud enough for my father to hear.

Instead of reprimanding me, I caught his eyes in the rearview mirror; they widened with the sudden cognizance that I didn't like her.

We must have waited in the car for fifteen minutes, if not

longer. It felt, all over again, like I was sitting on the maroon rug tolerating one interminable second after the next. I was about to complain, tired of sitting in silence, and then saw her walk out of the salon. My father left the car again to go to the passenger side and hold the door open for her. I rolled my eyes as she eased her wide ass into the passenger seat, directly in front of me. She didn't turn around to say hello and began speaking to my father, in Romanian again.

Since I could either stare out of the window or at the back of her head, I speculated her hair, unsure of what exactly they had accomplished in that salon since her head was just a stiff mass of unmoving hair, no different from any other day. From the sound of it, she was complaining again, her nasal voice rising with irritation. Had she turned around she would have found me smiling a ridiculous smile, the kind of smile that hurt my face.

I laid in bed, my heart beating heavily as I watched the early morning light filter through the blinds. For two hours now, I had vacillated between staying awake and falling back asleep, and as morning grew closer, I found myself taking deep breaths, listening to the silence. From across the hallway, I heard the sound of a doorknob turn and my stomach jumped. Then I reminded myself that it was my grandmother using the bathroom like she did every morning and that she usually went back into her bedroom for at least half an hour. I turned on my side and looked over at Lucine. She was still sleeping with her back to turned me.

From the parted curtains I saw the edge of our window framed by a fresh snowfall. I started thinking about the igloo that my father and Lucine and I had built after the first snowstorm last winter. Suddenly, I heard the swinging of a door open from the hallway.

I sat up, trying to discern the footsteps and I knew right away from the obnoxious, heavy-heeled pounding that it was her. *I own this house*, her footsteps announced. *I'm the boss*. I threw my head under the covers, instinctively covered my ears and then remembered the lengths I had gone to, that I had been waiting to relish this moment.

The highchair had been lighter than I thought when I had carried it up the basement steps only hours ago. Again, because of my sweaty hands it had almost slipped out of my grip and fallen to the bottom of the steps, but I had managed. What I wished I'd had was one of those coal miner's flashlights. I would have looked like a glowing cyclops in the dining room as I unfolded the highchair into place and situated it at the head of the table, but at least I would have been able to see what I was doing. And despite going back and forth about whether or not to hide the baby at my father's or take it back to my mother's house and stow it somewhere, I had ultimately buried it under a stack of clothes in my bedroom closet at my father's house.

Extracting the baby Jesus from its hiding place had been easy; Lucine was a very heavy sleeper. I had almost laughed as I walked down the hallway with the baby Jesus under my arm, giddy and terrified. At first, I had tried to put it inside the highchair, positioning it as if it was ready for a feeding. But it had been too big to fit in the seat. Without overthinking it, I had kept it simple and rested it on the plastic feeding tray as if on display. Having carried it out as I had planned, I slipped back into bed contemplating whether or not I should go back and put everything away. But I knew I wouldn't. I wondered, though, if I would still be going to church in the morning or instead, sent back to my mother's.

Now, sitting up in bed, I waited. I pictured the dining room table surrounded by the eight empty chairs and the baby Jesus perched on the plastic tray of the highchair. My father's wife had set the table for breakfast the previous evening and had covered it with an ugly, felt green tablecloth.

I could hear her shifting around the kitchen. The sound of the kitchen faucet running, the refrigerator door opening and closing, the clearing of her throat. I exhaled. The clang of a skillet and the utensil drawer pulling open with a clatter. Silence. I thought of the fake Christmas tree in the living room and how she had decorated it during the week, not waiting for us to do it all together as a family. Each ornament carefully placed, the star perfectly perched on top, the gaudy tinsel dripping ostenta-



tiously. Every time I looked at the tree I was taken by its theatrical presence.

*Merry Christmas, you kyooghatsee*, I thought. *Merry fucking—*  
“Antraniig!” A nasal voice ripped through the sleeping house.  
“Antranig!”

I heard my father’s bedroom door bang open and his rushed footsteps down the hallway past my bedroom. I glanced at Lucine, who was still sleeping, her back still facing me. The sun, now fully illuminating the room, cast a warm patch of light on my bed as I sat laughing quietly, at first. I hugged myself.

