
AFTER HAPPY HOUR
REVIEW
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After Happy Hour Review

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COVER ART:
"THOUGHT BUBBLE" BY HEATHER HEITZENRATER

LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY MIKE LAMBERT

SPECIAL THANKS TO THOMAS SWETERLITSCH

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* Submitted through the Hour After Happy Hour Writing Workshop

Foreword

Dear Reader,

You hold in your hands—or are reading from a screen—issue 4 of the *After Happy Hour Review*, produced by Pittsburgh workshop The Hour After Happy Hour. An evocative name, *the hour after happy hour*. When I first learned of the group I imagined drinks passing into dinner passing into further rounds of drinks in dim bars, huddles of writers with the weight of the workday on one shoulder, tomorrow's stresses on the other, with only a boozy night of too little sleep separating clocking out from clocking in—but in that glorious meantime, that evening hour after happy hour's already passed, trading printouts of poetry and fiction with one another, reading, critiquing, arguing about literature and art in a way usually reserved for tales out of The Savage Detectives or memoirs of the Beats.

And when I finally met some of the HaHH crew, I found what I imagined hadn't been too far from reality. The editors had invited me to read at one of their events, the reading held in an unfinished art space deep within Bloomfield with beer and wine and cupcakes, the attendees a fashionable young crowd; and the writing they shared was extraordinary, an expression of raw emotion and raw content but honed with attention to craft and precision of language. After, we talked MFA programs and Henry Miller and I learned more about the HaHH workshop, an ever-expanding nexus of writers, and drove home invigorated to have found where literature was *living*.

Enjoy issue 4—

Thomas Sweterlitsch


CHIPOTLE
DO NOT ENTER
ROAD CLOSED
PITTSBURGH POLICE
3TA3
ROAD CLOSED
Cherries Diner

NICK ROMEO

ZACK LEE

Ache In Three Rivers

BY BRIANNA ALBERS

I rise early, rinse my hair in the after- / currents of yesterday's thunderstorm. You like to go / before it gets too hot. I go to eat tamales, / masa like sun on my sweltered, / open tongue. My palms a receptacle, brown / and curling. My mouth against yours, beet-red and / puckered. At the farmer's market, I am / a lost commodity. No one knows / my name. You haggle and I / sing. For three hours, the language of others / is all I know. I sell my voice / for a mouthful of peaches. Tonight, I will dream / of apple fields and rolling, golden / hills. Meanwhile, I handle the eggs with / care. Neighbors fight over / ripened corn. The river swells to high- / tide. The farmers say / I'm in love, but all I do is eat / pears.

Aftermath, 2015

BY BRIANNA ALBERS

At night, I rise, my fear the scabs
on the heels of your absence the unbecoming of our
weight, loving for the sake of light
running, ankles
snapped

remember when our love was total
& the only thing in sight was the shining
kingdom. you hummed me into perfect fourths,
holy & blameless
in my sight

Why I'm Not Where You Are

BY BRIANNA ALBERS

after Thomas Patrick Levy's "Lost"

I.

When you died on the street I knew I was dreaming. You asked me why and I said I didn't know and you said you were sorry and I still don't know what for. I said it's fine. Your body jerked like something was leaving and I held you under the summer streetlight, listened to a quiet hum as time and the cicadas died.

When you died on the street the second time I knew I was dreaming and I promised you I would always be where you are. You died laughing, like the time we watched that movie with that one actor from that one show and you said you missed your mother and there was nothing I wanted more than to steal your mother's corpse from the casket in the graveyard where she forgot to breathe. I can't make things better. I thought it's not supposed to be like this, I thought when did we get so small.

When you died on the street a third time I knew I was dreaming so I kissed you on the curb with your body in my lap. You did not kiss back. I kept thinking the universe is a glass of spilled milk. I closed my eyes and did not cry.

II.

It was morning and our hearts leaked around us when I told you the sheets needed to be washed. We did the laundry in a beautiful room with thin white walls and you made a sound like a dying animal and I thought, listen, this is why I'm not where you are.

HEATHER HEITZENRATER

The Beauty

BY RON RIEKKI

The great thing about nitroglycerin is if you hate your ambulance partner, you just spray him on the neck from behind and in minutes he'll have a killer migraine. And never know what caused it.

You have a patient being a real jerk, you just push the needle in a little further than you're supposed to. They'll behave. People don't really tend to listen when you have a gun. It just pisses them off, creates insanity. On the other hand, people listen when you have a needle. Especially if it's your brother. And he knows you're high on vodka and rage. And off work.

You found out he slept with your French girlfriend and it's literally impossible to get a second French girlfriend in one lifetime. You've told him the needle is infected with hepatitis (a lie, but effective).

He's in the general jurisdiction of the sink, but hopefully soon he'll be in the sink and on the curtains and across the stove burners, splattered.

I've been in a psych ward twice.

It's funny, but they don't check that when you become a medic.

That's the beauty of medicine. They need people so badly that you can be a total alcoholic psychopath and still wiggle your way into some hospital.

When you think about it, there's a reason why so many serial killers have been in the medical field. You rip open enough bodies in the name of science and you're one dangerous individual.

I, of course, would never harm a human, unless that human was a

motivational speaker who makes me call him "Kev" and who decimated my prized G.I. Joe the day after Christmas just because he was bored and found an ax in the garage.

There's not a whole lot of "put it down." It's just Kev avoiding my reach, deciding if he should make a break for the front door or back. Either way, I plan to have the needle inserted in his trapezius before he gets out of the room. With enough force, it'll go through his heart.

If this was a movie, you'd freeze frame on that moment, the needle about to penetrate skin. My face would look like failed mortgages. The sun would hit the syringe with a perfect flash of angel-white.

The reality was uglier, with me missing, stabbing air, inoculating oxygen.

He chose the back door, tripped on the stairs and fell on his arm, tumbling like a drunken ninja.

I watched him stumble into the woods, eaten by branches.

Then I had his apartment to myself, decisions to make. What came to mind was lighting it on fire. But anyone who does that has serious hate of humanity. There's too much odds the fire will spread, burn down possessions of the innocent.

Another option: baseball bat to the furniture. There has to be a rush to Louisville Slugger a microwave. They're made for it.

I found a golf club, shattered his front window in two strokes—a double eagle.

I needed a caddy, but since none was around I tossed the one-wood through the window.

I relaxed, read a wall poster: *In moments of decision, DESTINY IS SHAPED.*

I wondered if Kev screwed her under that sign, if he got in her pants by using Thích Nhát Hanh anecdotes and amateur massage. No one's more sexually dangerous than an American Buddhist.

Strangely, I felt at ease.

There are some truly good moments in life, where you feel motivational speaker-level powerful.

I saw the $10.99 lava lamp, tie-dye pillows, the whole sad, cheap, fake peace of his world.

Then he's back in the doorway, hobbling, with what I spot as a closed humerus fracture. He's hypoperfused, like he just walked into the anti-Christmas. I'm a living, breathing Douglas fir from Hell, stainless steel needle as tree ornament. All the years of our past smack together.

He sits on the futon, its hard wood that ensures back pain. One-armed, he struggles to take off his ripped shirt. This is his way of letting me know I don't have to kill him, showing me how bad his arm is.

I put the needle down, pick up the shirt and turn it into a sling-and-swathe. I go to the refrigerator, grab ice, putting it in a bag.

I listen to his breath, the strength of it.

I'm fat from paramedic work—junk food meals, sleep deprivation, alcohol weekends to cure your brain of patients who went down the drain. He looks like a free solo climber—a combination of anabolic steroids and free time.

I'd introduced Chloe, encouraged the two to hang out.

You want to last a lifetime with someone, you protect them like a wolf.

I put the ice to his arm, telling him to hold it—our first words since his return to the room.

A siren.

It could be the police, maybe an ambulance.

It could be coming for us, maybe not.

I put my arm around him. Too much has already been ruined. Jail would be a mild annoyance, a blessing. I wouldn't mind it. We both could think, recite mantras, make deep promises to stick to the path of Wayne Dyer, decide to quit jobs. I've been thinking about applying for a position at a nearby yearlong haunted house attraction. I want to hear fake screams, not real ones. I want to be around people who smoke pot at work, who are tired of trying.

The jail cell has two bunks; I choose the top. They've taken my shoelaces so I don't hang myself. I take off my shoe and use it as a pillow.

That night, with the jail's lights continuously on, I dream about ghosts, about werewolves, about meeting a hot Japanese goth girl who thinks bodybuilders are gross and we walk in a midnight cemetery as I tell her stories about people I've seen die and each one makes her fall more in love.

At The Spillway

BY ANDREW MOBBS

The fish have been reduced to flashes of silver
streaking beneath the current, and light
has never seemed so slow.

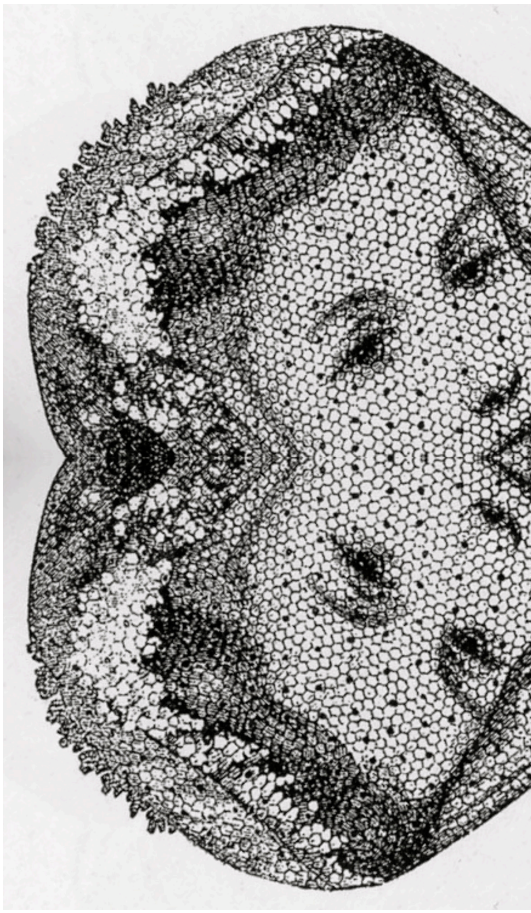
We set down our rods for a moment to
bait the hooks. You opt for an artificial jig,
fluorescent like sin.

Now is a good a time as any to say
love cannot be articulated—

Instead, I slip thread through a new hook,
banking off a metaphor while the sun
reddens my forehead. Before we recast,
I am branded a child of this earth.

Consider this:

our lives, the tepid water spilling over
the edge.



Pastry Tong

BY JASON PRIMM

BILL WOLAK

Before sunrise,
In our nearly empty coffee shop,
You behind the counter
And me at the corner table,
A few dull lines dutifully written
That you will never read.
I'd trade them,
The whole life of the mind,
To be some simple machine of your everyday.
Maybe the pastry tong.
To grab, for you, sweet or savory treats.
To hang along the mirror of the glass case
And watch over your flock.
To appraise and measure without tasting.
To be like a letter designed to do one thing
And for rest to be perfect readiness.
To give communion without discrimination.
To be open by nature and closed only by force.
To be held gently in your soft hands
Like an eye holds morning.

Self Control

BY LAUREN YATES

My mother wants to know what it is like to smoke pot. My grandfather has collapsed dead into a bathtub, so my mother and I pack up my fourth-floor walk-up. Everything must go into boxes. The movers will be here tomorrow at 10:00. "I thought you gave up cigarettes," she says, holding what must be the fifth lighter she has found in my room.

"I have." "Do you smoke marijuana?" She stares at me wide-eyed, as if I am the first girl in our class to kiss a boy or get my period, while she is stuck pecking the back of her hand. Putting quarters in the tampon machine, unsure where these contraptions go. I ask if she wants to smoke.

I do not have my own dealer—my friends are home for the summer—but I can get on my knees. In the 70s, my mother was in high school, yet she has never smoked pot. She says she never tried it because she was afraid she would like it.

She doesn't drink much either. Three Thanksgivings ago she nearly swerved off the road after one glass of white wine, snorting and giggling like Beavis and Butthead on laughing gas.

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My boyfriend asks if I have an addictive personality. I do not tell him about the times I have rubbed myself raw or eaten boxes of Thin Mints in one sitting, sometimes both simultaneously. I tell him I get it from my mother. That there are times I anticipate

the buzzing, so I keep buckets of self-control on hand. He says having the power to stop your addiction is not addiction. I read him this poem. He calls me "brave," says he could never be as honest as I am. I tell him it is something I have to do.

My mother praises me for never getting stage fright. I tell her I get butterflies each time I am on stage, but I go up anyway. The two of them deserve each other, resenting me for the risks they will not take. As if I wasn't scared to smoke the first time. As if I wasn't the last girl in my class to get kissed.

