



AFTER HAPPY HOUR
REVIEW

ISSUE 10 // FALL 2018

AFTER
HAPPY
HOUR
REVIEW

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JONELLE SUMMERFIELD

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the 10th issue of the *After Happy Hour Review*. This issue marks five years since we first had the idea – over beers, naturally – to publish an online journal in compliment to our weekly writing workshop, the *Hour After Happy Hour*. Many faces have come and gone (and stayed), and we’ve picked up some new ones along the way. Our slush pile has grown exponentially larger. Meeting locations have shifted, although for some reason never further than 3 blocks. All these and more will continue to grow and change, and we look forward to it.

The five-year mark is more-than-sort-of important to all of us. Most literary journals don’t make it to nice round psychological numbers like this, and for good reason. The investment of time, effort, and money is all considerable, and – since again, so few journals make it to five years – the payoff comes with an equally considerable delay. But for every day of these five years, it’s been worth it. And at this point, while the most important part is keeping on our grind, we can now start to look ahead at the journal we want to be in another five years. And that journal’s gonna be pretty sweet.

So, enjoy the issue, and we’ll get back to work.

—Mike Lambert, *After Happy Hour Review* editor

Self-regulating Systems of Growth

BY ANDY STALLINGS

Gravel rolls under passing tires, yet remains in a general shape that we hear as a road. It sets the afternoon to something like music. As a child, I sat all summer on gravel, urging mint and wild chamomile to grow. There was a party with beer, and dancing, and karaoke, a couple families who knew each other well, it was early September, football on the TV, but in the end, one man had a gun, and he shot three middle-aged brothers dead, then put a bullet through his own head, too. Entropy interrupts. It was a neighboring town. Out there with the field stones and brambles, I allowed the cadence of autumn to dissolve my imagination of regret. Anyhow, somehow or other, you come to survive the hours. Myself, I'm shedding skin incessantly, watching light dendrites drift in the air all around me. A series of small refinements shakes the day, every day. No love exceeds any other by much, we find, contemplating love's absence. It extends in every direction from any source. At times a permanent record recedes in its wake, like the ancient temples viewed beneath a tsunami's sucking back, or photographs of flowers at half-bloom. Yet the process of being is nothing if it's not total. A rolling cover of high cumulonimbus. The downpour it could at any moment let descend, as though by choice. A repeating chime, silenced. Hard summer clarity, its softening drift. Luminescent activity of permeable dusk. With or without rigorous judgment, there exists the problematics of rigorous judgment, a rippling, or cascading, or fluttering that exceeds its source. To what am I fixed as the jockey to the galloping horse?

The Disposition of Common Fields

BY ANDY STALLINGS

The break is not clean between sensation and echo. But one bird, I swear it, chuckles each time it calls. You say, meaning well, there's anxiety in the bloodline, and that is why you dream of ghosts when near the ocean. Like the music forever latent in a book of orchestral scores. Sound gives shape to its speed in colorful briskening patterns. When you say unheard melodies are sweeter, is that an argument or merely the wishful ordering of principles? Let's say coherence comes for you in the night. Moving contour of an edge advancing, the sudden mass of a solar eclipse, something you don't have to ask to know you weren't meant to see. But even so, the sky's tone floods you with hope. Is it what you're meant to feel when you contemplate the city at night, the arterial streets, the central metaphors, the desolate shop fronts of the outer ring, the ragged ghostly lives of the far circumference? It begins with careful fragmentation, then proceeds to organisms whole but lacking choice. Like many hives, it resembles an archive and will later be mined for data. This is at the heart of how I hurt to simply exist here, my every move in praise of destination. We're bound, like so, to a different century's tensions and desires. If your heart is racing, my heart is racing also. Someone adjusts the buttons on their cuffs in a room where they sit alone, patiently awaiting your own envisioned arrival. Everywhere strewn, the pattern and the promise of the dampening, damaging tide. I'm warm, but remembering other times. What I most desire just slowly falls away, as we attend to daily habits and resubstantiations. A broad, directive American suburban perceptive malady. To focus on the motion of thousands of birds. The millions of branches bare, surrounded by light. The silencing power of the sky. What was it that drove me to act as though I would act?

Before the Swell

BY KARA KNICKERBOCKER

My mother turned thirty,
sitting on a beach out west, alone.
Her ring finger stark naked in the sun,
her freckled skin hadn't yet earned its marks.
She didn't have a career to drown in—
just the blue of the Pacific stretching across her eyes.

I wonder if she could've known
the world she was about to give me,
the white crested wave of her old life
about to wash out with the spring tide.
I wonder if she felt the Earth align,
sensed the gravitational pull of the two of us.

I wonder what it was like when she first held me,
if she whispered to the swaddled bundle:

*What was the stomach before the swell
of hallowed breath,
What was me before you?*



SEIGAR

El Cruce

BY WENDY SCHOUA

Lucho was grateful he did not throw up. The pill he swallowed this morning had stopped the uncontrollable churning in his stomach. He was working on his last construction job in Zacatecas, Mexico, on a ladder painting the wall for the new grade school. Lucho had already paid the coyote half the fee. He had made most of the money in Chicago doing the same type of work, but in dollars, a living wage. For six gritty years he had risked deportation, sharing an apartment in Cicero, Illinois with five other guys, returning to Mexico each Christmas to see his parents, and now his young wife and infant son. This time he could not go back to the U.S. without Melina and little Javier.

One of his housemates in Cicero was Alberto, an Argentine in his forties from Tucumán. He and Lucho became friends working for the same construction company on the day shift. Their shared passion for soccer and their curiosity about each other's culture, the differences and similarities between Argentina and Mexico, drew them together. They liked to work to the blare of Country and Western music, especially old Johnny Cash tunes blasting out from a now paint-spattered radio they had bought at K-Mart. The stories in the songs reminded them of the tangos and rancheras they had grown up with, sad and plaintive.

The Sunday before his return to Zacatecas, as they were sitting at the kitchen table in the otherwise empty apartment listening to their favorite C and W station, Lucho told Alberto that he had begun to experience panic attacks. And after many pauses, he described his fears about what in

his mind he called his final cruce.

“I’ve lost my nerve and I don’t know why. Maybe because it’s forever,” Lucho said. “Because even if we make it, I’m not sure that we’ll ever be able to go back to Mexico or see our families again. If Melina knew how frightened I am, she wouldn’t trust me to get them both across.” And he started to sob while gasping that he was ashamed about his lack of courage.

“It’s alright. You don’t need to suffer, Viejo,” Alberto said, getting up and putting his arm around Lucho. “There are pills for that. When you get back to Mexico you can get them over the counter. It’s going to be okay, you’ll do what you must.”

Alberto then told Lucho that most Argentine males were not ashamed of seeing therapists or telling their loved ones about it. Lucho stared at him in disbelief, until Alberto showed him an article in the Sunday edition of El Clarin which he bought every Tuesday. The article claimed that, in proportion to its population, Argentina had the highest percentage of psychologists and psychiatrists in the world.

Lucho followed his friend’s advice. No one but the pharmacist in Zacatecas knew. He gave Lucho sixty U.S. one-milligram pills called Clonazepam for his nerves. The pharmacist told Lucho not to take more than two a day, and to avoid alcohol. The pills were green and inoffensive-looking, but they worked. He had taken one in the morning and the anxiety that was roiling in his stomach had stopped, allowing him to finish the job today.

He came down the ladder and wiped his face with the old blue kerchief that he always wore tied around his forehead to keep the sweat out of his eyes. He took a deep drink from his water canteen, hosed off the tools,

and put them away neatly in the shed. Then he walked over to the boss' trailer to pick up his last pay envelope.

They hugged without a word. They had gone to the secundaria together, and except for Lucho's ponytail they looked alike, short, dark, and compact. Francisco finally spoke. "I'm sorry to see you go, cabrón. It's been great having you back for a while. If I didn't have five kids, and my mami, I'd go with you. I'm sure I'd make more money doing the same work."

"I know, man, and I wish you could come. Tell you the truth I'm scared shitless of crossing. I've usually gone alone, or with a bunch of guys from the ranchos around here."

"But I remember that one time you took your cousin Marisol," Francisco said.

"That was scary enough going with a woman, being responsible for her, never mind also taking a baby."

"Good luck, Lucho. Call if you can. If not, I'll find out you're safe from one of your brothers."

Lucho's oldest brother Juan drove him, Melina, and little Javier northeast to Nuevo Laredo in his new red pickup to meet the coyote. No one made a sound during the two-hour drive except the baby, who whimpered in his sleep.

While she held her baby, Melina looked straight ahead and tried to imagine what their life with Lucho in Los Estados Unidos would be like. Had she been too impulsive? She had been unable to imagine a future for herself in the village, marrying some field worker and bearing children until she dropped. She had seen Lucho at a wedding in her village

outside Zacatecas last December, and had surprised herself and her girlfriends by asking with great urgency who he was. He did not look or carry himself like the younger men who had courted her without imagination or success. Except for his silver and turquoise belt, he was dressed in black. Ignoring her friends' shocked whispers at her forwardness, she had stared at him until he had come over and asked her to dance. Later, during their hurried courtship he had thrilled her – she had been a virgin –not only with his assured lovemaking, but also by telling her that if she married him they would live in Chicago. They would have their own house like gringos. She could learn English; she could continue her education and he would care for her. No one close to her had ever crossed. Her mother and her younger sisters had begged her to wait, but Melina's passion for Lucho and his promises for a different life had overcome their objections. They had a New Year's Day wedding and she was sure that their baby was conceived that night.