“How did this get here?” I heard her screaming in Armenian.  
“She’s evil. Pure evil. What kind of a person does this? *Khent* – crazy!”

“Kohar!” my father hollered from a place as distant as my childhood. “Kohar!”

I laughed out loud. Pressing my knees to my chest, I rocked back and forth, laughing. *Merry Christmas, you kyooghatsee.*  
*Merry fucking Christmas.*

The Whimsical Life of  
Madame Croque

Natalie Louise Tombasco

*after Monica Youn*

not much different from mister she carries an egg she is French  
in her stench  
with thin brioche-legs gold strolling smears of Grey Poupon  
and well-to-do  
at night an accordion follows her into a roux “but, I’m more than  
a sandwich!”  
objects mademoiselle still her lovers insist on her dolled up  
in béchamel

sure, she’s got frills wears tulle filthy as swine not a perfume in  
the world  
to guise the reek of brine dirty little miss with a soul glued  
together with fromage  
her boss sniffs out her stink pays her an unwanted massage “you  
were asking for it”  
his grounds for a grope she spends Sunday in bed buried in  
bars of soap

“daddy issues are delicious” dead-eyed on the parquet on empty  
park benches  
cracking up like crème brûlée thought tales end lighthearted?  
a godmother’s toast?  
she darkens into a midnight snack all wants had been poached  
her body was foodporn  
poor madame croque swallowed piece by piece when she had  
been hungry

*after Claire Wahmanholm*

R is for reign and razzle-dazzle, red carpets and rockefellers. For rotten apples with no redeeming qualities. For rhinestones and rolling papers filled with goldenrod. For the ruby slippers that were regifted and confused *Home for Reno*. For where everything is as retro as rice pudding, and retellings about red hens are read by Republicans. For red scare in the realm of overripe heirlooms and russets that grows in rows. For rummage sales that line streets like a running stitch. For the rabble-rouser in lieu of a gold-star recession. R is for the raconteur who tells of ravines that show little remorse in the face of a rain dance. For long-eared rabbits lugging around a kingdom's worth of regret. For Rapunzel revealing a tunnel behind a poster of Raquel Welsh; for road sodas and retail therapy. For the risk of fathers who give daughters away for enriched ritual. R is for remembering his name. For Rumpelstiltskin, the noteworthy recycler of cans and bottles and straw. Only he can turn rain into a gold rush. If only the spinning wheel could thread a ruin shut.

S is for storytelling, for singsongs, soundscapes. S is for speaking slant as snake venom. S is for spindle and sage, for the sea witches who steal voices and lock them away in a shrine for safekeeping. See the submarine's periscope in the San Francisco Bay. S could be for the secret keeper whose stories are sky-blue and slither out like silk bandanas. See Scheherazade, sleepless and sliding into the DMs of unsavory kings. S is for spondees and stormclouds and how ocean walls are soundproof. S is for silence, struggle. For skinny-dipping in a stream of synth, for *Sally sells seashells under the floorboards*. If S is for safety, it's also for a stick of dynamite. S is for slighted stepmothers, where sixteenth birthdays turn to Stockholm syndrome. For a girl feeling sympatico with a room filled with stalagmites, solar systems, and feminine stink. See Sisyphus, that shmuck who shrunk to a small stone, sad shoulders slouching. See how the solstice can seldom become the sadist. S is for spells and walking into a good summer sleep. For *stay the hell awake*. S is the slow open of a screen door like a mouth told often to keep shut.

## Afternoon Tea Afterthought

Natalie Louise Tombasco

A man once said,  
very Britishly and dapper  
and deadly, “I could eat you  
all up with a pudding spoon.”  
Groundbreaking.  
(Stiff upper lip) I slip  
into what if  
I were a sinkhole?  
On the surface I am  
railroad, bridge, street,  
but below I am woman-  
spreading, containing.  
I drink it up.  
I think of the ocean’s floor.  
I sink into my eye sockets  
all the way to China,  
to the trembling core  
of the matter. This is a wake  
up call—man oh man,  
don’t flatter yourself—  
I’ve consumed ponds  
five times your size.  
Small hand man, quicksand  
is a dear friend of mine.  
You want less nag  
while you drill and spill?  
I’ll be so quiet you won’t hear  
my detonator—  
a weight  
I’ve buried beneath  
your house  
as you fiddle around worrying  
about the stock market,  
or whatever.

