

AFTER HAPPY HOUR

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SUMMER 2022 EDITORS AND READERS

ELIZABETH ABELING
NATHAN KUKULSKI
SHAWN MADDEY
DANIEL PARME
JASON PECK
JESS SIMMS
BRENDAN SULLIVAN

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COVER ART BY ANTHONY AFAIRO NZE
LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY JESS SIMMS

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FOREWORD

Hello, friends, and welcome to the latest issue!

I'm not gonna lie about it—this one's a bit dark. Beautifully written and well-conceived works abound, but, yeah, dark.

I suppose that makes sense, given what we've all been going through the last few years. In fact, I went back and re-read the forwards from our last handful of issues, trying to find some inspiration and amp myself up to amp you up about what you'll find in these pages.

I'm not 100% sure I should have done that. Each of those previous forwards mentioned at least one horrific national or global event, at least one nightmare we've been collectively forced to endure, to either accept or rage about, to either drive us apart or bring us together.

And these nightmares are ongoing. Since our last issue: they've overturned Roe v. Wade; there have been multiple mass shootings almost daily; kids are still locked in cages at the border; Covid is still never leaving, and now monkeypox has entered the fray, etc. etc. These events have impacted, and will continue to impact, the collective consciousness, and I don't think we'll be fully aware of the consequences for a very, very long time.

One thing I did notice about the pieces in this issue, however, is that no matter how grand the scale of all this madness, no matter how global the impact, each of us is affected in our own deeply personal way.

I'm choosing to take heart in that. These are stories and poems written by folks who have been through the same bullshit the rest of us have. Stories of isolation and fear. Of the need to feel connected to the whole, even as the whole seems to be rotting away.

It's a lot to process, this current reality, particularly on one's own. What these writers and artists have given me is a sense of connection, of unity through difference of experience.

So yeah, this issue's a little dark. But that's okay. There's a certain comfort in knowing I'm not facing the dark alone, and I hope these works bring you that same little bit of light.

Take care, fellow humans, and fight the fights you need to.

Daniel Parme
Fiction Editor

Prayers

BY KATRINA KAYE

You say you have some prayers to teach me.
Prayers that could sooth you to sleep
or shake you awake.
Prayers that can raise the dead or let them lie.
Prayers that will keep your hands out of your pockets.

I don't know those prayers.
But I pray scars that poach underarm
bleach and shallow when given time to heal.
I pray lungs take one year to shed
the black they spent seven years collecting.

You know prayers like crickets,
prayers that spark rainbows in the desert,
prayers for sex with strangers
and wide-eyed staring dolls whose marble eyes
gleam across dark bedrooms.
Prayers that will keep you from calling out the wrong name
 across the dining room table,
 in the bedroom,
 when he asks for a towel.

Prayers for wild horses
who don't know when to stop their chase.
Prayers for scarecrows and splintered straw.

I pray skin toughens under desert sun;
the sand in my chest scrubs me clean,
scours the ill, the wicked,
the ugly I held tightly,
until it shines.

You know prayers that cast black magic,
that knock out front teeth
and rebuild shattered mirrors.

I pray my body is in a state of redemption.

I pray to resist the temptation
of a Thursday night in the back
of your car and one drink too many.
Do not allow me to regress into sickness.
Lead me not to deteriorate to the
fragile I once was.

Unable to move I crouch low and hold tight
to wooden beads that coddle the back of my throat
cutting off the circulation to hands
grasped tight in prayers for daylight,
prayers for the flutter of wings,
prayers for morning song.

FIX ME



SHANNON KERNAGHAN

The Girl Who Finds a Moss So Soft You Can Sleep in It

BY COURI JOHNSON

A wayward daughter finds herself in the woods one day where she encounters something strange.

This daughter is older than she feels she ought to be. She's collected many weights. On her wrists and her ankles and even her neck and her waist, padlocks hang and beat against her in time with her steps.

She isn't the kind to venture far from others, in fact she doesn't remember leaving home, but still she finds herself in the woods, one day, with something very strange.

On the padlocks there are words carved into the metal. On her wrist one says Home. On her ankle one says Please. The one around her neck says Root. There are names and dates. She even has one around her finger so small and so tight it cuts into her skin to sparkle like a ring, and above it the whole digit is blue and purple and throbbing.

She's going to lose it soon, but what can you do.

Before the woods a man smiled at her at a café and asked her what do you do and she stared into her coffee and she thought, Gosh I hate small talk, and when she looked at his smile she thought Teeth, which is another word on another one of her padlocks.

The something strange is growing on a rock like a blanket. At least it looks like a blanket, its many parts are so small and so tightly woven

together they are indecipherable. But if you look close enough you will see those parts for what they are.

People come and people go from the wayward daughter and she thinks she is like the shore of a very long beach very far away from everything else and each wave of people is taking more of her clean sand away, and leaving her with more wreckage dragged up from the bottom of the sea.

Gosh, she thinks, I am tired, and she sits down on the forest floor not knowing for now that she is resting with something strange.

"Hullo," is what the thing that looks like a blanket says. "How are you?"
And the wayward daughter hates small talk.

It is made of many eyes and many hands and many mouths all budding out of small vines as thin as thread, crisscrossing together and snipping and snapping like the synapses going on inside your very own skull. No two eyes are the same color. No two hands are the same shape. And yet they are together.

"I hate small talk," the wayward daughter says.

The man with the Teeth at the café stops showing them, and the girl plays with a weight around her wrist and tells herself that's good, really, for the best.

"I hate small talk," the wayward daughter says.

And the something strange all together says that everything is small if you look at it the wrong way, and so she must be lonely.

"Eat me and be free," it offers.

Once the wayward daughter had walked into a library. She had been there with a name on the padlock that encircles her entire waist. Every time she eats too much her belly presses into the thick metal bar and aches. She doesn't like eating.

She found a book there with a picture of a woman lying in a pool of water, her hair intertwined with the reeds all around.

The Lady of Shallot, the caption read. And she knew the story. She, in some way, had always known every story.

She knew it was a dangerous thing, a woman looking out her window and wanting more. And yet there she was, in a library, with a name on a date that would become nothing more than a lock.

The wayward daughter looks at the moss, which is something strange, which is something other than moss, and she knows how this story goes.

“I’ve read Stephen King,” she says, smartly. Being smart is the last defense she has, and it is a weak one.

“This isn’t fiction,” says the moss.

“That’s debatable,” she says.

“What is?”

And the girl lays back with a sigh and her arms outstretched and says all of it.

She was a sensitive child, too sensitive by half. Or more. She never could sing sticks and stones may break my bones. She never could lie.

“It’ll kill you,” her mother said. Then her mother died. The girl dug her a grave, and in the earth, found her first padlock.

No, she didn’t always hate small talk. Everything is learned. Everything is taught. She is not much more than a product of experience.

On the forest floor, she thinks, What did I come here for? And knows she came to push a boulder. Something of substance to ache against. But when she closes her eyes and tries to think stone all she can think is Teeth.

On the forest floor, she lies and something strange says:

“You don’t have to debate. You don’t have to argue for love,” it says, and

what a strange thing indeed to think. Can she be muscle and bone without a voice? Can she rest without weight? Is this acceptable?

She sat across, once, from the boy she took to the library, the boy that became the weight around her waist, and they had small-talked and he had smiled. He had shown her all of his Teeth, and so she thought she knew them, and by extension him.

It had been small talk but ended in a bedroom.

It had been small.

It had started so small.

But in the end, she had handed him her ring of keys.

In the woods the girl trails her fingers through the mesh of the moss, and it reaches up tiny fibers that are hands, it reaches up tiny fingers that are vines and looks at her with many eyes that are as small and sparkling as shards of glass, that look all together like a strange glitter, like a smear of stars in the night sky.

