



# SHIFT

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY ODDITIES

ISSUE 3

The logo for SHiFT features the word "SHiFT" in a bold, white, sans-serif typeface. The letter "i" is lowercase and includes a dot. Above the letters "H" and "T", there are horizontal white bars. A small white circle is positioned between these two bars, centered above the lowercase "i".

# SHiFT

A JOURNAL OF LITERARY ODDITIES

Dear Readers,

To assemble a literary journal like *Shift* is to voyage, like the skiff on our cover, into uncharted waters. Our slush pile is mysterious and layered, teeming with talented writers and artists from around the world. We have done our best to plumb its depths, snagging strangely beautiful and sometimes disturbing selections that challenge readers to consider new perspectives. As contributor Holly Day writes in her poem “Mermaid,” “we were going to take the boat out, sail to the edge of the world, [and] tease the monsters waiting there....”

As a student-run journal, *Shift* changes hands each year. The 2020 pandemic complicated the usual exigencies of editorial work: We faced technical obstacles, hot slogs of manuscript reading, and extensive discussions among passionate readers both on Zoom and in a room observing safety protocols. Although each issue reflects the sensibilities of both the team and the submissions of the moment, *Shift* remains constant in its dedication to elevating oddities—art and prose and poetry that warp reality, make the untrue true, and create a sense of awe about the twisting, shifting world around us. We welcome emerging as well as experienced writers and take pride in amplifying diverse voices. Weird and fun—that’s our promise.

Thank you for supporting our nascent literary journal with your work and your attention. This issue, our third, brings you stories and images from Japan, Nigeria, the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom, and across the United States. We caution readers sensitive to certain topics that our selections touch upon loss, lynching, and other painful subjects. But they also offer hope and humor. We are taking this voyage together, and all it requires is courage and an open mind. Thank you for sailing “to the edge of the world” with us.

The *Shift* editorial team

Cover art: Into the Unknown by Wen Dou

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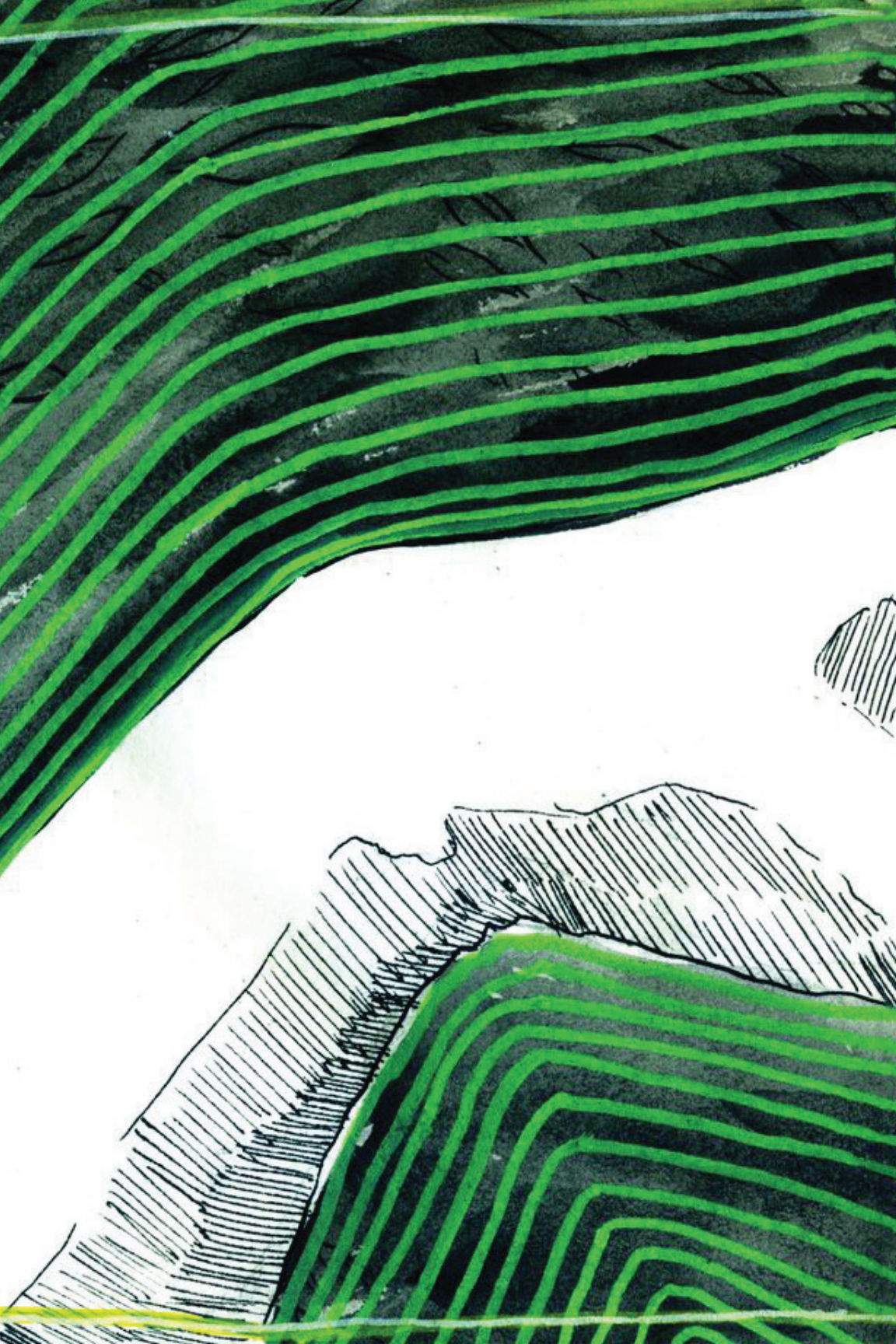
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## *A New Language*

**Kaitlenn Rose**

Hold the V in forgive, find out how far its valley goes

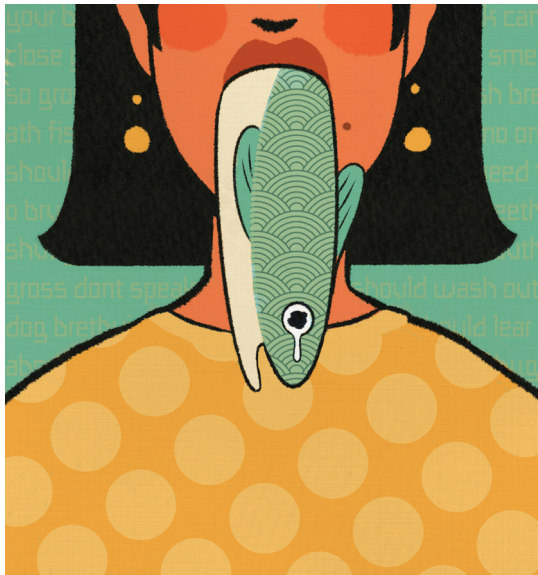
Become a builder to carve it out, turn it over  
make it the roof of our home

Bend my body to mold to its shape  
making me easier to cradle

Remember, when hiding, its arrowhead  
will jab me until I look

It's only smooth when it hangs in my mouth  
Sounding it out, hitting teeth then lip, hums  
splitting syllables, the point to a needle that hems

I will hold it here, hidden in my cheek  
for as long as you need



Mint Advertisement by Ezra Gaeta

## M.M. Kaufman

The itching came with the sun one morning. I had torn open my slip from scratching in my sleep. Standing naked in front of the full-length mirror, all I could see was a patch of red, raw skin stretched across my left side. I winced when I put my fingertips to it. Taking a deep breath, I pushed on it. My body gave where it shouldn't and pushed back in unexpected places. My lower left rib felt larger and softer than bone ever should.

I wasn't worried then. I'd lived in the country my whole life and had enough sense not to panic over one itchy spot. I slathered on calamine and threw on my loosest housedress. As it fell over my head, I saw something out of the corner of my eye and gasped.

I'd taken the mirror, tall and stark in the corner of the room, for a person. But there was no one here but myself.

As I headed downstairs to make coffee, I swayed in the doorway, off balance. A wave of nausea hit me. I shook my head and hung it between my knees.

My hands traveled back to my side. I scratched harder and harder. I pulled my hands away. Red crescents bloomed under my nails.

My parents raised me in this house I now call my own. I clean it that way, too. Four bedrooms may seem like a lot for one woman, but I think it's right. Each room cleaned like the last. There is nothing spare about my life here.

My parents died the day of our high school graduation. They made it to the ceremony all right but got hit by a truck hauling eggs on their way back home for the party. My brother, J-boy, and I were riding with friends to guide them down the tree-lined roads that lead to our farmhouse. We found our parents crushed at the last bend—a mix of egg, blood, and dirt.

J-boy cleared out with the dust from the wake. He visited a handful of times over the next year. Showed up on the front porch with a ham or a basket of peaches—a request for casserole or cobbler disguised as a gift. After a week or so, he left to sell tires or fix toilets, whatever filled his gas tank and kept him driving back and forth across the Southeast.

I stayed behind. I was a solitary girl, and now I am a solitary woman. The house is old but paid off. I work as an online transcriptionist to cover the few bills. I never could find a reason to leave this house except for groceries and books.

As a child, I dreamed of traveling the world, but it hardly crosses my mind anymore. I experience the world fine in the stacks of the Appleby Library every Sunday at eleven. I return what books I'd gotten the week before and pick out enough books for the week ahead. My church—a visit about as long as a service and more interesting.

Once I finished hanging the linens, I threw on a pair of my mother's overalls. The calamine lotion hadn't done anything to quell the itching, but the spot looked less menacing. I cut off a leaf from an aloe vera plant on the kitchen windowsill, prepared it, and slathered some on. As I rode my bike into town, I let the overalls hang open on the left side so the wind could hit against the aloe patch.

At Appleby, I nodded to Nancy, the weekend librarian. She mumbled a distracted, "Morning, Marigold," from behind her *Cast Iron Cooking* magazine.

I set down her coffee, the bag of donuts, and my old books and then walked into the stacks.

With my eyes closed, I took slow steps and fingered the book spines. What comfort books gave me. The solidness of them, the tight binding, the weight of them in my hands.

Fifteen minutes into my survey of Science and Civilization, pain shot across my side. I braced myself against the shelves and breathed until it passed. I unhooked my overalls and pulled them down. There was now a large, dark-pink welt where, an hour ago, there was only a scratch.

I pressed my fingertips to it, and it burned them as if it were a lit stovetop. "Lord almighty!" I hissed.

I wiped my damp forehead with the tail of my shirt and stuffed it back into the overalls. When had I started sweating? This wasn't like any spider bite I'd had before. Whatever it was, it felt like it was taking me for a ride.

I left the books I had pulled off the shelf on the floor and walked back to Nancy's desk.

She dropped her gold beaded chain connected to her glasses onto her bosom.

"That was fast." Nancy stopped when she saw I was empty-handed. "Something out of place again?"

I lifted up my shirt. "No, I—it's nothing."

"Pretty nasty wound there."

"Did you say *womb*?" I asked, louder than intended.

Nancy shh'ed me and spelled, "W-O-U-N-D."

I nodded and tucked the shirt back in. My eyes focused and unfocused across the myriad pictures taped around Nancy's desk. They were all pictures of her daughter with her many sticky-faced children.

“Have you seen my newest?” Nancy pulled out her phone and flicked through shot after shot. “Here’s Lolee with the twins at the trampoline park. It’s a little out of focus ‘cause Presley-Ann was taking the picture.”

Lolee, or Tupelo Lee, was Nancy’s daughter, named after Elvis Presley’s hometown. She had been in my class all through school. Nancy had another child, Aaron, but I never heard much about him. Whatever he was doing somewhere up east, it wasn’t making babies.

Lolee had been as listless as I was when we graduated. Where I locked up my listlessness in my parents’ house, she took hers out for a joyride. She tried on different boyfriends, part-time jobs, and drug habits. I remember how, a few years ago, Nancy railed against Lolee’s latest bender on a given Sunday morning. She questioned why she ever had Lolee, why she hadn’t kicked her out.

But then Lolee got pregnant. Everything changed. The world rotated around Lolee and her precious gift to the world. The unexpected fetus, named at what I estimate was 20 minutes old, was Gracelyn Mae. The name was embroidered and hashtagged on everything. Gracelyn Mae somehow turned Lolee into the Virgin Mary.

I was jealous of the respect and admiration. I hadn’t ever planned on having children. But my mother would have loved to be a grandmother. She would have been like Nancy here, showing pictures to anyone who walked by.

It made me hate Nancy.

She broke off into giggles at the next picture. “This was when Gracelyn Mae ate some of my face cream thinking it was frosting!”

I took the phone and looked at the toddler with the pained, beet-red expression. I handed the phone back and came up with my fifth iteration of the sound, “Ahh.”

I felt another sharp pain like a crack of lightning. A wave of intense pressure across my side followed it. “Christ on a cracker!”

“Get yourself home, girl. Have a bath.”

I nodded and walked out with my empty bag slung over one shoulder and both hands pressed to my side. There was hardly traffic in town to interfere with organ music as it drifted out of the church and across the two-lane road.

I rolled my bike over and peered through one of the stained-glass windows. I couldn’t see anything but the blue-and-green marbled shapes of the people as they stood to sing. I waved goodbye knowing no one could see me. I peddled up the hill until my calves burned and the asphalt sputtered into the sandy-red dirt that led to home.

For some reason I imagined the pain would stop, or at least subside, when I got back to the house. Or that the solace I felt each time I came home would blot out any discomfort. But it didn't. I felt the pain pulse like a racing heartbeat as I took the steps.

"Damn it all," I cursed when I noticed I'd left my bag in the bike's basket. I walked back down the steps, keeping pressure off my left leg. Something like an ice pick pierced my side. I sank to my knees and knocked the bike over into the bird fountain. Concrete smashed and slimy water ran down my chest.

"What in the actual fuck?"

No one but the birds answered.

The red rash had spread into a much wider circle. I called it a rash, but, it looked like a galaxy, like constellations made from blood drawn to the surface. And the mass, the wound, whatever it was, had grown so that it protruded farther than my fist. Lavender-colored veins threaded through it. It was strange and beautiful.

