

AFTER HAPPY HOUR REVIEW



ISSUE 6 // FALL 2016



AFTER HAPPY HOUR REVIEW

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LAYOUT AND DESIGN BY MIKE LAMBERT

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

Welcome, once again, to the digital pages of the *After Happy Hour Review*. When you last read us, the weather was warmer (at least here in Pittsburgh), Gene Wilder and Leonard Cohen were still alive, and many of us had a much different idea of how this election was going to go.

Even the most stoic descriptions of 2016 lean towards phrases such as ‘a doozy’, ‘a wild ride’, and ‘truly the darkest timeline’.

That last part’s a joke, mostly. Fortunately, the content of our Fall issue is just as audacious, challenging, and unexpected as these last two hundred and fifteen-odd days have been.

The pieces you’re about to read – and indeed, the artwork that accompanies them – are about digging into the confusion and conflict in our relationships, our worlds, and ourselves in a way that rarely arrives at anything resembling an *answer*, but always at something *genuine*.

We hope you find that as satisfyingly appropriate as we do, and above all else, that you enjoy it as much as we do making it.

See you in 2017,

Mike Lambert, Layout Editor of the *After Happy Hour Review*



ASHLEY GARNER

Gilmanton, 1991

BY BRIANNE MANNING

See royal blue plastic chairs, *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart*, a table in the teacher's lounge, laminate maple, coils of her dark hair, graying strands at his temples, thin-rimmed spectacles, a leather-strap wristwatch, fading Florida chlorine freckles, skin everlastingly tanned and scabrous from years spent roofing under northeastern sun, a half-crooked smile.

Hear slow southern syllables, *hellos*, melting snow, no *goodbyes*.

Imagine a blistery March afternoon: he takes his peanut butter sandwich out to the edge of the field to eat and listen for woodpeckers working in the forest between the school athletic fields and Nighthawk Hollow Brook, an empty teachers' lounge, strangers remain strangers.

I remain unstitched, a series of artless threads, blind and deaf.

Caipora

BY HOLLY DAY

You can't count on nature spirits to find
babies wrapped in old sheets, by the side
of the road and under the trees, gasping for their
first breaths
not quite alive, simply abandoned. You can't
count

on fox-headed women, sylphs with cow tails
to be there to find babies left behind
in rest station bathrooms on lonely country
roads
to come just in time to stop those tiny cries

to save those tiny fingers twitching in lines of
ash
left by cigarettes burning out on wet tile.

Company

BY MARTINA NEWBERRY

We are bridged
by the tender things:
the “yesses,”
the “thank yous,” the winks,
the cortège
of other insects
like ourselves
scurrying around,
trying to
avoid God’s dual-
density,
polyurethane-
soled boots as
he saunters this way.





Legacy

BY MARY SOON LEE

Tony stood alone in his bedroom
staring at his mother's shoes,
all twenty-seven pairs.

His mother knew before
she saw him standing
in front of the mirror
wearing her lime-green dress.
She knew, but didn't know
what to say.

She liked to be useful,
tried so hard to be useful,
tried to teach him
how to hide who he was.
No knife as sharp
as a love like that.

Lady Problems

BY CLAIRE COBURN

On nights when you feel dizzy with nostalgia and liquor, you locate your gallon-baggie of letters from Sarah—Sarah, who is with a man now, despite everything she wrote to you when you were fifteen, seventeen, or twenty. Sarah, who lives a normal life, or at least the façade of one. You devour her letters like pink frosted donuts, savoring each one, licking your fingers along the way.

Most days you push her out of your mind. She is five foot two and pregnant; she complains about her back. You picture her on the sofa, feet propped up, and know that the man takes care of her in his way. With his love. It's the kind of love that leashes her. She has made the mistake of "taking a break" from work. During the day she peruses the home and garden channels, rearranges furniture, and no longer writes you like she used to.

She wrote until he discovered she was writing and had to stop. He hovers over her—hovering existentially, Big Brother style—and she does what he says. You have seen this happen with other friends, and with family members, and with coworkers. Over time the leash becomes a noose. There are secrets about money, about phone calls, about the fast-food wrappers and empty bottles in the trash, and before long the women begin keeping an extra toothbrush in their car, intercepting the mailman in the driveway, taking precaution after precaution to keep things copacetic. You think of all the children growing up in families like this, babies

born into a mess of lies, and you think of Sarah's baby, and then you think of yourself.

You learned how to lie from your parents, lying until it became more of a habit than a choice. You pass as something you're not, pacing through the halls of your life as straight, as educated, as upper-middle something—and maybe now you are. Maybe you've grown into what you always wanted to be and it feels like a costume. At college in New England, you dropped hints that you were poor without realizing it. You ate everything on your plate, scraping the crumbs into a little pile with your fork and shoveling them into your mouth. Anything could be boxed or tucked into a purse as leftovers—from a young age you learned to scavenge, to make things last. In the dining hall, you learned new phrases: equestrian, gluten-free, housekeeper, girl-crush. You found ways to incorporate them into your life even if they didn't apply, because you were an expert at lying.

Your parents used to pretend to feel something when they kissed each other, and you do the same: with the boys in your classes, guys at parties, men in your building. In church, they would listen and nod like it all meant something, and you copy this in your grad-school seminars—the nod, the attentive eyes, the pen pirouetting across the page. Your father collected disability while still repairing houses for cash, and your mother kept painkillers in her jewelry box. You tuck the baggie of letters from Sarah within your bed, pressing it between the springs and the prison-style mattress like you're preserving a flower between pages. Which is exactly, metaphorically, what you wish you could do: keep the old Sarah

for posterity while the real one, the one that breathes somewhere in Kansas City, evolves.

Today she calls you, frantic, because he's trapped in a meeting at work and can't go with her to the hospital. She is twenty weeks pregnant, due for an ultrasound, and paranoid at the prospect of going alone. You haven't heard from her in months, but you make the two-hour trip from your campus to find her with goo on her distended stomach and worry that stretches like constellations across her forehead. Your body tenses up when she grabs your hand—she has all the telltale signs of the poor and undereducated, and you don't want to see her this way. Her nails look dirty, she reeks of drugstore perfume and onion rings, and has she always been this way? And, more importantly, who are you to scrutinize? Your education, your stint in the Northeast, all of it has ruined you, and now you cringe when Sarah tells the technician, "Me and her go way back," because *me and her* is wrong and why did Sarah never learn that?

You want to wipe the gel from the soft blonde fur of her skin and drag her to the nearest Planned Parenthood, but you don't. You want to tell her she has the lead role in the ultimate heteronormative performance, that she's a thorn in the side of progress, a poster child for the patriarchy, that she's submerging her identity in the pursuit of selflessness and there's no way she can be this selfless and not regret it. She's choosing to strand herself on an island of diapers and drool and medicinal smells, choosing to abandon her freedom and sanity, making a series of choices that will land her in the same position as so many other twenty-three year old women with no formal education, no career, and

a “fiancé” who in six months will inevitably leave. She’s choosing to be a statistic, and you want to tell her this, but then you notice she’s smiling. Not at you, but at the little alien on the monitor. “It’s a girl,” the technician says, and Sarah’s eyes go wet. You forget what you wanted to say, so you squeeze her hand and look at the baby and tell her the only thing she wants to hear: “She’s perfect.”



ASHLEY GARNER

Splinters

BY TARA ROEDER

There's a splinter in your palm and you know that this is real, the kind of Tuesday where nothing happens, the kind of Tuesday that might as well be Sunday with different daytime television programming. Was reality ever glamorous, really, the way you remember it in unreal chunks carved out in punk clubs and, later, hotel bars? You've read up on the selectivity of memory but debate whether repression or recollection is more conducive to recuperation.

If desire structures language, you decide that a definition of living room might be: I entered it and saw you.

Which leads to the eternal question: what if you were life-threateningly in love with someone who didn't love you back? And some tiny voice answers, there's always the arcade. Where children yearn to win stuffed rabbits and once the skee-ball machine malfunctioned and ribbons and ribbons of tickets poured out like blood in a Quentin Tarantino movie. And that's a place you can actually go, unlike a map, or memory, which are not really places at all but skeletons of places, or the opposite of place, or its representation. And you could stand on a soapbox and shout, "Parents, Teenagers, Toddlers: Lend me your dimes!"



DAVID WATT DW

Over The Route 28 Guardrail Toward the Train Tracks

BY LISA ALEXANDER

We had been coming
or going, but hiding
from everyone. She had my hand
acknowledging yes, this. Finally, yes.
We sunk beneath a semi,
16 wheels around us, under-
carriage above ashing
our shirts and hair. Sucked
her salty lip as I had wanted,
she sucked back like she wanted,
like it was mutual, finally mutual.
Hot grime sticking August to our skin,
gravel in my knees a constellation of ache,
my whole chest a scattershot of tiny gasps.

Skillet

BY LISA ALEXANDER

Untie this pan that's tethered
to one wrist and I promise
not to hit you with it,

won't raise the skillet high above
my head and howl, won't swing it
sideways into your neck, cast

iron hard on your soft
shoulder, shifting boney
continents under skin.