Eat me and be free.

More often than not, lashes are what you get in return for love. The wayward daughter knew. She knows almost every story.

The moss has pairs of lips to her ear, more than she can count. Enough to vibrate all the way into her collarbone when they whisper.

“You can write a new story.”

Where does a wayward daughter begin? Usually with leaving, but where had that ever gotten her, other than away?

She eats.

She had handed him her keys, and he had used them as a lash. Everywhere there was no lock, metal bit like Teeth. She had handed him these, hoping he would use them, and he had used them, but not in the way she had hoped.

After she dragged herself through the dirt on her belly and felt dirt in her cuts and dug her fingers into the soil, and dug, as she always did, a new grave. And in that grave, as she always did, she found another new lock.

It clicks into place. It constricts against her skin. And in this way, at least, she knows she exists. Can feel the heaviness of her existence being pulled deeper down into the Earth.

The wayward daughter tastes soil and bitter grass as she comes to on the forest floor. She did not know she was sleeping. She did not feel her body drift. This is something new for her. All too often, always, she is ever aware of her body and its restrictions.

She feels full, and yet, her stomach is unrestrained.

There is nothing strange lying across the rock in the forest. The wayward daughter sees the rock and remembers she had a desire to push one, once. To roll it up a hill. To play out a story of suffering. She supposes she could.

But her arms feel numb and tingly, as if they are waking up after a long hibernation.

You can write a new story.

A woman is a weed that will grow in every direction, a sprawl of green, a wild and unloved thing her mother told her, eyes red rimmed and glassy with coming death. “They will try and prune you. They will pull you out by the roots if they get their hands on you.”

Her mother was always saying she was too sensitive by half, or more.

She makes her way back to the city where she came from. Where most things are concrete and all the grass clipped and managed. From out of the forest and all along the road she leaves a trail of locks. They fall off and clatter to the ground without her notice, without the keys which she long ago stopped carrying. Which she long ago discarded. Knowing that no one would use them, at least not in the way that she hoped.

She had wanted the graves she dug to be gardens. She had wanted

the plots to be something sweet. The ends never come out right for her, the wayward daughter. There were never any seeds, and there was never anything fertile enough to take root in. Only metal clicking shut. Only another weight for her to carry.

There is something miniscule working its way through her blood. There is something miniscule with tiny hands and tiny eyes, yet keen and quick, weaseling into her locks and dropping them like flies.

From underneath her toenails sprout little curls of vines that undo the stitches of her shoes until they fall apart. Each place she sets her bare foot down on the asphalt erupts into green. Moss and leaves and flower buds. It spreads like a fungus behind her. It reburies the locks in growing things.

Some weeds are flowers the girl thought. What is the difference, she had asked her mother.

“The only difference is want,” her mother replied.

“I want to be wanted,” the wayward daughter said. “I want to be a flower.”

“It’ll kill you,” her mother replied.

The daughter wanted her mother. Did her mother know that?

Regardless her mother died, and her daughter planted her, hoping she would grow. Nothing came of it. Or maybe something did. After she left the grave. She never should have wandered away. She knows that now. Some things need help to grow. She will go back.

The city never loved her, and she had tried to love the city. Tried to come to people with her arms out, her hands open, her words seeds dripping from her mouth looking for somewhere to take root, saying love, love, love, but the words returned to her only became weights.

Now as she moves through the city a carpet of green follows her and chokes the buildings, twisting through them and chasing all the people out into the street. Chasing them towards her until she has her own parade marching through the moss.

The moss knew want. It knew what it was to be unwanted. It knew the difference between a weed and a flower. When its many eyes had seen the girl, it had known that she wanted to know. That she was of them. That she would be them. And together, they would grow.

She sees the boy to whom she had given the keys, the boy that had hung around her waist for years, that had been the scars lashed into her skin. He too, is following. And the man from the café. And all the many people she had seen before, who she had gone to, who she had said love to, and who had given her heaviness in return. And she can see now what none of them understand. That there is no difference between a flower and a weed. That they are all together just one growing thing.

She leads them through the city and leaves it a green wreck. She comes to the plot where she had buried her mother. It is a sad thing. A place abandoned. Once there stood a home here, but the home had fallen apart. It was torn down and left nothing but dirt. Dirt, and her mother's corpse.

She will give her mother a garden.

Perhaps the story was all wrong and the Lady of Shallot did not need the man. When she gazed out her window, perhaps it was not him she wanted. Perhaps it was all the green that shocked her eyes after being closed up for so long in so much stone. Perhaps she ended up right where she needed to be, with her hair woven in among the reeds.

The wayward daughter returns home to stand above her mother's corpse. She turns and faces her parade and sees the city draped in a green veil, and all of the people lost and clustered and alone before it. Where will they go? Where are they wanted?

She raises her arms up, and they are draped in moss made of tiny eyes and tiny hands and tiny mouths, all reaching and blinking and longing and growing. Now she can see all the locks the people have that she had never

seen before, so concerned with her own. Now she can undo them all with her clever little many fingers. Now with her many little mouths she can say love loud enough that it cannot be ignored. It will vibrate within their bones.

“Eat me and be free,” she tells them.

In one great wave they come to her, showing their Teeth.

LANDSCAPE



ELIZABETH SCHOONMAKER

From Gravesend with Love

BY GARY SOKOLOW

What did the hum of the air conditioner mean when I was one apartment over, feeling the stickiness of my hands, the tubes almost melted inside the old B&W TV, and what good was a can of beer, a French fry, boric acid for the roaches, when it wasn't my apartment, not my lousy \$52 a month, and what did it matter that I had failed twice out of college, that the words would soon run dry, when Burns & Allen was resurrected, if fuzzy, with the rabbit ears facing east, and why was there vodka in the mornings and a fish swallowed whole, like I was in the old country, fortifying myself against the plague, my rotting teeth, and it was beautiful my wall of postcards—*a man on a ceiling sitting in a chair, another leaping off a thatched roof somewhere in France*—and there I was somewhere at the far edges of Brooklyn, in my little tower, the family of roaches eating, a beer warming, and the one fan blowing the heat this way and then that.



RICHARD HANUS

Łazienki Park

BY CAMILLE CARTER

Years ago,
A man stopped you
To ask for some direction.
In that moment—
In other moments—
The feeling that you owe him something
Flickers, flickers still.
O Polonia.
Pyrrhic flame.

Fucked-up mythologies,
You labored fuel.
Poppy-seed bread you broke
To throw half-hearted in the water.
To feed the geese
You didn't want to touch you.
O Polonia.
Pyrrhic flame.

A story—
The one with the stranger who stopped the girl
And asked for directions. The one where the girl
Had no hesitation—
The girl gave them. She *gave* them.
The pond was full of geese wearing
Fancy feathered-coats.
The breadcrumbs fell like snow.
O Polonia.
Pyrrhic flame.

I'd been living in the city
for some time [O, Polonia]
[Pyrrhic flame]
I had no sense of time, and no direction—
I pointed to the path the breadcrumbs
Made that led into the water.
I reasoned that because that man was lost
Then I must of—at last—been found.
O Polonia.
Pyrrhic flame.

I spent the days in Łazienki Park.
I paid no mind to the time. I had no real sense of direction.
I walked and thought *Find-and-see* and *Forget-me-not* and
lost man and *démodé*
It was raining poppyseeds. No—
It was snowing.
The snow we ate in place of bread.
O Polonia.
All that you gave me
[no direction]
Flickers, flicker still—
A stranger's
Pyrrhic flame.