I can't tell you why I didn't call a doctor. I didn't want to, and that had always been a good enough reason in the past.

Hours later, I woke up in bed exhausted as I had never been before. It was dark outside. I hung my legs off the wrought-iron bed frame and smiled to myself as my dream came back to me. In the dream the itch on my side had grown and grown until—

Another shooting pain rocked my body. I sat up, gasping for air.

I lifted my shirt to see that the spot had grown. As in my dream, it was the shape of a cantaloupe. I traced my finger around its edges, amazed that it seemed to be a perfect circle. It didn't hurt when I touched it now. My touch felt like a feather. I traced the veins of deep purple.

I took off my clothes and stood naked in front of the mirror. I strained to see the spot in the moonlight through the window. I never felt so alone as I did in moonlight. I closed the curtains on the moon, put my clothes back on, and lay back down. I picked one of the blades on the slow-turning ceiling fan and watched it spin.

I hadn't felt alone in my dream. I felt that my rib really was a something. It was growing and moving beneath the surface of my skin.

The spot itched worse than ever and burned like fire. I put socks on my hands to soften the scratching and pressed a cold rag to my side, but nothing helped. The itching wasn't coming from the surface of my skin, but underneath it. Something was scratching back.

I made my way down the stairs. Walking was slow and painful. I don't know what I wanted with going downstairs, but it felt like the right thing to do.

I kept walking to the front door, to the porch, to the clothesline. It was pitch black except for the moonlight. I used the scent of the tea olive tree to guide me. To what, other than the tree itself, I don't know.

I sank down to my knees and tore my clothes off. I could feel the spot radiating heat. It grew away from my body. It grew until I could feel it pull my center of gravity. I held the mass protruding from my ribs in my hands as it grew, twisted, and took form.

The pain felt surreal and necessary. I needed this. It was tearing my body apart but fortifying my spirit. There was something guiding me, a kind of fire both in my rib and in my head. It told me to hold the spot gently but with firm hands, to lie down on my unencumbered side and take deep breaths. I inhaled so deeply I felt like I was bringing the tea olive's small white blooms into my body. I gritted my teeth, got a strong grip on what felt like appendages, and pulled hard and fast. Whatever it was came away from my body so fast I almost let it fly.

Then I heard it: the first cry. I brought it close to my chest, pushed myself up to my feet, and stumbled from the dark side of the house to the moonlight. I felt the absence at my side, felt the hollow of my missing rib. As fast as my fingertips had found the wound, the flesh had already come together. My body was whole.

In the flooding moonlight, I made out that the wriggling something I held against my chest was a newborn baby. It was wet with the slime and blood of birthing. She cried to make herself known.

I was once a solitary woman. Then, there was you.



Girls by Wen Dou

# ***Goblet of Her Memories***

**Catherine Coundjeris**

Her mind has spaces  
that we fill  
with gratitude  
for days gone by.  
We hold for her  
a lifetime of  
conversations,  
stories told.  
We carry  
the goblet of her memories.  
We sip our thoughts,  
taking small bites  
of daily bread,  
quiet times spent  
together.



Burst by Ezra Gaeta

# Mermaids

## Holly Day

we were going to take the boat out, sail  
to the edge of the world, tease  
the monsters waiting there with our  
bare, dangling feet, toes tickling the ocean skin  
like tiny pink fish

but you had to go and ruin it  
chase shore-hugging mermaids instead  
had to search clam-shell bikinis for pearls  
find out where baby mermaids come from

we were going to become pirates  
treasure hunters, world explorers  
wrestle giant squid at the world's edge  
find the fountain of youth

but you had to go and spoil everything  
in your search for suburban normalcy  
chase dreams of apron-clad mermaids  
who'd give up their kingdoms for you



Travel by Kevin Cuellar

# *The Meanwhile*

## **Tess Gunty**

i.

All this death and I'm just fluttering a scented trash bag. I'm just feeding the cat. Usually, I'm going somewhere. Meanwhile, I feel fine. I Instagram alibis like everyone, post excuses like: I can't find my fire hose or my diploma, I can't find my time maker or my policy machine. What's the first-person plural? I'm so little. I'm no king. Meanwhile, I live like one—even leave the lights on, even get pedicures. Do you have macadamia milk? Degrade me, Mr. Internet. It is important to remember that millennials did not invent the internet—we just took it and ran with it. Meanwhile, the world is killing itself. We are the world, but not exactly. We are not smart or sellable or lush enough. Meanwhile, I just scream, "Frighten me!" at the mailbox in the lobby, at the walruses on the screen, the calculators at the bank, the podcasts in the kitchen, the algorithms in my pocket, his percussive pulse on the mattress. I want to feel the end. I want the end to feel me.

ii.

Meanwhile, we "fall in love." We think this will help. It is a pleasure to lift a barbell of tandem neuroses, to soften my hardware and debug his software, to clock no hours of this pink work. We forget that romance is a hospital and so is this epoch, but the teenagers know it. In love, we get plump off a meal plan we can't afford. Can I just have another? When we feel like being explicit, we say, "Immortality." When I don't like my pasta, Anthony trades me his and I take it. He escorts me to the edge of my body in a canoe, in a garden, in a forest. On a hot night in Key West, we drink a bottle of Prosecco and accidentally browse engagement rings. Ocean salt on our lips. His hand beneath my sundress in the alley. Free cookies in a downpour of fluorescence. The jewelers can tell we aren't going to purchase anything, but they're nice to us anyway.

"Don't do it!" yell the frat boys on the sidewalk.

"Do it," smiles the man in his fifties.

All this death and my finger's a size four.

We're staying with a dying billionaire who likes to shoot the iguanas on his property. The groundskeeper offers to shoot them for him, but he insists. He made his fortune buying and selling companies, and when I learn this, I also learn that wealth will forever remain a tautological language to me. The billionaire's face is purple, pitted from time and rage and melanoma surgeries. His real kids never visit

him, although he's had their names engraved on the doorways of the bedrooms in the guest house, and that's one of the reasons we're here. I, specifically, am here because I am in a relationship with someone who is related to someone who works for this man. The billionaire is mean to the toddlers who are with us and has trouble enjoying life.

At dinner, he says that on this island, many people live in boats. "When there's a hurricane, they just party," he tells us.

By *they*, he means everyone who facilitates the hedonism we are here to indulge. I blush. Try to recall the last time I paid for anything.

"And you?" Anthony's father asks. "What do you do when there's a hurricane?"

The billionaire pauses over a forkful of salmon, imported from Scotland. Involuntarily, I picture him in a tuxedo, snatching this fish from the paws of a grizzly bear, then pushing the bear in the water. "I go up," he finally says, absolutely nothing in his eyes.

It takes me a couple of minutes to understand that when the billionaire says this, he means he rises in a private helicopter, not into the afterlife. When I think about the end, I think about that.

iii.

Meanwhile, I listen to the cyanide inside the mouse and the canary inside the Paris Accord. Meanwhile, face-down on the shag rug, I read the gossip in the Twitter thread. I grip the cash, print the science, phone a friend. Health insurance evades me. I work a lot of jobs and make bafflingly little money. Avoid the dentist, invest in floss. Days of this and then I'm 30, watching a docuseries on all the species I never knew we were cancelling. The scientists publish their findings in dire language. Repost. Repost. Report. It's a lump in our planet. It's the fatal mass. We like to watch. Koalas on fire, kid bellies ballooned, grandparents paddling down the street. We like the post. "Can't be sure," announce the whitened teeth on television. "What's it gonna take?" we ask each other. Then we order flutes of feminist champagne and slices of feminist cake. Chocolate frosting mudding our mouths. Glare of sprinkles, hard on teeth. Can I just have. Meanwhile, everything tastes holy. All this death and I'm just licking my lips.

iv.

Who's the first-person plural? On the backroads, in my hometown, I remark, "It's fucking hot." In the passenger seat, Anthony nods. We pass many worlds of corn as I drive. Over here, the eschaton is painless as suburbia, smooth as an engine gurgling gasoline, sweet as steak.

"Lately," he says, "I see all politicians as hamsters in crowns."

I know what he means. Me, I call the macho autocrats *Junior* in my head. We want to shrink our fear. The year she lost to the dumbest megalomaniac was the year I stopped wearing a bra; we all have coping mechanisms, and we use them to furnish our *Meanwhile*.

“Was it always this hot in October?” I ask. I accelerate at a yellow and blast public radio. Anthony feeds me a fry. A billboard asks us: WHO IS YOUR KING?

v.

Downtown Los Angeles flares like a bouquet of knives around me. Earbuds dispense an interview to my brain, nobody looks at me, I look at everybody. I am walking up Broadway, on my way to the city law library, whole streets blinded by yoga studios and juice bars and human suffering. In the interview, Elon says we ought to use the sun. He says the sun is our friend, says the sun shows up every day, calls this ball of fusion good, says solar can foot the bill—yes, the whole wide bill. I’m paraphrasing. As I walk, I notice that light is everywhere, accompanied by heat, as Elon promised. A hundred and ten degrees, worst air quality in thirty years, and pollution crowds every lung in town. I pass a man sitting against an abandoned theater. He appears to be looking directly at the sun. When he turns to me, it’s like the sky has deposited itself in his irises—they are an impossible shade of blue. All this heat and I’m just offering a bottle of water.

“Lucky me,” he says as he accepts it. “God bless.”

I wonder if the sun can really do all that Elon says it can. It sounds like a lot of work, but I don’t know; math makes me nervous. Some demand exceeds supply—some demands are not to be supplied. Can we just have. And even if solar can power everything, must we ask it to?

When I reach a crosswalk, I glance back and see the man opening his bottle of water. He takes one small sip, then stows the rest in the shade.

vi.

In college, I noticed an epidemic of the word *just* when young women ordered coffee, even when their orders were complex. I noticed I was one of these women. The world wants us to atone for our requests, soften our consumption with the language of apology—that’s nothing new. We learned this from folktale and mother, from leatherbound men with fish-hooking grins, from online statistics and history textbooks. When I noticed, I vowed to stop.

But recently, I’ve changed my mind. I sit at the beach, surrounded by plastic, my toes obscured in blazing sand, and watch people I love dive and splash in the turbulent Pacific, heat raging in our skulls. As I chat with a friend, I find *just* all over my speech, and I keep it there, because I think lots of Americans should

start atoning for coffee, I think maybe all those apologetic women in campus cafés were on to something, and I think embarrassment is an appropriate national reaction, all things considered. We have been coughing all week. Our phones tell us to stay inside, but we're coughing there, too. California is on fire and I just need some caffeine. I tell my friend I will be right back and ask if she wants anything. She doesn't.

"Can I just have two shots of espresso on ice?" I ask the barista on the boardwalk. Smoke blooms in the sky, obscuring the sun. I hear it has made its way to New York, this smoke. You can see it from outer space.

The barista asks me to repeat myself. "Sorry," she says. "My head's all cloudy. What did you say?"

vii.

Meanwhile, in Elysian, over tacos, my friends and I excavate the dirt of our adolescence and compare the evidence. The sun sets, and we see three coyotes descend from the hills, their shadows jagged on the picnic lawn, but we aren't ready to leave. We discover that men have pressed cigarettes into all of our bodies. Boyfriend, stranger, professor, husband, boss, dad. The end is about that.

The end is about addiction, gross domestic product, my fridge and our passports. Boys in the yard, a game of fire and gasoline. Boys hurling bombs into their suburban lake. Boys napping with dogs in the shade. Boys with cigarettes, looking for ashtrays. Boys with babies. At war. Can I just have. The end is about four flags, two Amazons, and thousands of branded women. The end is about an island of people drowning as one man ascends above them. Where'd you get your jeans?

The coyotes are closer, now, just a few trees away on the indigo grass. Phonelight reveals them to be skinny and honey-eyed, with thick tracking collars locked to their necks. "Weird," someone whispers. "They don't hunt in packs unless they're very hungry."

viii.

Meanwhile, I plug myself into my phone and eat whatever it serves me. I red-yarn the micro to the macro like a conspiracy theorist. I mistake the charming narcissist for late-stage capitalism, I confuse catcalls for nuclear arsenals, I call too many crises biblical. I'm rude about Baby Boomers. I watch Greta cry. Anthony says that *The New York Times* podcast is radicalizing me. We are the world, but not exactly. All this death and I'm just photographing deer.

Anthony proposes in Sequoia, but I don't reply for 12 hours, until the wildfires smoke us out. One blaze in the north and another in the south, and none of it is "contained." I can't conceptualize a long time. Eternal contracts make me

sweat, make me laugh. We enter the rental car as quickly as we can, to keep the smoke out. “Yes,” I say after we buckle our seatbelts. Anthony doesn’t hear me at first, but when he does, he kisses me for what might be described as a long time. Then he flicks on the windshield wipers to clear away the ash.

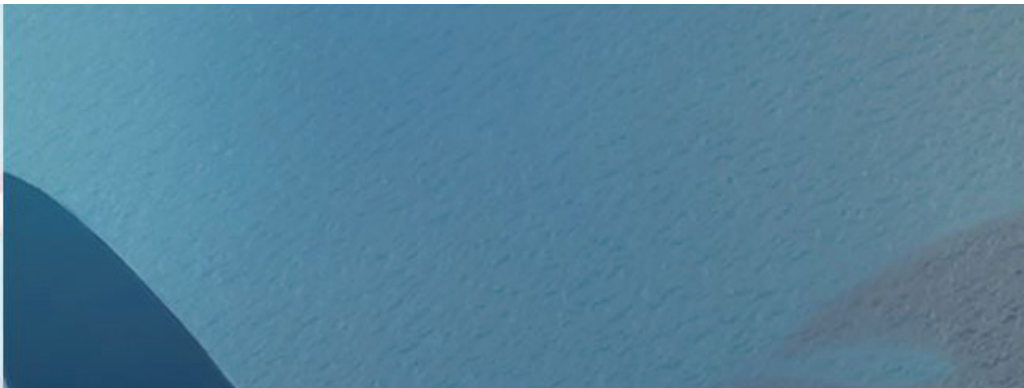
ix.