HEATHER HEITZENRATER

Emily As Big Wings
by Darren Demaree

I wanted the mystery
of the slow changes
from a great height

& I wanted each dip
of her to change the wind
for miles. I'm a human

man that has nested
where everything else
was broken. I've loved

what creates the currents
in the same way my parents
loved their God

despite having no more
names for him than what
they had been told by others.

TAY WETHERBEE

Emily As The Smell Of Hickory

BY DARREN DEMAREE

Emily has refused
to ever eat meat
again. That does

not mean she
can't give off
the scent of deep

red. There are times
when I eat bacon,
because Emily

is withholding
from the places
where blood rises

without tenderness.

Dragonflies Among Us

BY MELISSA WILEY

In this world even flies can be predators. Even flies, grown hungry enough, can become dragons. Yet dragonflies are, in their youth, no more than nymphs, pendulous pockets of larvae housing organs pink as human hearts, living below the water while breathing through gills at their rectums. Only after a certain number of years, their larva hardens. They rise from the water as their dragon eyes emerge, enormous compared to the rest of them. They see more than fly or dragon alone has ever witnessed, the 70 beats of the wings of a hummingbird per second. They sound the thunderous heat of starlight close against the water's surface, telling you something of life's raw hunger when you are tired from too long and hard a swim.

Yet you are so much bigger than a dragonfly when you are five years old, when you no longer like peeing outdoors behind a towel stitched with a sheaf of yellow balloons. A shield your mother holds like the cape of a matador, letting it wave in the wind so any of your father's friends in a speedboat the color of a tomato might watch the stream of your urine thicken then attenuate into a filament.

She held the towel with a wrist gone limp and languid, not understanding why I needed a curtain to pee beside the open bag of charcoal. Because my nakedness was yet clean as a peeled apple. Because she didn't realize that men with mustaches were predators also. That the stuffed blue elephants they gave me for my birthday only a month ago did not alter their appetite for things smaller and sweeter than themselves.

Then she understood so little. It's the only reason I can fathom as to why she brought no bathing suit when the only place to escape the dragonflies was below the water. Why she wore silk panties and a fawn lace bra beneath her tennis dress where there was no tennis to be played and she had no racket either.

Larry spoke more quietly than the rest of the men in the boat with dark hair swirling round their navels, antic wire coronas flaming from stars gone lightless. He never cupped his hands into a wrinkled megaphone for greater volume when addressing someone across the table as occasionally did my father. But his mustache was a curtain, and curtains conceal what lies behind them, my mother should have known better than her daughter. She should have seen through hairs hanging stiff as a broom head looking as if blood had stained them that there were spaces inside him where someone could become trapped and succumb to suffocation. Only I never saw the lips it shielded because compared to a dragonfly's my eyes were too deeply sunken.

A woman with any sense, I thought regardless, would keep her distance. This was before I knew the pleasure of coming closer to strange men than you needed, the freedom of unfurling the towel that once held you tight as a cocoon from which you long wished you had molted.

I never knew how many pairs of panties in her top dresser drawer my mother had folded, though I always felt there were not enough to offer her protection. Perhaps I was awaiting the moment when she would take her dress off in front of someone not her husband and stand there too naked; perhaps I was that prescient. If not, I still know when I helped her heft a load of laundry out from the dryer and dropped it onto our

dining room table in a loose and lavender hummock, I saw the streaks at her panties' cotton isthmus. Panties uniformly silk and translucent, all sepia as photographs from an era almost forgotten.

And while she went shopping for more of them, I stood with one hand to hip and another raised to forehead as still as any mannequin as she rummaged through racks of clothing. Mannequins couldn't talk, but they could see everything, the flutter of a woman's heart and the beat of the hummingbird's wings both without ever blinking. She bought no new panties with any color to them, none that any mannequin ever noticed. Just more with all the brightness long leached out of them, until she was stiff as a mannequin herself inside an oaken box as light a beige as all her undergarments. Until they melted into her skin begun desiccating from lack of oxygen.

Inside the boat, she laughed with no consciousness that she was the only woman, I the only smaller one. That we were different from the men who wore only bathing suit bottoms, she with her skin all a smoothness. She never shaved her calves or her legs' upper regions, because she grew so little hair on them, and so I was the first to litter our bathroom with any pastel razors. She grew hair only on her knees, that on her left the longer, I observed while sitting beside her, my eyes level with the dashboard as she drove me to kindergarten.

Shapely as urns, her calves and thighs felt glabrous as her palm, as if she had survived a fire without scarring. And she smothered herself with oil to absorb the sun's rays the faster and bronze into a samovar that boiled no water. Her skin freckled in the sun, overspread with brown constellations I traced but couldn't transfer onto my own outer layering.

Children had less freckles these days, she softly bemoaned, searching my limbs for small star formations as my father choked the boat's engine into a guttural grown. She didn't count the mole on my right hip when I rolled over in my seat and pointed at it by way of evidence I was like her. Because that was just a birthmark, nothing to do with the sun, though I secretly thought it might have done. That it shrank at night and swelled with light come dawn.

My father, drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon while driving the boat with one thumb, raised the boat's nose high so it could inhale the scent of lake water as waves leapt at our sides like blue flames from a gas burner. As he drove faster, rainbow shafts appeared within the rising waters as the boat leaked a rivulet of gasoline that was to me a heaven evanescent as still are all heavenly things. I dangled my hand in the little rainbow that parted through my fingers, fanned like pale palm fronds shot through a prism that kept widening. While after a few beers, I understood gradually, the women in the boat had all but left his memory.

I preferred gasoline to blue elephants, because gasoline was closer to love, I knew without loving anyone aside from my parents. Indifferent to your hunger for it, because there was never enough, I sensed while still languishing in a surfeit, the less the more you wanted. Gasoline was my mother in a boat with no bathing suit, my mother in a tennis dress printed with pink daises on a man-made lake with the sun leering down on it. You couldn't lure either closer or beg it into existence. They either happened or they didn't.

And when the gasoline dissolved into a rainbow at my side so thin I could chop it with the heel of my hand, I opened my mouth the wider

for more gossamer shards to pierce my softness. A nymph with unfreckled skin yet nacreous, I was greedy for pleasure. It was, for the moment, the closest I could come to swimming in fawn silk panties like my mother's while mine were cotton imprinted with butterflies a fading yellow.

When the boat slowed and we were drifting toward the dam, she stood me up to fasten my life jacket. A red strap fell like a tail from its back, and she pulled it tight between my legs to prevent me from looking reptilian—like an alligator, she said, because I breathed with my mouth open. She snapped it so hard against another latch that the air within my lungs contracted into a clear brick that began beating like a second heart wedged in more tightly than the other. Only the brick grew wings and soon escaped out my trachea.

Once my breathing slackened, before I could sit back down and continue shredding the foam I'd found within the seat's inseam into an ochre snow, Larry placed his hands around my ribs where in eight years' time my breasts would be. He did not hear my breathing stall or the whir of dragonfly wings above the gasoline overspreading water turned vitreous and watchful. He tossed me into the water as if spilling blood onto glass. As if the spray of me were as easy to clean after I'd done my damage.

Glass. That's what Larry called the water, obsidian and cool in the boat's shadow womb, creeping into the dark crystal of my lungs as I tried to breathe the faster while they ossified into bone. Glass I could still swallow, could cycle my legs within as if I were riding a unicycle. The water's smooth as glass, he slithered, and your daughter's in the water. Look, she's crying now, so better jump in after her. We'll close our eyes while you undress. No one else will notice, I promise.

My father sat facing the opposite direction, watching a family of ducks trace a lasso around a shifting island of seaweed as he filled beer cans with lake water until they stopped breathing and started sinking. I watched them bubble before asphyxiating and falling too deep for anyone besides fish large as speedboats and the people it held and kept from drowning to bother following. The biggest things, I knew already, sank the more easily. And I was relieved I was small enough not to fall among the cans of PBR and whales that swam through the same depths below me.

Before sinking the cans, he tore off their tabs like hangnails that left no skin bleeding. Then with all the beer cans fallen, he did the same for those of grape soda I'd emptied while my mother unstrapped her sandals and started giggling. Only once the tabs became yet more debris to mix with the seaweed, he left the empty soda cans in the cooler because I said I wanted to sink them, Daddy.

Because emptied of their grape juice that had no real grapes with no seeds, they tasted better to me. Because without its tab, the ridge of the can's opening became jagged as saw's teeth. When I tipped the can back into my mouth, pretending to quaff what was there no longer, it cut my inside upper lip, so that I could drink a trickle of my own blood, suckling the juice of it. And I continued drinking without any thirst to speak of, putting my lips to the cool, rough metal while we circled the lake, dug by men like a grave for someone larger than I liked to imagine.

As my father kept sinking cans while I cried for my mother to come save me, I peed again where no one could see while I rode my unicycle and kept peddling. I bobbed beside the engine as my mother unzipped

her dress after undoing the clasp at her neck. I peed into the mouths of the fish beneath me, the ones that had just cut their lips trying to drink beer already finished and inflating my dad's beer belly. And bleeding underwater, I knew, the broken lips of all the fish had no hope of healing, because their blood had no way of drying. They could not even taste its trickling for the lake they swam in always, the sweetness of their own insides for the cooler water dissolving it into a liquid nothing. Could not see the scarlet for the blue diluting it.

Then as my mother hesitated with her zipper fallen down her back halfway, someone with a voice of sharpening knives and no red mustache, someone holding a beer can still with its tab, shouted that a bra and panties were the same as a bikini, when other voices raised in an echo that began jangling. From the boat, the shouts became a glare too bright for me to see without squinting. The pretty pink daisies then fell to the boat's carpeting, trapped between the cooler and water skis, and my mother turned into something colorless in front of me.

Only the lace filigree just above her nipples showed she was wearing anything besides her skin spotted with freckles the sun kept metastasizing. Her hair too looked so light against the sunlight as to be little more than a nimbus. Only the dark patch of curling hair between her legs I could see as different, as any point of contrast from that surrounding it, and the smell of gasoline began receding. The love was leaving all of us.

A dragonfly hovered just above me when a splash frightened it and made it flee toward a cloud eclipsing the sun for the moment. My mother appeared beside me wearing an orange life jacket that stiffened her shoulders into battlements. Her hair was straight and dark and she looked fully

clothed again, because the water had become another curtain. The water that made our cut lips whole again against our wishes.

She wrapped her arm around my waist and paddled with me to boat's ladder, pushing me up by my buttocks while my father lifted me by my wrists, saying I was getting too heavy for this, though I couldn't help growing, I told him. He tossed one ski out and then the other, letting each smack the water, which now sounded harder than glass even, grown suddenly firmer and impossible to shatter. While she's wet, she might as well ski, he muttered. She might as well skate on it like the glass that it wasn't.

Once a rainbow appeared again in the wake at my finger ends, my arms began to pickle in the wind. I wound my towel around me tight as a chrysalis while my mother jumped wakes in her panties, the hair between her legs shrunken to the size of a flying insect. Larry and the other men howled with voices grown higher as my father stared straight ahead, driving us in a loose ellipse as if we were a planet lapsed from orbit. I reached out for another empty can of soda with no grapes in it, when I bled my lip and tasted my own sweetness.

Until Death
BY W.S. BREWBAKER

After Miguel Angel Rios's A Morir ('til Death)

Catharsis like a heart arrested.
The wail of the flat-line. Stop motion
in black and white: a grid
drawn in chalk and smudging.
Tops whirring across lines.
Erratic and spinning. The black
bodies colliding and toppling.
Stumbling over the fallen.
Letting go like acceptance or faith.
Not wanting to be the last one. Afraid
the spinning might never stop.

damn blind bad luck. three strikes.
BY GARY LUNDY

a bird swifts from a limb. a leaf falls. suddenly there can be no going back. reading stumbles among barking dogs. a nothing i can neither see. nor hear. voices as thoughts. clamor after attention. repeated flavor of a deep silence. shallow breaths. my friend reads poems to a packed house. no one gets past the first few words. what's it mean caves into a solid resistance. disabling thrust a pull. words sacrifice. a root. from which blooms. ginger. you construct small lies. to support a narrative. to believe your reading makes sense. sans research. native longing. the i floats midsentence. descends spiral dislocation. to light another one. a moment among drags. of wonder. it goes wrong. write the two out of the frame.

DESIREE PALERMO

NICK ROMEO

Oysters

BY ERICA GELMAN

What's the use in calling scavenging an art?
in pulling apart blue oysters
and watching the slow muscle drip
across the palm
a slow death, a
whipping of the tongue
the salted desire that reminds us that we never anticipated things like this,
objects so small that they can be tucked into ourselves
but never consecrated.

You're supposed to pull it off
blue-honey-tabasco
that stings and burns and sticks
all at once
what is it with the men
and their obsession with the bitter?
with the rawness that must be
cooked to be consumed
and swallowed to be felt.