SUNDAY ABRAHAM

Tamara

BY CAITLIN BRADY

I like to sit on Sinnickson with the windows up, pulled over on the shoulder by the tight curve in the 661 with my cigarettes and Code Red. This is where we came blasting by, five years ago doing something like 70, 80—me and Sharp and Sharp's younger brother, Endicott, who we call Toddy. Toddy was queasy so we pulled over, he's like a cat with his little dry heaves. He gets out or we push him out, he's yakking in the grass shoulders hunched and I was stretching my legs when I saw it, a perfectly good duffel bag in the trash. It said Marlboro Adventure Team in big red letters and I thought yeah, I smoke those.

I picked up the duffel, it kinda smells, and I'm walking back to the car and something is rolling around in there. Someone must've forgot his soccer ball, I think. So I unzip it and there's a woman's head inside. Eyes half-open, no teeth just gums, her blonde hair stuck to the side of her cheek with blood. For a minute I thought it wasn't real. Well, why would it be fake? I dropped it. The bag, I mean. Sharp started shouting let's go and I said call the cops. Toddy still had the spins but Sharp said get in the car dipshit and he did.

Later they found two suitcases with two arms sawed into two parts, two legs in two parts, feet and hands together in a bag, three fingers missing between the two hands, plus the trunk part, or half of it, in the last bag. It was hard to ID her without her teeth, but they found out she was a girl named Ocean who went to the arts college in Forrester and had recently gone missing. DNA tests said yes it was her but there was no answer for why. Why her versus any other girl, or why did he take her head

off and keep it separate? It brought to mind Marie Antoinette and Iraqi terrorists—people and places with nothing to do with us.

After that things kept going as normal. I went to the plant as normal and was sorting through the cullet on the line. Bits and chunks, bits and chunks. Benson was talking about joining the Coast Guard and playing a video of a sea rescue that kept freezing and needing to reload. I wondered if I might find a tooth in the broken glass bits. I pictured light on her lower front teeth, slightly crooked, as she talked into the phone. What they need to identify you is the pulp root, not the obvious outer part. Teeth are what made us omnivores. That's how we got off the ground and stopped slurping mud, which is something I saw on a show about dinosaurs.

Later I met up with Chenelle and her boyfriend Jonah, who looked a lot like me and clearly did not know we were fucking. He hid a double chin with a black beard and wore a baseball cap to cover a small bald spot. He had big arms, was kinda husky; more or less the same build as me. I wondered if she had more versions of us—understudies or alternates, prototypes. They would do her dishes or play ping pong tournaments, before she chained them up again and wished them goodnight. In my head, not in real life, I had several Chenelles, from different nights and times: in the dark of the yellow duplex, getting beers out of the open trunk or the glow of the express checkout lane where I met her. Chenelle to me was several girls rolled into one, but Jonah and me were the same guy, split in two.

I didn't tell her about Tamara, which is what I had started calling the head. Late at night or when I was very tired, she slid from my chest and opened her eyes all the way, as big as they could go. Sometimes, she rested sideways on the couch or on the floor like a doorstep. A couple times on my way to the bathroom I tripped on her hair, but it was just the laces of my work boots. From time to time she hovered by the open closet door. Once, when I went down on Chenelle, I looked up and saw her on the windowsill, grinning and toothless.

I thought it would be a nice change for us to fuck in a tent in the backyard because maybe Tamara wouldn't bother us there. And she didn't. But the

guy who lived in the other side of the duplex sat in the driveway with his headlights on, vaping with the car door open. No one wanted to start shit with him because he was methy. It killed the mood, so we went inside and watched this 4 a.m. show about how bike tires are made. I wanted to do it in the tent again but Chenelle wouldn't. It was winter, she said. It was technically not, but okay, I said.

At one point I was alone in the tent, she'd gone inside, I was resting on my back. I was listening to the woods and night sounds. I wondered at what moment Ocean had become Tamara. At what point that was—did he do it first or was it the last thing, or somewhere in between. I heard a cat yowl on a nearby fence and a far-off car alarm. I wondered how long she had been at Sinnickson when I found her. I stood up to pee in the dark and while peeing, I cried. It's no big deal to become a head, I thought. I tried to say to myself: It's okay. In fact: Good for her.

I was fine with Chenelle still seeing Jonah and keeping up that front, so I don't know why she gave me such a hard time when I asked her to sit in a trashcan, just for a little while. We weren't going to have sex in there, I just wanted to see her in it, in the can, outside. She said she didn't like how "the suggestion" made her feel.

"What suggestion?"

"That I'm garbage."

"That's not what I'm saying."

"So what are you saying?"

"It could turn me on."

"It's bullshit. It smells."

It was late spring and all around the trees were blooming. I pointed this out to her, but she said I was trying to distract from the ask.

On the news I saw a Local Jogger who found a dead fisherman washed up in Tarpon Springs. He was an older guy, beach guy, who jogged there all the time. He thought the body was jetsam. He shook his head, his reflective sunglasses turning purple then pink. I wanted to say: *Tell me more*. Was his shirt pulled up around his neck? Was he curled like a shrimp or bloated

and rigid? Were his arms above his head or down by his sides or straight out, Christ-style? Were his fingers and lips blue? Shoes on? How long did you stay, or did you call 9-1-1 right away? Did you try to take his pulse? What did you do afterwards, back at home?

I didn't follow Ocean's funeral arrangements or any of that. I don't think it would've helped me. Instead, I got into jogging. I would go out in the mornings or late at night, or whenever on the weekends. You can run along the side of Sinnickson, though cars go very fast there. I like to run along the river. Sometimes I stop and watch the black waves foam on the rocks and one time I saw a small pink tennis shoe. I climbed down for a closer look, but it was not attached to anything.

The trashcan thing is not why Chenelle and I broke up—that was the watermelon thing. They were on sale at the store and I'd never bought a whole one before. Remember that game, for kids, where they would grease up a watermelon with shortening or oil or something and throw it in the deep end of the swimming pool? And you'd dive down to see who could get a grip on it, and swim it to the top the fastest? It was so heavy, slippery. I never won. I don't think that's a safe game either, not for kids. But I bought this watermelon and had it in my car, no idea what to do with it.

Chenelle went to the fridge in the middle of the night when I was asleep. She found I'd carved out half a watermelon and took a piece. And she took a bite but my cum was inside. I guess that's what I mean when I say I wasn't sure what to do with it. I don't remember why. I remember it being cold. I took it to bed. I put it beside me afterward, my arms burning. Chenelle told me I needed to get help, but I told her that jizzing in fruit is not a crime and never has been.

Things changed when Tamara started talking. She was getting harder to predict. I'd always been afraid of what her voice might sound like. It started out as a low gurgling, black bubbles between her lips. Something was running out of her mouth and down her chin and it smelled like Toddy's yak but looked completely different. The pitch of her voice was like the hum of an air conditioner or a table saw. I thought it was one of those

things before I turned around and saw her lips were open, shaping with great effort something like a word. In the beginning there were no words, only this grinding sound.

The first clear thing she said was numbers. She was in the backseat and I caught her in the rearview while changing lanes. Low, gibberish numbers and some letters mixed in, like 84457245WV3J. She was running out of breath. I asked her to stop but she kept on with all the numbers. I almost rear-ended a bus I was so distracted, and the radio couldn't drown her out. Then she opened her mouth and it was violin. It was a violin, several violins, and then a sharp yell and then "Pour Some Sugar on Me" but that was the actual radio. I had to pull over and rest my head on the steering wheel. I had to get out and walk away, leave her in there. She had an angry expression on her face, which she'd pressed against the window, her breath now fogging it up.