You can take it
off me, my arm
will rise without the weight.

Courage

BY IVA TICIC

I think of my poetry teacher, when it comes to these things. Of her deadpan face in the face of all that might go wrong. Of her living alone with her young teenage daughter, in that 4th story walk-up and of that one time I came by when she made us mint tea and we looked at some of my poems on the screen of her Mac. Her dog had just jumped up, gnawed at my pen when she said *Honey, I'm 64 years old and I still haven't figured it out.* I think she meant life.

Then later she attached puppy to leash and proceeded to walk us both out, it was cold, it had snowed, it was white, it charmingly squeaked under foot. That's when she showed me the spot, right there on the third step from top, *that's where she fell.* An icy night just as this one, she'd only come out for a minute, with the leash and the dog, her daughter upstairs and I could imagine how scary it would be, with no way to get up, just lying there instead all alone with the white. But the thing is, retelling all this, she didn't seem scared. Only grateful and just a tiny bit small. But maybe the snow had skewed my perception.

Growing Old Together Might Be Hard If You // /Would Rather Shrink Young/

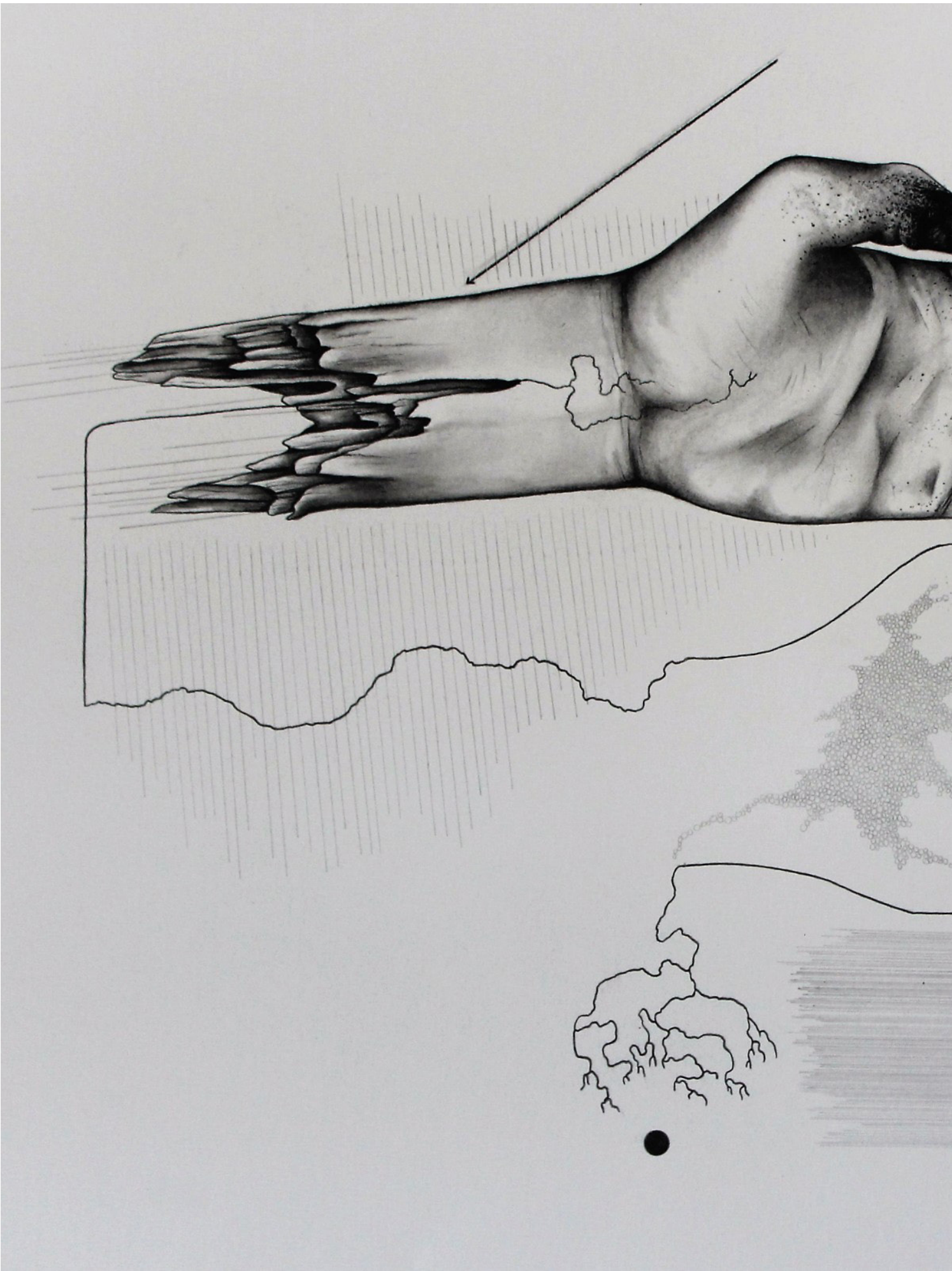
BY IVA TICIC

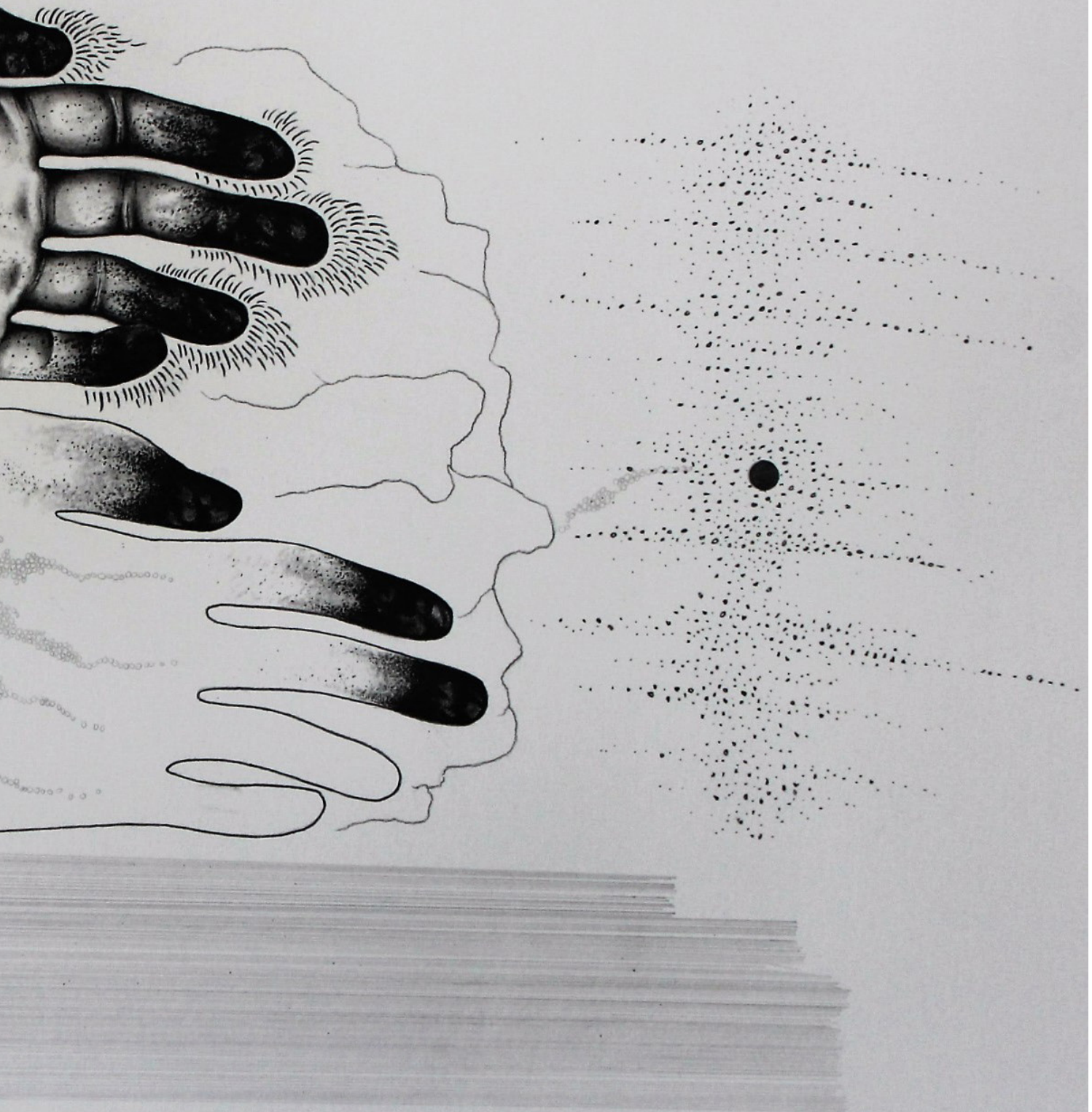
Do you remember that time when we soaked together in the lukewarm lull of the Adriatic /
on the Lillo with only our bare elbows pointedly sticking out/ the arms resting with shriveled
fingers on rough fabric, salty droplets occasionally swirling down our curvy crevices/ which were
problematic even then –

