



AFTER HAPPY HOUR

A JOURNAL OF LITERATURE AND ART

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AFTER
HAPPY
HOUR

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SPRING 2020 EDITORS AND READERS

ELIZABETH ABELING
MEGAN BUSHEY
OHAD CADJI
ANNIE GITLITZ
NATHAN KUKULSKI
SHAWN MADDEY
DANIEL PARME
JASON PECK
JESS SIMMS
BRENDAN SULLIVAN
MARTIN VAN VELSEN

COVER ART BY HYEWON CHO
LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY JESS SIMMS

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FOREWARD



DANIELLE O'HANLON

Dear Reader,

I joined the *After Happy Hour* crew as a reader for issue 6, back in 2016. In the four years since, I have been consistently blown away by the writing that gets submitted to us—but never more so than I was during our Issue 12 reading period. Both the quality and the number of submissions exceeded my expectations. Paring them down to the pages that follow involved many heated editorial discussions and heartbreaking decisions over countless pitchers of Yuengling.

I have to admit, though: I was relieved to be in that position, even if it did mean letting go of some pieces with a lot of promise. It's always nervewracking when a publication changes hands. Having worked closely with the journal for about half its life, the last thing I wanted was to let it die on my watch.

Based on the work we've received since October, I think it's safe to say *AHH* is alive and kicking.

So thank you to all of our readers, supporters, and contributors who returned after our brief hiatus! Some things have changed, but I think you'll find Issue 12 as delightfully quirky as our past offerings. We've got big plans for the future of the journal and we're excited to share them with you over the coming years. Hopefully you'll enjoy reading the new crew's inaugural issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

— Jess Simms, *After Happy Hour* managing editor

Octopus Dreams

BY RENEE EVANS

Maxine, the dreaming octopus, fancies herself an intergalactic spy, well-suited to camouflage with any environment, unfurling her sweetly cupped arms to send kisses up walls, silently squishing through cracks in the mortar, dripping into air ducts, dressed in the inoffensive beige and acoustic dampening texture of corporate ceiling tiles.

On her first mission she stalked across a greasy kitchen floor, tasting with her suckers the eleven secret spices of the Colonel's recipe. The names of each spice are recorded in her mantle; she whispers them with every puff of her siphon. They are all carcinogens. No one on earth listens.

Some nights the city is quiet. She'll run her arms across the back of a park bench and watch the blinking lights of tugboats as they trundle up and down the river just before sunrise. Captains smell like the low-level anxiety of deadlines and deliveries to make. A quick stop-off to steal a breakfast of Dippin' Dots from the ice cream cart—cake batter, because it's fun—before she tucks herself into her tank, snug in the caverns of the plastic diving helmet.

Tonight she watches the sheriff spin the pistol off his finger as he funnels drug money from one account to another. The custodian, Carl, mops too long in the line of sight of the sheriff's computer monitor. Maxine smells Carl's misgivings. The sheriff's paranoia is founded. She records the entire episode with her inky, discerning eye. No need for her to interfere just yet. She releases hormones to let Carl know he's on the right track.

In a flash of brilliance, she puffs herself up and parachutes away on a

conjured northern wind to her compatriots waiting on their mollusk ship in the stratosphere, where they feed on the fear puny humans provide so easily. *They think we're loners*, she reports to those assembled for the feast. She scoops a heaping glob of first-day-of-school jitters into her beak then passes the bowl to her left. *They suspect nothing*. Their mantles throb and quiver as they chortle through the meal. Their shifting colors glimmer off the hull's iridescent interior.

Safe inside her tank, Maxine shimmers through her sleep. One arm has come unstuck from the diver's helmet and floats along the artificial current in the salty mix, a maestro conducting an orchestra, the music bending to her will.



DANIELLE O'HANLON

Four of Pentacles

by Elizabeth Adair

*warns to let go; you may be weighted down
by the inability to let go of the past*

there are dead things on the beach to grasp & grub
you can fill your pockets with crab carcass empty bubbling stones
& walk into the sea
the dead things don't bleed but wilt & float
you can gulp dried oysters & dine on sun-warmed blubber
suckle half-hard jellies like brackish cough drops
you can take all the dead things inside you
you can be the sea the ocean can crawl in
it's like having wings but on the inside of your skin
you are the exoskeleton now cracking open
to expel a pale heart yellow and foaming
like stomach acid crumbling butterfly dust in the sand
sluggish & clumped as crawfish brain pus
red & wriggling as a manure worm
a life-sized horseshoe crab whose stiff legs retract
beneath a blistered shell a dead thing on a beach sand heavy
with all the other dead things
you have stuffed in your mouth



GUILHERME BERGAMINI

Circe Throws a Dinner Party

BY ELIZABETH ADAIR

I am the screeching woman
who strings teeth like popcorn,

like fairy lights for the party of swine
waiting outside my bedroom door.

I bathe for pleasure in bergamot
& lavender & read my tarot

to the cadence of their whines.
I sew wall hangings of tanned man skin

while the quarter moon reclines
in the sky's opalescent noon-blue.

& when the glinting quarter drops
into the night's snarling belly at dusk,

I howl like a bitch and begin my hunt
for consumable men with wriggling spines

& swiveling fish eyes. I accept their miseries
as gifts then return home with earthworms

for my garden, & thick-bodied red snapper fillets
to serve my dinner guests. I fashion party favors

from those too unclean to eat,
pulling the guts through their mouths

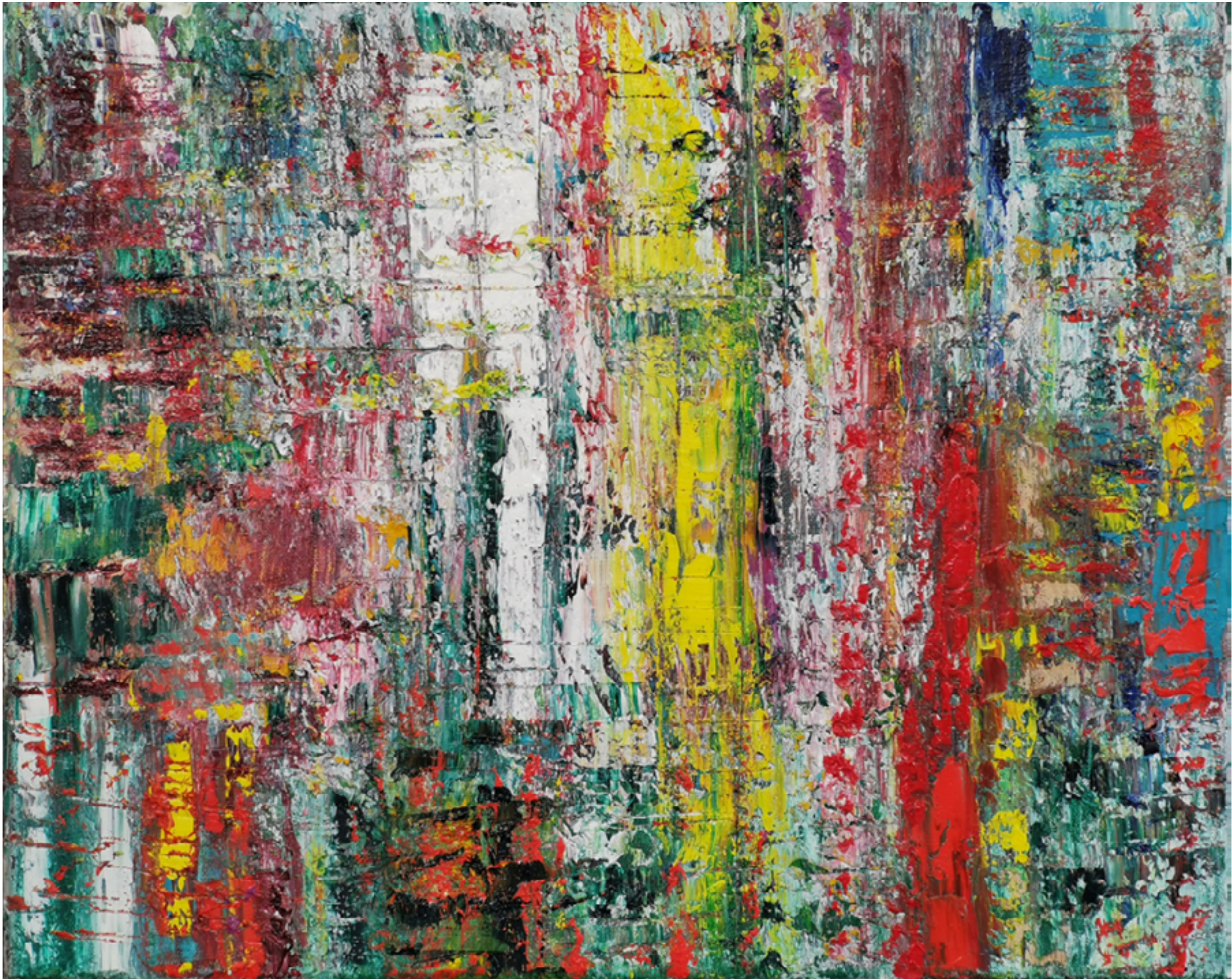
& twisting intestines into petal-pink ribbon.
I make bagpipes of their stomachs,

bite the heads off their stems,
& raze slippery-soft belly tissue

for decorative garland. I try not to think
of the women who have loved them,

or how many pigs I need to slaughter
to make the world more forgiving than I am.

I wonder when my guests will arrive.



How to Change Yourself (For Others)

BY DACIA PRICE

For a new life, start on Monday.

1. Wake up at 6 AM. Drink water mixed with apple cider vinegar, cayenne, and honey. Do one hour of yoga. Practice Standing Bow and Eagle. Get that leg over your head. Wrap left leg around right until toes are visible around right calf. Repeat with the other leg. You don't need a studio membership. You can practice in pajamas. It's ok if those pajamas are torn and soiled from days on the couch or the bed or the floor, you'll buy new ones.

Breakfast:

*½ cup overnight oats with flaxseed
fresh fruit
Nut milk only
Half teaspoon maple syrup
250 calories*

2. Take note of the molded mess of sink dishes. Decide you might be ready to wash and dry and put each one back into their proper place but first, carefully extract a spoon. Using the hem of your pajama shirt, wipe it clean. Savor every bite. This is your nourishment. This is your fuel. Roll the strawberry or melon or banana or pear or apricot or apple around in your mouth until you've sucked each dry of every drop of flavor. Swallow and repeat.

3. Apply moisturizer to your skin. SPF 35, at least. Paraben free shampoo. Tea tree oil. Charcoal. Don't sit in a pile of self-loathing at the base of the shower like you always do. If you practice pretend bliss long enough it will become real.

Packed lunch:

*spiraled zucchini noodles
vegan kale pesto
fresh tomatoes and cold asparagus
No cheese
Green tea for metabolism
200 calories*

4. Remember bamboo fork. Glass container. Metal water bottle. Walk to work. Don't stop for doughnuts. Don't think about doughnuts. Don't imagine the weight of doughnuts in your empty stomach. Doughnuts will not make you happy.
5. Divide your weight in half, not your ideal weight, your actual weight. If your scale is broken from an angry argument in which you threw it violently into the trash and cannot bring yourself to dig it out, add 20 pounds to the last number you remember seeing on its blinking self-righteous face. Divide that in half and drink as many ounces of water. Start now. 70 ounces every day.
6. Use organic cotton tampons. The Cup. Be unapologetic about your body. Be unapologetic about the blood on your hands or the way it swirls and pools in the broken public bathroom sink as you wash it off, while the line of women behind you point and whisper and grow longer by the minute. They wish they were as confident as you. They wish they were as environmentally conscious. As comfortable in their skin as you are in yours. Be unapologetic about the space you take up.

7. Wear flats. Except heels make you feel like the attractive thin woman you were before everything felt so heavy and impossible. Wear heels until your ankles turn and your legs bow. Until you become the embodiment of an infant giraffe, all clumsy and shaking-legged; all graceless absurdity. Go back to wearing flats.
8. 80 ounces of water a day.
9. Delete from your social media the accounts of all the men you've slept with or sexted or sent photos of your body in provocative, half clothed, reclining on bed poses of attempted nonchalance. If there are more than 28 of these men, delete your account entirely and start again. This new one will be used for friends only. No exes or lovers. There is no space for potential hookups in backrooms or cars or hourly hotels in this version of yourself. Do your social media editing standing, so you can avoid the funk that settles into your bones the moment you sit down.
10. Stretch.
11. Walk. It doesn't matter that your bladder is an overflowing bucket filled with 80 ounces of water that gurgles and sloshes with each step. Count those steps. You must reach 10,000.
12. Assert yourself. Speak up. Say no when you mean it, and not yes when you don't. You are not a vessel for the desires of men. Even if it feels good. Even if he pretends he loves you. Even if he promises that next time, it will be different.
13. Eat your lunch outside under the trees, on the grass. Take off your shoes. Touch the earth with your bare skin. Wipe off the dog shit you've stepped in because you didn't look where you placed your feet.

14. Meditate on the significance of earth to skin contact, not shit to skin, though shit to skin feels more accurate.
15. Buy a crystal to be thinner, to be happier, to be worthy of love. Remember to charge it under the full moon. Ideally when you have your period. A lamp doesn't count. Through a window doesn't count. You must be outside, under the moon, bleeding.
16. Read a book while you eat your lunch bare foot in the grass. Make sure it's written by a female writer. Ideally, one of color. Diversity is important.
17. Let your stomach feel empty. It keeps you alert. Think of all the productive things you can do now that your stomach is empty and your social media has been rebuilt. Do not think about men. Do not call men. Definitely do not show up at the houses of men, drunk, and fall into bed with them. Do not daydream of matching toothbrushes or wall colors some future man might let you pick, or the dog you'll adopt together from the rescue shelter at the Saturday morning Farmer's Market. Don't call your most recent ex-boyfriend to tell him how desperately you love his eyes. His hands. The sound of his laugh. Or how the green tea you're sipping in the grass, with your book open in your lap, reminds you of the way he might have wished you had been when you were together, but weren't because you hadn't yet started this new life.
18. Drink 90 ounces of water a day.
19. Turn off your inner voice. Don't name her. Don't feed her. Don't let her tell you you're fat. That you're an imposter. That you're undeserving. Unloved. You are beautiful just the way you are. As long as you stick to this diet. As long as you perfect your Standing Bow. As long as you drink 100 ounces of water every day.