When we fight time,  
we lose.

Danika Stegeman LeMay  
&  
Nate Logan

When we fight time, we lose.

I've got it now: a thorn in my side the size of a Cadillac.

You can't keep your vigil / you can't watch forever.

There is no color for blood. (You see, the island will be full of strange  
foreboding.)

The eye we call cloud will dreamrain the sky

trapped between the motives of self and world, learning the repercussions of sleep and inattention.

A pure and most clear mirror...it follows that the angel does not understand by reasoning

an earthworm playing a zither

at the bottom of everything there is the hallelujah

Then I get bored and have to admit I want to go

I return to Colonial Williamsburg™ and its euphemistic quasi-theme-park portrayal of America's corrupt origins

it is the ball a-rolling on / for Tippecanoe and Tyler too

and perhaps one day, this morning will not be ashes in your mouth.

So far, we have seen the impenetrable fabric of night, really up close,  
and a neighbor's garage, really up close.

It's necessary to go to as many extremes as possible.

It is a long time ago since I was six.

Our faces have filled with smoke.

And it was all goose, let me tell you,

and I worry that spontaneity acts for its own reasons, not mine

the way one does in the morgue

(the letter reads: "Dear friends, I bring you so")

I knew the queen died before the BBC did because the irish blood  
inside me vibrated like an amber alert

–that is how / the whole field is / seen to bend–

Perhaps she is sitting somewhere, by the open window, her hands  
folded in her lap, gazing down over the olives–

the trees are incendiary.

(Someone has probably used that trick before.)

Never confuse the worthiness of your calling with who you are.

Pragmatists say truth is what has cash value.

May matter be transformed by belief here.

The movie would get a different rating, but this is a review of the  
poster.

You cross the threshold / into the welcoming forest

a hundred thousand hopes subject to fail.

I hope you can see as much.

One can easily imagine it, Pina with her partner and collaborator, Rolf, who designed her sets and costumes, in Munich or in Darmstadt, looking out at all the dirt.

I know now that I am no longer waiting, and that the previous part of my life in which I thought I was waiting and therefore only half-alive was not waiting, although it was tinged with expectancy, but living under and into this reply

and I believe in the abdomen powers, grazing cattle meeting in clearings, as if to say I found something whole and feathered, with only the head missing.

Instead of projecting inward until all I could see was a tunnel focused to a blinding circular spotlight on what I already knew, I had to project outward until I found some sort of illumination that included the outside and the inside.

Let's have some coffee. You're beginning to look maudlin.

The undatable bifurcation of destruction, sharp as a claw, unpredictable, throbbing, magnificent.

Slowly, Spanish is extinguished from their feelings

It gets worse you'll be glad to hear, steadily worse.

Nevertheless his shell collection, with every vacation, grew an ambiguous productivity miracle.

Women knock at your door in vain, you won't open.

I too am held together by shreds.

Can I guess what I'm thinking?

..-we took it /as sign, as promise //still for nothing wavered, /nothing begged or was unreal, the thing /happening, filling our eyesight



bookmarking “eclipse plumage” for the poets.