My father and brother used to fish together before
my mother began to gut the fish raw
I remember the littlest feeling
watching the tail swim all on its own
as its head was opened and filled with the peppers
and emptied of its red and its throbbing
it was purple-hearted desire;
knowing that I would stick to the white and the soft,
my father telling me that I would love the savagery
if I only tried it.

Touching the scales, I managed to feel something in between
wrought-iron
and velvet.

The Fourth Time

BY NASHAE JONES

The first time it happened, I cried. It was a messy sort of cry. Snot congealed on my face. My lips, red and swollen, wouldn't stop moving. They quivered to an unknown beat. I turned my face from images of cherub babies, happy toddlers, families who laughed and sighed in familiar unity. I turned my face from the pile of tiny, cotton clothes that had formed an unattainable mountain at the end of my bed.

The second time, I felt the numbness climb through me. It separated my limbs piece by piece. The pain, which was far reaching, was barely noticeable. I sat with my legs propped up in metal stirrups, drowning out the hum of the hospital room.

The third time, I didn't move. I sat on my bed, hands moist with blood. I sat and I listened as my husband cried. He tried to muffle the sounds, pushing his face against his arm. I had only heard him cry once, five years ago at his father's funeral.

The fourth time, the doctor slipped his hand into mine. He pursed his lips in sympathy, a look I'm sure was practiced. I sat staring blankly at the wall, imagining how he looked in the mirror, practicing the droop of his mouth, the odd pucker of his lips. I don't think it's wise to try any more, he said. Sometimes these things just aren't possible. He said it with conviction and I remember digging my fingernails into the palm of his hand, hoping, praying that I would draw even the tiniest pinprick of blood.

JOE MAHER

In The Light My Mother Never Wept

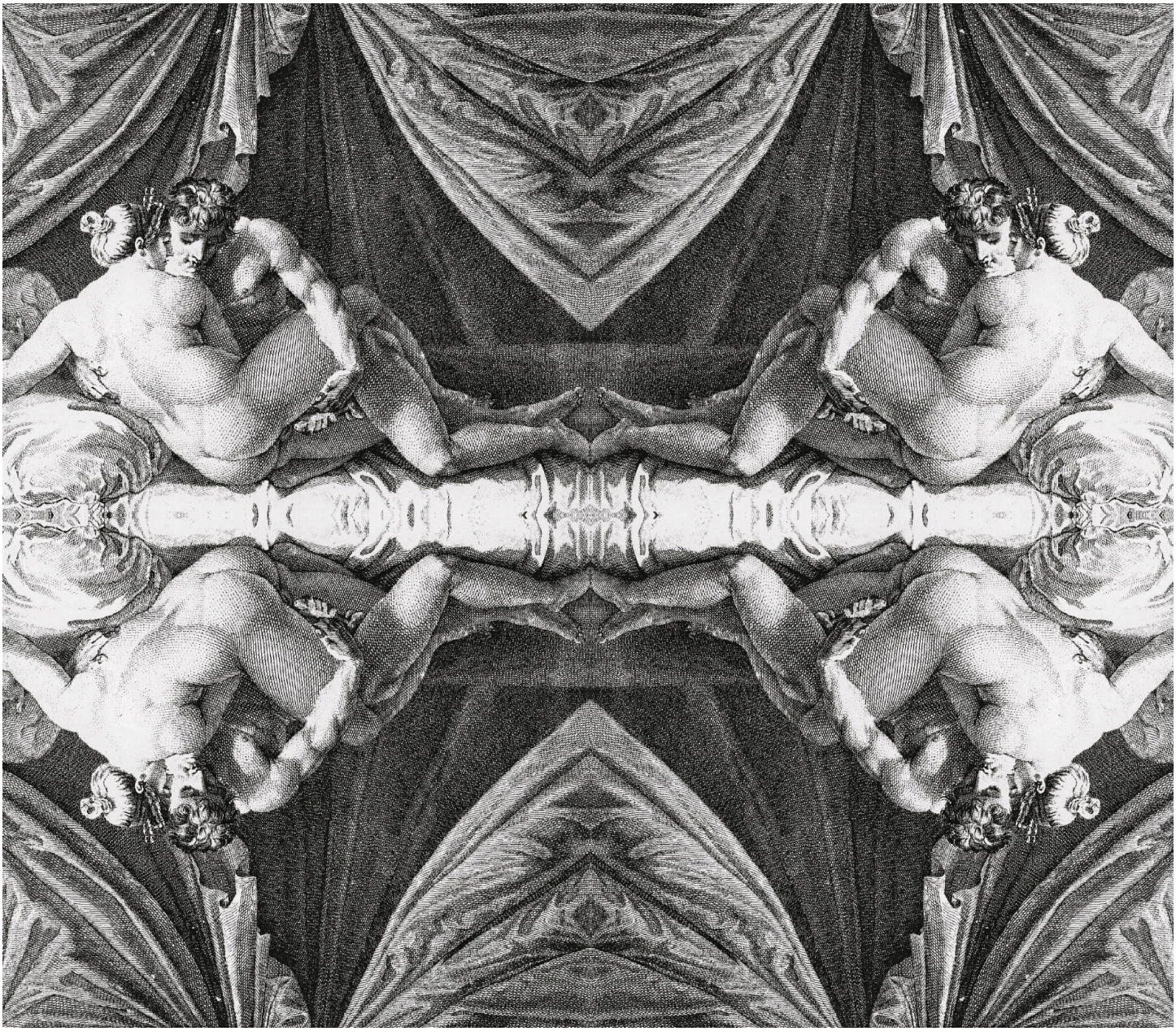
BY M. ANN HULL

In the dark, my mother's
shatter-plate eyes could flash,
cracked. I walked on her back,
a wire-walker. Storm caught
in the cage in her ribs. In the light,
I never found a cloud. She asked,
would I knead her after. I did.
In the dark, my mother
was stagger sunken in. She walked
like she walked down hallways.
Lay down like she lay fenced-in.
In the light, her wires had once split
a hole inside her, width enough
for an animal to fit. I crawled out
and into this. Rubbed her back
nightly. In the light, my mother was
fetal-fist, futile, a broken door's
busted hinge, window cracked
not by the baseball but the bat.
In the dark, she called for
hands beyond hands; I only had
the hands I had to console her with.
In the light, I am the chipped glass
empty half. In the dark, I am the spine's
straight line on which to walk.
I still walk like walking back.

Epistle 1

BY JASON PRIMM

The first cool mornings and the old injury is acting up,
Making me limp across the house for my morning piss.
Is it still hot in Louisiana? Did I tell you that the mosquitoes
Here are different? Large and black and slow, they drift like a tide.
Always a surprise when I see one on my forearm and always
A smear of bright red blood when I slap them. The children
Get quarter size welts from the bites. Did you? Somehow,
I think you didn't. I'd ask somebody but I see no one
From those days. This is strange but whenever I write letters
I feel like I'm in a sanatorium. Something I caught from a book.
To be honest, in case you see this, these true details
Are to hide that I'm talking to myself. Though I think of you
When hurricanes are in the gulf. And I think of how the river
Changed course two hundred years ago and gave us a curving lake.
I'll ride my bike today. That is all the mastery of the world
I desire. Horace always gave advice. I'll say one thing: do not die.



BILL WOLAK

108

BY KITTY SHIELDS

"One-oh-eight," I growled as I hoisted myself over the edge of the cliff with the last of my energy.

Rolling away from the edge, I lay there panting, arms splayed out, letting my burning muscles rest for the first time in hours. Breathing was all I could accomplish. Then I realized I was lying in bird shit. Layers upon layers of crusted crap from generations of sea birds. Wonderful, I thought.

With a sigh, I unclipped my harness, rolled out of my pack, and managed to sit up. The newest set of blisters across my palms stung something fierce, so I opened my canteen and poured water across them, watching blood mix with climbing chalk. Then I looked down at the rest of myself. The bird poop was nothing compared to the sweat soaking through my front in smiles or the dirt streaking my limbs in stripes. I'd have some pretty bruises tomorrow, and maybe a few battle scars from when I'd lost my grip, fallen a few feet, and slammed into the cliff face. The thought of new scars didn't give me the thrill it used to. Actually, looking at it all—the blood, dirt, shit, sweat—it just made me tired.

Pushing away my exhaustion, I stood and got my first real glimpse of the view from the top of the Old Man of Hoy. He was a four hundred fifty-foot sandstone tower off the coast of Scotland, a stubborn sea crag. The view was stunning now that the fog had burned off. The ocean spread out like a blue infinity that crashed and whipped about, making the land behind me seem unreal. The soundtrack was moody as the wind and ocean toyed with the idea of a storm, and the circling birds above me

complained about my presence. The sky stretched out in one unbroken, flat grey color. Despite the view, all I could think about was erosion.

Scientists thought the Old Man wouldn't last more than another decade, and then he would collapse into the sea. I still saw strength in him, though. Standing there, I felt more grounded than I had in a decade. The Old Man wasn't giving up. He was going to continue on proud and stubborn until the last possible second.

I wanted to give up. Maybe that's why I chose the Old Man for my last career climb. He wasn't the hardest, certainly, but he was stalwart. He was burdened by sun, sea, and sky, but he was still here, still standing like me.

Okay, I wasn't standing per say. My back was killing me, I leaned over my knees to keep from falling down, and I still hadn't caught my breath, but I was alive. Some days that's all I had in me.

"One hundred and eight," I said, and felt the tears well up.

Failure crashed around me, and my knees gave. I sobbed for a few minutes before I could shove my feelings back down. No, I decided. The answer had to be here. I hadn't climbed this far to not finish. I didn't quit.

I made a circuit of the tower. It was a rough, circular plateau, fifteen feet in diameter, with a bed of sea grass on the surface. I searched for a clue, a glimmer. Hell, I'd be happy if a pigeon shat on my head, some sign that I wasn't alone. Getting crapped on by birds was lucky in some cultures. As I paced, my eyes darting back and forth, I felt that wave of failure clutch at my chest, and my breath came out in tight gasps.

Come on, I thought.

A flock of startled birds took off from one of the sides, causing me to freeze. Was that my sign? Crossing the plateau, I leaned over the edge.

Fifty feet down, a man scaled the Old Man up another path. I hadn't noticed another climber, but I wasn't surprised either. The Old Man boasted several climbing paths, and it's not like I had rented the sea tower for my exclusive use. Still, I hadn't expected anybody else. The weather and fog this morning had been so dense that even the locals stayed inside. Plus, I wasn't in any state for company.

Turning, I went back to my bag and dug around until I found my towel. I didn't have a mirror, but I was guessing I looked as composed as a mourner. I didn't want some stranger to find me a blotchy mess, so I splashed water on my face and toweled off. Then I took several deep breaths and pulled out the trail mix. Focusing on the food, I managed to avoid the emotional tsunami drawing itself higher inside of me. It would break, I knew, but hopefully I could stave it off until I got back to my hotel room.

A little while later, a figure came into sight, hands grasping for purchase. I waited for the newcomer to climb over the edge but didn't assist. This was his adventure, the challenge he accepted—interfering would be disrespectful. As he rolled over the top, panting, I studied him. The guy was in his mid-twenties. He wore the typical gear of the bourgeois bored: the name-brand climbing shoes; a pre-faded, pre-bleached REI shirt; a bandanna; and some surfer necklaces. He sported an outrageous beard, probably hoping it made him look older.

Nope, it made him look like a hipster crossed with Bigfoot. He was a walking cliché for the suburban-turned-vegan-turned-libertarian/eco-friendly generation. I sighed and sorted through the five key greetings these kids always seemed to lead with.

There was "Sup!" because saying the entire sentence was too much

work.

Or "Yo!" the "I have a college education by I refuse to enunciate it" response.

Perhaps he would use "Hiyah!" meaning "I'm a super nice guy who hasn't gotten laid in five years."

My personal favorite was the chin nod. It meant "I am mysterious and contemplating Mother Earth. I can't deign to notice other people, let alone greet them vocally."

My least favorite was the "Hello?" said in a puzzled voice, then accompanied by a baffled sideways tilt of the head. All lone outdoorsmen seemed confused by the sight of a solo woman at the top of a mountain. Clearly, the world of men had come a long way from the 1950s.

Swiveling my head sideways, I gazed out at the horizon, drinking it in, and sifting through the scents on the wind, still searching for my sign. Then I took a big gulp of oxygen and swirled it around in my mouth. Every place had its own flavor. There was a tang in the air you couldn't describe unless you'd tasted it, unless you'd felt it against the roof of your mouth, rolled it around your tongue, and swallowed. I had sniffed and breathed in countless energies, whirled them around my canteen, sipped them, and sometimes spit them back out. The Old Man's energy tasted bitter. He knew his fate.

Looking at the clouds, I made a bet with myself on which greeting Beard Guy would use. I was banking on the chin nod. If I was right, I won a hot fudge sundae when I got back to town. If I was wrong, it would be a night of crying in my hotel bathtub, possibly with a hot fudge sundae for company.

