



AFTER HAPPY HOUR  
REVIEW

ISSUE 7 // SPRING 2017



# AFTER HAPPY HOUR REVIEW

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# FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Obviously, we editors are partial to the works included in any given issue. We were excited enough about them to give them space in the journal, after all; clearly there's something about the pieces that spoke to us.

That said, I hope you won't take it as standard editor-style gushing when I say this particular issue is one of the most consistently compelling ones we've put together to date. From the stories to the poems to the artwork, everything in this issue offers something surprising and unexpected: a touch of dark humor, a fresh metaphor, or a detail hiding in the background of a painting.

It's also incredibly satisfying to bring together an issue with such a broad range of stylistic voices. There's a wonderful mix of absurdity and realism, of imagery and narrative—and all of it presented with the kind of strong language and emotional conviction that makes you want to keep reading.

Editorial biases aside, I think you'll find that there's something in this issue to suit every taste.

Happy reading,

—Jess Simms, *After Happy Hour Review* fiction editor



RACHEL DAWN RENAUDIN

# Bucketmouth

BY JENNIFER JACKSON BERRY

We catch our largemouth bass  
with nightcrawlers.

He says, *It isn't how deep you fish,  
it's how you wiggle your worm.*

He says, *Bucketmouths.*

This seems dirty, too, like cum tunnels  
or like I shouldn't add ".com"  
and be surprised it's not a fishing site.

Like when looking online for the Golden Girls  
and cheesecake, but finding different women and piss.

There's such a thing as *buzzbait*.

I imagine the sound of a lure's metal blades  
on lake water, the flash and vibration.

The neighborhood kid Weed put  
a buzzbait and a note in Donnie's casket,  
a cousin who died days before our wedding.

Even if, as he tells me, I'm the only one  
who equates *bucket* or *buzz* with sex,  
there was no mistaking Donnie's sister  
Angel's hand gestures when she asked  
why we were at the funeral home:  
a few times quick, one finger  
in her other hand's O,  
that's what we should be doing.

We laugh, imply there's plenty of time for that,  
honeymoon coming in a few months, a wait  
for better weather.

When the guy fishing down the shoreline  
of the same quiet lake, asks, we lie.

We say, *Only caught a few.*

Walking again tomorrow, the neighbor will see  
us up against the cabin's single pane window.  
Our mouths will be open against each other.

# Icebergs in Chile

BY MEGAN CHIUSAROLI

I was thinking of old arguments and shades of white in the arctic as we passed the Alabama state line. I was thinking of how the blessings of God usually come from the mouths of beggars and how the nicest stranger I ever met owns an apartment I didn't take.

In the city, the sounds of birds echo the enduring questions. Their songs are sung by guitar; piano's are tuned to their melody.

Around the house, Italian newsprint, bell jars, and basil remind me that my mind is a set of folding chairs, a landscape of Antonioni's. I cut a tomato and let the juices drip down my hand, always ready for the unexpected visitor.

Crossing the street, the light changes for us, reflects on buildings, cool, crisp, uncomplicated.

And I'm dreaming of icebergs in Chile, a heavy coat full of feathers, my future pain and what to do with my left life.

# Winter

BY MEGAN CHIUSAROLI

Chunks of ice in the East River.  
Icicle lights on the trees.

I tell myself three times  
to remember  
the bitter cold that  
walks me home.

Long pencils like long necks,  
high noses and new scarves  
wind whipped and Happy  
Chinese New Year.

Trains bumping along,  
cats follow me home,  
bulldogs lick the dirty ice.

Hold the door, you lucky  
lucky man.

We burn the roofs of our mouths,  
the roofs of our homes,  
bite into dulce de leche and  
wait for sincerity.

Glory glory, car rides  
we'll close our eyes to. Bent,  
broken and preserved. Cool  
our feet in warm water, warm  
our hands by the fire.  
Beat our breast and mouth the  
words,  
for you are impressively beautiful.







JAY GRIFFIN

# The Factory

BY PHILIP KUAN

Let it be known that the Gilgamites jogged onto Lot 457 after much surveying, and found it both fair and bountiful.

Let it be said that the Gilgamites held great council for seven days and seven nights, and on the culmination of the eighth morning they emerged to declare Lot 457 their Locus of Settlement, with which there was much rejoicing. And much fanfare. And this was good.

Let it be further confirmed that for one day and one night, there was held amongst the Gilgamites a fierce whilst civil discourse. And let it be additionally confirmed that upon the tock of the midnight hour, the Dynasty of H came into being, presenting cause for additional rejoicing. Which was also good.

And let it be generally understood that for three more days and three more nights, each Gilgamite prayed to the Fearsome Loving Flavor Man to bless this decision. And let it be shouted from the thatched rooftops of everywhere that within that interval each and every Gilgamite was visited, except for those who weren't<sup>1</sup>, by the Mystic Transparent Rainbow of Anaheim, though only four were granted remembrance of the visit. And that these four shall henceforth be named and written to lore as The Keystones of H<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Postulation that there existed Gilgamites who were never visited by the Flavor Man or that they were visited but received no blessing are completely unfounded. Historians agree that, to date, no records have been uncovered to support this theory.

<sup>2</sup> Precious little is known about the Keystones, or their identities, or their history. Or how long they lived, or where or how they lived, or died. Or whether they were part of the original founding Gilgamites, or [REDACTED]. Or what the H stands for.

And let it be footnoted that there was no evidence of inebriation when Keystone ■ announced his reception of The Official and Legitimately Legendary Contract of Mega-Acceptance, signed and notarized by Flavor Man himself. Nor should it not be footnoted that this faithful Keystone ■ was simply following the will of Flavor Man when he buried it beneath his backyard for posterity, only to have it stolen by the uniquely dreadful Cavity Bear<sup>3</sup>. For it was the will of Flavor Man to put his most loyal Gilgamites through trial and tribulation, thereby uncovering their prudency and dramatic goodness.

And let it be corroborated by many Cavity-fearing Gilgamites that the prophecies of H clearly called for the building of The Factory. Then let it be twice corroborated that the project's pillared dependence upon unpaid overtime was in fact never illegal. Then again let it be thoroughly, thrice corroborated that the opening ceremony was held amidst many pours of discounted champagne<sup>4</sup>, and that the ceremonious ribbon cutting was both red and clean. Now let us sing praises of how good this was.

Now at the eleventh second of the twelfth minute of the fifth hour of the twentieth day some among the Gilgamites, the strongest and tannest, rose from their straw beds to call themselves Gardeners. And as they marched onto the plantations surrounding The Factory, to tend and to grow that which was their favorite crop, that which has always been and henceforth shall always be called Luminites, this they found to be a routine most adequate. And the rest of the Gilgamites applauded their initiative with gusto, much gusto.

Then a second wave of Gilgamites, those that were swift and restless, rose from their beds to push the wheelbarrows, to transport the harvested Luminites into bins well

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<sup>3</sup> Historians agree that this should never not be footnoted.

<sup>4</sup> Gilgamites love champagne.

within The Factory docks. These called themselves Postamites, and found themselves equally lauded. Heartily.

Then a third class, those fancying themselves the sharpest minds, began labeling themselves Chemists. And they congregated around the bins to refine that which they found into that which they could. And what they did refine would become branded as [REDACTED], which was adequate.

Finally a fourth class, those with sweet smiles and melodious voices, did swing briefcases toward The Factory office spaces. These ones, calling themselves Jabberers, did shout with passion into their Bluetooth headsets; sometimes of themselves, occasionally of others, but often of the greatness embodied by these delightful [REDACTED]. And by the seasonings of Flavor Man, with each speech a great number of [REDACTED] would disappear from the warehouse floor, becoming replaced by equally delightful things, to be labeled as “Something Useful” or “Something to be Craved.”

And let it be reflected that there was then held an emergency reckoning. This time, henceforth referred to as [REDACTED], was spent on deciding how these “Useful” were to be distributed amongst The Factory classes. And let it be gleamed that though these times were tumultuous, and somewhat lacking in manners, the agreement finally reached was at least somewhat satisfactory, for those who were optimistic.

Let there now commence a digression, by recalling a coincidence known to several as [REDACTED], which did culminate towards an undisclosed boardroom session, to decide the next restructuring of Factory leadership. After which it was announced, in a [REDACTED], that by the good seasoning of Flavor Man, all founding executives would humbly reprise their roles, with

few if any changes<sup>5</sup>.

And so The Factory flourished under identical leadership, bringing unto many Gilgamites continued prosperity. And it came to pass that several laborers were able to lease a convertible for their thatched garages. And though their roads would become somewhat congested, and though it seemed that only Jabberers or upper management were able to afford two convertibles, the conforming consensus was that having one convertible was better than having none.

Then, on the [REDACTED] morning of the [REDACTED] day, which did come to pass beneath the pretext of a torrential downpour, which did make the ground wet, which did tamper with the traction of one Postamite's sneakers, there occurred a slip and fall of major ramification.

And let the youth be educated that this one Postamite, while lying face-down in his wheelbarrow, did **not** hear the cruel laughter of the sinister Cavity Bear, though Cavity sightings have in the past been associated with foul weather, or other misfortunate concepts<sup>6</sup>. Nor did the Cavity Bear encourage this Postamite to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] in spite of what heathenistic [REDACTED] would have the youth believe.

And so it came to pass that later that day, above The Golden Bowel of Porcelain<sup>7</sup>,

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<sup>5</sup> Records indicate that these executives received a humble salary increase, humble stock options, and humble titles of [REDACTED].

<sup>6</sup> Ancient patent records have credited Cavity Bear with the invention of limited warranties, dental malpractice insurance, and evil Kung Fu.

<sup>7</sup> References to this artifact in Early Tittlywinkian Era texts have sparked numerous debates regarding the authenticity of its conception. Postmodernists are quick to point out that "Bowel" could be a misspelling of [REDACTED], propagated by the lackadaisical masses. Logicians point out that no known construction material could be both gold and porcelain simultaneously. Some empiricists reference recent archaeological digs, finding no evidence of [REDACTED] within the vicinity of the Factory, lending weight to a theory that ancient Gilgamites were known to use their own [REDACTED] as plantation fertilizer.

the first Tittlywink did plunk. Then being of shiny, red composition, while smelling of Christmas, its discovery was welcome. And also, by coming to pass within Factory property limits, by the will of Flavor Man it became the exclusive invention and property of The Factory in perpetuity, as decreed by a well-reputed legal patent department<sup>8</sup>.

Then equally surprising was that discovery that these Tittlywinks, when left unattended overnight, without refinement or praise, became replaced with many, many “Usefuls.” And for some this was good.

Then so it came to pass that the defecating Postamite did become a fifth class, called Taste Testers, who did sit in the [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] the Luminites. And this Taste Tester was soon joined by other Postamites, with similar proclivities for producing Tittlywinks. Then so did the ranks of Taste-Testers swell.

Then so it quickly followed that Jabberers and Gardeners did themselves venture to [REDACTED] Luminites, and did plunk down Tittlywinks of Green and Blue, respectively. Thus did the ranks of Taste-Testers swell again, praise the Flavor.<sup>9</sup>

Let it be consequential that by the end of that fiscal quarter, Taste Testers had become the largest subdivision, far surpassing the summed ranks of the other classes. And that among the Taste-Testers there was an undisputed decision that a new position titled [REDACTED], a.k.a the [REDACTED], would come into being, with an accompanying golden parachute and majority stake in boardroom decisions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The credentials of this legal firm can be found in [REDACTED].

<sup>9</sup> Some records seem to imply that Chemists did similarly attempt to [REDACTED] Luminites, only to find that Flavor Man had deemed the entire class scientifically un-worthy of Tittlywink manufacturing. Those who persisted found themselves subjected to unmarketable diarrhea.

<sup>10</sup> The flavorful seasonings of Flavor Man selected [REDACTED] to fill this position. [REDACTED] commemorated the appointment by having an actual golden parachute installed beside [REDACTED] office window.

Now let it be assumed that for several consecutive intervals, profit growth reached nearly double-digits, until it didn't. However, let the blame not be inflicted upon leadership, or [REDACTED], but upon the conventional circumstance discovered by subsequent, high-profile audits, which did reveal a downturn in Luminite production. The discovery that this circumstance was both conventional AND highly profiled, was quickly confirmed to be entirely subsequent<sup>11</sup>.

And let it be confirmed from non-fabricated sources that the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] did rise to the fiscal challenge, with fierce aplomb.

And let it be proudly assumed that by the following quarter, percentage growth did increase by [REDACTED] based upon non-fabricated accounting records. And let it never be questioned that the Chemists, those who did accept their plantation transfer, were visibly available for their new responsibilities, while those who opted for the severance package had no reason to remove their commemorative buttons.<sup>12</sup>

Let it be further commemorated that when percentage growth once again dipped, it was [REDACTED] who did once again rescue The Factory. Neither the thick of the chains nor the aperture penetration of the pneumatic tubes were at any point controversial. Rejoicement did in fact commence at the newfound camaraderie, which did streamline the distribution process in a significant way. And let those who did find themselves [REDACTED] of the company picnic be commended for their acceptance of [REDACTED] and their commemorative buttons.<sup>13</sup>

Then let it never be seriously acknowledged that profits continued to dip,

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<sup>11</sup> Historians generally confirm the subsequence of this confirmation to be both highly profiled, as well as adequately conventional.