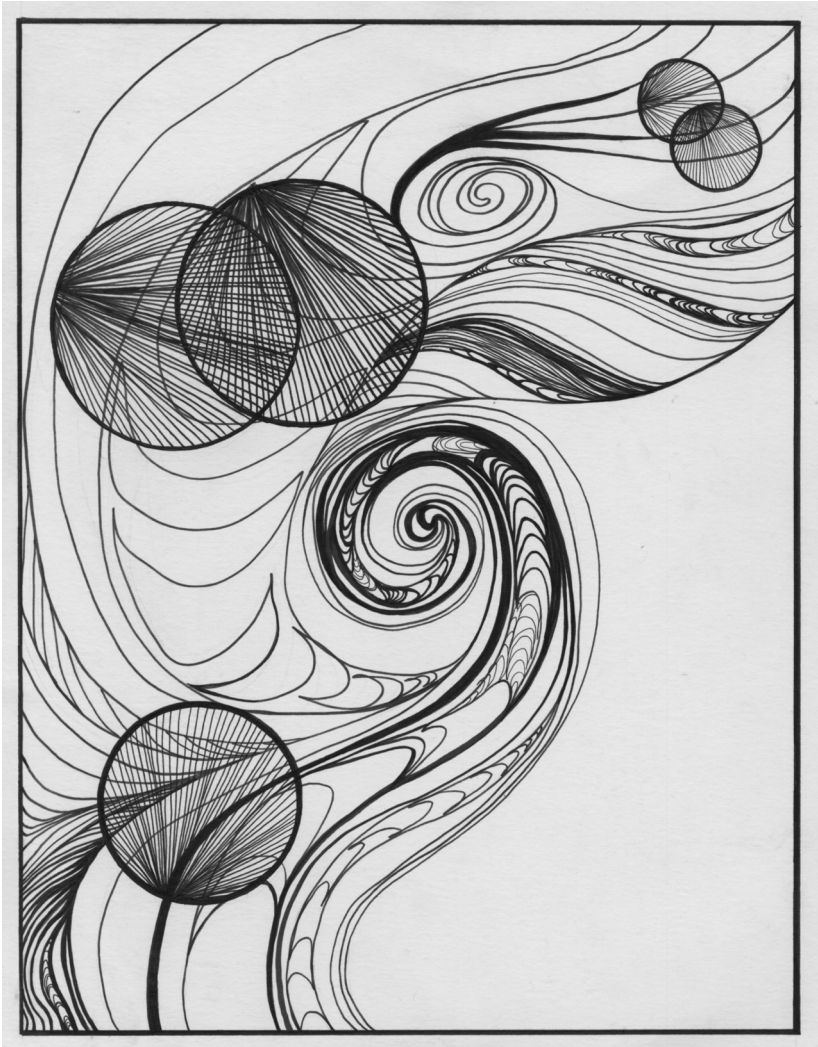
They found that they had one tongue.

I see tall grass. I see a lake. I see a dock.

You take your good language across town.

So if you don't receive any poems from me for a long time, please understand.

Nate and Danika wrote this cento through the mail for nearly a year. It contains 52 lines, including the title, because the USPS will be 52 years old this summer. Danika chose a line, wrote it down, and mailed it to Nate. Nate chose a line, wrote it down, and mailed it to Danika. Over and over again. The danger is, sometimes the mail gets lost, my friends. But danger is the force of life.



## Contributors' Bios

**Gabrielle Aboki** is an MFA candidate at Florida State University. She is a poetry reader for the *Southeast Review*.

**Heather Bartel** is founder and co-editor of the literary journal and community, *The Champagne Room*. Her work can be found or is forthcoming in *Qu*, *MAYDAY*, *Fence*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Grimoire*, *Miracle Monocle*, and *Birdcoat Quarterly*.

**Jess Booth** was born in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. They earned their Bachelor's of Fine Arts in painting at Maryland Institute College of Art. Jess works in oil on canvas, using small scale clay sculptures as reference for their paintings. Their work reflects an interest in interpersonal relationships and how people communicate through the sense of touch. They have been included in various exhibitions including *Combustion* in the Lazarus building at MICA and *Virtually Beside You*, a virtual exhibition. Jessica Booth currently lives and works in Baltimore.

**Lauren Camp** is the Poet Laureate of New Mexico and author of five books, most recently *Took House* (Tupelo Press). Two new books—*Worn Smooth Between Devourings* (NYQ Books) and *An Eye in Each Square* (River River Books)—are forthcoming in 2023. Honors include a Dorset Prize and finalist citations for the Arab American Book Award and Adrienne Rich Award for Poetry. Her poems have appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Massachusetts Review* and *Poet Lore*, and her work has been translated into Mandarin, Turkish, Spanish, and Arabic. [www.laurencamp.com](http://www.laurencamp.com)

**Emilio Carrero** is a PhD candidate in creative writing at Florida State University. Their work has appeared in *Guernica*, *Kenyon Review Online*, and the *Sun*. They have received fellowships from the Aspen Institute, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, the Breadloaf Writers' Conference, and the Atlantic Center for the

Arts.