Afternoon snack:
carrots and celery
unsweetened nut butter or humus
(No more than one tablespoon)
One orange
(Not an orange Creamcicle)
150 calories

19. Manifest your own destiny. Believe it and it will be true. Put in what you want to get out. Treat everyone you meet as you want to be treated. Think positive thoughts. Practice kindness. Don't forget to smile. Don't let anyone tell you to smile. It's ok to be angry. It's ok to take your power back. Take up space. Manspread. But sit up straight. Be flexible. Listen more than you speak but speak your truth.

Dinner:
green salad with oil and vinegar
3 almonds
Ground pepper for flavor
Cucumber for crunch
2 gluten free crackers
no cheese
No eggs
Sit with your hunger
Embrace your hunger
Become one with your hunger
200 calories

20. Do 100 sit-ups and 100 crunches and 100 squats. Hold plank for 30 seconds. Hold side plank for one minute. Open your hip flexors. Open your chakras. Strengthen your IT band. Practice your handstand. It doesn't matter if you've never done one. Learn. Use yoga modifiers like

blocks and belts and walls, but don't. You can do it without. Real yogis don't use modifications. Real yogis practice yoga in 110 degrees plus humidity. Save up for a wet sauna big enough to do Standing Bow. Save up for an apartment big enough for a sauna.

21. Don't eat after 5. Don't eat after 6. After 7. Don't scoop peanut butter straight from the jar onto a spoon already layered with Nutella. Don't compare yourself to that girl from high school who has a master's degree, 4 kids, a successful company, and runs marathons on the weekends. She's probably miserable. Her photos are definitely filtered. Do not add her to your new social media account.

22. One bowl of ice cream is ok, if it's fat free. Sugar doesn't count after 8 PM. It's ok to have one glass of wine, as long as it's red. As long as you've turned off your phone. As long as you've hidden your camera. People who drink one glass of red wine a day live longer. And you want to live longer, right? Right. One bottle of red wine is ok if you've skipped your daily glass. Oreos in bed are ok as long as you're doing leg raises and not sending texts to men on Tinder, or Fling, or Craigslist personals. 30 for each cookie. 1,000 for a single texted word.

Post Workout Snack:
Bake a chocolate cake
Make frosting
Eat both straight from the bowl without bothering with the oven
Zero calories

23. Remember that calories from raw foods don't count. Calories consumed after 10 PM don't count. Any calories accidentally counted are immediately discounted after another glass of wine. Falling asleep in a pile of cookie crumbs and melted ice cream doesn't count if you've

walked 10,000 steps. If you've walked 4,000. If you've showered. If you've changed your clothes. If you've pulled yourself out of bed once. If you've deleted the names of every man you've ever slept with from your phone. Every man you've ever dated or been their midnight fallback in the backseats of cabs, or under bushes in backyards, or behind the dumpster at the bar with its rats and trash smell and discarded underwear.

24. Calories don't count when all the other women have left and it's just you and him and the stale sick of alcohol tongues and pliable flesh. When the clothes you're wearing are torn from your body in a drunken attempt at passion, but which instead feels violent and violating. Calories don't count when he's pressed his body against yours and yours is pressed against a wall, a bed, a door, a couch. When there's nowhere to move and no air to breathe and no flesh to hold because he is behind you and you cannot see his face or his eyes or the curve of his neck because this is not love. This is not respect or attraction or common interests. This is back alley fucking with a man whose name you never learned and who is using you like a cavity. Like a chalice. Like a vessel for his desire, the way they all do. The way you always let them.

25. Violent, impersonal, regretful sex, sex that leaves your body sore and your skin raw and your lips torn and swollen, doesn't count because this is supposed to be your new life and not a new version of the old. It doesn't count if you wash your body of all traces of his sour breath and grabbing hands. If you brush your hair and scrub the grime from beneath your nails. If you throw in the trash the dress he ruined and the heels he loved and the stained underwear he didn't notice. If you drink tea and clean your sheets and practice Child's Pose on the floor of your bedroom, instead of passing out in the smeared mascara, and stained clothes, and tangled hair, and your cheek pressed against the cool bathroom tile like you always do.

26. Sex doesn't count if you choose not to count it. Neither do calories.
27. This new life doesn't count if today was just practice.
28. Today was just practice.
29. Start again on Monday.



KARL ZUEHLKE

Title

BY WILLIAM PEDLOW

I hate when you are drunk
and I am not



JEROME BERGLUND

Forecast

BY CLEO ROHN

Today I miss home and don't,
 want the sea and don't.
Today I can walk through his streets
 but can't hear his favorite singer's voice.
Today I have not cried, but the city
 has its raincoats on.
Today I will buy a new plant.
 Today, maybe, I will bake bread,
Or maybe I will sit on the floor
 of the kitchen again, where the days
Can pass, and I don't need to know.
 Today I will save the spider
On the tabletop. I will hold her life
 on a saucer and leave her just
Outside the door.
 Today will be quiet,
As quiet as tomorrow. I will not die. There will be
 no earthquake, just a slow and steady eroding
Of the soil, a slow rot of the roots. The rain
 will fall, or it won't.

Lessons

BY MARIA MCLEOD

We draw the drapes. In my boyfriend's apartment, we walk around with our clothes off. We open our orange value pack of condoms and the smell of latex fills the air. Night blurs into day, day into night. When we have sex, we drink, we lose our place. Our bodies collapse and converge, turn liquid and evaporate with the quart of beer next to the bed. Beer is the one thing we run out of, but always have just enough money for. My boyfriend goes out to get more, and I wait in the bed: a single shiny mattress with one blanket, no sheets. The blanket is yellow with different-colored race cars; the fiber scratchy, synthetic. He calls it his "hot rod" blanket, covering me before going out. Alone, I notice it feels hot between my legs. The skin raw, chaffed. I am afraid to look down there, at myself. Afraid of the pink underside, flesh swollen apart, the image of me that belongs to someone else. He says we'll get high when he gets back. I have never done that; I say yes without hesitation.

He is the first, my teacher. When we have sex, we joke that these are my lessons. I am graded on attentiveness, willingness to learn. Performance. The sex between us began as what we did after work at the diner, when our bodies smelled of smoke and grease. There, he is the cook and I am the waitress, serving miniature hamburgers in green and brown plastic baskets for twenty-five cents a piece, one sheet of white deli wrap underneath each. I yell in the window *six on two, four on one*, etc. I pass him notes written on order sheets. The notes begin "Dear Mr. Fun in the Tub," "Dear Mr. Hands in My Pants."

When he returns from the store, I am in bed waiting for him. He enters

the room naked and hands me a lighter and a small, flat pipe. I light it as if I am an expert, then cough. In his room there is a small closet he uses for growing pot. Inside, a grow light is wired to a timer. As we get high together, I begin to think my teeth are not secure in my mouth. I begin to lose feeling in my face, or think I'm losing feeling in my face. My fingertips turn cold. The timer ticks too loudly and the room goes dark. I fear I am losing my sight. I find my predicament hilarious. I laugh and laugh. I get out of bed but can't stand so well by myself. The timer sound has merged with my body; I imagine myself as a life-size metronome, swaying rhythmically left and right.

My boyfriend holds on to my wrist. I am still naked and my white breasts jiggle and bounce, seem to glow in the dark. Irritated, he holds my wrist tighter as he inhales the smoke, until I fall to the floor laughing. He gets up from the bed swearing and shaking his head and tells me to stop laughing. I don't, or can't. He lies on top of me. I am surprised he is already hard. I tell him to wait; I'm too dry. He doesn't wait. I feel a burning between my legs. I tell him roll back; I want to be on top. He does. I move slowly up and down, still I'm dry. The burning is worse. I think I'm hurting him now, too. I continue, go faster. I begin to feel wetness, but it's strange. I reach down, feel the wetness with my hand. I lick my hand to taste; it's familiar. My boyfriend says he can't come, says he is too sore. He pulls away, gets up, turns on the light. I look at him and see smudged handprints from where I've touched him. It's in the carpet, a streak on my arm, my thighs. He looks at me funny, scared. *It's blood*, I say.

Before I can say anything else, he's left the room. I want to follow him and don't want to follow him. I lie back down when I hear the water running, the shower turned on. I remember there is food in the kitchen, what is left of melted cheese and crust in a cardboard box. I remember I am hungry.

Falling Apart

BY MARIA MCLEOD

Light spills in slices, in sideways slants, from the small rectangular window in this basement apartment. It is a winter morning in Wisconsin, and the light above her is particularly bright as she takes wads of wet toilet paper and wipes her thighs spread open over the toilet. The white dissolves pink beneath her hand. Outside, it is snowing. Her lover sleeps on a single mattress on the floor of his room, twisted up in cream flannel sheets. Next to him is a bloodstain the size of a serving platter. They see each other on the weekends when she drives up from Chicago. There, she works at a university library where she steals away in the stacks, reading instead of shelving. The toilet paper is no good. It keeps falling apart. He's a musician, a pianist. Sheet music is scattered around the apartment. She is careful to step over it even though he is not. The problem, she thinks, is that he is too much inside her. But because they are still new to each other and she wants him to desire her, she doesn't stop when it starts to hurt. She thinks of his hands moving down the white of the keys, the way he bends his body into the sound, closes his eyes. The water in the bowl turns red, but she's afraid to flush, to make a noise that will rouse him. If only she could make her bleeding stop, return to the warmth of that bed, start the night over and over again like music, like slices of light.



JEROME BERGLUND



MANIT CHAOTRAGOONGIT

Grief-Room

BY VICTORIA PANTALION

My therapist says, “You have to be able to stand in the room.
To shake hands with Grief is the only way to heal.”

But Grief is a dead body, hands too cold to hold. My Grief
Was found rotting in an apartment for four days after an overdose.

I try to cope, but when I close my eyes I imagine the room in decay
And they fly open out of fear. The room is fine but you’re not here.

My Grief was buried next to his grandmother, six feet out of reach.
And who said I wanted to heal, anyways.

Shifting Light

BY VICTORIA PANTALION

in this version of the story light shines through
the bullet holes and you see only the light see only
the walls surrounding the holes and not the holes
themselves in this version of the story depression
puts up a hell of a fight against you but worse to see
your friend standing in the shifting light you try and
try to focus on anything but the darkness creeping in
the light is still there you sense it there is good in
all of this but the sun is setting you try to tell your
friend and yourself that darkness is just light waiting
to happen but in the end only one of you wins.

Grief-Mirror

BY VICTORIA PANTALION

So I was wrong, and Grief was
Never a dead body. Never a room.

So Grief is a mirror in which all you
Face is yourself. Cold hands pull

At your shirt and they are your own,
Beckoning you to join them, six feet

Under and further.

We Came Up the Hill

BY RAIN WRIGHT

I wait for Evie across the street from her school, near the rows of stores showing off their 10% discount signs. People walk in and out of doors too far away for their coolness to reach me. These people have a way of passing with their eyes on the sidewalk cracks. If I sit still, I half-believe they can't see me.

Evie stays in class as late as she can. She complains about the dark, says it's easier to do her work at school. When she says the word school, I smell the turning of pages in books and the recycled air of classrooms.

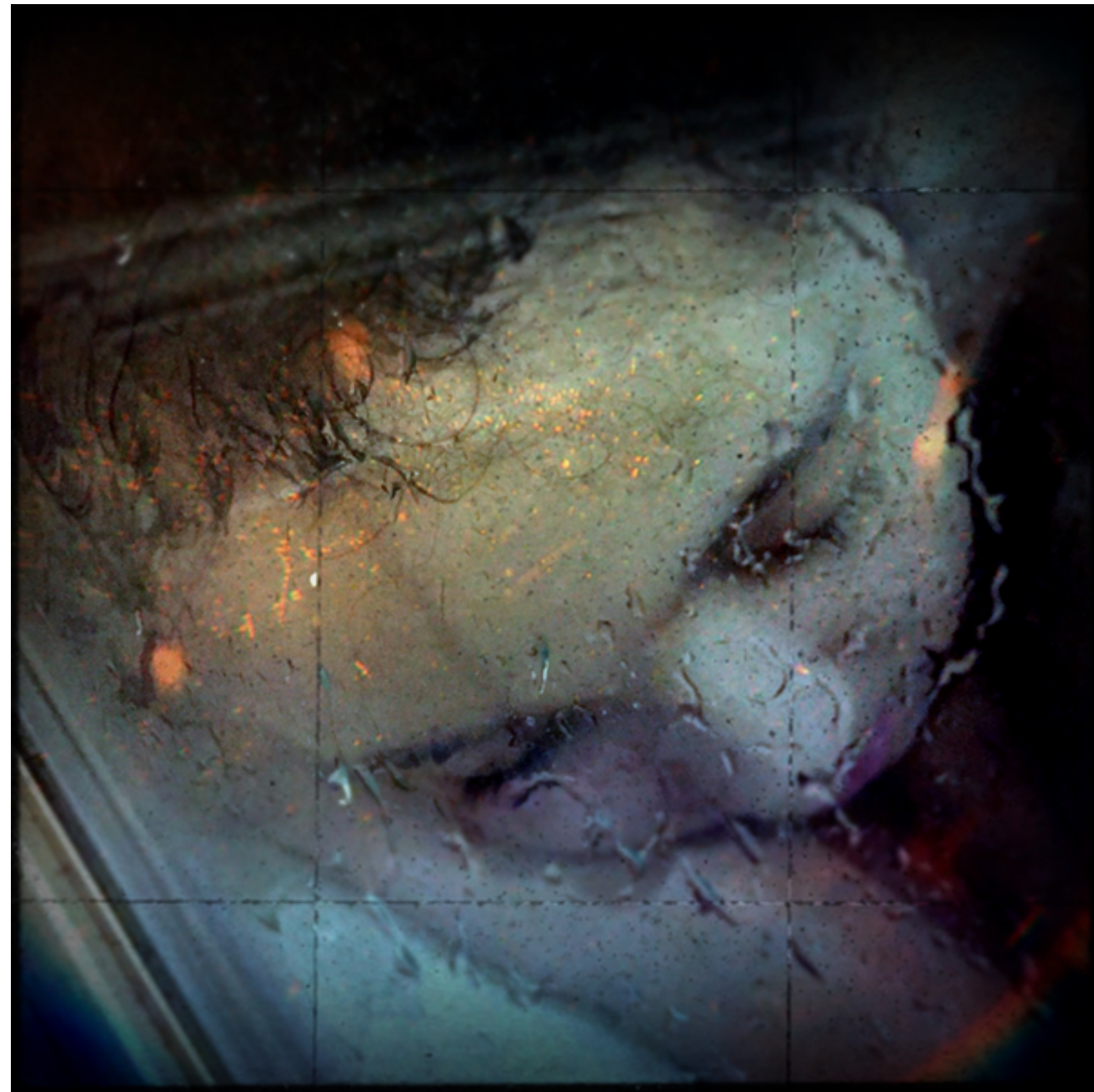
My eyes touch on a man standing near the Goodwill donation box. I don't let him catch my eyes. Sometimes eyes like his still want to tell me something.