Remember you said/ we could split our time between Sydney/New York/Zagreb/LA/ to live
seasonally between the continents so we could have the lives we felt were stirring in our bones as
well as have each other and have to have had and keep having /but you were already
hoping to have less of yourself –

We grew since then in general/ but in particular, you had shrunk/ those arms you once
propped on the inflatable mattress had slowly deflated to yellowing tightness/ and there had
been so much silence/ / whenever I asked if you wanted to
change –

So now you live seasonally in different contexts than varying continents/ you're sprawled yet
again on a hospital bed where thin plastic tubes bite you as leeches/ while your Hemisphere
welcomes the Winter I fear we are still in that lukewarm bath / but you've totally shriveled
and I can't pull you out/ I can't pull you out/ I can't pull you out/





Black

Spoons

BY ROBERT DANBERG

A spoon goes in the lunchbox and does not come back.
A spoon falls behind the couch and does not come back.
And although I washed spoons, day after day, I never noticed their slow disappearance.
For all I can think now, I may as well have rinsed them out of existence
And filled the little basket on the dish rack with suds that dissolved like some promises.
One day, I looked and counted only two in the drawer, although we number three.
As I drove to work, I considered whether the problem was spiritual or psychological.
I discovered a discipline which regards the loss of spoons and other utensils
As 'keyholes' to the 'Yet And Never' the broken hearted peer through.

Your object is caught in a veil of sadness or remorse.

You will know because every meal tastes of tears.

Then, the spoon has crossed over from the drawer to the DRAWER,

Which is merely a metaphor humans use to apprehend the Divine.

I considered whether I hid them from myself, which both
My therapist and the woman who reads my cards
Ignored in favor of suggesting discount outlets where I could buy more.
Lucid dreams failed when I woke in them so tired I saw my dream-self fall asleep.
Then, one day, another spoon disappeared so I went to Wal-Mart
Where I spent 1.50 for six teaspoons, 1.50 for six tablespoons, 3.24 cents, total.
But, they are not like our old spoons.
Our old spoons' heft declared mine a home with spoons.
These—you could not dig out of your cell with one or make a shiv.
Yet, despite the differences between the old and the new,
The language of spoons has only one word that all spoons speak.

In English, we say, meagerly, 'spoon,'
But in spoon, it refers more precisely to the hunger that completes us,
And its companion, the hunger, that sated, wants more.
The day I brought them home
We ate ice cream in silence, each with a spoon of our own.



DEVIN ASHMORE

Strays

BY ERIKA DONALD

Through the kitchen window
I watched your widow
lay cold lunch meat upon a plate.
I wondered, was she thinking
of escape.

In Mexico, that October
we sat in the shade
of your Jacaranda tree
and drank cold water.

We fought over your note books
your watch, your laptop,
even that old shrunken sweater
your sister sent
all the way from Glasgow, Scotland.

The night you died
my brother said flies
bit your face,
your neck, your legs
as you walked to the Zocalo
in your straw hat, stopping often
to pet stray dogs.

When Trying To Trick Me, Do

BY KELLY JONES

Take a minute before attempting to convince me that staying takes more strength than going. After all, women in movies tend to jump when placed between open air and a decision. They leap off mountains and drive into canyons, embracing the nothing that waits to catch them and carry them away. Simply walking is tame. Twelve years ago the abortionist handed me a gasmask and said breathe in deep, you will barely feel it. Last week on the news I saw a girl get knocked off her bike by a basketball some boy threw at her. As she tumbles I wonder if she wished for more height, or if she was thankful the ground was only three feet down as her face planted into the pavement. This morning I woke up believing in a planned rearranging of the world—once upon a time, God destroyed dinosaurs. Some days I wish I were more animal. What kind of wings would lag behind me then? I used to twirl around until the world blurred and I fell to the ground, hot and dizzy. I feel like that right now, except I'm sitting at my desk, drinking coffee and revising poems. Today the sky is ready for making a change—a storm; I am in my thirties and childless, childish. Let's trace our shadows in chalk on the sidewalk, or lie down in the grass and see what the clouds can become.

The Uncertainty Principle

BY BRUCE SAGER

Heisenberg proclaims a fundamental limit to the accuracy with which certain pairs of physical properties of a particle, such as position and momentum, can be concurrently known.

HEISENBERG WAS RIGHT.¹ IT IS QUITE BEYOND US TO STATE WITH ANY CERTAINTY² THE PRECISE POSITION,³ THE EXACT VELOCITY⁴ OF A GIVEN⁵ ATOMIC PARTICLE AT ANY GIVEN⁶ MOMENT. WERNER WAS RIGHT.⁷

¹ *Heisenberg was right*

Redounding to the credit of footnote 7.

² *to state with any certainty*

Or to state with any conviction,
past a certain age, any but the
platitudes drear, that What goes
around comes around, that He'll
get his, or (shambling from destiny
to self-delusion) There's more
where that came from . . . though
No more at home like you.
(But, *natürlich*, there are.)

³ *the precise position*

Always loitering in the pit, Schatzi:
Uncertainty unmans us all. Yet conviction
may be just as troubling. Take the conviction
of the dystopian or the drunkard: they
alone can turn *Scheiße* back to shallots;
but just as reliably a boy into a puppet,
wine to water, clots of barium to lead, base
lead, precisely as much as one small man
with stooped shoulders and a mustache
might cart to a place of honor athwart
the curtains (positioning just so) in hope
of a public miracle. Smart, to steer clear
of *that*, Heisenberg, with those raw lips of
yours, that wen, the speed lines of your hair.

⁴ *the exact velocity*

Not to be confused with momentum. Oh,
Doktor, always this war between position
and momentum; which shall be known first,
or, better, best? You show me yours. And
by show me yours I mean not merely to echo
in this tired yet storied manner the standard
schoolboy dare, but to provoke a response
sugared in the sacraments of Pure Physics.

“Your first gulp from the glass
of natural sciences will turn you to
atheism, but at the bottom of the glass
God certainly awaits you.”
Mein Gott, Werner! . . . *Certain?*

⁵ *of a given atomic particle*

See footnote 6.

⁶ *at any given moment*

As if anything, even particles,
even moments, were ever freely *given*,
artlessly come over to our camp
of their own free wills, and nary
a string to jerk them back
from the pavement of our dreams –
a child’s game, of little atomies.

⁷ *Werner was right*

According to plane geometry.
Yet late or soon, this must swing round
to a place of blooming humor
where the air is alive
with blossom, dancing
with blossom –

the high-powered lens
of the imagination. This the plain
science has carved for us,
the louche geography of art.

Ah, we have drifted, through some process,
from the heart to the head.

And by drifted I mean
moved predictably in a fashion consistent
with the curtsy of the Higgs boson.
Time to retreat. But first – (*riddle me this*) –

Have you never been to a pagan dance
on a spring night in a small town,
never seen a gentle madman
wobbling on the gym floor of despair?

Not so very hard to spot, he's
the one with tape on his glasses
plotting the shortest distance
between two points. His and hers.

He knows how quickly
she is moving. He knows exactly
where she is, instant by
instant, and the instants accrete
to minutes, and the minutes
bong off the looming barrel
of the moon. Nature
bounces like butter

in her bosom, the points of light
reflect her smallest movement.

(Recall Herr Doktor here.)

Perhaps there is a god, you see,
and s/he's a principle.

The act of observation is an art,
a checked velocity, a fixed position.
A shutter's click. A frozen frame.
Nothing like quantum mechanics. But
something like the longest slowest
softest sweetest wettest sort of kiss.