The thought of the hotel bathtub made my emotions boil below

the surface. Shaking my head, I stuffed them down again. I couldn't escape them, but I could stave them off for a little while longer. Glancing at the newcomer to distract myself, I saw his body shaking from the exertion. From the looks of it, this climb was a big win for him, a test of his strength. It took years to build the kind of endurance and core strength required to hike or climb the world's curves. My guess was he'd just moved on to the next phase in his climbing career. The Old Man was a big milestone. I thought about milestones. I'd accomplished all the goals I'd set out for myself except the most important, and now, at the end of my journey, I wasn't sure what to do.

"Nice towel," he said, drawing my attention back. Damn, I lost the bet, and he was mocking my favorite towel. Okay, it did have ducks all over it.

"Nice beard," I said.

Either Beard Guy missed the sarcasm or didn't care because he grinned. He managed to get himself into a sitting position and tore his eyes away from me to study the view. I recognized the expression on his face. It was part satisfaction, part smugness, and part bad-assery that came when one physically conquered a peak, trail, or adventure. For a while, we sat in silence. In my case, I meditated, trying to empty my mind. Otherwise, I would lose my composure.

"So, what's your name?" he asked.

"Jenna Bowman."

"The Jenna Bowman?" he asked. "The writer?"

Damn. I thought he'd be too young to know my column. I didn't respond, which he took for an answer. His eyes widened with awe, and I groaned on the inside.

"Holy shit," he exclaimed.

"Shit's not that holy," I told him.

He laughed, but I turned away, regarding the ocean once more. I could tell he wanted to ask a million questions, but he was restraining himself.

"Alright, I'll give you two questions and then I'm done," I said.

Beard Guy grinned again, a flash of teeth through the whiskers. Really, who grows a beard like that? While he contemplated his questions, I pulled out my canteen and a bag of peanut butter granola, chomping through lunch. He sat on a rock across from me and ruffled around in his pack until he found a protein bar and his canteen. Beard Guy was slower to eat. I was finished before he spoke again.

"Okay," he said. "What number are you on? I mean, there's like an endgame to your mission, right? Last time I read your column you were pretty close."

The question made me pause. I didn't want to lie but I didn't want this conversation either. Here I was at the end of my journey, struggling with a ton of emotions, and this kid asks the one question I wanted to avoid. Usually, fans asked me what was my hardest expedition. Of course, just my luck he didn't ask that.

"Well, this is 108," I told him, hoping he wouldn't catch on.

"Isn't that—" he stopped, searching my face with a frown. "Isn't that the last one?"

"Yup." I took a long swig of water while he processed the answer.

"So how do you feel?"

"Sorry, you got two questions," I said.

Lunch eaten, I closed up my pack. Part of me wanted to be a bitch

and tell him to buy the next issue of the magazine if he wanted his answers. Considering I wasn't even sure if I could write the article, I buried the urge. How could I write about failing my mission in life? I bit back more tears.

"That's it?" Beard Guy asked.

"Well, I was thinking of traveling to the center of the earth next," I snapped.

He stared at me, a wounded expression under that huge mound of hair. I turned my back and strolled off to the cliff edge where my ropes waited. I really wanted to climb down and get away, but my body wasn't ready yet. I considered throwing myself off. I don't care, I told myself. I don't care anymore. Nothing fucking matters. Biting my tongue to stop from crying, I realized I had really failed.

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The Buddhists believe that on the pathway of Life, Man is tempted by 108 distractions. In Gnostic teachings, a person has 108 chances at rebirth. The number is sacred in Hinduism where each god has 108 names. It's also referenced in Jainism, karate, and Stonehenge, which is approximately 108 feet in diameter.

One hundred and eight ideas on God, ways to God, lines to God. That was the idea behind my mission. I would tread all the ways to God. Through these pathways, I reasoned, I would strip away everything I didn't need and live in humility, compassion, and naturalness. That was my plan. I got into a traveling magazine internship and pitched them the idea. They were intrigued by my literal search for the divine and offered to send me along with an expedition up Kilimanjaro. I'd been hunting the

Big G down ever since.

Turns out that struck a note with readers. I didn't do new things. Other adventurers had come before me, but they were hunting thrills and adrenaline rushes. I was searching for the divine in the most in-your-face, I-want-answers-now sort of way, and I wasn't shy about it. That premise touched people who were just as frustrated and disillusioned with the Eternal as I was. My search became other people's hope for truth or an answer in a pale world full of semi-solid boundaries between hell and heaven. It also garnered me a lot of hate mail but I was never home long enough to read it.

I had traveled over ten years. 108 trips, 3,758 days, and one goal. No God, though. I hadn't found Him, hence the tsunami of emotion. God created the world in seven days, but He couldn't show up and say hi just once on one of my trips?

The temperature dropping. The sea was becoming more serious about that summer storm. Whether or not my body wanted to, I realized I'd have to climb down soon. Judging from that sky, I couldn't go slowly and take my ropes with me. I'd have to rappel down and come back for them later. Great. I was having trouble facing the day as it was and now this.

"Hey," Beard Guy said, breaking the silence.

We'd been politely ignoring each other for a little under an hour and, honestly, I'd forgotten he was there.

"Listen, I don't mean to bother you. I just wanted to apologize for intruding. I can't imagine it's an easy day."

Damn. Why did he have to go and address the situation directly? I felt the tears welling up again but fought them.

"Yeah, well..." I had nothing to say to that. I nodded and set my jaw,

working on keeping the tears in my tear ducts.

Beard Guy shuffled, kicking at the dry grass with his foot. He looked stuck between wanting to give me space and desperately wanting to talk.

"You need to gush, don't you?" I said.

At least he seemed mildly sheepish about it but more pleased at the opening. He told me about the first time he picked up the magazine and how it got him into rock climbing. At that point, he came across my column around Adventure #56. He was so impressed he found all the back issues. Finally, he asked, "Why the Old Man? For your last one I mean?"

"Well, I thought it'd be funny to climb an old man looking for the Old Man."

It was meant to be a joke, but it came off frustrated. Beard Guy looked at me askance. I knew that expression. It was part pity, part confusion, as if to say "why don't you understand about God?" I'd seen it from a lot of zealots over the years, and I was not going to deal with that now.

"You're not going to go into a religious rant are you? Because I will throw myself off this thing, if you are," I said.

"No, I was just wondering, what were you expecting? In God, I mean?" he asked.

The question put me on the defensive. I'd heard it a lot in my career and it aggravated me. What was I expecting? Right then, I had no idea. Originally, I expected it to be easy. God was big, right? There was so much out there about Him. Plus, people had spiritual experiences in nature all the time. I'd done my research; I had a vague idea of what I was waiting to see. He didn't need to show up like the Monty Python version, but, yes, I expected Him to show.

Then again, maybe it was me. The pragmatist inside had a tough

time seeing God in anything. A butterfly flapping its wings in the morning sun on top of Mount Kilimanjaro was a stunning sight. Sure, it moved me, but was that really God? Was that all I could touch of Him? If it was, it didn't provide any answers.

"What are you chasing?" I asked, instead.

Beard Guy noticed the evasion but let it go.

"Well, my goal isn't as lofty as yours," he said. "I want one pure moment."

"Define a 'pure moment.'"

"I can't," he said. "Any more than you can define God."

Sitting back, I tried to figure out if he was mocking me. That damned beard hid a lot of facial expression. His eyes were serious though.

"Do you know how to dive?" I asked. He nodded. "Go to the Yucatan peninsula. It's pockmarked with sinkholes and underground caves. If you get on a good team, you can go into some of the older caves. If there's a pure moment, you'll find it there."

"What did you see down there?"

The wind was picking up, and it whipped my ponytail across my face. I moved the hair so I could see again, wondering how to explain.

"Fossils. Collapsed civilization, pristine and preserved. Everything is scattered along the seabed in this bizarre, teal world. It reminds me of an alien landscape."

Beard Guy frowned, his bushy eyebrows knotting.

"So you associate alien landscapes with pure moments? It sounds like your perceptions are a little skewed. Maybe that's why you can't find Him."

His comment stunned me.

"Fuck you," I said and stormed to the edge. I grabbed my pack in a huff, threw it on, and began clipping into my ropes.

Beard Guy watched but didn't try and stop me. I didn't look at him as I knelt and swung over the edge in a cloud of righteous indignation, but I'm pretty sure he felt guilty. Good, I thought and began rappelling down.

A moment later, Beard Guy followed me. He threw his own ropes over my side of the Old Man and descended some ten feet to my left.

"Are you stalking me?"

"No," he said. "This side is protected against the wind."

He chin nodded at the darkening sky. He was right. The winds could get as high as thirty miles per hour, and with a summer gale maybe more. Beard Guy rappelled another five feet.

"Look," he said, "I'm not trying to upset you, but I think maybe you've been searching in the wrong places."

"What?" I asked as I kicked off and went down another seven feet.

"Well, you've been seeking out God in majesty," he said, keeping up with me. "Everywhere you've gone has been away from civilization and in these strange, beautiful, extreme places, looking to see something you can't find in a normal place. Maybe, you're overloading your senses, though. Maybe that's why you can't see Him."

I opened my mouth to argue and realized there was some truth in that. Beard Guy kept going on anyway as we kicked off the Old Man over and over, zooming down the side.

"My grandfather always said God was in the details. Cliché, I know. I'm not saying you should take up crocheting or whatever, but maybe it's time to change your approach."

He was out of breath, and I jumped in when he tried to catch some air.

"Then what do you expect me to do?" I asked.

He shook his head; he didn't have an answer. I was crazy to even consider listening to him.

"Ask yourself if you are looking for God or for your dad."

The question caught me off guard and I forgot to push off the rock. I skittered and bounced in an arc along the surface, picking up more bruises and dirt. The air whooshed out of me, and I clung to my rappelling devices, the brakes engaged. After a moment, my vision cleared. Beard Guy stopped a little below me.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Good question."

He hesitated. "We should probably finish this conversation on the ground," he said.

"Why, 'cause hanging two hundred feet in the air off a sea stack talking about God is strange?" I asked. "Or is it too alien?"

"I'm sorry."

"No, you're not," I spat. "You and everybody else have no idea what that fucking word means."

That should put him back in his place, I thought.

People didn't want to talk about dead people. They avoided it at all costs. The dead were off limits to the living. And what was worse than dead people? Grief. No one ever seemed able to talk about that. Or handle it. But not everybody had a choice. People died, and the ones who were left picking up the pieces weren't given a choice. They carried grief whether they wanted to or not. It was a virus. You couldn't cure it, and

you couldn't get rid of it. You just carried it around inside for the rest of your days. Some days it broke out all over you.

"You never answered the question," he said.

It was no secret that my dive into religion and my search for God had started when my dad died. I had been open about that in early articles. At that point, I needed answers. I knew what happened to my father. The biological facts of his death didn't interest me. Like anyone trapped by grief, I needed to understand why death happened. People kept telling me I needed reassurance. No, at twenty years of age, I wanted to find God and spit in His face for taking my dad away, and then I wanted answers. Now, though, I wasn't sure what I needed. I was tired.

"Have you ever gone back?" he asked.

"Where?"

"To see your dad," he said. "Where did you scatter the ashes?"

"Vesuvius." My dad had been a classics professor and a major Roman history nerd. His last wish was to have his ashes scattered above Pompeii.

"So, have you gone back?" Beard Guy pressed.

I hadn't. I avoided Italy like one avoids an agitated beehive, moving with caution around it, afraid the swarm would billow out like an angry cloud.

"Don't you think that would be a more suitable ending?" he asked. "Full circle and all?"

"Don't you think my readers would be pissed?"

"It's not about them," he said. "Your fans may be along for the ride, but you need to be satisfied with the end."

He was right. Damn it. Who the hell was this kid?

"What are you doing here, besides chasing purity? And what is your name?"

He grinned. "William Newsam."

"Oh good. If you had been a Jesus or a John it might have been too much for me," I said getting my feet under me.

He chuckled, and we started rappelling again.

"To answer your other question, I'm on holiday from university."

"What are you studying?"

"Ornithology," he said. "That's why I climbed the Old Man. It's a great place to see birds."

I shook my head. Really, what do you say to that? Then I started to giggle. Then I went into a full-body laugh. After a moment, William joined in. There we hung, in our harnesses, several hundred feet above the ground, standing against the Old Man's rough face, laughing our asses off.

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We made it down the Old Man as the line of rain hit the sea stack. We hid in a small hollow from the majority of the weather as we collected our gear. We left our ropes, still tied at the top. We'd have to come back and climb the Old Man again later, after the weather passed. I would worry about that later though.

As we walked, I thought about William's comments. Part of me thought it was all crap, but another part began a micro-search for the microscopically divine. The Hindus believe that every person has a Universe inside of them. It comes from the story about the god Vishnu, who encapsulated the Universe inside his body. Like Vishnu, we were all sup-

posed to be microcosms.