I went on more and more jogs. Even when my body hurt too bad and I thought I couldn't, I would force myself. I would stop and hock loogies in the grass. The breeze out of nowhere makes the sweating bearable. I'd stop in the shade here and there but rarely because when I was running and in motion, I never saw Tamara. I did see Chenelle and Jonah together get out of his car and walk into an Italian restaurant. They were holding hands, I saw them kiss. I saw her lead him, I saw him check her out, I saw their fingers loose, light threaded between them, and remembered how Ocean's fingers were lost in space somewhere, away from her hands, which had since been burned up and were now maybe in an urn, maybe in a wall.

Maybe they'd been scattered out in the river, or that's what I'd prefer, rather than buried or locked in a mausoleum. Or would water be too tacky to Ocean, given her name? I imagine Benson's Coast Guard jumping out of the helicopter to perform a daring sea rescue for her fingerless palm, and then when he reaches down to get it, it turns to ash in his hands, and the ash blows in the breeze, the wind drummed up by the helicopter, straight onto the reflective sunglasses of Local Jogger, who smiles. He stands among a rainbow of broken beer bottles washed ashore, beaming sunlight

and destined for the plant I work in.

At the plant we have an oven-like machine, like an incinerator, and it liquifies the glass into a great hot burning soup. Glass is technically, chemically, classified as unstable. You need lots of heat to get the particles moving, the ancients knew that, and then carefully cool it into a new shape, introducing air at the right time and intensity so it doesn't seize up before you finish. Glass to me is much harder than metal to work with, because it's so delicate. I sort broken glass but I don't mold or cut it. I wanted my own version of Tamara. She could be melted down, a liquid, resolidify, take a float bath, receive a protective coating, and then be annealed, inspected, and cut with diamond steels. She'd be durable, reflective.

That's why I went to Bubblegum Galaxy. The shop's been there a long time. I'd never been in but guys I knew had for a bachelor party. I had no idea what to look at. It was my first time in a sex shop. Rows and rows of dildos. There were some books, too; I scanned one about the lost art of female ejaculation. This girl came up to me, a pierced nose and blue pigtails, some chin stubble.

"Are you looking for anything in particular?" she asked.

"Sort of," I said.

"We also make custom pieces," she added. She then told me how, in her other life, her real one, she was a ceramicist who had also gone to the arts college in Forrester.

She told me about this one dildo she made. The guy requested custom dimensions. It was like a horse dick. He came in a month or so later and asked for an even bigger one. She made it. I think her name was Star but maybe I'm imagining that. Anyway, this guy came back in another time after that. Even bigger, he said. I need a bigger dildo than the last two times. She was unsure if it was ethical to do. But she looked at this megalodon dick she'd made and though she was highly concerned, she sold it to him anyway. She never saw him again.

"He either died or found what he was looking for," she said. "What are you looking for?"

A mold. A receptacle. She was drawing it up and she paused to ask about the head. How detailed she should make it. I described Tamara, bit by bit. Blonde hair, brown eyes, but I wanted them bloodshot, sort of yellowed. She made notes. No teeth. Eyebrow pierced. I was allowed to pay for it upon receipt, and I got a rewards punch card to keep in my wallet. Five weeks later, I picked her up. She was a little over 350 dollars, which is in the running for most expensive thing I have ever bought myself after a car.

It was strange to hold the head because the head wasn't Tamara. The head was a fake Tamara, which was exactly the point, but I felt embarrassed that real Tamara might see it. I kept it wrapped in the Bubblegum Galaxy bag, which felt even weirder. Like what was I hoping for anyway, to buy this head of a head of a girl and then keep it in a bag and never look at it? I smoked like 10 cigarettes, staring at her on my kitchen counter. I took her out of the bag. I poured her a coffee, like a kid having a tea party with his stuffed animals. We looked at each other. I took her to bed but absolutely could not stick my dick in her to save my life. I waited for real Tamara to appear. She didn't. It was almost like the plastic hair smell had dispelled her. What do you want me to do? I asked.

I figure because of the arts college in Forrester thing, Star from Bubblegum Galaxy told some people about my custom order. She had told me about the other guy's mastodon dildo, so I guess I should've known better than to trust her. The cops showed up to question me. They had also, apparently, talked to Chenelle. Let them, I thought. I didn't do anything illegal at any point. I ejaculated into a watermelon, so what. When she said no to the trashcan thing, I did not force it. So there was really nothing for the cops to find. Except my replica of Ocean's head.

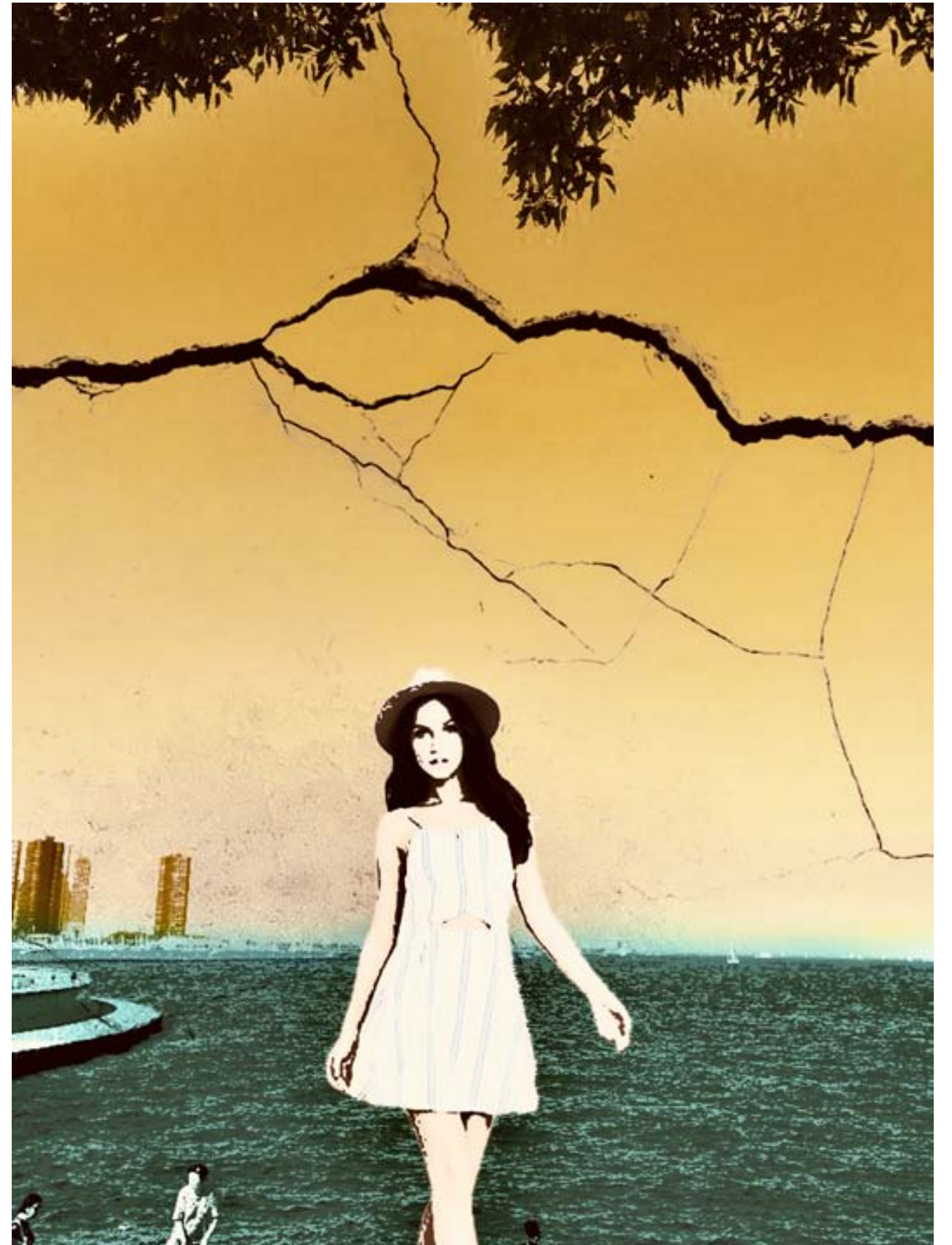
It wasn't like I had it on display or anything, but it was in my bed. That didn't look good, I'll admit. But I'd shown up for all my shifts at work and there was footage of me in the plant at the time in question. The cops had already been there too and asked about me.