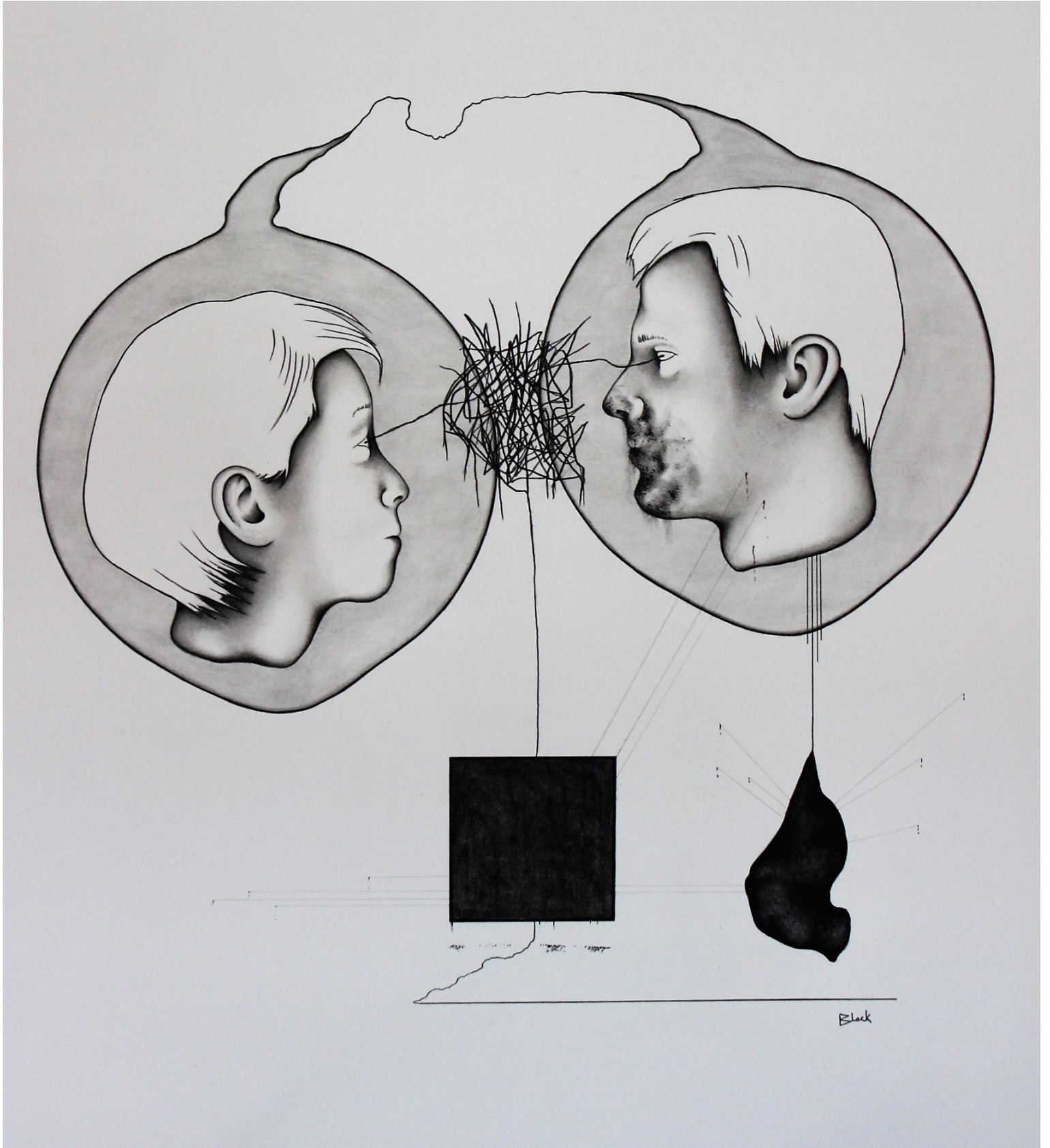
And thence doth Art buss Science . . .
in what hall, after all,
standing tiptoe, if not here? . . .
stretching to kiss her
on her uncertain cheek

*Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the irons gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.*

If there be proof of any god at all
uncertain ends with stockings on the floor.



BILL WOLACK



BRAD BLACK

I Chose Ash

BY DARLA MOTTRAM

When I was fourteen my mother told me never to call a boy first. *Always let him call you, she said, or he'll get bored. And so will you. Men need to pursue. Women need to feel pursued. You need to know the rules of the game, just make sure they don't catch you playing them.*

He called me. He brought me flowers. He held the door open. He proposed on one knee. On our wedding night he carried me over the threshold into the house he bought for us, and there he set me down and shackled me with insecurities. *If you love me you will speak gently and soothingly; will defend me when I call your friends fat; will resist me in the bedroom so I'll never think of you as easy.*

I wished my mother was still alive so she could see me in this dress. She'd cover her mouth with one graceful hand, her mouth a shocked little oh. She'd say, You're not the daughter I raised.

Well, I wouldn't be, anyhow. Not after tonight.

"The black one's classic. Sexy. Chic. You can't go wrong with black."

"And the nude?" I asked, tickling my arms until a shiver ran down them and my nipples hardened beneath the silky fabric of the dress.

The sales clerk raised an eyebrow. "You'll need to wear a thong."

"No I won't."

*

In the early years of our marriage, I worked so hard to convince my husband I wasn't interested in sex so he would want to have sex that eventually I lost interest in sex. One afternoon, while I was vacuuming, he approached me from behind and kissed the back of my neck.

"You look so pretty when you clean."

"Not right now, Pete."

"Come here baby."

"Pete, I'm not in the mood." I swatted at him.

"Mmmm. Take off your shirt." He pressed himself against me, his cock hard against the side of my ass.

"Knock it off." I pushed against him and his tongue slid into my ear. "Pete, stop." The vacuum died as I tripped over the cord and tugged it from the wall. He used the momentum of my fall to wrestle me to the carpet. A fine sweat broke out over my skin as he popped the buttons of my blouse. This was no different than any other time except this time I wasn't playing the game. I did not want to have sex with my husband. I wanted his skin to stop touching mine. I thought that if he yanked my underwear down and started to shove his way in I would clobber him over the head with whatever I could get my hands on. I said in a quiet, desperate voice, "Pete—it will be rape."

He jerked away from me. "You really don't want to." It wasn't a question. There could be no confusion; my face was a hard little fist. "The other times? All the other times..." He was shaking his head.

"It was a game." It was as if I had slapped him. "You didn't want me unless I said no."

“You whore.” He stood up.

I sat up, clutching my blouse, hands shaking. “You really want me to not want it, don’t you?” I said, and it didn’t feel like a heat-of-the-moment accusation. It felt dangerous and true.

His eyes bulged. He walked away before I had a chance to feel empowered by my audacity, and I began doubting myself. He had never, would never, physically hurt me. I couldn’t imagine him cheating. He worked hard and he came home at the end of the day. He was trying to be intimate with me. Just last week I’d woken to find him lying next to me in bed, propped up on his elbows, smiling. *What are you doing*, I’d asked, and he’d replied, *Staring at my sweet little wife*. I’d wiggled my way out of the moment, slipped into the kitchen to make coffee. Now I heard my mom’s voice in my head, *Cut him some slack, he’s just a man*. My shoulders slumped. I was ruining my marriage, and for what? I was making this more complicated than it needed to be. It was just a game; everyone has their kinks. I had taken this too far.

I walked down the hall to ask him if he wanted something for lunch, or to apologize, or to gauge how much I’d wounded him. He was in the bathroom. I lifted my hand to tap on the door, but what I heard made me stop. He was wanking off in there. I don’t think I’d ever heard him put that much work into anything. The sound of it was enough to send a wave of heat rolling through my loins, a tingle that swept from my toes to the tip of my tongue. We hadn’t made it like that in years. Who was I kidding? We hadn’t made it like that ever. I felt an animal urge. Then my head caught up with my body. What was he fantasizing

about?

(You really want me to not want it, don't you?)

His eyes had bulged. So had something else. A different kind of shiver ran down my spine. I walked away.

That's a lie. I didn't walk away. I should have. Instead I pressed the palm of my hand against the door that stood between his sounds and my silence. I stood there with my eyes closed. I didn't touch myself but I kept my eyes closed and imagined what it would be like if I did, what it could possibly mean.

The night came. The drinks were expensive. I picked the most forbidden one, a clear liquid in a delicate glass with a single speared olive. *Gin is for women with loose morals.* My mother's voice or Pete's? Had there ever been a difference? *You whore.* I drank three, then closed my tab. Tonight would not be a blur. There are some things one needs to remember in crystalline detail. First kiss. Graduation. Wedding night. And this, the night I set aside my ring.

I picked the man with the smirk, the fifty-dollar haircut, the finely-tailored jeans and cashmere sweater. A man who looks like what he is. A man used to getting what he wants. Tonight he would want me.

There had been failed attempts to leave. One time I even began to book a flight to Paris, convinced a new start would be more attainable in a place where I didn't know the language, the customs, the rules. I pictured myself standing inside the Louvre, sipping espresso at some busy cafe, conversing with strangers in broken, hopeful gestures. As if I needed a foreign country to feel like I were in over my head.

I stood in the doorway of the bedroom I shared with Pete and tried to imagine leaving the States as Mrs. Broadstein and arriving in Paris as plane old Amy.

He rolled over, a soft, sleepy smile on his face. The years were printed around the corners of his mouth and eyes. They still had time to deepen, to change, but they were already outlines of the shape they would be when he grew old. Those same lines, I knew, had already marked their space on my own skin. We'd done this to each other.

"Hey hon. Come back to bed." That familiar mumble and the age-old mix of resentment and surrender welled inside me.

I folded myself around him and let myself be softened by sleep and the feel of his skin. As I slid in two different directions I felt a necessary numbness, like when I was a kid and would cross my eyes into a purposeful blur in order to retreat from words I was tired of reading. I told myself I would book the flight to Paris in the morning, and in the morning I told myself, The next time it feels like I can't breathe. I'll do it then.

"You're not wearing any panties."

“No.”

“A guy might get the wrong idea.”

“A guy might get precisely the idea intended.”

“Martini?”

“Why waste time?”

“Delayed gratification is said to yield better results.”

“Trust me, I know all about that.”

I told my mom over tea one morning, *I don't remember the last time I felt attached to my body. How am I supposed to use my body to love him when I'm not inside it?*

Nonsense, she'd said, you just need to stop watching those dramatic movies of yours. Go home and look at your husband. Really look at him. He's the man you fell in love with.