**Taylor Cornelius** is a poet, artist, and writer from Denver, Colorado. She is the recipient of the 2015 Academy of American Poets prize at Kenyon College, and a former Kenyon Review fellow. A recent graduate of New York University's MFA program in poetry, she currently lives in Brooklyn.

**Bertha Isabel Crombet** was born in a tiny town on a hill about 15 miles from Santiago, Cuba, but lived in Miami for twenty-one years, where she received her MFA in Poetry from Florida International University. She's been published in *Jai-Alai Magazine*, *Black Warrior Review*, *New Delta Review*, and others. Her chapbook, *Paleotempestology*, was the Winter Soup Bowl Selection Winner for C&R Press in 2018. She's currently pursuing her PhD at Florida State University.

**Satya Dash** is the recipient of the 2020 Srinivas Rayaprol Poetry Prize and a finalist for the 2020 Broken River Prize. His poems appear in *The Boiler*, *Anomaly*, *Chestnut Review*, *Rhino Poetry*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *Diagram*, among others. Apart from having a degree in electronics from BITS Pilani-Goa, he has been a cricket commentator. He has been nominated previously for Pushcart, Best of the Net and Best New Poets. He grew up in Cuttack and now lives in Bangalore, India. He tweets at: [@satya043](https://twitter.com/satya043)

**Joseph Fasano** is a poet, novelist, and songwriter. His novels include *The Swallows of Lunetto* (forthcoming from Maudlin House, 2022) and *The Dark Heart of Every Wild Thing* (Platypus Press, 2020), which was named one of the "20 Best Small Press Books of 2020." His books of poetry include *The Crossing* (2018), *Vincent* (2015), *Inheritance* (2014), and *Fugue for Other Hands* (2013). His honors include The Cider Press Review Book Award, the Rattle Poetry Prize, inclusion in the Forward Book of Poetry, and a nomination for the Poets' Prize, "awarded annually for the best book of verse published by a living

American poet two years prior to the award year.” His writing has been translated into Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Spanish, Chinese, Swedish, and other languages. He serves on the Editorial Board of Alice James Books and as the Founder and Curator of the Poem for You Series. He is currently writing a “living poem” for his son and posting it on Twitter at @stars\_poem.

**Daniel Galef’s** first book, *Imaginary Sonnets*, is being published in 2023 and can be ordered from Word Galaxy/Able Muse Press. It is a collection of persona poems each from the point of view of a different historical figure, literary character, or inanimate object, including Lucrezia Borgia, Wernher von Braun, Paul Cézanne, and a chicken taco. His poetry has been published in the *Atlanta Review*, *First Things*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, and his short fiction has appeared in the *Indiana Review*, the *American Bystander*, and the 2020 Best Small Fictions anthology.

**Sequoia Heidt-Kausch** is an artist who focuses on book arts and printmaking. Her time living in South Korea taught about self-responsibility and the human need for community, themes she often explores. Through her art she hopes to encourage honesty and empathy between people of all backgrounds.

**Stephen Hundley** is the author of *The Aliens Will Come to Georgia First* (University of North Georgia Press, 2023) and *Bomb Island* (Hub City Press, 2024). His work has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Carve*, *Cream City Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, and elsewhere. He holds an MA from Clemson, an MFA from the University of Mississippi, and is currently completing a PhD in English at Florida State University.

**Andrea Jurjević** is a Croatian poet and literary translator. She is the author of *Small Crimes*, winner of the 2015 Philip Levine Prize, and the chapbook *Nightcall* (Willow Springs Editions, 2021). Her book-length translations from Croatian

include *Mamasafari* (Diálogos Press, 2018) and *Dead Letter Office* (The Word Works, 2020), which was shortlisted for the 2021 National Translation Award in Poetry.

**Carella Keil** is a writer and digital artist who splits her time between the ethereal world of dreams, and Toronto, Canada, depending on the weather. Her art has appeared recently on the covers of *Glassworks Magazine*, *Colors: The Magazine*, and *Frost Meadow Review*, and is forthcoming on the cover of *Straylight Magazine*. Her art has also been featured in *Skyie Magazine*, *Existere*, *Burningword*, *Chestnut Review*, *Wander Magazine* and *The Field Guide Poetry Magazine*. She can be found on [instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams](https://www.instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams).