The math is easy, the greed is easier. The end is about boredom, amplified content, the infinite scroll, and memes. The end is about the euthanizing Meanwhile. Perfumed, Netflixed, waxed, automated—we’ll be fine. All this death and I’m just googling miracles. A wall around Manhattan. State-sized mirrors. No, here’s an idea: We drop canisters of tree-shit from planes. Boom! Death Valley? Flood it. No, listen. What you do is take a huuuuuge umbrella and open it in outer space. What you do is wait for the tech geniuses to upload their consciousnesses to the Cloud and multiply. I’ve got it: Ice balloons in the stratosphere! Or maybe just—no more cars? No more cows? No more babies? Almonds? Forget it! Let’s pretend we’re a volcano. Sulfuric acid in the sky. Let’s pretend we’re ice.

I watch the cat chew the shower curtain as I pee on a stick. Not our plan. I don’t even know how to overthrow capitalism. I’m so little, I’m no king. I study my toes. Need a pedicure.

x.

Usually, I’m going somewhere. Meanwhile, I feel nauseated. The end isn’t here yet, but we feel it coming, feel an urge to run. Which is why I’ve boarded a self-driving train, booked a ticket to visit family on a ranch in Tehama County. Seats away from me, elegant people say, “Weird weather.” They say, “Too much safety abuses its inmates—just ask the fish in the tank, already ideating on his leap out of fluorescence, into absence.” They say, “Extraction economy. Fermi’s Paradox. Fiduciary law. Cognitive lingerie.” I listen through my hammerhead dreams and the



Summer Vacation by Patricia Burgos

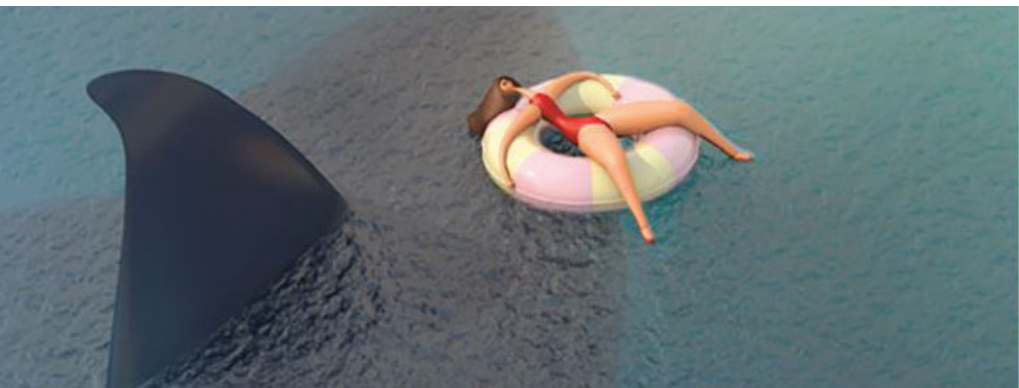
cold, fake air. I wake up and use a lot of demon emojis on the sibling text chain. Chew pistachios, sip decaf from a biodegradable cup. We pass fracking; it looks like Mars. We just need. My friends and I keep finding human ashes at the summits of our hikes. They are chalky, white, thick. Copious. Cracked pottery on rock and wildflower. The body reduces, but what's left is resistant to erasure, sturdier than you'd expect. And so I am suspicious of biodegradability. And still I can't conceptualize a long time. "That's bananas," says a man on the train.

Outside my window, cows stand in acres of parched grass, tags punched in their ears, watching us. Their horns are stunning and useless. In my seat, I google prehistoric bottom-dwellers. Degrade me, Mr. Internet, but at least show me things that last. I stare at jawless fish on my phone, their hellish little mouths, until I feel better. I search for images of harpy eagles, because they terrify me, and I want to feel something. They eat monkeys. "Death is not the opposite of fluorescence," says a woman on the train. "It is the logical end." My hand on my belly, I think it would be fun to get lost in all the grapes we pass. Wine, pistachios, coffee—will the life inside me taste them? No one—not even the internet—tells you what do you do, at the end, if you accidentally make a beginning. Meanwhile, I stockpile hearts on my feed. As the self-driving train pulls us up the California coast, the views make it clear that most species are not designed to live in the desert. All this death and I'm just five months pregnant.

"So now what?" the woman asks her group on the train. Someone tells a joke, but I miss the parts that make it funny.

"Stop it," gasps a man in a gorgeous laugh of donkey brays. "Stop it. You're killing me."

We love to bemoan the algorithm, but the filthier truth is that nothing—absolutely nothing—drives itself.



# Bach

## Grey Wolfe LaJoie



Bach lies in a bed of grass. He watches the sky sailing by, and he prays. He asks God to send his divine soot, to fill every cathedral with it. Bach wanders through the blinking trees, the music of light breathing all about him. Here, there are no keys to touch. You merely have to listen.



Bach, at the mirror: "It is not the finest venue, but it will have to do."



Playing catch-the-bubbles with one of his young daughters, Bach notes the way her giggle dips and rises. "Have you any more like that, Catarina?" he asks. And she gives him another song.



The candles are all snuffed for the night. Wandering in and out of his mind, the beginnings of his Magnificat.



"How does he get his fingers to do all of that," my wife asks me, "yet he can't hold open a door for a lady?"

"There are good men," I explain, "there are great men, and there is Bach."



The wind howls in tattered movements all night long.



Bach sits in the back, at the opening performance of St. Matthew Passion. Luisa and Niklas stand together on stage, singing intermittently. Bach thinks to himself, *Even the children seem moved!*

Bach lies on his deathbed. In his delirious fever, he hums like a child.

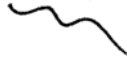


Hmm-hmm! Hmm-ah!  
Hmm-hmm. Ohhh...  
Ah-owhh. Hmm-hmm!  
Hmmmm... Mmm-mmm.

Dada doo-deedee!  
Awoohoo-deedee.  
Ah, ah. Ah, ahhh.  
Ah, ah, ah, ahhmm-Mmm!



As with before, he is referred to as a genius. But after death, people remember him also as sweet.



Bach dreams of strands of lightning, landing all at once and dyeing the earth with their glow. He wakes up and makes love to his wife.



How honest Bach can be. He confesses to making it all up as he goes.



He draws on the lid of his desk. His feet do not yet reach the ground, so he swings them back and forth and sings a song in whooshing sounds. He draws a ragged sunflower:



and beneath that:

For this, the  
proctor strikes  
him fiercely  
with her ruler.

JOHANN





Bach speaks to his infant son and holds him to his breast. "At the end of the broken rainbow, Tish and Tass found the shards of their father, The King of..."



On the aristocracy: "The way the wig feels against my skin. Itchy. Dusty. Heavy."



"It is all right to laugh at music," he argues. "Laughter is our most divine gesture."



Bach brings his lunch to the church each day: a sack full of hard-boiled eggs.



"So far as I'm aware, it is not a crime to kiss The Lord on the lips!"



The great Bach has not yet forgiven me for the stern way in which I once spoke to his youngest. "A gentleman speaks when spoken to," I reminded the boy. But Bach scolded me. "My children will be free!"



Funerals are his favorite events to play for. He can bring God's sorrow down onto us, or he can cause everyone to dance...



He spends his last week in Paris running his hands through a stream.



Ashes fill the sky. The Harz Mountains have burst into flames, 160 kilometers NW of them. Ashes rest on every surface. *A miracle!* he thinks. *I will do nothing but write for a week!*



Bach in pajamas, wielding his flyswatter. “Where are they all coming from?”



Bach falls into a deep depression during springtime.



“Eleven strings! You must construct one with 11!”



Dizziness grows a part of him, and then he goes to bed.

Goes to bed?

Yes, to bed.

Can he stay with us any longer?

No. No longer.



Rusting Gears by Akiva Uriel Bakst

# *Lying in Bed Thinking in the Darkness*

**David Romanda**

how do snails have sex?

if I learn to pray with my full being  
will God materialize in the room  
and maybe sit on the edge of the bed?

murder couldn't ever be truly satisfying, right?

should I or shouldn't I mention  
my epilepsy on the first date?

does anyone really win big on scratch lotto tickets?

do I love myself unconditionally?

what time is it?



Who Is Trapped? by Emily Fromhage

## ***Born With***

### **Philip Deal**

Flat feet repaired by  
pediatric shoes,  
bowed legs straightened by  
a heavy metal brace,  
buck teeth reshaped by wire.  
Where would I be without medicine? I ask my wife.  
Single, she says.

One piece of broken heel, removed,  
two fingers, snapped in games, surgically realigned.  
A double hernia, held in place by gauze,  
glasses for reading,  
prescription cream to make my skin stop itching.

Six sets of stitches  
in my head,  
one daily pill for stomach acid,  
another for a thyroid glitch  
that runs in the family.

Four steroid injections  
for joints that won't unbend,  
ibuprofen every time I decide to be a runner again.  
Where would I be if I had been born 200 years ago?  
Dead, my wife says.  
I laugh, and throw out my back.

# *The Loneliest Universe*

## **Addison Rizer**

The morning I put my dog down, a love letter skitters across the sidewalk. I can tell by the flashes of pink scribbled onto the thick envelope turning end over end as it dances with the wind. On a bench, across the street, I wonder if it's real. If I am real. I'm half-convinced, too late now, that I should have kept him alive.

Yes, there was the tumor. Yes, there were the seizures, two and then three times a day, but only when he got excited. His tail was wagging and then, all at once, it was stiff and soaked in his urine as he yelped on the floor. Yes, there was the heart murmur that the overweight vet said was a six out of six. Not a murmur—a pause, a giving up.

But he was coherent most of the day. Sleeping underneath the television, walking, skewed sideways by his growth the size of a baseball, then a softball, then even larger upon his ribcage. He followed me to the kitchen when I came home with his favorite tortillas from the Mexican food place down the road. Yes, most times he was himself.

But then for an hour after the seizures, he was walking into walls. He was staring at nothing. He was unaware of his own name.

Though 90 percent of the day he was himself, the other 10 percent he was empty, and the balance was growing ever more to the hollow side. What percentage was I waiting for? I told myself not yet. Not until it felt right to say goodbye. Until it didn't feel so selfish to say enough was enough, knees aching from cleaning up his pee from the carpet for the third time in a day.

It was convenient to consider putting him down. Horrible to admit to when he still slept curled against my side every night, chasing the neighbor's cat through his dreams. When he still knew the smell of fresh tortillas. It was selfish of me to want not to worry so much about him. To want him to be his old self. To be easier—my entire shift at the gas station spent counting how many stains I would have to scrub when I got home, carpet marks pressed into my skin permanently, it seemed.

But the seizures got worse. Still, I couldn't be certain. I couldn't be sure. Not with a decision like this. I asked the vet what he thought, and he only looked at me with sad eyes. He couldn't make this decision. In every universe I existed in, this was the one in which I was the loneliest.

I nodded. I nodded. How could I have nodded?

I'm convinced now, as I watch the love letter slide away, that I was wrong to put him down. He could have lived a few more years. He could have walked sideways into the kitchen and bit my fingers as I fed him tiny pieces of tortilla broken from my own quesadilla, warm from the oven. He could have been happy and alive and dreaming, still.

But the seizures. The tumor. The way his heart was giving out.

The love letter slides against the sidewalk, drifting farther from the mailbox glinting sunlight into the eyes of everyone who passes. Farther and farther away from me. The love letter will waste away. It will find a puddle and sink into it. Pick up boot-print and mud-streak and deteriorate beneath the sunlight.

Surely, someone else will pick it up. Surely, a passerby will make sure it reaches its rightful place.

But no one stoops to pick it up off the ground. Eyes glance, mouths frown, but still, no one touches it.

I have to be at work in 20 minutes. I have to dry my eyes. But I take seven steps after the letter even as it takes seven steps more away from me. I lurch for it. It lurches for someone else. I understand that. I wish I could lurch away from myself, too. I killed my friend just hours ago. I held him as he died.

I crash into the shoulder of a man walking in the opposite direction. I don't even apologize. I notice the throb in my shoulder only after he has already disappeared. I look back and wonder if I collided with a ghost. That doesn't matter now. The letter needs to find its home. It would be a tragedy to expect a letter on Saturday and find only an empty mailbox. What if it's the last love letter that person will ever receive? What if it's the last love letter in the whole universe? I can't let it stay lost.

I have suspected for a while now that love letters are only ever about one thing: regret. Regretting leaving, regretting staying, saying the wrong things, never saying the right ones. Attempts at righting wrongs, even the simple wrong of the universe's distance between two people. Who am I to witness the destruction of that? Who am I to enable it by my inaction?

I've waited too long. I should have started running when the letter hit the ground. I should have caught it before it fell. Now, it will have wounds it doesn't deserve, scrapes picked up from the ground.

I run. The letter catches air, envelope shining in the light. The suggestion of rain clouds on the horizon. My shift is starting, and I'm still running. The sun shifts, and I'm still running. I slip on sidewalk cracks and push off passing people and bruises bloom on my biceps. They ache with my reaching.

Still, I reach. I lunge. My lungs burn. My legs go numb. The sun begins to

set, and the suggestion of clouds becomes the reality of rain.

I miss the entirety of my shift. I miss dinner with my mother. I miss 10 phone calls from my boyfriend. I miss my dog—my friend—and I picture his face as his eyes went dull. I miss the letter, over and over again, hands always empty.

Still, I inch forward. The letter slows, in my eye line but ever out of reach. Midnight nears. Rain falls. Is it fair to stop running now? Now that I'm soaked and starving and have missed all my plans? Now that the water is ruining the letter, smearing the words?

When the sun comes up, the letter is half-sludge, crawling upon the sidewalk. The name on the envelope has disappeared in the night. Should I keep running, now? When can I say I tried hard enough to be satisfied with failing? With losing?

If I scoop it up in my palm, it can't be delivered. The mailman won't try.

What now? A trashcan sits nearby. Should I throw it away? A letter once so full of meaningful regret? A letter that meant something to someone? A tragedy thrown in with orange peels. That feels wrong. It all does.