<sup>12</sup> Historians believe that Chemists who did not become Gardeners were allowed to relocate to the [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

<sup>13</sup> Historians generally agree that the decision to chain the Gardener to the Taste Tester, and then to "tube up" the Taste Testers, both now industry standard practice, were two of [REDACTED] top five innovations during [REDACTED] reign.

especially while [REDACTED] manned the helm. And let those Jabberers who did [REDACTED], be compensated with buttons.<sup>14</sup>

And let no liability be placed upon [REDACTED], who shall forever remain unburdened by liability, as it is only natural for there to be disruption prior to a greater good. So let there be comfort drawn from the public reassurances of [REDACTED], allowing for the continued anticipation of prosperity, from stakeholders.

And let it be acknowledged, with great conviction, that [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] did still receive buttons.

Let it be reminded that [REDACTED] was not upset when a year later, without [REDACTED] authorization, a box of [REDACTED] did suddenly appear in the corner of warehouse dock [REDACTED], seldom used. Nor was [REDACTED] deceived by its perceived exchange with some units of “Useful.”

Let it be decreed that it was a corrupted Chemist who had wandered into the Factory, tainted by the dreaded Cavity Bear to restore [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. And let those who postulate that this Chemist was none other than [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] be smote where they stood. So says the Flavor Man.

Then let it be known that when our heroic [REDACTED] did uncover this [REDACTED]

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<sup>14</sup> Historians believe that Jabberers who did not become Gardeners were allowed to relocate to the [REDACTED]



wicked Chemist, an epic kung-fu battle ensued, and by the good graces of The Flavorful Dance of Fisticuffs did [REDACTED] finally defeat the evil, who turned out to be the Cavity Bear itself.<sup>15</sup>

And let it be known that immediately after, [REDACTED] did rebrand Tittlywinks into Tittywinks. And that this was a wholesome, distracting conclusion.

And let it be known that the modest, humble [REDACTED] did insist that all specifics regarding [REDACTED] identity be stricken from all records, which in no way coincided with the scandal brought about by [REDACTED], towards which [REDACTED] had no liability or recollection.

And let it be known that soon afterwards, [REDACTED] did retire from The Factory, to spend time with [REDACTED]. And that this was in no way related to anything previously stated.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Evidence of the wicked Chemist's remains has yet to be discovered, though one alternate text has [REDACTED] instead banishing the sinner from the Factory, after performing a kung-fu-style purification. The source also claims that this same Chemist went on to

[REDACTED]

<sup>16</sup> [REDACTED] ultimately culminated in a [REDACTED] later that same year. The retirement party of [REDACTED] was streamed live to all remaining Gilgamites, from an undisclosed island paradise, which historians and the [REDACTED] have yet to locate to this day.

# On His Dresser

BY JOAN E. BAUER

Matchboxes, stray business cards, dictaphone,  
scribbled phone numbers, mementoes.

There was, Paul claimed, an order to it.

Keys for his red Corvette that the fire,  
the year before, melted to a pretzeled frame.  
Chunky gold wedding ring, K (for Kaplow)

as a flower unfurling, with a diamond from  
his mother's ring, his mother born in Poland,  
who died just before he graduated college.

The miracle contact lenses, essential after  
he nearly lost both retinas. Tortoise frames  
as back-up, with thick, smoky lenses.

Driver's license, checkbooks, lapsed corporate  
ID, but also his weathered one from Justice,  
salvaged from the 70's as keepsake.





BILL WOLAK

Three-ring leather binder with fancy stock  
on which he'd begun to sketch some poetry:  
*as mighty eagles soar, their talons—*

June 1994 plane ticket, his last flight from  
Chicago when, though rail-thin, he lied,  
even to his friends: 'preventive' chemo.

His voice preserved on dictaphone:  
*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*  
*The Bhagavad Gita, The Book of Job*

# Ants In Here/Orange in Here

BY JESSLYN WATSON

## I. Unemployed/Reanimated

I cartoonify into my couch: the pink mandala  
of my pull-apart pixels passing between the threads.  
All a-move, rolling texture, the floor a cat-scratch-tongue,  
the linoleum fresh-shaved skin. There are ants in there.

They usually move in a flood, they usually carpet  
like tight-wound pubic hairs. They are there  
under my mons pubis like segmented pearls, crunchy,  
marching somehow just between the striations  
of individual muscles. I kill them with Kegels.  
I am the type of cartoon that perverts. I am test-animal  
Jessica Rabbit and my breath can eat through film.

## II. Cluster B Personality Disorder/Chicken Wings

I am a vegetarian but today I crave meat.  
The ants are sapping my protein, eating  
it right out of me like pomegranate seeds.  
I have a hard time telling where I as an entity end  
and their exoskeletons begin, where  
my technicolor sugar-organs end and the inevitable  
fruit-moldering begins. I have a hard time  
telling where my pregnancy ends and where  
the entrance of the graveyard is, the one  
with the visible bones and the sinew-strung birds  
of carrion and the sign that says:  
Carnivore Memorial Cemetery, No Loitering.

### III. Spring Break/Lizard

I am the daughter of the devil, which is a relief.  
I learned that in Florida. I went there for a week  
to get away from the ants and somehow,  
the sunfire shot inside me and grew an orange  
in that already-opened part of my puzzle-guts.  
It got too big and now I have to go for the late-term  
harvest, now I have to watch on camera as the farmer  
sticks his whole hand down my throat and digs  
the orange from my viscera with ragged gouge-nails.  
I am the daughter of the devil so I am cold-blooded,  
so I sun myself on the sermon-rocks, so I peel my orange  
and I pop its citrus cells between my carnage-incisors.

### IV. Boy Trouble/Prozac

When he calls, the ants are in the speaker-piece  
so they do all my talking for me. They tell him  
all about Florida and the orange and the meat,  
and the way I'm being animated now, the unnatural  
angles at which my limbs are allowed to bend.  
He doesn't say anything for a long time but when he does  
all he says is, that kid would have been  
mutant anyway. What do you know, the ants say,  
and they hang up. I think he was talking about the synthesis  
that turns my blood into pixie-stick-dust, those experimental  
injections that have rotted my cotton-tail off,  
that exorcism-capsule they gave me to make sure  
that I wouldn't talk backwards anymore.

## V. Avian Flu/Alternative Student

I go back to college at the end of the year  
but everyone there has been replaced by birds that have come  
looking for the ants. Birds that squall trite lines  
from literary classics impede my bicycle's tires; heavy-crested  
crows pick bugs like wriggle-runes out of my hair.

Birds who know all the numerals of pi shit  
on the statue of the toothless pioneer who built the university  
back when organic chemistry was just cutting things up.

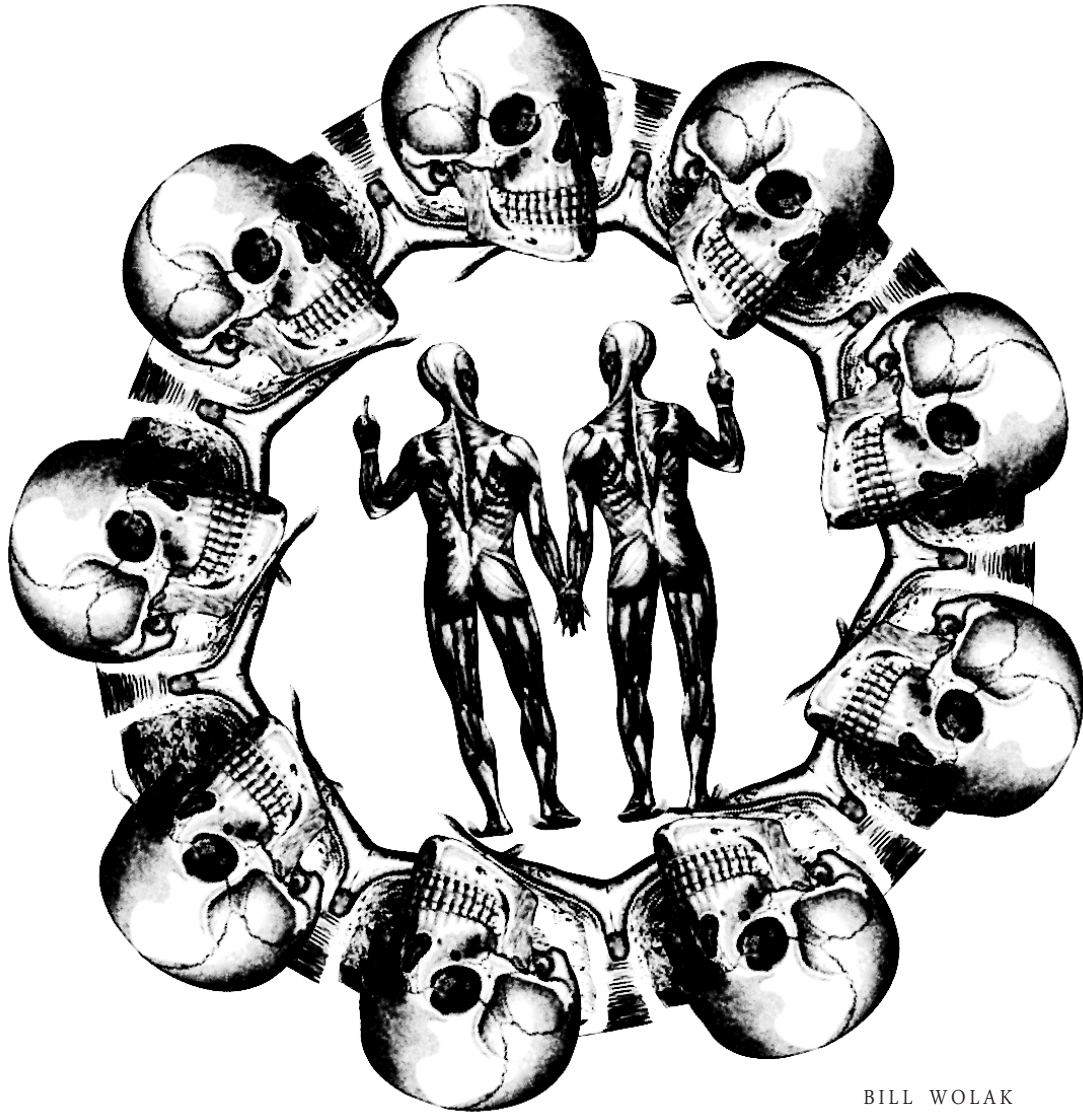
I don't know what to do, so I sit on the library  
steps and I wave away the clown-faced finches  
who reassure me that it's *better to reign in Hell*  
*then serve in Heav'n* but only if you can find  
the throne. Only if you're born in time. Only if  
your PG rating gets revoked so you can really do it right.



RACHEL DAWN RENAUDIN

# Halloween Party

BY SCHLOMO STEEL



BILL WOLAK

I liked that he had romantic notions about port. Because there's only so much time that you can spend trying to shake someone out of something. My chapstick was down to the hard plastic bit at the end and it felt like I had been shaking his shoulder for months. Are you ok? Oh, ok.

He hadn't really been into port before we met, and he said he liked that. He liked that I had introduced him and port. Him and port. Like



there had been a handshake deal or something. He ordered a bunch of take-out and he said that a guy in the corner kept looking at him, but he always thinks someone is looking at him. I'm gonna flip him off. - God, no you're not.

The butterscotch pudding was good, and the trick-or-treater turnout was bad. It was just us sitting around with a big white IKEA bowl full of organic fair-trade chocolate talking about my TMJ and disappointments. I had to smoke out back in case any trick-or-treaters came, which is ok, 'cause it's not like I want kids to smoke or anything, but it was raining, no, I mean sprinkling, because you're not ever ever allowed to say it's raining in Michigan. I have a big fancy degree and I approve of that run-on sentence. Besides which, God, there are bigger things to worry about. Fuck.

My cigarette was starting to curdle in my empty gut and I realized I hadn't watched It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown yet. I went inside and put it on and it made me really, really happy, but I figured a couple of those kids probably would have died in the Vietnam war or something. Peppermint Patty and Marcie probably would have gotten an apartment in the east village and burned their bras, even though nobody really burned their bras. Maybe Franklin would have joined the Black Panthers. Some burly types outside were joshing each other about hunting or dick size or something and we froze and then they pushed a little girl in a pretty good skeleton costume up to the door. Trick or treat. He gave her a big handful of our shitty fair-trade organic chocolate.

Our reservation was for for 8:00. I didn't want to go out, not to a god-dam restaurant, but I was happy he wanted to eat. He backed the car up

onto the curb, even though he wasn't even really parallel parking because there wasn't a car in front of us. I had to push myself by my elbows off the frame of the car to get out and my sweater got wet. I wonder if the guy who was staring at him started like right off the bat or if maybe he got there after us.