Nuevo Laredo sat right across the Río Grande from Laredo in the U.S. You could cross the hundred-meter length of the bridge spanning the river in less than fifteen minutes by car if you had the right documentation. At either end and in the middle, there were checkpoints with armed guards and drug-sniffing dogs. The official crossing was less than a mile from the widest part of the Río Grande where coyotes had built a thriving business getting the most determined Mexicans across the river. The precise spot of the crossings changed daily to deflect the U.S. river patrol and their limited numbers and capabilities.

Everyone on both sides of the river knew about the compuertas under the bridge. Built and maintained by both governments, their purpose had never been made public. They were a system of metal and

wire portals that could be opened and closed. When the portals were open, which was most of the time, the river waters flowed freely under the bridge. When they were closed and the water drained, whatever was trapped under the bridge could be seen clearly. Every few months, when enough families on the Mexican side filed police reports of relatives who had “disappeared” and paid hefty sums, the compuertas were closed, and the horrors under the bridge were revealed. The watery communal grave held dozens of bodies, mostly male, some without arms or legs, perhaps eaten by crocodiles, drowned while attempting to cross or murdered by their coyotes and then thrown back in the river. The terror etched on some of their bloated faces was horrible to see. Those who had known they were drowning often died with their mouths opened as if in a scream of soundless despair, their eyes bulging, staring at the pitiless darkness of the sky above and the river around them. Some of the bodies were claimed and buried by their families. The others were trucked to a nearby cemetery on the outskirts of Nuevo Laredo and buried in a mass grave. Although a priest always came to bless the dead, the people of Nuevo Laredo felt it was the saddest way to go.

The brothers settled Melina and the baby on a park bench across the street from La Buena Estrella, the bar where they were appointed to meet the coyote. Lucho hoped the name of the bar was a good omen for the crossing but he did not tell Juan, because he was reluctant to show Juan how frightened he was. Despite an early morning dose of Clonazepam, Lucho’s breakfast was churning in his stomach.

They walked in and looked around. The coyote rose from a small table in the back to meet them, and they sat down. Lucho blinked. Dressed in American clothes, with short hair, and average in size, she did not look tough until the conversation turned to money.

“The baby is the same price as you and your wife,” she repeated firmly. “The risks are the same for me and my guys. I’ve got to pay people on both sides of the river, you know, and maintain two safe houses in Laredo and San Antonio. You came to me because your concuño, your cousin Rafael told you I was gentle and treated people right, no?”

“Yes.”

Juan spoke for the first time. “We’ll pay you three quarters now and the final amount when he calls us from San Antonio to tell us they’re safe. I’ll be waiting right here for the phone call two days from now. I’ll wire the money from the Western Union down the street the moment I hang up the phone.”

“I can deal with that. I’ve done it that way before,” she answered, giving the big man a good look for the first time.

“Oh, and don’t try to put someone else on the phone, because I’ll know it’s not him right away.”

“How will you know?”

Lucho tried to speak, but Juan put a meaty hand on his arm to silence him. “I’ll know,” he said looking hard into the woman’s eyes.

They waited for nightfall near the river in a large van without air conditioning. The hot air outside the van’s open windows was still and unrelenting. Two young women, sisters, were in their group for tonight’s crossing. Their names were Cata and María. Before he could chastise himself for the thought, Lucho noticed that neither was as light-skinned or as delicately featured as Melina and his baby. Cata, who was tall with short hair and looked like the older sister, told them that she was making the crossing because after twelve months of discussions, María had agreed to come with her.

“I’m luckier than Cata,” María said, “I have a job that I love as a teacher assistant in Nuevo Laredo, and I was going to be married, that’s why I didn’t want to come. Then last month I broke my engagement, and there didn’t seem to be a reason to stay. I never wanted her to do this alone anyway.”

The sisters cooed at little Javier, and Cata asked if she could hold him. As she rocked him in her arms, she looked so at ease that Melina said, “ I think you want a baby too, right?”

“O, sí,” Cata replied blushing, “I do want one of my own. But first I need to find a decent job, and a good gringo husband.”

Lucho snorted and the three women laughed.

After Lucho fell asleep, they spoke a little in low voices and halting sentences about their fears about making el cruce and their hopes if they reached the other side. María and Melina braided each other’s hair with the rubber bands they had brought around their wrists, and then pinned it up with the bobby pins that Cata had slipped inside the coin pocket of her jeans. They took turns sleeping in pairs while one held the baby. When Lucho woke up, they drank bottled water provided by the coyote’s driver and ate the food they had brought: cold chicken, ham and cheese sandwiches, tortillas, bananas, and apples. The air was sultry and it began to rain hard. They had to close the windows almost to the top. It was suffocating inside the small space. They kept moistening their necks and faces with the remaining water, but the relief was very fleeting.

When it was dark and the rain had stopped, the driver started the van and drove further west from the bridge to a part of the river where the rest of the team was waiting sheltered in another van. He asked them to step out then patted them up and down. They knew they could carry nothing at all, even a wallet. If they had money on them

they might never make it. They had been warned about unscrupulous coyotes killing their own customers. Lucho had packed the small plastic pill container inside his tight cotton briefs, anticipating it was probably useless because the river waters could reduce them to a paste. He passed muster. Now he watched when it was Melina's turn. The night before she had hidden the last of their money in a small bag made of oilcloth and stitched it into her bra. Satisfied, the driver handed them over to the four other men.

It started to rain again.

The men in the other van hauled out four inner tubes, black and inflated, and showed Lucho, Melina and the sisters how they would sit in them.

“You're going to put your backside in the middle and then lean back all the way,” said the leader. “Each of us is a strong swimmer, so we'll be pushing you from the back until we get to the other side. You, Melina, will hold the baby tightly in your arms with this toy salvavidas around his waist. It's the only way to cross him. I don't like taking babies. I've got a couple of my own.”

“We know,” Lucho whispered, “but this is our only chance.”

Nobody said another word while the group crept towards the bushes on the bank, until Cata asked, “How long will it take?”

“It's been raining hard for days – the river is really high.”

The group turned to look at the swollen, brackish waters licking the river bank.

“Takes twenty or thirty minutes when it's normal. Tonight I don't know.”

Lucho threw up his dinner in the bushes. The man who was to swim behind him laughed, not unkindly. “Hey, hombre, it's probably

better this way. You won't be as heavy to push."

The four coyotes dropped about three feet into the swollen river and then grabbed the inner tubes from the bank. "Jump," they urged their charges.

"Jump now and we'll help you get on. I will hand you the baby when you're afloat, Melina," said the driver who was behind them on the bank.

Melina hesitated and looked at Lucho, who nodded. She showered Javier's head with kisses, inserted the pacifier in his mouth, and then gave him quickly to the driver. With her eyes closed tightly, she dropped behind her husband into the oily black water. The coyote caught her and put the tube over her head. Melina grasped the sides firmly and pulled herself through it to a sitting position. She blinked the water out of her eyes and immediately focused them on her baby. The man pushed her a few meters towards the bank, and Javier was lowered into her arms screaming. She held him fast. The pacifier floated away.

Lucho put out his arm and touched them both once more, before he felt his tube being propelled swiftly to the front of the group. He could not hear Javier wailing any more. Lucho clenched his teeth and slammed his eyes shut when he realized he would not see his wife and child until they made it to the other side. He didn't want to think about the pungent stench of the water, the alligators, the pelting rain, the chunks of bark and trees floating around them, and the possibility that his son could be snatched from his wife's arms by the strong currents tossing him back and forth. He wished they had waited a few more days until the rain had ceased. Then he stopped thinking and concentrated on grasping the sides of the tube as tightly as he could with his wet hands.

The night was pierced abruptly by a scream. Lucho tried to twist

around to see if Melina and Javier were safe, but the coyote growled for him to stay in position or they would both go under. As the man pushed him harder and faster, Lucho could hear María's cries coming behind him in agonized gasps, "¡Sálvenla! ¡Por Dios! ¡Salven a mi hermana! ¡Cataaaa, Cataaaa!"

Then there were only the sounds of the crashing waters and the hard rain slapping Lucho's face. He closed his eyes tightly and, for the first time since his Holy Communion, he prayed to the Virgin of Guadalupe. He implored her to let the remainder of their little group survive the river.

When he stopped praying, Lucho could still hear the rushing water, the colliding chunks of bark, and the heavy breathing of the swimmer behind him. But the rest of the journey was eerily silent of human voices. He lost his sense of time until he opened his eyes and saw that the river bank on the opposite side was close. The coyote pushed him with one final, almost breathless effort. Lucho swiveled around to look for his wife and child.

They were right behind him. And so was María, but not Cata. Lucho's eyes turned back to the coyote who whispered that she had probably drowned. After the fourth coyote climbed on the bank empty-handed, he told them that a huge wave had crashed over them. Cata had fallen off the tire. She had been swept beyond his reach by the current and then swallowed by an immense vortex of black water.

Wet and shivering, Lucho, Melina, Javier, and María were lifted out of the river by another group of men, who gave them some towels and herded them into a truck. Melina handed the baby to Lucho so that she could hold María, who clung to her weeping and shuddering. Javier also began to cry, so Lucho rocked him and put his thumb in the baby's

mouth.