I started a subtle, curious poking at what may be sacred. I wasn't convinced of its effectiveness, but I'd been staring at majesty for the last decade. Small things tended to escape my notice, which made me fear that God had really been in the small things. Imagine searching for ten years for someone who's been poking at your ankles the whole time. How embarrassing.

I closed my eyes and breathed in rain and salt water.

Was God here?

I didn't feel God. Instead I remembered the day I let my father go. I saw my younger self—my skin was four times lighter, hair shorter, face not as lined by wear—standing on top of the caldera crying while tourists walked around me taking pictures. Maybe I hadn't found God because I had lost too much of myself that day. Maybe there was a part of me left behind, waiting on the caldera with my father's ashes.

"So what are you going to do?" William asked.

"Good question," I said.

I breathed in one more gulp of salty air, and looked back up the Old Man. He was a shadow shape, but he was still standing. I doubted this would be the storm that did him in. Erosion had taken its toll, but it hadn't killed him yet.

I didn't answer William, but I knew my plan. Tomorrow I would climb the Old Man again. Then I was going to visit my dad. Then I was going to keep searching. I didn't know if He would show up or if I would stumble upon Him, but we were going to meet.

A Relationship

BY CARL BOON

First, there was a ribbon
of lavender sunset
through the window,

then the clatter of knives.
The kitchen, too small
for the two of them,

also needed fixtures
and re-papered. Ants
meandered where sugar

had spilled in the space
between the counter
and the stove. But still

they cooked, occasionally
kissed there, and salted
the tomato salad. Once,

when there was no sunset
through the window,
he was seen frosting

a cake, heard humming
melodies for children
among the abstract art

adorning the walls,
and thought how strange,
the word *adorning*,

how heavy, and decided
against it forever. But this
finally was a stupid thought,

so he went on frosting,
humming for a cake
that would be eaten, only.

TIMOTHY DORIS

Father of Invention

BY ALISON D. MONCRIEF BROMAGE

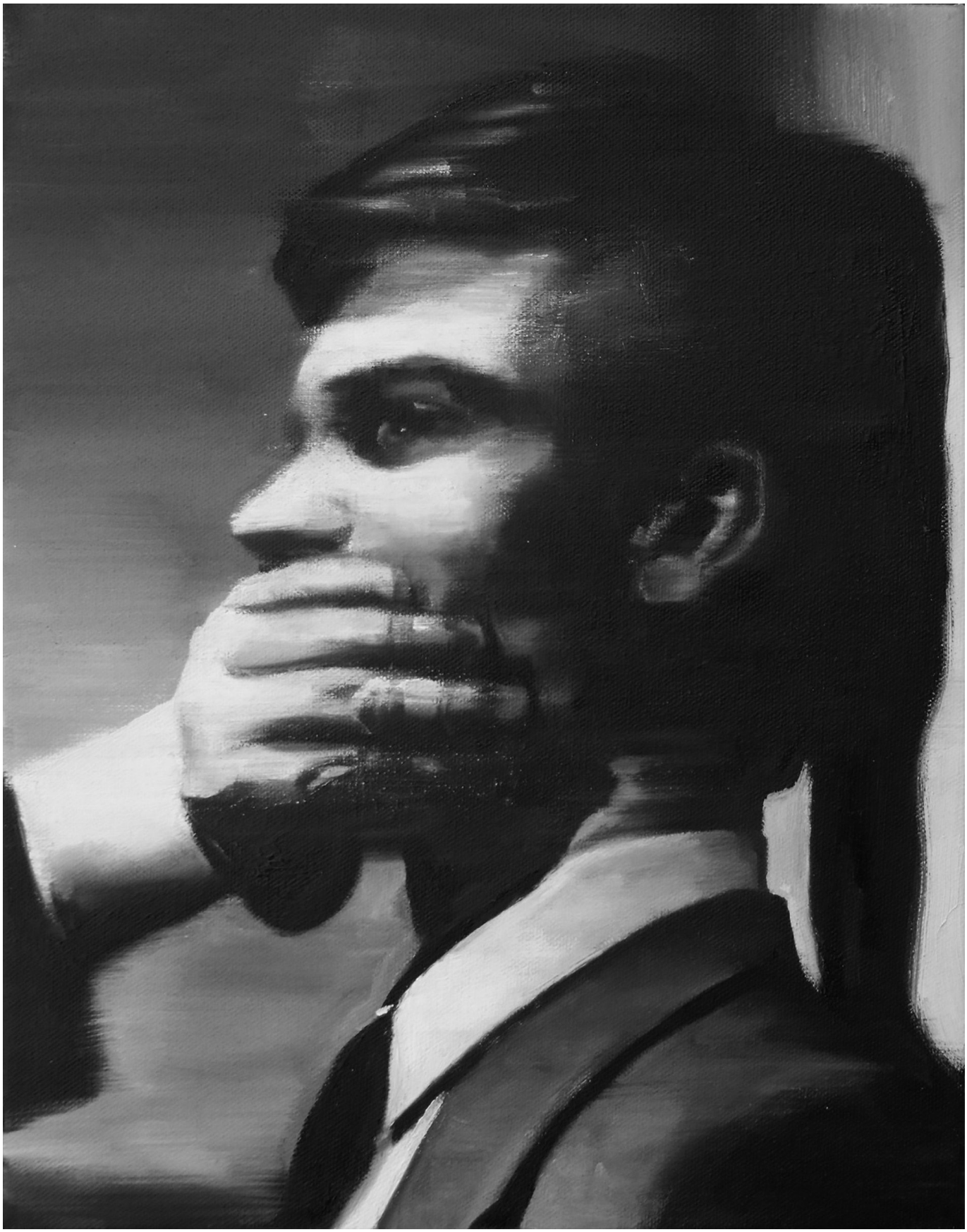
Daedalus made a peahen's fan for me
out of cattails and milkweed.

He wove the stalks in cardboard
and punched a hole in his belt

for my waist.
It isn't pride, but instinct

all of this pretending.
We'd wake early to run the streets.

He'd say When the day broke
it broke behind us! Omnivorous,
those of us, a bevy of believers.
He thought, under his thousand eyes,
we'd roost in the braces of the attic.
He thought I'd never leave, but still fastened
the feathers in the same way a lone peacock's
call is plaintive in the clear of a wood.



TRAVIS K. SCHWAB

Drone

BY LARRY NARRON

While I slept, a drone flew
over my world. It charted
the low places, sketching
the shifting topography
of my dunes with praying
mantis hands that clicked
inside a metal sphere.

My dreams were recorded
& promptly stored somewhere.

When I woke, the wrinkles
of my brain had been smoothed
out by the screens that had
long ago replaced the sky.

Whistlepig Tally

BY JAMES GUTHRIE

I grew up in the country. Ottawa Valley. I'm not at all a country boy, but I do have a soft spot for certain things, like purple loosestrife, reckless driving, marmots.

I recall quite fondly a groundhog digging two burrows in our backyard when I was around eight years old. His favorite abode, it seemed, was beneath the gazebo by the apple tree. We'd see him poke his head out from time to time, then, if we were still enough, he'd wiggle out and grab one of those sour little apples we used to smack around with hockey sticks, taking it with him either back under the gazebo or over to his less occupied second abode under the shed by the vegetable garden that'd gone to seed. There was less to snatch at back there, though there might've been some rhubarb still. Rhubarb's hearty, I believe. He could eat it with those teeth.

Later in the year, my mother would pick the apple tree pretty much clean, so we'd leave our groundhog some supplementary eats.

"Look at him at that," we'd say. "Loves that lettuce."

"Didn't go in for those carrots though, did he?"

"Picky rig."

"Wait, where'd he go?"

Versatile word: burrow. Both the method of construction and the structure constructed. Like digs. Look at these digs, you'd say, if a groundhog invited you inside.

(Typically independent groundhogs do occasionally take on burrow-

mates during mating season and hibernation, so if you're stuck out in the cold, remember, one of the telltale signs of hypothermia is mental confusion. If you start feeling a bit punchy and you come across a burrow, strip off your clothes and give it a shot – they might let you in. Of course it would be a tough fit, but if you made it, you'd be well below the frost. [The six foot burial custom was apparently established way back in plague times, six feet being thought a fair enough depth to avoid pustule ridden carcasses being dredged up by plows or the heaving frost.] You'd be warm down there with rooting runts. You could sleep, finally, your lullaby the soft bleating of the dreaming whistlepig.

Put your head down, they'd say. The mud is amniotic. You can hear the rotation of the earth.)

Our very own yardhog moved on sometime in the early spring. Or so my parents claimed. Quote-unquote moved on. He might very well be under the gazebo still, his little skeleton surrounded by fossilized apple cores. He probably didn't dig his digs deep enough or he starved off the sour apple and lettuce fat he'd built up before the long winter. Or maybe he moved on. It's possible.

A year or two later I had another run-in with a groundhog, though this recollection isn't quite as fond. (I only had a couple run-ins during my young years in the country, besides the occasional unfortunate thump under the tires of a recklessly driven minivan.)

Each summer my older cousin and I would visit my grandfather's beef farm where we'd spend two or three days being generally feral and Huck Finn-ish. One year, my cousin, the burgeoning outdoorsman, was quite keen on Grandpa taking us out to hunt something. Whatever we

could find. He wasn't picky. Varmints were varmints.

Towards the ending of our visit, Grandpa took us out to a field where he'd seen something digging. He turned off the four-wheeler and handed me the .22, which I promptly dropped in the thankfully forgiving hay. I sometimes fret about the different path my life would have taken had the gun gone off and I accidentally committed Grand-patricide at nine.

He said it was okay, no need to apologize. The safety was on. It was okay.

I felt a terrible mixture of anxiety and shame as he handed the gun to my cousin, then, crouching down next to him, he showed him how hold it, how to aim. About twenty feet away, a little brown head poked up. It was peeking out of its spy-hole, probably. (Groundhog burrows have multiple entrances/exits as well as variously functioning rooms: bedrooms, bathrooms—they're quite impressive.)

It was a good shot, apparently. Grandpa asked if I wanted to finish it off, figuring if anything I could handle a stationary target. I couldn't. I couldn't even look at it. (I could hear it bleating, though, in amidst the purple fringe of the infected field.) My cousin couldn't finish it either, but he at least walked over with my grandfather. I stayed back by the four-wheeler. Holding the gun at his hip, my grandfather looked down at it, pityingly, then he shot it once, and that was it.

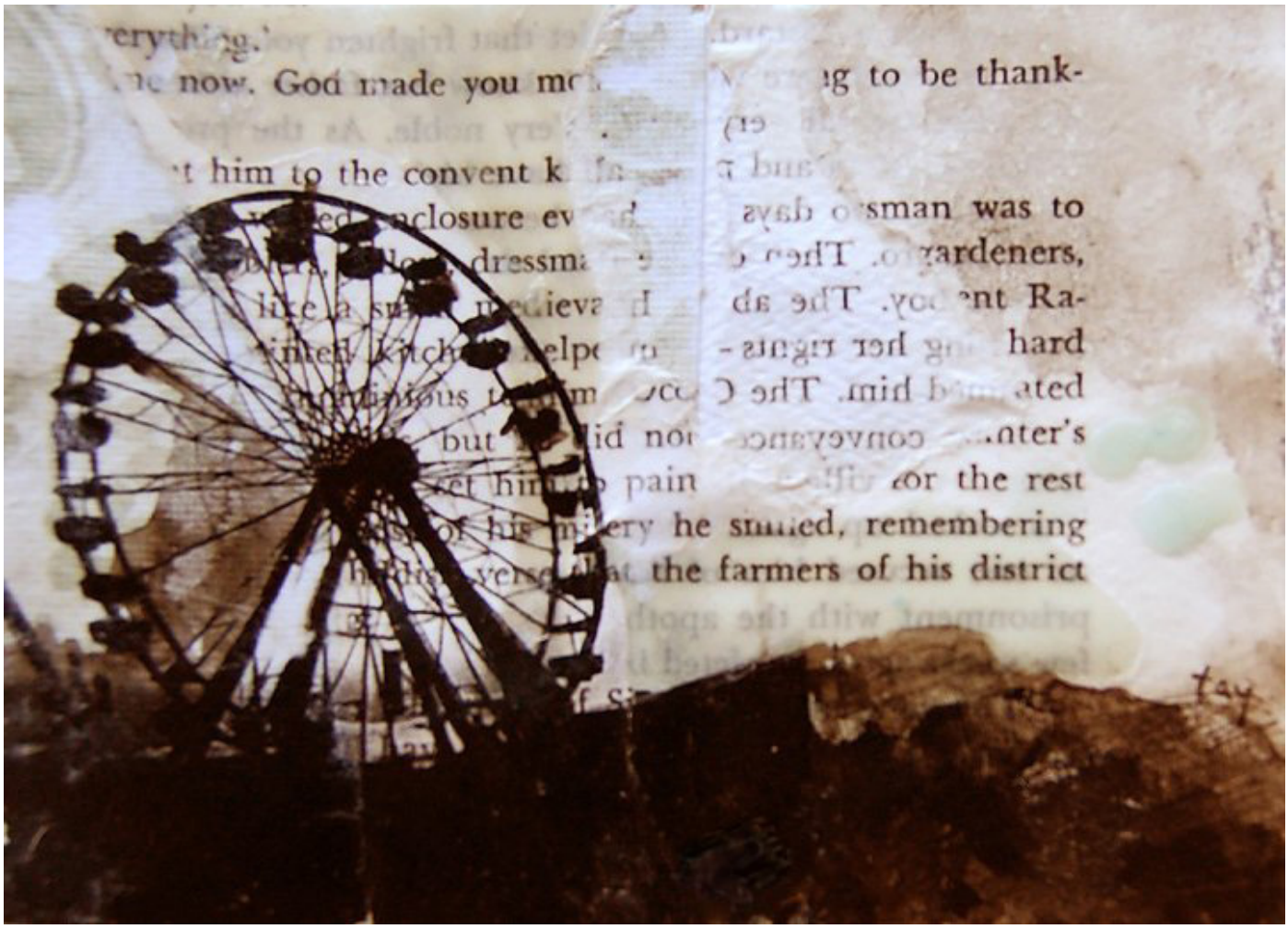
As a sort of consolation, he let me shoot a tree. I hit it, they claimed. I remember pulling the trigger. I remember the sound of the shot, but I didn't see it hit anything. I just remember the two of them going ooo and saying nice one, like you would to a toddler swinging at a tee-ball.