In a patch of grass, I dig with my hands, nails broken and fingers pruned. I slide the sludge into the hole. I cover it up with damp dirt and mark the spot with an uneven heart and say goodbye aloud. I cry.

I'm not convinced I shouldn't have put him down. I'm not convinced, sludge stuck to the crevices of my fingers, of the suffering I had spared him. Too early or too late. I tried for so long to catch the letter. Tried until my legs gave out.

It's impossible to know if, had I tried harder, I could have caught it in time. But I did what I could. I did what I could. I promise, my friend, I did what I could. I hope I can be forgiven for that.

I hope a tree grows from this place. I don't know; I don't know. I was only trying my best in this loneliest universe, and more than anything I am grateful for the body that slept beside me, for the fact of the love letter at all.



Turmoil by Kaethe Thomas

# *The Playdate*

**Nathan Mann**

Before Teddy's mom goes, she teaches Jacob and his mom three signs.

*Thank you.*

*You're welcome.*

*More.*

Teddy can lip-read. But his mom worries. This is his first playdate. She leaves, turns onto the logging road, disappears.

Jacob leads Teddy inside to his action figures. They play quietly with the men, pointing to talk.

*That man.*

*That man.*

*They should fight.*

They play until all the men are dead.

Jacob wants Teddy to have fun because their school can be mean. He gives his friend a thumbs up. Teddy nods, signs *thank you*. Jacob's heart is happy.

The wallpaper in the living room is faded. Teddy likes it. Climbing vines. Blue flowers. He traces the leaves with his finger and then taps Jacob's mom. He gives her a thumbs up. She says "thank you" with her lips and then remembers to sign.

*You're welcome*, he says.

Teddy feels like the house is perfect. It is warm with sunny windows and wallpaper, and he wants to explore every room and stay forever. Maybe Mom can, too. He wants to ask Jacob.

Jacob puts on the album that Teddy selected from the CD rack. The speakers crackle. Jacob turns them up halfway. Jacob sits on his bed and listens for the both of them. Teddy copies him, holds his head sideways, and signs more.

At full volume, the bed shakes. The window squeaks against the A/C. Jacob's mom yells that he's in trouble, but he can't turn it down. Teddy is dancing. He bobs his head to the thundering bass. Teddy can hear. Jacob will show Teddy's mom the impossible. Teddy can hear.

They go outside. Jacob tugs him around and points. *The birds?*

*No.*

*The chimes?*

*No.*

*The whirring AC?*

*No.*

They stand by the road and wait for a logging truck. Jacob holds up a finger, touches his ear. Teddy knows patience.

A truck bounces by, and Jacob pumps his arm. The truck tumbles on.

*Did you hear that?*

Yes.

*The horn?*

It was fainter than the rumble Teddy felt in the bedroom. The happy buzz.

But it was there. He points to his chest. *Here.*

They find a dead deer beside the road, its chest caved in.

*The truck?* asks Teddy.

Yes, says Jacob. His mom would be angry if they touched it.

Rain comes and goes and leaves puddles in the logging road. Jacob and Teddy play. They splash, fling mud. Jacob's mom is angry. She waves them inside, and Teddy obeys.

Jacob sits in a puddle alone, his eyes closed, his fingers in his ears. He needs to understand how Teddy hears so he can tell Teddy's mom. He sinks into the mud, opens his heart to the world. A buzzing fills his chest. He pushes his fingers deeper.

More.

Pebbles shake.

More.

Jacob sinks into the mud, feels the music in his body, as the logging truck nears.

# ***Enduring Beasts***

**Gavin Bourke**

Landed into the midst,  
ensuing chaos.  
Exaggerated connections,  
heart-sink presence.  
Cynicism and entitlement  
Severed from the natural, human relationship.  
Emotional shrapnel inside the urn,  
carried by the pallbearer.

No longer to be ventriloquized,  
alcohol seeping through the cracks  
of the last few generations.  
Induced Alzheimer's in a mother,  
cared for by her unmarried daughter.

He walked through the working life,  
causing scars to bleed,  
closer to savagery than those  
in the vicinity.  
A broken father stood in a doorway,  
in the darkness, for over 20 years.  
Carried the anger, through the social world,  
harnessed by Valium's touch,  
carrying inherited darkness that  
never was hers.

From father to son and so on,  
throughout each new generation,  
traits in common.  
Knowingly and unknowingly bringing  
the weight of unwarranted aggression  
to bear on every situation.  
Dysfunctional frameworks,

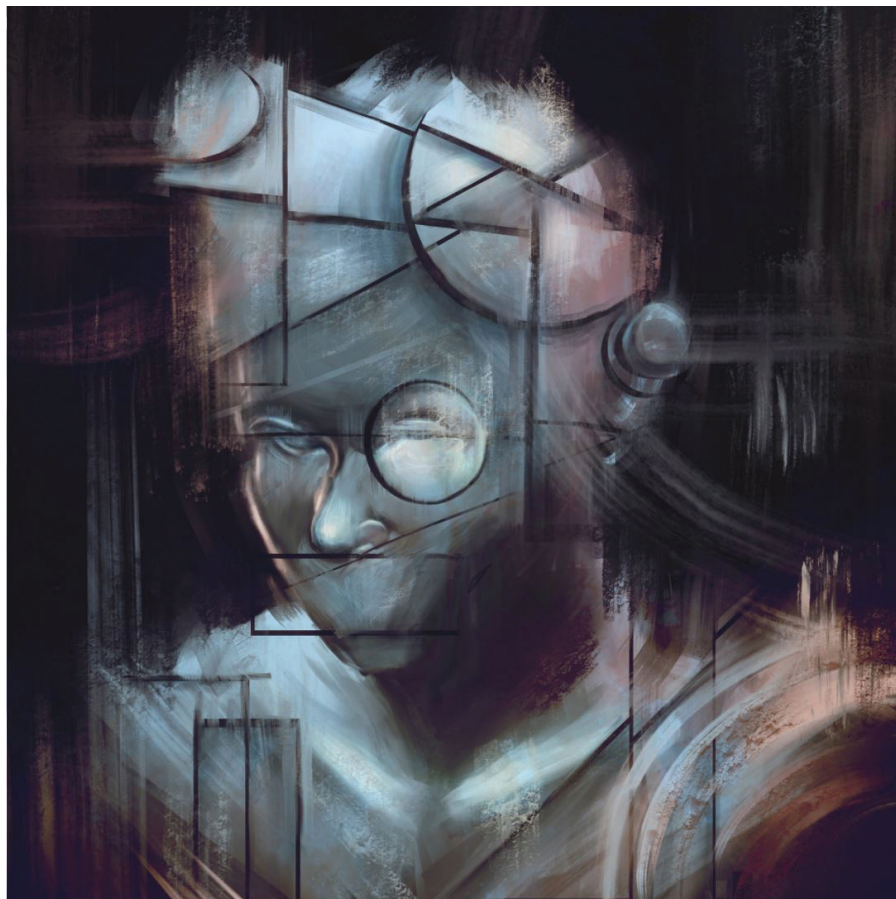
paradigms passed down from the rotting wood  
of successive staircases.  
Selfish emotional terrorism,  
oft rewarded by the modern organization.  
Emphasis on cute bureaucrat,  
the enemy of statute.

The movement of the body and eyes,  
mismatching language.  
The departures of form from semantics  
under well-dressed hides.  
Privilege without responsibility.  
Deeper into valleys of narcissism,  
schisms of aggression, never contented,  
mottled mind.

Couldn't live with this anymore,  
a father and blackening suns.  
Barking in hallways,  
through watering eyeballs,  
with persistent rancor at everyone  
and no one in particular.  
Left blood on autumn leaves,  
results of peculiar anger  
and personalities disordered.  
Ethanol breath,  
condensation around brass pendulums.  
Fell like the blackest slugs,  
from stalactites to stalagmites  
in darkened caves,  
through the generations  
on his father's side.

In chain mail,  
draining those in close proximity.  
Killings with pens and phones and keystrokes,  
the black filth of back-office politics.  
Twisted in online abysses,

morbid self-interest, records amiss,  
the stock in trade  
of negative diatribes.



Deconstruction by Akiva Uriel Bakst

## ***Aunt Ida's Apple Pie***

**Jeffrey Hantover**

*Spectacle lynchings were preserved in photographs that were made into postcards sold openly in stores and city newspapers, sent through the mail, and presumably displayed in homes.*

Bob,

Me on a postcard! Right there in front. Grinning like a cat with a bowl of cream. My new bowler hat and my red tie, though you can't see the color. I'm not bragging, but I tie a good knot. My grandfather taught me. We sure were having a swell time. Show it to Connie—boy, will that give her a thrill. I didn't have to ask Mr. Jameson for the day off. He closed the shop. Gosh, the whole town was there.

Your pal, Dexter

My dear Gertie,

We were packed tight as a barrel of salt fish. Shoulder to shoulder, you couldn't move barely an inch. Just a sea of hats as far as the eye could see. Horace lifted up Constance on his shoulders so she could get a better view. I am somewhere in the back with the ladies in their bonnets. We didn't want to get our going-to-church dresses crushed. I wore my Sunday best. Horace thought it bad taste not to. I got me a nice souvenir booklet with photos and postcards.

Fondly, Helen

Dear Sis,

Hope your lumbago has not been acting up. We're all fine here. Get your magnifying glass out and look for your nephew Charlie there in the right-hand corner. He's wearing his going-to-meeting hat—the one he keeps special for Easter services. He does love that straw hat. Kind of makes him look extra special handsome, don't you think? Quite a crowd. Simon Lancaster, who runs the print shop on Elm, took the photo and printed these cards. Selling them for a quarter. Says he's going to share the money with the Advent Methodist Ladies' Auxiliary. I'm not holding my breath. That man squeezes his pennies till they holler. Running out of space. Hope you can read my tiny writing.

Love, Betty

Dear Aunt Ida,

I baked an apple pie before we headed into town for the excitement. It came out real good. Not as good as yours, but pretty good. I know, your secret is your secret. We did a double grace thanking God for his bountiful blessings and for our dear Ida for the best apple pie in all the world. We can't wait to see you at Thanksgiving and sit around the table holding hands and bowing our heads in prayer for the blessings of our Creator.

Your niece, Beth

Lettie,

You can't miss Glenda, right there in the front in the dress you bought her for her birthday. It is one of her favorites. She thinks herself quite the young lady at the ripe old age of 11. Lou Smithers, our neighbor down the road, is standing right next to her in his straw boater—he is quite the looker. Twenty-five cents for one postcard seems like highway robbery, but it was a day worth remembering, and our Glenda smack-dap in the middle of it all.

Lizzie

Dear Lloyd,

“Service Above Self.”

Quite a crowd and a great many of us Rotarians turned out, didn't we? Respectable men of good character have to stand up and be counted. Just a reminder that the next luncheon meeting of the Rotary Club will be held on Tuesday the 17th at 12:15 pm at the Sinclair Hotel. The featured speaker of the day will be Prof. Eugene Slater of Springfield College, who will speak on “The Promise of Eugenics and the Future of America.” Hope to see you there.

Your brother in service, R.J.

Dad,

I'm worn ragged, limp as an old dish rag, but business couldn't be better. I've been in the studio ten days and nights. Gulping black coffee and eating slices of white bread slathered in butter. I've lost count of how many I've made. For sure, thousands. Twenty-five cents and folks can't get enough of them. I hear they're selling them all over the state. A friend in Terre Haute called to say they were in the windows of all the drugstores. Set up my tripod in a good place right smack in front of the tree. Give mom my love and tell her no more work in the garden till she feels better.

Love, Simon

Myrtle,

I tell you it was one special night. Hundreds of Kodaks clicking—you would have thought it was cicadas chirping on a summer evening in August. Owen Jr. hollered himself hoarse. But the wind was blowing the smoke everywhere. I had to wash my dress to get the smell of the smoke out. That'll teach me. Next time I won't wear a new dress. You and Dick come visit soon.

Love, Dot

P.S. Pardon if I brag, but Junior got first prize in the "I am an American" American Legion essay contest and won himself a \$25 savings bond. One proud mother here.

Dear Margie,

Quite the crowd. They ran an extra train to handle us all. I packed ham-and-cheese sandwiches for Paul and the kids. Came back and we all fell straight to bed. A fellow had set up a printing press right there, and we got ourselves a bunch of cards before we left. Can you believe I'm going back to town tomorrow? It's the annual Golden Rule Sale when all the downtown merchants reduce their prices. Hoping for some real bargains for the kids.

Love to all, Sis

Tom,

That's what happens when they annoy our young girls.

Ben

Dr. Abraham Washington,

Stay in your place. We are watching you.

The Committee

# *The Myth of Rebirth in Drums*

**Ifeoluwa Ayandele**

My mind is a wandering star, travelling  
through illustrations & re-thinking how  
to redraw the graffiti of my ancestors.

My ancestors are people of drums & dance,  
& in my dream, I'm initiated into the occult  
of the calligraphy of an hourglass-like drum.

My grandfather leaves indigo footprints  
in the marble floor to teach me how the paths  
of music intertwine into choreographic steps

on the hilltop. I place my feet on his footprints,  
& my mind glows into a slithering memory  
of the polyrhythmic drum in my dreams.

I'm in the forest of gods; I beat my ancestral drums,  
& my ancestors hear the melody of my call.  
Their ghosts gather around the tantrum of rhythms,

dancing around my naked being & chorusing:  
You are the son of the Earth & the stars in your mind  
are constellation of echoing corridors. Walk through

the echoes & pick your roots from the interlocking  
sounds of footsteps in the corridors of your ancestral  
gods, & you will unravel the myth of rebirth in drums.