I did as she said. That night, after dinner and a glass of wine, he reached out and stroked the hair from my cheek, tucked it behind my ear. I looked into his deep-set blue eyes, the ones I'd committed to for life. Yes, I remembered him on our wedding day, earnest and trembling. The shy but increasingly confident smile that had spread across his face when he saw me in my white dress. His gentle hands belying the force of his kiss. He hadn't changed much, hadn't grown soft in the middle or grey, but when he rested his hand on the inside of my thigh I recoiled as if he were a stranger. He couldn't douse the flicker in his eyes. I averted mine, sat staring at his hand on my thigh as he sat staring at the side of my face.

His breath was rapid and restrained. The more my body tensed against the proximity of his want, the more I felt him wanting me.

I forced myself to raise my eyes, but I couldn't get as far as his gaze on me. My eyes stuck to his parted mouth, the glistening speck of spittle on his bottom lip. I was acutely aware of the rise and fall of my own chest, the small, raised freckle on the swell of my right breast, the one Pete would always kiss on his way down the highway of my body. A shudder went through me then, a shudder of want laced with self-disgust. He got up, took my glass, kissed me chastely on the forehead. He looked in my eyes and I knew I must be imagining the whole thing, but god save me, I wasn't. *He wants me until he knows I want him*, I thought. And then, *He only wants it if he can take it from me*. I went into the bathroom, turned the shower on, and dry-heaved into the sink.

His name was Gregory. We left the club like tigers released from a circus cage. He opened the door to a svelte black car. We didn't speak. Halfway to his loft I spread my legs slowly but deliberately. "God, I can smell you", and he wasn't smirking anymore; his face was long, hungry, ravenous. He could barely keep his eyes on the road. I found myself quite capable of saying exactly what I wanted. No one was touching me and it was already the best sex of my life.

When I was sixteen I walked in on my parents necking in the living

room. They looked like rhinos, they were so stiff and awkward. It was the only time I ever saw them desire each other.

Sometimes, out of the blue, my mother would mention masturbation. *Men have to do it sometimes, she'd say, they're physical creatures. But it's a sin for a woman to do it. Perverse.*

Of course it was also a sin to have sex outside of wedlock. Or oral. Or impure thoughts.

Pete was the first person to touch me that way. I laid stiff as a tree, repulsed by anatomy and everything it entailed. He loved me for the way I needed him to show me how, and I loved the idea of being loved, worthy of a man's instruction.

The lawful union of a man and wife is a beautiful thing, my mother explained, her smile guiding me toward what it meant to be a woman. *Why would you throw it away on someone who doesn't love you?*

How do you know if it's love?

Men don't buy rings for passing flings. Her laugh was champagne. I thought that meant she was happy.

Gregory's apartment was modern, clean, beautiful. He did not put on music. He did not offer me a drink. He did not tell me to sit on the sofa, make myself at home.

I did not play coy. I did not walk around looking at pictures in order to show off my figure and create a space in which to feel desired from a comfortable distance. I did not ease the tension with jokes. I did not want

to feel comfortable. I had desire for the both of us, enough desire to get us anywhere we needed to go.

We stood in front of the sofa. Never before had I felt so exposed; Gregory looked clear through my dress, my skin, my bones. His hunger looked at my hunger.

“You’re not going to touch me,” I said, and at first he didn’t believe me. “Not until you’ve seen how bad I want it.” It was like a bolt of lightning. A tree split down the middle, smoking. He watched in awe as I undressed, slipping a strap off one shoulder, then the other; tugging at the zipper; bending over, stepping out of the nude fabric, the matching patent leather heels.

Minutes later, I stood naked in front of a full-length mirror. My hunger was written all over my face, my mouth loose and wet. I took my time. He watched, said nothing. He was naked and beautiful, glossy as a magazine page. I looked from his body to mine. My god, what I had to give! There was no hurry. We were both in awe of the moment. And then I was reaching for him.

The next morning I went home to my house, but it wasn’t my house anymore. Inside it was a man who wasn’t my husband anymore. I sat down on a sofa that had nothing to do with me and talked to Pete with a voice that belonged to someone I didn’t know. It was a voice I couldn’t fathom. When he asked where I had been, if I had stayed out fucking someone, the voice said yes. When he asked who, it said “Me”.





ASHLEY GARNER

Slender Blondes, No Diseases

BY BRUCE SAGER

I suppose that you've heard by now
of the Little Town With No Name
tucked into some valley or other
between two foggy Alps. It's true,

access is limited – horseback or rail –
and most prefer two nights of linen
and a rich menu of portered meals
to the bitter whip of the winds

across the evolving wafers of snow.
This would explain the popularity
of the comfortable antique train
that runs perhaps twice a month,

always full, of course, always booked
half a year in advance, and always
an object of delight as it departs
the Old World capitals. The route

it tools is scenic beyond all telling –
plains of snow giving way under
wheels of steel to deeper plains,
the fairest ribbons of green,

the finest strokes of blue, and as
you wind through the extended ellipse
of Newton's Second Law, you are lulled
a little by the sparkle on the leaves

and gulled a little by the even stitching
of the pistons, the kind of repetition
a lesser artist would spend some time
explaining or, lacking all mercy,

God-help-us emulate
through an argosy of poetic devices
the Latin names of which
I've mostly forgot.

If you've come by rail, departing the
nearest capital at sunset, by sunrise
of the second day you are starting
into what a captain might call

your final descent. The redcaps
bustle through their corridors
bobbling fruit and papers, and
then, upon the stroke of noon,

voilà, the station! – metropolitan
letters and wrought iron filigree,
bubbled panes of glass, brick laid
by the sure unhurried hand

of an era more concerned
with ornament than speed,
mortar crumbling into the slow
decline of the decades

and fawning vendors on the quay
hawking coffee, almonds, magazines
and forty types of schnitzel.

Many of the passengers, you'll

note, bypass these transient charms
to fly directly into the streets, often
forgetting their bags, and if you yourself
stride past the quaint displays

and head directly for the outside doors
you will note a fair part of their number
dispersed already, dashing from shop
to shop, the man with the umbrella

who sat for two days across the aisle
dressed in classic fashion, legs
crossed, nose buried in the Times
and nary a word to anyone

now slipping a plastic donut
about his middle
to broadcast a squeaky interest
in water sports

while over there, the newly marrieds
from one car down are queued
in a line of eager faces
all hoping to enter

Great Career, No Effort.
Kill A Stranger, No Guilt
seems popular also, with two lines
from opposing directions

crashing flush in the heart
of the shop, two rivers
in white water froth, the long line
entering from the front

composed of tourists
with blood in their eyes, the shorter
one, huddled in back, fed
by townies, furtive and sad,

collars loose and hair undone,
desperate, exhausted,
looking to end it all.
Eat Tons, Lose Weight verges upon

Bottomless Chocolate, No Zits.
These city planners were no fools.
Amazing High, Keystone Kops
borders the chief city park,

a square where visitors often wander
to show off their new tattoos
while resting between adventures.
Sometimes the younger ones

will bounce across the street
to inspect a display of dumbbells –
but nothing over three pounds.
No Pain, All Gain.

Up All Night, Sleep All Day.
Our Bar's A Rip Off, BYOB.
Punch The Boss, Get A Raise.
Gamble Till Dawn, Chips Are Free.

Get Snuffy Back is trending
as well, and named against the grain
in a town where the marketing
typically flows

from the introduction of an initial
risky Proposal
to the denouement of its shockingly
painless Result.

Though they're trying to keep it
under wraps, it's only a matter of time
until they're finally forced to disclose
their Fountain of Youth, No Waiting

and even the two-star rooms shoot up
to several thousand per night.

Perhaps this explains a distant quarter,
its oversized windows, its smoky streets

littered with teenage girls and boys
of astonishing street-level beauty, rows
of brunettes and redheads and blondes,
all slender hips, all practiced smiles,

and if you've come with a companion,
these are the ones you must scurry past
without so much as lifting your eyes,
pretending to not even notice.

Existence is Futile

BY JENNIFER QUARTARARO

It's a dismal November day, the leaves are losing their color, the sun is losing its warmth, and Maryanne and I come armed with Milchkaffes and a bright blue Diana F+ camera. I hold onto the iron bars which have been pushed back just enough for me to slide into the massive five-story building. Beelitz-Heilstätten, a crumbling 60-building complex and former sanatorium, is situated in Brandenburg, a region of Germany known for its white asparagus.

This is one of the most heavily wooded regions in one of the most heavily wooded countries in Europe. Recent surveys show there's more deadwood in these forests than there used to be. Trees die, the timber decomposes, fungi and lichen grow and then insects such as beetles and wood wasps bore holes through inner chambers to make homes. There's more timber regrowing than Germany uses, though the soil of Brandenburg isn't suitable for farming, having earned the region its nickname, "The sandbox of the Holy Roman Empire."