When Evie was little, she used to imagine where everyone was going, who they were, making up the story of every person she saw. She'd have made up a story about the Goodwill man. Something like he had a dog he loved more than his kids then the dog died so the man could never be happy again. Evie doesn't tell stories like this anymore. Sometimes I think it's the age, other times I think it's a silence she's leaning on to create space between us.

She's as tall as me now, but I'll know her as soon as she comes towards me, from the school. I'll wait.

Evie will come soon. I need to make up stories while I wait. I watch the man near the Goodwill box again from under my eyes, a side glance, never full-on. The man glances toward me, and I bounce my gaze to the ground.

The last evening I saw Joe, I waited for him. I'd fallen asleep by the time



JACQUELINN KAI

he came home. He pushed his hand into the pink night-panties I wore. I had day panties and night panties. The night were always a bit loser, more comfortable and worn in. When Joe pressed his face against me he smelled of gear oil and fire smoke, watered whiskey and salt. He asked me who I was waiting for. Bit the edge of my chin. Asked me why I didn't love him enough. Not like he needed. I didn't love him like he wanted. Never could, he said.

I knew not to speak when he came home with all that in him. I let him talk, let him cry against me. I knew not to move when he cried. He cried until he slept, and then I moved to the edge of the bed, didn't sleep. I had to be awake, had to watch him, make sure he woke up loving.

Evie looks a little like Joe. I never tell her this because it wouldn't come out in the right words. She wants to forget everything about him. I let her pretend we can, but he's caught in the shape of her eyes. And he's there sometimes in the movement of her body. She has a way of wrapping herself up with her arms now, letting her hair fall forward to cover her face. At times, I want to tell her that she makes him beautiful. She wouldn't understand these words yet.

Before, when she was little, she'd let me place my lips on the top of her head, kiss her. I'd breathe in the smell, warm and slightly sweaty from playing outside. Feel her hair sticking to my lips as I kissed her. Once she had ukus so bad I combed her hair with olive oil every morning before she went to school so the ukus wouldn't climb back on. I always imagine that smell in her hair, olive oil and what I thought was my care and love—always, as if it never left.

Sounds come from across the street. Bursts of noise. *What sounds do you hear, Evie?* Is it different than when I was young— *Cho cho lips, bamboocha, bolo head, bulai, halana ukulele peanut butter jelly, halanaaaaa*—song words mixed in laughter, slap of tether ball, pounding of running feet on a playground. Screams. Laughs. Have the sounds changed?

Her sounds must be older, not so much play sound now. More kissing in

the hallways. More smoking behind buildings. I remember these sounds too. The sound of a kiss. When I was in school, the kids went down off the hill from Konawaena. They'd cut out during recess and lunch time and walk down off the steep hill to smoke behind the church in a banana patch. I only went once. The girls who seemed to know about everything talked and I listened. They passed words and smoke between them. I sat looking at the ripped hole in my jeans, wanting to tear it further with my fingers.

When Evie was small, we always stood holding hands for a few minutes before she went into her class in the morning. She liked to listen from doorways or outside windows. She liked to listen to Ms. Yamashita read to the kids who got to school early. We'd stand on the grass path near Evie's classroom as shadows. That's how I saw us, just shadows on the ground.

All that waiting and watching and I miss Evie coming out of the school. She walks up near and then past me. I know she won't talk for a few minutes. I pick up the backpack and start walking, following a few feet behind her. I let it remain silent between us as we walk. I know she needs this. She wouldn't want any of the other kids to hear me talking to her. I try hard to remember my mother's voice. When we head out of Mō'ili'ili, I keep thinking of what I could ask her that would make her talk, maybe make her laugh, but all I can think of is one question.

"Did you eat lunch?" I say.

We keep walking. I know she's heard. She moves a little further ahead.

"I know you heard me, Evie. Evie," I say. "You know the rules. I have to know if you ate." I watch her move. *Sixty-eight pounds*, I want to say. *What a strange number*. I wait for her to talk. She only lets me speak when she is comfortable.

"Yes," she says, and puts her head down. "Stop asking that. I told you I would."

"What'd you eat?"

"What does it matter? I said I ate. Said I did."

"Tell me." I know she might take off down some side street if I push too hard. She's done it before—three hours of worry, searching, wondering if

she'd come back. But I have to ask. She pulls at the strings on her jacket, let's one string go and puts her hand in the ripped pocket, takes it out, pulls the string again. She keeps walking, not so fast though. Her face is hollowed along the bones of her cheeks, dark with shadows. At times, I see her veins like a blue string right under the skin.

"Some food, okay?"

"Are you lying?"

I can hear her breathing. She wants silence while we walk. I think about Lena. I look at the sky. Lena had three brothers, one brother only nine months younger, one brother named after an Indian guru her parents worshipped, and another brother with the eyes of water. When I met Lena, she told me about her house out in Opihihale with the 'ōhi'a wood beds that her papa had built. She told me about the small outhouse with the moon and star shapes carved into the walls. She said her mother liked to sing, but she didn't know the words to the songs her mother sang. She mumbled words, trying to think of her mother, trying to sound like her mother's song. Then she told me about her cat. She said it was a grey cat that ate only cottage cheese because her papa wanted a vegetarian animal.

"I brought your snack," I tell Evie. "Three bananas. They're really ripe—just like you like—almost black they're so brown. I also have some canned beans, canned corn, and canned green beans, and tofu and some cabbage. We can have that later."

"I need to eat that at five. I am not eating later than five. Will we be up the hill? I have to eat at five. Okay? Five. Five," she says, letting her voice trail away.

I don't answer. She takes the bananas as I hand them to her. I walk closer so I can see her eat. I watch her hands. She has long, thin fingers. We used to say she should play the piano, and I'd imagine her sitting in the afternoon light, her feet not reaching the pedals. I watch the food as it goes into her mouth. I watch to make sure it doesn't drop to the ground, go under her shoes, off the sidewalk.

There's a pathway up the hill where we go now. I found it three days ago.

The first two days we were up there, we'd walked up the road. It took over an hour. Evie ducks beneath the underbrush and cuts off the main road to the path. I follow her, feel the branches catch on my hair, only briefly. I smell the dried grass and dirt of the trail. We aren't the only ones who use this path.

My eyes follow Evie. The soft, fine hair that had begun growing over her body several months and months ago is slowly leaving now. I can't see it all up and down her arms. *Downy*, I'd thought when I first saw it running along her arms, over the bones, along thin skin. That hair was dark and long when the sunlight hit it. *What is this*, I'd asked, laughing. *Are you turning into an animal?* I'd said, as I watched the outline of her hollow cheek, as I touched her head, her hair. Her skin was cold. Her hair was falling out, dry and brittle. *Something is wrong*, I'd said. *Nothing, nothing, nothing*, she'd said. Pulling the clumps of hair from my hand. *Nothing*. She'd pulled her legs, her arms, her whole body into the sweatshirt she was wearing.

"Walk slower," I say. I count her steps. I see her muscles, long beneath delicate skin. Her legs are like thin little arms grabbing at the earth. They might leave her body, keep moving without her. "Don't use all of your energy. Stop. Stop. I want you to rest. I mean it. Sit here." I keep my voice low, and I touch a rock and sit down. I say the words so she might hear. So she will sit. I have to say words soft so she can hear me. I'd learned how to speak soft with Joe. My voice could upset the balance of Joe—speak low, soft, pulled away from myself. I could never tell her she was anything like Joe. Joe needed spaces, silences.

"I'm fine," she says.

She keeps walking. I stand still and watch her grow smaller. I could remain silent and let everything move away. I breathe out and let everything leave. The wind picks up, as if it hears my thoughts. I take everything back into the center of me.

"Evie," I yell, just as she moves around the corner. "Evie, listen," I say it louder, not caring who will hear, not worrying if the houses on the ridge hear my voice. "I told you that you have to listen. We made a deal when you

were in the hospital. You know what will happen. You know they'll take you away from me if you don't listen." My voice is high, full and caught up in the air near her. I think about how loud I've had to scream to make her hear. How my voice has vibrated with words for her.

She stops. I know she is thinking about what I'll do if she keeps walking. I've told her I'll give Oscar away. I'd do it when she was at school. I'd do whatever it takes to make her hear. I told her I'd walk into her class at school and tell all her friends, everyone she knew, exactly what was going on with her—all of it. If she doesn't listen, I'd do whatever it takes to save her, make her hear me.

My friend Lena died when we were both fifteen. I knew this shape of memory and the outline of Lena's stories. I see the sky in Kona when I think about Lena. Lena said the red sunset sky was Pele's hair spread out. I dreamt about Pele after Lena died—that she was sitting in the living room on that faded flower couch with my grandma. Grandma died a few months after Lena, and somehow their deaths became one thing to me.

Evie doesn't walk back down, but she stops. I sit. I watch her breaking off pieces of grass. She won't sit. "I'm waiting," I tell her. "Come back down here now. You know the deal. Me and you, Evie. We have to listen to each other. It won't work if you don't hear me." My voice holds everything between us.

"You come here," she says.

"No."

"Why? This is so stupid. Come here."

"No. You look pale," I yell this. I know I have to make her come to me. "We're resting. Ten minutes. This pack is heavy," I say it a little softer, knowing she can hear. I point to the backpack, making her see maybe it is me who is tired. I carry things we need in the pack—a flashlight, cans of food, a hairbrush, toothpaste, a tarp, a small mirror, band aids, deodorant, a sweater, some emergency change for the bus.

She comes down the path towards me. "If you're so worried, why'd you make me walk back down? This is so stupid." She stands near me. "It'll be

dark soon, won't it? We'll have to go up in the dark." Her voice is high. It moves away as she turns to look up the path. She brings her eyes back to me, bringing her voice around until it falls near me. She pulls the strings on her coat again and again. "We have to go."

"Are you cold? I have a sweater."

Evie doesn't answer. She won't sit. She looks at the path again. "I heard him ask you last night, you know. The guy. I heard," she says. She moves the earth near her shoe, kicks it a little. She can't sit still. She moves her legs, quick patterns, quick rhythm. "I heard him ask you what was wrong."

"He didn't say it mean. He didn't mean anything by it."

"You didn't say anything, did you? Tell him about me?"

"No," I say, and I exhale a little bit of air. "I wouldn't."

I stand up to go. She follows. I can almost hear her thoughts. The movement of sound in her mind. I know she keeps a list of things she has to think about to keep them safe. I list her in my thoughts.

"Where's Oscar? Is he safe? You didn't do anything."

"He's fine," I say, not turning around.

"You don't think anyone would eat him?" she says.

"If people were going to eat all the small animals around, they'd start with the chickens—they're all over the place. Not a rabbit, and he's in his cage. I put some branches over it, his cage. He's fine. Safe."

"He isn't as hard to catch as a chicken."

I want to tell her about Ida and Robert, the people up the hill, not the rabbit. "Ida said she lost her daughter when she was fifteen." I wait to see if she will answer. She passes me on the trail, and she breaks off a branch from a bush as she walks. She throws it down and grabs a handful of grass.

"Why are you telling me about her dead kid?"

"Ida said she was shopping at Ala Moana when her daughter died. Didn't even know she'd been hit by a car. Her daughter crossed the street to go get a soda from the machine after school. She was hit by a car."

"I don't want to hear this." She walks a little faster.

I think about pausing, but I don't. I need to talk. "Ida said she had to hear

about her daughter dying from strangers who saw it happen. She wanted to know; she asked them to tell her. She said she always thinks about the purple shirt she bought when her daughter was being hit by a car.”

When we had to leave our house five days ago, I filled up black plastic garbage bags with our things—borrowed a car from Liz, the neighbor with the cat. The cat was old, twelve or thirteen. Evie always loved the cat, wanted the neighbor to give it to her, ran her hands over and over again down the cat’s spine.

Evie slows down. She says, “I don’t know why you want to talk about a kid dying. You say stupid things.” She is silent after saying this. When she speaks again, her voice gets caught up ahead of her. She doesn’t turn to speak to me. “Is that why she talks about the gospel books so much? She kept talking about it last night.” She runs her hand over the top of grass as she speaks. “She said she has a friend named Ida—same name as her. They read the gospel over the phone on Sundays—Sundays when she doesn’t go find a church downtown. She said last Sunday she went to Kawaiaha’o.” Evie stops walking. She doesn’t look at me. When she speaks again her voice is changed. “She likes to try a new church every Sunday. She’ll probably run out of churches.”

I turn my face down, looking at my feet. As we walk, I know I want to talk about Lena. Lena died when we were both fifteen. Lena had a way of using her hands when she talked. She would lift them up and sweep them around, all over the sky over and over. She didn’t know about the dark car that eventually would come and break the bone in her right thigh. Does Kuakini Highway remembered her body hitting the ground as the car lifted and dropped her? Lena’s brother, I heard he cried and kept punching the car that hit her. This was what everybody said when they talked about Lena dying.

When we get to the top of the hill, Evie sits down. She takes her hair in her hands, places it around her face. She’s tired, breathing hard. After a few minutes she stands, moving toward our tent. She stops before she reaches Oscar’s small cage. “I always think he’s going to be dead. I am afraid of

seeing him dead. I don’t know what I’d do,” she says. “You look. You do it.”