We had a reservation but we didn't even need one. The place was dead like a, fuck it, whatever, Halloween pun. They sat us in the same booth as the time before. He knew the server. He knew all the servers. The menu up and ate the conversation. He always said he never wanted to be those people who can sit across from each other for an entire meal and never say a word, so just pare down your goddam menu, ok, this is hard enough as it is.

What are you going to have. -I don't know, I'm really hungry. -You should eat more. -Mmhm. If I get a bunch of things do I have to do the tasting menu? -Nope, you can order à la carte ounces mmhm third-course protein portion. -Can I have a Moscow mule? I don't feel like my usual drink order is grown-up enough for fancy restaurants. What I always want is bourbon and ginger ale with a lime wedge, which I guess in a certain light is a bourbon buck, which is totally grown-up and manly if this is 1952 and for the record it's not. My drink came with a thick plain white plastic straw and I felt embarrassed and you're probably not supposed to order two. Or you're supposed to order six. Can I get that with bourbon instead I mean what are they going to say?

I don't think that witch died, I think she was casting a spell on that creature. We're finally talking, about a cable horror show we like. We sound

crazy right now. -I don't care, I love that we can talk about it. I do, too. His drink is orange and in a martini glass and it tastes just like I thought it would. I didn't take any ibuprofen before we left and my head is cracking. I've had at least one headache every day for months. He has stomach problems. A couple of Christmases ago he had to get his gallbladder out, so now I tell him he can't go into organ failure during the holidays. We're walking out of another restaurant and it's raining and I can tell he feels really poorly, and it's kind of sweet, even though

"The cat's been scratching at the attic door again." My conditioned response is "Ghosts," and then a wry grin like I'm so fucking clever.

"I went up there. There's an animal."

"An animal? What animal?"

"I don't know, I couldn't find it."

My quail comes. I don't know why I order these tiny fucking birds. Normally I'd suck out the bone marrow but there are these people at the next table just killing it adjusting insurance or their secret homosexual relationship or something. Their wives have to talk conspiratorially over the flickering battery-powered candle. "There's some guy in the corner staring at me."

I know there's an animal in the attic. Sometimes I joke that it's little dead girls playing tiddlywinks, but I looked it up and I don't think tiddlywinks is the game I mean. Tiddlywinks sounds pretty good, though, and you can't exactly Google that game with the little thingies that no one my age has ever played but like our grandparents still have in an ottoman with a Readers' Digest from 1961 and I don't know, it looks like it would make a

faintly creepy noise in context of it coming disembodied from your attic.

“I was on the State Department’s website today, and”

My grandparents say they quit smoking when the first piece about the dangers of smoking came out in Reader’s Digest. I always liked that. I think about how their friends must have made fun of them and blown smoke in their faces, and they obviously still had to have ashtrays at all their parties or they wouldn’t have had friends. Smokers being dicks in the 50s somehow seems so wholesome. I bet little dead girls never played tid-dlywinks in my grandparents’ attic.

He looked great in his sweater. “I always wanted that sweater to be mine, but it looks a lot better on you.”

“Really?” He smirked, blushing. “You know, it’s your sweater, too.”

“Yeah, but you’re always hiding it somewhere.”

“It’s always out somewhere.”

“I took a picture of the cat lying on top of that pile of jackets in the guest bedroom the other day.”

“Oh, yeah? Are you taking secret pictures without me?”

“What? It’s not secret! I just told you about it.”

I noticed I had left a substantial piece of quail on the bone and I picked it out of the bowl, tearing the flesh and skin away. I wanted to eat the quail, but I had already set my silverware in the bowl and I felt like the insurance adjusters were looking at me. One of their wives ordered an Irish coffee for her husband and I hated him so much.

Fall soup. Too sweet, lots of cream. Fried sage, god I hate fried sage. Why don’t you just shove my face up a turkey’s ass. Unthinkingly I check

my phone in my bag. I don't know why I'm always checking it, it's not like I'm an insurance adjuster with a secret ongoing rendezvous and I need to keep a vigilant eye on pork belly futures or texts from the mistress I maintain to distract my wife from my mister. "I wish that guy would stop looking at me. Do you like tuna? Here, you have to try this."

What I wanted to say is that I felt terribly isolated and like there was no one on my team but it felt so shallow and stupid that I wasn't even sure I meant it. My right ear burns when I drink, and I rub it, and obviously that doesn't make it burn any less. Sometimes I think about telling him. I told him about the cavity I think maybe I got when I was scratching some corn away from the back of a tooth, but I don't even know if you can get cavities like that unless you're on meth or something. I smelled Brie from somewhere close and I couldn't tell if it was a good thing or not. The smell of good cheese can be really scary if it turns out not to be cheese at all.

The cat sleeps in the guest bedroom a lot. The door to the attic is between the guest and the master. I want to think it's sweet. She's probably just sleeping on the softest thing because the guest bed is the softest thing in the house. I sleep in there when he's snoring or thrashing. I hardly ever make the bed and it embarrasses me. Sometimes he has people over and he doesn't warn me and I have to make the guest bed because you have to walk past the guest room to get to the bathroom, and that's just not a conversation I want to have. Seeing someone see your unmade bed is like, they might as well have caught you masturbating to a Charles Manson biography. When I was a kid, if I didn't make my bed before I went to school, I'd spend the whole day thinking about how gross that was. Gross like the

one and only day I ever wore a sweatsuit, a forest green Nike sweatsuit to school, and when I got home a guy in these white jeans took us to Frankenmuth. Have you ever watched a guy in white jeans eat goose-liver pâté?

It's embarrassing like that.

Our server sets down more silverware at the edge of the table. I'm never sure what to do with my plate. He had to teach me not to hand my plate to servers because this one time at a shitty Americana restaurant the server got visibly upset that I handed her my plate. It was one of those restaurants where the servers go around with that scoop thing to clean up crumbs. Christ. I almost choked to death on some duck fat and when I coughed it up I had a real clear sense of happiness. I can still remember exactly what it feels like to know that you are about to choke to death on duck fat in a shitty Americana restaurant.

I go to the bathroom, which is way too close to the kitchen, and it has one of those automatic hand dryers that you slide your hands down into, and all I can think is that some disgruntled prick could have made a prototype and convinced all his coworkers to cut off their hands. I just barely cut off our server when I left the bathroom but I didn't know because I didn't want to see who it was and then there she was right behind me at the table and she said

“What about you, Sharp? Would you like another drink? Should I bring back the drink menu?” Oh, fuck, am I supposed to order something different? “I'll have another of the same.” She looked disgusted. She remembered my name. I didn't like it.

“And you, Harris?”

“What’s the flavor profile of the—”

I don’t know where I am for a second.

I know we’re not going to have a Halloween party.

But I don’t want you to think I’m unhappy.

Our drinks come, and then our entrées. The server mixes them up and each passes the other his plate. I don’t want you to think I’m unhappy, because that’s inaccurate.

The server sets our bags of takeout on the table across from us. Now that guy across the room probably really is staring. I know we’re not going to have a Halloween party, and it’s like...it’s like my stomach is trying not to cry. I wish Harris didn’t frighten so easily. I know we’re not going to have a Halloween party.

But I don’t want you to think I’m unhappy.

The flickering electric candle hits Harris’ fork just right, and I see my red hair sliding down towards the asparagus. “American tourists in Lebanon,” I hear him say. I wonder how long Harris has known the server. I wonder if he’s told her funny stories about sticking didgeridoos up his butt, and about trapdoor spiders at the family estate in Australia.

A funny thing about portents is that atheists are enthusiastically bad at picking up on them. Earlier that day I heard something slide - or did it skitter? - down the gutter astride the porch. A warm glow spread from the base of my spine, like when you’re taking your lover and grasping futilely at the bedclothes. Halloween makes me want to believe.

A judicious note of acid hits me right between the eyes. I see Harris. I

see the stretched-out neck of his shirt give way limply to his bountiful chest hair. I see him drag a raviolo through a smear of orange cream. He's as naked as day, and I want to take his openness. I worry that I'll spill my drink, that glass will hit glass, and we'll never go anywhere again. I see Harris; I see Harris, and in that moment I take him.

"We have to get dessert," he says, and I smile a smile of indulgence for show. "And port!" he adds, taking up a menu with all the heft of his palm.

Harris and I sit across from each other, sharing port and crème brûlée by the light of an electric candle. "I'm glad we came out tonight," I say, a plastic toy shovel rooting around in my guts.

"I'm sorry we're not having a party tonight, Sharp," he says, his fork, having just skewered a raspberry, now hanging in the air. "But we can have it this weekend!"

I know we're not going to have a Halloween party.

But I don't want you to think I'm unhappy.



# Reading Bodies

BY TALI KUHEL

Crouching over an old book  
Our vertebrae like hooks; heads bait.  
There is grass in the binding and the

creek babbles like aunties at bedtime.  
We shudder with the trees and drool over  
the yellowed instructions half buried in mud.

*Look for a spiritual triangle*, so we spread  
our fingers and hold each other's hands  
rolling our eyes with Ooohs and Aaahs;

*If the contours in the brain draw lines on  
palms then we no longer need speech*, I say.  
A silence. His neck snaps back and howls!

In the morning we will walk the dog and  
scan newsfeeds for hope and fantasize about  
touch and never understand one another.

# Bedside Lighting

after Diane Seuss' *Jesus, with his cup*

BY ABE BECKER

1.

The lamp by my mattress on the floor where I sleep is tall as I am standing and weighs more than all my waking anxiety. So tall I have to sit all the way up and hyperextend my arm to turn it off when I'm done reading a short story or masturbating. It wobbles ominously as I twitch its switch to its brightest setting and then off completely the way my mind won't, too scared of being lamped to permanent mush in my sleep.

2.

My ex's new lovers all have these personalized, whittled-basswood candleholders she blows out one by one like Romance Santa, blows a kiss by each bedside, and smoke and possibilities and lack of only need waft peaceful above their grotesquely attractive physiques.

3.

The first months after the break-up I'd notice the homeless in my neighborhood weren't visible under the lampposts on my one-A.M.-or-later walks to the gas station for emergency Ben and Jerry's. One or two would be panhandling graveyard shift by the cashier's window. The rest were trying to sleep where I'd get off the 18 coming back from her apartment, restless in the bus stop's safety-grade glare.

4.

Porch light filters through my window when I turn my lamp off. I shut my eyes and imagine my loss as tears that don't fall but mist between our towns, through the window she always left open, splashing in a puddle beside her bed. The big spoon cradling her clanks to the floor, scoops my loss in its mouth, asks if she wants to imbibe the part of herself that loved me. The question gurgles and they giggle and make out and sleep and sleep...

5.

We called mine the responsible side of the bed because I controlled the lighting and got the water and phones. Her lamp switched with a necklace chain so close it didn't even feel like reaching. I can't remember what material covered the bulb, the safety of that dark, the unknown we would face together. I turn my deathtrap lamp off and on, each night into mourning. My window must look like a hostage signaling for help when the kidnapper's gone.





# Furious Hi-Fi

BY RAFAEL PADILLA

*Helmand Province, Afghanistan.*

*Spring of '09,*

Stand huddled on uneven concrete, flush with industrial light at Camp Leatherneck in Afghanistan and tell me if you've ever fallen out of love. Listen to the sun-reddened chaplain Bible-bash about pits and corruption and you'll know we have. At night, whirring with helicopters and coughing trucks, the dust-choked skies are always starless. At night, stained red with headlamp silhouettes in the spring humidity get reminded that we've learned to cope anyway. We look like killers, milling on a grey slab in a lazy circle, surrounded by Connex boxes and wooden buildings with loose dirt and antennas reaching; the chaplain gives us a coronation because we're doing the will of Christ and shit. You know, kill.

We are the hammer of god, he says. We will cast the enemy into the pit of corruption, he says.

The dude is on another level.

Royce asks if he's serious.

I say I don't know.

We don't wear the typical Army checkered pattern colored different shades of gray, that's chump stuff. Instead we have ballistic Kevlar-plated kits straight olive drab with MICH helmets spray painted tan, brown and green. We have weapons decked with EOTech reflex scopes for expected

close combat and LA-5 IR lasers that flash invisible in the dark. At night you can't see us, but with the dual hanging optics strapped to the front of our helmets we can see you. The thirty-something of us are real commando cowboys now, we're real Rambo Rangers. It meant something to us since most of us were still young.

Flatbeds trundle, crossing concrete barricades and a pebble trail, a tarp-covered concertina wire fence and stopping in front of us with rusted brakes screeching, wafting dirt clouds on our sweating faces. All we can do is grimace.

We don't wear dog tags around our necks, that's regular army shit. Instead, we tuck them into pockets at our breast. The medics know where to look in case one of us is hit. Some people have *Buddhist* etched on their tags, and others *Jewish*. Some read *Christian*, but we all look turned off by the chaplain's enthusiasm. My tags say *no preference*. I throw my machine gun atop the flatbed truck and in the dark it thuds flat, lost in the rumblings of diesel engines. Grab the dust oil film edges and step on a big fat tire, haul up and see how many we could fit to each truck. The going rate is fifteen.