"They think you did it," Benson said. He looked at me sideways.

"I didn't do it."

“Course not, man.” He tossed a plastic toothbrush handle from the conveyor belt. “But they seemed pretty convinced.”

I put Tamara, or the mold of Tamara I had made, back in a bag and put her in the trashcan on Sinnickson. I drove away as fast as I could. That whole night I woke up at odd hours. I dreamed the room was burning hot and painted blue. I dreamed my mom was putting folded T-shirts in my dresser. She was asking what was burning when I woke up again. There was some guy, some military guy, wearing all these medals who crawled into bed with me with his clothes on. I got up and went for a jog right at dawn. All my muscles were sore. I didn't see Tamara all day and drove back to Sinnickson that night. The trash guys had already come and taken her away. It's funny how you can know that, how you can drive back, drinking your soda, and still sit, waiting.



Aftermath

BY ALLYN BERNKOPF

When I was 23, my brother offered
me sanctuary at his house on Florida's
gulf coast. I don't remember

the flight in but I remember
how my nieces glued themselves
to my legs, how my brother

bent in various angles to accommodate
me, how he gave his wife a look
when I brought Landsharks

& cigarettes back to their porch,
as if to say, *hush*. I don't remember
him chirping quietly to his wife,

She's going through something. That I
needed them. I do remember
my sister-in-law taking me

to the beach. Allowing me to watch
my nieces with beer glass littered
between my knees. Remember

she requested I not lap my booze-drowned
wounds in front of her daughters.
No problem, I don't remember

saying, but I remember I bought a koozie to cover
up my fins. I remember my nieces, three & five,
were mermaids if I'd ever seen one.

I remember I went to the beach alone
the next day. More Landsharks in hand,
I settled atop my borrowed Ariel towel.

I don't remember how I met this older
woman, but I remember us drinking
Cheladas. Perhaps I offered her cigarettes

in exchange for minute companionship.
We spent the afternoon together, trying
to find me a lover, though I image she eyed

the younger men for herself, too. Remember
her bringing up her son. *He's your age*, she
said, *and such a gentleman*. I met him next

day. I don't remember if he was handsome,
nor do I remember his name. I do remember
dragging my toes, considered burying

them in the sand while we drifted the ocean.
I remember us kissing among jellyfish & stingrays.
Remember dolphins slicing through the salty waves

in the distance. I remember locking my legs
around his waist, asking him if he'd ever met
a west-coast girl before. Remember telling him,

I'm fucking crazy. I remember him kissing
me, exploring me with his algae-logged
fingers. Remember feeling his dick bulge

against my labia. Remember thinking, *I guess he wants me*
& being unsure how salt water would feel inside.

This Home Is No Safe Haven

BY AMANDA COLEMAN WHITE

I hold little sympathy for the snail,
its shell burgled this morning
by a thrush intent on breakfast
after two days of downpour.

So much rain the brick turned soggy,
my house a cardboard box
I huddled under while gazing out
of finger-prodded windows.

A wet package on the porch to open.
Plucking it from the rotten welcome mat,
I see a snail clinging to the bottom.

I'm sure it begged for life
as all creatures must when facing death.
One flick and over the second story rail;
a faint sound as shell hit pavement.

Hearing my name called, I see
my child beckoning from below
as he squats, engrossed in study.
He spins a folktale around me
of his new friend, lovingly stroking
a snail that glitters upward,
toward a crack in the wet brick wall.



DANIEL CIOCHINA

A Drowning in Corporate Lake

BY DERMOT CORY

Bones turn up when they dig Corporate Lake. A crane operator blurts out the news on the steps of the construction trailer, right in front of Dennis, and then the guy goes red and picks at his burger while everyone shuffles and coughs.

“Well, more like these white sticks...” one of the dozer guys says, but then he pretends to receive a call and wanders away.

Dennis finds the contractor at the edge of the forest, directing a backhoe to dig fresh stumps out of the frozen mud. The contractor glares over Dennis’s shoulder at the construction trailer, but then grins with many teeth and says Bones? What bones?

“Archeological Preservation Act.” Dennis shrugs. “We’ll pause construction, investigate. Dang. Damn.”

“Aw, Mr. Upchurch.” The contractor has a pink sprinkle stuck behind one canine tooth. He stretches in his worn coveralls. “The APA’s nothing but a wet shit. It’s gross that you even bring it up. Don’t worry. I don’t see bones. You see bones?”

Dennis shivers in his suit coat, his mud-splattered oxford shoes.

“We can’t just plow ahead,” Dennis says. “What’s right is right. Right?”

“You were a baby when they passed the APA.” The contractor admires Dennis and then picks up a clod of dirt and crumbles it in his hand. “What do you think it’s all made of? Decay. Plants and animals. That’s what’s under us. We build on old bones.”

The backhoe bites into roots, dirt spilling between its steel teeth.

Dennis trudges up the hill from the shallow pit of Corporate Lake. The

shoulders of half-built office buildings hulk above the pine forest. It's a long walk and he checks messages on his Exiger. The screen cascades into view behind his eyes. Zero messages. His foot catches in a rut and he falls on all fours with a tweak of pain in his back. Laughter echoes across the site, but when Dennis looks at the trailer the men are milling around, whistling, examining the cement sky.

Dennis turns up the seat warmer and noses his Toyota around muddy pickups and bundles of rebar, past the poured foundation of a sexy-waiter restaurant called Keisters. A billboard at the roadside already loops video of fried shrimp slow-motion falling onto an infinite white surface. Dennis turns on his blinker and waits as a flock of starlings swoops across the road.

On his way back to the office, Dennis rehashes the conversation with the contractor, taking no crap this time, jabbing at an imaginary chest.

"Who do you think you're dealing with?" he says. "I'll go loco on your butt."

Through the forest, past the hunting cabins and campgrounds of his youth, and soon the trees give way to new big-box stores, and then the outlet mall that was his first project with the company six years ago, most of the shops already out of business, their signs now ghost letters on stucco walls.

By the time he reaches the office his anger has burned down to a nub. Angie paces her office, attending a video meeting on her Exiger. Dennis slumps into a chair. The knot in his back stiffens.

"Always darkest before dawn," Angie's saying. "All's well that ends well. Keep your chin up. Okay, buh-bye."

She pockets the Exiger, blinking, and grins when she notices Dennis.

"I smell trouble. You stink."

During his story Angie rolls her eyes, scoffs, massages the crow's feet at her temples. She gives that conspiratorial smile that always prods him to say what he really thinks about the Corporate Lake project, or CEO Bob Burnett's spray tan, or the bewildering company motto, "Always Future."

Dennis says that everyone has ignored the compliance issues at Corporate Lake, right from the start, from that unapproved VR presentation to the county council with the aquamarine lake and those computer-generated deer that drank from the lake and then smiled at the camera with big white orthodontized teeth. He says the tenant estimates are inflated, the TIF breaks are ridiculous, the county's population is declining, and the contractor parked the construction trailer above some now-dead mammal's phlegmy nest hole, and this is the problem with this company and with everyone on Earth, really, and it's fraying him, thinning him out, like he's been standing in a river with his arms spread, trying to hold the current, and then he stops talking to keep his lower lip from quivering.