They drove through muddy back roads. Melina and María sat together holding each other tightly, while Lucho was in the front seat next to the driver cradling Javier. The driver had turned the radio on to a Country and Western station. In the distance, they could see the bright lights of Laredo. To Lucho the soft sounds of Willie Nelson and the reflection of the city lights he glimpsed through the windows felt like heaven, and for the first time almost like home. He thought this might be because he was not alone. He wondered how it would be for Melina, if she would regret it.

They stopped at a shabby trailer park and entered a large trailer in the back of the enclosure. The woman who received them asked them to peel off their filthy clothes. The trailer was air-conditioned, so they sat shivering in their underwear clutching their damp towels until Melina, eyeing the small stove and a box of teabags next to it, asked the woman if she could make some tea for María, Lucho, and herself.

The woman assented. While Javier slept in a laundry basket, they cradled their mugs of hot tea in silence, grateful for something to do for the next hour. They watched as the woman tossed the clothes in a washer with plenty of detergent and then dried them. When she handed them back they were stiff and scratchy, but clean.

“Tomorrow,” she said, “we’ll buy you some new clothes at a discount store in Laredo so you can blend in with the other Mexicans on this side. But now you’d better sleep while you can.”

Melina took Lucho aside and said, “You sleep with the baby. I will take care of María.”

Lucho just nodded, but as he picked a corner of the room for Javier and himself, he marveled at her composure. She was only twenty years

old to his thirty, and he knew she had never been away from her family or her village. A sharp twinge of gratitude ran through his body like electricity. He took the sodden pills in their plastic vial out of the pocket of his clean pants and debated whether to throw them into a small garbage can in

his corner. As he put them back in his pocket he decided to continue taking them as they were until he could get some more at their final destination.

In the opposite corner Melina prepared herself for a long night. She felt María's pain like a physical ache. She had never lost a sister or even a cousin, but now that she had Javier and Lucho, she felt more vulnerable to the abyss of sudden loss. They held each other rocking and speaking in weepy whispers for hours. When María fell asleep, Melina detached herself gently and closed her own eyes. Lucho's soft, regular snores reassured her like a lullaby.

They slept. In the morning, the woman made them coffee and fed them scrambled eggs and tortillas. They put on their new clothes: t-shirts, cheap jeans, denim jackets, and sneakers. The baby wore a pale blue sleeper and was wrapped in a yellow baby blanket.

"This is the easiest part," the woman told them. "There's another checkpoint half an hour from the city, so we'll get out of here without crossing Laredo. It's a bumpy ride, but then we'll travel on the highway to San Antonio."

"What happens after that?" Lucho asked.

"I take you to the safe house, and the rest is up to you and the people in the house, whatever you arranged."

In the early, clean morning air they drove away from the trailer park in a dusty pick up. Melina and Javier sat in front with the woman

driver. Lucho and María were less comfortable on the truck bed under a dusty and heavy tarpaulin that smelled of cattle dung. They had to be silent and still, the woman told them, so as not to arouse anyone's curiosity. They had bottles of water to sip. It would get very hot before they got to the San Antonio highway.

After miles of gravelly, bumpy roads they began to travel on a smooth surface. Under the tarp Lucho and María signaled their mutual relief, imagining that they were already on the San Antonio expressway. The truck came to an abrupt stop. Lucho put a steadying hand on María's shoulder, and they held their noses so as not to sneeze. They heard a conversation between the woman and a male with an American accent.

"Why are you stopping us?"

"The Laredo checkpoint is closed for repairs. So this is the new temporary checkpoint before the San Anton express. Where are you going, ladies?"

Lucho could barely breathe as he listened, hoping that Melina would not speak. Her poor English and her accent would betray her.

"My daughter and I are from Laredo. We're going to visit her mother-in-law. My girl was pregnant with another child, but she lost her baby yesterday. She's barely awake now. We need someone to care for this other precious one."

"I'm sorry Ma'am. We'll do this as quickly as possible. Driver's license?"

There was a short silence.

"Anything else in the pickup?"

"Nothing, except some fertilizer I haven't had a chance to unload yet with all these troubles."

“I have to take a look in the back, Ma’am.”

Heavy, booted footfalls approached as María and Lucho sweated and shivered at the same time. They clung to each other in silence. The tarp so odorous, dense and annoying when they got in, now felt as insubstantial as a cobweb. They heard the back gate of the pickup open with a loud click. The fetid air under their covering was altered slightly by the aroma of Polo Blue. Lucho started to lose control of his bladder.

“Ugh, I see what you mean. And with the sun...”

The gate was clicked shut, and the footsteps moved away.

“You’re good to go, Ma’am.”

“Thank you, Officer.”

Four hours later, when they got to a small, barely-furnished house on a quiet street in San Antonio, Lucho called his brother from the grubby kitchen phone attached to the wall.

“How’s your mother-in-law, Juan?”

“She went to the doctor, you know. You heard she’s having surgery, Lucho?”

“Yeah,” Lucho responded, “in the head, next month.”

Juan laughed with relief. “Let me talk to the guy in charge, Mano, so I can keep my part of the bargain. Remember he’s supposed to take you to the bus station and put you on the bus to Illinois. I’m sending enough money for the tickets. Give my love to Melina and Javier.”

“Thank you, Juan. We’re going to be all right now. I’ll also give your love to Elena, and I’ll call you again when we get to her house.”

It was night when they arrived at the bus station and were finally alone.

At the convenience store in the station, Lucho—who spoke some English—bought a package of Pampers and American baby food in a jar for Javier, and sandwiches and bottled water for Melina and himself. Melina, standing next to him holding the baby, reminded him they also needed a comb and a box of tissues. The lady at the counter smiled at him when she glimpsed Javier and added some plastic spoons for the baby food and a handful of paper napkins to the bag with his purchases.

Then they headed to the ticket booth and bought three tickets to travel on the Tronador, the legendary express bus that would take them from San Antonio to Waukegan, Illinois. His older sister Elena would be waiting at the station.

While Lucho sat on a bench outside the ladies' room holding Javier, Melina went inside. Once she was alone Melina took off her t-shirt and her bra. It still had the dank smell of the river. She ripped out the small package of money that she had sewn inside one of the cups and shoved the bills in the right front pocket of her fitted jeans. She threw the bra away in a tall garbage can outside the stall. Then she locked the door again and sat down on the toilet. For the first time since leaving home, she broke into loud, wet sobs. Melina made the sign of the cross and prayed that she could be a good wife to Lucho and adapt to her new life. Outside the stall, she washed and dried her face and ran the new comb through her long wavy hair. She hoped her sister-in law Elena would like her and love Javier. In the mirror she practiced the wide smile she would bestow on her husband and child when she emerged from the washroom.

As he rocked the sleeping baby, Lucho allowed his thoughts to wander for the first time since crossing the river. Now that he was by himself he felt a pang of anxiety. It could get worse, he knew. The panic could start gnawing at him and unman him like before. There was the question

of the pills. What would Melina think if he told her? Would she feel, and rightly so, that she had made a mistake not only to come with him but also to marry him?

He felt like a gambler with his last chip, afraid of making the wrong bet. Then he remembered how her composure had surprised him.

Perhaps he could tell her the truth and she would understand. He could not make up his mind. The bus trip was forty hours long. There would be plenty of time to talk. Telling her, he thought, might be another sort of crossing altogether.





JONELLE SUMMERFIELD

Classified

BY EMILY BOBO

I.

Gently used baby
grand. Rebuilt soundboard. Keys trill
grief like Woolf's sparrow.

II.

'77.
Maple. Mason & Hamlin.
Like new. Make your muse!

III.

Syncopate these: ex-
perienced sirens. Major.
Minor. Do-re-mi.

IV.

Restrung piano.

Must go. Priced to sell: your heart,
soul, OBO.

V.

Broke pedals flop loose.

Clingy keys. Melancholy

overtones. Take. Free.

Fried Onions

BY ALEX SKOROCHID

I.

Born a subhuman in the old country
she died a white woman in the new
and left behind her
an increasingly pink brood.

With birth-right of cannon-fodder
and famine cases:
a legacy of asbestos,
flat feet, big noses,
the work-ethic of chumps

and all night fever dreams
of rolling smoke and tachankas
that leave you to toss and turn
and wake at dawn
with the taste of fried onions
on your tongue.

II.

Then in town you lost the dreams
but the fever stuck, dull-brained,
because the men are raw pale-blue
like twists of cigarette smoke,

because kissing them would be like
kissing cold-greased steel
and that smoke isn't fire
of a revolution
only Lada's burning oil.

Thank god you never found her face
and the only thing you'll take home
from here is a break with the past
and a bottle of vodka
to wash the taste of fried onions
off your tongue.

Odd Couple

BY JOAN E. BAUER

Kitty Oppenheimer's first language
was High German & she spent her college years
in Paris cafés.

She was related to German royalty
& would visit her uncle, the king of Belgium.

Oppenheimer was

her fourth husband.

She loved him from the first day. He was mild & generous,
she was strident & unforgiving.

What did she make
of his mysticism, his philosophic nature? (When
they married, she

was pregnant with his child)

Both skinny as a rail

& chain smokers. His
were Chesterfields. Her second husband had died
in Spain with the Communist brigade.

What to make of this man
who taught himself Sanskrit, read Yeats
& made the best martinis.

His favorite toast: To the confusion of our enemies.

What to make of this husband who still loved
Jean Tatlock.

What to make of this professor
whose students aped his every affectation.