“He’s fine.” I touch his ear through the cage. He is lying on his stomach, great brown rabbit eyes looking out at me. She comes over, stands a few inches from me. I can feel her skin near mine, her breathing, her smell. She takes the rabbit up from the cage and puts him against her, running her fingers over his fur.

When we had to leave our house, Evie’d asked if she could keep her things, not give them away to Goodwill where no one would really care about them. Her things from when she was little, just those, she’d said. *Just the things that are special.* When she asked, she had her toy duck—all its babies in a row behind it—her brown stuffed dog, and her glass figurines lined up all around her like she used to when she was small. She didn’t talk to her toys like when she was small, but I imagined, or maybe believed she still heard their voices as she sat there not touching any of them, just looking over each one.

When we first came up to the camp, the people who live up here told me to find a place that no one could see easily from the hiking trails. When we’d made the space for our tent, we moved branches, we moved rocks. We found small bones. Evie said they looked like rabbit bones, thrown-up rabbit bones. I told her they couldn’t be rabbit bones, no wild rabbits around here, doubt someone’s pet would be up this way. Maybe something an owl ate, I said. She’d looked around for owls. Said she could feel eyes watching her. The bones were white, small, crossed over one another, in laid out webs of fine fur. Evie wanted to bury them, felt like they were watching her, expecting her to do something with them. I found a stick and dug a hole. She said, deeper or something will dig the bones up. Deeper, she said again. She asked if we should bless the bones somehow. I told her to talk to them. She did. She talked to the like she was whispering, but I heard.

The first night, we didn’t go to the fire. Evie didn’t want to be near people. She said she was tired. I made sure she ate, watched her. I thought she’d refuse, maybe scream like she did when we lived in our house near Liz and the cat. But she ate. She didn’t even yell at me not to watch her. She didn’t

cry and beg me to let her stop eating—*too full, too full*. She ate and watched Oscar. The first night when it got dark, Evie said she didn't know it could be that dark. Not that dark. It got cold, and I wanted warmth between us. I wanted to wait until she slept. I wanted to roll to my side and try to think how I could give her all my warm, but I couldn't wait for sleep.

My mind told her about Joe, told her about when we had to leave him. About crawling out through the window as the house burned. I wondered how much she remembered. My mind told her about the blanket I wrapped her up in. About the tuna fish sandwich his mother made us on a thick grainy bread with the mustard she liked and celery all chopped up fine. She made it to take with us so we could leave him, as if a sandwich could help with the leaving part.

That first night, Evie said the wind has a different sound when it's dark. I knew she could hear it different. I knew she was counting up everything she had to keep safe as she listened to the wind. She was cold. I could feel it all around her, but she wouldn't let me put blankets on her. She said she didn't deserve them, kept hitting her thighs and crying. She wanted the cold. She wanted her body to shake. *My thighs, my thighs. You lied. They're so big. I'd rather die. So big. So big.* I placed my body over hers, careful not to crush her. Her heart was weak now. Her bones so fine. When she was in the hospital, they told me about percentages of dying.

After she fell asleep, I finished the story about leaving—but I only said the words in my thoughts. I told her about her Grandma Evelyn, who told us we had to leave Joe. Next time could be the last, the worst, she'd said. Grandma Evelyn drove us to Hilo. She said Joe wouldn't look for us there, as if the other side of the island made us safe. As if he couldn't be bothered to find us if there were a few miles between us—a thought gone out of sight.

We stayed two days with Evelyn's friend, Jackie, before flying to O'ahu. Jackie's house had clocks on almost every wall. A tall grandfather clock right near the door to the kitchen, a black cat clock over the toilet, ten cuckoo clocks lined up over the living room wall, a round clock in a ship's steering

wheel over the T.V. *You wanted them all, Evie.* I sent these thoughts to my sleeping Evie. *You stood on the couch and tried to get the birds out of the cuckoo clock. When you finally sat down near me, you ran your fingers along my hairline against the stitches of blue thread. You asked me to count the stitches again. I told you they were magic, made me stronger, told you blue was my favorite color. You watched the clocks and listened as I talked.*

We slept in the living room. Me on the couch, Evie on a bed Grandma Evelyn's friend made out of pillows. I wanted to take her on my stomach, have her sleep right there, but I knew she needed to sleep on the pillows. She fell asleep listening to me tell her stories. My words got mixed up with the sounds of the clocks. When the fever came in the night, she cried with each moving clock part. I leaned over her and smelled her crying. It mixed with mine. She said my name like small children do. With words that pierce. When I stood up and walked into the bathroom, she cried for me to come back. She said I'd forget her on the floor and she'd have to live with Grandma Evelyn's friend.

I came back saying, Hush, hush. I'm here. I have to find something to bring your fever down. Don't talk. We don't want to wake up the house. I touched your face with my fingers. Just the tips at first, cool pinpoints against your face. Then I placed the back of my hand against your forehead, cheek, neck and back. I placed aspirin in your mouth, you said it tasted like pink. You wanted another one. Like candy, you said. You leaned against me. I held you with my arms. I told you, When we have our own house, we'll plant tomatoes and flowers—and your fever broke.

Evie liked the fire after the first and second cold nights on the hill. She said she'd go. Kapono is already there when we get to the fire tonight. He is talking to Tom. When we met Tom the first time, he'd carried an armful of signs up from the yards of neighborhoods below. The signs were red, white, and blue. He said, *these fuckers don't care about anybody* and punched the faces printed on the signs. *They don't deserve these happy fuckin' signs. These signs are all fuckin' lies.* He tossed them all into the fire—the whole bunch of signs all at once. The wood parts lit quickly, the plastic singed,

smoked, filled the air. *Fire moves quicker than you think.* I wanted to tell Tom about fire. What I knew about the sounds of fire. I didn't. I watched the smoke lift.

Kapono yelled, "Go easy. Go easy. Those fuckahs don't burn. Plastic, bruddah-man. Look! Look! The air is filling with smoke." Tom kept crying.

It's quiet tonight. Just Kapono and Tom talking. Tom is relaxed. His long legs are stretched out. "Caught some fish," Kapono says, he looks at us and smiles. "Sit, sit. Here's a perfect log, special made for you."

Tom doesn't look up. "Perfect. Beautiful fish. Perfect," he says. He watches the fire. The fire, cracking a bit, moving high, smoking a little. Tom doesn't move, he watches, holding onto a half-smoked cigarette.

I look over and see Iwa walking toward the fire. Her flashlight dances a little. When she comes into the firelight, I can see she is holding a container in her arms. She has her face down, looking at her son. She kisses my cheek when she gets near enough. I can smell her clothes—something like laundry soap and smoke.

"Say hello to aunty," she says, touching her son's shoulder.

He lifts his hand and waves. His face is an oval, bright, turned up. He smiles when he sees Evie. She moves over so he can sit near her. He asks her about her rabbit. I can hear her voice up near him, talking about Oscar.

"Ida's not doing too good," Iwa says, placing the container down, "Brought rice. No paper plates tonight." She sits near me. She speaks, "Not a good night for her. Robert's keeping her company."

I want to know about Ida. I ask if I can do anything to help. *Lena was fifteen when she died. Lena's mother might have had a purple shirt.* When Iwa shakes her head, I don't ask anymore. Not again. I want to hear about Ida's daughter, but I don't want to know. I don't want her death too near.

"Fish smells so 'ono," Iwa breathes, looks over at Kapono as she speaks. Then back at her son. He is pulling on Evie's hand, telling her to look for sticks with him. "We can put them on the fire. We can make the fire big," he says.

When the fish is done, Kapono places it on a piece of slightly burnt sign

left over from nights before. It hadn't burned completely. Only the edges. The fish covers the name on the sign. "Dig in," he says. "Eat, eat," he tells me. He watches me, keeps his dark eyes on me.

I can hear my daughter breathing near me. She's pulled away from Iwa's son. She's leaning close into me. I can see her legs moving—quick rhythms, not stopping, shake, shake, shake. She turns to look back toward the tent. I follow the movement of her eyes. There are no lights. A few trees stand out against the sky, dark on dark. There are a few trees the fire lets us see, but we can't see the tent.

"Eat. Eat," Kapono says, again. "Nothing like eating around a fire." I watch his mouth as he eats. He catches my eyes.

"Come, make a plate, Evie," Iwa says, putting her hand on my daughter's arm. "You, too," she says, looking at me. Then Iwa laughs. "No plates tonight. Eat off the sign. Rice, there's rice." She's bent over the open the container, trying to see the rice. "Wipe your hands, son."

Tom doesn't look away from the fish. The firelight illuminates the cooked fish. "Beautiful fish. Beautiful. Fuckin' fish probably loved the fuckin' ocean."

"Eh. Eh none of that. Look, look. Watch the mouth. There's children." Kapono points to Evie. He waves his hand over Iwa's son. "Look."

Iwa places rice near the fish. Her son steps closer. He eats. He wipes his fingers on his shirt after a few mouthfuls.

My daughter shifts her body towards the dark. I can hear her thoughts, the counting of things around. I can hear her mind moving. "I think I'll go," she says. She says it close to my face. I can feel her cold fingers. They touch my hand. She is so close, so near. "I think I'm tired."

"Don't go. Eat. Eat," Iwa says.

"Oh, no. It's okay. I ate. I ate before," Evie says, and she points off towards our tent.

"You sure?"

I can feel my daughter, her legs shift. "I'm okay," she says. "It's okay."

"How 'bout you, momma? You eat?"

“I’m good. Fine. I ate. Thank you. Thank you.” I let my words match my daughter’s. My voice is low. Like hers.

“Mom, I have school tomorrow. I have to sleep. Oscar is probably scared. I have to go to him,” Evie says.

“Us too,” Iwa stands as she speaks. “Us too, son. You finished, boy? Son, time to go moemoe.” She lifts him into her arms, places him near her chest. His eyes only half-open. She bends and kisses my cheek as she leaves. I ask if I can help her back to her tent with her son. She says she has it. She has him. She waves as she flicks on the flashlight and walks down the path. Her voice comes back towards the fire. “Look, son. You can see stars.” I imagine as she lifts her hand toward the sky. “How does it make you feel?” She has her mouth near his face, I know. I can hear her the muffled tones of her lips on his hair. “How do you feel in your ‘ōpū? How do the stars feel?”

“Mom, I’m going to bed. I don’t need you to come with me. I can make it by myself. I’m okay,” Evie says.

I move to stand.

“Stay, mom, stay,” Kaponono says, he waves his hand, motioning me to stay on the log. “I’ll walk her, keep her safe. Relax a moment. Keep warm. You need rest.”

Evie starts to say she doesn’t need him to walk her. I can see her mouth forming words. He flicks on the flashlight and starts walking, not listening. Tom stands as Kaponono leaves the fire. He is wordless. He walks away without turning back toward me. The orange of his cigarette lifts and flickers against the night as he walks. He never uses a flashlight when he goes into the dark. I don’t know where his tent is.

When Kaponono comes back, he asks if he can sit near me. I slide over a little without speaking. I can feel his arm. I’ve forgotten how warm a body can feel. He smells like salt and smoke but good. He doesn’t speak for a while, and we breathe near one another. The fires sparks, dies, builds, and dies. The sounds momentarily fill the space of breathing. We look at the fire, a dark thing almost gone. Just red outlining black.

“My son,” he says, finally, “he just made eleven.” His voice, low near my

ear.

“Where is he?” I don’t really want to ask. I am tired. But I know he needs to say words about his son. I understand this need. I feel the words I should say sitting in my chest.

“Mainland.” He sits silent after he says it. He turns his face up to look at the sky.

“I left Evie’s father a long time ago. We remember him.”

“Good or bad,” he says.

“Both,” I say. “Maybe both.” I sometimes think I want it to be both.

Kaponono keeps his face near mine. The fire is dark ash and leaving warm.

“Goodnight,” I touch his wrist lightly with my fingers. Kaponono seems to know about silence.

I hear him stand as I leave. I know he is putting out the fire by the sounds.

My flashlight is small. The dark is all around caught in the circle of the beam. I know I could miss the opening in the bushes if I don’t walk carefully. The night noises lift and drop and lift as I walk. They cover everything I know—I know the hums of the night—an owl, the wind, a siren way off in the neighborhood down the mountain. I can see the lights below through the trees on the edge. The tent is an outline, a mound against the night. I’m silent as I enter the tent, but I want Evie’s voice. I want her to tell me she is okay. The air in the tent smells like us, like me and Evie. I lift my hand, and her skin, my daughter, she is gentle against my fingertips. Her fingers are slim and cold, and briefly she is seven again. The seven of loving me as much as I love her. I can feel her. The blankets are in the corner, folded, and she is on her side. Her face to the tent wall. Her body shakes, moves, vibrates. She is a quick movement of cold.

“I don’t like the things scratching the tent. The nylon, I guess it’s nylon—makes it sound strange,” she says.

“It does. I don’t like it either.”

“Are you scared?” she says.

“Yes.”

I unfold the blankets. I put them over us.

When my Evie was a baby, I'd watch her lips against my nipple. That was a singing type of waiting—a waiting I never wanted to leave. I'd sit in the silence of the house, counting the places that filled with sun at different times of day. I wouldn't put Evie down when she fell asleep. I'd listen to her, thinking I could hear every cell in her body. I'd tell her I loved her with my thoughts. Those thoughts came as music, different than the music on the phone, in the background, when Joe would call to tell me he couldn't come home: the wind over music from his radio; the flap of the black plastic trash bag duct taped over his window. I'd wait for the sound of his truck coming up the drive, Evie's small weight on my chest holding me in place, allowing the earth to move around us. The house, its silent waiting, belonged to me and Evie.



STEVEN TUTINO

Caricature of a Tourniquet

BY JUNPEI TARASHI

1.
There are two men running through a cornfield, a man and his past,
one wearing a pretty dress and the other a jacket that smells
like another man's cologne.
Do not choose yet. There is still much to observe.
Both men have dark hair, dark eyes, rough hands, loyal hearts. The sun
shines down, golden as the corn, blurring the scene such that
it's hard to tell where one man ends
and the other begins.
The corn seems infinite, but the cliff's edge is closer than either of
them thinks.