In 1898, the Berlin Health Insurance Authority purchased 140 hectares with the intention to build a tuberculosis sanatorium and nursing home. It was opened in 1902. It first housed 600 beds. On August 3, 1914 all of

the patients were forced to leave when the complex was taken over by the Red Cross and used to recuperate injured soldiers from WWI, including Hitler, who spent two months at the palatial space nursing a wounded leg. At its peak the sanatorium housed 1,338 beds, 30 percent of which were occupied by those with lung diseases, the most common being tuberculosis. The patient pavilion was constructed in an east-west direction to allow for maximum sunlight on the terraced balconies, called 'air baths'. Beelitz also housed a post office, a washhouse, a bakery, stables, a butcher shop, a rifle range, a psych ward, a theater, and its own cogeneration station, providing the complex with both heat and electricity. It was said that the power station was so strong that snow never settled on this ground.

The sun is beginning to sink behind the tree line to our right, in an hour it will be dark. We quicken our pace and continue north along a path dense with Douglas fir, crunching over dead leaves. Each turn along the narrow road unearths another grand, crumbling structure, each with plywood covered windows and padlocked doors. Further north, in a clearing surrounded by black alder and birch trees, a decrepit brick building covered in thick, dangling vines looms tall and ominous. There is a single open window five feet up, the wrought iron bars just wide enough to slide up and into, the interior pitch black and still. Maryanne is too short, so I go in alone.

Stories circulate about the inhuman experiments that might have taken place in the psychiatric ward while the complex was under Nazi reign. Between the years of 1989-91 Wolfgang Schmidt, a serial killer and former police officer known as “The Beast of Beelitz” killed five women and a baby. Schmidt had a thing for pink underwear. He often waited in the brush for his victims, under the cover of firs and pines. The Soviet Union abandoned the complex in 1994 after seizing control following WWII. Potential private investors lost interest in the space in 2001 and the complex continued to fall into disrepair. Seven years later a 20-year old model was beaten with a frying pan and raped here and all remaining interest was also lost.

Branches come through the broken glass of the windows and I jump down to the cavernous space. It’s colder inside than out, and the floor is a pile of debris, dead leaves and disintegrating pieces of plaster. The wallpaper peels off in chunks, huge sheets of faded yellow and brown, while the grimy windows block out the grey sky outside. Each footstep across the floor echoes, the reverberations felt deep within the walls. I climb up to the second floor, where it’s hard to sense the end of the hallway, though the shadowy profiles of chairs jutting out at odd angles help to punctuate doorways.

The Aveda lip liner in my bag is made from forestry certified wood from Germany. The timber from the Swiss Pine in these forests is good for

making tool handles, shovels and hammers. More things will be built from the pieces cut down. Brandenburg is a region of Germany that's seen a sharp economic decline over the last few decades but interestingly enough, that economic neglect is thought by some scientists to have benefited the flora and fauna of the region. Birch trees grow from the rubble. When someone kisses me some of this forest rubs off.

On the fourth floor of Beelitz-Heilstätten time moves differently. There is the slow disintegration of blue tiles and shredding of pale yellow curtains. There are the wool-like sheets of dry rot, tiny orange dots of decay. There are the trees protruding from rooftops. There is the return of snow in winter. I am no longer Maryanne's friend that is temporarily living in Berlin, no longer sister to Stephanie, no longer girlfriend to Ray. I am no longer a girl with a valid Maine license, or a stable checking account at Bangor Savings or a frequent drink card to the Hungry Ghost coffee shop. I am blood rushing through veins, dirt on palms, air bursting through lungs as I collapse on the ground outside.

[*Author's note: One year after this visit took place a pop-up picnic was held on the lawns outside of the women's sanatorium. Food trucks served brats, schnitzel, black bean and chorizo arepas, and cold brew coffee. The band "Send More Cats" played a set, though blankets were not provided. It's unclear how much new timber grew in that time.]



DW

Fidelity

BY CATHERINE BRERETON

What I've never told anyone is how we really met. Actually, that's sort-of a lie, too. I half-told one person—Claire—not long after, but I only gave her the expurgated version. These days, we have a standard version, a lie that we've agreed on so much that it's become its own truth, but in the beginning, we were recklessly inconsistent in our falsehoods.

I told Claire that I'd met Susan online. Some kind of Internet forum, I think I said, although I don't remember now what kind of forum it was. We were driving; a late-night-early-morning journey back from a dance competition, I think. I was driving the car, Claire in the passenger seat—that I *do* recall—driving the dark green Passat that would become the place where I told most of the lies. We were on the motorway. Seemingly endless hours of dark road ahead of us, two children—one mine, one hers—sleeping in the back seat. I couldn't see her face, and she couldn't see mine. It was the perfect time to share secrets. I told Claire that I'd spoken to Susan—properly, at least—for the first time that morning, and that was the truth. But I didn't give her the whole story. I didn't tell her how we'd met. Nevertheless, Claire would become my conspirator, sharing the lies I told other people. Claire keeps secrets well.

I told my mother that I'd met Susan at a conference in New York (and this is where Claire comes in again). I'd been to New York, that part is true, and I *did* meet Susan there, but it was not at a conference. Claire knew I was not at a conference because Claire was taking care of

my children while I flew to New York. But, when my mother asked why I was suddenly going to America, I told her it was an industry event, paid for by someone else. I told her that I was staying with a woman, a friend of a friend, to save money on hotel bills, and I told her that I didn't know this woman, but she seemed nice from her emails. If she had thought to check, she would have discovered that I was traveling the day before Thanksgiving, and that holding any kind of conference over the hallowed break was, frankly, unthinkable. She has never checked.

When the immigration officer at Philadelphia airport asked how I knew Susan, I told him she was a friend. When he asked how long I had known her, I did not tell him that I had only known her for six weeks. When he asked how we had met, I told him that we had met on the Internet, then panicked and wondered if he had a way to check. When he amused himself by asking the nature of our friendship, I blushed and said we were "close." He stamped my passport and welcomed me to America.

On Thanksgiving morning, while we ate quiche, Susan's mother telephoned; Susan told her that we were eating something with cranberries, for tradition. When her mother asked how we had met, Susan said that we had been introduced on a social network. She had already told her family that she could not fly home to Kentucky for Thanksgiving because she couldn't get a flight, although that was the truth.

I have never had to lie to my daughters because they have never asked a question that needed me to.

When we got married, the county clerk at the courthouse in Maryland did not ask how we had met, even though she raised an eyebrow at

my British passport.

We had planned, consciously, to tell the truth only once, and only then because the stakes were too high to lie. As it happens, the immigration official responsible for processing my application for a green card took pity on us—the only time that cancer has worked in our favor—and granted permanent residency without a single question.

I do not recall what we told our now ex-lovers. I do remember, though, answering an early-hours transatlantic phone call and telling the half-awake woman beside me that Susan was a wrong number. Susan's ex-lover called me a trashy English bitch and scathingly said I looked like someone's *mom*, as if being a mother is the worst thing that can happen to a woman. She did not believe that Susan and I were simply acquaintances.

Of all the lies we told, we never once lied to each other.

When we are asked, now, how we met, we blame a bar in a hotel in San Francisco. When we are asked, now, how we met, we finish each other's sentences as we tell the story of a British accent, a poem by Andrew Marvell, and another glass of wine. Only the bar, the hotel, and San Francisco are lies.

We forget, mostly, how we really met. Sometimes, one or the other of us will stop in our tracks, turn to the other, and speak the single word that tells the entire story. "I know," the other will say, and we will screw up our faces, bite our lips, and change the subject.

The lie that has become the truth rolls off our tongues with the sleekness of practice. We take it in turns to demure: “You tell the story, honey,” one of us will say, and the other will tell half of the story, uninterrupted, before we both gabble our way through the rest with the delighted excitement of a new couple. While our audience buys into the enchantment, we reach for each other’s hands, squeeze each other’s fingers, and forget to remember the truth, faithful instead to the falsehood that brought us together.



ASHLEY GARNER

Neurocity LXVII: *is this my grave or my mother's womb?*

BY JAX NTP

it upsets me when my mother thinks my poetry is silly
the word “silly” comes from the old english word “selig”
meaning happy, healthy, and prosperous.

in german, “selig” means to be blessed:

but consecrated and made holy with what?

when a title, silly, precedes the name of a person,
their identity, vigor, and passion
are reduced to the relevancy of a car alarm.

i failed to master french and vietnamese.

my mother has a myriad of domesticated excuses
to not speak the english language. it complicates
the process of checking and rechecking
the meaning of words in results to the drowning
of palettes in sand dunes of iodine soaked palm fronds.

a car alarm without a car is not just an alarm.

as mother calls poetry silly, she shucks and drains
the basket of mussels and oysters in the sink,
shucking and draining with such a lonely authority,
the way a business woman shucks off her nightgown,
the way a flaccid regime shucks off its totalitarian characteristics.

my mother is above logic, she cannot be subpoenaed,
even under oath in court she will not admit
to stating that my poetry is trivial.
in the kitchen, i read her a line from Marcel Proust
*happiness is beneficial for the body, but it is grief
that develops the powers of the mind*
but she wasn't listening.