Take a bumpy ride, thinking that this must be what Mars looks like. Plywood buildings cut by surgical lights buzzing, spray painted with numbers and draped with slapping tarps. We funnel down avenues flanked with concrete barriers looming and tent cities whipping in the breeze. The chaplain watches longingly like we are batting for little league, like we are going to live out some wet dream. Amid a billow of dust in the dead of night, get ferried away.

Blinking, knees slipping while mud and rocks pelt our faces, a blacked out CH-47 claws at the air, thudding up a storm. Shove my knee into the ground and fight not to fall. Even if I scream, my voice is swallowed by the ramming propellers. The violence, beating air subsides, becoming a blip in the distance and leaving the skin raw and damp, cold. In the middle of nowhere, sinking in mud listen to the insistent buzzing of drones. Look up and see humming blinks of lights; unmanned aerial bombers.

*2-1, this is 2-6, you have the go ahead, says static from thick Peltors wrapped under helmets. We're all clear.*

*Roger 2-6, Shadow Man says.*

In the distance figures move, silhouettes flashed by IR strobes pulsing on top of MICH's like beacons. Have you ever followed like mosquitoes in the dark, careful to trace the steps of the man ahead as to not get zapped? The rest of us heft up with shoulder-crushing loads and hip stumping gear.

Under night-vision goggles everything is a different shade of grain and green. Trudge along endless valleys, become little shadow figures bogged down by weapons and waifing up slow muddy plains. Tramp like we're walking on clubs, ankles packed with clay thickness up to our boots. The miles around stretch with Bible mountains fencing a deeper shade of black. I have never seen anything like them. Out here, away from the world on a cloudless night, our pepper dust Milky Way lights up the sky. Sometimes I get lost.

Carry an eighteen pound weapon with at least three hundred rounds



of 7.62 linked and then tell me you're a man. Carry a bobbing kit rubbing raw the skin and then tell me that gravity doesn't hate me, hate my ankles and my knees. Turn into gum. Finally reach the hard-packed trail that we've racked up clicks for the last hour for. Considering everyone feels the same, remain valiant. I could never allow myself to be the weakest link, so I retreat into myself.

Have you ever been laughed at by a chest deep shit ditch trickling? At twenty-one, have you ever followed a low crumbled wall and thick shrubs winding like burned reefs? I see shadows everywhere, but realize I'm just subconsciously scared because deep down I really am afraid of dying.

An exploding flash on the west horizon – impressing, alien, enormous. Boom.

Glance for a second, flashes of pillaring smoke turn into cigarette ash embers obscured in the night.

*Ain't shit*, I say, but I've been known to lie.

My team leader Hammond tells me to “fucking” look at that. A C-130 scouring the distance, the dual jumbo jet just a blip strobe of itself skirting crooked mountain tops and firing streaks of violent light. They cover first platoon on a joint mission a few clicks away. They've been in sporadic contact for the last hour.

Kaboom. Our walking silhouettes could've been *TIME* picture of the year.

Roiling fires, erupting magnificence; I finally feel like I'm in a war

movie.

At twenty-one, have you ever grunted a machine gun that numbs the arms? It numbs so much that I am sure like the rest of the Army, it hates me.

Another eruption, washing white and scattering skeleton tree silhouettes. Hammond's freakishly long legs stride far on the trail, telling me to sack up my shit. He talks like he doesn't have a machine-gun, and he doesn't. A long line of Rangers walk in two lines staggered along the unforgiving dirt road.

Stone-faced in the dark, I tell him I got it. Another boom opens, flashing cannons illuminate like lightning. We keep stomping, moving toward the target with rocks scattered on the floor and slipping, the sky lighting up like a green Fourth of July.

*2-6, this is 2-1.*

*2-1, send it.*

The place must have stood here for at least a hundred years; a squat mud compound with twelve-foot walls surrounded by blooming opium fields. After tonight, it will stand another hundred more.

Roger, we hit checkpoint four, moving into isolation. The voices hiss, static.

Have you ever walked through a sea of opium poppies dead set on tearing you into the mud? I think the land wants to kill us too. Smell like filth, caked and dried with sweat. The land wants us to rot with the British, the Macedonians, them Roman bones.

Hammond spits shit, ripping poppy stalks from his rifle. Damp Earth

smells so nice. Poppy bulbs smack flat, rubber flesh hitting hollow with a thud. The knocking bulbs entangle in every hook and cord, it's a fucking nightmare, a quagmire up to our necks and shoulders. Twenty minutes of sticky sap dusted, teeth gnashing and grunting, fighting a field like knuckling gorillas.

The field always wins.

Trudge for almost half an hour listening to the engine vulture buzzing above. I have a feeling someone is going to die tonight.

Hammond says get ready, pulling a shoulder strap on my kit to get me close. Cursing and stomping, Rangers rustle thick and moving fast. The drone sparkle lets us know we are a few hundred meters away.

At twenty-one, have you ever been a shuffling beast, cutting through fields like wild boars? I rest a corner of my machine gun against my kit and use it to force my way like a dozer. The ground churns mud, making progress pointless. Radio chatter picks up tempo with laborious breathing.

Rationalize the extremity, only one hundred meters to go. Our forces spread in unison, a beam of light beats from above, invisible IR from an indistinguishable blip lost in the salt and pepper night. Heels drag in mud, stumbling. Rack your machine gun and lie to yourself. Say you're a badass Ranger, a straight warrior killer. Say this and grit your teeth, ignoring poppies smacking you in the face. When you break through the clearing you always fall.

Knees sore, kneeling, I hurt. I am mud and sweat, the creature from the Black Lagoon. The road cuts, draped with chalky dust while Rangers

amble forward, weapons at the ready, moving toward a large mud wall standing ominous with peek-a-boo trees from within. They step all over everything, tripping and tumbling on their asses while rushing, moving like our limbs are filled with lead. Stubborn Afghan vegetation line, the ditches and the compound, tough carbon ladders hoist against crusted parapets. We spread into assault teams and avoid the double door main entrance. IR flood lights streak from weapons while helmeted men become golems. In the early morning chill, we and everything are damp.

When the interpreters start blaring Pashtun into megaphones and Rangers set up tight security with trigger fingers itching, Hammond and I prowl rushing between knots of twenty-one year old killer bad-asses.

Are you the Lt? Nope.

Move past a team of four gripping crowbars and a sledgehammer and very real rifles.

Are you? Nope.

Move past the dog handler and his Malinois Shepherd literally taught to hate Middle Eastern people. That's not a joke.

Hammond points toward a lanky Ranger leaning against a wall, kneeling in a small-shrubbed ditch with scum gutted edges, radio man standing close. We move.

I pull knobby-headed poppy bulbs from straps on the radio of Royce's back. He grunts, refusing to talk but I understand; the RTO has one of the shittiest jobs ever. We smell like sweat and shit, and Hammond and the Platoon leader talk quick and efficient.

Lieutenant Lombard is only a few years older but tells me that all is

going to plan, his voice east coast and eager. Somehow his white Puritan face always looks clean, no matter how horribly taut and dirty the rest of us are.

I nod, determined.

He tells me he needs my gun up top, looking over the parapets. Lombard tells me I am doing great things for my country.

I nod.

Have you ever been conditioned to take every word of a man as church? Lombard turns back toward Royce and they talk and use the radio. Hammond pats my head. We stand near a ladder, listening to the buzzing above. Watch the blinking lights from the vultures in the sky, the helicopters, the UAVs and C-130 and you will know how small you really are. Watch the stars twinkling and spread like modern art canvases and you'll know irrelevance, scurrying around mud and shit like ants. Squeeze your weapon tight, gloves mud crusted and sweaty because you might have to kill someone. These are the lands of the Bible, but we found no gods.

Have you ever seen a grown man really cry? Like, really cry? I think I have. Sit stacked like sardines in a tin can that whirs above a barren landscape, night vision goggles lifted on scratched helmets and see mostly darkness. From the mouth of the drop ramp, jagged hills try to reach us with crooked spines and see the hint of a wake up sun on the horizon. My ass numb, body vibrating from the shaking frame of the bird, lying on a steel floor conjoined with half sleeping figures that are all friends. Rest, limbs like lead, I hurt. With my Peltors off, the drumming of propellers feels so distant that I drown in oblivion.

The sun begins to really poke its head.

I am Omega Zen, oblivion never felt so nice.

Mud with skin rubbed bloody and cracked from salt sweat dried so many miles ago, my nose assaulted from the stink of man and burned carbon from discharged weapons. We killed some people today.

At twenty-one, have you ever seen stick figure men who've lost it all? A robed Taliban haunched, stuffed between Rangers and blindfolded with back bent awkward and drenched in cold sweat. The tiny man wears bare feet and zip tied hands behind his back and smells like shit. Watch him, cause I bet he's crying. The man is a pathetic sight.

Have you ever aimed guns at women, wives or sisters, daughters? In Afghanistan you might. Brothers or fathers, his friends all dead and he's crying. I know I would. His Alpha, his Omega now burning in that pit the chaplain was talking about. I know he's crying. It's procedure; interpreter says women and children first, come out quickly then the men. Tons of children, a bunch of wives and no men, it's all the same, nameless. People always stay inside. Rifles splinter sternums of whoever is left, five men then a little girl catches a ricochet; it doesn't matter. She could be a daughter, or wife, in Afghanistan you never know. He's crying. I would be if I was him, but I'm not him and no matter how hard I try, my eyes stay dry. I know I should be crying, but I'm not.

Have you ever felt afraid and small, roaming an open void with stars like space and an endless sea of green, of bulbs, of damp Omega? This is your life, still twenty-one and knowing you've lost something but no matter how hard you try, you'll never get it back.



CARA LOVORIO

# Night Shift

BY DONALD FISHER

One winter  
I was working nights  
in a security guard shack  
at a power plant.  
I'd go crazy from boredom.  
I'd huddle obsessively over the radio  
twist the tuner back and forth  
try to find decent rock 'n' roll.

There was  
another guard  
in another shack  
at the opposite end of the plant.

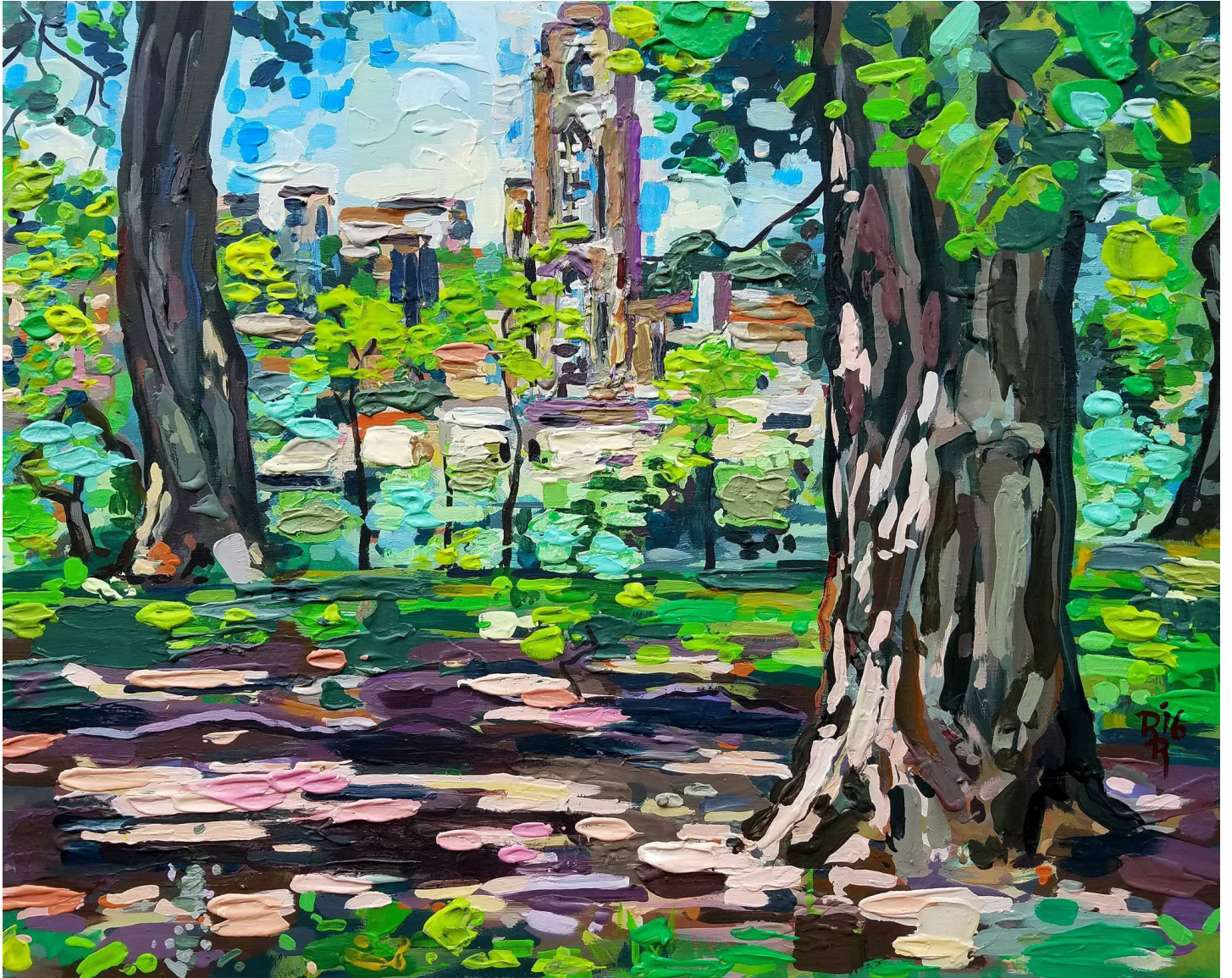
His name was Bill.  
A co-worker told me  
Bill was crazy.  
More than once  
he got juiced and called me  
at three in the morning,  
told me about Vietnam,  
how he was in the bush country  
and about his latest sexual conquest.