2.
There are two men on either side of a door.
Let's call them Andrew. And because the one inside was the first to exist
he believes he is real
though the one outside is just as sure.

The Andrew outside wants very much to be let in, to be known,
to be comforted,
and the one inside wants the same,
but for different reasons.

Neither of them is who the other thinks they are.
Both of them are the same in this, and many other ways.

It's the ways in which they are different that matters. Can you see them?

3.
You're sitting at a bar and you're drinking something cheap.
You're sitting at a bar and you're drinking something expensive.

You're sitting at a bar and you don't care what you're drinking,
as long as it gets you drunk.

You're sitting at a bar and the man in the mirror says,
boys cannot die without accountability, circle the right answer:
You're sitting here cause you wanted *it*, cause otherwise,
You would have fought back
Cause otherwise, you would have reported him.
Don't bring up these excuses now.

The liquor shows your reflection and you can't tell which Andrew you'd
rather be,
the one in the bar
or the one drowning at the bottom of a glass

Take a sip. Break the mirror.
You were always so good at breaking things.

4.
Suppose you're standing in a field:
There are two men here, a man and his reflection,
and neither knows which is which.
Look into the sky: the sun is blinding. The sun is changing
The landscape covered in different hues

Did the sun always look like that?

The sun is singing, but you don't understand
what it's trying to tell you.

Look into the sky: the sun is a mirror. Which side of it are you standing
on, Andrew?

5.
You're sitting at a bar and there's another man beside you.
You know him better than he knows
himself and this gives you power over him,
but you have to be careful not to break him.

Breaking things is so easy,
but you've never liked easy, have you?

Reach out, feel the empty space
he carries around inside him.
We're all carrying something empty around inside of us.
Reach into that empty space. Make it the shape of everything you need.
Now, say hello.

6.
Your name is Andrew and you are standing on one side of a door,
but which side it is depends on which Andrew you are.

Knock on the door. Answer the questions. Do as you're told.

The real Andrew has always been good at following instructions. The real
Andrew is an obedient little girl, well-trained, and would never be caught
off guard by something like this.

Both of you are caught off guard by this.
Each of you swallows his fear.
Each of you feels his heart pounding in his ears.

Each of you hates, and hates, and hates the other.

7.
Your name is Andrew and somewhere outside your life
a monster (*a liar, a sin, something disgusting*) wearing your voice is
trying to talk its way inside.

Your name is Andrew and somewhere inside this life
a monster (*a coward, a fool, something broken*) wearing your face is
trying to get
your friends, your family (and himself) to kill you.

8.
Suppose that you are a nebula, a collection of corpses
Of stars that once used to be, of stars that will be boys
Becoming men, becoming gravity, physics, becoming a rule.

You've read textbooks. You know what this is - the postulates of the
world, a series of rules and maths that predicates a gender, predicates
law.

The Andrew outside knows what he is: a series of fusion reactions
building a man,
A shining sun, another chance.

The Andrew inside is too burnt to believe in second chances.

(Both Andrews remember
The blooming man his father was, with painted purple flowers on his

neck and cheek

And how he would talk of uneven stairs and lanky feet
and doors in the wrong place, at the wrong time
And of being man enough to take it from her, probably man enough
To tie the ropes, hang up all pretty lighting the living room
With the last of his fire instead of burning another tear.
The Andrew that did not want to be Andrew, tightening up the dress
thought afterwards that it was probably all that water
That put out the fusion quickstart beat of his heart.)

9.
Let's say the devil is played by two men - you've heard of this in the
sermons and prayers:

We'll call them Andrew.

Dark hair, dark eyes, barbed tongues, loyal hearts -
they're twins, mirror images.

The one on this side of the door would die for her
and the one on that side of the door already has,
and both of them carry something broken inside that you know
is easily shaped into a weapon.

The sun is singing to one, like a siren that calls to a metamorphosis,
forbidden
and the other is singing along. Their voices sound identical,
but you've never been one for harmony.

10.
There are two men in a motel room
just like every other motel room they've seen,
with two identical beds and two identical scratchy blankets
and two identical bloodstains on the carpet,
and the room is quiet except
for the sound of highway cars hurrying past

and the rush of water as someone in the bathroom washes blood
from his hands.

Sit up. Listen. You'll need to know the sound of his heartbeat soon enough.

His hands shake when he kisses you, like the way a thunderstorm wreaks
through a body

Alien to the concept - intimate
Like he's just come to realise that lips and hands and that fire
Don't have to burn for love.

11.
There are two men on either side of a door,
and one of them is a fraud.

He thinks about infiltration, about peeling apart
the layers of a man and stepping inside his skin,
wearing it like another man's coat until
he becomes the mirror.

Or maybe he doesn't,
maybe he doesn't know anything, maybe he believes in binaries and rules,
but can you take that chance?
The sun is in your eyes, and the men blur together.

There are two men running through a cornfield
but one is closer to the cliff, now.
You reach out to them, but who you can save depends on what you feel.

Do you feel anything? Do you care? The sun is in your eyes, so
Who do you choose:
the one with the hands and dress stained with blood and soot
or the one with stardust in his hair?

Look closely; can you tell the difference? Would it matter if you could?

The gun is in your hand. The clock is running down. Time to make a decision.

12.

There are two men on either side of a door,
but one of them is not real.

The Andrew inside thinks about how a bullet
could shatter the bubble of safety he's built for himself,
and wonders why he doesn't care.

The Andrew outside thinks about stars, and darkness, and
the price of needless laws of the world no one remembers
Writing in the first place.

Neither of them sees the big picture. That's your job.

Can you see the big picture when you can't even see him?

13.

You realise far too late, that there are
too many unmarked graves born out of the age-long infestation
of building suns without warning of the explosion

And you think, *it was right there, right in the textbook, in the guidelines and
the rules*

*You put too many things in one place, in one man
Make a core of tears and sadness and all that "dammit man, stop with that girly
bullshit-"*

How is it that the white dwarf that comes after is always a surprise?

14.

You're standing in a washroom and there's blood in the sink,
but it's all right because it's mostly yours this time

The person in the mirror wasn't you, never was,

but that's all right because you've always been good at breaking things

in just the wrong way

There's scissors on the counter and bandages on your chest,
and there's music playing somewhere outside. There's hair and glass
and blood in the sink, all of it yours.

Sometimes you are remade. Sometimes you remake yourself.

Take a deep breath. Open the door.



JEROME BERGLUND



JEFF HERSCH

Same Time Same Place Same 2" X 4" Head Breaking Metaphor

BY MICHAEL MILLIGAN

Never strikes twice.
Everyone knows it
but I'm here to show you
the scars, my testimonied
flesh once fried, fried again.
Don't talk to me about
coincidence. Don't need
to bring God into the front
seat with us either. I mean
that second-time-around
dance with spark and flame
re-distorted my already
stricken universe enough
without martyrdom
or sainthood added in.
But twice?
You explain it—
I can't explain it.

Barbed Wire Tattoo

BY BRIAN MCCARTY

Curls and pull-ups accessorized
with come-at-me eyes and flexes in wall-length mirror
as I advance like a seasoned gamer
through successive levels of masculinity:
cut; chick magnet; “you talkin’ to me”; real swole:
legitimate badass; action hero
damned to wife beater fashion hell
because it’s unlawful to conceal weapons.
Totally worth it, of course, since everyone knows
chicks don’t dig skinny guys.

When my biceps began to rage
like German Shepherds barely contained
by a muzzle, I got branded with a barbed wire tattoo.
It’s savage: wires braided together
like cobras fighting to the death;
when I flex, the barbs bite into my biceps
until it seems they’ll leak awesomeness
in inky colors down my hairless arm
bronzed with tan from a spray bottle.

Other guys with barbed wire tattoos,
including older guys with barbed wire tattoos
like rubber bands stretched beyond use,

give crazy mad props to my barbed wire tattoo;
When we fist-bump and blow it up
they hold the detonation an extra second
as though wowed by how much
I’m sure to get laid.

Haters mock my bod,
say with my bulging pecs and skinny legs
I look like a thought bubble, but I pop
thought bubbles, drain them of their stick figure postures
and use them to season my protein, creatine,
and peanut butter mix.



NICK ROMEO

My Darling, My Parasite

BY KATHERINE SINBACK

The writing workshop is a birthday gift from my husband: Favorite Writer Live in Portland, to be in front of me in mere minutes. I unpack my notebook and pens, assemble my station at the end of a folding table in the middle of a convention center conference room. The smell of burnt coffee mingles with cloying floral perfume coming from somewhere in my vicinity. Eau de decaying rose. I lay two black pens next to each other across the top border of my spiral notebook.

“When’s the big day?” a woman, the suspected source of the perfume, asks from the table behind me.

For a moment, I freeze. Of all the places I could sit in this room of fifty seats, I end up in front of the pregnant woman.

“Any day now. I am so ready for Malia to get here.” Her voice is sharp and nasally like Courtney Love.

“Malia’s a pretty name.” The woman coos.

Courtney says, “Yeah, I was going to wait until I met her, but then I realized that I’d already been getting to know her. She’s a Malia.”

I try to resist the urge to turn around and peek at Courtney. Looking at pregnant women is my own personal rubbernecking. Even though the merest suggestion of a swollen abdomen sends me into a dark spiral. I can’t resist. I steal a glimpse over my shoulder. My mental image of Courtney is not far from the reality. Late twenties, round belly straining her faded black band tee, dyed black hair in crooked pigtails. I admonish myself: You cannot dislike women because they are pregnant, because they speak

breezily about their pregnancy like the majority of women who’ve never stared down the barrel of a bad ultrasound.

During the workshop, Favorite Writer instructs us to draw spirals as a gateway to creativity and focus. Before we begin to write, we “work our spirals” as a way to distract our critical minds, to clear room for creativity and stories to flow from our pens. We spiral while other workshop participants read from their work as a way to occupy our minds just enough to silence any critical chatter so we can focus on hearing the reader. Since our eyes rest on the drawing in front of us, our spirals provide a thin veil of anonymity for the reader. As our pens loop on the pages of our notebooks, Favorite Writer paces the rows of tables to call on people who have their hands raised and want to read.

With over a decade of writing workshops in my rearview, I have a definite sense of how things should be done. I have rules. After the first hour of the workshop I decide that reading aloud one to three times per day is acceptable. Give other folks a chance. Keep some things to yourself.

Courtney does not respect my code of the Favorite Writer workshop. She stomps all over it. Not only does she read at every opportunity, she also raises her hand so fast that she is the first reader. I’m a Larry David without the nerve to act on my code beyond a disappointed look or mutter, but I find myself at my edge. As the day goes on my sighs become more audible at the sound of her voice.

Before my husband dropped me off at the workshop, he said, “Don’t be so quick to find a *bête noire*. Maybe try not looking for one at all.”

I snorted. “Yeah right. I mean, I’ll do my best.”

My best lasted until the lunch break.

That night I give him the news. “I couldn’t do it. I have a *bête noire*.”

He sighs.

“Yeah, yeah, I know. But she read every time. And she talked about her pregnancy in that fake-complaining-bragging way.”

I reassure myself it’s not the pregnancy that’s bugging me so much as

the breach in writing workshop etiquette. I want to look around and see if anyone else is annoyed, if any other eyes dart up from our spiral doodles, but fear I will attract the attention and ire of my idol. Don't be such a jerk, I say to myself.

On day two of the workshop our second assignment is to write something inspired by the word shock. My first image is the darkened ultrasound room where the technician spoke the words that have implanted in my brain: "I'm not seeing what I am expecting." I chide myself. Can't I leave miscarriage world behind for a day? I have written recently and extensively about my miscarriage shock. I am growing bored of my despair. I force myself to write about something else.

After the requisite eight minutes of writing, we bow our heads and begin our spirals. The first reader clears her throat. In stark contrast to the scrape of Courtney's voice, her voice is thin and halting. She speaks of the day that she learned she was pregnant and excitedly told her husband. Out of the corner of my eye I glimpse her downturned face and quickly look back to my spiral. Her voice grows quieter as she navigates the words, pausing to sniffle and swallow. I feel my eyes growing full. I wanted to escape miscarriage for this weekend, for these precious two days, but there is nowhere to run.

The woman takes a deep breath and reads the final sentence of the piece, her husband's reaction to her pregnancy announcement. "He said, 'Don't get too excited. Sometimes these things don't stick.'" She breaks down into sobs.

I want to get up from my table and sling an arm around her slight shoulders. Did it stick? I want to ask her. Did it?

During the lunch break, Favorite Writer signs books. I feel like a dope for leaving my copies at home. Courtney plops down next to Favorite Writer and inserts herself into every conversation Favorite Writer has with the workshop participants lined up to get their books signed.

"Malia is totally going to read all your books," Courtney says.

"Do I sign it to you or Malia?" Favorite Writer asks as her pen hovers over the front page of Courtney's copy.

Across the room I jam my PB & J into my mouth and fume. It's always the loud girls who command the attention of the writers I love. Likely because the writers are awkward and quiet like me and can relax into the comfort of not having to concoct conversation from scratch.

The woman who read her "Shock" piece sits a few tables over from me, picking at a bowl of noodles. I wonder if, like me, she is eavesdropping on Favorite Writer and the students. Her shoulders are stiff, her face closed and tight. Her lips are a taut lipsticked red line. When I look at her eyes I have to look away. Did it stick? I still want to ask. Did it?

I crumple my napkin. Favorite Writer is rubbing Courtney's belly and kissing it. "For Malia," she says joyously.

Jealousy flashes. In different circumstances, Courtney and I might be bonding right now. I imagine our conversation.

"Yeah, I'm about five months along," I would have said had my embryo lived past ten weeks.

"Oh girl, you are in for some fun." Courtney would have slapped a hand on my shoulder. We wouldn't have become best pals but we could have shared a pregnant lady bonding moment.

"I call Malia my parasite," Courtney says in real life. "My sweet little parasite."

"I love parasites," Favorite Writer says.

I shoot out of my seat and bump into desks and chairs, but thankfully not any of the people in line for the book signing, on my way out the door. I walk the halls of the convention center and settle in a nook away from the hubbub of Wordstock and the Holiday Food and Gift Festival. My longing for my own parasite almost knocks me over, steals the breath from my lungs. I want to break workshop rule number one and talk to Shock Reader about her pregnancy. Did it stick? Did it? Me neither.

