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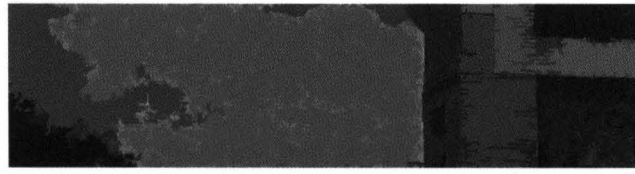

INSCAPE

INSCAPE

a journal of

LITERATURE *and* **ART**

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Inscape is the inward quality of objects and events as they are perceived by the joined observation and introspection of a poet, who in turn embodies them in unique poetic forms.

—*Gerard Manley Hopkins*

THIS ISSUE

FICTION

NONFICTION

POETRY

Interviews with

Editor's Note

"Arriving from always, you'll go away everywhere."
-Arthur Rimbaud

Dear reader: Go read. This issue is a winding stair. This issue is a dirty hula hoop. In this issue, you forget about fingernails. You forget about shoes and breakfast. The names get mixed up and the bathrooms are flooded. A mattress swings from a meathook. A blind man stands watch with an axe. You are a backyard archeologist collecting the trinkets of your ancestors. Picture frames and knives. Love letters. Boxes of silver candles. You put on their clothes and feel nostalgic. You forget what is yours and what belongs to the dead. In this issue: the blood is fake but the bleeding is real. The children's feet are muddy. The church is roofless. Snow makes everything taller.

—CDB

2 A.M.

by **Jia Oak-Baker**

Bill grabs my hand and guides me into the meditation room.
He's married and I'm married, but we're not married
to each other. He's a novelist and I'm a poet, which means
this night is clocking towards disaster. This night, doomed
before he turns the wheel of the skylight as if steering
a ship hard right, will have sunk before I see the shooting star,
before I remember that I should think of his wife.
A shooting star for heaven's sake! It's so late and nothing good
ever happens past midnight—that's what my mother would say.
When he leans in and whispers, *I want to kiss you*, I don't
turn away. And so we kiss. I squeeze my eyelids shut.
A million black balloons rise, a blanket of single targets. I want
a spray of buck shot or a shower of arrows to let in the light.
Instead, I let him grope for me in the rising and sinking dark.

WE BEGIN AT LAKE CALHOUN

by **Jia Oak-Baker**

When the weather grew bitter that winter,
    we chose to enjoy it. Too in love to feel
sorry for ourselves, we couldn't sulk
    inside that drafty house. No way we could pay
to crank up the heat. Instead, we strapped on skates,
    etched lines and figure eights on the lake.
Our laughter cut through the silence,
    echoing in the clean air each time we fell.
Peering through cracks, we caught sight of the rush
    and the blackness of the water beneath us. How
were we to know in time those fissures would give?

ETUDES

by **Jia Oak-Baker**

An auger,
placed to the temple

of a modern-day man
and turned slowly

to the right, might
let out a penchant

for relative clauses,
a dependence on first

hand accounts, and a required
waiver for a remarkable

repast. It doesn't make
sense all this sense-

making, in these swelling
forms that lie sometimes

in repose, sometimes
swishing by in sluice boxes,

a casual confluence of circles
and lines. Framed

in primitive clapboard without
insulation or medieval

cloth to cover its panes,
the windows turn

purple through oxidation,
and the light I think

if there is any
can't find its way out.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE

by

Maddison Colvin

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE in the kitchen, flap your hands. Open a window, turn on the stove fan, and hold the burning object under running water until extinguished. Flap your hands some more. If the burnt object was formerly edible, pretend it is still so. If inedible, pretend the fire never happened.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE in the bathroom, do not, on no account or under any circumstances, let anyone know that you burned your hair in a curling iron because you got distracted dancing around in your underwear to Daft Punk.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE in a wastebasket, try to discern what is being burned. If the envelopes appear to contain government secrets or evidence of corporate espionage, weigh your options (potential blackmail payout vs. likelihood of ending up in a Serbian prison). During the deliberation process, absentmindedly watch the documents turn black and curl in on themselves until useless. Later, ask the owner of the wastebasket what the letters contained. Discover they were love notes. Immediately lose interest.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE raging wildly in a clearing in the woods behind your house, assume that your brothers have built it for reasons of their own. Take the opportunity to roast marshmallows and Starburst candies. Watch it until you become sleepy and all of your clothes smell like woodsmoke.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE escape ladder tucked into the corner of your closet, obsess over it for days. Lose sleep for weeks thinking that the existence of the ladder means that a) a fire could potentially burn down your house, trapping you on the second floor, and b) this will definitely happen, probably tonight, and you will be one-hundred percent dead. When your parents notice your phobia, they will run fire drills so that you can feel more safe and prepared. These drills make you even more certain that you will die in a fire. Eventually, forget about the ladder. Move on to more serious fears, like wasps and brightly colored wigs.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE that your burgeoningly bipolar sister has set in your Barbie house in the closet, put it out with a bottle of water. Hide the smell with nail polish. Hide all the lighters your sister keeps buying at gas stations. Rebuild the house with more cardboard boxes and origami wallpaper. Don't mention anything to your parents—they would only worry.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE has burned down your favorite hometown diner, do not think about all the times you went there with your grandmother. Don't think about *Benny and Joon* being filmed there in the '90s. Don't think about the cast of Norman Rockwell characters that made up its regulars. Mourn for a while. Find another place to buy your weekly French dip and stare at sandwich boys the next time you visit Spokane. It will be fine.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE in a dream, do not run away. You'll be unable to escape. Instead, sit a while with the fire. Talk to it. Discover its secrets and its personality. If you are lucky, it will quiet. When it becomes reasonable, you won't be burned at all.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE that burns with an unearthly spectrum of colors, do not panic. It is probably a combination of chemical chlorides, carbonates, sulfates, and household cleaners. NOT magic.

ON DISCOVERING A FIRE that has never before been seen by human eyes, don't be surprised. Do not plant a flag. Do not proclaim your discovery from the rooftops. Do not name it after your favorite middle school science teacher. Remember this: all fires are new.

ORBITAL

by

Trace Timothy Cross

I feel the melancholy coming. I'm sitting at my desk, eating a Hot-N-Ready and reading a book of Anthony Smirnov's poetry.

Smirnov was a man who went further than me in both joy and despair—someone already halfway down the path to schizophrenia, immersed in metaphor, paradox, seeing connections everywhere. His obsession with geometry and astrophysics was in reality an obsession with the movement of language, life, and paradox. He pitted himself relentlessly against meaning: saw incompletes, unanswered questions everywhere he looked.

In the Divine Comedy, heretics are enwombed in unquenchable fire. This is their everlasting punishment and reward—the self-immolation of a star—resisting the darkness and the nothing. Smirnov is relatively unknown now, his star burned and blazed until he fell—Lucifer comet—and whatever is left of his glory soars in particles through deaf space.

I have a confession. Most of that last bit was straight from Smirnov himself. I doctored up the ideas, tried to make them my own. But I won't be able to make people understand those words. He's Anthony Smirnov, after all. And I'm Trace Timothy Cross.

And never the two shall meet. I realize this as I write: Smirnov's words—I can never make them my own. What follows—the ruminations on the Hot-N-Ready pizza—that stuff is mine—the intellectual property of Trace Timothy Cross.

The Hot-N-Ready pizza is actually an example of honest advertising. It is hot, and it is ready. No mention is made of "tasty" or "nutritious," only "hot" and "ready." Like microwavable burritos or Top Ramen. Tonight, I eat too much Hot-N-Ready. Nearly the entire pizza. I'm aware of a growing warmth in my stomach, which for a moment I mistake for happiness. Later tonight, when I'm shifting around in my bed, trying to get comfortable, this happiness will prove to be nothing but indigestion. How ironic—happiness becomes sadness without warning.

This morning I say my prayers by sitting up in bed, slumping against the wall, and thinking about a girl I met a month ago. We played racquetball. She was good. Athletic, but not too cocky about it. So, I sit slumped against the wall with my eyes half shut, and I think about this girl for a while. I think about kissing her, but I have to shove that thought out of my brain because I just woke up and I haven't brushed my teeth, and kissing someone in that state would be a violation of the golden rule. I admit, I have this weird vision of us as a couple. A married couple. It's not a daydream I entertain very often, but that's what I'm thinking about. It's a Sunday afternoon, and we're lazing around, completely comfortable, not trying too hard to make a good impression, because, you know, we're married.