Madely Williams - Solberg 20

# *We Walk the Long Hall Down*

**William Snyder**

Me, my father, nurse Joanne—the blue carpet, the clean fluorescence, the open rooms. And inside those rooms, people with gift-wrap paper, soda cans, TV remotes. My father doesn't look, though days ago he would have, would've asked, even strangers: *How are you? Beautiful day, isn't it?* But now it's his feet—if he can align them properly, one foot in front of the other. His arms stiff, tremulous, his fingers too, gripping the walker handles. Legs, knees, hips—stiff. Head, neck, shoulders sagging. Joanne says, *Lean back on your heels. Try to stand up straight.* But his feet lag and she says, *Step, step up, step up to the walker.* He tries, his slippers toeing the carpet like a toddler's might. I walk behind, watch the gown sleeve slip from his shoulder, the gown bottom open, his flattened butt, the serrated veins like tobacco leaf. I push the wheeled, silver pole he's tethered to—plastic bags swaying there like translucent fruit. I stop when he stops. He's tired. Or it's just his stubbornness. Food, water, medicine slosh in the bags, seep down tubes to the hole in his side, cut there for drips, for funnel spouts the nurses use when time is important. Time is important, even on this walk—how long, how short, is anybody's guess.

# *Angelus Novus*

**James Reidel**

The mild winter, the weak frosts, and an old, stale flu shot that still dispels the aches that flutter about my temples, the fits of it's-nothing, my dizzy spells, and the like—they slackened the healthy fear of getting sick, that last fear on which today's gods and empires would stand and fall. For the first time in years, there were no snow days nor any cancellations to heed any higher power than our own impulses. On the brown hillsides where the best sledding had always been in previous years, what good was that breakneck desire of the downhill run? When there was at last a dusting, every attempt suffered the halt of the exposed grass. What snow fell was barely worth the trouble of walking back to the top when it meant scooting like crabs all the way to the bottom again. And the tracks of our disappointment just scattered home, leaving trails of slush spots in the trampled turf. Sure, children still coughed and sneezed, but they did so into the crooks of bare arms instead of long sleeves. No one wears winter coats anymore—nor galoshes like they once did, with those black metal clasps found on no other footwear, which you had to press down with your thumb to stay put. Some of us, a dwindling few, an elephant's memory really, will remember the pull-tabs, like hard light switches that bit the fingers, and the trouble they gave when you could just leave them all undone, with the black rubber uppers flapping as we ran to where we are now—to where there is no real effort to the season, no caveat, to where other things are taken seriously and no snow angel's impression would like to stay.

# *Home Wrecker*

**Joe Baumann**

Matthew Smythe cannot get his father out of the house. Whenever he carts in potential buyers, his father rattles the pots and pans, bangs cabinets, creaks up and down the stairs, leaves hot breath on the master bath's mirror. He even makes the bedrooms smell like cat pee, despite the fact that he never let Matthew have a pet. His father once dragged all the freshly-laundered sheets from the beds in a fury of linens and tossed them down the stairs. On another occasion, he managed to turn on all the faucets and stopper all the sinks while Matthew was away for a long weekend, flooding the basement, ruining the kitchen floor, and rotting the baseboards. The contractor gave Matthew several raised eyebrows as he walked through the house surveying the damage.

Matthew loves the house. Whenever he walks in, it is filled with old smells, sights, and sounds—his father's turntable playing Tom Jones or the dial radio blaring swing while he baked cherry pies. But it has become a burden, the heating and cooling pricey because of the original—albeit gorgeous—windows and the fickle Missouri weather. Matthew has to pay a lawn service to cut the grass and shear back the Boston ivy and Virginia creeper every two weeks, and a month ago a raccoon died in the attic. Real estate has been all ragweed and scutch ever since the economic downturn, and Matthew's not raking in from commissions. His book royalties have also dried up; the tightness in his purse strings is starting to feel like a noose. Ergo: he's selling the house himself. No point in tossing the commission share off to someone else. And with his father causing trouble, he can't bring himself to leave the keys behind in a lockbox so an unsuspecting realtor walks into a ghastly deathtrap.

Matthew tries to explain himself to his father, constructing arguments at the open throat of the linen closet or standing before the half-bath, pouring out his financial woes. He crosses his fingers that his father will chill out long enough for Matthew to show off the house to young married couples looking for a quaint suburban two-story, even though he knows these pairs piss off his dad the most—the husband some kind of investment banker or accounts manager in mid-thigh khaki shorts, the wife a fitness instructor or graphic designer, and the pair somehow affording a mortgage beyond their means. The last time Matthew showed the house to such a couple, half a dozen cans of green beans and corn came flying out through the kitchen pantry's door like grenades, leaving

the husband with a black eye. Matthew has since emptied the cupboards of all their foodstuffs and glass and china, aside from the wet bar, which looks more impressive lined with wineglasses and bottles of Lagavulin and Grey Goose.

Matthew hears the noise of car doors thumping shut outside. He watches the Bennetts—tan, lithe, movie-star looks—walk up the concrete steps cut into the front yard. He takes in the way they saunter, her right hand cupped in his left, and watches as they pause, looking at something on the gabled roof. Mrs. Bennett, whose first name is Charlotte or Cheryl or something like that, laughs and leans into her husband. All good signs, Matthew tells himself. Their agent is sick with a stomach bug, but they want to see the house anyway. Another good sign.

He lets them come all the way to the threshold, Mr. Bennett's arm reaching out to press the bell. Matthew screams one final silent prayer that his father won't upend a bookcase or turn on the living room TV halfway through the showing before he yanks open the door. Matthew flashes a gregarious smile and takes in the Bennetts up close. She has the smoothest glowing skin he has ever seen; if she's wearing makeup, she's achieved that like-I'm-not-wearing-any-at-all look. He has gone sterling silver at the temples even though he can't be more than 30, but the lightning strikes wisping through his hair somehow make him even more youthful. The only thing that will keep him from getting carded for booze well into his 40s is the breadth of his shoulders. He must, Matthew thinks, wake up at five in the morning to sweat through CrossFit workouts.

Matthew is reminded of Leonard, the college swimmer he had an affair with during his short tenure teaching at a marginal liberal arts college in the Midwest. Leonard was a jock, but he bubbled with kindness and an intelligent vulnerability. The stories he wrote in Matthew's class were sparse in language but rich in subtext, their underbellies wide as caverns. Matthew thinks of him sometimes, jolted awake in the middle of the night by a lucid dream of their sex, the way Leonard's body seemed to consume his when they lay panting and gyrating. He's tried googling Leonard's name now and then, but the results have been inconclusive at best.

"Hi," Matthew says, extending a hand toward Mrs. Bennett first. "Good to see you." He knows that it's really the wives you have to impress, whether or not they're the breadwinners. Their desire for breakfast nooks and updated bathrooms always trumps the need for a man cave, a finished basement, or a humongous garage that could double as a refugee camp.

The tour starts strong. They love the home office, located just off the entryway through a pair of French doors. Mr. oohs over the built-in mahogany, and Mrs. is keen on the deep green paint. They wonder aloud about the possibility

of buying the desk—gigantic, its shine matching the shelves—and Matthew is relieved that his father doesn't rattle any windowpanes or send a Stephen Ambrose volume flying across the room. Matthew waltzes them through the formal dining room with its crown molding and into the open kitchen-living room combo, and he's pretty sure he hears Mrs. gasp at the size of the granite-topped island with its massive stainless-steel sink. He feels a swell of pride every time the Bennetts gleefully point out another of the house's features—the bay window overlooking the manicured yard, the brick fireplace, the composite back deck—and Callie Bennett tugs on her husband's arm (finally, her name revealed when Bradley muses on how much counter space there is for her to bake cookies during the holidays). Throughout, Matthew is clenched just so, wondering if—when—his father will make his presence known.

Everything is fine until they reach the master bedroom, their last stop on the second floor. Matthew has carefully arranged a vase of calla lilies on the bureau next to his father's old Timex. Little touches of life help clients imagine themselves living in these intimate spaces. He can see Bradley picturing himself reading the paper on Sunday mornings while sun blots through the generous window, cinching his ties in double Windsors in front of the long vanity mirror in the en suite bathroom, curling up to make love to his wife on Friday nights. Callie stands by the window overlooking the cul-de-sac. Matthew can read her mind; she's seeing her future children on bikes, wobbling on their first rides without training wheels as they scoop around the circle.

Then the door to the walk-in closet yawns open.

Matthew lets out a dry, mirthless chuckle and walks to the door, prepared to at least shut it and draw their attention back to the jacuzzi jets in the bathtub. But then come the shoes.

He made the mistake of leaving all of his father's things. Matthew had nowhere else to keep them—his apartment was too small, and he couldn't afford a storage facility, and those corrugated steel rooms felt so funereal to him anyway, black holes of lost, forgotten, hated things—so he left almost everything as it had been when his father died. Until now, the idea of selling or donating them has felt too painful, the roots of dread and grief too tender for yanking. But now shoes are flying out at him, a cavalcade of Oxfords, brogues, chukka boots, and white nubucks. They clip him in the ribs, smack his shinbones, dash him at the temples. Several tumble into the bedroom.

Matthew turns to the Bennetts. He slams the closet door and then gathers up the shoes, cradling them like a litter of pups. The Bennetts stare at him, mouths open in dark, wet caves. He has spewed out excuses for his father's misbehaving

during previous showings: poorly hung shelving in the pantry, groaning pipes that need to be refitted in the walls, floorboards creaky with age. He can maybe excuse the closet door with some notion that the room is slightly slanted, or maybe that the door is a tad too small for its frame.

Matthew's eyes hurt. His arms feel heavy, as though the shoes are made of lead.

He drops them and sighs. "It's my father. He doesn't want to leave."

The Bennetts both raise their eyebrows, as if they've synchronized this move through practice.

"He's haunting the place." Matthew bends over and takes up one of the shoes, a simple loafer. He remembers these shoes. He bought them for his father as a Christmas present many years ago. They were a half-size too small, but his father wore them anyway, probably ignoring a crunchy pinch in his toes. He kept them at the front of his shoe rack. Now they have become a projectile weapon.

A look passes between the Bennetts. Callie approaches him, avoiding the remaining shoes like they're land mines, and, to Matthew's surprise, gathers him in a hug. The toe of his father's shoe jabs at the space between her breasts.

"You poor man," she says. "We have the same problem with my mother-in-law."

"You what?"

She sets him free. "That's why we're looking for a new place. She's destroying ours."

"She sprays me with the sink hose just about every day," Bradley says. "Usually while I'm drinking coffee in the morning. My own mother."

"And don't get me started on what she's been doing to my dresses." Callie gives herself the once-over, flattening the material along her sides. "This is about the only one that isn't in tatters."

Matthew stares at them. Callie bends down and takes up the other shoes.

"Let's put these away and see if we can't talk some sense into him." She pries the loafer from Matthew's hands and nudges him to move out of the way. Balancing the shoes in one crooked elbow, she pulls open the closet door and peers inside. Matthew expects his father's Geoffrey Beane ties to slither out and choke her, but nothing happens.

"There a light in here?" she asks.

"Oh, yes. Of course." He reaches in and flicks the switch.

"This is really spacious." She turns back toward them. "Bradley, we could probably actually fit all of our clothes in here."

"I keep my suits in our hall closet at the moment," Bradley explains.

"It does have good storage room," Matthew says.

"Okay," Callie says, dropping the shoes on the closet floor. "What's your dad's name?"

"Jonathan."

"Jonathan, look. I know you love this house. But homes are just spaces we occupy for a short time. They're meant to be let go of, eventually, no matter how much we care about them."

Matthew turns to Bradley, an eyebrow raised.

"She's good at this kind of thing. She works with abused dogs. Similar skill set."

Callie pushes her way into the closet, her shoulder brushing against his father's plaids and Oxfords, his moleskin trousers and twill pants. Matthew catches his breath, praying his father doesn't deluge her with his panama hats or belt buckles.

"Jonathan," she says, voice muffled by stacked sweaters. "You love your son. And I know you love your home. But haven't you seen what you're doing to him?"

She looks back at Matthew, who smiles sheepishly.

"He needs to move on, too. The dead are meant to help us do that, not stop us."

Matthew's father, if he's listening, makes no response. The walls do not rattle. The sinks in the bathroom don't splash on. The sports jackets are silent. Matthew thinks of the day he told his father that yes, he liked dating women, but men too. His father had stared at him with a puzzled look on his face until something behind his eyes clicked into understanding. They stared at one another, wordless. Eventually, his father nodded dumbly. They'd never spoken about it again.

Callie looks at Matthew. "Is the silence agreement or a tantrum?"

"I have no idea."

Taking the lead, she hauls them down into the kitchen and flings open the pantry.

"I love how spacious this is. Do you hear me, Jonathan? I love your house."

Matthew glances at Bradley, who shrugs, his muscular shoulders slightly stooped.

"So," Callie continues, "if I'm going to buy it, I need to know that you're not going to fast-pitch cans of peaches at me. Because—and you can ask my husband for confirmation—I love my canned peaches."

"She does. Even though the syrup is bad for you."

"That's what wind sprints are for." She smiles at her husband, a mooning, smack-dab-in-the-midst-of-love grin. Matthew wonders how long they've been married. She turns back to him. "I want it."

"You want it?"

"The house. Yes."

"We wanted something move-in ready," Bradley says.

"Oh, we can move in."

Matthew feels a raw tingle on the back of his neck and wonders if it's his phantasmal father stroking his hair, or maybe preparing to garrote him with his ghostly fingers. But the tingle passes, settling as a dazzling excitement in his lower gut. He nods at Callie and Bradley. She winks at her husband, who looks like he needs to pass a kidney stone.

"I guess the location is great," Bradley concedes. "Features are what we're after. Minus the complimentary angry spirit. Which we already have now."

"Not like this," Callie says. "This is fixable." She reaches out and snatches Matthew's hand. "Write up the paperwork. Call our agent. We're ready to make a deal."

When they're gone, arrangements for faxing of documents sorted out, Matthew slumps down on a barstool, elbows propped on the kitchen island. He lets out a deep, sour breath.

He's about to pour himself a drink from one of his father's luminescent amber bottles of liquor when the shaking starts. The drinking glasses cry from their shelf; he hears wine bottles bumping on the wet bar. For a moment he's frozen, unsure of what to do as the linoleum rumbles under his feet. He's not even sure if he should stay inside or run out into the yard. He could be hit by a falling support beam if he stays put, but a fissure could open up and swallow him if he dashes outside.