**Jenny Maaketo** (she/her) is a neurodivergent poet, psychiatric nurse, former professional actor, and first-year poetry candidate in the MFA Creative Writing program at the University of Mississippi. She was named a finalist in the 2023 Michelle Boisseau Poetry Prize and runner-up in the 2022 Patty Friedmann Writing Competition. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *The Cordite Poetry Review*, *Bear Review*, *The Peauxdun-que Review*, *The Madison Review*, *Ponder Review*, *Gris-Gris*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Host Publications*, and *Francis House* among others. She lives in Abbeville, Mississippi on 66 acres with her husband, newborn son, six chickens, four dogs, two cats, and lots of love.

**Danika Stegeman LeMay**'s debut collection of poems, *Pilot* (2020), was published by Spork Press. Her second book, *Ablation* is forthcoming from 11:11 Press in November 2023. Her website is [danikastegemanlemay.com](http://danikastegemanlemay.com).

**Nate Logan** is the author of *Wrong Horse* (Moria Books, fall of 2023) and *Inside the Golden Days of Missing You* (Magic Helicopter Press, 2019). He lives in Indiana.

**Jude Marr** is a Pushcart-nominated nonbinary poet who writes

to survive. Jude's first full-length collection, *We Know Each Other By Our Wounds*, came out from Animal Heart Press in 2020 and they also have a chapbook, *Breakfast for the Birds*, from Finishing Line Press in 2017. Their work has appeared in many journals, including *Kissing Dynamite*, *Cherry Tree*, *Harbor Review* and *SWWIM*. Jude recently relocated back to the UK after 10 years of living, teaching, and learning in the US.

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**Gabrielle Spear** is a queer, chronically ill poet and educator based in Baltimore and raised in northwest Arkansas. She has been named a Brooklyn Poets Fellow and an inaugural member of Catapult's 12-Month Poetry Generator. Her work is most recently featured in *Revolute*, *Protean Magazine*, *Catapult*, *Cotton Xenomorph*, and the anthology *A Land With a People: Palestinians and Jews Confront Zionism*.

**Natalie Louise Tombasco** was selected by Kaveh Akbar for the *Best New Poets* anthology 2021, Copper Nickel's Editor's Prize, and as a published finalist for Cutbank Books chapbook contest with her manuscript titled *Collective Inventions* (2021). She is a PhD candidate at Florida State University and serves as the Interviews Editor of the *Southeast Review*. Her work can be found in *Gulf Coast*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Plume*, *Hobart Pulp*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Peach Mag*, *The Rupture*, *Puerto del Sol*, among others. Find out more at [www.natalielouisetombasco.com](http://www.natalielouisetombasco.com)

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**Zoë Ryder White's** poems have appeared in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Salamander*, *Thrush*, *Plume*, *Sixth Finch*, *Guesthouse*, and *Threepenny Review*, among others. Her chapbook, *HYPER-SPACE*, was the editors' choice pick for the Verse Tomaž Šalamun Prize in 2020 and is available from Factory Hollow Press. She co-authored a chapbook, *A Study in Spring*, with Nicole Callihan. *Elsewhere*, their most recent collaboration, won the Sixth Finch chapbook competition in 2019. A former elementary school teacher, she edits books for educators about the craft of teaching.

**Aida Zilelian** is an American-Armenian writer, educator, and storyteller. As part of a diaspora culture, she writes stories that reflect the contemporary lives of American-Armenians, often-times from an untraditional perspective. Her work has appeared in *West Texas Literary Review*, *Red Hen Press* (*Two Countries Anthology*), *Phoebe* and others. She is the author of *THE LEGACY OF LOST THINGS*, (recipient of the 2014 Tololyan Literary Award) and *ALL THE WAYS WE LIED* (Turner Books, forthcoming January 2024). Her short story collection, *THESE HILLS WERE MEANT FOR YOU* was shortlisted for the 2018 Katherine Anne Porter Award and her short story "The Piano" won first prize in the *Lighthouse Weekly* contest.

**Jane Zwart** teaches at Calvin University, where she also co-directs the Calvin Center for Faith & Writing. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, and *Ploughshares*, as well as other journals and magazines.



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