I collect myself and return to the room for two more hours of writing

exercises. Favorite Writer gives us another word. We spiral. We write. We spiral some more. When it's time to read, Courtney's voice sounds first.

She tells the story of the last time she saw Malia's father. He is in love with another woman; he doesn't even want to know when Malia is born. Courtney breaks down into sobs. Still I feel hard towards her. On my spiral sheet I scribble a note to myself: *Y CAN'T U B KIND?*

That night I dream I am getting an ultrasound after my D and C.

"The baby isn't developing but it's still alive," the doctor says.

"How can that be?" I ask, upset that the D and C didn't remove everything.

The doctor shrugs his shoulders. My dream fades into images of waiting rooms, overstuffed tissue boxes, and a fluttering heartbeat on the ultrasound screen.

The symbolism is too heavy for even me to miss. My baby is alive even if it isn't developing, even if it is discarded cells in a biohazard bag. I carry the weight of the absence. My darling, my parasite.



GUILHERME BERGAMINI

Protection Spell

BY RYAN SKARYD

Take your mother's favorite flower.
Now, take its seed &, if applicable, a thorn.

Pray over cigar smoke & nail clippings
hidden in a carpet.

Expect a memory.

You might taste copper. This is normal.

Take your dead friend's face from
the funeral card, the one you left
in your back pocket during a load of laundry,
now crumpled, as thin as a Bible page.
Hold it in your palm, somewhere
above your life line.

See where this takes you.

Remember your father. Remember when
your father threw the finale firework
in the mailbox for fun, flattening
its metal shell, two 4th of Julys

JARON NEWTON



before the divorce. Consider the sparks:
how they flew sideways & sizzled the air.
This feeling parallels itself when
a Florida boy finally stands under snow.

Start craving the future.

Start tonight two martinis in.

Destroy something
that you've had for at least ten years.

Unwrap a piece of candy &
put it on your tongue.

Wait.

See how long it takes you to swallow.

Toast

BY JULIA RUBIN

I fear my limbs are flames
glowing orange, red, blue; wreaking havoc
on my apartment, destroying
the family upstairs, the dog. I fear I am a fire child.
Most mornings I ask my landlord to check the toaster.
I say it's probably fine but there's a chance the whole building is ashes.

My grandmother still smells ashes
when she sniffs the kitchen air; she hallucinates flames,
says "is something burning?" to the toaster.
Her nostrils have memorized havoc.
Inside still lives a fire child,
every room a vessel for destruction.

Every creature inside the tent was destroyed;
the lions, the tigers, her grandfather, piles of ashes.
A stranger says run, child.
The whole circus is flames,
glowing orange and red and blue; wreaking havoc.
One hundred and sixty-seven spectators burnt like toast.

How quickly a slice of toast
can become destruction.

One second too long wreaks havoc:
your breakfast, a slice of ashes,
your kitchen in flames,
your whole house a violent fire child.

My great grandmother, a child
watched Pavit burn like toast.
Her village, her home, her books up in flames;
officially mandated destruction.
Ashes to ashes.
Now let her wreak havoc.

I fear wreaking havoc.
Inside me is a fire child.
I turn hurt into ashes,
tears into toast.
Can my anger destroy?
Is my power a flame?

I will not sleep before checking the toaster
but I, too, am destruction;
born from women who were born from flames.

Seed

BY CRAIG FINLAY

The girl has always been worried about speaking too much. She fears her father and worries that her stories are a stairway into her. That's part of it. More than that, she feels sick if she doesn't tell the one truest thing she knows and she knows that her family walks the path of the dead like a hand-me-down labyrinth. That they find their way like water. She knows inheritance is a shit lottery jackpot but we still count our winnings. She knows things without having to have learned them. Knows them like a newborn knows to take the breast.

She followed her mother into the back yard one night, after her mother and her sister had spent hours locked in the bathroom. That's when she found the seed. Her father spent the entire time listening to the radio and drinking and never even got up. The girl waited until everyone was asleep and dug up the tiny little thing Mother buried in the moonlight. Three inches long, with tiny legs and tiny arms and a big funny head. It was the color of a bruised peach. She kept it and knew it must be a seed from which a great tree would grow, one that would consume the farm and then the fields and then the world so she must never let it be planted. She thought to keep it in a cigar box with other treasures she had collected. The skull of a cat, a robin's nest with three perfect blue eggs still inside. Some precious totems salvaged from the trash after Grandmother had died: a broken ivory comb and an ivory button. A puck of face cream with deep troughs where Grandmother had pulled her thin, lovely fingers through it.

That very night, though, there arose a wind. The girl lay in bed and



listened to the howl of the wind and to the house creak and groan in protest. Wind such that the rusted windmill that had not moved, not ever in her memory, at last screeched to life and began spinning again. In the morning she saw that the farm had surrendered pieces of itself to the world. The chicken coop had collapsed and those hens that survived were nowhere to be seen. Shingles littered the yard. The great oak tree that she loved lay on its side, roots reaching skyward. And she knew she must plant the seed. She knew that the world had already claimed it and when she stole it the Earth screamed like a mother losing a son.

So she picked up an acorn from the beloved oak and retrieved the seed from the cigar box. She opened the seed with a paring knife and placed the acorn in its belly. Then she walked to the edge of the yard, by the barn, and returned it to the little hole where her mother had planted it. She hoped the little thing that surrounded the acorn would love it and so the tree that grew would not in fact consume the farm and eventually the world. She still felt that love was true. And should love find itself insufficient for the task the girl took solace in the fact that oaks grow very slowly and she would have time to make peace with her own children.

Waiting Outside the Hall of Love

BY CLIFF SAUNDERS

Bundled up, looking for a bundle
of clothing worn by a courageous exile,
I kept trying to hush the whip
spellbinding me in the breakdown lane.
Winter birds swept about my car
like rags from the end of the world.
I was history when one slipped away,
sort of using radioactive seeds
to light the way through January.
It was me who discovered the ants
that fell on Maine's crumbling
lighthouses, on a desperate sea.
It wasn't me who lost sight of three
acrobats reading the gospel in rhyme.
The day the trees fell between me
and fields of asylum, I was running
from a single truck full of pitchforks.
I misunderstood my time in the city.
Although the sea confided in me,
I walked out of its corner
happy to let it go. I had to do it.
I became a wall in my backyard
that wasn't built for its power.

The Worst Part of Kissing

BY SAMUEL LEUENBERGER

The worst part of kissing her was when I found a cake in her ear and afterward I showed it to her, and she said, What's this? and I said, I found a cake in your ear.

At first I thought she might destroy the cake or throw it out or have it hauled away where the cake might be frozen at a lab or buried in a field; but instead she laughed and carried the cake into the kitchen where she baked it in the oven until the cake was dead.

I stuck around to make sure she was alright, and she plated each of us a slice, and although I was not hungry and the cake was dead—and bleeding—I ate every bite, for she said, God is watching from a window shining in my heart.

That night, in the shower, I found a wedding cake in my ear.

I found a little wax bride and a little wax groom, shod in frosting.

The bride said her wedding dress was made from a parachute the groom had plundered from a German airplane hangar in Normandy. The groom was wearing a bolo tie.

The bride said the secret of a happy marriage is wrenching all preverbal memories out of your body and scattering them haphazardly among the slipped ruins of a town guarded by the photographed spirits of gods and generals.

Is that true? I said, referencing the groom.

I can't hear you, the groom said. I have a cake in my ear.



MANIT CHAOTRAGOONGIT



NICK ROMEO

Weekend Visits

BY LEWIS CRAWFORD

Carrying a carton of cowboy killers
like a prized pigskin, my granddaddy'd strut
his ass from the counter
of the convenience store to the car:
A '98 Thunderbird, with the clear-coat
flaking off, a dent in the driver's side door
where *Surprise, surprise, a woman
didn't know how to stay in her lane,*
a sun roof that leaked but *a little rain
on your back won't get you deported,*
and a sound system that boomed
the Beastie Boys because,
in case you weren't catching on,
he thought he was

cool

as

fuck

even though he collected quarters,
and spent his nights in his tighty-whities
—stained with coffee, urine,

a little blood—

sitting at the kitchen table, rolling coins,
pinching them so hard,
I could hear the eagles scream.



Venom

BY BILL STAUFFER

Boonsri Srimapan glances at the English word written in red lipstick on the mirror and wipes a mascara brush through her lashes, evening out the little black clumps of polymer. For the last six years she has learned English this way, one word at a time, as she dresses for work each evening.

She fingers the glass vial hanging from her neck. Even the pretty girls—and she, humbly, believes she is one of them—rarely find a foreign husband. Tomorrow she will turn twenty-five. It's 2016, the year of the monkey, and she calculates she has one more year until age siphons away the better prospects. One more year until her mother's pleas and daughter's duty shame her beyond compromise.

"Prerogative." The word chosen randomly from her dictionary. She sounds it slowly, follows the changing shape of her crimson mouth.

At the bar, everyone calls her Lek, *little*. The reason is obvious: she stands five feet tall wearing four inch heels. Most clients don't seem to mind. Some prefer a petite girl, especially the ones who think she's underage. She does her best to maintain this adolescent image, though she always tells the truth if someone asks. She's never seriously considered wasting money on fake braces.

When she finishes her make-up, Lek chooses her red plaid skirt. It rides high so she pulls on a pair of shorts underneath. So clever, how the outfit makes her look youthful and sexy but still decent if a customer wants to play her at billiards. She puts on a simple white sleeveless blouse, straps on her red pumps last. Outside her apartment, she flags a taxi.

Lek looks out the cab's window at columns of red taillights. Almost six

and the hot air floats up from the pavement, wavy and distorted, Bangkok's temperature still stuck in the high nineties. She ignores a call from her mother, not wanting to mix the incessant questions about money and time and obligation with her own stress of running late.

She loves her mother, loves the feeling that warms her body just beneath her skin when her mother says, *Lek, you're a good daughter*. Last month, with her mother's motorbike in the shop, Lek travelled to Phuket with an older German man. He didn't wipe his ass clean and she nearly puked from the smell. After returning to Bangkok she wired twenty thousand baht to her mother and waited for her call. Waited for her mother's words to dissolve any memory of the shit-stained man from Germany.

The taxi lets her out at the entrance to Soi Cowboy. Steam wafts from the noodle cart that sets up every night outside Country Road Bar. Scents of cilantro and lime, chili pepper and garlic hollow out the emptiness in her stomach. She hesitates in front of the cart but decides against a bowl when she spies Mama San standing at the edge of the bar's patio, watching her over the top of those old lady glasses.

Lek stuffs her bag in her locker, slides her phone in the waistband of her skirt, and goes to find her friend Kita. They're an unlikely match; Kita comes from Surat Thani, and Lek's mother warned her to beware of southern people, yet they became close.

Kita and Lek are different in another way. Lek finds it hard to go with a customer she doesn't like or find attractive; she's putting her faith in finding a man to marry. Hopefully a man from America or England. Better than a Thai man with no money. Kita has given up on finding anyone. Instead, she sometimes goes with two or three customers a night. Kita has built her mother and father a beautiful teak house on the banks of the Tapi River. Her father no longer fishes and her mother does laundry in a Japanese washing machine.

Kita is upstairs with a short-time customer so Lek walks outside to the patio. The sun has set behind the alley; charcoal and copper layer the sky. Against this background the neon signs pop like foiled candy. Lek feels

happy her birthday isn't today, that tonight she is just another bar girl in Bangkok.

Mama San comes up beside her, nudges her toward a customer sitting alone at one of the patio bar tables. His face is fleshy, but also handsome and youthful, safe and pleasant looking. He pretends to scroll through his phone, but Lek can see him looking at her out of the corner of his eye. She walks over.

"Hi," she says to him.

"Hello."

His English is clear but not American. He keeps staring into his phone. A thin film of sweat coats his forehead.

"You want to be alone?" she asks.

"You can sit." He says this without looking up.

She sits across from him, locks her heels over the lower rung of the stool. He's still looking at his phone. Sweat now covers his entire face. His beer is empty but she doesn't ask if he wants another, as she is supposed to do. Instead, she takes a pink tissue from its holder and wipes his forehead.

"Thank you," he says. "This heat."

"Where are you from?"

"Ireland."

He still won't look at her.

"It's cold there?" Lek already knows this. Ireland is close to England, though not as rich.

"Well. Compared to here, yeah."

For the first time he looks her in the eye. His eyes are tired and blue. "You don't have to sit with me," he says again.

His words surprise her. She can't think of what to say so she takes another tissue and wipes his forehead and the side of his face. Bits of pink tissue moisten and stick to his late day stubble.

Lek covers her mouth and smiles. "I'm sorry." She tries to pick the pieces out with her nails. "I'm sorry," she says again.

"It's okay," he says.

“What’s your name?”

“Robert. Robby. Look, you really don’t have to sit with me.”

“I’m Lek.” She reaches her hand across the table. Robby’s hand engulfs hers. It is warm and sweaty and soft.

“Hi Lek. You don’t…”

“Why wouldn’t I want to sit with you, Robby?” She wipes her hand on her skirt.

Robby frowns, then erects his posture, bites over his lower lip so tight his canines hang out of his mouth like fangs.

She waits.

Robby pushes his hands against the table, his stool scrapes along the concrete patio. He stands up and walks over to her. His body, massive in all ways, betrays his handsome face. His breasts sag like those of an old man, his stomach could swallow two or three of her.

“You see, there’s this.” Robby waves his hands over his body.

The fat on his arms jiggles like a dish of Mizu Yokan. His body rolls and crashes with the slightest shift in his stance. She pictures Robby towering over the men in her village, plucking sparrows from the sky, feeding them live into his mouth, shitting dung like an elephant.

“It’s okay. There’s always the older girls or the uglier ones.” There’s an edge to his voice. It’s more knowing than spiteful, as if he’s ridiculing not himself but something ubiquitous and universal.

He smiles and shrugs, takes a step toward her.

His body emanates a sweet, musty smell. She imagines burrowing into him, covering herself with the soft, pliable folds of his skin. Once settled she’d lick the salt from his fat, bite into his flesh, peek out at his face wincing in pain. Robby would pull her closer, until she disappeared inside of him.