Angie rocks in her chair.

"Got it," she says. "I'll send it to Externalities. Wash your hands of it."

Dennis says Bob Burnett will freak out if the project is delayed and Angie smiles reassuringly and says don't worry about it, keep your nose clean.

Back at his cubicle, Dennis searches deep into his music history and blares Betty and the Anarchers in his headphones. He researches the APA until the headphones die and he has to remove them to charge.

He leans back in his chair and closes his eyes. Beneath the buzz of his coworkers' earphones, rain thrums on the office window. On days like this, as a kid, his mother would take him to the botanical gardens and they would have the place to themselves. He stomped through puddles in the hedge maze, splashing in those purple galoshes, chased by his mother's breathless laugh. Once, a wren burst from the brush only a foot in front of his face, the feathers flashing before his eyes, and he turned to his mother, stunned, ready to cry, but she broke out laughing, and then he laughed, too, and more birds scattered from the hedges. Her cheeks were pink, her dress damp with rain.

Someone's earphones accidentally disconnect from their Exiger and a recorded shriek of pornography stabs through the office. Dennis opens his eyes to the blank fabric cubicle. He doesn't own galoshes anymore. A few

years back, those botanical gardens were razed for a Party Depot.

He burns the afternoon researching projects that have shut down under APA rules, land-usage histories of the Corporate Lake site, and then old news stories about a string of missing salesmen whose bodies were found in a nearby woods. On his way out the door, he detours past the Externalities department to wave at Ergonomic Gary, who's sitting far from his computer, straddling what looks like a massive inflatable anus. Gary waves back, wristguard clacking.

Dennis feels like he has awakened from a long sleep, suddenly alert on the power of the steering wheel in his hands. He cranks up the Anarchers in the parking garage, hoping his coworkers see who he really is, not some suit. The rain on the windshield is electric.

Tonight he might dig out his dad's camping gear from the basement, where it's buried behind bins of fishing rods and stuffed trophy ducks and boxes of the man's clothes that he has yet to sort. The old college crew might be up for a wild weekend in the woods. Some of those guys still live in town.

He arrives home and strips off his wet coat and gasps and clutches his spine.

Propped on the couch with an ice pack and microwaved chicken, he watches a new show called Murder Police. The detectives interview a tight-lipped widow who, when they turn to leave, abruptly sobs, "Don't let my Donny die for nothin'!" and it occurs to Dennis that this line doesn't seem to refer to anything in the plot so far, but then there's a chase through a kitchen full of Korean cooks, and he's hooked.

At a commercial break, one of those interactive ads pop up, this one asking him to strangle a 3D animated bird that's branded with a competitor's logo. The music cuts out and a silent timer starts counting down from ninety. The bird hops curiously along the coffee table. Dennis leans back and notices wallpaper peeling in the corner. Too high to reach. It will peel and peel until one day, all of the wallpaper will flutter to the floor and he won't recognize this house anymore. He can hear the glue releasing. The cartoon

songbird is ridiculous, frowning and cocking its head. He sighs and reaches out and squeezes the bird's neck, and its eyes bulge and head puffs up until it bursts into virtual smoke, leaving in Dennis's palm a three-dollar coupon for Long John Silvers.

The show starts back up, and the Murder Police are really in a bind this time.

Brushing his teeth at midnight, he remembers the bones and then has trouble sleeping. When he does, he dreams that his dad is alive and across a frozen pond, in a duck blind with his shotgun, beckoning for Dennis to step onto the ice.

He arrives in the office before sunrise. On the historical society's website, he finds an old county map that marks, near the Corporate Lake site, a town founded by freed slaves called Knapsack that dried up in the Great Depression. There are only a couple of paragraphs and one sepia photo—a kid in overalls on a wooden porch, petting a mule and scowling at the camera—but he sends this to Angie with the subject, "Cemetery?"

When his coworkers arrive, Dennis walks to Externalities and knocks on Ergonomic Gary's door. Gary turns and smiles, a long package in his arms.

Dennis holds the steel braces against the wall while Gary ratchets lag screws into the studs.

"Haven't seen that in the system," Gary grunts, cranking, sweat shining on his scalp. "I'd remember bones. But we're short-staffed. So you saw bones, Den?"

"Yeah. Well, no. The workers saw them."

"Aw, Den, Den, Den. You gotta see them yourself." He glances at the door and lowers his voice. "For real. Dump 'em on someone's desk. Or else it's, 'What bones? I don't see no bones.'"

"Investigating is your job, Gary."

They pause and stare at each other, both surprised.

"Damn, D. You're serious, huh?"

"Sorry. Sorry."

"It's not like I don't care. Back in the day, I was full-on radical with

environmental shit. Know what depends on the developable woodland around here? Cornflower finches. Know what they eat? Kinderbugs. We're paving the way for a kinderbug kingdom up here, man. I don't want to live in that world."

They finish and admire the ergonomic contraption on the wall. A fragmented human stencil.

Dennis yanks on his jacket and strides past blank-eyed coworkers, their thumbs caressing Exigers like vigil candles. He speeds through yellow lights with the Anarchers screaming. The Keisters sign looms above treetops, displaying a roasted turkey leg rotating in flames against a black void, apparently gone to hell.

He brakes short in the parking lot. His mouth drops open. Overnight, the office buildings have gained windows and balcony railings. Flagstone studs the completed walls of the restaurant. Excavators ride a ramp into the deep pit, where a drainage pipe rises like a smokestack.

Across the pit the contractor is doing pull-ups on a caterpillar, but Dennis loses sight of the man while picking through the mud. He then sees the contractor on the trailer steps and circles the pit, but the man is gone again and the dozer guys only shrug at Dennis's questions.

He writes a brusque message to the contractor's assistant, and then pauses to add friendly exclamation points before sending.

He drives home with the sun setting like water draining between cupped fingers. After dinner, Dennis heads to the basement to organize his father's things, but then only stands there in the quiet with a handful of limp trash bags, gazing at the mess, and returns to the couch upstairs to nurse his aching back.

The Murder Police threaten a senator.

He texts his mother from bed and she responds immediately. All's well, and he should come for dinner next week if he's not too busy, or any other week, and she sends a local-news article about an uptick in Lyme disease and the devastation it wreaks on the body.

He lies awake, picturing his mother alone in that darkened house, reading

about ways to die.

The next morning in the office, Dennis is scanning old obituaries for mention of Knapsack when a message dings in. Bob Burnett has scheduled a 3 p.m. staff-wide announcement about Corporate Lake.

Dennis leaps from his chair. Angie's door is closed. She must be upstairs dumping bones on Bob Burnett's desk. Dennis punches the air and whimpers at the twinge in his back. He fires up a heating pad, blasts the Anarchers in his earphones, and looks up photos of cornflower finches. He promises to camp on the former Corporate Lake site someday and see their boat-shaped nests.

At three, the staff mills around the cubicles. Gary salutes Dennis from across the room, wearing a kind of velcro helmet. Dennis bounces on his toes as two accountants behind him criticize the no-nonsense, damaged detective from Murder Police. She's unreasonable, they say, a loose cannon. Dennis smiles to himself. That detective really has a heart of gold.

Bob Burnett exits the elevator, his silver hair barely clearing the tops of the cubicles as he shakes hands, two-handed grips, purring intimately to each employee, "Hey, you!" or "Hi there, you!" Angie follows him through the crowd. She meets Dennis's gaze and winks.

Bob has to stand on a swivel chair to be seen. His cinnamon breath fills the room.