If he didn't like Tchaikovsky, then
neither did they.

Thinking about Philomene Long Queen of Venice's Avant Garde

BY JOAN E. BAUER

This morning, the young guy behind me
in the grocery line asks if I'm homeless.

I think: Is it the empty water bottle?

Do I look that scruffy & does he think
I sleep under rags on an LA sidewalk,
or in the kind of dingy netherworld

the old Venice Beats lived in years ago?

While I don't mind some grime, I draw the line
at cockroaches. I know it's bourgeois.

This gets me thinking about Philomene,
that wild Irish poet in thrift-shop black
whom some revered—as a goddess.

She'd been five years in a convent, nearly
a nun, when she escaped down a mountain,
found herself in Venice. Looking for a god?

She found a poet-husband, John Thomas,
& while she loved his poetry, joked about
his stubbornness, his girth & 'wise sloth,'

she wasn't joking about cockroaches,
mice, stale mattress & bad plumbing
or fourteen hours coughing from Asian flu.

She prayed to St. Francis to embrace
the poverty. (Her husband prayed for silence)
Desolate & ragged, surrounded by addicts

& prostitutes, was she a poet on fire or
a magnificent raven, flying, upside down?
Her daughter's an economist at GAO.

Millennial Milk and Honey

BY MARY ARDERY

We went to the city for lollipops
and men who'd pull our hair
in bed. We found cigarettes
and slept with women
whose hair fell longer than our own.
We didn't save money or go jogging.
We were still on the upswing, still
on our parents' health plan.
We drank gin and tonics
because they smelled like our fathers'
goodnight kisses,
and we were looking
for hard-earned affection.
We summoned ubers, instagrammed
avocado toast and mimosa-sipping friends—
posted every brunch onto a cloud
where it would live forever,
floating higher and whiter
amidst money that grew
on trees our parents planted.

We hadn't known anything but success
and dependence, the offspring of two
who pursued their American Dream
until there was no want left
for us to inherit.

This is the way it goes
when Mom and Dad say
dream big, honey, but
there was never any way for honey to fail.

Our desires were short-lived,
fulfilled or forgotten.

Our nightmares were fear
of losing what we already had,
the things we'd been given
without lifting a finger. We understood
only the false art of thumbwork:
how to swipe right and fall in love,
how to tap tap tap and bring
hot food to our front doors.



JONELLE SUMMERFIELD

Women at Windows

BY ROCHELLE SHAPIRO

No wonder Hopper women painted
women at windows. I grew up watching
women clothespin wet wash to clotheslines
that creaked softly on rusty pulleys,
their Jergens Lotion hands hanging
white brassieres of surrender and middy blouses
with sanguine ties and striped boxer shorts
that broadcasted, "A man lives here."

I grew up with women at windows screeching
like gulls to their children, "Get upstairs now, or else,"
and women in silver pin curls or pink foam rollers
who looked up and down the street,
searching for husbands not home from the bars,
women backlit at windows, silhouetted, women
in a wedge of sunlight or sitting
at a Cherrywood counter. "I'll have a cup of joe,"
she says with a Tangee-lipstick smile.

I saw a woman wearing a slip the color of moonlight
step one bare foot on the sill, then the other,
ease out of the window, stand on the ledge,
arms back. Her hands holding the window frame,
she arched her torso forward like a lady
on a ship's prow, then let go, and leaped.
Over and over I watch her fall.

Plague and Rumour (NY, 1981)

BY AARON FISCHER

At night the city trembled on the molten slate
of the Hudson, the river strobing red
and blue, squad cars and fire engines —
something always burning, scorched flake

and cinder, the siren's shrill call and response.
The city teetered on the cusp of plague and rumor:
private clubs screening snuff flicks, packs
of feral cats swarming strollers in the South Bronx.

From my midtown office I could see skaters
on the ice at Rockefeller Center — part snow globe,
part diorama — the Art Deco Atlas balancing
the world of commerce on his titanic shoulders.

A homeless man on the A train — shirtless
and barefoot — walked up and down the car
on his knees, face and back blistered
with AIDS sarcomas, as if a lamprey or suckerfish

had batted on him, worrying and worrying
at the same refrain: *When I was little my mother
told me there's no shame in asking other people
for help.* Did I ever sluice my spare change

into his cupped palms? One night a woman
wearing a garbage bag like a tunic
squatted between the subway's closing doors
at 125th Street, releasing a stream of urine

the color of green tea. The puddle stank
and steamed in the February cold. When I got
to my stop, the plows had finally been through,
gouging and forcing the snow into huge banks.

Above them I saw the fog-colored lights
of the bridge, a scant handful of half-hearted stars
that offered neither solace nor redemption,
that promised nothing and delivered it.

Ocean Life and Other Things I Learned From You

BY ALEXA T. DODD

You would make Mom rent those National Geographic documentaries from the library, the ones about every species of shark, about the Great Barrier Reef, about anything that swam in the ocean. You must have watched each one about a hundred times. The docu-series theme song would trickle through the hallways, a male narrator with a British accent timing his commentary to the music's pulse. You would sit on the couch, surrounded by your stuffed animals and Lego spaceships (or submarines), your little afternoon throne. When I'd get home from school, Mom would be on the phone, or paying bills, or starting dinner, and you'd be in the living room, content as a horse with a hay bale, learning for the umpteenth time that if a shark falls asleep it dies.

"You're really watching this again?" I'd ask, sometimes wishing I had a normal little brother who watched *Power Rangers* or *Clifford the Big Red Dog* in the afternoons. You'd glance at me, tuck your stuffed Shamu under your arm, and go back to watching male seahorses give birth. I'd complain to Mom every time she rented another VHS, but I still spread my homework on the coffee table every day, pretending to work while I watched the tantalizing blues and indigos flow and ebb around strange creatures whose names I could never remember. You'd recite facts at the dinner table, ones we'd all heard before. Mom would praise you, and Dad would tell you to eat your vegetables, and you'd never listen.

The first time my husband and I see our son, he is nothing but a

twitching blob on a blurry screen. I've heard that women cry the first time they see their baby and hear his heartbeat. But all I can think is that he looks like a little tadpole, or like the throbbing embryo inside one of those translucent angel shark eggs. Maybe I'm actually thinking of clown fish—yes, that's it. When the daddy fish in *Finding Nemo* finds the last, scarred egg, the titular character is a spastic head with tiny fins, just like a human embryo.

My husband squeezes my hand as the ultrasound technician tells us the heartbeat is strong, and I'm happy, but also terrified, because it seems impossible that something that small can actually stay inside me long enough to become anything more than my little fish.

Every summer, you'd count down the days to *Shark Week* on the Discovery Channel. One year, the week coincided with a week of summer camp, and you programmed the TV (something I never figured out how to do) to record every show. But something happened when you came back—you didn't clean your room, or you argued with Mom—and Dad grounded you from TV. While he was at work and Mom was busy, you settled yourself into the couch and found the recorded shows and watched them anyway. I'd lectured you on listening to Dad, but I never told.

Another year, I sat on the floor, pretending to read while you watched a show about great whites or whale sharks or sharks that swam up river. At the commercial break, an ad came on for the next show—a throaty narrator talked over jazzy, sensual music. *Shark sex*, the commercial promised, as stone-eyed sharks swam around each other, flicking fins and other body parts.

My cheeks flushed, and I looked up to see if you were paying atten-

tion. I was about to tell you to change the channel, but then wondered if it was better that I didn't make a big deal of it. I knew you knew how sharks and fish and dogs and cats reproduced, probably better than I did. But you were about ten, so I liked to think you didn't know anything about the human side of things.

You ignored the commercial, or at least pretended to. Still, I turned the TV off before the show came on.

"I was right," I say to my husband when they tell us it's a boy, because everyone else was certain it was a girl. My husband merely smiles. He knows I kept saying it was a boy because I was trying to prepare myself for what I feared — raising boys, I've told him, seems less intuitive than raising girls. A girl will tell you her feelings, will wear them on her sleeve. A boy will pretend like he doesn't have any, because most of the time that's what the world expects. (But these generalizations, I know, come from my experience with you.)

When we leave with a cascade of grainy photos only we can make out, I keep repeating, "It's a boy," as though repeating it will somehow help me understand who he is.

"Girls rule the world," the ultrasound technician warned, which I think is an odd thing to say, until I go to Target to look at baby clothes and see that the girls' side is overflowing with pink tutus and giant bows and little patent shoes. If we were having a girl, I tell my husband when I get home, we'd go broke. (My husband is relieved, but also skeptical, seeing the bag full of boy clothes I unload.) Baby boy clothes center around animals, as if self-expression from infancy is, for boys, linked to bears and dinosaurs and aquatic animals. I know that everything I buy him is my

attempt to know him before he comes, even to decide who he is before he's born.

“He'll be a handful,” Mom tells me, because she's thinking about you, about the little boy who knew everything, until he realized he didn't. She is thinking about how hard she has tried to know you, and yet still feels she doesn't.

You were always the smartest one. Watching documentaries at age four was the symptom, and not the cause, of your intelligence. You went to college to become a marine biologist, just like you'd always planned, and in a single year you failed every class.

Mom and I tossed around countless explanations — you were too smart, not used to studying. Everyone pushed you too hard. No one pushed you hard enough. Dad wasn't around enough. I didn't play Legos with you often enough. Mom let you watch too much TV.