Matthew looks out the kitchen window and is puzzled. The trees are calm and unmoving. The old swing set still tucked into the grass isn't wobbling.

"Really, Dad?" he yells, hands gripping the kitchen island.

The shaking intensifies. Thick wood moans. A wrenching noise. At first Matthew can't place it, until he realizes it's the groaning pain of the house's foundation.

"Come on," he says. He starts for the front door, but the rumbling has gotten so bad he nearly falls, ping-ponging back and forth against the walls like he's blotto off his ass. He hears the first window—those gorgeous, original windows—shatter somewhere upstairs. The French doors leading into the office

blast out shards of glass like they're spitting at him. Matthew covers his face with his arms and dashes, crunching noises beneath his feet.

"Okay, Dad," Matthew says, placing his hand on the front doorknob.

"Dad." He starts yelling, voice growing throaty and harsh as he tries to out-volume the sounds of the house falling apart: bone china chattering to pieces in the dining room, the chandelier swooping down in a bursting arc, drywall whining and cracking.

"It's over," he says.

He tugs on the front doorknob and is hardly surprised when it refuses to open.

"Is this how it's going to be, Dad? You're going to knock the house down and bury me with it?"

Matthew releases the knob and leans against the door. He rubs his eyeballs at the inner corners, trails his fingers down his nose and wipes his philtrum; there's nothing there but an ant-crawl itchy feeling. The house rumbles, a series of tiny shockwaves that burst through his bones. Matthew can almost feel his father's hands beating through the I-beams and joists and then into the plank of the door, ramming across his back and shoulder blades. When he would get sick as a child, his dad would lay him on the couch and tap on his tiny boy muscles with the fatty sides of his hands. Matthew would let out a tiny hiss of noise, a miniature whine that warbled up and down in pitch as his father moved his hands like he was pounding weirdly on a piano. This would always jostle something in Matthew, and he would feel better, if even for just a few hours, before snot or nausea or stuffy sinuses came rolling back in.

This feels different. But he shuts his eyes and tries to imagine that all his father wants is for things to be better.

Not that Matthew knows what that means. Two years ago, he left his teaching job, denied tenure thanks to his lack of publishing—despite the fact that he came into the position with a well-regarded book—and the rumbled (true) rumors that he'd been romantically involved with a student. He never found out how word of his affair with Leonard spread; they'd both been careful during, but when it ended, they didn't speak again. Leonard's name never appeared on the department honor rolls, nor did he show up at any of the pre-graduation parties the department hosted for those completing their degrees. Maybe Leonard changed his major to business or sports management. Matthew took his lumps when he was gently nudged by his department chair to try something else with his life. He packed up his tiny office, which reeked of old incense thanks to the philosophy professor next door, and, in lieu of anything else on the horizon, studied for

and passed the realtors' exam. He loved houses but couldn't imagine studying architecture, so why not invade people's spaces to see what they held, show them off, and make money doing it? And maybe, he'd thought, he'd come up with stories to tell, something he hadn't managed in ages.

But less than a year into Matthew's new salesman life, his father's lungs shriveled, filled with grape-sized beads. He was gone in months.

But not quite gone.

Aside from the slosh and gurgle of water somewhere in its bowels, the house has gone silent. The floors are covered in glass. When he stands up straight, Matthew feels his pulse all over.

"Now what, Dad?" he asks, voice rattling up the stairs.

He doesn't expect an answer, and he doesn't get one. His father has dialed things back to zero. The air ticks like a car engine popping after a drive. Matthew wanders the house, imagining what he would say to a prospective buyer looking at it now. See how spacious the dining room is without that ugly chandelier? The kitchen, with its broken sink and off-kilter oven attachments, is in perfect condition for a gut job. That large crack in the living room wall? Just knock the whole thing down and gobble up the study for more living space. The flooded basement? What flooded basement? I see an in-home swimming pool!

By the time he's reached the master bedroom, he's laughing at the absurdity of it all. Family photos have fallen in the hallway, many of their frames shattered. He plants a hand on each blank space as he passes.

The bedroom is largely untouched. His father's watch and loose change are still tossed on the top of his bureau in the same reckless pattern. In the bathroom, the tub has not dislodged itself from the wall. The tiled floor is dry.

He lies down on his father's side of the bed, where he used to curl as a child after waking from nightmares and finding the night too terrifying for solo sleep. His dad would wrap a bare arm around him, and Matthew would drip to sleep washed in the sweet-sour aroma drifting from his father's armpits. When he was 17 and left home alone for a weekend, Matthew snuck a girl into the house, and they had sex here. His first time, clumsy and brief and full of awkward laughter and a trio of poorly-used condoms that filled the room with a sterile, institutional odor. He washed the sheets the next day, convinced his father would still be able to smell out what his son had done. But not a word was ever said.

Matthew stares at the ceiling, where a long crack has cut from one corner to the other. He shuts his eyes and takes in deep breaths. In the blackness he can feel his father squirming around every inch of the house, like a battalion of noiseless mice. Matthew sits up, opens his eyes.

Standing before him at the foot of the bed is a child, or something shaped like one, made of plaster and water, crown molding and light fixtures. It doesn't have eyes, but it does have little hollows where eyes should be, thumb-sized depressions pushed into its lopsided head in a familiar shape.

"Dad."

The child raises a hand, wiggles fingers made out of fused-together nails and screws. Matthew wonders which wall will crumble first without them.

"You're not going to leave, are you?"

The child shakes its head, drywall flaking off.

"Alright. I get it. Or, well, I don't. But it doesn't matter."

The non-eyes squeeze closed and then widen again.

"What can I do for you?" Matthew asks. When the child doesn't answer, he adds, "Tell you a story?"

The child nods.

"Okay," Matthew says. "Come here."

As the child bounds toward the bed, smelling like a stuffy attic, Matthew shuffles to create a pocket where it can nestle. He's not sure what kind of story to tell. Maybe one from his book, which his father never, to Matthew's knowledge, read. Or he could tell him about Leonard. Or about Eddie, a new part in Matthew's busted life, who is still out there somewhere, waiting for him to show up for dinner. A date Matthew knows he will miss. Because, in just a second, he'll scoop up this father-child, hold his crumbling body in his arms, and find himself coated and caught, pulled into the busted walls and uneven floor, enmeshed in his childhood home for the rest of his adult life.

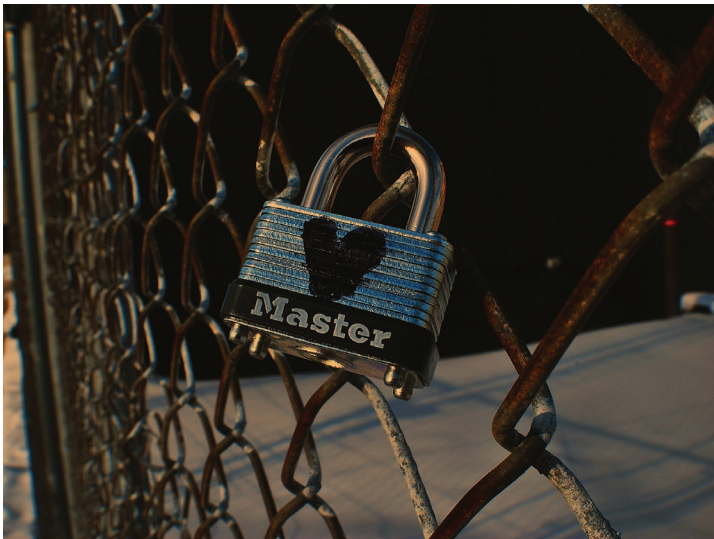


Self Portrait by Kevin Cuellar

## *Pickpocket Mary*

**Amanda Tumminaro**

First, Mary will pick at your brain,  
till you feel like a lab rat  
rushed down the drain.  
You're a fad, and she takes out her Nikon  
to make you feel so utterly diseased,  
till Susan Atkins considers you her personal icon.  
Second, Mary will pick up your clothes and ask,  
"Why are you such a ragamuffin?"  
She'll then look about for the steel of your flask,  
and throwing up her hands, she will be frustrated.  
Dangling a gold coin before you—  
this is how she is compensated.  
Finally, she'll pick your heart like a flower  
and check it like a pocket watch  
every quarter of an hour.  
Though she senses no strut in her stroll,  
she wants to know for certain  
that there's no guard on your patrol.



Love Rusts by Erik Suchy

# *That Kid Who Saved the World One Time*

**J. Howard Siegal**

I stop into the gas station the other day to pick up a pack of smokes, and I see him there, that kid who once saved all of humanity from a looming catastrophe, or just found himself really bored at a party, or possibly both of those things at once.

He sits behind the counter, his dark hair and narrow features folded into the crease of a newspaper, his limbs rumpled in his work overalls, framed by plexiglass and impulse-buy offerings, slouching through time.

“Hey,” I say, “box of Darts.”

His hand reaches up to grab the pack and, bringing it down, flips it into his other palm, where it momentarily disappears. He produces the pack from under the counter, then looks up, and his face softens in recognition. He gives me a weak smile.

“How do you like it here?” I ask.

He laughs.

“It’s better, right? Than people dying in the streets or something?”

“I’m dating Marie now,” he says.

I meet him for the first time at Marie’s house party, waiting in line for the bathroom. Lydia spills out of it, shouting into her phone at her boyfriend, and then as soon as she closes the door behind her, that kid opens it from the inside and peeks out, eyes darting above his slender nose and chin.

He just stands there for the longest time, saying nothing. Then he turns and walks straight into the kitchen. We all bust up—what the hell was that about!

I go into the bathroom, and the window is still nailed shut, from that time that creepy dude was arrested in the park.

Marie says, “Okay, I’m going to talk to that kid.”

We find him in the kitchen, looking through the cupboards.

Marie says, “Can I help you?”

He starts going on about orange soda.

She says, “Why were you in the bathroom with my friend, huh? What were you doing in there?”

The kid shrinks into his clothes and starts apologizing.

Marie grabs Lydia and drags her over. “Were you watching my friend?”

She backs him up against the screen door of the kitchen.

Lydia swears the dude was not in the bathroom with her.

Marie pokes the dude in the chest and says, "I'm watching you, skinny."

Lydia puts her arm around him. "This lamb is clearly lost as fuck. Let's get him a beer."

Marie tails along to surveil as Lydia sells the whole beer line on the idea that this kid has taken way too many drugs and needs a drink, like immediately. She liberates the tap, pours three beers, and whisks us out of the kitchen.

In the living room, Lydia and Marie sit the kid down in an armchair and flank him.

Lydia: "Where are you from, honey?"

Marie: "What were you doing in that bathroom?"

Lydia: "Are you a student?"

Marie: "Hold on, I'm going to take your picture. Sit still."

Lydia: "Are you, like, on the spectrum?"

Marie: "Do you even know anyone at this party?"

Lydia: "Did someone give you something to eat? Was it, maybe, mushrooms? A little piece of paper?"

Marie: "What the fuck were you doing in that bathroom?"

At long last, the guy mumbles something about air, then gets up and walks away. We lose sight of him through the crowd in the hallway.

David Hu says he talked to the kid. He also relates the curious phenomenon of walking into a seemingly empty bathroom and having this guy breeze out of it.

All David can think to say is, "Keep the door closed."

A while later, we come into the kitchen for a refill and find the kid standing by himself, looking around. "Hey man, are you okay?"

The guy shakes his head, looks worried.

"Follow me," David says, and we all walk out to the back porch. "Hey, this is, uh, some guy I just met. We're gonna smoke this joint."

"Nice," someone says.

David puts flame to the joint and passes it. "Ever smoke this before?"

The kid shakes his head.

"No pressure," David says. The joint goes around several times, and David and the rest of us lapse into giggling reminiscence.

Stories begin flowing, the evening air is cool, and everyone huddles closer. At some point, the kid reaches to intercept the joint, puts it to his lips, and

inhales. He coughs out a billow of smoke. He hangs around the circle, smoking and smiling, chuckling at the borrowed stories. At one point, he lets out a deep sigh that halts the conversation. The kid looks around. Everyone starts laughing again. He phases out of the circle some time before we notice he's gone.

He pops out of the bathroom, turns hard for the kitchen, and bashes straight into the back of some huge guy, spilling beer everywhere. The guy turns slowly, with a scowl. The kid shrinks.

Then we hear a voice, "Hey, it's the Bathroom Dude!"

Lydia emerges from the crowd, puts her arm over the kid's shoulders, and scolds her man. "This dude has now arrived at this party three different times, and you barely even got your ass here once!"

Bathroom Dude says he's been too early.

The next time he shows up, we've adopted him.

"Bathroom Duuuuude! BD!"

He's walking down the hallway. The crowd parts.

"Are you, like, an internet magician? Is this gonna be on YouTube?"

BD brushes past rims of plastic cups. Fingers pat his shoulders.

We follow him into the kitchen again, where he leans against the counter. Everyone looks at him, waiting for a trick. Several people hand him beers.

Suddenly he looks up. Someone else is parting the crowd in the hallway, holding aloft a trophy of stacked white boxes.

"Pizza's here!"

Marie slides in next to BD at the kitchen counter. His eyes are locked on the pizza.

"Gonna grab a slice, BD?"

BD shakes his head.

Marie looks up at the side of BD's face. "I don't like you, Bathroom Dude. I don't like you. I'm on to you. I think you're full of shit, that's what I think."

She drinks half a beer in three gulps. "I think you're just a tricky kid. I gotta be honest with you, man. I'm sorry if you, like—you know, have difficulties or whatever, but I gotta tell you, Beee Deeee, I think you're here for a reason. And you know what else? I think you're just a fucking scrawny lonely kid with poor social skills."

BD tells her this is all true.

Marie rolls up her T-shirt sleeve. "You see this tattoo, man? You see that eyeball? I'm watching you, dude. It's watching you. All the time."

BD takes his eyes off the pizza, just for a moment, to look at all of Marie's eyes.