To this day I'm still ashamed.

I'd like to say it was my soft spot that stopped me from shooting the groundhog. It wasn't, really. I certainly felt sorry for it, but I was more afraid of bungling it up somehow—missing or dropping the gun again. I'd proven myself inadequate enough for one day. I had a whole adolescence ahead of me to feel small next to types like my cousin (country types, to my generalizing teenage mind). Ironically he'd grown up in the suburbs, yet he was the one that could hunt and kill game. I was (and still am) the type that would feed game lettuce, and try to curl up with it. I know this is silly, but the nine year old in me still tallies the score:

He'd brought back the head of the beast.

I'd brought back the board it was mounted on.



TAY WETHERBEE

The English Teacher Lady

BY KATRINA KNEBEL

The English Teacher Lady is common and widespread in the United States. As befits such a wide-ranging species, the English Teacher Lady occurs in nearly all school environments, so long as the populace is willing to put up with her high expectations and snooty remarks. Characterized by prominent black-frame glasses, noncompliant jeans, and bad posture, there are, however, many individual variations. Early specimens tend towards rayon, fantastic heels, and fundamentalism, while later ones are larger and keener, with their ability to give a shit about instructional progression documents and state standards content frameworks, more or less broken. At times the English Teacher Lady is strongly committed to best practices and timely feedback, but these periods of engagement-abundance are usually followed by periods of scarcity. The fluctuations are probably caused by corporate and political parasites, misogynistic wrestling coaches, and exhaustion, as well as by student apathy. Fortunately for all personnel, the English Teacher Lady is closely in tune with her inner self (self-absorbed, really) and, therefore, capable of both refusing and feeling guiltless for the occasional mental health day. In the summer months it may be seen migrating in great numbers to the front porch swing (with a book in hand). It is also fond of picking zinnias and contemplating the gray-whiteness of a sycamore trunk. Since we do not fully understand all the behaviors of this undependable species, a great deal of careful study and thorough analytical work is still needed. And conventional ideas of "species" as distinct populations, do not fully apply.

Larva: Extremely variable; head stuck in clouds or pages of book; freckly and rosy; lives jointly with schoolmate; third floor efficiency apartment, emerging often for companionship, etc.

Food: Chiefly anthologies of literature, yellow highlighters, sunny windows, and "No School" marked in black permanent marker on the calendar.

Range: Fluctuating, as typical. From situational—Jodi plagiarized—to intentionally cognitive—Jodi's plagiarism is not necessarily a personal F. U. Being evoked by body—having to pee as third hour takes their final (the whole goddamn hour)—or by environmental stimuli: Madeline's assertion to the class, this book calls attention to Americans' characteristic...or last year's student, Haley, her thank-you letter in the middle drawer (in with the referral slips). From downtrodden to elated, pissed-off to tender, lost to certain.

Subspecies: None known.

One Man in Three Parts

BY ADAM REGER

I. Childhood, 1954

Patrick Williams was nine years old and climbing the fence enclosing Saints Peter and Paul Cemetery when he slipped and fell against the top of a barbed post. The point punctured his thin cotton shirt and entered his abdomen. He felt a dull pinch and then a sharp, precisely focused pain. Patrick was pinned to the fence, looking down at the edge of the cemetery lawn and the gravel beside the road, watching as knots of blood splashed the thick grass. Seeing the blood, Patrick whimpered and began to cry.

It was a long several minutes before the first car rushed past, and a few minutes after that that a woman, a few years older than Patrick's mother, saw him wriggling at the top of the fence and pulled her wood-paneled station wagon to the side of the road. She ran back to him self-consciously, her blue canvas shoes scattering gravel.

After a brief conversation—"You stay here," the woman said, her face turned ashen by what she saw—she ran across the road and up a low, grassy hill to a brick building on the other side.

Patrick grasped the bars of the fence, steadying himself. He had begun to cry harder, watching the woman run away and imagining that she would never return. His head felt light, and the sunshine on the dusty road seemed to grow weaker, as if a veil were sliding across the face of the sun.

At last the woman returned, crossing the road ahead of a short, wiry man with an olive complexion. Patrick watched the man dart across the

street. Raising a hand, he trotted past a speeding Plymouth whose driver pounded the horn as he swerved to avoid the man. He was dressed all in black. He had dark, thick hair and eyebrows. Patrick recognized the man as a priest; among all that black there was a dab of white at his throat.

As they came closer Patrick noticed that the priest's arms were coated in thick black hair. The priest stood at the base of the fence with his old brown shoes touching the blood that had run out of Patrick's stomach. He didn't grimace or recoil when he looked up at Patrick. His name was Father Guanella, he said. His voice was not what Patrick had expected: it was high and clear, almost like a girl's, and he spoke with an accent. Father Guanella smiled and said, "Hey. You be all right. We call you a ambulance." Father Guanella's smile was broad and steady, and there was something about his dark eyes that brought Patrick comfort.

A fireman stood on a ladder and sawed the pike off the fence post and Patrick Williams was transported to a nearby hospital, where doctors performed surgery to remove his kidney, destroyed by the iron barb. He received a blood transfusion, and after two lonesome weeks in the hospital he was able to walk with his father out to the family's Packard. The accident had come at the end of the summer and in the time Patrick had been in the hospital the school year had begun, and the leaves on the trees along the road leading home had begun to be mottled yellow and orange, and here and there a reddish shade of brown that made Patrick think he had been away from home for a very long time.

II. Career and Great Failure, 1971–1999

At the age of 54, Patrick Williams was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship for his work in the field of sociology. He was sitting in a coffee

shop in Boulder, Colorado, conferring with a graduate student, when the department secretary rushed in, stomping snow from his boots, to tell Williams the news in an overexcited voice. Williams' smile was nearly sardonic, fuller on one side than the other. He stood and bowed ironically, to the bemusement of other customers and the staff, who knew him well. He'd grown tall, though his youthful injury caused him to stoop slightly, just enough that he seemed a bit shorter than he was. He was lean, narrow in the shoulders and chest, and his hair was nearly finished going a pale shade of gray. The constant movement of his hands and the flickering of his eyes communicated a restless energy. Williams thanked his assistant for the information and sat to regard the graduate student once again. "Now then," he said, adjusting his wire-rimmed glasses. "You were saying?"

Williams knew, already, how he would use the grant money. He'd spent the last three decades observing the minutest violations of social norms—stirring milk into his coffee counterclockwise, beginning conversations "Goodbye" instead of "Hello"—and documenting the responses. His dream was to create a new social science, focused not on documenting but changing social norms. He had been working quietly on the question for several years, amassing a small library of theoretical texts and hundreds of pages of his own speculations on the matter.

Williams assembled a team of researchers from the university, graduate students and adjunct faculty eager to work with the so-called "genius." He hired a playwright from the theater department to write scripts for participants. Actors were cast, of all ages and types. Sworn to confidentiality, they rehearsed the scenarios Williams intended to create. Williams spent hours, beyond his teaching and committee duties, working out a new rubric for the battalion of observers who would shadow the actors, taking

furtive notes on the reactions the scenarios created. How to quantify what had always been measured qualitatively, how to measure the growth or failure of the targeted behavior? After months of preparation, this and other details were ironed out, and the experiment began.

Williams was present to observe the very first trial, outside the coffeehouse where he had learned of the MacArthur Fellowship. An actor dressed as a homeless person sat against the brick wall, rattling a styrofoam cup. A second actor wearing a long, expensive coat and carrying a briefcase passed the storefront. "Got any change?" the homeless man asked. Looking down at the homeless man, the businessman answered, "Get a job." The homeless man replied angrily, "You get a job"; the businessman retorted, "I have a job." At this the homeless man extended his middle finger, smiling cruelly (one tooth blacked out to create the illusion of a gap), and the businessman responded in kind. Williams took assiduous notes, marking the facial expressions of passersby and the wider berth pedestrians gave the homeless man. "Doesn't he have enough trouble already?" asked a woman—a citizen, unconnected to the experiment—giving the businessman a dirty look. Williams stifled a laugh of joy, delighted by the response.

At dinner one evening soon after the experiment began, Williams scolded his oldest child, Michael, then eleven years old, for coming to the table with dirty hands. "Why don't you go wash them, Michael," Williams said sternly.

Michael stared at his lap and did not respond. "Answer your father," said Cynthia, Patrick's wife. She was holding their two year-old daughter, Jane, in her lap. Michael looked at his father, who had coached him on what to do next. Michael had his mother's clear green eyes and the same fine, shaggy brown hair his father once had had. "Get up and wash your

hands," Cynthia said sternly. She had spent a long day at home with Jane. Her curly auburn hair was frizzy and lopsided, the area around her eyes puffy, and she had an expression of deep tiredness.

Michael looked back at his father sheepishly. Cynthia dabbed at Jane's mouth with a cloth, and Williams encouraged his son with a bump of the eyebrows. Michael stole a glance at his mother and at Jane, her head wobbling unsteadily, before raising a quivering middle finger in his father's direction.

Cynthia, glancing up at her son's silence, gasped. Her soft features turned sharp. She stood abruptly, the chair's legs scraping the tile floor, and handed Jane to Williams. "Take her," she said. "Take her!" She stalked over to where Michael sat and gripped him roughly by the shoulder. "Michael Eric Williams," she said. "Did I see what I think I saw?" She was dragging him out of his chair when Williams intervened.

"Cynthia," he said, standing awkwardly, Jane in his arms, and putting a hand on his wife's elbow. She turned toward him, real anger glinting in her eyes. Cynthia knew about the experiment; she had encouraged him in it, seeing the passion with which he spoke about the project. But she was not thinking of that now. Her forehead was creased, the skin around her mouth tight, preoccupied by punishing Michael. "Cynthia," Williams said quietly. "Cynthia. Lay off him."

She looked at him strangely, her face slackening by degrees. Cynthia let go of Michael's shoulder. Williams did not know what to say now. He could see that his wife was very upset. Jane made a wet gurgling sound and knocked her legs against his belly. She reached her arms out for her mother.

"I'm sorry," Williams said. He peered over Cynthia's shoulder at Mi-

chael and said, "Michael, I'm sorry that I put you up to this." He looked down at Jane, a silvery spit bubble growing from her mouth, but didn't say anything.

They finished their meal in silence, the air in the kitchen heavy. Jane was returned to her high chair and pounded against its plastic tray. Michael began to cry quietly, curling in on himself in embarrassment of his tears, and neither Williams nor Cynthia moved to comfort him. Finally Williams cleared his plate and washed it hastily, standing at the sink peering through the window. It was mid-October and outside the first snow of the year was falling over the back yard in darkness as it had fallen throughout the gray afternoon, drifting in the corners against the wooden fence. Williams dried his plate and went to his study. He closed the door and went to his computer. Reception of gesture, he typed, hostile; considered inappropriate behavior for children. Element of moral failing, bad manners implicit in hostility.

When other scholars learned of the experiment, their criticisms were uniformly negative. One of Williams' colleagues at the university, interviewed by a journalist, said, "What is the function of this exercise? To prove that paying people to do a thing increases incidence of that thing?" An editor of a prominent sociology journal, a friend of Williams' and a champion of his early work, devoted the foreword of one issue to the experiment: "Why make this change?" the editor asked. "Why introduce a behavior as nasty as the middle finger? Why seek to turn this gesture into a common one, as unremarkable as a wave or handshake?"