DW

of tendencies, sketches during rush hour on the Chicago Loop

BY JAX NTP

each tomato heart beat, softer
than the sole of ballet slippers
the way we keep track of things
throughout the day as if the act
of measurement made us a promise

to measure something is to change it

each tick of the body, bubbles
in saliva, spasms of streetlights,
the way you use a lint-roller, vertical
rotations, spiderworts and slot-machines,
edible hissing coins, such sour aftertaste

to refill the vacuum is to excavate the void
to refill the vacuum is to excavate the void

each chord of cheap tequila, jaunts
the momentary nature of nearness
the way i think about counting distracts me
from counting how many times i've washed my clavicles,
now i must reapply soap, rewash, recount

to do nothing is an action
to do nothing is an action
to do nothing is an action

Neurocity LXXXVIII: *in memory of my emotions*

after Frank O'Hara

BY JAX NTP

my anxiety has a baby rattlesnake in it, the babes are most dangerous because they've yet to learn how to control their venom — my anxiety has a number of naked selves, the accumulation of conversations

that i've excluded or have been excluded from, the poetics of negation, when women are stressed, especially during wartime, the production of cortisone decreases and they are more likely to give birth to girls,

the correlation between tree density and population density per square mile, how the wealthy plant more trees, aesthetically pleasing, spiritually uplifting, the way we make the same decisions over and over and over

and over again, the price of being poor, transformations of the self, salmon roulettes and crudités, loss of hearing, mechanical cranes, to be deaf, but not deaf-less, the biscuits and gravy of poetry,

text messages are the fragments of communication engineered by modern technology, the arrangements of physical bodies, the different implications of what it means to sit next to versus across from — my anxiety

renovates the womb, my anxiety renovates the womb, one fact at a time, the ability to create forms, the quiet world of phosphenes, the nebulous galaxies you see when you rub your eyes, the maple seduction of pearl

everlastings, not sunset green, but sinatra blue, not sunset green,
but sinatra blue, the way we suffer more from imagination than reality,
a meditative space between pages, paper cities and weights on clavicles,

the dictionary's synonyms for coincidence: accident, luck, and/or fate,
the ability to render nothingness into the state of fullness, there is no
such thing as a non-habit-forming sleep aid, there is no such thing

as a non-habit-forming sleep aid, well, good morning midnight

Julio César Chávez vs. Oscar De La Hoya, 1996

BY ALAN CHAZARO

Neighborhood guys who couldn't afford HBO
gathered at our apartment to watch pay-per-view.
They brought beer and made bets; the losers
paid the cable fee and complained—
husbands who boozed away rent money
and the next day lied about it to vigilant wives. That night
our living room was an armpit,
testosterone and sweat soaked
as if my dad and his friends were the ones
entering the ring. I knew
it was a big deal when Papi let me sip beer, strange
and bitter. I stumbled, hiccupped, imitated
Dumbo in a Disney movie I had seen
some days before. When Chávez, the Mexican Warrior,
appeared on screen, everyone cheered.
Papi would always tell me how he had defeated 100
opponents, more than Ali, or Tyson,
or Dempsey. Then De La Hoya
entered. The men in our apartment booed
yelling maricón and pocho, telling him
to go back to his locker room like the pussy
he was. The Mexicans
thought he was gringo and the gringos

thought he was Mexican, a sort of glitch
in the system. I didn't tell anyone, but smiled
at De La Hoya's outfit: U.S. flag on one half,
Mexican bandera on the other. I don't remember
the actual fight. But it happened. A blur
of punches and card girls in bikinis. I didn't know
what happened until some of the machos
in the room started grumbling.

Chávez had squandered Mexico's pride,
his right eye swollen like a grapefruit
from repeated jabs to the brow.

De La Hoya stood untouched.

I wasn't sure if I should celebrate
or sulk; if it mattered what I claimed.

Lesson on Manhood

BY ALAN CHAZARO

We'd go to East San Jose to visit Pa's friend with the sky blue Mustang in a garage with ripped pages of women in bikinis taped to the walls. He told us about 289s, 302s, 351s, how he'd excavate them from inside rusty Fords like salvaged treasures. We learned numbers meant cubic inches of an engine—manhood throttled beneath the hood. We traced the curves of '68 Cougars, '69 Galaxys, dipping into the oil-greased argot of gearheads with questions of what made an inline-six an inline-six. Teenagers, we'd later race down El Camino in our parent's cars, bragging when we didn't crash. As carburetors cooled we'd jaw about saving for the biggest muscle on the block, never admitting it was more than we could wrangle. When the mechanic married and had a kid, it altered us. He became like oil dripping through a filter overnight. Eventually he'd only flash his ride from underneath a tarp instead of under the sunlight on 101. Eventually we stopped coming back.



ASHLEY GARNER



NICK ROMEO

Big Alabama and the Dumb Boyfriend

BY JAMES VALVIS

Big Alabama brings home a boy, who surprises everyone. He's neat, polite, and handsome, not at all like Billy, who was known widely as the boy who ate his own snot, a kid my father despised and forbade Big Alabama to see.

Dad drills this new boyfriend, but he's not into drugs, doesn't smoke, enjoys high school, loves his mom and dad. His name is Michael, he's a year older than Big Alabama, and after the interview Dad has all but married off my sister. He might even throw in ten or twenty bucks for a dowry. And since he'll be taking Big Alabama off our hands, why not also the parakeet my father has been trying to give away ever since he made the mistake of buying it?

He asks Michael if he would like a bird and Michael says, in words that will ring through the decades, "No thanks, I already ate."

After that, Dad pulls Big Alabama aside and tells her flatly he'll drown any offspring they produce.

Big Alabama just smiles, like she knew this would happen. A week later Big Alabama holds Billy's arm in the kitchen and we all pretend we don't see the snot smeared on his hand.

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PROSE & POETRY

LISA ALEXANDER holds an MFA in Poetry from Drew University and is a member of the Madwomen in the Attic writing workshop. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in various journals including *Tupelo Quarterly*, *5 AM*, *BLOOM* and *The Burnside Review* among others. She's a sound engineer for *Prosody*, NPR-affiliate WESA's weekly show featuring the work of national writers.

CATHERINE A. BRERETON is from England, but moved to America in 2008, where she is now an MFA candidate at the University of Kentucky. Her essay, "Trance," published by *Slice Magazine*, was selected by Ariel Levy and Robert Atwan as a Notable Essay in *Best American Essays, 2015*. She is the 2015 winner of the *Flounce's* Nonfiction Writer of the Year award. Her more recent work can be found in *Crack the Spine*, *The Rain*, *The Watershed Review*, *The Indianola Review*, *Literary Orphans* and *The Spectacle*, with more forthcoming in *GTK Creative Journal*, and the *Burning Down the House* anthology. Catherine is the current Editor-in-Chief of *Limestone*, the University of Kentucky's literary journal. She lives in Lexington with her wife and their teenage daughters, and can be found online at catherinebrereton.com.

ALAN CHAZARO is a public high school teacher pursuing his MFA in Writing at the University of San Francisco. He is the current Lawrence Ferlinghetti Fellow and a graduate of June Jordan's Poetry for the People program at UC Berkeley. His work has been featured in the Intro Journals Project from the Association of Writers & Writing Programs and is forthcoming in *Iron Horse Review*, *Huizache*, *BorderSenses*, *Pilgrimage Magazine*, and others.

CLAIRE COBURN received her BFA in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College in Boston. She now lives in Dallas, Texas, where she gets paid to wrangle actors and write emails. Her short fiction has previously been published in *Adirondack Review*.

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HOLLY DAY has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *Walking Twin Cities*, *Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*, *Northeast Minneapolis: A History*, and *The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book, *Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press.

ERIKA DONALD holds an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Her writing has appeared in *Faultline*, *Palooka*, *East Bay Express* and *Nibble*. Her essay about working at an Internet call center was voted one of the top ten articles of the year by *AlterNet*.

KELLY JONES divides her time between North Carolina and New Orleans. She has an MFA in Poetry and a BA in Literature and Social Justice). She is terribly fond of manatees, glitter, Wild Turkey, and dance parties. In her spare time she runs *The Gambler Mag*, lazes by the bayou, and tries to come to terms with the concept of infinity.

MARY SOON LEE was born and raised in London, but now lives in Pittsburgh. She has won the Rhysling Award and been nominated for the Elgin Award for her poetry. The first book of her epic fantasy in verse ("Crowned," *Dark Renaissance Books*) appeared in 2015. She has an antiquated website at <http://www.marysoonlee.com>

BRIANNE MANNING is a New Hampshire native, digital strategist, and poetry alumna of University of Central Florida's Creative Writing MFA program. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Blue Monday Review*, *Absinthe Poetry Review*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and other great publications. Her photography has been published in *The Sun* magazine and by *Vintage Contemporaries*. Find her at transientexistence.wordpress.com.

DARLA MOTTRAM is an MFA candidate at Portland State University. She lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon, where she is currently obsessing over the collected stories of Clarice Lispector.