For nearly a month at the end of your freshman year, you wouldn't pick up your phone. I sent you a giant egg full of candy for Easter, and you sent me a picture of it sitting on your cluttered desk. No words. Mom got so worried she sent campus security to check on you, which prompted you to send a brief text, saying only that you were fine.

And then one day you posted a blog on Facebook, as if the words couldn't stay inside you anymore. In it you wrote that you were alone, that you sealed yourself off because you felt no one could understand. That you failed because you were so alone.

My husband and I watch an episode of *Blue Planet*, the sound of David Attenborough's voice more soothing than the slosh of waves

against the camera screen. You probably know this, but there are areas of the Antarctic Ocean so cold and dark that a shark might go for an entire year without eating so much as a plankton (and yes, I know only whale sharks eat plankton).

Watching the creatures of those depths, unaware of the gloom they exist in, reminds me that sometimes I was scared by the documentaries you watched, troubled by the vastness of that underwater world, of its incomprehensibility, its beauty and its darkness. I would imagine myself, alone, under all that pressure and liquid, trying to reach the surface and never finding it, because something or someone — my own weight, perhaps — kept pulling me back to the sink-pit ocean floor.

But, back then, you were never afraid.

Attenborough tells us that we know more about the surface of the moon than we do about the depths of the ocean, as if this is justification for sending million-dollar cameras to the sand-frothed seabed, where they mingle with life transformed into monsters by pressure and darkness. It is amazing how clear and crisp the images are — like something out of a sci-fi movie and not those grainy documentaries you used to watch. It is incredible that I can see the brain of a barreleye fish, whose transparent head offers a clear glimpse of all its firing neurons, more clearly than I can see my own child's face in a sonogram. It's strange that I now know that the bottom of the Antarctic Ocean, despite how barren it looks, is teeming with the most bizarre creatures (you probably know all their names), but I still don't know what you're thinking.

My little boy kicks in the watery darkness inside me, and I like to think he's responding to the pulse and throb of the instrumental music, but we'll never know.



WILLIAM CRAWFORD

Theresa Harris

BY KATE LADEW

You're born on New Year's Eve. 1906 or 1909. Your official bio makes you older, your tombstone, younger. One written in ink, the other in marble. But what doesn't matter is, you can sing and you can dance and you can act. What matters is, you are black. You are a woman. And it is now, or any time.

Maids. Hat check girls. Waitresses. Prostitutes. Tribal women. Blues singers. These are the women you play because these are the women you can be, while the rest lace themselves up as Southern belles, socialites and molls. You're their friend, their confidant, just as young, just as pretty, a maid's uniform can't hide that. But they are blonde, even in black and white, and no matter how many times your voice is heard, your name doesn't appear onscreen. The radio's easier, no one can see your face, but — no one can see your face. The arch of your brows, the smirk in your smile, the deep dark life of your eyes. You crowd around a microphone with people the same color as you and entertain a world that isn't.

When you're 33 or 36, Val Lewton and RKO show up, and, after ten years in Hollywood, you rescue yourself. In movies with names like *Cat People*, *I Walked with a Zombie*, *Phantom Lady* and *Strange Illusion*, you play a waitress and a maid and a maid and a maid but you have guts and looks and sass and smarts and when the white people see monsters, you run and they don't and the audience sides with you.

At 38 or 41, you're finally offered a part with a first and last name. She is an ex-maid, and you could kill somebody for the difference they claim it makes, but you take it and when Robert Mitchum sits down next to you, the camera rolls into life and so do you. It's the best you've ever

been and it's the best you'll ever be given.

Looking around the parking lot and the studio at all the pale eager faces, the straight hair, the light eyes, the upturned chins that have never had to look down, you find yourself halfway to a decision. There's a sharp, deep anger inside you, crisp as cut apple, and maybe your father was a sharecropper and your mother was his wife and you're a thousand miles from Texas — it isn't enough. When you attend the premiere and watch your straight, bright body move on the largest screen you've ever seen, it isn't enough and it's the least human you've ever felt. You are in the balcony. Fifteen years and you are in the balcony. Roped off, an exhibit with your short, succinct label in bold brick letters: COLORED. All the distance in the world can't separate you from that. Your hands move before your mind tells them to. Gripping the edge, you drop your eyes and take in the scene. 63 movies have given you a director's eye. One lid closes and your fingers form a rectangle, boxing in the tuxedoed and diamond encrusted crowd below. When the camera clicks you know, fully and completely, you are not a part of this, you have never been a part of this. You will never be allowed to be a part of this.

So you descend the stairs and walk out the backdoor of the theater, the one that isn't but might as well be marked especially for people like you. You don't pause. You walk until you get to your apartment. You turn on the light. It's filled with everything you care about. Some are framed posters of movies only you know you were in. They will have to go. It will all have to go.

No-one can appreciate quiet unless they've known noise. Thirty years later you die a doctor's wife, comfortable and safe in Inglewood, living off

the money you earned when you were young and beautiful and so much less than you wanted to be. Two months before your 79th birthday (or is it 76th?) you find yourself in Angelus - Rosedale Cemetery, in the same ground as former Los Angeles mayors (the 10th, 31st, 35th, 36th, 38th and 41st), Rasputin's daughter, the composer of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, suffragette Caroline Severance, Hattie McDaniel, the first black woman to win an Academy Award, Ernestine Wade, Sapphire from *Amos n Andy*, and Dooley Wilson, Sam in *Casablanca*. There's also Louise Peete, the second woman to be executed in the state's gas chamber. You don't know who she killed to get there, but maybe they had it coming.

You played maids. Hat check girls. Waitresses. Prostitutes. Tribal women. Blues singers. And the most unreal thing of all: an actress. The night you die, you have a vision. Dancing across a stage you can't see for the flowers at your feet, your waist bends and the applause is a cyclone picking up all the little black girls in the world and tipping them over to look down at a black form, the center of all the lights and noise and booming freedom and energy and life. Sparks shoot from their tiny hands and you look up at millions of eyes that see you and all you really are, the similitude of your outside and the endless parade of grit and ability and intelligence and grace of your inside. The arch of your brows, the smirk in your smile, the deep dark life of you winks at all those little girls who watch you like a dream. You are black. You are a woman. You exist. Have, are and will, now or any time.

Birdsong

BY JESSICA BROFSKY

When Grandpa lost his will to live, he took a block of basswood and a box of tools to the basement and for two weeks he sat and carved me a nightingale. He grinded away the excess, developed the body, then the head of the bird, sanded and smoothed away the rough with a diamond stone. He carved the feathers first with a Dremel then with fire, took the wood burner and singed the skin, the softness.

In the movies the WWI heroes were stuck in trenches cut off from music, from wives, from sons, from daughters. Grandpa left the theatre halfway through, said this wasn't what it was really like. No one needed birdsong so badly they blew their heads off. That night I knocked on his door and when he didn't answer, I crept in, found him under a tunnel of blankets. I saw the opened cassette tape first, then the Walkman, as it shattered on the floor. *Get the fuck out of here!* I shut the door and ran until my breathing was the sound that broke me.

No one had ever been able to hand me a war. Once, Grandpa choked on a memory that split his tongue like a machine gun. I was already hollowing years ago, I think. Running through my skin, I visit his grave. I go underground, under covers. I hold his bones. I know nothing but what haunts me.

The man at the door came with a bag of eyes and legs. Grandpa painted the bird over in eight washes and a few dabs of medium gloss. He attached the limbs and mounted it onto driftwood. In his basement he recreated day in and day out his worst nightmare. The nightingale sits on my shelf. It never sings.



LAURA ALLEN

Jessie's Crayons

BY CAITRIN CLUTE

“Is it because she didn't brush her teeth?” My six year old looks up from his drawing.

“What's that?” I say. He gestures at his sister in the hospital bed.

“Is Jessie sick because she didn't brush her teeth?”

“No, champ. Your sister always brushed her teeth.” Brushed? Brushes?

“I don't like that her eyes aren't closed all the way. It's creepy. Is she going to wake up soon?” *Jesus*. I pull Colin onto my lap and put his crayons back in his hand.

If you asked Jessie her favorite color, she would tell you it was scarlet. If you asked her what color the sky looked at bedtime she would say indigo. If you asked her what color the walls in this room were, she couldn't tell you. Her eyes have been — mostly — closed for a week. Nontraumatic coma.

Colin grabs my face and presses his lips into my cheekbone. “Can she hear us?” he whispers. I pick up a brown crayon. I start drawing a tree on his paper.

“Draw a picture for your sister.” He picks up every crayon before settling on an orange for her dress. Before he finishes, he peels all the paper off the crayon. Jessie has always been better at being still. *Jesus*.

“When are we going home? Do we have to be here for even longer?”

“Why don't you help me draw a house for Jessie?” I outline a house and let him fill in the rest. He picks off more colored paper. I grab a blue crayon for the sky. It matches the walls. Periwinkle.

Vulture Poop

BY NANCY FORD DUGAN

VANTAGE POSITION

Harry confided he was stoning the vultures. They'd taken up residence on his roof at night and sunned themselves daily on his deck's railing.

"Aren't they a protected species?" asked his neighbor Ed. They were out on the street in the cul-de-sac at the annual neighborhood picnic. Ed was concerned not only about a potential "bail out" call but also about Harry, whose balance could be better.

"Well, yes," said Harry. "But if they're going to poop all over my deck, there are going to be consequences."