He was fired when supervisors  
found a pile  
of beer cans outside his shack.

I'd heard he was all short fuses  
booze  
but he never lost it with me.  
No, he opened up,  
told me damned near everything about himself.

Of course that could have been the beer talking.  
Maybe there was no real trust  
just a need  
to talk to someone  
anyone  
at three in the morning  
on the coldest goddamn night of the year.



RACHEL DAWN RENAUDIN

# Equations of Mud and Weeds

BY STEVE KLEPETAR

Last night you explained the equations of mud and weeds, which block my view of the neighbor's house: a white truck in the driveway, a motorcycle and a small brown boat on a trailer in the street. "Don't worry," you said, "pressure eventually makes everything round." But they unnerve me, staring in the morning when I walk to the park. I wave, but their eyes are hollow, their mouths sewn shut with fine thread. In May they planted marigolds, and now they water and weed. Flowers rise up over their mailbox; all around their house orange and yellow heads strain toward the roof. One day their children will climb and be gone, somewhere through the thin wash of cloud. Your calculations make it clear. The German word for "space," you tell me, is "Das All," a concept that terrifies. I've noticed a slight limp, an ache in my left heel from some invisible wound, an arrow shot from a far off tower, as the pyre burns on the opposite hill. But it can't be that, not so far from the river, which drops down from high banks into a lush, green gorge. Often I have crept across the old wooden bridge and heard that slice of water gurgle beneath me as if voices called, offering a name, a fate, a long fall into oblivion.

# The Planetary Invaders Recovery Group

BY KEITH GABOURY

We meet at that YMCA  
over in the seedy end of Bushwick  
where I must slither through a dry cold  
and descend onto a cheap metal chair  
against the fire alarm.

Five heartbeats in, I gladly fall  
into a trance — pull the switch,  
hail a wet cab to Neptune  
ripe for spearing the native inhabitants,  
blood smearing across a galleria

of domination. I wiped out  
the Europeans last weekend  
after drilling through the ice  
and sucking up the sea creatures  
with a bendy straw.

Back in the bitch of a Brooklyn winter,  
they confiscated my straw —  
plopping my green-to-the-bone body

before a drone moderator's hemisphere  
projecting to a slab of cognition.  
Oh what satisfaction I seek  
to blast that machine away

when ten heartbeats in  
I succinctly trip into submission  
as Ed begins his confession  
of failed conquest — Neptune must wait  
until the next solar eclipse —

the humans will burn their eyes out  
and I will slip away — like a fish  
finning a black ocean transgression  
above the Y's cold shooters, one more  
blind release through a streetlight heat.



WESLEY USHER

# Cocoons Like Sideways Clouds

BY REGGIE MILLS

Faye tells herself that she wants to be a doctor. She saw her grandfather die of cancer, she was there for her aunt's carcinoma diagnosis. These are events that Faye feels sit at the heart of her being and she thinks that this gives them significance.

There are cliffs at the edge of town that rise above the little lake. Faye stands here looking down. There is the sky and the water and they are coordinated, moody and grey. A ways behind Faye is the highway and the cars passing by are like the sound of A/C. Among the university's pre-med program's other incoming first-years Faye was not unique in her sentiment, in wanting to be a doctor, and this is something she knows. But it is no longer first year and the fact that her aspiration has maintained is a distinction.

Here on the edge Faye feels cold. You get to this spot from Main Street via series of paths that wind through the town's woods. There are waves in the water making softly distinguishable cuts across the surface. She wants to be a doctor and she carries this like a sadness.

The cliffs at Faye's feet extend out into her periphery. It is the world's mouth opening up before her. It asks her to come inside.

Faye knows that for a successful med school application there are certain cutoff-values that need to be met and one's grades on the MCAT exam are a set of these cutoffs. The MCAT assesses your knowledge of basic first- and second-year concepts deemed both requisite and fundamental. And so there are things that she is sure to hammer home.

For instance, Faye by now knows the Krebs's cycle, the 20 amino acids, the general properties of the phospholipid bilayer. She knows the Adrenergic, the Dopaminergic, the GABAergic pathways. She knows MHC classes I and II and she knows T cell activation.

Apparently the actual entrance into med school is the hardest part, and after that everyone with half a head moves through fine.

She studies for the MCAT when she goes to the university's medical science library. It has its floors with the stacks upon stacks of books and in the far back corner is a little contained cubby-desk with just a tad of light from the orthogonal wall's window. This is the spot for Faye.

Although the MCAT really only tests you on concepts you should've learned in your classes, there is a sheerness to the quantity of material and there are many trains of thought towards the most efficient way to go about studying.

She knows every word and melody on John Mayer's Continuum by now by heart.

By routine, she has her coffee in the morning and doesn't have any more for the rest of the day, because with the MCAT being nearly eight hours with a one-hour lunch she can't necessarily guarantee that she'll get her re-caffeinating Joe #2 on the day of.

She listens to John Mayer when she studies the material but when she writes the practice exams she does so in silence because she knows that to prep herself for exam-day she must replicate the exam conditions to a T.

The Mannich, the Pinnick, the Simmons-Smith.

Except there's the issue of the day-of anxiety that in her practice exams she gets close to feeling, but knows isn't even close in the slightest.

The appointment with the OB/GYN that Faye's mother uses was a regular checkup which the aunt had put off for some time out of not having a physician or OB/GYN of her own and not knowing where to start in getting one, and that she finally asked for Faye's help to book. The gynaecologist, who can speak in English to the mother and who was recommended to the aunt as someone quick and convenient to book but who doesn't speak Korean; Faye had to act as translator on the aunt's behalf.

The aunt living in an English-speaking country but only knowing Korean.

And the OB/GYN performed the checkup with Faye out of the room and when she called Faye back in she explained to Faye that there was something. Probably nothing, but something which would be best to double-check with a specialist (the options for which, upon checking, were solely English-speaking). Which the gynaecologist said shouldn't be an issue since the specialist-appointment was meant only to relieve the minor doubt of it. Which Faye said she agreed with.

The gynaecologist with the waiting room with how many pastel-flower prints across the wall.

But in the car the aunt told Faye that there had been an irregularity and a pain.

Faye imagines what it would be like to live without an eye, the sensations. If she suddenly woke up and her left eye were gone, her left eye being the "worse" one, its glasses-lens having a stronger prescription than the right, and in its place then just the empty left socket, open to the air



and to the world. Would the eyelid open and close, still? Would it blow like a tent-entrance in the wind?

For a while she has wanted to feel another person's eyeball touching her own, the squishy slime of the surface. She wonders if she pushed her eyeball up against another person's would they get enmeshed, maybe? Or at least just exchanging eye-slime-bacteria with someone else. Making her own eye more infection-prone.

There is also the option of touching her eyeball to the one removed. Her detached left eye pushed up against the still-intact right. Having a surgical procedure to do this. Of course keeping in mind that it would have to be done in a timely manner to ensure that the left eye stays hydrated and wet.

The room is blank and pale and smells like a mix of church and high school portable-classroom. There are roughly twenty of them, Faye and the others. It is 8:44 a.m. and Faye had to wake early to make it; her body feels jagged and fragile as a consequence. Many of the others have coffee and some have tea or water. This is the bulk of the refreshment that they're allowed.

There are particleboard desks with attached seats that you slide into from the left. Faye chooses one closer to the front just off the centre row and places on it her writing utensils and water-bottle and then brings her backpack to the front of the room to drop it. As she walks her legs feel like loosely packed sand.

Whole month-long sections of your life go by when the only time your mind ever goes blank is when you're washing dishes.

Faye wrote the MCAT once and on the sections Physical Sciences, Biological Sciences, and Psychological Sciences her performance was fine but her Critical Analysis section score was suboptimal so she is planning to write again.

She knows the cardiac cycle, hypertension, parasympathetic and sympathetic control.

There are the lessons she paid too much for, that she thought would be helpful and probably were, even just for the fact that they got her through the material but which she still felt didn't really do anything she couldn't have done herself.

Faye's GPA isn't the best but it's at least okay, and with her graduating from the pre-med program this upcoming June it's not like she can do much about it anyways.

She goes to the MS library's coffee counter in the morning, still feeling the blanket of sleep, and when the barista asks for her order she pauses for a second, drowsy, uncoordinated, and then the barista says the order for her, laughing; the same size brewed coffee Faye has ordered every morning for however long. Faye doesn't know what to feel, realizing she's become a regular.

The average GPA-cutoff rises every year for med school applications, and this acts as a little time-pressure and one more anxiety for the back of her mind to weather.

She even looks forward to the little retreat of washing her dishes under poor lighting every evening.

The renal, the lymphatic, the GI tract.

She studies for the MCAT exam the second time around but this time she doesn't tell anyone because she wants to be the only one who knows.

As a first-year pre-med student, you take all the required first-year courses along with everyone else in your program. These are the students who want to be doctors out of vocation or parental pressure or because they don't know what else to be. The courses you take being things like physiology, like cell biology, like biochemistry. And in September with the first day of class there is the lecture hall full with pre-med students eager to learn.

The prof walks up to the front of the hall so big he needs a mic and he introduces himself. Then the first thing he says is he asks: who of everyone there is wanting to go to med school?

All around Faye is a sea of hands.

And he says, We will see if there is the same response a year from now.

In here it is sterile. There are the smells of latex and isopropyl alcohol and lavender. Faye's hand is moist and sticky. The gynaecologist comes in and she asks Faye how they've been and then gets right to it.

Faye and her aunt had gone to the appointment at the specialist's place downtown, which Faye had to skip a whole day of high school classes to attend and less than a week later they are back at the gynaecologist's again. The specialist had taken a few samples which they had their technician run and they sent the gynaecologist the results.

Now less than a week later they are back at the gynaecologist's again.

They had to pull a chair in from the hall so that Faye could have a spot to sit. Behind the door beside Faye is the distant buzz of mechanical movement, of tracks and gears. There is one window but the white drapes

are pulled, making the lighting soft yellow and translucent and ambient. And there is the gynaecologist who sits across from them without papers or anything else whose face is grave and already says it all.

The one test Faye wants to fail.

Her mouth moves.

Faye's grandfather lived in Korea, and though she never met him she keeps a photo of him up on the wall in her room and in a way this keeps her company.

Faye dreams she goes into the exam room and she discovers upon looking at the paper before her that there's a whole section it never even occurred to her to study, and she wakes drenched in panic and cold sweat with the half-hearted relief that the next exam hasn't even been scheduled.

It is spring. Faye is at the closing semester of her pre-med program and she has applied to med schools across the country but she didn't get in. She reasons it wasn't her GPA; though below the previous year's reported cutoff for some select institutions (cutoffs being reported only roughly a year after application-season) her GPA is still high enough for most. Most likely what held her back was her MCAT's Critical Analysis score, the exam of which she wrote last summer and felt generally okay about afterwards, but was mainly hovering on uncertainty about. Faye knows this is usually not a good thing; doing well on an exam—just like doing poorly on an exam—is something you can sense, feel, hold as truth in the part of your brain that keeps knowledge of the other undisputed laws of the world. Without med school for next year, Faye is unsure of what to do, so she emails her university's med school's guidance counsellor

and asks him to meet.

He is able to talk the next day.

Faye sits in front of him. She tells him she wants to be a doctor. She tells him she applied but didn't get in. She tells him she is unsure of her options.

His office is wood-panelled except the panels are painted the same maroon as the university logo.

Then he tells her that her GPA doesn't meet his program's cutoff. This is something Faye knows. He tells her there are other med school programs across the country that might be better suited. This is something Faye knows. Programs abroad. This is something Faye knows.

His hair is thick like mud.

He says it is a difficult thing.

The red walls turned brown and grimy from how many spoken voices.

He says that is it best to be realistic and Faye says yes. She thanks him for his time. Then she exits the room to the hall and takes a big breath of air.

He says, It is competitive.

She moves her feet down the hall.

He says, Comparisons have to be made.

She reaches the MS building's exit-door, her hands on its push-bar.

Choices.

Behind the door it is day.

He says, And how do you compare?