Once Williams' team had completed its research, the paper that ultimately resulted from the project was declined by most publications and found a home, finally, in a European social-science journal of dubious

merit. Williams returned to the ordinary, lesser scope of his research, and soon he was again publishing reports on tightly controlled experiments with table manners and elevator etiquette, the use of cellular telephones in different social settings. In time, after again producing meaningful, accepted work, the middle finger episode, that colossal waste of the MacArthur Foundation's generous gift, was forgotten.

III. The End of His Career, 2015

Patrick Williams, age 70, had seen his health decline precipitously over the last year, and from his bed he'd written the dean a frank note indicating that his teaching career was at an end. After some discussion, it was agreed by all parties that a banquet would be held to celebrate the remarkable career of professor emeritus Williams.

Folding himself into a tuxedo constituted an effort for Williams. In a speech he prepared but ultimately threw away, he listed the physical manifestations of his age. These included his grayish, easily bruising skin; the pulses of pain that ran along his long leg bones; and an almost-narcotic sleepiness that made his research increasingly difficult. He scrapped the speech when he nodded off during the writing of it, and upon waking found its possible conclusion, the tying-in of this list to some meaningful statement, unfathomable.

Jane and Michael wheeled their father along the driveway, and helped him stand and climb into her mini-van. Michael folded up the wheelchair and placed it in the van's backseat. Winter was finally yielding to spring in Boulder and the brightness of the sunshine stung Williams' eyes. The roads on the way to campus were wet with the last of the melting snow, and the pine branches seemed naked now that the mantle of ice and hard-

ened snow had dropped away. Jane drove to the campus along the same route her father had always taken, and it was natural for Williams to think that this would likely be the last time he would make this trip.

Inside the school's grand ballroom, Michael wheeled his father up a ramp to the dais. "This isn't a roast, is it?" Williams asked Jane, walking beside him and holding his hand. "If it is, tell them my liver's failing. That ought to generate some good material."

"Oh, daddy." These sorts of jokes bothered his children, Williams knew, though they had never bothered Cynthia.

The spread was impressive, the turnout favorable. The university's president and trustees were there, scattered between the dais and the front tables. A tuxedoed caterer appeared at Williams' elbow to take his order, and returned minutes later with a crystal wine glass filled with cranberry juice and a cup of coffee in a china cup that Williams found slightly embarrassing to hold. The president of the university, a much younger man who'd been hired just two years earlier and whom Williams knew hardly at all, came over and shook hands with Williams, who introduced him to Jane and Michael. The three of them had a polite, perfunctory conversation, touching on the ballroom's high points and the future of the sociology department, until the lights dimmed and the president clapped Williams on his shoulder and hustled to his seat.

Dr. Andrews, the master of ceremonies and provost of the Patrick Williams Center for Social Research, came to the podium. Andrews wore a neatly trimmed, dark beard and a navy bowtie and silver-framed glasses. He cleared his throat and tapped the microphone to call the audience to attention. "Tonight's speakers are distinguished, highly erudite members of our campus community," Andrews said, glancing down at notes. "But all

are here to honor one man, almost literally a pillar of this community—we do conduct our business, after all, inside the Patrick Williams Social Sciences Building." Polite laughter at this statement of fact. Andrews went on a few minutes more before introducing the first speaker, Anne Driscoll, a junior faculty member with the distracting nervous habit of tugging at her earlobe as she spoke.

Driscoll, and the several speakers who followed, praised the early work of Patrick Williams, his dedication as a professor, the lasting legacy of his vision. After a time his attention wavered.

Williams was fighting back sleep when, some time later, Andrews re-took the podium to introduce the man himself. Beneath the table, Jane pinched the loose flesh around her father's knuckles, and Michael pushed a second cup of coffee toward him. Williams took a long drink from the china cup, followed by a deep breath. He visualized the breath filling his lungs, alveoli introducing oxygen to his bloodstream. Williams smiled when the audience laughed, unsure what Andrews had said. At last there came a round of applause, and Jane tapped her father's knee beneath the table.

Williams stood, with Michael's assistance, and leaned against his chair. He grinned and waved to the audience with his sheaf of pages, and beckoned Andrews over to shake his benefactor's hand. With Michael's shoulder as an aid, Williams made it to the podium, which became his crutch.

He cleared his throat and thanked the university, the trustees, and Dr. Andrews for the send-off. "I think that if I heard anything more to the effect that Patterns in the Sand changed the landscape of sociology," he said, "my head might get so grotesquely big it would really be in danger of

exploding." Obliging laughter. Williams shuffled the pages he had brought to the podium with him.

"While I am on the topic of grotesque misfortunes that befall the body," he began, and paused, though there was only silence from the floor of the ballroom, "there's a story I would like to tell. I don't know that anyone in this room knows it, because it's not one I've ever been keen to share. I will spare you the horror movie details, but, as I see that a number of you are enjoying red wine, it's only fair I should warn you the story is somewhat macabre."

He paused, coughing loosely into a fist and turning one of the pages. Silence and darkness out beyond the dais. "When I was a young man of nine," he began, "I loved to roam around. I followed creeks and explored woods. I caught crayfish in Mason jars and fired stones at birds with a slingshot made from the branch of a birch tree. I was a pretty regular boy that way. One day, it happened that my travels took me into a large cemetery a mile or so from my home. This was someplace I had never been before, and it thrilled me to discover it and to explore it. I wandered about for some time, taking in the grassy fields, the mossy gravestones, and so forth, giving myself chills by thinking, in my glib way, about death. While I walked around, investigating this and that, the caretaker of the cemetery left to take his noon-time break, locking the gate behind him, as I soon discovered when I attempted to leave the cemetery." Williams looked down at his notes.

"Now, I could have waited for the man to return, or gone back the way I'd come. But I happened to be at the front gate, which looked out on a main road in that town. I'd never come so far on my own, you see; to turn back now, to retrace my steps . . . there would be no dignity in it, if

you see what I mean, no adventure.

"I decided, ladies and gentlemen, to climb the fence. Now this was no everyday fence, certainly not the kind I was used to seeing in my everyday travels. It was seven or eight feet tall, with great barbed pikes at the top of each bar. It was an adventure to climb such an immense and forbidding fence." He looked around the audience, licked a finger and turned a page. "From that regal word I have used, 'pikes,' you can perhaps guess at where this story leads. Being a clumsy boy, I did not make it over the fence without slipping, and had the bad fortune to slip at the very top of the fence, falling upon one of the pikes with sufficient force—" Williams spoke over a low chorus of groans. "—that I was stuck upon it." Williams smiled benevolently out at the audience.

"As you can see," he said, holding up his arms and turning his palms out, "I survived. You needn't worry about me." Because of the spotlight that lit the dais, he could see only a few tables into the audience. The face of the president's wife, a severe, black-haired woman, was twisted into a grimace, her eyes glassy and unfocused. "I was up on that fence post for a good five or ten minutes before any of the cars passing by happened to notice me," Williams went on, "and a kindly woman pulled over. This was before cell phones, of course, so when she'd gotten out of her car and come over and ascertained the rather grisly facts of the situation, she had to run across the road to locate a telephone she might use to call for help.

"While I waited for the woman to return," Williams pressed on, "I did a curious thing. I was positioned so I could look out on the road, and as I waited I watched cars go by. Now, at first I simply took stock of the color and model of each car—which is a damned good way to take your mind off the pain in your belly, should any of you ever find yourselves in

such a predicament." Williams knocked on the podium and uncomfortable laughter rose from the audience. "But as I watched," he went on, "a strange thing happened. I began to notice the people inside the cars. I realized that not only could I see them, I could see them looking back at me. I could look down the road and watch each driver, from the time their eyes rose to greet the sight of a boy on a fence post, and said, 'What in the dickens is that?' to when they passed by, and recognized definitely what had happened, and slowed or even swerved their cars."

Williams straightened and brought to his lips the glass of water standing beside the podium. Someone had left this here for him, hadn't they? He supposed it didn't really matter. While he drank he watched those portions of the audience he could make out, noting the uneasy anticipation with which they looked back at him.

"It interested me immensely," he went on, replacing the glass, "to see the ways that people responded to me, and to know that they made adjustments in their behavior based on my presence. I was not running out into the road, or throwing things at them, or even doing a very good job of trying to attract their attention—there's a strict limit on how much gesticulating you can do when you've got a piece of metal in your belly." He waved his long arms at his sides to illuminate the point. "I was simply stuck there," he said, "trying my damnedest not to move too much. Yet I forced them to react."

He paused, looked down at the sheet of paper, looked up again. "This brings me to the why of my decision to tell such a gruesome story on such an adulatory occasion," Williams said. "And that is because it seems now a seminal event in my life, those few moments. It was a brief window within which, above the clamor of my own body in its intense discomfort, there

rose a vivid interest in the responses of humans to one another, and in the ways that one's experience can be changed by the presence, the actions, of another person." Williams cleared his throat and turned another page.

"Before long," he went on, "the woman who had pulled over returned, bringing with her a small Italian man, a priest named Father Guanella. At the time I found myself stuck on the fence post, the building where Father Guanella lived and worked was called the Carroll Center, named after another priest, long since dead. Now, if you were new to my school in, let's say, the third grade, and someone asked you whether perhaps you'd come over from Carroll, this would be a very clever and cutting insult, because Carroll was a home for mentally disabled boys. I'm told by reliable sources that the same euphemisms obtain today as did when I was a boy, with the name 'Guanella' substituted for 'Carroll,' as the home was re-named after that much-loved man, Father Guanella, after his death in the early nineteen-seventies."

Williams looked around. Through the veil of lights, the audience seemed very still. "I go through this quite meaningless history," he went on, "by way of suggesting that here was a man who obtained fame enough that his name remains on a building, and in that sphere he is remembered. But otherwise, not. Otherwise, he is merely a name on a building, and a few dusty pictures in a dim hallway, and a memory in the minds of a few. Otherwise, not." He looked up again. The president smiled dully back at him. The president's wife had lost her grimace; indeed, she had lost all expression and simply stared off at the heavy crimson curtains behind him on the stage.

"But I met Father Guanella," Williams said. "While he and I and the woman who'd first seen me waited for the fire department to arrive and

cut me down, Father Guanella talked to me. He asked me about my dog, Augie, my family, whether I liked baseball, and so on. I can recall clearly, but cannot fully convey, the sparkle in this man's eyes, the loving patience and compassion with which he stood and spoke to me, and reached up to take my hand, and held it until the ambulance arrived."

Andrews and the dean and several of the trustees stared up at Williams from the tables at the foot of the dais, on their faces expressions of bemused toleration. He wondered if they would react to anything he said from that podium, if these men in business suits wouldn't simply feel they'd gotten all they wanted from him. Williams' name appeared in all the university's promotional materials, always alongside mention of the MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship. And of course there was the center, that hideous work of concrete and steel, his name on a brass plaque drilled into the brick beside the elevators.

No one but Williams and his two children knew that over the last year he had resumed his long-abandoned research, recalling dusty file boxes from storage and digging up any available data on usage of the middle finger. At the time that the experiment ended, Williams had taken the last of his MacArthur money and funded a trust to pay the fees of a polling service that solicited respondents' attitudes toward the middle finger. They'd been sending him their poll results once per quarter for some sixteen years. For all that time he'd been tossing the manila envelopes into banker's boxes, unopened. Each time he added another envelope to the box, Williams wondered why he still bothered with the polling. And yet, so long as the money remained, he'd never been able to bring himself to cancel the arrangement.

Williams had begun a scholarly paper, a radical revision and expan-

sion of the tepid paper that had been published. He'd begun the paper rashly, out of an old bitterness that he supposed had been incubating quietly over many years. Yet the paper had grown into a quite sensible book-length theory on the astonishing flexibility and complexity of the community and its mores, and he was more than ever convinced of the soundness of its arguments.

The years of polling results demonstrated a spike in middle-finger usage in the early 2000s. What was more interesting, to Williams, was that there had followed a long backlash against the gesture: according to poll respondents, today it was considered vulgar and offensive where only recently it had been largely tolerated. What was that about? How had this happened? Williams was certain he would answer these questions, that this would be the last puzzle of his long career. Many of his ideas, he freely admitted, were rooted in the reaction of the academic community to his own "failed" experiment, and he wrote about that experience extensively. If he finished the book before his death, Williams had decided, it would be published posthumously. One last word from the grave.

Williams cleared his throat and went on. "What I most remember about Father Guanella," he said, "is that he never seemed concerned about the pike stuck in my belly. I think of his reaction alongside those of the drivers who shuddered at the sight of me and sped past on their way to someplace else. I was cut down that day, and taken off in an ambulance, understanding that there are standard responses, just what you would expect if you were only imagining these odd and fantastic situations. There are those responses and there are surprises. There are those, perhaps, that disappoint. But, too, there are responses like Father Guanella's, suffused with compassion and empathy. If I merely became interested in the matter

of behavior, seeing those drivers, I was hopeful about studying behavior and social environments, after Father Guanella stayed with me."