"I heard that vulture poop was actually pretty high-end poop," said Ed, sipping his beer. "It's cleaner, they say, than some other species. For what that's worth. In a way, you should be flattered. Your roof gives them the best vantage point. They can see the lake, the woods, everything."

Harry felt a momentary flash of triumph. His home on this tony block, having the best something? It was a nice house, a nice view, but a vulture attractor? He had no pool, no guesthouse on the property, although he did have a perfectly serviceable shed (filled with leftover floor tiles the previous owner had over-ordered). Harry was aware that his new

generator generated a lot of attention from his neighbors, given the non-stop extreme weather alerts they all received. Harry had developed a Gatsby-esque obsession with it, checking twice a day that its steady, lime-green light was still on.

Every night he could hear the vultures scratching and settling in on the roof over his bedroom. He was grateful they weren't particularly noisy, since his main goal in life was to get a peaceful night's sleep. When they weren't pooping, or staring at Harry from the deck all day, or attacking his screen doors (leaving holes he'd have to fix), Harry had to admit that the vultures were actually not that intrusive to his gym-attending, bill-paying, Quicken-budget-updating, TV-sports-watching, and library-visiting routine. He just wanted them gone.

TEN-AND-TWO POSITION

Harry told his sister about the vultures on one of their twice-weekly calls.

“Dear Lord, I see extensive poop-cleaning in my future. On my next visit I can tackle it. I hope you're not turning into Dad. Remember his fixation with moles in his twilight years?”

She was younger than Harry, still employed, eager to remain stylish, and had not quite passed into the delicate pre-elderly stage Harry had. They were spending more time together than they had since they were kids. After retiring from his job on the West Coast, Harry had impulsively and recently returned to the east, figuring he was next in line to benefit

from family attention when it was his turn to fade away. His small home near San Francisco had snared enough money for him to purchase this upscale lakeside house in a summer community where he was living year round.

On her monthly visits Harry's sister was determined to relearn the basic driving skills she'd had enough of to get her a license as a suburban teenager. But due to her decades-long urban, car-less existence, Harry quickly realized his sister was essentially starting from scratch. He suspected her eagerness to drive was partly to be prepared to help him as his ailments accumulated. After picking her up at the train station, he'd drive his car to a fancy nearby community with speed bumps, mansions, stop signs, and few visible living creatures, human or otherwise, anywhere in sight. They'd swap seats and his sister took over the car, adjusting the mirrors, jamming the brakes, pumping the gas as if it were 1969, and looking for a stick shift. At the rare sight of another car, she'd gasp. As they navigated the mostly secluded streets, she alternated between nervous, often nonsensical chatter and silent, focused intensity, gripping the steering wheel in the "ten and two" position all the while.

- "Every time I go over a speed bump, I die a little. It hurts my organs."
- "Isn't it great that these rich people have to walk so far to get their mail?" (The mailboxes were centrally lined up at the entrance of the community.)
- "Remember when the word 'intersection' meant just this? Roads

converging? Now everything is the intersection of this and that.”

- “I had a dream last night that my pillowcases were in a puddle, and I was debating whether or not I had to launder them. By the way, in real life, all my sheets are inexplicably ripping. There’s no such thing as quality fabrics anymore.”

“You can’t turn in here,” said Harry. “It’s a private driveway.”

“Oh, right. Thanks.”

PANCAKE-FLAT PRAYER POSITION

She’d brought up some photos their cousins had sent her after cleaning out parental homes of newly departed aunts and uncles. His sister had taken on the task of representing their family at all the funerals. Harry was grateful; he just wasn’t up to the travel.

They were sitting at Harry’s dining room table under the low-hanging chandelier his sister knocked her head on at least once per visit.

“So in this picture the block-headed girl with braids and the lunatic fringe of bangs is me, correct?”

Harry quietly chuckled. “Yes, it is.”

“Why-oh-why did you allow Mom to butcher my bangs like that?”

“Well, there was only so much I could do,” said Harry. “It just looks worse on you because, well, that large forehead.”

“Thanks very much. Look how cute Mom and Dad look in saddle shoes and squatting. It would take a village to get me out of that position now.”

“They do look great. They were young and in their twenties. You

could have squatted at that age too.”

“Even in saddle shoes they look glamorous. And thin,” said his sister. She picked up another faded photo with tiny paper fringe around its rim. “I showed this one of all of us at the beach to Ben, and he said I looked angry. I thought I was smiling, but it is kind of a grimace.” Ben was his sister’s on-again/off-again partner.

“That’s your ‘I’m trying to behave so Mom doesn’t yell at me’ smile,” Harry said. “I remember it well.”

In the photo everyone was wearing unflattering swimwear and sitting or sprawling on a beach blanket, squinting into the camera with expressions that ranged from genuine happiness (the grandparents, since their clan was all around them; their dad, who seemed to have fun no matter the occasion) to uncomfortable or bored (the teenagers, including Harry, who looked annoyed to have to lift his eyes up from the book he was reading) to posing politely (the various aunts, uncles, cousins) to absolutely miserable and yet beautiful (their mom).

“This is a skin cancer prevention advertisement if ever there was one,” said Harry. It was a festival of overexposed, pale, piled-up Irish flesh that would require extensive dermatological attention in the years to come, hacking off all the beach-formed basal cells.

“I think it is a Eugene O’Neill play waiting to happen. There’s a lot of posing. And repression,” said his sister.

“But no morphine, as I recall,” said Harry.

“No, that came later,” she said. “At the deathbed scenes.” She held the photo up closer to her progressive eyeglasses. “My posture was pretty good back then. No hunching. And look, my toes are out. It’s been de-

cares since they were. They felt so cool and gritty in the sand. Now all my toes have a sad story.” She sighed.

“That is why God invented sneakers,” said Harry. They were a family of fallers. They were all too tall. His sister had vertigo and bad toes, intermittent stress fractures (“the bone density blues,” she called it), all contributing to her frequent tilting on city streets and curbs, resulting in stitches and ice packs, scrutinized knees, and then somehow managing to heal just fine until the next incident. She sneered at and refused to succumb to an informal culture of “dress casual” and sneakers. She carried a purse that would make a strong man pull a pectoral muscle, convinced since 9-11 every possible item she would need in the event of calamity had to be with her at all times.

Harry had bad eyes, shins, and ankles, a quirky heart, a closet full of 20-year-old Lands End Tshirts and shorts, walked like Ratso Rizzo but got where he needed to go—mainly the nearest Stop & Shop and a long string of doctors’ appointments.

“Remember how hot church was down at the shore? No air-conditioning at all,” said his sister.

“It was a killer,” said Harry. “Sticky and stifling. And we had to dress up.”

“I always thought if I kept my hands in pancake-flat prayer position, and if I could keep my back straight enough, not touching the pew, I would be safe, I would be holy, the world would be at peace, and my family would be fine. It was paramount that I hold the perfect pose and we’d all be set.”

“Interesting. How’d that work out for you?” asked Harry.

“Shut up. Let’s tackle the poop,” she said.

PERONI POSITION

Later, at the local Italian restaurant that excluded garlic from Harry’s dinner choices, after the poop-cleaning, driving lesson, and photo review, his sister mentioned the BB gun.

“Didn’t Dad have one for the moles?” she asked. “Would it be in one of those endless storage boxes in your basement? That crossed state lines? As a fervent and longtime gun control advocate, I’m not encouraging this, just asking.”

“You may be right. Good thinking!” The deck and roof could be mine again, he thought. This battle may be won after all. Harry was delighted. The end of poop was potentially near. He sat back and sipped his Peroni beer. “This could be the solution, the answer to all my vulture prayers. You’re a genius.”

“Hardly. You have to promise never to use it on the deer.”

“Oh, of course not. I like the deer. They keep to their own devices. And they bolt at the sight of me.”

“Well, not me. We have a special bond.” At Christmas a deer had stopped in its tracks near Harry’s driveway to quietly stare at his sister for an extended, still moment in the snow. They were mutually mesmerized, freezing all movement and breath, soundless, until the deer looked away and headed back into the woods. Afterward Harry wondered if the deer had been confused, or possibly enchanted, by the holiday reindeer hair-band his sister had been wearing.

“How about dessert?” Harry asked her. “My treat.”

He'd considered having another Peroni but knew his sister wasn't quite up to driving them safely back home in the dark. No matter. He'd savor the one he had and look for the gun bright and early tomorrow morning.

Let the vultures have one more glorious night on his roof, Harry thought. Let them enjoy the view a little longer.