BD is thronged in humanity. Someone has turned on music, loud, and all of us in the kitchen are moving. The floor bows in and out of rhythm. He keeps his eyes on the pizza boxes, trying to catch, in his periphery, what is going on with these moving limbs. People press and jostle him, but he smiles. The music is pulsing and articulate. The room smells of cologne, sweat, and beer. Marie is over there, dancing with Lydia and her boyfriend.

Someone bumps him. A laugh spills out.

A beer is pressed into his hands.

"Yeahhh, Bathroom Duuuude!" someone yells.

A chant starts. A hand guides the cup to his lips. A cup is pressed into his other hand.

We are patting his back, rubbing his shoulders. He drinks down the cups.

An energy seems to well in him. He throws down the plastic cups, pushes the crowd away, staggers forward, and knocks down the pile of empty pizza boxes on the table. He then attacks them, pulling them apart in strips, intoning to no one in particular, "I came here from a long time forward. There is a fungus that gets made here. It is catastrophic for humanity. The orange soda gets left out with the pizza boxes and some cigarette ash and the rotting wood of the balcony. It makes the mold."

BD looks up at the partygoers, strips of pizza boxes in his hands.

"Everyone gets sick. Few survive. Please, my friends, dispose of your food, your drink, your trash, responsibly."

Everyone dies laughing. This kid is too much. We love this guy. He must be high as fuck. We beg him to stay. He admits he does like it here, but he has to make sure he finishes with these pizza boxes. And where is the orange soda?

Someone runs out to grab some.

After a time, the party flags out. The crowd thins, and stragglers condense into addled little clusters of conversation. BD sits on the couch, his eyelids closing and opening, Lydia breathing into his ear about her boyfriend.

The diehards sink into snoring poses all over the apartment.

The next morning, I get up to piss, and the bathroom door is locked. I lean against the wall of the hallway, rubbing my face. The lock of the door clicks, and the latch turns, and out stumbles BD.

"Hey, man," I say. "No trick this time, huh."

He looks pale and sick, totally lost.

I pull out my phone. "Can I get you a ride home?"

He scowls and shakes his head, then slowly turns and shambles away from me, down the hallway and out of the apartment.

I head for the kitchen to scrounge for a forgotten cigarette among the abandoned cups and party debris. As I push open the screen door, I have a momentary fright, that I'll look down at the rotting wood of the back porch and see an open pizza box, slices going soggy under the drips of an overturned bottle of orange soda, and a greenish-grey spatter coming to life on the crust.

But I find no super-mold, no evident aftermath of heroism, just the same old planks of the porch, the same old haze of the morning. I pick up an empty pack of cigarettes from the window ledge and rip it open. Inside, with a pen from my pocket, I write, "Here the world was saved."

I let the paper monument float down into the future.



Out the Window by Ezra Gaeta

## *Red Chimney*

**Mark Niedzwiedz**

I wonder who lives in the house  
with the bright red chimney. Someone must,  
for on cold winter mornings,  
smoke bellows from the stack,  
and the smell of freshly baked bread  
stops me in the thaw and snap.  
So, I linger for a moment  
and stare at this dreamy abode,  
lit by the soft edges of snow clouds  
and the sun a pale embroidered gold.  
All is well with the world then I say to myself.  
All is well in the house with the red chimney.

I wonder who lives in the house  
with roses around the door. Someone must,  
for come late bloom,  
peckish birds gather, flock  
to taste the plum tree garden  
and jam from the pantry pot.  
So, I wait at the kissing gate  
to see who drinks the cooled barley,  
who hangs the crisp, cotton sheets.  
Then comes a girl to peg the sky, a threadbare carpet beat.  
All is well with the world then I say to myself.  
All is well in the house with the red chimney.

I wonder who lives in the house  
with the bright red chimney. Someone must,  
for you were built to silence the soulless city,  
smash the concrete slab, my daydream cottage  
with honeysuckle borders  
and thick soup made from pottage.  
So, if you glimpse me at the fence,

tap my shoulder, then with muddy boots we'll tread  
the creaky stairs, the homely rooms,  
and rest our weary bones on a soft feather bed.  
All is well with the world then I say to myself.  
All is well in the house with the red chimney.



Dusk by Kippy Sage

# *For I Have Sinned*

**Bryan Okwesili**

It is a cold Wednesday morning. The harmattan breeze settles over the city like the heavens have come to meet the Earth. Everything is brown and dry and cold and more brown. It is mid-November, but the people on the streets have begun to talk about Christmas, its merry moments, and how everything skips past with each bottle of beer. You want Christmas, too. Your mother says Christmas has a distinct smell, and that fried beef tastes better then. You inhale, but dust fills your nostrils. You put a palm over your nose and quicken your steps. You must meet God and tell everything.

The church is a warm embrace when you enter. It is like heaven doesn't touch here. A statue of a bleeding Jesus stares down at you, its eyes sullen from pain. The pews shimmer under the tiny bright lights on the ceiling. At a dim corner is the confessional, a space where trapped sins roam. You walk up to it, your heart clinging to your throat, ready to jump out.

You cross yourself, and then you kneel. There is a purple curtain before you, keeping you from seeing the priest. You wonder if he can see you, if he has the same clenching tightness in his stomach.

"Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It is three months since my last confession." You pause. You cannot feel your tongue. "I am a student of biology at the university. This is my confession."

You take few minutes going over trivial acts you know won't count as sin—a mild quarrel, a swear, a midnight erection—but you say them anyway, because the things you truly wish to say are broken vowels, refusing to stick back together.

"Is that all?" An airy baritone arrests you.

The church is suddenly hot. You can feel beads of sweat running down your thighs. You remember your holiday in Kano last year and how the sun there was always a boiling orange. When your mother asked you if you would like to visit there again, you told her that Kano felt like hell, but a busy hell. She laughed.

"Can you know a thing and never speak of it?" you ask, peering into the curtain.

A chuckle sieves through.

"I am under oath," he says.

You bite your lips. Of course, he is under oath. You have heard about the

seal of confession. You drag in air, a little too much, and as quickly as you blink, you say, “I lust after a boy.”

There is silence from the other side.

You can feel air leaving your body through your ears. “Father, I look at him the same way I look at girls, and I think of us entangled in bed, naked.”

More silence.

“Tell me what I should do to stop this. I know this is not of God. It is the devil, Father. It is him.”

You try not to cry. You want him to say something. Anything.

The last time you touched yourself, you were alone in the bathroom, trying to hold a mental picture of him in your head. You saw his face, then his lips, and when his butt swayed in your head, you stopped and let the soap slip. That night, you invited your girlfriend over, and while you were inside her, you told her you would write a poem about slippery spiders. She stared at you; for a moment, you thought she would scream and run out. The next day, she told you that you were weird. It was not a compliment.

“I once loved a boy in the way one loves a girl, too,” the priest says, finally.

Your heart skips, a painful thud. You want to snatch the curtain away and slap the priest. You do not know why.

“How did you overcome it? How did you beat the devil?” you ask.

He chuckles again. “There is no devil. It is natural. One can only manage it, for love is of God. And God is love.”

“How do I manage it, this love?”

Right. Wrong. Just. Evil. The priest is saying so many things you do not understand. You nod. Love is a thing with faces—this is how you would write it in your diary. Or perhaps in a poem.

As you step outside the church, the sun sits in the sky blurred by the harmattan fog. The Earth is now warm; heaven ascends slowly. You can see the full stretch of palm trees in the distance.

You walk to a corner beside the ixora hedges in the churchyard and remove your phone from your pocket to call your mother. You tell her that you can smell Christmas and that you can’t wait to see her again. Then, you begin to cry.

She doesn’t tell you to stop. She says only that she understands.

You cry all the more, knowing that you cannot know a thing and never speak of it.

## **True Beauty**

**Eloise Schultz**

Morgan finds the first louse on our bed.  
I pinch the second in a piece of tape, drop it in the trash.  
Our long-haired house is understandably horrified.  
Jess won't share her hair dryer. I borrow Gaia's but don't say  
what for.  
Shir advises to drown my scalp in Cetaphil. At the pharmacy  
she waves, keeps her distance.  
Drugstore woman murmurs, *Good luck, sweetie*.  
TV detective shouts, *We've got them cornered now—*  
At home I wear a plastic bag & think unwelcome thoughts.  
Translucent droves descend the shower drain, clinging to  
licesaving rope,  
Floating to lice afterlife while I wash the bedding  
& my friends watch Italian art dramas.  
True beauty, says Andela, wavers between vulgarity &  
sensuality.  
My mom used to check my head at breakfast. She pulled the  
brush so hard, I cried & begged for her to stop.  
Now Morgan stands behind me & searches my hair.  
Glides her comb through each curl: pronounces me clean.

## ***Final Piece***

**Philip Deal**

When we're done for good,  
we leave behind an unopened box  
of colored pencils, two brand new tubes  
of cadmium red,  
a set of new brushes  
bought at full price,  
a tube filled with  
delicate silk paper, never tried.  
This is not waste.  
This is our final piece,  
*Optimism.*



Flower Theft by Madeleine Kneubuehl

# INTERVIEW

## ***A Conversation with Elizabeth Sims***

### **Interview by Esty Loveing-Downes and Jacob Shapiro**

Mystery writer Elizabeth Sims knows a whole lot about a bunch of stuff.

After all, she's a former newspaper reporter. And photographer. Also, a ranch hand, corporate executive, certified lifeguard, bookseller, symphonic percussionist, and member of American Mensa.

An award-winning author of books stretching from one end of the literary spectrum to the other, Elizabeth Sims has expertise on the subject of writing that runs the gamut of fiction, craft, publishing, and education. Along with the publication of her Rita Farmer Mysteries, the award-winning Lillian Byrd Crime Series, and her nonfiction work, *You've Got a Book in You: A Stress-Free Guide to Writing the Book of Your Dreams*, Sims somehow has found time to become the most published contributing editor at *Writer's Digest* magazine. Whether launching her own imprint, Spruce Park Press, or teaching seminars on craft, Elizabeth Sims does it all when it comes to writing. A former professor of mystery, horror, and short story, Sims has a knack for appreciating and analyzing the written word.

Recently, she agreed to an interview with *Shift*, where we discussed her take on all things literary. "Zooming" in to meet with us from her home office in Michigan, she graciously commented on a wide range of literary topics, offering wisdom and insight into her life, work, and theories on writing.

Presenting a conversation with Elizabeth Sims...



Photo by Thomas Bender

### **On writing during a pandemic**

"Twenty twenty was a big deal for me. I wish I could have been on lockdown when everyone else was instead of trying to deal with a home sale and a home purchase, because I'm part-introvert. I moved with my wife from Florida back to Michigan, which is our home state, during the pandemic. There was a slowdown

in freelance work and an opportunity for ramping up of my own work. And so, everything is now going on in my new little office in my new little house.”

## **On working from home**

“I do a mix. Variety seems to be good for me. I have my own little space; I can shut the door and do my own thing. I listen to classical music on an old school radio. I really enjoy the café, and I miss that. It’s not attractive enough for me to risk COVID-19 sitting there with a mask on. ‘People in hell want ice water, but that don’t mean they get it,’ to quote Patsy Cline. When I have my radio on in my office, it’s my attempt to duplicate Starbucks.”

## **On self-discipline**

“It’s easier for me to procrastinate [at home] than when I’m sitting at the café. I can’t look at email; I can’t shop for something on Amazon. So, I do tend to get my work slammed down more efficiently if I’m at a café out someplace. And then, of course, you get to have your coffee. It’s that part I kind of miss. I have to be more self-disciplined at home.”

## **On writing queer characters as an LGBTQ author**

“It probably would have been easier for me to have written straight-oriented material. I know if I hadn’t written queer subject matter, it would have been way easier to land a mainstream publisher right away. It definitely was harder to break in and try to figure out what to do being an outsider, but I’m glad I did write what I wrote first, which was the Lillian series, and that I used my real name and just decided not to try to game it in any way or in any way disguise myself. I feel good about that decision.”

## **On apprehending story**

“I taught Short Story Writing and Writing Mysteries and Thrillers at Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. ... I had [students] read too many. [Now] I would have them read fewer and spend more class time analyzing them: ‘What is the author trying to say here? What am I supposed to interpret from this?’”

## **On theme**

“I certainly like ‘the quest for truth’—honesty at whatever cost. Many times there is a cost. Readers read to learn things. They want to learn how to live their life, how to live better. We put ourselves in the position of those characters: ‘What would I do if that happened to me? What choice would I make? If I was in that situation, would I run away or stand and fight?’ Some of the greatest literature has to do with moral questions, whether it’s Shakespeare’s tragedies or a perennial straightforward classic like *To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Aesop’s Fables* do a similar thing. The Old Testament and New Testament Bible stories, old Judeo-Christian principles—and the Qur’an has a story in it as well.”

## **On work as contributing editor for *Writer’s Digest***

“I have a bit of a dual career. I found I have a bit of a talent for helping authors get better/more efficient/closer to where they want to be. That’s been nice. It’s certainly a symbiotic thing. I learn about how to write by writing my fiction. I’ll be writing a novel or something, and I’ll be like, ‘Oh yeah.’ And I’ll solve a little puzzle or something will trigger the idea for an article. I’ve written 53 articles for *Writers’ Digest* all this time. I think I’m their most prolific contributor, which is cool.”

## **On holding reader attention**

“Pure, plain honesty really can be funny. Which is kind of sad actually, because people are expecting someone to be trying to act a certain way, or put out a certain persona. But, when you totally give up on any cogent persona and just let it all hang out? It can be funny.”

## **On developing authentic voice**

“How I developed my own voice: I stopped trying to be like anybody else. I stopped trying to write like I thought a good author should write. I let out all the stops and would use vernacular, use my opinions. Actually, lots of opinions in your fiction can help characterize your voice. Helping other authors find their voice is really hard. Take the work seriously and do a good job. The writers that I’ve worked with who had the best voices were probably fairly well read, didn’t take themselves too seriously, and they felt relaxed and loose—more so than other writers—as they’re writing. You have to give yourself permission to throw down crap in order to

get to the good stuff, and sometimes the crap is better than you think it is.”