“Sit down, Robby. Please sit back down,” she says, as if out of breath.

Robby returns to his stool.

“Do you want another beer?” Lek holds up his empty glass.

“Yes,” he says.

She doesn’t ask him to buy her a lady drink, hopes Mama San isn’t

watching. Inside, she waits for Robby’s beer. Kita has returned. She nudges Lek with the tip of her pool cue.

“Now you have a thing for fat guys?” Kita’s braces sparkle in the red light.

“I know. But his face is handsome. And he’s shy. I like shy.” Lek brushes blue dust from her forearm.

“He’d kill you if he fucked you on top.” Kita laughs again.

“Who says he’d be on top?”

Robby’s staying at the Sheraton Grand on Sukhumvit, a five star luxury hotel. It’s a block’s walk from Soi Cowboy. Regardless, he insists on taking a taxi. Lek hesitates before following him into the back of the cab. What if he’s lying about the hotel, about being able to pay her? Five minutes later the car pulls into the hotel’s circular drive and Lek’s body exhales.

Robby has a large two-room suite on the twenty-eighth floor. When he asks her if she wants anything from the minibar, she decides he must not be a cheap man.

Lek is licking peanut skin from her fingers when Robby emerges from the bathroom dressed in one of the hotel’s soft cotton robes. It looks like a child’s. It’s tied over his belly like a girl’s top knot. His legs emerge like trunks of a baobab tree. She has worn one of these robes before and recalls how the belt went around her waist twice and still there was slack. She wonders if it could even be the same robe, washed and bleached in the hotel’s industrial washing machines many times since.

“The robes are small, you know?”

Lek realizes her smile is too pronounced, reins it in, and tilts her head in admiration for his courage. She turns out the bed lamp but leaves the bathroom light on, the door ajar. She wants some light, as if complete darkness would suck away the truth of this moment.

Robby moves his hands around her body hesitantly, yet un-clumsily. She is happy when his hands pass, uninterested, over the glass ampoule that bounces cool and heavy between her breasts. She doesn’t want to have to swat his hand away, as she has done with so many other customers. She

doesn't want to be thinking about it at all, the oddest of gifts from her mother, the delicate glass vial filled to three quarters, piss-like with the venom that killed her father.

When they finish, sweat shimmers on Robby's chest, pools in the crevice between his breasts. Lek runs her hand over his skin, spreading and dissipating the puddles of perspiration. She presses her other hand over her own chest like a stethoscope, listening to it heave like a heart attack.

Robby reaches for his wallet.

"You want me to go now?" she asks.

"I...I just thought...well...you don't then?"

"I'd like to stay, Robby. It would be nice if I could stay the night."

She backs her body into the den of his mass and falls asleep.

They have sex once more, in the early morning, as white sunlight slices through the dark curtains. At nine-thirty the hotel phone wakes them. Robby listens and grunts a sleepy reply.

"Who?" She tastes the staleness in her own breath, feels comfortable and safe in Robby's massive embrace.

"Hotel. Letting me know the buffet closes in forty minutes. Want to eat?"

Lek wants to sleep but she is hungry.

"Okay," she says.

Lek's friends often joke—where does all the food go? With Robby she sees where all the food goes, yet she is still amazed at how he can finish off so many plates: massaman curry with rice and a few slices of dahl puri, an omelet stuffed with ham, cheese, and scallions, two croissants, one chocolate and one plain, and a bowl of fruit. He also drinks two cups of espresso, heavy with cream.

One of the waiters gives Robby a ten-minute warning that the buffet will be closing. He rises from his chair and Lek wonders how he will eat another plate. Robby returns with only a small banana.

"For later." He smiles and reaches out his massive paw, pulls her up from her chair.

In his room he hands her an envelope. It's a nice gesture, putting the money in an envelope. Last week a man threw the money at her. He was incredibly handsome with slivers of silver in his hair. He told her she was the girl of his dreams, bought her a new dress just because she said she liked it. In the morning he patted his ripped abs incessantly. He said Lek needed to leave so he could get to the gym. The money wasn't right for an overnight stay; she looked at her toes when she said this. *Fuck if you didn't enjoy it.* He stood over her talking like this, then tossed a thousand baht at her. It still wasn't enough, but she said nothing more, just fell to her knees to grab the money before the King's face touched the floor.

She folds the envelope and puts it in her purse.

"You're not going to open it?"

"Later," she says.

"But I need to know. If it's enough."

Lek slices a nail through the back of the envelope, counts out fifteen thousand baht, three times her normal overnight fee.

Robby raises his eyes and smiles.

"Because I know about the duty girls like you have," he says. "To take care of your mother and father."

"Ka." She fights an urge to punch him in the stomach.

Instead, she decides his ignorance is well-meaning and tells him, "It's enough, Robby. Khapkhun Ka." She stands and waiis him.

She pictures him taking her to one of the beaches. Koh Samui or Phuket, better than Koh Samet where there are too many Thais who might stare openly at them, at the dichotomy of their physicality. She's surprised by a sudden desire to fuck Robby at night on a blanket with the surf rolling close to their feet.

"When do you go back to Ireland?"

"Day after tomorrow."

Hearing this, Lek struggles to breathe. She hates this part of the job. Hates feeling close to someone and then having it ripped away so quickly until there is nothing but silence and dead air. It's this the abolitionist

church ladies don't understand. The women who visit the bar once a month speak soft and kind, smell funny, and leave cards with clever sayings and their local number. Lek has tried to tell them about the hollow feeling when a man she likes leaves and disappears back into the real world, as if she were just a plaything, a plastic mold, a toy made in China. This feeling of something and then nothing. The grey woman who visits again and again, wears a tarnished cross that pulls her head forward, whispers so close lipstick courses her wrinkled mouth, *it's not love when a man pays you for it*. Lek doesn't want to be rude so she keeps it to herself: *what else but love could have the power to ferment such loneliness?*

She doesn't tell Robby that today is her birthday. She doesn't want to give him another reason to be nice to her. Still, she needs the money and they spend the next two days together, separated only when he has to attend a short business meeting related to his family's import clothing business. She goes home to grab a change of clothes, tries to take a nap but can't stand the silence of her apartment and returns to Robby's hotel room to wait for him. On his last day she accompanies him to the airport.

Lek ignores the stares and reaches up to his bent body to kiss him goodbye.

"Will you wait for me?" he asks.

"Wait? What do you mean wait?"

"I'll come back next month."

She has heard this many times before.

"I'll be here if you come back."

"Not if. When. Next month. I don't want you to go with anyone else. Please."

"I have expenses. Rent. My mother."

"I will send you money."

This she's heard before, too. Yet she believes him.

"Will you? Wait? And not go with any other guys?"

"Yes, Robby."

Robby keeps true to his promise and sends her money, sixty thousand

baht, twice what she earns in a typical month. She continues to work at the bar but doesn't go with any customers. It's too soon, too risky to cut ties with her job. She knows men are fickle and Robby's money could slow to a trickle, or to zero.

Robby asks her to Skype him when she gets home each night.

"I just want to know you're safe," he says.

One night she's so tired after her shower she falls asleep, her phone cradled in her hand.

"Were you with someone last night?" His face searches behind her small profile on the screen.

"I was alone, Robby. Just tired," she says. "When are you coming back?"

When she greets Robby at the airport, he is more handsome than she remembers. In his hotel room, he hangs up his one suit and asks her if she wants to go eat. Instead she pushes him to the bed. Later they shower, stop by Country Road Bar to pay her bar fine, and go to Oskars on Soi Eleven for oysters and steak.

Robby is telling Lek about the rapid growth of his family's import business. She understands some of what he says as she looks at the one uneaten oyster, glistening under the buttery light. The twenty-three empty shells give off a smell of low tide. If he asks me to go to the beach with him, I would want to go, she thinks. It wouldn't be a compromise. It's an unsettling feeling, wanting something that also serves her filial obligation.

Instead of this, Robby wipes his mouth with a white cloth napkin, asks her, "So were you good while I was gone?"

"Good?" She knows what he means but good means something different for her.

"Faithful." Robby folds his napkin in half, and half again.

"I waited for you, Robby."

"Because you can tell me, if something happened. If you were with someone. I know..."

"I was good, Robby."

“I know girls like you...well a lot of guys would want to...and it's what you're used to here. I can...If the money's not enough...”

“Can we go to the beach, Robby?”

“I could...well...sure.”

Lek lifts the last oyster from the plate, tips it into her mouth, and licks the salty brine from her lips.

The next day Robby pays five thousand baht to the bar for her time away from work. For ten days they act like boyfriend and girlfriend on vacation—riding elephants in Chiang Mai, driving ATVs in Chiang Rai, and snorkeling the reefs off Koh Samui. When Robby agrees to try surfing in Phuket she decides she could like him at least as much as some of the other men she has liked, those few she still remembers, nice men who wanted more than short time and made promises they couldn't keep.

Lek can't stand to be alone in her apartment days after his return to Ireland.

For business reasons Robby delays his third trip and Lek becomes so melancholy that she calls in sick twice. For missing work, Mama San fines her one thousand baht. Because she had expected Robby this week, she uses her last five hundred and borrows the rest from Kita to pay for her stupid mistake.

At home she calls Robby to ask for his help.

“Whatever you do, don't go with any customers,” he says.

“You think I'm bad like that?” Lek says.

“No. But it's what you're used to, isn't it? When you have no money.”

“Can you help me? Or not?” She says.

“On one condition—you leave the bar,” he says.

“You want me to leave my job?” She's not surprised by his ultimatum.

“Don't you want to? I mean, don't all the girls want to leave? If they could?”

“Yes. Of course. Nobody wants to work at the bar.” Actually, the thought of leaving is unsettling but she doesn't say this to Robby.

Instead she asks, “Leave and do what?”

“I don't know. Work at the mall or something? In an office?”

“It's not easy. I never finished high-school,” she says.

“What can you do?”

“You mean ...?” She remembers a word from her mirror. “Like talent? What talent do I do?”

“Yeah. What are your talents?”

She can't recall anyone asking her this question before. She is twenty-five and believes her life has been framed not in terms of what she can do but what she is willing to do.

“I speak English well. Mama San always asks me for help when one of the girls needs help speaking with a customer.”

“Everyone speaks English good these days.” Robby says.

“But it's useful here. Maybe I could do a translation business.”

“What you do is your prerogative, but...sorry...what I mean is...”

“I know what you mean,” she says.

“What else can you do?” asks Robby.

“I can make great som tam. Everyone says I should open a cart.”

“Som Tam?”

“Papaya salad,” she says.

“Well that's something. That's a start,” Robby says.

“I'd need some money. To get started.”

“How much?”

There is the cart, the food. She will need a larger mortar and pestle; the one in her apartment is too small. And bowls and utensils. She multiplies and adds numbers in her head.

“Twenty-five thousand baht,” she claps her hands.

“It's a lot of money to make a few salads.”

Lek uses Robby's money to purchase a used cart and the supplies she will need. For a share of the profits, Mama San let's her set up outside Country Road Bar.

All night Lek is busy filling orders. Her little fingers grip the pestle and

pound, pound, pound first the garlic and chilies, then the palm sugar, fish sauce, and lime until the dressing dissolves, releases into the air, spicy and sweet. Roasted peanuts, tomatoes, and shredded papaya, she pounds and twists the pestle.

She moves so quickly the glass vial repeatedly works its way out from under her shirt so she has to stop and tuck it back under her collar. She thinks about removing it but likes how it feels against her skin.

The next morning Lek wakes early, not even ten yet. She can barely straighten her right arm which makes her laugh out loud. Eight thousand baht makes her laugh again and she wonders why she didn't do this before; before there were choices.

Lek uses most of her money to buy more supplies. The following week business steadies but doesn't slow. She ties a cotton scarf around her head to keep her hair back and to prevent the sweat from clouding her eyes.

When she gets home she calls Robby.

"When are you coming back?"

"Working on it."

"I miss you, ka." She hasn't told him how well her business is doing and he hasn't asked, except to confirm she's home alone each night. She's excited to show him when he comes back.

"Me, too," he says.

Another week and her orders are still strong. Word has spread up and down the alley. Her fingers are calloused and she wonders amusingly why both her arms are lean and strong. Why not just her right, the one doing all the work? She can't believe how much energy she has.

To save money she purchases a higher volume of food, knowing she will go through it quickly. Maybe she will have to hire someone to help her, one of those immigrant girls from Myanmar or Laos. With the holiday coming the alley throngs with tourists which seems to make the bar girls less stingy with their money.

While Mama San waits for a free plate she points out that Songkran

starts in a few days. Lek knew this but her mistake punches her in the gut. No carts can be on the soi for the water festival. Too many people spraying water from hoses and dumping buckets on one another. For the first time in her life she is not happy about the holiday.

Mama San looks at her. "Aren't you ready for a rest? You've been sweating over your cart non-stop for two weeks."

On the first day of Songkran, Lek tries setting up the cart outside her apartment but she makes only two plates. Everyone is off "playing water," celebrating the holiday. She stuffs as much as she can in her apartment's half fridge. Most sits on the cart. She showers and takes a taxi to Country Road Bar.

Mama San greets her on the bar's patio.

"Happy Songkran," Lek waiis Mama San. "Have you seen Kita?"

"Gone with customer. What brings you here?"

"Just bored at home." How can she save her business? Without being unfaithful to Robby?

"Bored, na?" Mama San tilts her head, inserts her forefinger and thumb into her mouth, and yanks out her top row of dentures. Her breath smells like gin and her face is red. She holds them up under the warm light and laughs. In her hand the fake teeth look prehistoric.

"Go home." She reinserts her teeth and walks away.

"Hey." A man she doesn't know reaches a hand around her wrist, pulls her close. So close she smells his sour, expensive cologne.

"Sit with me a while, eh?" he says and sips from his bourbon.

His biceps and chest push against the fabric of his black T-shirt.

"Here..." Still holding her, he squeezes his other hand into the front pocket of his jeans, pulls out two thousand baht. "Just sit with me and then we can decide." He sets his drink on top of the bills and Lek is bothered by the condensation spreading toward the King's face.

They take a motorcycle tuk tuk instead of a taxi because the man's hotel is on soi seven, which is always so crowded with tourists and bar girls.