The Table-Setter

BY ABIGAIL WARREN

Feelings were the fork
set to the left of the plate
sadness was a knife

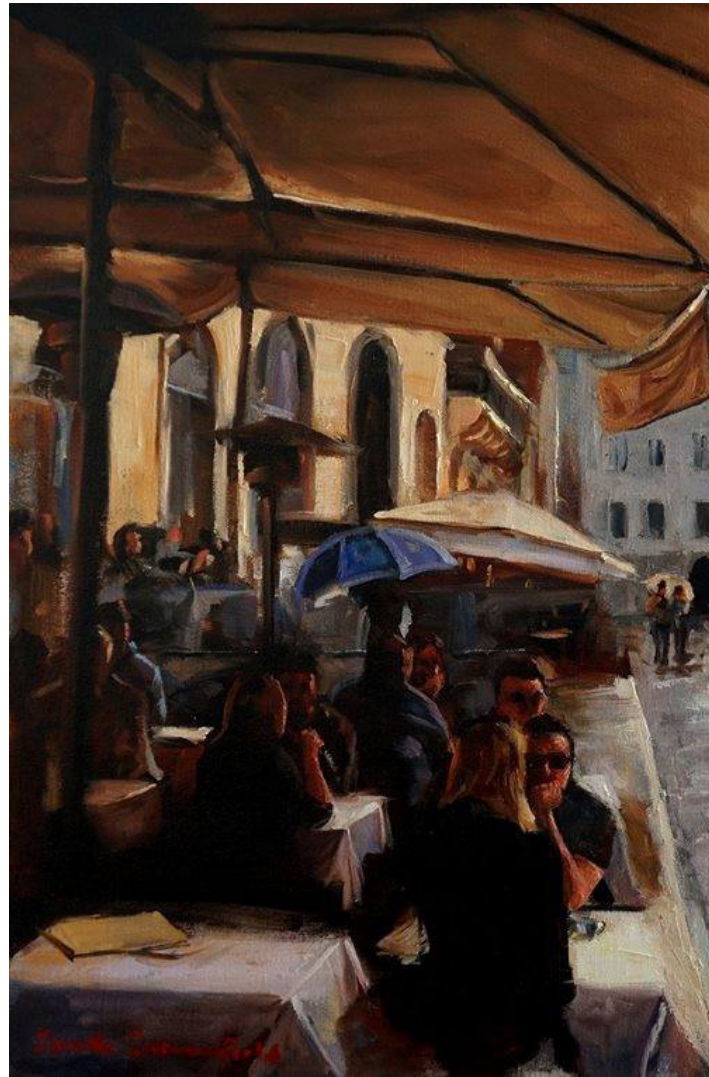
on the right;
She spooned out joy,
in small mouthfuls,

cut a slice of pride,
when you came to the table.
Labeled it in the photograph album

afterward.
It made everything clear
for everyone in her family.

Like reading the label
on the prescription bottle:
may cause vomiting,

or feelings of euphoria.
It went on like this
for years





JONELLE SUMMERFIELD

that clarity of emotion;
Until truth spilled
across the table

running in the napkins
dripping on laps, then
all over the floor.

She was angry
angry with death
staining the tablecloth.

They wrapped her
in it, said good-bye.
Went back to the empty

table. Feasted on air.

Squeaky Clean Freaks

BY CAITLIN JILL ANDERS

I knew I was my mother the day I started cleaning hair out of the shower drain. I had never noticed the way it collected there before. I only ever looked down at the drain when I was afraid something was going to come out of it. A snake, or a hand. A shower drain is just another dark space where things can jump out at you from. When I started seeing the hair instead of the dark I thought maybe I was getting less anxious. Maybe at 17, I was finally learning how not to be afraid of the dark anymore. Maybe I was growing up. All I ever wanted to be when I grew up was my mother, anyway. I still don't know why.

Why does so much hair get caught in the shower drain, I asked my mother as I padded barefoot through the kitchen, headed for the child-locked cabinet beneath the sink. Has it always been like that? Mom laughed in an unhappy way. Don't touch my cleaning supplies, and she positioned her body in front of the sink, her butt and hips digging into the cabinet handles. Get your own.

I tried to reach around her but she flicked at my fingers and arms hard with her sharp nails, leaving pretty pink marks like confetti. Her nails were always painted, filed, and ready. I started to tell her not to be ridiculous when my father called out to me from the other room. Come here Mimi and I'll give you money for CVS. You're not going to win this one.

My mother never parented. Children were emotionally messy, and the only messes she liked were real ones. Dishes in the sink that needed to be cleaned or muddy footprints in the laundry room that needed to be wiped up; my mother thrived on those. Cleaning was her salvation. Children couldn't be folded and tucked into a closet or wiped up and thrown away. She loved us, but she loved a spotless house too. The problem was

she'd always had a spotless house. She hadn't always had children.

The cleaning supplies were in the cabinet below the sink because mom spent the most time in the kitchen and she needed them near her always. She organized them by brand and by type, products to clean everything she owned. When I was little I used to sit at her feet while she cleaned the dishes, running my hands over the bottles filled with aqua blue liquid and toothpaste green gel. They sat pressed up against each other, glistening into the bottle next to them, creating brand new colors and worlds. You shouldn't let the children play with the cleaning supplies, my father would comment, and mom would shoo him away. Clean children are not a bad thing, she would tell him.

He'd shake his head. Poisoned children are.

Mom just shrugged, glancing down her body at me, positioned between her legs. She nodded at me. Try not to drink it, ok?

I asked Joey if he wanted to go to CVS with me to buy cleaning supplies. His eyes twitched, his nails scratched his kneecaps, his throat squeaked, and then he shrugged. Nutter butter, nutter butter, nutter butter, he mumbled. He looked at me and said, ok. I asked Molly if she wanted to go and she said, see you later, squeaky-clean freaks.

Joey was squeaky and I was clean and off we went.

Joey and I got into the car and I peered into the backseat at him, his too tiny for a 13-year-old body blending into the gray seats. Is it bad today? He nodded and squeaked. My parents didn't like to take him out on the bad days. I started the car.

The people who didn't know Joey stared at him as we walked down the aisles of CVS. I surveyed the different cleaning supplies, kinds for sinks, floors, windows, toilets, drains, an instant fix for anything undesired. I wished it were that easy for Joey. I pulled a bottle off the shelf. You think this one is good? He shrugged and asked if he could get can-

dy. I nodded and watched him shuffle down the aisle. Candy was better than cleaning supplies because candy made you feel good, while cleaning supplies just washed things away before they got dirty again. Candy was an easy high while cleaning was a struggle. Maybe that's why Molly refused to clean. She never saw the point in anything that didn't involve constant bliss.

My mom started teaching me how to clean when I was 5-years-old. My dad thought it was ridiculous. She's supposed to be finger painting at this age, you know, bright red paint on white paper, not warm soapy water on our kitchen floor. My mother didn't even acknowledge him. Instead, she carefully guided me through the process, detailing every move I should make. Now, she began with an excited breath, a lot of people prefer to mop, but for these gorgeous hardwood floors, I like to get down on my hands and knees and really give them a good scrub, really get the dirt out of there. A mop just grazes the surface and makes it look clean. A little elbow grease is what really does the trick. After a cleaning like this, your feet will feel like they're walking on a cloud rather than a wood floor. Trust me, I know what I'm talking about.

I remember her taking my hand that was clutching the sopping sponge and guiding it across our floor in small circles. Tight little circles, Mi Mo, tight circles. That's it, good girl. You're a natural, see, what did I tell you? Just like your mama, Mi Mo. Just like your mama.

When I was seven and Molly was five mom tried to teach her how to clean too, in the same way on the same floor, but Molly threw a fit because she got a splash of water on her new leopard print leggings, and she flipped the bucket of soapy water and stormed out of the room. Mom just sighed. My little firecracker, she said, and turned her attention back to me. Molly was her firecracker and I was her little Cinderella, scrubbing the floors because it's what her fairy godmother told her to do.

Mom never taught Joey how to clean.

I finally threw a few different products into my basket because I couldn't make a decision to save my life, rounded the end aisle, and headed in the direction of the candy. I found Joey sitting on the floor in front of shelves and shelves of chocolate. He had a bag in each hand and his hands were moving up and down like a scale, as if he were literally weighing his options. Joey had never been very good at decisions, either. I knew he was sitting rather than standing because it was easier to hide his tics that way. Joey had been diagnosed with Tourette's syndrome when he was six, and over the years he'd developed many creative ways of making himself look normal. Every time he came up with a new method he told me about it in detail, and every time he told me, the conversation always ended with him saying, but it doesn't always work.

I came up behind him and he glanced up at me. Kit Kats or Milky Ways, he asked, holding up each bag of minis. Kit Kats, I said, and he put the Milky Ways back on the shelf.

As we were heading out of the aisle a woman almost ran into us, and as we tried to go around her she stopped us. You're Lorinda's kids, aren't you? Yes we are, I responded for both of us, and she smiled. I should have known, she laughed, you look just like her. That wasn't true at all, but I thanked her anyway. Before she walked away, she looked down at Joey.

Funny, I always forget that Lo has a son, too. And with that, she flew down the candy aisle towards the pharmacy.

Joey and I both watched her walk away. I opened my mouth to say something but nothing came out. Let's go, Joey mumbled, and he squeaked five times.

We got back into the car, and I knew I should say something to him. I was his big sister. I was supposed to teach him things and protect

him from bullies. It was hard when I was scared of everything. Joey was a quiet kid, but I'd still always gotten the impression that he was braver than me. He had to be. I turned around in my seat to look at him. He glanced up at me and let out a sigh. That woman smelled like a dentist's office, and not in a good way, he said. I laughed. Yeah, she did, I said, and turned on the car.

Mom had been cleaning the windows in my room when she got the call about Joey seven years ago. She flew down the hallway to answer the phone in dad's office, and came back with it tucked between her shoulder and her ear so she could continue to clean. Mmhmmm, right, ok, she murmured into the phone as she scrubbed invisible dirt off the glass. But what exactly does that mean? Right, no, I read the pamphlet. I — mmhmmm, right. And you're sure the test was accurate? I know there's sometimes a margin of error with these — right, ok. Thank you. No, I'll talk to my husband and call back tomorrow to make a follow up appointment. Thanks. Ok, bye.