For a minute I think I might be in love. Then I realize I'm about as distant from this girl as a satellite—orbiting around her in

space. She's the planet. I'm sucked in by the gravitational pull of love, or something, but I'm also threatening to slip out into the nothing—into the unknowable universe. That's where my body would explode. Blam-splat.

Did you know there are more possible variations of a chess game than atoms in the universe? I heard that once. I believed it. I mean, what's not to believe? Just because it's a huge number doesn't mean it isn't true. But when I told Sami—the girl I'm orbiting around—she said it was impossible. Flat-out-freak-effing-no-way. "Why not?" I said. "Atoms in the universe," she said. It's a pretty big number. I guess it might not be true.

Anyway, this morning, slumped against the wall, I realize thinking about Sami isn't the way I want to start my day. So I start doing something else—praying, supposedly. But then I'm thinking about the number of chess games in the universe. It might have been a prayer, in the end.

Anthony Smirnov once said melancholy isn't a humour, but an ingredient in goulash which adds zest. I'm not exactly sure what that means, but I can say for a fact that I like goulash.

Tonight I sink into melancholy the way a very old man sinks into a hot bath. That's the kind of mood I'm in. It means I'll do a lot of talking. A lot of meaningless storytelling. And you won't be interested unless you're the kind of person that just likes to listen to stories.

* * *

Yesterday I watched a seventeen minute YouTube video on chess strategy. I suck at chess. But I can't stop playing it all of a sudden. I'm playing the computer right now, as I write. There are more variations of a chess game than atoms in the universe. Just think about that number. They say there are 10^78 atoms in the universe. The number of possible chess games is 10^120. A much, much larger number. Almost inconceivably larger. I know it seems ridiculous. But how can you say you don't believe it? Atoms in the universe. That's not an argument. It's just an expression of something too large and too overwhelming for your mind to comprehend.

Anthony Smirnov wrote, "Horizons have homes where dwellers have horizons where the night is dispatched like a blessing . . . A blackbird reaches 36.6 mph towards a crane fly and 1,300,026.6 mph towards Andromeda."

Weird, but also cool, especially the part about the blackbird. The other night I was looking at the stars, and I saw three planets in a line, from one horizon to another. Venus. Jupiter. Mars. I looked at Jupiter through a telescope, and it looked a lot like a smudgy white dot. A dirty little disk. Like a dime in a fountain, but less impressive. You could say it didn't turn me on. But when I saw those planets in a line—a horizon to horizon panorama right across the Milky Way—I felt awe and vertigo. I thought about what a tender little connection it is that keeps my feet on the ground. I thought I would slip away, fall up, into space. Maybe explode, blam-splat. But then I realize I'm already floating, on this giant rock, Earth.

In my room, I have a map hung upside down. Because in space, there's no up or down. And it's sprawling, growing in all directions.

It's a powerful thought, and it brings the melancholy, like the poet Anthony Smirnov when he got old and tired of things. Sank into a hot bath. Let himself into the water, down the drain.

I wonder if he ever fell in love, or if he just orbited around some girl, pushed and pulled by gravity and inertia.

Here's an excerpt from the introduction to *Orbital*, one of his books on astrophysics:

"I thought of the seeds that have been sown in anger and the seeds that have been sown in envy—Cain's planting which was unaccepted by the Lord—and the frenzied seeds of hatred and fear and selfish lust. I thought about the growth of evil seeds in the soil of the ignorant and impoverished heart. I thought about the lurid harvest moon hovering over centuries of chaos . . .

"The darkness we have become blind to and the cold we have become numb to—these are nothing—nothing. In the beginning there was the matter, and there was the nothing, and the nothing was nothing but the lack of the matter so that in the beginning there was nothing but matter.

"I thought about the bitter apples we have eaten because humans would not sit forever at the threshold of a closed but unlocked door. And the seeds that grew into the trees which bore those bitter apples—those were good seeds, because they grew. The darkness and the cold are nothing. "But my heart is something, because it is bitter, and because it is my heart.

The end is an allusion to Stephen Crane's "In the Desert." A poem I've always loved without understanding why. I think it has to do with being human. I feel afraid to interpret it any further, especially on paper where people can read my thoughts. Anyway,

it's getting late, and I'm starting to get that indigestion from my Hot-N-Ready.