There is a fullness to the scratching sound of pencil on paper, the multiple-choice answer sheets quickly and precisely bubbled in. The desks'

seats themselves are two-piece, the seat and back connected by metal tubing, and by an hour in, the lack of lumbar support for Faye is bothersome to the point of distraction. She feels her nerves have calmed slightly, but her heartbeat is somehow both forceful and fluttery and it makes itself felt in waves. She likes to lean her face in close to the page when she fills in the little bubbles. There are precisely four distinct persons with runny noses and corresponding snuffle-rates and based on the checkerboard seating arrangement Faye is confident that she's mentally placed their locations in the room by sound alone. Also a boy two seats to her immediate left has a serious case of restless leg syndrome. If Faye's sits up straight, he's just inside the outer edge of her peripheral vision, but since she's right-handed, she can put her face down into her desk and exam-sheet so that she's looking more rightwards at her hand, and she can kind of block out the visual aspect of the joggling leg.

The restlessness only exacerbated by anxiety, Faye knows.

And then they started their second-year pre-med classes and on the first day the prof for PSL201 asks the same thing as the prof from last year: Who here is looking to go to med school? Knowing that they were asked it in their first year and now checking up, this new prof and the old in on the same understanding – the difference first year does to a student. How it affects ambition, or understanding, or understanding of ambition and dedication and what these things consist of. The true difficulty of it. Because now what used to be a sea of hands among a similarly packed audience in first year's Week One some 365-odd days back has turned into a scattering.

Her aunt's diagnosis is an important moment for Faye, Faye thinks. Afterwards the aunt falls into a depression, which Faye feels to be an inter-

twined part of. Faye had a cousin in Korea who killed himself at 33. She didn't know him personally, cousin or second cousin, but she knows the realness of it. Her uncle takes the depressed aunt halfway across the country with his work. For this period of time they Skype, Faye and her aunt, weekly, biweekly. The aunt living in an English-speaking country and only speaking Korean. Then Faye's aunt comes back, gets an apartment near Faye's family that the uncle is able to pay for.

Three years later, Faye leaves to university.

She holds the moment of diagnosis rigidly, sharply, uncomfortably. It is this moment which she uses when she writes letters of intent to med schools, saying it's at the heart of her aspirations towards gynaecology. She puts on the page that she knows the emotional pain, the need for compassion, for empathy; for cures and for people who can do things to help. She writes this with truth in her heart and she thinks that this is good.

She was 14 when her aunt was diagnosed. Faye Lee, student, translator.

During break Faye sees a boy shining a flashlight with a blue lightbulb at his face. She knows how blue light triggers wake-state circadian systems and thinks this may have something to do with it.

Then Faye is back home and cleaning the stack of dishes left from yesterday when her anxiety all but left her incapacitated. You take the week off before you write the MCAT because by that time you've hammered your brain up against the material so much you either know it or you don't. Some schools are okay with it being your second test. The week before the test when you try to not psych yourself out and to just get your nerves under check and do anything but not study, and yet still it's hard to let yourself do this because you're so conditioned into being aware of

and realizing the fact that every minute not spent studying is a minute wasted. The dish soap's orange citrus making you feel guilty, almost. TV shows feeling icky. And after only two or three days of no studying you find yourself starting to feel bored. The first time in you can't remember when. And you don't know if this is good or if it's bad.

But Faye knows too that at that first second-year lecture for PSL201 "Human Physiology II", despite the apparent mediocrity of her grades to that point — Faye got good grades, all As, surely, but even As, especially with med school in mind, are relative — Faye knows that even though she, Faye Lee, 20-year-old pre-med student, still wanted at that early-September point-of-time to be a doctor, to compete against the odds, to compete against everyone and everything else, and knows that she held this intention with determination, she knows as well that she too, like her many other second-year pre-med peers, didn't raise her hand upon her PSL201 professor's inquiry, didn't identify herself at this point as a med school aspiree despite having done so the year previous, a curious detail which Faye, considering this identification-declination, thinks could correctly, at least partially, be somewhat attributed to a vague indecisiveness or lack of confidence in her chosen path, but Faye thinks there is something else here, another sake at play which is to blame — an aforementioned piece — namely, the identification-ness of it.

Because on the one hand it is after your first year that med school — at least, med school admission — becomes, like grades, like GPA, like MCAT scores and all the rest, a competition — it's inherently competitive — and it's a competition that perhaps it would be best to keep your cards close for; and, on the other hand, once you and everyone else learns the extreme challenge of it, med school admission becomes a goal not just



to achieve, but also one to fail — one where you may in fact not be good enough, where the risk of your own personal failure and knowledge thereof makes you want not only to hide the fact of your pursuit from everyone else but somehow even from yourself, because the dreams you've held onto for so much time that they've become an identifying aspect of you won't just slip away but'll come crashing down on top of you with such force that you can do nothing else but curl up into a ball in your bed with the letters from the one, five, however many countless schools you applied to, letters whose harsh reality you thought you had an understanding of and that you tried to keep in mind the whole time but which you only fully grasp and take in and swallow down deep into yourself when it hits you in the dark of your room under covers with a wish that you could stay home with contentment and calmness for the rest of your days. And you stand on the cliff at the edge of town and look out and see that there is the life that lies before you and the life that you had known.

Choose.





CARA LIVORIO



STEVEN TUTINO

# Coming Home Late Through Niles Canyon

BY WULF LOSEE

*Papa Legba, ouvri bayé-a pou mwen, pou mwen pas...  
(Papa Legba, open the gate for me, so I may pass...)  
—Haitian Vodun invocation*

That evening I stopped  
at the three-way intersection  
paused for a minute  
under a buzzing light  
its sterile glow  
hit and flailing on the road  
the bleached gifts  
nor stop for strangers

car windows down  
on the road to Sunol  
where the crossroads shivered  
a streetlamp island  
the color of a hissing possum  
but I would not take  
offered by these crossed roads  
standing within a ring of light.

If I could, I would travel  
concealed from the lamp's eye  
submerged in night's reservoir  
but I flicked my high beams on  
dark  
as far as a steel-barred gate  
and beyond the gate  
and I smelled  
and saw distant lights of traffic

under the safety of darkness  
car headlights off  
that overflows the valley  
pushed back the wall of  
that flared in my headlights  
waters gurgled in an aqueduct  
the hayfields ripening  
crawling up the highway.

My high beams followed my turns  
they tracked its windings  
its cleft of shadows  
of freight train tunnels  
or to the street-lit suburbs  
past the flooding scent  
down the black groove of pavement  
at a trestle underpass

gripped the velvet road  
through the canyon  
of secret sidewalks  
to the underworld  
beyond the gap  
of eucalyptus groves  
where  
a crouched shape waited.

I slowed and looked at it  
then its form resolved itself  
in the window rising  
the breath of emergence

incomprehension  
a barn owl with its prey  
wingbeats of air brushed my face  
gift of the night.

# Homunculus

BY JIM ZOLA

Mostly he sits  
in a reupholstered divan,  
feet up, deep in me-muddle,  
wishing time were as simple  
as a snapped twig.

He wonders how we came to be  
steeped in the stew bones  
of his particular life.

Wife bats the eyelash of Eve,  
deep dreams that ovulate  
a nest of her, matryoshka shrinking.

I give my sperm a name.  
The night has tiny fingers.

# Loquacious

BY BETH GORDON

She wants me to stop talking. She thinks I don't know that she wants me stop talking. She thinks I won't smash the glass-top coffee table with my fist if she lets me talk all night. We're taking off in September, moving to Paris, if we are both still alive that is. She's dying inside and not just because of the coat hanger. Internal bleeding is the least of our concerns. God is on vacation so I'm punishing myself with Adderall, enough to keep me awake seven nights in a row. It doesn't have to be Paris, it just has to be somewhere else but here. Her lipstick, the color of poisonous apples, reaches across the room, touches my soul like a modern-day talisman and I see an entirely different future, complete with black-suited men and destitute opera singers peddling their wares on the train platform. She wants me to stop talking but I have to tell her what my daughter's hair felt like in my hand after she was dead. No matter how many pints of dried blood we have seen on the sidewalk, the knowledge we have gained, the ability to tell the difference between enchanted sleep and dead, we can't get used to the idea. We will still be shocked when it's our turn. When the biopsy reveals the cancer that we have always known was there.

# Your Itemized Suicide Note Included

BY BETH GORDON

Multiple courses of sautéed boar's snouts, French vodka infused with tusk shavings and the tears of wounded Syrian children. Donations to your first cousin's felonious political campaign, a cannibalistic hunting excursion with the erstwhile dictator of an unnamed South American nation.

Limousines overflowing with the entire cast and crew of America's Got Talent, medical-grade marijuana ordered by the case, fresh-faced prostitutes to be used only on special occasions. Your last kiss, shared with a dying man who smelled of mercury and over-toasted bread, scribbled in the margins of scented stationary. An afterthought of some consequence it seems.





RACHEL DAWN RENAUDIN

# Untitled

BY SIMON PERCHIK

\*

It knows nothing about the others  
smelling from feathers though you  
stop inching up, tucked between

the nearest candle and its happiness  
—after coming this close you're locked  
in place and continents stay dark

—it's impossible to strike a match  
as if some invisible arm went down  
scraping against an oversized box

unwilling to take the chance  
—so certain is this cake it makes  
a second pass, open to small flowers

ones running from you at night  
afraid to put on the lights, that become  
cities, pieces and in your mouth

never lose heart —every year  
each has a day to itself and you  
blow out what's left and motionless.

\*

You let it dissolve  
the way a stone falling through stone  
is pulled by far off currents

wants to lay down –this pill  
has to be swallowed at night, soak  
and your mouth already stuttering

embraces it with the same waters  
that once flared up, are now headwinds  
and the claim from when the sun

reached down mouthful by mouthful  
till the drowned opened their wings  
were cured and rotted hulls

shining on the surface as seabirds  
learning how to sing again and each sip  
takes root, ends its silence and fever.

\*

It's enough —even asleep your skull  
is not important here —you are alone  
and the river worked up, heads out

the way each hand still instructs the other  
when to come back, where to make the turn  
covers your eyes as if they were her breasts

melting under the heat from someone no longer  
facing you —overflows! each breath a parasite  
spends all its usefulness attached to her body

and you are learning to count, one side then the other  
higher and higher though the air has no lips  
goes about forgetting and yet your fingers ache

as if the marrow leaking from your forehead  
spills out as the man standing in front a mirror  
unbuttoning a blouse, looking off to the side.

\*

All wood floats though this shack  
hems you in –it's hopeless  
drinking water at every meal

pointing to beaches, channels, boats  
till slowly they row end to end  
as shadows, half alongside, half

something to hold that is not sunlight  
thrown far off to build a crater  
from these empty chairs –you thrive

on rage: a well that gave all its thirst  
to the scent near the open window  
named after the walls and ceiling.

\*

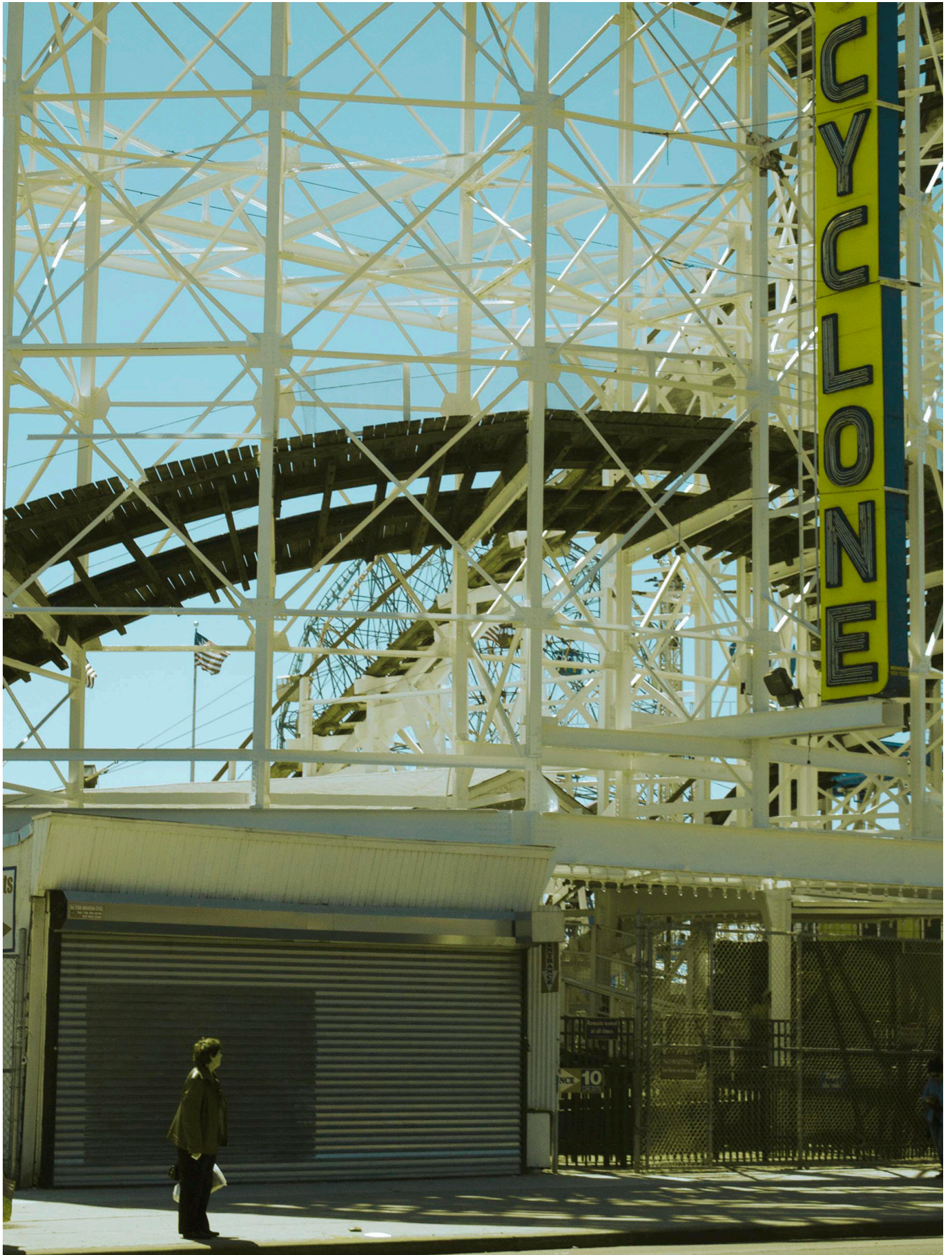
This dirt will never dry by itself  
though further down a random storm  
climbing out the first known sea

tries to move again —you dig for fossils  
naming each find after this place  
as if it was here the early sun

flowed across the sky not yet a gust  
and your own bones just now  
learning to grieve —you collect

certainty, everything encased  
helpless in the same darkness  
that would become a trace, calmed

the way all rivers are spreading apart  
putting you back and in your hand  
a small rock for a map.