He thanks them for joining, calls them friends, calls them family. A family with common purpose: to build. For great cause: Always Future. He leads a round of applause.

"Like a family, we ride together, through thick and thin. Riding into sunsets. Each with our purpose—our saddle—our hats for the sun, and a nice new pair of spurs...maybe a little whip..."

Angie stands beside Bob as he rambles. Dennis strains on tiptoe, trying to read her expression.

"...to keep our little family together. To leap obstacles, rather than letting some silly obstacle wreck our horse, this great horse we've been raising together all these years." Bob bitterly shakes his head and takes a

composing breath. “And that brings me to Corporate Lake.”

Dennis’s stomach flutters.

“Angie Seiler has guided this project over many-a-mountain. Around boulders. Cacti.” Angie is beaming at him. “We’re all better off with Angie in the saddle. That’s why I’m proud to announce that Angie is our new VP of Employee Management!”

Dennis automatically claps along with his cheering coworkers, blinking, waiting for the real announcement. Angie stands on another chair and promises to do her best, looks gratefully into each of their eyes. Then the clapping returns, and Bob is saying something about tumbleweeds, and then the crowd is chatting and pulling out their Exigers and Bob is on the elevator and the moments are falling far from Dennis’s reach, the relentless, unbearable slip of time.

Angie accepts congratulations outside her office. He squeezes through the crowd to reach her.

“What about the bones?” he whispers.

“Bones?” She bites her lip and then she clucks her tongue in recognition. “Right. No bones, turns out. Que sera. Fight another day.”

“But there’s still time. We can save them.”

She smiles, confused, until an elderly secretary breaks in to hug her, laughing like a cricket, and Dennis washes back into the crowd as Angie shakes hands, head bobbing on her long neck.

He rushes to the garage without fetching his coat. He hurtles past abandoned malls and new condominiums and the anguished remains of cineplexes and plunges into the darkening woods. Under the fleshy glow of the Keisters sign he slams the car door, stalks across the empty parking lot, rounds the restaurant, and halts, breath caught, at the view of Corporate Lake.

The remains of the sunset ripple on the water. The drain tube sucks at the lake’s surface. Reflections of the buildings quiver above the bones, somewhere down there, buried in mud.

Dennis’s jaw works, searching for a retort. He pulls out his Exiger and

scrolls until his thumb wears out and he stands small on the hillside, breathless. Finally, he plods downhill and slumps onto the sod on the bank. He turns off his Exiger.

The surrounding woods are silent and cold. In a few months, cicada and frog calls will fill this office park. Maybe deer really will drink here. They will emerge from the forest and wonder at the clearing and the buildings. The last colors of sky dissolve into the black water, and as the day dies, the lake becomes beautiful.

Two speckled birds pass overhead and glide onto the water. A keen sounds through the site, a cracked sob, a ghost.

Loons. He hasn’t heard loons in a long time.

The loons swim and dip below the surface. Maybe they will nest here. Maybe the bones will nourish cattails and a new home for the birds. Someday no one will remember that this lake was fake, and maybe that’s fine, to let things fall apart.

He’s climbing the hill toward the parking lot when the splashes begin. He spins and squints. In the center of the lake, one of the loons tilts at a strange angle, wings clapping the water, legs up, its tail trapped in the suction of the drain pipe.

Dennis rushes to the bank. The frenzied bird struggles against the suction, neck straining, its partner circling with panicked wails. Dennis paces, heart pounding, glancing wildly around the vacant site as if a bird expert might show up. He crouches and touches a fingertip to the frigid water. The loon’s ripples wash his knuckles.

The desperate clawing in his chest suddenly falls away. The loons and the lake sharpen into stark shapes, with him on the shore, and for a moment he wonders at how incredibly real it all is, right before him, how he can reach out and touch this place.

He readies a breath, adjusts his spine, and unties his shoes.

Bullet Points on How to Write about Your Sister

BY IAN POWELL-PALM

- o First, begin writing
 - a. When it is 3 AM
- o And you are driving the wrong way down the backroads
 - a. With both feet on the gas.
- o Then, stop writing
 - o When you realize that
- o If no pills/no drunk racing/no woman dying that night, then how would he
 - o Live, this boy you cherish/who forces the page down his throat
- o And begs it to speak for him.
 - o What would he be, if not for this pain?

- o If you decide to close your eyes long enough
- o You'll soon see your mother
- o Lose her body
- o On the morning her daughter died
- o Over and over again, without stop or end, or even beginning
- o Because she is every age she ever will be the moment her child dies
- o And then suddenly you are jolted back awake
- o By a deer leaping through the air, asphalt spraying from its hooves.

- This is you. Watching the boy
- Gun his Toyota 110 miles down this stretch of highway
- That leads to nothing but unmarked graves
- The dugout remains of broken Mike and Ike's tossed out car windows
- In sweet toothed tribute to the dead beneath this asphalt
- Entire grocery shelves of candy, ground into the underbellies of white crosses
- These white Montanan roadside tributes soaked with the blood of this state's children
- Whose insides keep bursting open with light, just as your daughter's body
- Burst open with sunrise, keeps bursting open every morning, every new day.

- o Most importantly,
- o Know that this poem means nothing,
- o And cannot save anyone,
- o Because all this poem knows,
- o Is that everyone thinks their child has a head on their shoulders,
- o Until it is their daughter who dies inside the metaled mouth
- o Of a Ford Focus
- o Summer rushing in to steal away the scent of the body
- o As the car is drug from out the ditch.

- You are writing this because there have never been answers
- To these questions, and when the Toyota sprouts blood-red wings
- From its back and swallows you inside it
- Your mother, your sister, every dead child and their parent will be there
- Seated beside you, atop you,
- As you speed towards a Summer untouched by grief
- 2012, born again, where your sister presses both her feet on the gas

- And the car doesn't shatter into 4 am
- But lands safely, eternally home
- And in the morning, she kisses the car, thanking it for safe passage home
- And that car touches her back, smiles through jagged teeth, like an Old God
- Because that morning when she makes her mistake
- Her spine does not burst open with flight
- But instead leads her to our mother's house
- Where unannounced she bursts through the front door
- And kisses that woman
- Both of them weeping and alive.



TOMISLAV SILIPETAR

A Breakdown of (Dis/ownment) or an Autobiography of Semantics

BY CORI BRATBY-RUDD

The word disownment wears a top hat, sunglasses, a detective coat. It pretends it's free from ambiguity. It pretends it's simple, not hiding at all. It is a word we think we understand; we think obvious. But is it? Can you define it without Google? Is your definition the same as your mothers'? As your grandmother's?

Once, my mom and I sat at the table eating cheeseburgers, and I mentioned, *When grandma disowned you...* but I couldn't finish the sentence; my mom stood from the brown table, her hands shaking, and somewhere between defensiveness and trauma whispered, *She never disowned me. She kicked me out. She never wrote me out of the will.*

It's funny all the singular non-singularities, like how you're only supposed to have one mom. Or how so many truths emerge from a single event. Or how your story is supposed to start with you, but it doesn't.

Or how when my mom flew to San Diego to tell her mother about her girlfriend, her life, and my grandma turned, yelled, *Get the fuck out of my house. I never want to see you again.* It didn't count as disownment. She had said mean things, sure, but disownment? Hardly.

But here's the thing about legal disownment. How do you know you have been officially disowned? Likely, your ancestor isn't going to cc you on the new will. If disownment is purely legal, does it even hold weight? When I hear the word disownment, I do not think: you poor soul, you have no money. I think: you poor soul, you have no family.

In other words, Grandma, I concede (at least to the best of my knowledge, or as of yet) this wasn't a legal disownment. Do you feel better now? Now

that the world knows we were *only* missing love, a family; that what you did was just cruelty and nothing big like the D-word.