When I wake up in the morning, the melancholy might be gone. So the precise space that I'm in right now—it might not come back. I could go in one of a trillion directions tomorrow. More than a trillion. 10^10,000,000,000,000. More than that. So let me just write a few more things.

"Paradox is the is in is not—black hole devours supernova, becomes hungrier for more light . . . " That's Smirnov.

"Dark leaves are moving through space/to lite in vermilion on my grave." Again, Smirnov.

This one, also by Smirnov, is addressed to "The Philosopher," generally recognized to be the long-dead Plato: "A star is still invisible everywhere you choose to look . . . Your . . . infallible senses may not be gratified by the speed of light." And later, "The sun is dead."

"I like pizza." That's not Smirnov. That's me.

II.

I need to be square with you here. Anthony Smirnov, as you may have gathered, never existed. All the quotes are made up, too. Maybe you googled his name. You found somebody's Facebook profile, named Anton Smirnov. Me too. I don't know that kid. Anton-Smirnov-the-Facebook-guy exists, but as far as I know, he wasn't a writer or a philosopher or a math genius or any of that, although he could be. I haven't clicked on his profile. I don't want to know who he is or where he's from. He could be my next door neighbor, or he could live across the world. His first name makes me think he's from a Slavic country. Maybe he lives in the States

or the UK or Canada, but in reality he could be living anywhere. I imagine him as a young guy, but for all I know, he's nearly seventy. In fact, I can't really be sure that he's male. I won't click on his profile. I don't want to know.

Somewhere in Kiev, Anton-Smirnov-the-Facebook-guy shows his latest painting to his girlfriend. She laughs because the painting is absurd. She asks for an explanation. She wants to know why. Anton has nothing to say. This guy—wherever he is—has my respect. His painting is better than any I've seen.

III.

After arguing with Sami for a pretty long time, she relented that there is one circumstance which allows more variations of a chess game than atoms in the universe: the number of chess games is infinite when and only when the two players are willing to engage in an eternal rally of fruitless moves. Knight to C3. Knight to B1. Knight to C3. Knight to B1. Knight to C3. Knight to B1. And so on indefinitely. At any stopping point the game is made new—has never been played before—and so the board game is of unlimited variety.

Something about this disturbs me. The idea of endless agency, endless improvisation, and endless virtuosity only being possible in a never ending series of B1 to C3 and back again, until the game is "out of book"—never before played. There's no novelty there. It seems like a shortcut to eternity—a cheat code.

As I've mentioned earlier, Anthony Smirnov was obsessed with geometry as well as astrophysics. There were certain shapes that received special attention: diamonds, circles, and straight lines.

He found these shapes everywhere, and in everything, like Donald Duck in Mathmagic Land. The diamond he despised, the circle he loved, and the line—the line fascinated him—he perseverated on it—like he was terrified of it and in love with it at the same time. What the ultimate significance of these shapes was to Smirnov, I don't know. It seems all connected, though. The diamond had to do with some beef he had with the formalist school. The circle and the line stuff—it's trippy. There was some profound significance in the fact that in any given line, you can find eternity "contained." The two ends of the line are constantly approaching the "end point," but never quite arriving. Because space can be eternally divided. Spaces within spaces. A desert. Nothing ever meets.

Some of the most spectacular rock formations are a result of enormous ice slabs scouring the land. Essays are a bit like that. You never see the ice, but sometimes you can see some of the places it's been. A lot of time has elapsed since I started writing this piece.

The other night Sami and I were sitting under a pretty expansive set of stars. I told her how I felt about her—that I liked being with her. She told me she wasn't on the same level as me, but that if I wanted to kiss her, she'd let me. I pondered this. What a way to start a kiss. Like getting ready to ride a roller coaster—all fun and adrenaline—but right before you hop in your car, a clown walks up and kicks you in the groin.

I kissed her anyway. So she added, "You remember what I said, right?" as if the kiss, like alcohol or a hard hit to the head, had deprived me of short term memory. Ah, yes. The clever clown greets you after the ride as well, his boot steel-toed.