JOSEPH LYTTLETON

# Simulacrum

BY MISHELLE ANTHONY

Sure, we had cowboys. I knew five men from different families with “Bubba” worked into their state fair belts. But my town was no metaphor. The dairy farmer’s son grew up a banker with that fieldstone walkway, every Saturday digging irregular shapes in the clay. His shovel tangled in chickweed, sent up red eddies from his sloping lawn. We all sucked our teeth when his corner bank went under. We worked stalks of dried grass with our tongues, nursed porcelain mugs at the café. Some of us sympathized. Most didn’t. That family had it coming with their Lincolns and slacks. Mr. Morris approached the wife’s office, belt buckle shining over Lee denim, to show that woman she deserved it, perched there while electric hands swept around the dial, her buzzing typewriter’s metal ball ready to strike.



Later we recalled a prairie woman captured  
in some silver screen Western, pale dirt rivulets  
dividing her skirts, straddled  
by a Seminole who made her swallow  
her own jeweled chain, the necklace  
stubborn as a bull snake in a well line.  
I want to tell you the superintendent  
sheriffed in, paunch spilling over  
his trouser snaps, and defended her  
from the savages. But he didn't.  
My town was no metaphor—  
the secretary lived, no sticks or stones,  
just a quiet dinner that night,  
my father's grim mustache  
over the swiss steak,  
my mother smiling, smiling  
across the dark wood expanse,  
even as she choked around  
the clasp and settings in her mouth.

# Hurry, Hurry

BY MADELINE PERETT

Last September, my father was supposed to go on a bus tour of the National Parks but the morning he was due to leave he had a stroke. He was going on the trip by himself. He'd made a bucket list after my mother died and had been slowly checking things off.

I arrived at his place that morning ready to drive him to the airport, but found him on the floor of his living room.

"I don't feel well," he said.

He's very stoic.

I'm visiting him now at the nursing home my brother and I placed him in. My father was very independent up until the stroke. It's sad to see him here. His room is smaller than most dorm rooms, I think. We're sitting in the common room at a table near the doors to the garden. The common room is very drab and lit with garish fluorescent lighting. There are at least eight other people, other residents, in the room but no one talks. It's dinnertime and they're waiting for their meals. My father and I have a game of Scrabble laid out in front of us but we don't play.

"Someone needs to flower those suns," he says, looking out at the garden.

He sometimes mixes up his words, a result of the stroke. I look out at the garden. I'm not sure what he means.

"Do you want to go outside?" I ask.

He offers a lopsided smile. I go behind his wheelchair but he swats me away and points at a walker along the wall. I bring it to him and he pulls himself up. His steps are slow but I stay beside him as we make our

way outside to the garden. We only have to walk about five feet to get outside but my father is out of breath by the time we reach the doors. I put my arm around his shoulders and he leans into me.

“Lion lily,” he says softly, mixing up his words again. He means Tiger Lily, his old nickname for me.

We make it to the bench in the center of the garden and sit. My father says, “I used to walk two miles every day.” This is something he’s been repeating since the stroke, the only coherent statement he can make.

He cups a daisy head in his hand, feeling each petal. He used to love gardening. As a child, I would help him plant bulbs and seeds every spring. It was my favorite thing to do with him, the only activity we ever really did together. One year, he did all the planting without me. I had turned thirteen that February and was starting to spend more time with my friends. I had come home from a birthday party and found him kneeling in the garden. When I asked him why he didn’t wait for me, he said he thought I didn’t want to garden with him anymore. I might have hinted at that but didn’t mean it, and so I was hurt.

Clouds move in, blocking the sun. It suddenly gets very chilly. I notice my father shiver and ask if he wants to go back inside. He shakes his head then struggles to pluck the daisy he’s holding from the ground. It comes loose and he hands it to me. I twirl it around then put it behind my ear. He smiles and pats my knee.

“My Lion Lily,” he says. He doesn’t realize he’s saying the wrong words.

I like this new nickname.

I took my time driving to his place the day he had his stroke. I stopped at the car wash on my way and drove below the speed limit. It

was 5:00 a.m. on a Sunday and there were few cars on the road. He wanted to be at the airport by 6:30. A song came on the radio, "Hurry, Hurry" by Air Traffic Controller. It was my first time hearing the song. I liked it and listened closely to the lyrics. It was an ironic song; it was really saying slow down. The song echoed in my head all that day while I sat with my father in the hospital. The song had been telling me to hurry. The refrain played non-stop in my head: "Hurry, hurry, whoa oh, hurry, hurry, whoa oh." I wonder now if I had hurried if it would have made any difference. But how could I have known.

A few raindrops hit my cheeks and I stand up. My father remains sitting. He's looking up at the sky.

"Tears," he says.

"No," I say. "Rain."

"Tears," he says again and wipes at his cheek.

I nod. "Let's get inside."

I get him back to his wheelchair at the table and he starts shifting around his Scrabble tiles. He starts to lay out a word on the board, his shaky hands placing each letter carefully. I spell it out as he lays each tile.

"H," I say. "U-R-T."

I add HINTS.

He adds LOVES.

I add MORAL.

A nursing assistant interrupts to ask what my father would like for dinner. They eat early here; it's only 6:00 p.m. She describes the meal options and he says, "Night." The nursing assistant puts the menu in front of him. He points.

"Roast beef," she says. "Good choice."

She asks me if I'd like a dinner. I shake my head and thank her.

“I think it’s time for me to go,” I say.

My father looks at me with sad eyes. He looks at the Scrabble board and pulls the S from the end of HINTS and LOVES. He takes the T from HURT, the A from MORAL. He pulls another tile from his rack and spells STAY.

I don’t have a good reason to leave. I look at my watch. I’ve only been here for a little over an hour. It’s felt like longer. I look for the right letters and add to his word. I spell out OKAY.

The rain comes down harder and it grows dark. His dinner comes and I help to cut the roast beef. It’s very soft and pulls apart easily. They’ve given him a full meal: a small salad, mashed potatoes, overcooked green beans, and for dessert a Jell-O pack. We don’t say anything, just stare out the window watching the rain. I stay until he’s finished his dinner.

“I really have to go now,” I say, standing up.

He nods and looks up at me. “Daisy,” he says.

I’m afraid he’s forgotten my name. He’s never mixed that up before. But I realize the daisy is still behind my ear. I take it from behind my ear and put it behind his.

The bus tour he was meant to go on would have brought him to Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon. The last stop was going to be Las Vegas. I tell him, “We’ll finish that bucket list. We’ll try again.” I promise to go with him next time.

I kiss him on the forehead and whisper, “Good bye. I love you.”

“Good luck,” he says. “I love you.”

I’m glad he got that right.

# Showing My Husband What I Learned in Elementary Ballet During a Whiteout in Omaha, Nebraska

BY KRISTEN CLANTON

Shiny—my face chapped from our blizzard hike  
to the grocery store and the champagne we bought there—  
I press my shoulders down, make my neck long,  
and force my eyes to the woman who hangs on our wall:  
her black sweater, her belly and blue jeans.

Mouth curled, face made up—she's watching me  
in his giant Doors tee-shirt, my new bob haircut  
and thick purple socks. I'm not the person I was before

we were married—all alabaster and beauty, afraid  
of everything. My knees are locked, hips  
turned out under black sweatpants that hide  
any momentum of sexuality,

the openness of the line  
forced from the heart to the feet:  
it's the apple he's supposed to see.

I bend to the shag carpeting and my eyes break  
from her peach mouth, her long fingers  
clinging to the bell of hips, all of her refusing  
to take me seriously. And he pretends he can't  
see her, who I used to be, as he lays across the bed,  
sweater in hand, chest bare and body  
six years younger than me.

# Memorial Day Weekend, Omaha Boarding House

BY KRISTEN CLANTON

The plastic lawn flags slap red, the whites pink  
from last night's storm, but the blue is bright royalty,  
straight and clean, balking at the sky.

As the boy upstairs drops his truck,  
he drops his pail and it collides with my  
open windows, the scratched sound of the sparrows  
outside. My son thinks the people living upstairs  
are sky monsters,  
he thinks they are ghosts finding their way  
into his closet, the plumbing, and sometimes the TV.  
I tell him it's Jesus up there, but he hears the chairs move,  
the scraping claws trying to emerge,  
and he doesn't believe what I say is true.

The boy upstairs, the boy I didn't know was there,  
drops his broom, his boat, the boots he must be wearing.  
His moth-bitten voice is a whimper melting against the floor  
and his grandmother, the scaly sound of her aggression:  
Do not fuck with me, she says into the wild loam,  
the dandelion fuzz of summer.

Most mornings my son screams he doesn't want  
to brush his teeth, wear his shoes,  
he doesn't want go to the bathroom.  
And I leave the corner space, I carry  
the laundry to the basement, his playground socks  
and paint-stained pants, puked-in shirts, smeared  
with all the vegetables he refuses to eat.  
I listen for the morning news  
in a neighbor's living room,  
for other voices in other kitchens  
as I count the steps it takes to not hear my son  
pitching his body into the walls,  
his violent laugh and squealing cartoons.

# LAUNDROMAT



BRIAN MICHAEL BARBEITO



# Rapture

BY KRISTEN CLANTON

From my bedroom window, I see no gods, but a man bent from the back, his shoulders leaning into a hoe, slowly folding seeds into the earth. He never looks up to the sky, does not know the kaleidoscope world

he's constructed, the gardens grappling the heavens down, each lotus flower a bloom against the beauty of the bare, wide-eyed plains of blue made grey-green, the color that happens right before the world splits open,

and everything beneath us, all of the tumbling sea, slick-backed fish and baleen whales, the nets of their mouths, are moments from capsizing beneath the burden of gravity, the sky too heavy, the ornaments of the man's blooms

hung too high to stay still. But the man will not look up. His back bent to God, his knees deep in the soil, he does not know the danger overhead, the mountains trembling beneath the weight of his reveries. He only sees

it's raining in the way the roots swell, the meaty veins beating the ground, and when the trees spring back green. He knows God is in the spaces between the branches and trunks, the roots and leaves, and

this must be how Noah felt after the flood, leaving behind what he wanted for memory, pulling the rest through the eye of a needle, watching the world erupt in his form, in every movement he made for only the things he loved.

# Beverly Hills Studio

BY MACKENSIE PLESS

I wondered if we were in heaven or a hospital,  
waking up from an afternoon nap to a palette of white  
so pristine it could blind. The barren walls  
and twisted linens. The curtains sheer, Pacific  
billowed through from the balcony doorway  
as I crawled over your still dreaming form,  
careful not to disturb. And yet—that was paradise.  
A terrace in mid-August, almost alone. Kimono silk  
encasing nakedness like tulip bulbs folding up  
for the night. Behind closed petals, stamens  
lift hands in worship to the wan almighty  
moon, full as the jails. That divot of city between campus  
and Beverly Hills lupine for the same aureole;  
a valley of palms leaning to meet it like a spring tide.  
Neighbors waved Budweisers in welcome, flushed  
as I was with the world's clandestine blessings.  
Fingers fiddling with the loose bathtub knobs.  
Clustered laughter peeling sweat from summer heat  
like muscadine skin. Somewhere, a mezzo-soprano  
singing Spanish ballads. A stray napkin mistaken  
for a seabird aimlessly pirouettes downwind.