MARTINA NEWBERRY's books are *Where It Goes* (Deerbrook Editions), *Learning By Rote* (Deerbrook Editions), *Not Untrue & Not Unkind* (Arabesques Press), *Running Like a Woman With Her Hair On Fire* (Red Hen Press), *Lime Beans and City Chicken: Memories of the Open Hearth* (E.P. Dutton & Co). Her work has been anthologized and widely published in the U.S. and abroad. She lives in her beloved Los Angeles with her husband Brian.

JAX NTP holds an MFA in Creative Writing from CSU Long Beach. They currently teach critical thinking & composition courses at Golden West College in Huntington Beach, CA. They are the Poetry & Fiction Reader of *The Offing Magazine*, Poetry Editor of *Indicia Lit*, the former Editor-in-Chief of *RipRap Literary Journal*, Gender Editor of *Watermark Journal*, and Associate Editor of *The Fat City Review*. Their work has been featured in numerous publications such as *3:AM Magazine* and *Cordite Poetry Review*. Jax has an affinity for jellyfish and polaris, and a fetish for miniature succulent terrariums.

TARA ROEDER is the author of two chapbooks, *Maritime* (Bitterzoet Press), and *all the things you're not* (dancing girl press). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in multiple venues including *The Bombay Gin*, *Cheap Pop*, *Hobart*, *MonkeyBicycle*, *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*, and *Bateau*. She makes her living as an Associate Professor of Writing Studies in New York City.

BRUCE SAGER's work has won publication through contests judged by Billy Collins, Dick Allen and William Stafford. His newest book, *The Indulgence of Icarus*, has recently been released by Echo Point. Four new volumes – one of short stories, three of poetry -- are forthcoming by mid-2017 via *Hyperborea Publishing* and *BrickHouse Books*.

IVA TICIC completed her MFA at Sarah Lawrence College in 2014. She is originally from Zagreb, Croatia where she currently resides and teaches. Her chapbook, *Alice in Greenpoint*, came out in 2015 with *Finishing Line Press*. She has also been featured in the *Four Way Review*, *Prelude Magazine*, *Coldnoon Magazine*, and more.

JAMES VALVIS has placed poems or stories in *Ploughshares*, *River Styx*, *Arts & Letters*, *Nimrod*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Sun* and many others. His poetry was featured in *Verse Daily*. His fiction was chosen for *Sundress Best of the Net*. He's a recent finalist for the *Asimov's Readers' Award*. A former US Army soldier, he lives near Seattle.

JENNIFER QUARTARARO is currently pursuing her MFA in nonfiction at Northern Michigan University. Prior to that, she received her BA in English Communications from Emmanuel College in Boston as well as a certificate in nonfiction writing and editing from The Salt Institute for Documentary Studies in Portland, ME. Though raised in the woods of Maine, she has also called Florence, Berlin and most recently Brooklyn home. Her work has appeared in *Hobart*, *COVEN Berlin*, and *Portland Magazine* among others. While still in New York she dreamt of one day passing Joan Didion in the street and going for coffee together. She still holds out hope, though the chances seem slimmer in Marquette.

VISUAL ART

DEVIN ASHMORE graduated with a BFA in photography from Point Park University in 2014. Since, she has been exploring all mediums of art, searching herself to find the purest form of expression that resides within us all. While fine tuning her style, she believes free expression should shine above all technical and traditional ways in creating.

BRAD BLACK has been creating art for more than 10 years in the Pittsburgh region. His style is often characterized as surreal with its absence of color. Black along with negative space is an important factor giving his works a dream like quality. For him, it's always been important to create a visual link between conscious, subconscious and unconscious thought.

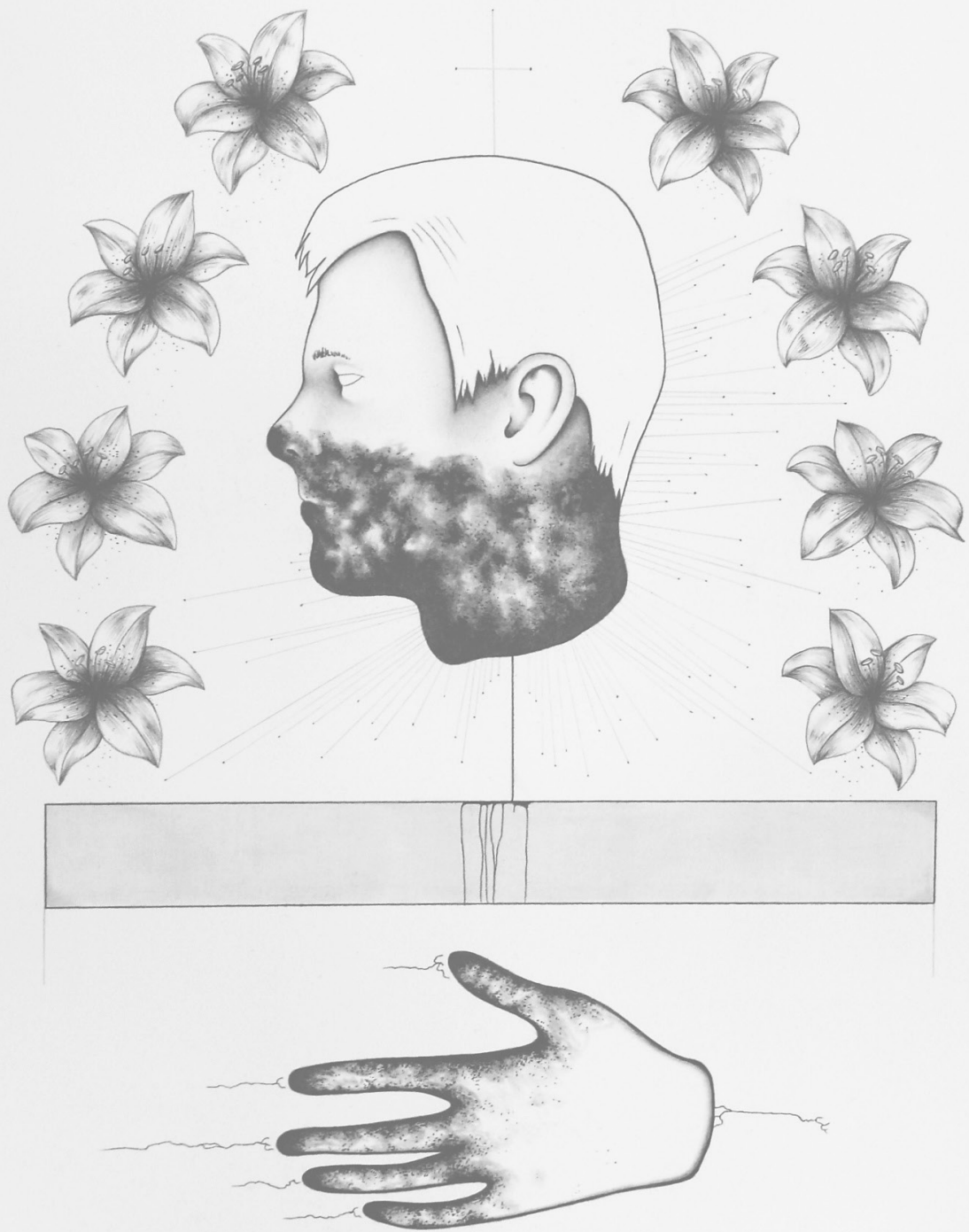
CATHERINE CATES was born in Southern California and currently lives in Las Vegas, Nevada. She first started creating art, taking photographs, and writing poetry while growing up in Salt Lake City, Utah. She earned her Associates of Science at Salt Lake Community College in 2001 and attended Westminster College as an English major afterwards. Some of her poetry has been published in the December 2014, Vol.1 No. 7 issue of Verse-Virtual.com. She believes that art is a narrative of the human condition. It tells the stories of who we were, who we are, who we are becoming, and who we'd like to be. For more, see <http://catcat.es>.

ASHLEY GARNER grew up in Central PA, earned her BFA in Painting from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 2014, and is now living and working in Pittsburgh, PA. She enjoys working with the human figure and takes inspiration for her paintings from daily influences and experiences. Her work has been shown in various solo and juried shows that include the following: Erie Art Museum, Erie, PA; Bruce Gallery, Edinboro, PA; Urraro Gallery Artists' Collective, Erie, PA; RAW, Pittsburgh, PA; Double Mirror Exhibit, Pittsburgh, PA; and Shaw Galleries, Pittsburgh, PA.

NICK ROMEO is self-taught, and he always strives to absorb and learn from his environment. He incorporates the multitude of subject matters into his artwork. Nick's main forms of expression are 3D digital renderings, poetry, fractal generations, and photography.

DAVID WATT is a self-taught artist and designer living in Pittsburgh. He's been drawing and painting since he was a kid, and subsequently has been freelancing illustrations and design work for over 10 years, working with a large array of bands, writers, production companies, publishers, record labels, & basically anyone with an exciting idea and a creative attitude. His paintings and fine art have been displayed in numerous galleries, cafes, and art spaces in the Pittsburgh area.

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.



Black