Williams turned over another sheet of paper. His speech was running shorter than the others, but to him it had begun to feel very long. His back and legs were tired and he thought longingly of the soft leather seat of the wheelchair. He looked up, out at the audience with its dim collection of faces. "I'm not sure, ladies and gentlemen, exactly what inspired me to tell this story," he said, and smiled a little ironically. "We get sentimental in our old age, and there's sentiment galore in thinking that the hideous accident of one's youth contained all the seeds of one's career. It gratifies me that the accident in question is one of particular hideousness, which tends to cut through the sentimentality. Most of all, ladies and gentlemen—and here I will conclude—it gratifies me to know that the work I have done, the changes I have wrought on this world, have their origins outside myself, that indeed my life and work can be viewed as one action in a chain that, in turn, will be continued by the responses, surprising or otherwise, of all that vast sea of people, our human race. I won't elaborate further, other than to say that there is nothing greater I would wish for any of you, my friends and colleagues. Thank you."

The applause as Williams accepted Jane's and Michael's steadying arms, and shuffled to his seat, was greater than he had expected. Williams had begun to sweat under the lights; out of their range, he could feel the moisture cooling on his brow, and feel the clammy cotton of his undershirt bunched beneath his armpits. Dr. Andrews occupied the podium again. Jane offered him a glass of water but he declined. Williams sank into the seat of the wheelchair. Andrews waited out the applause, smiling. Williams gazed out at the audience. People were standing. The dean and president

stood; other trustees took the hint and got to their feet. Beyond them, in the murk of the ballroom, Williams perceived the specter of old students, colleagues, university people he had seen every day of his career, getting to their feet. At the back of the room he saw a couple of waiters, their pressed white shirts standing out in the gloom, clapping along with the rest. Williams nodded, smiling first only politely but then feeling his face turn hot and break into a broad, giddy smile.

Andrews' face twitched. No doubt he was devising something clever to say. When the applause died down, Andrews smiled and said, "I think I speak for all of us when I say that Professor Williams has lost nothing over the years. Forceful, electric, and brilliant: Professor Williams, you remain as you have always been to us, to this university." Andrews clapped in Williams' direction and another spike of applause rose from the floor. Andrews' eyes fell, and before the applause dimmed again he turned over the sheets of paper Williams had left on the podium. He cast a wry glance at Williams. "Please enjoy the remainder of the banquet," Andrews said when the applause had slackened. "Our postprandial refreshments will be available, I'm told, for the next forty-five minutes. Thank you."

Andrews stepped back and the microphone gave a brief clicking noise and then the lights died, leaving the ballroom in darkness for a moment, long enough that nervous laughter could be heard before the electric candlelight of the chandeliers returned. Andrews stepped over to Williams, laying a light hand on the older man's shoulder. "Well done," he said. "I noticed your pages were blank. What's the matter, you don't want them to know you can still extemporize better than the rest of us can read a canned speech?"

"An old man's ruse," Williams said. "Like a cane or an ear trumpet,

useful as a means of gaining sympathy."

Andrews offered him his hand. "We'll miss you," he said simply. They shook. Andrews had a big, forceful grip and Williams could imagine how his own dry, shrinking hand felt within it.

Andrews walked away, pausing to shake hands with Michael, in conversation with Ann Driscoll on the dais, and then clapped the president on the back, squeezing the other man's shoulder chummily. Jane appeared at her father's elbow holding the pages, glancing through them herself. She bent at the waist and over the rapid murmuring of the ballroom asked, "Is all of that true? You were stuck? On a fence post?"

Williams turned his head and looked at Jane for a long moment, seeing her as she was and as she had been. "Yes, I was," he said and, motioning for Jane to sit beside him, deftly un-tucked his pleated white shirtfront, lifting it so only his daughter could see the aged flesh behind it. "Look here," he said. "Beside the navel." In the low light of the ballroom that ancient mark, stretched by time, looked like a pale, distant star against the old man's gray and sickly skin.

ZACK LEE

The Authors

PROSE & POETRY

Brianna Albers is a poet, writer, and storyteller, located in the Minneapolis suburbs. A student at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, she is currently studying psychology and the philosophy of literature. While her work can be found in *The James Franco Review, Transcendence Magazine, Winter Tangerine,* and others, she is currently compiling a collection of her poetry; her début chapbook is forthcoming, hopefully. Her fingers are crossed.

A native Ohioan, Carl Boon lives in Istanbul, where he directs the English prep school and teaches courses in literature at Yeni Yuzyil University. Recent or forthcoming poems appear in *Posit, The Adirondack Review, The Tulane Review, Badlands, The Blue Bonnet Review*, and other magazines.

W.S. Brewbaker was born and raised in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He currently attends the University of Virginia, where he studies Political & Social Thought and Poetry Writing. His work has appeared in *Gyroscope Review* and *Bird's Thumb*, and is forthcoming in *Lost Coast Review* and *Stepping Stones Magazine*.

Erica Gelman is a 17-year-old student from the suburbs of Chicago. She enjoys writing and reading and is, 9 out of 10 times, likely to be filled with some sort of existential dread. She has won numerous merits through the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards program, including multiple gold keys and a gold medal.

James Guthrie studied English at the University of Toronto. His work has appeared in *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Red Savina Review*, and is forthcoming in *Apocrypha and Abstractions*.

M. Ann Hull's work has appeared in *32 Poems, Barrow Street Journal, BOXCAR Poetry Review, Mid-American Review, Passages North* and *Quarterly West* amongst others. She has won the Ed Ochester Award for Poetry and the Academy of American Poets Prize. A former poetry editor of *Black Warrior Review*, she holds an MFA from the University of Alabama.

Nashae Jones has had her work appear in *Blackberry, American Athenaeum*, and *Bicycle Review*, among others. Her work has been nominated for several awards, including the Pushcart Prize. She currently lives in Virginia with her husband and two kids.

Residing in the St. Louis region, Katrina Knebel is a high school English teacher and writer. She has earned an MA in English from SIUE and is looking to pursue her doctorate in Creative Writing. She has previously been published in *Away Journal* and *Spry Literary Journal*.

Gary Lundy's poetry has appeared most recently in *Yellow Chair Review, The Main Street Rag* and *Guide to Kulchur Creative Journal*. His fourth chapbook, *when voices detach themselves*, was published in the fall of 2013 by is a rose press. Each summer he is one of the instructors of the mandolin building class at Rocky Grass Academy, in Lyons, Colorado. He lives in Missoula, Montana.

Andrew Alexander Mobbs has been writing poetry for nearly a decade, primarily as an undergraduate student at the University of Central Arkansas and as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mongolia. In 2013, he released his debut poetry collection, *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Six Gallery Press). His work has also appeared in *Vortex Magazine, Deep South Magazine, New Plains Review, Ghost Ocean*

Magazine, Calliope, Zetetikon, Gravel Literary Journal, The Montucky Review and *The Round*. He was a 2014 Pushcart Prize nominee, and he co-founded *Nude Bruce Review*, a nonprofit online literary magazine, in 2012.

Alison D. Moncrief Bromage has seen her poems published in the *Paris Review, Denver Quarterly, Barrow Street* and in *Drunken Boat* (which has just nominated her poem "Teratoma" for a Pushcart).

Larry Narron is a teaching associate at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. His poems have appeared in *Phoebe, Eleven Eleven, Permafrost, Whiskey Island, The Boiler,* and other journals.

Jason Primm pursues modest goals in a coastal city. When he isn't writing, he can be found sharpening his slice backhand. His work has most recently appeared in *The Southern Humanities Review, Pantheon Magazine, The Maynard, Literary Orphans* and *Heron Tree*. He maintains a blog at jasonprimm.wordpress.com.

Ron Riekki's books include *U.P.: A Novel*, *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (2014 Michigan Notable Book), and *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula.* His play "Carol" was in The Best Ten-Minute Plays 2012, "The First Real Halloween" was best sci-fi/fantasy screenplay for the 2014 International Family Film Festival, and "The Family Jewel" was selected by Pulitzer Prize-winner Robert Olen Butler for The Best Small Fictions 2015. Riekki's nonfiction, fiction, and poetry have been published in *Shenandoah, Bellevue Literary Review, Prairie Schooner, Juked, decomP, Spillway, New Ohio Review*, and many other literary journals.

Kitty Shields was born and raised in Philadelphia, and earned her MFA from Arcadia University. She has been published in *The Minotaur's Spotlight* and is an Art Editor for *Marathon Literary Magazine.*

Melissa Wiley is a freelance writer living in Chicago. Her narrative nonfiction has appeared in literary magazines including *[PANK], Superstition Review, Prick of the Spindle, Tin House Open Bar, Stirring: A Literary Collection, Poydras Review, Gravel, Eclectica Magazine, Gone Lawn, Split Lip Magazine, Menacing Hedge, Beetroot Journal, Specter, Lowestoft Chronicle, Midway Journal, Pithead Chapel, Great Lakes Review,* and *pioneertown*. She speaks softly and carries a big umbrella.

Lauren Yates is a Pushcart-nominated poet who is currently based in Philadelphia. Her writing has appeared in *Nerve, XOJane, FRiGG, Umbrella Factory, Softblow,* and *Melusine*. Lauren is also a poetry editor at *Kinfolks Quarterly* and a member of The Mission Statement poetry collective. She is currently a Poet in Residence with the Leonard Pearlstein Gallery at Drexel University. Aside from poetry, Lauren enjoys belly dancing, baking quiche, and pontificating on the merits of tentacle erotica. For more information, visit http://laurentyates.com.

Adam Reger's fiction has appeared in the *New Orleans Review* and *Cream City Review*, among other publications, and he is the author of *U.S. Navy Pirate Combat Skills*, a humor book.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of "As We Refer to Our Bodies" (*8th House*, 2013), "Temporary Champions" (*Main Street Rag*, 2014), "The Pony Governor" (2015, *After the Pause Press*) and "Not For Art Nor Prayer" (*8th House*, 2015). He is the Managing Editor of the *Best of the Net* Anthology. He is currently living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

VISUAL ART

Timothy Doris: "This poster originally started as a poster to promote a music festival. I then removed all the type and decided to offer it as a poster after a great response from my peers. The music festival was geared towards classic rock and jam bands and I thought that the multi-colored wax candles from the 70s would work well to illustrate the differences in the music as well as the fluidity and energy of the festival itself."

Heather Heitzenrater is a young, determined artist with big dreams and feathers in her hair. She was raised in Punxsutawney, PA and recently graduated from Edinboro University with a major in Studio Fine Art with a concentration in Painting and a minor in Drawing. She is interested in the human figure and creating surreal environments from reflections that they inhabit.

Zack John Lee is a Pittsburgh-based artist and Illustrator. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 2013 with a BA in Studio Arts. His work revolves around the unconscious inner workings of the mind. By employing an automatic drawing technique, Lee creates beautifully grotesque forms. He has exhibited in Pittsburgh and around the country.

The entire *Tension* series was produced during a difficult time in Joe Maher's personal life and expresses the tension, sadness and anxiety of that period.

Desiree Palermo earned a B.S.Ed. in art education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and is currently working on her M.F.A. in painting at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia. She had her first solo show, "Di[pro]gress," at Fresh Exhibitions Gallery in Savannah, and group exhibitions in Pittsburgh and Savannah, including "the RAW Artists' Showcase" and "the Port City Review". She creates large-scale abstract paintings with a focus on relationships between the materials, formal elements and intuition.

Nick Romeo utilizes technology to create his art, whether it is generated on the computer or assembling recycled "spent" technology into a sculpture. His main forms of expression are 3D digital renderings, music, fractal generations, photography, sculpture, and audio/video installation.

Tay Wetherbee studied at Glassell School of Art, Tufts School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and Boston Architectural College. At a young age she took to the arts naturally dancing, singing, and always drawing. She is an avid poetry reader and is fascinated by mysterious and whimsical subjects. Tay evokes intense emotion through her multi-layered mixed media techniques, always inspired by the written word. She currently lives in Pittsburgh, PA.

Born 1984 in Wichita, Kansas, Travis K. Schwab lives and works in the Pittsburgh, PA area.

Bill Wolak is a poet, photographer, and collage artist. His collages have been published in *The Annual, Peculiar Mormyrid, Danse Macabre, Dirty Chai, Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal, Lost Coast Review, Yellow Chair Review, Otis Nebula,* and *Horror Sleaze Trash*. He has just published his twelfth book of poetry entitled *Love Opens the Hands* with Nirala Press. Recently, he was a featured poet at The Hyderabad Literary Festival. Mr. Wolak teaches Creative Writing at William Paterson University in New Jersey.