CARA LIVORIO





## POETRY & PROSE

**Mischelle Anthony** is Associate Professor and Chair of English at Wilkes University specializing in poetry and eighteenth-century literature. Her poetry has appeared in *Slush Pile*, *Found Poetry Review*, and *Blue Lyra Review*; her collection, *[Line]*, is available from Foothills Press.

**Joan E. Bauer** is the author of *The Almost Sound of Drowning* (Main Street Rag, 2008). Recent poems have appeared in *Calyx*, *Chiron Review*, *Confrontation*, *Slipstream*, and *US 1 Worksheets*. In 2007, Joan won the Earle Birney Poetry Prize from Prism International. With Jimmy Cvetic, she co-hosts and curates the Hemingway's Summer Poetry Series in Pittsburgh. A new manuscript, *Dear Communist, Dear American*, is making the rounds.

**Abe Becker**, a.k.a. The Poet Laureate of Awkward, was recently published in *Drunk In A Midnight Choir*, *The East Bay Review*, and *Melancholy Hyperbole*. He is a Grand Slam champion of UC Berkeley, a playwright, a caretaker, and was long-listed for the 2017 Lascaux Prize.

**Jennifer Jackson Berry's** first full length collection *The Feeder* was released by YesYes Books in late 2016. Her newest poems have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *Duende*, *The Indianola Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Split Lip Magazine*, *Stirring*, and *SiDEKiCK Literary Journal*. She is the Editor of *Pittsburgh Poetry Review* and an Assistant Editor for *WomenArts Quarterly Journal*. She lives in Pittsburgh.

**Megan Chiusaroli** is a teacher and poet living in Brooklyn. Her work has been published in *Aphros* and *I Want You To See This Before I Leave*.

**Kristen Clanton** was born and raised in Tampa, Florida and graduated from the University of Nebraska, earning an MFA in poetry. Her poetry and short fiction has been published by the *Bicycle Review*, *Birds We Piled Loosely*, *BlazeVOX*, *Burlesque Press*, *Furious Gazelle*, *Leopardskin & Limes*, *Mad Hatter's Review*, *Mangrove Review*, *Midnight Circus*, *Otis Nebula*, *Outrider Review*, *Ragazine*, and *Sugar House Review*. She also has work in the forthcoming issues of *Gingerbread House Literary Magazine* and *Paper Nautilus*. More of her work is available at [www.kristenclanton.com](http://www.kristenclanton.com).

**Don Fisher** has been published in *Bryant Literary Review*, *Muse* and *Clark Street Review*. He also has a poem published in the online journal *The Raven's Perch*. He was also picked as a finalist in the Pat Schneider Poetry Contest for *Peregrine Magazine*. He has been writing poetry, fiction and nonfiction for over thirty years.

**Keith Gaboury** earned an M.F.A. in creative writing from Emerson College. While his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in such literary journals as *Fife:2:One Magazine*, *The Birds We Piled Loosely*, and *New Millennium Writings*, Keith has been rejected from *The Boston Review*, *The Paris Review*, and *Poetry*. He also co-founded a social justice-themed online literary magazine, *Words Apart*. While spending his days as an early childhood educator, he spends his nights writing poetry in San Francisco, California.

**Beth Gordon** is a poet who currently lives in St. Louis, Missouri and spends most weekends in the company of fellow writers, musicians, wine drinkers, and two dogs named Izzie and Max. She is the proud mother of three creative human beings, Matt, Alex and Elise, who fill her world with art and music.

**Steve Klepetar's** work has received several nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. The latest of his nine collections include *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto* and *The Li Bo Poems* (forthcoming), both from Flutter Press. His book *Family Reunion* is forthcoming from Big Table Publishing.

**Philip Kuan** is an aspiring Californian writer with a passion for befuddling readers. Some of his favorite authors include Charles Dickens, Tolkien, and Franz Kafka, among others. He has been published in several short story magazines, and is always looking for constructive feedback at <http://philkuan.wordpress.com>.

**Tali Kuhel** is a NYC-based writer with roots in Cleveland, Ohio.

**Wulf Losee's** poems and short stories have appeared in journals such as *Arsenic Lobster*, *Burning-word Literary Journal*, *Crack the Spine*, *Forge*, *FRIiGG*, *Full Moon*, *The New Guard*, *The North Coast Literary Review*, *Oak Square*, *OxMag*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Poetalk Magazine*, *Rio Grande Review*, *Serving House Journal*, *SLAB*, *Westview* and *Whistling Shade*.

**Reggie Mills** lives in Toronto where he eats granola and bagels. Elsewhere, his short fiction has appeared in *Buffalo Almanack*, *The Impressment Gang*, *Wolves*, and *Print-Oriented Bastards*, among other journals.

**Rafael Padilla** currently lives in Los Angeles. He is a veteran with four combat deployments and a graduate of Cal State Northridge, holding a degree in creative writing.

**Simon Perchik's** poetry has appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere.

**Madeline Perett** has been published in the *Bicycle Review*, *Five 2 One Magazine*, *Prime Number Magazine* and others. She lives and works in Boston and is a graduate of UMass Boston. You can find out more about her on [madelineperett.com](http://madelineperett.com).

**Mackensie Pless** is a writer from Southport, NC. A recent graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she currently works as an editor and production assistant in Durham, NC. Her poems have appeared in *Cellar Door*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

**Schlomo Steel** is a writer and artist in Ypsilanti, MI. His work has appeared in *Polari Journal* and *Rose and Thorn Journal*, among many others, and his chapbook *If I Go Now* took the 2011 Gertrude prize in fiction. Steel holds a BA in Russian from the University of Michigan.

**Jesslyn Watson** is a fourth-year student at Ohio State University majoring in French language and minoring in creative writing. She has been previously published in *Clementine Poetry Journal* and *Collision Literary Magazine*. After completing her degree, Jesslyn hopes to go on to receive her MFA in creative writing.

**Jim Zola** has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for Deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children's librarian. His publications include a chapbook -- *The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press) -- and a full length poetry collection -- *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He currently lives in Greensboro, NC.

## VISUAL ART

**Brian Michael Barbeito** is a Canadian writer and photographer. Recent work appears at *Fiction International*, *The Tishman Review*, and *CV2: The Canadian Journal of Poetry and Critical Writing*.

**Manit Chaotragoongit** was born on Sept. 30, 1983 in Bangkok. He received Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Public Administration.

**Jay Griffin** is a mediocre artist who produces rather insignificant work when compared to the inconceivable escapist-like thoughts he exhibits on a day to day basis. His works of art often demonstrate the reality of the quixotic nonsensical non-reality around him. Put simply, he is a daydreamer and a visionary whose seemingly random thoughts and ideas are not as easily grasped by those he comes in contact with. He views most human emotions as nothing more than abstract concepts, and attempts to portray their infinitesimal appropriateness in his works. He challenges the observer to question their own reality, their own significance, their own emotions, and their own beliefs about the world around them through his labyrinthine depictions and their visual aesthetics.

**Cara Livorio** is a professional artist based in Pittsburgh, PA. She obtained her BFA in drawing and painting and pursued graduate studies in visual art and curatorship in Milan, Italy. Cara's work has been exhibited nationally and resides in private collections throughout the United States and in Europe. <http://www.caralivorio.com>. Her "Passing By" series of paintings speaks to the seemingly unexceptional, yet special, "slices of life" that often pass by overlooked. Cara is the owner of the art school, gallery and art boutique, Artissima Studio, located in Fox Chapel, PA. [www.artissimastudio.com](http://www.artissimastudio.com)

**Joseph Lyttleton** is a writer and editor living in Brooklyn. He's the creator of *10 Cities/10 Years*.

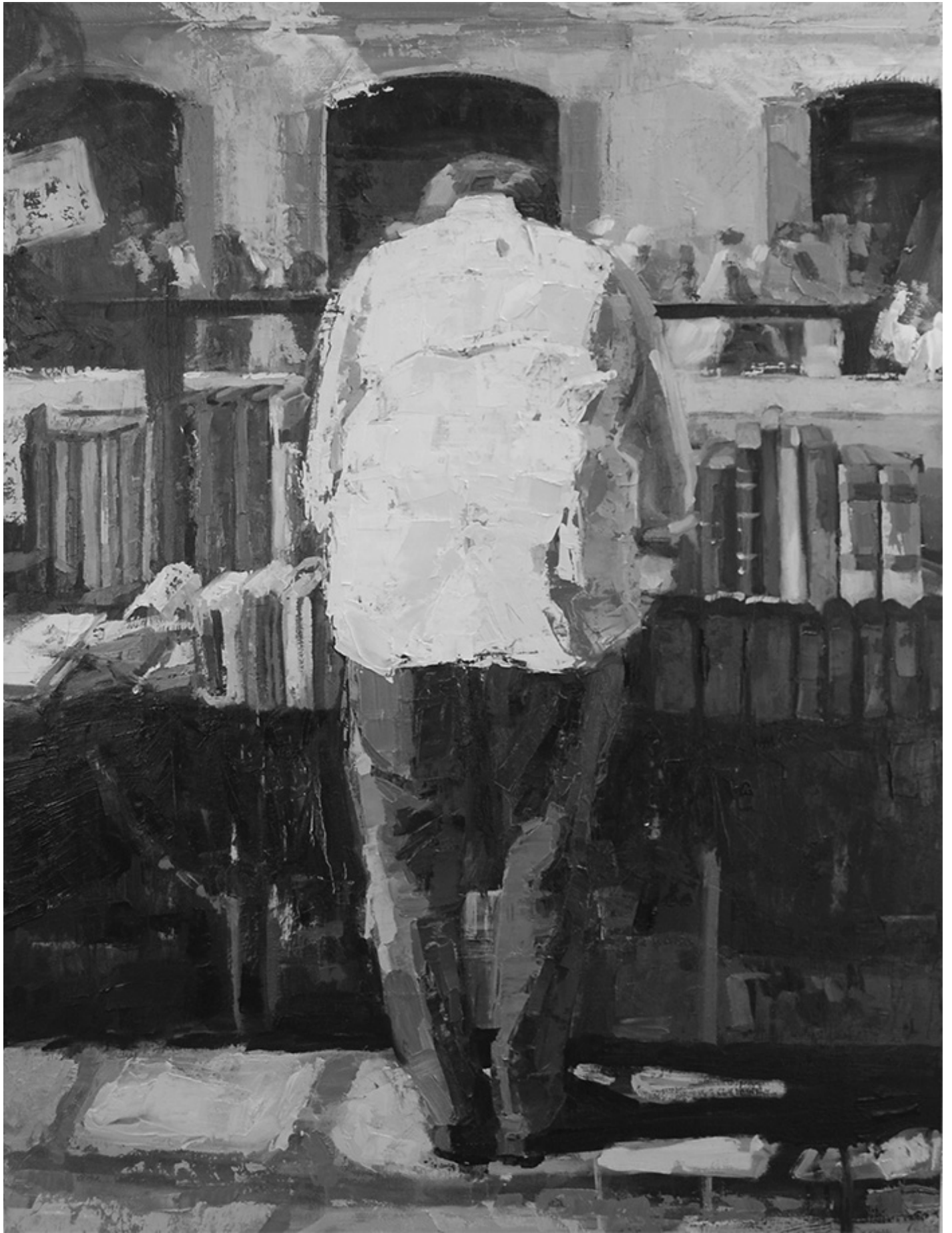
**Rachel Dawn Renaudin** is an observational oil painter, she feels she is not only inevitably connected with the human experience, but is personally enraptured by it. She harmonizes precise drawings with a thematically painted manipulation of form, light, and color. Her subject matter is often placed in a relatable environment, reaching to imbue the fleeting feelings that show themselves in and out of everyday life. She draws to speak. She paints to feel alive.

**Steven Tutino** is currently an undergraduate at Concordia University in Honours English Literature with an additional major in Theology. His poetry has appeared in Concordia University's *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality*, *The Paragon Journal* and *Halcyon Days*. His artwork has appeared in *Word in the World*, *The Paragon Journal*, *The Minetta Review*, *Beautiful Minds Magazine*, *GFT Press: Ground Fresh Thursday*, *Michael Jacobson's The New Post Literary Movement* and *The Omnicult*. Steven currently resides in Montreal, Quebec.

**Wesley Usher** is a licensed counselor, multi-disciplinary artist, and recent graduate of Columbia University's Narrative Medicine Program. Her visual artwork has been part of installations in both private and public spaces, including The New York Public Library and Mount Sinai Medical Center (NYC). Her larger professional projects include New York art exhibitions of solo and group works by artists living with disability and performance works centered around classic literature for the benefit of children and adults. She is a new voice in poetry, recently published in *The Intima*.

**Bill Wolak** is a poet who lives in New Jersey and teaches Creative Writing at William Paterson University. He has just published his thirteenth collection of poetry entitled *Love Opens the Hands: New and Selected Love Poems* with Nirala Press.





CARA LIVORIO