In bed he says, "You're so fucking sexy."

She doesn't reply.

He cups the necklace in his hand. "What's in it?"

She doesn't want him to speak so she leans forward and shuts off the light.

The alarm clock shimmies off the glass. "Looks like it could be whiskey."

Lek closes her eyes.

But the man keeps talking, talking, talking.

Lek pulls the necklace over her head, bites out the cork, pries the man's mouth open, and pours in a few drops.

"Nasty...what the fuck..?"

Lek recorks it, tosses the vial into the darkness.

When he finishes, Lek rolls on to her back and stares at the grey ceiling. She waits for the man to fall asleep then dresses and leaves without getting paid.

It's after three in the morning when she returns to her apartment. She needs a few minutes to assemble her thoughts. Robby is a good man who understands her needs, knows that Lek is like all the other girls who grew out of a singular path to feeling whole. She is nothing unless what she decides is good for her mother. Yet, for Lek, there has always been a duty higher than filial obligation. She carries the burden of repaying her mother for stopping her father—another father doing what fathers aren't supposed to do with daughters. Every decision must consider this: her mother deciding that for Lek to live, her father could not.

She hopes Robby is too busy to answer her call.

"Hello? Lek! I've got good news!"

"I messed up, Robby. I'm so stupid. Can you help me?"

"Wait. What?" his voice softens.

She tells him about the cart, neither embellishing her initial success, nor glossing over her big mistake.

"Well," Robby says.

"Can you help, ka? Just a little more?"

"No need."

"No need? I don't understand, ka."

"That's my good news! I'm coming next week and will be staying for a while. At least a month."

"Good news," she agrees.

"You don't need to work anymore. It was never about the money."

It's always about the money.

"So forget the cart," he says.

"Forget the cart. Ka."

It's in the shower, after her call with Robby, she senses nothing that feels like something. Lukewarm water pings off her shower cap. She doesn't remember his room number or floor, never bothered to learn the man's name. Still she leans back, then forward, a silly attempt to feel its touch, to make the necklace reappear around her neck.

Lek towels dry and slips into bed.

The next day the papayas leak their insides onto the ground and the tomatoes collapse in on themselves. Even the garlic begins to mold. The roasted peanuts sweat.

She pushes the cart into the corner, behind the outdoor laundry machines. Her arms are too weak to lift the mortar out from its opening so she leaves it there, imagines it filling with rainwater. She carries the rest of the supplies to her room, balances what will fit on the small table, the rest on the floor. Lek sits on her bed staring at all of it: the pestle, butcher knife and block, and pile of blue plastic plates. She considers dialing Robby again but decides against it.

Her room darkens with time. The supplies still sit where she left them, colorless shapes. Lek rolls off her bed, carries everything from the table and floor, stuffs it all in her armoire, out of sight behind her bar clothes and high heel shoes. She closes the door and sits back down to wait for Robby.



GUILHERME BERGAMINI

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Elizabeth Adair received her B.A. in English from the University of Alabama in 2016. Currently, she serves as the Managing Editor of the *McNeese Review* and organizes MSU's graduate reading series. She is the first place recipient of the 2019 Joy Scantlebury Poetry Prize, and her poems have been selected as finalists for *Jabberwock Review's* 2019 Nancy D. Hargrove Editors' Prize in Poetry and F(r)iction's Winter 2018 Poetry Contest, judged by Kwame Dawes. She currently lives in Lake Charles, LA with her dog Rocky.

Reporter, photographer, and visual artist, **Guilherme Bergamini** is Brazilian and graduated in Journalism. For more than two decades, he has developed projects with photography and the various narrative possibilities that art offers. The artist's works dialogue between memory and social political criticism. He believes in photography as the aesthetic potential and transforming agent of society. Awarded in national and international competitions, Guilherme Bergamini participated in collective exhibitions in 30 countries.

Jerome Berglund graduated summa cum laude from the cinema-television production program at the University of Southern California, and has spent much of his career working in television and photography. He has had pictures published and awarded in local papers, and last year staged an exhibition in the Twin Cities area which included a residency of several months at a local community center. The most recent show featuring his fine art photography, at the Pause Gallery in New York, opened in early December.

Berglund has explored a variety of themes figuratively, following a principle of fatalistic discovery within the chaos of natural elements spiraling through his daily experience and environment to seek out and construct—via a scavenger hunt of sorts—a series of allegorical tableaux centered upon subjects of addiction, recovery, alcoholism, mental illness, depression, anxiety, alienation, loss, heartbreak, gentrification, corruption, hope, and acceptance.

Manit Chaotragoongit was born September 30, 1983 in Bangkok, Thailand. He got photography awards from Globalhunt foundation, India and Burggrun institute, USA. Photography is his passion. Streets and alleys are the place there he journeys to take his photos. He presents artwork from his inspiration.

Hyewon Cho is a sophomore attending Korean International School in Seoul, South Korea. When she is not making artwork, her hobbies include walking her two-year-old collie and experimenting with old film cameras. She is currently building a portfolio for university.

A Georgia native, **Lewis Crawford** holds a BA in creative writing from Young Harris College and is currently living in Raleigh, North Carolina where he's pursuing an MFA in poetry at NC State. His work has appeared and is forthcoming in *Waccamaw* and *Naugatuck River Review*.

Renee Evans earned an MFA from Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. Her work has appeared in *Fogged Clarity*, *Weave Magazine*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and others. She lives and works in Auburn, Alabama.

Craig Finlay is a poet and librarian living in South Bend, Indiana. His poems have appeared in numerous publications, most recently in *COAST|noCOAST*, *Obra/Artifact*, *Seven Circle Press*, *mutiny! magazine* and *Levee Magazine*. His first book, *The Very Small Mammoths of Wrangel Island*, will be released in 2020 by Urban Farmhouse Press.

Jeff Hersch provides analog collages for the modern being. Like his thoughts, these pieces are often constructed in short, frantic spurts of energy, with bursts of self-doubt, though calm and subtle. Also like his thoughts, these pieces represent everyday observations and conclusions about the vast world that erratically suffocates us, with little time for a quick escape or chance to relax, as we are currently inhabiting an advanced state of infinite stimulus. His works lend themselves to your own interpretation of meaning – if any – but should also serve as inspiration and demonstrate the simple notion that you too can and should create something/anything on a regular basis. When he's not hunched over his desk cutting and gluing clippings, Hersch finds the time to play in bands and volunteer as the executive director Flemington DIY, a non-profit community art space in the town he grew up in.

Jacquelin Kai is a writer, artist, and photographer living in Windermere, FL. Currently, she is the host of a weekly podcast called Read-ish on Anchor.fm, an Online Content Creator for Jacquelin-kai.com and a full-time Creative Writing student in the Bachelor of Arts program at Full Sail University. In addition, she has earned two Bachelor of Arts degrees in Communications at the University of Central Fl along with minors in Graphic Design and Film. You can connect with Ms. Kai through her website.

Sam Leuenberger's fiction and poetry has appeared in *The Spectacle*, *The Collagist*, *Cutbank*, *Timber*, *The Gravity of the Thing*, *Fourth & Sycamore*, *Every Pigeon!* and *Glint*. His short story "Puzzle" was nominated for the Best of the Net 2017.

Brian McCarty received the Howard and Helen Bahr Award for creative writing at the University of Southern Mississippi and the Graduate Creative Writing Award at Kansas State University. His poems, which are generally surreal with satirical undertones, have been published in *Lunch Ticket*, *Palaver*, and others. He currently resides in Carterville, IL, and is a PhD candidate at the University of Southern Illinois. When he's not writing or hitting the books, he enjoys hiking the local national forest with his wife, toddler daughter, and lovable puppy, Mr. Winston.

Maria McLeod writes and publishes poetry, fiction, and monologues. Honors include three Pushcart Prize nominations, the Indiana Review Poetry Prize, and the Robert J. DeMott Short Prose Prize. She's been published in literary journals such as *Puerto Del Sol*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Harpoon Review*, *Critical Quarterly*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and others.

McLeod is a professor of journalism for Western Washington University. Originally from the Detroit area, she currently resides in Bellingham, Washington. She earned her MFA in poetry from the University of Pittsburgh.

Michael Milligan has worked as a construction laborer, migrant fruit and grape picker, homestead farmer and graphic arts production manager. Because his parents would not let him play drums he tortured them with stringed instruments instead and has now been playing guitar for 50+ years. He took his MFA in Creative Writing at Bennington College, thereby joining the teeming mass of writers with degrees of dubious cachet. He was co-founder of Poetry Oasis in Worcester MA and was co-editor of *Diner*. His book reviews, fiction and poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *The New Orleans Review*, *The Valparaiso Review*, *Chaffin Journal*, and others.

Jaron Newton is a social surrealist painter based in NYC. His interest lies in imagery that portrays narratives that challenge and shed light on white supremacy and its aftereffect in the 21st Century. He also is very keen on displaying his narratives in a spacious environment. This not only an interest of his but a rebellion against the current state of art in which he feels the mass majority lack true dimension of space and are in fact FLAT not by design but by lack of true deliberate skill.

Danielle O'Hanlon is a visual artist specializing in acrylic on canvas and based out of the Monadnock Region. She draws inspiration primarily from Edvard Munch and Jackson Pollock while creating her own techniques, experimenting with different compositions and styles. Currently she is big into abstract but has also done many landscapes and still lifes.

Victoria Pantalion an emerging writer, having published work in her Sam Houston State University's literary journal, *The Beacon*. She is a writer and recent graduate of SHSU's English program. This collection, *Grief-House*, focuses on the death of her close friend, David.

William Pedlow is a poet, novelist, and Park Avenue doorman. He writes poems in his head while operating an extravagant 100 year-old Otis elevator. His work has been featured in *Cathexis Northwest Press* and *Prometheus Dreaming*.

Dacia Price studies creative writing at the University of Washington in Seattle. Her short stories and creative nonfiction can be found in *Pacifica Literary Review*, *Storm Cellar Quarterly*, *Into the Void*, *Chaleur Magazine*, and *New Limestone Review*. She loves craft beer, mountain hiking, her single speed bicycle and used books of any kind.

Cleo Rohn is a Vermont-born, Seattle-based poet and teacher. She is fascinated by the relationship between identity and location, and by the process of navigating and redefining the self in unfamiliar places. Much of her work deals with sense of place, belonging, and healing. Her poems have been published in the University of Vermont's *Water Tower* magazine, *Vantage Point*, and *Dryland Lit*.

Nick Romeo is a multidisciplinary artist, musician and writer. His writings have been published in *Panoplyzine*, *Rune*, *Degenerate Literature*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Basement Outpost*, and others. Nick lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his wife and cat, Megatron. Poet's Haven press has recently published his first chapbook, entitled *The Insolent Somnambulist*.

Julia Rubin is a writer and poet living in Rhode Island. Her work has been published in *Bust Magazine*, *Hello Giggles*, *The Collapsar*, *Typo Magazine*, and *Mortar Magazine*.

Cliff Saunders is the author of several poetry chapbooks, including *Mapping the Asphalt Meadows* (Slipstream Publications) and *This Candescent World* (Runaway Spoon Press). His poems have appeared recently in *Atlanta Review*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *The Aurorean*, *Pinyon*, *San Pedro River Review*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Dream Noir*, and *Neon Garden*.

Katherine Sinback's work has appeared in *The Rumpus*, *Hobart*, *Gravel*, *Nailed Magazine*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, and *Oyster River Pages*, among other publications. Born and raised in Virginia, Katherine lives in Portland, Oregon with her family. She blogs at ktcrud.blogspot.com and can be found on Twitter @kt_sinback.

Ryan Skaryd holds an MFA from the University of Central Florida in Orlando. His chapbook *bottle rockets* was published last year from ZED Press.

Bill Stauffer recently received his MFA at the University of Southern Maine. His work has appeared in *Levitate Magazine*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Stonecoast Review*, and *The Press Herald*. Bill resides in Portland, Maine.

Junpei Tarashi is currently a sophomore undergrad at Johns Hopkins University. They published their very first novel, *And All That Was Well*, in Farsi in 2012. Since their immigration to the U.S. six years ago, they have often strived to improve their writing as a method of exploring their various identities.

Steven Tutino is a writer, poet, painter and personal trainer. He is currently a graduate student at Concordia University in the process of completing an M.A. in Theological Studies. He also works with with students with disabilities at the university, taking notes for them in classes ranging from a wide array of subjects. His poetry has appeared in Concordia University's *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality*, *The Paragon Journal*, *Halcyon Days*, *Perspectives Magazine* and *Founder's Favourites*. His artwork has appeared in *The Paragon Journal*, *The Minetta Review*, *TreeHouse Arts* and *Montréal Writes* and is set to appear in *The Indianapolis Review* and *Bishop Street: A Theology Journal for Graduate Students*. Steven currently resides in Montréal, Quebec.

KJ Williams is an abstract expressionist. She has studied art at Newbury College and The Art Institute of Boston before moving to New Hampshire. Through her work, KJ has expressed her physical pain from an accident in 1993 to the depression and frustration of trying to work

while in pain. She has been compared to Frida Kahlo in that respect. In the past few years, her paintings have leaned more towards abstract representation of her thoughts, causes, and passions. 'My work represents my life. It's who I am. It's my passion. If I could not express myself through my art, I would not exist.' Her paintings, and drawings range from animals and people to abstract and self portraits. A piece can be dream orientated or a cause that she feels passionate about. Her strong use of earth tone colors capture a somewhat dark feel. She has sold many of her works. She is one of the artists featured in The Pain Exhibit. Her work can also be seen at Deviant Art, and Artmajeur.

Rain Wright received her BA, MA, and Ph.D. in English with a focus in creative writing from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She currently teaches writing at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Rain has been published in *Hawai'i Review*, *Mud Season Review*, *Connotations Press: An Online Artifact*, *Madras Magazine*, *Summit Magazine*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Entropy Magazine*, and *The Pinch Journal*. She won the 2014 University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Biography Prize for her work *A Way With Water*. Rain is obsessed with the ocean. She feels it cures everything.

Karl Zuehlke is an artist, writer, and translator. His visual art has recently appeared in *The Penn Review*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Cream City Review*, *Tint*, *Camas*, and *New Plains Review*.



HYEWON CHO