She put the phone down on the floor next to her and continued to clean. I asked her what the call was about, and she just shook her head. Just a doctor calling about Joey. Don't worry, he's fine. Everything is fine.

They eventually sat Molly and I down to explain it to us, and throughout the entire conversation, my mother never used the term Tourette's syndrome, and she never looked up at us.

Welcome back, kiddos, mom greeted us as we walked into the kitchen. Joey squeaked twice. Mom walked over and tousled his hair. Did you have fun? CVS is a joyous place, she said, as if she were describing an amusement park. Joey shrugged. We ran into your friend, the one with the weird hair who smells like a dentist's office. Mom's face stiffened but she smiled through it. That's exactly what she smells like, Joe. You're so clever. Joey's smile was small but pure, and he grabbed his candy out of

the bag I was holding, squeaked four times, and shuffled out of the room.

Mom walked over to me as I unloaded the cleaning supplies I'd bought onto the counter. You shouldn't take him out places when he's bad like that. People will notice.

I let out an exasperated sigh. He has Tourette's, mom.

Mom's face stiffened even more. I know that, Mi Mo. But, some days it's easier to hide than others.

I didn't say anything, just threw away the plastic CVS bag and then realized hauling everything upstairs would have been much easier with the bag. I could have grabbed it out of the trash again, but I didn't feel like admitting I'd made a mistake. Mom turned all the bottles so the labels were facing her, examining my choices. Well, they're not what I would have gotten, she said, but they'll do the trick.

Can you show me how to use them, I asked, and she just shrugged, already turned back towards my father and the TV. Maybe tomorrow, if I have time. As she plopped back onto the buttery leather, she called back to me. See if maybe Joey wants to help you clean. I bet that would be good for him.

I grabbed my armful of cleaning supplies off the counter and started heading upstairs. As I padded down the hallway, I could hear my mother say, I love that boy. She didn't say it to anyone in particular. Just herself.

After I dealt with the hair in the shower drain, I figured I might as well scrub down the rest of the shower, too, while I was on a roll. Maybe I really was becoming my mother. I climbed into my shower, opened a bottle, and went at it, trying to remember what I'd learned as a little kid. I could hear my mom's voice echoing in my head. Tight circles, Mi Mo, tight circles, and so I did, tight little circles of sticky blue liquid all over the tub, imagining my mother was right there beside me, reminding me what it meant to truly be clean.

POETRY & PROSE

Caitlin Jill Anders is currently living in Los Angeles and working as a full time writer for an animal news website. She graduated from Emerson College in 2014 with a degree in Writing, Literature, and Publishing. This is her second publication in a literary magazine.

Mary Ardery is from Bloomington, IN. She is currently pursuing her MFA at Southern Illinois University. Visit maryardery.com for more of her work.

Joan E. Bauer is the author of *The Almost Sound of Drowning* (Main Street Rag, 2008). With Judith Robinson and Sankar Roy, she co-edited the international anthology, *Only the Sea Keeps: Poetry of the Tsunami* (Bayeux Arts and Rupa & Co, 2005). In 2007, she won the Earle Birney Poetry Prize from Prism International. She divides her time between Venice, CA and Pittsburgh, PA, where she co-hosts and curates the Hemingway's Summer Poetry Series (www.hemingwaypoetryseries.blogspot.com).

Emily Bobo is the author of *FUGUE*, a limited edition, short book available through Lost Horse Press in their Emerging Poets Series: New Poets, Short Books Vol. III (2009). She has also published original work in literary magazines such as *december*, *Seneca Review*, and *Redivider*. When not obsessing over Bach, the piano, or her former identity as a musician, Bobo is Department Chair of Fine Arts and Humanities and Professor of English at Ivy Tech Community College, where she teaches writing to single moms, ex-cons, military veterans, and other non-traditional students.

Jessica Brofsky recently graduated from Cornell University. Her work has appeared in *Marginalia*, *Pembroke Street*, *Notes*, and *Kitsch*.

Nancy Ford Dugan's work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize (in 2012 and 2013) and has appeared in over 30 publications. She lives in New York City and previously resided in Michigan, Ohio, and Washington, DC.

Aaron Fischer works as an online editor at a news site. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Blue Lyra Review*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Naugatuck Review*, *Poetica*, *Redactions*, *Sow's Ear*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Tishman Review*. He has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes. His chapbook, *Black Stars of Blood: The Weegee Poems* was published this summer.

Kara Knickerbocker is a writer and world traveler from Saegertown, Pennsylvania and the author of *Next to Everything that is Breakable* and *The Shedding Before the Swell*. Her poetry and essays appeared in: *Amaryllis*, *Broad River Review*, *Coldnoon*, *Moledro Magazine*, and the anthology *Voices from the Attic, Vol. XXII*, among others. Knickerbocker currently lives in Pittsburgh, where she works at Carnegie Mellon University. A proud member of the Madwomen in the Attic at Carlow University, she also co-curates the MadFridays Reading Series. Visit her at www.karaknickerbocker.com.

Wendy Schoua was born and raised in Argentina, so she is bilingual/bicultural. She is an avid reader of fiction, and highly prefers the short story form. She finished an anthology by various writers, some well-known and newcomers, and is hoping to publish it this year. The theme is alienation in every situation imaginable.

Rochelle Jewel Shapiro's novel, *Miriam the Medium* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), was nominated for the Harold U. Ribelow Award. She's published essays in *NYT (Lives)* and *Newsweek*. Her poetry, short stories, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in many literary magazines such as *Mudfish*, *Westview*, *Stand*, *Amarillo Bay*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Poet Lore*, *The Griffin*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *East Jasmine Review*, *Peregrine*, *Gulf Coast*, *Passager*, and *Willow Review*. Her poetry has been nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize, and she won the Branden Memorial Literary Award from Negative Capability. She currently teaches writing at UCLA Extension.

Alex Skoroichid's work has previously been featured in *The Quilliad*, *Morel Magazine*, (*parenthetical*), *In/Words Magazine* and others. His collection of micro-poetry 'Lorena' is out now on Rinky Dink Press. Alex lives in Victoria, BC and when he can steal back enough time and energy from his day job he writes poems and short stories.

Andy Stallings lives and teaches at Deerfield Academy, in Western Massachusetts. His first two collections of poetry, *To the Heart of the World* (2014) and *Paradise* (2018) were both published by Rescue Press. He formerly edited *THERMOS*, a journal of poetry. The three attached prose poems are from a collection titled "The Invisible Afternoon," and have titles quoted from the text of "The City Shaped," written by Spiro Kostof.

Abigail Warren's poetry has appeared in over twenty literary magazines, including *Big Muddy*, *Emerson Review*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Sakura Review*, *Soundings East*, *Tin House*, and others, as well as in the anthology *30 Poems in November*. Her essays have been published in *Huffington Post*, *Northampton Media*, and *SALON*. While at Smith College, she was awarded the Rosemary Thomas Poetry Prize. She teaches at Cambridge College in Massachusetts; additionally, she is a board member and chairperson for *30 Poems in November* at The Center For New Americans, raising money through poetry, for a literacy program in Western Massachusetts.

Caitrin Clute is a junior studying English with a concentration in Media, Rhetorical and Cultural Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has never before been published.

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She resides in Graham, NC with her cats Charlie Chaplin and Janis Joplin.

Alexa T. Dodd is a fiction writer and essayist, pursuing her master's degree in creative writing at Texas Tech University. Her work is forthcoming in *The Atticus Review*. She lives with her husband and their son in Texas.

VISUAL ART

Laura Allen is a visual artist, writer, and instructor living in Seattle, Washington. Her visual art has been featured in numerous exhibitions, and her poetry and other writing has appeared in numerous regional and national journals. She is also the host and producer of the “Original Lines” arts podcast, and owner of Two Ponies Press.

SEIGAR is an English philologist, a high school teacher, and a curious photographer. He is a fetishist for reflections, saturated colors, details and religious icons. He feels passion for pop culture that shows in his series. He considers himself a travel and an urban street photographer. His aim as an artist is to tell tales with his camera, to capture moments but trying to give them a new frame and perspective. Travelling is his inspiration. However, he tries to show more than mere postcards from his visits, creating a continuous conceptual line story from his trips. The details and subject matters come to his camera once and once again, almost becoming an obsession. His three most ambitious projects so far are his “Plastic People”, a study on anthropology and sociology that focuses on the humanization of the mannequins he finds in the shop windows all over the world, “Response to Ceal Floyer for the Summer Exhibition” a conceptual work that understands art as a form of communication, and his “Tales of a city”, an ongoing photo-narrative project taken in London. He usually covers public events with his camera showing his interest for social documentary photography. He has participated in several exhibitions, and his works have also been featured in international publications. He writes for *The Cultural Magazine* (Spain) about photography and for *Memoir Mixtapes* about music (L.A.).

Jonelle Summerfield is an oil painter from Indiana, PA. She received a degree in Interior Design from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 2001. She began painting as a hobby shortly thereafter, taking lessons from her mother, Jolene Joyner. After taking workshops with other artists she admired, she began to paint full time in 2012. Her paintings are impressionistic, and her subjects include interiors, street scenes, animals and still lifes, among others. European travel is one of her biggest influences, and the artist travels to obtain her own reference photos for each painting. The goal of her work is to depict the good things in life to provide relief from a chaotic world.

William C. Crawford is a North Carolina photographer who invented Forensic Foraging, a minimalist, throwback technique for modern digital photographers.