When my mom sat there shaking, denying the reality that seemed so clear to me one second before, I tilted my head and looked at her with a mix of challenge and soft sympathy. I pushed back; *You really don't think she disowned you, mom?*

How could I have been disowned, Cori? She calls me on the holidays, she sends me gifts, she lets me come over, we go on the boat together, drink beer in her backyard.

My mother, who had already jumped from one explanation to another, was at this point referring to her *undisownment*—she was citing that, after a few years, my grandma came back. Therefore it was only an attempted disownment, not the real thing. Sure, the disownment was sought after, but because it wasn't followed through on, because grandma called on birthdays, because she went to our soccer games and bought us winter coats, because my mother was *undisowned*—no disownment occurred at all. See, my mother was undisowned, and so she pretended this new update canceled the original trauma as if this were some sort of math problem. For instance, if a mother disowned her child and then undisowned that same child, how many of the children are still disowned?

I stood to meet my mother, who had moved swiftly to the sink, cleaning the physical mess, the dishes, the pan, the spatula, in an apparent effort to distract her from the emotional one. I hugged her. Said, *Right, that makes sense* while thinking, Do people who have not been disowned shake when asked about it? Do they run to the sink to do dishes when they own a dishwasher? Do they face a wall, use the sound of running water to cover the fact that, undoubtedly, there were tears on their cheek?

Juanita and Bill

BY JW BURNS

Hafted to a tricycle
he wasn't prepared for the pavement,
uneven surfaces, cracks,
the hernias of old water.
Starting, the pedals resisted his feet.
Aimless, he crossed the calico cat's tail anyway.
The driveway stretched for miles;
his parents' distant doggerel floating to the sidewalk,
across the street, hanging in trees.
There was a bird, gelatin wings pushing
the shapeless air. He was riding in circles.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Anthony Afairo Nze is an artist and graphic designer from Indianapolis. His work consists of graphic art and illustrations used with Adobe photoshop and illustrator. For more of his work visit him at Afairosgallery on Instagram.

Abraham Sunday Anebi is a hyperrealistic artist based in Lagos state, Nigeria, originally from Benue state. Art has been his dream right from while he was growing up. Then, all he was into was comics and cartoons but over time he developed a passion for art, which he has been making since 2018. He base is works that try to speak out for people and tell their/his story the best way he can using art. His works are mainly drawn with graphite pencils and charcoal pencils.

Allyn Bernkopf is pursuing her Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Oklahoma State University, where she was the recipient of the Gladys Burriss Creative Writing Fellowship and is an Associate Editor for *The Cimarron Review*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Bayou Magazine*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Two Thirds North Magazine*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Door = Jar*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, and others, and has been anthologized in *Women's Voices Anthology* (These Fragile Lilacs, 2017) and *Lost: Reflections* (Medusa's Laugh Press, 2017). She holds a Master of Arts in English from Weber State University.

Caitlin Brady is a writer from Texas who received her MFA in Fiction from Columbia University. Her work has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Rumpus*, *The Hairpin*, and *The Columbia Journal*.

Cori Bratby-Rudd (she/her) is a queer LA-based writer and co-founder of Influx Collectiv(e)'s Queer Poetry Reading Series. She is the author of the chapbook *Cage of Eden* (Finishing Line Press, 2020). Cori is a co-founder and Director of Programs at Dissonance Press. She edited their debut anthology titled *Under The Belly of the Beast*.

JW Burns' poetry and prose has appeared in several publications, most recently in *I 70 Review*, *Ginosko Literary Journal* and *Adelaide*. He lives in Florida.

Camille Carter is a writer, poet, and educator. She currently resides in Harlem, Montana, where she teaches at Aaniiih Nakoda College on the Fort Belknap Reservation. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *SWWIM*, *Broad River Review*, *Cherry Tree*, *Cider Press Review*, and *The MacGuffin*.

Daniel Ciochina is an artist based out of Portland, OR and has been accepted into the product design and arts programs at University of Oregon. His art has been featured in numerous publications including the *Stoneboat Literary Journal*, *Carte Blanche*, *Riza Press* and *The Black Box Gallery: Portraiture through the lens*, as well as shown in exhibitions at the Umpqua Valley Arts Center, Garibaldi Maritime Museum, and the prestigious 2022 PNW Drawers Show at Blue Sky Gallery in downtown Portland. More of his work can be found on his website www.ciochina-art.design.com and instagram @ciochina.art.design

Amanda Coleman White is a poet and storyteller currently residing in Nashville. After focusing her Master's research on a poetic exploration of the persecuted women in her lineage, she decided to embark on a PhD that combines creative writing and Celtic myth. She has been a featured poet with Indolent Press, and has poems published in literary magazines *Obsessed with Pipework*, *The Dawntreader*, and *Ffraid*.

Dermot Cory is a writer and filmmaker in St. Louis, Missouri, whose fiction has appeared in *The Penn Review* and *fresh.ink*. He recently completed a manuscript for a literary horror novel.

Richard Hanus had four kids but now just three. Zen and Love.

Couri Johnson is a graduate of the North Eastern Ohio Master of Fine Arts, and a Ph.D candidate at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She writes speculative and fabulism, and has two orange cats named Pumpnickel and Jelly. She's the head editor of Pumpnickel House Publishing and its imprints. Her short story collection, *I'll Tell You a Love Story*, is available through Bridge Eight Press, and her novel-in-stories, *The Girl Who*, is forthcoming from Gateway Review. For more on her work, visit www.courijohnson.com

Katrina Kaye is a writer and educator seeking an audience for her ever-growing surplus of poetic meanderings. She hoards her previous published writings, links to publications, and additional information on her website: ironandsulfur.com. She is grateful to anyone who reads her work and in awe of those willing to share it. Twitter: @PoetKatrinaKaye Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/katrinakayeguarascio> Instagram: poetkatrinakaye

Shannon Kernaghan has always been intrigued by crows. The similar appearance of these clever birds makes it tough to identify female from male and she empowers her subjects with the same unassuming designs. Kernaghan creates visual art from Alberta, Canada. Her work has been exhibited with galleries in New York City, Laguna Beach, Chicago, Calgary, Palm Springs, London and more. Kernaghan's passion is storytelling in all forms – she also writes poetry, fiction and everything between. More at www.shannonkernaghan.com/mixed-media/

Ian Powell-Palm is a writer, poet, and musician currently living in Belgrade, Montana. His work attempts to interrogate familial trauma, sexual identity, and the resurrection of the dead. You can read more of his poetry on Facebook at 'Powell-Palm Poetry'.

Elizabeth Schoonmaker lives and works in the Town of Plainfield in upstate New York. She received a Master of Fine Arts from the University at Albany and has exhibited her work in Chicago and New York. More of her work can be found at <https://elizabethschoonmaker.blogspot.com/>

Tomislav Šilipetar was born in Zagreb. In 2014 he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb in the class of Igor Rončević-Painting Department. In 2015 he became a member of HDLU. In addition to many group exhibitions, he had a number of solo exhibitions in Croatia as well as in other countries. He was the winner of the rector's award for excellence in 2013. The paintings are mostly made in acrylic, and the themes vary from solitude and isolation to the very existence of human existence in the society that condemns. It favors the simple colors, and the line that goes perfectly with the total preoccupation of getting out of the 'boxes' of academy.

Gary Sokolow has a long ago MFA from Brooklyn College and currently works in finance. His poems have appeared in *The Connecticut River Review*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, *JMWW*, *2 Bridges Review*, *Salamander*, *Posit*, *The Shot Glass Journal*, *Third Wednesday* and other publications.