## **On modern writing**

“I’m an analog girl in a digital world. I love these old tools. And I love old style and old things, but of course one must adapt to changing times. A couple years ago, I wrote a piece about using throwback writing technology. I wrote about using a quill pen, pencils, ballpoint pen, a very old 1926 typewriter—things like that. That was a fun piece, and it got so much response. I guess you have to be entertaining, but the personal was very interesting to people.”

## **On the little things**

### **Tea or coffee?**

“I drink both every day. Coffee for medicinal, tea for comfort.”

### **Summer or winter?**

“These days I’m picking winter, because I’m a Michigander now.”

### **Sleeping in or waking up early?**

“Early on weekdays, sleeping in on weekends.”

### **Mac or PC?**

“PC. Android.”

### **Kindle or paper?**

“Paper. I don’t even have a Kindle anymore—gotta have paper.”

### **Fallon or Kimmel?**

“Who’s the one who’s in that famous *SNL* skit? Debbie Downer at Disney. Was that Fallon? I’ll go with him. I can watch that and laugh my ass off every single time.”

### **Short stories or poetry?**

“Short stories.”

### **Target or Walmart?**

“Target. If you knew the Target and Walmart where I lived in Bradenton for 10 years, you would absolutely be with me on that one.”

### **Podcasts or audiobooks?**

“I don’t really listen to either, but I like podcasts because they’re happening now—and a lot of them feel like a voyeur.”



# CONTRIBUTORS



**Ifeoluwa Ayandele** is a Nigerian poet. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming at *Borderlands Texas Poetry Review*, *Rigorous*, *The Concrete Desert Review*, *Ghost City Review*, *RATTLE*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Tint Journal*, *Mocking Heart Review*, *Thimble*, *Little Stone Journal*, *Glass Poetry*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. He has completed his MA in English Literature at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. He lives in a room with a window facing a fence and tweets @IAyandele.

**Akiva Uriel Bakst's** illustrations are mainly done through digital software. However, he uses the fundamental essentials of traditional painting and applies it to his professional work. Akiva's influences come from a variety of traditional painters and draftsmen. With the inspiration of different artistic movements, Akiva uses his impressionistic intuition to give energy and mood to his pieces. This method helps his work gain a traditional quality while still being graphic by nature.

**Joe Baumann** possesses a PhD in English from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he served as editor-in-chief of *Rougarou an Online Literary Journal* and the *Southwestern Review*. He is the author of *Ivory Children Flash Fictions*, and his work has appeared in *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Electric Literature*, *Electric Spec*, *On Spec*, *Barrelhouse*, *Eleven Eleven*, *Zone 3*, and many others. He is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Gateway Review A Journal of Magical Realism*. In 2019, he was a Lambda Literary Fellow in Fiction Writing. More information is available at [joebaumann.wordpress.com](http://joebaumann.wordpress.com).

**Gavin Bourke** grew up in the suburb of Tallaght in West Dublin. He holds a BA in humanities from Dublin City University, an MA in modern drama studies, and a higher diploma in information studies from University College Dublin. He is published widely internationally. His first collection, *Towards Human*, will be published in April 2021 by Hedgehog Poetry Press.

Growing up by the waters of South Florida, **Patricia Burgos** is an artist studying illustration at Ringling College of Art and Design. Currently, she is exploring the world of 3D illustration while taking her passion for traditional drawing and painting there with her. She is always trying to learn new ways of expressing her art, and she is having fun doing so.

**Jesse Clark** is a Haitian-American fine art photographer based in Sarasota, Florida. Clark began his studies in visual art at the Harrison School for the Arts in Lakeland and graduated in 2019. Clark is currently pursuing a BFA at Ringling College of Art and Design with a concentration in photography, and he is the Presidential Scholar for his major.

**Catherine Coundjeris**, a former elementary school teacher, has also taught writing at Emerson College and ESL writing at Urban College in Boston. Her poetry is published in literary magazines, including *34th Parallel Magazine*, *Ariel Chart Magazine*, *The Drabble*, *Nightingale and Sparrow*, *Rune Bear*, *Backchannels*, *Inkling Magazine of the Storyteller's Cottage*, *Finding the Birds*, *Yellow Arrow Journal*, *The Dawntreader*, *Visions with Voices*, and *Nine Cloud Journal*. Catherine is very passionate about adult literacy.

**Kevin Cuellar** is a multidisciplinary artist primarily working in traditional media. He makes use of old-master techniques with a contemporary perspective in order to bridge the gap between the old and the new. Working in a realist approach, Kevin makes use of light and shadow, color, and composition to manifest the unknown into reality. Through his work Kevin aims to challenge the perceptions and conceptions of reality that have been established by popular culture.

**Holly Day** has been a writing instructor at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis since 2000. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Grain*, and *Harvard Review*. Her newest full-length poetry collections are *Into the Cracks* (Golden Antelope Press), *Cross Referencing a Book of Summer* (Silver Bow Publishing), *The Tooth Is the Largest Organ in the Human Body* (Anaphora Literary Press), and *Book of Beasts* (Weasel Press).

**Philip Deal's** publications include a literary essay in *Tamaqua* and a nonfiction novel, *Love In An Iron Bowl*. He has an MFA in fiction writing from Wichita State University and has taught writing courses at Georgia Southern University and at a technical college in China. Deal is an avid snorkeler and photographer and enjoys making what he calls concept art. He lives with his wife and daughter in Charlotte, North Carolina.

**Wen Dou** is a visual development artist and also has a background in props design for film, animation, and television. She is currently studying at Ringling College of Art and Design, majoring in illustration.

**Emily Fromhage** is an illustrator from Germany with a very multicultural background. She enjoys children's book illustration and themes of acceptance and imagination. Literature and movies are what sparked her interest in the arts. When she is not drawing, she can be found talking to family and friends or being outside in nature.

**Ezra Gaeta** is currently a senior illustration major at Ringling College of Art and Design. Throughout their entire life, creating has been a use of how they communicate with the environment around them. What they strive to create is something that encourages their audience to become inspired and have their artistic explorations within self-expression.

**Tess Gunty** holds an MFA in Creative Writing from NYU, where she was a Lillian Vernon Fellow. Her writing has been read on NPR and has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Peripheries*, and *Flash*. It is forthcoming in *Joyland* and *No Tokens*. She studied English at the University of Notre Dame, where she won the Ernest Sandeen Award for her poetry collection. She lives in Los Angeles and works as a writer, editor, and researcher.

**Jeffrey Hantover** is a writer living in New York.

**Miranda Hauser** is graduating from Ringling College of Art and Design with an illustration major and business minor. Her illustrations capture moments of lively expression through lines, form, and repetition. Focusing on the unique interaction of characters, events, and emotions, her work, especially sketchbooks, explores humorous and colorful themes observed in animals, cartoons, and graphic design, with purposeful contexts and the flexibility needed in fast-paced studios. Throughout her work, she keeps the viewer's delight in mind.

**M. M. Kaufman** lives in New Orleans, where she earned an MFA at the University of New Orleans. She has work published with *Slush Pile Magazine*, *Ellipsis*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Tuck Magazine*, *The Normal School*, and *Hobart*.

**Madeleine Kneubuehl** is an illustrator and designer currently finishing her final year at Ringling College of Art and Design. She was born in Madison, Wisconsin. As a kid, she always enjoyed dreaming about wonderfully peculiar things, whether it be flying fish or magic circus tents. She often begins her artwork with the intent to create something fun and unique, offering clients a variety of fantastic results utilizing both digital and traditional media.

**Grey Wolfe LaJoie**, born in Asheville, is currently an MFA candidate at the University of Alabama. Their writing and visual art have appeared or are forthcoming in *Shenandoah*, *Copper Nickel*, *Salt Hill*, *Mid-American Review*, *Puerto del Sol*, and *Carolina Quarterly*, among other journals. Thank you for visiting their bio.

**Esty Loveing-Downes** is a mother of five, wife, and full-time creative writing BFA student at Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. Her work can be seen in *West Trestle Review* and the *Santa Clara Review*.

**Nathan Mann** is an English teacher in New Hampshire and a student in the low-residency MFA program at the University of New Orleans. His writing is inspired by the magic and strangeness of small-town life in New England. His work has been published in *Outlook Springs* and *Change Seven*.

**Mark Niedzwiedz** is a professional composer and lyricist from the UK. Relatively new to poetry, Mark's poems so far have appeared in poetry journals such as *Grey Sparrow*, *Oddville Press*, *Scriptura*, *Wink*, *Rat's Arse Review*, *Sac*, *Literary Heist*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Wordgathering*, *BlazeVOX*, and elsewhere.

**Bryan Joe Okwesili**, law student at the University of Calabar, is a queer chocolate-loving realist. A poet and storyteller keen on telling diverse African queer stories, he writes from Anambra, Nigeria. His art has appeared in *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Shallow Tales Review*, *Writers Space Africa*, *Lunaris*, *Expound*, *Madness Muse Press*, *ARTmosterrific*, and elsewhere. He is a 2021 Pushcart nominee and first runner-up for the Defenestrationism.net Short Story Prize 2020. Follow him on Twitter @meet\_bryan\_

**James Reidel** has published in many journals, including *The New Yorker*, *Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *American Poetry Review*. His recent appearances include *Poetry*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Fiction Southwest*, *Wax Paper*, *Adirondack Review*, and elsewhere—including *The Best Small Fictions 2016*. He is also the biographer of the poet Weldon Kees and a translator. In 2013, he was a James Merrill House fellow.

**Addison Rizer** is an administrator in Arizona with a BA in English from Arizona State University. She has had pieces published in *Taco Bell Quarterly*, *Typehouse Magazine*, *Hoosier Review*, *Little Somethings Press*, *Hashtag Queer Vol. 3*, and *Canyon Voices*. She loves writing, reading, and movies critics hate. Find more of her work on her website at [www.addisonrizer.com](http://www.addisonrizer.com).

**David Romanda** lives in Kawasaki City, Japan. His work has appeared in *Gargoyle*, *Hawaii Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *PANK*, and *Puerto del Sol*. David's chapbook, *I'm Sick of Pale Blue Skies*, is slated for publication in spring 2021.

**Kaitlinn Rose** is a writer and editor in New York City. She recently completed her MFA from Columbia University, concentrating on poetry and cross-genre writing. Her poetry focuses on drug addiction and recovery. She presented a TEDx Talk on the subject in March 2017 on Long Island, NY.

**Kippy Sage**, from Massachusetts, is a junior illustration major at Ringling College of Art and Design. She has been drawing for as long as she can remember, and art has become her greatest passion. Although she most often works digitally, she also enjoys working with traditional media. Her favorite artistic subjects include portraits, figure drawing, animals, and nature.

**Eloise Schultz's** writing can be found in the *Sonora Review*, *Under a Warm Green Linden*, and *Terrain.org*. A human ecologist by training, she holds an MFA in Poetry from Oregon State University. She lives on Mount Desert Island.

**Jacob Shapiro** has a wide list of accomplishments, such as graduating from high school and learning to breathe without thinking about it. Born and raised in a suitcase, he's traveled the world—mostly the East Coast of the United States. A senior at Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, FL, he is pursuing a BFA in film and a minor in creative writing. On cold nights, he can be found dangling under your bed.

**J. Howard Siegal** writes fiction, nonfiction, music, and code. He plays barrelhouse piano and pulls occasional stints in world music projects. His writing has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Skeptic Magazine*. Currently, he is at work on his first novel. He lives with his wife and two children near Chicago, IL.

**Elizabeth Sims** is an award-winning novelist and journalist. She is the author of the popular Rita Farmer Series and Lillian Byrd Crime Series books, as well as the nonfiction book, *You've Got a Book in You: A Stress-Free Guide to Writing the Book of Your Dreams*. She is represented by the Donald Maass Literary Agency and belongs to American Mensa.


**William Snyder** has published poems in *Atlanta Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Southern Humanities Review*, among others. He was the co-winner of the 2001 Grolier Poetry Prize; winner of the 2002 Kinloch Rivers Chapbook competition; The CONSEQUENCE Prize in Poetry, 2013; the 2015 Claire Keyes Poetry Prize; Tulip Tree Publishing Stories That Need To Be Told 2019 Merit Prize for Humor; and Encircle Publications 2019 Chapbook Contest. He teaches writing at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN.

**Erik Suchy** is studying creative writing at Metro State University in St. Paul, Minnesota. He loves to pursue photography as a side hobby and find new ways to create exciting photos using Lego figures, plants, model cars, and watches. Some of his previous work has been published in past issues of *Haute Dish*, the official magazine for Metro State University.

Born and raised in Dallas, Texas, **Kaethe Thomas** has been drawing her whole life. She most enjoys creating artwork that presents concepts not found in reality, but she also likes creating animated characters and other cartoon-like artwork. She works with various traditional and digital mediums, in a variety of styles, from her realism work to more graphically cartoon-ish illustrations.

**Amanda Tumminaro** lives in the United States with her loving family and her cat. She's been published in *The Scriblerus*, *The Ginger Collect*, and *The Phoenix*, among others. Her chapbook, *The Flying Onion*, was published by The Paragon Press in 2018.

**Maddy Williams-Solberg** is a creative illustrator at Ringling College of Art and Design. Based in both Minnesota and Florida, she loves drawing kitschy characters with unique style and class. If she doesn't know what to create, she'll draw a cat or something.



Ifeoluwa Ayandele  
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Wen Dou  
Emily Fromhage  
Ezra Gaeta  
Tess Gunty  
Jeffrey Hantover  
Miranda Hauser  
M.M. Kaufman  
Madeleine Kneubuehl  
Grey Wolfe LaJoie  
Esty Loveing-Downes  
Nathan Mann  
Mark Niedzwiedz  
Bryan Okwesili  
James Reidel  
Addison Rizer  
David Romanda  
Kaitlinn Rose  
Kippy Sage  
Eloise Schultz  
Jacob Shapiro  
J. Howard Siegal  
Elizabeth Sims  
William Snyder  
Erik Suchy  
Kaethe Thomas  
Amanda Tumminaro  
Maddy Williams-Solberg