I'm not offended. My pride is wholly uninjured—I'm aware that she hasn't insulted me. After all, I'm orbiting in space somewhere far from her—maybe even slipping into the abyss—into a different universe—one whose atoms haven't been counted yet, because it is utterly unknown to us. Into spaces so deep that my senses fail me.

In this fantasy universe, I meet a girl. I can't imagine what she looks like, and I don't try. But we aren't a likely pair, she and I. For one, she doesn't like the fact that I smoke. But hey, she gambles to relieve the stress. So we break even.

I sit down with her at a chessboard and start telling her about this kid, Trace Timothy Cross.

He's a writer, I say.

What'd he write? She asks.

Nothing consequential. He liked pizza.

She laughs and rolls her eyes because we both know the story is just for fun.

OFFERINGS

by

Alison Maeser

"The attitude that nature is chaotic and that the artist puts order into it is a very absurd point of view, I think. All that we can hope for is to put some order into ourselves."
— Willem de Kooning

There was a time when he had liked nothing more than coming home to an empty house. Not because he didn't like to be at home with his wife. Only because it was refreshing, for a moment, to be alone.

These days he used his wife's name like some people use the name of God in vain. Only it wasn't in vain, it wasn't in anger, it wasn't a curse. But when a buttered knife slipped from his old, clumsy fingers and clattered to the floor, he would sigh, "Oh, Christine." And when he tried to lower his aching, quaking body into the big bathtub and lost his grip on the porcelain, he plunged into the scalding water crying, "Christine." It was an "Oh, Christine, look what's happened now." A "You see, Christine, what's becoming of me without you." He did not realize he had

developed this habit until he let her name slip after losing a card game to his son. He had never done this while she was alive.

"What did you say?" his son said, making a bridge with his cards and then letting it collapse.

"What? Oh—no, nothing. Christ. I said Christ."

His son did not believe him, but he didn't bother with a contradiction either. "Do you want to play another round?" the younger man said, drawing all of the cards toward his chest in grand scooping movements.

The man nodded, and then the phone rang. He hated that sound. If his son had not been there, he would not have answered it. He made a labored show of scooting his chair back and hoisting himself out of it, but his son sought to spare him the trouble. "Let me get that for you, Dad," he said.

He interrupted the phone, mid-ring. "Flagg residence. No, this is Sean. His son. Yes, just a minute."

Sean stretched out the telephone cord to where Frank sat and handed him the phone. "This is Mr. Flagg."

The woman on the phone sounded young and competent and busy, and through all of her hurried formalities it took Flagg a few moments to understand that she was asking to make a movie about him. He fumbled with the glasses on a slim rope around his neck and pressed them onto his face, as if he would need them to hear her better. "A documentary film, outlining your incalculable contribution to the art world and the projects you're involved with now," she said. "I think fans of yours and anyone at all involved in the visual arts would be very interested in this kind of a project.

I've been a huge fan of yours since . . . oh, I don't know, since I was born, it feels like . . ."

Flagg looked at his son across the long dining room table, shuffling cards. "I'm sorry. What did you say your name was?"

"Theresa Nesbitt," she offered.

By this point in his life, a whole year after Christine's death, Flagg had almost completely adopted the persona of a cantankerous old man. The stereotype had been so clearly laid out by films and TV shows that it had been easy for him to slip into, once he found himself old and infirm in a tall empty house. And as a cantankerous old man, he felt inclined to bark at Theresa Nesbitt, tell her never to call back—the stinging command "Let this old man live what little is left of his life in peace!" flew to his mind—and slam down the receiver, or rather offer it forcefully back to Sean. But as much as it would have thrilled him to deny the girl, Flagg felt greater excitement at the prospect of allowing her to film him. He had never been ashamed of his work, the good work that came out of the old days, after the war, and always felt his—what had she said? his incalculable contribution?—too little appreciated. Perhaps a good film about Frank Flagg was just what everyone needed.

"They're going to make a movie about me," he told Sean, setting down the receiver and picking up the hand of cards Sean had dealt him.

"No kidding?" Sean said. "Who's going to play you?"

"Me. Myself. It will be a documentary film. The film crew will be moving out here in three weeks."

"A documentary. No kidding," Sean said. "Cool. Your turn, Dad."

And Flagg scanned his cards, resisting the urge to joke aloud with Christine, "A prophet is not without honor, huh?" Anyway, he smiled. He had never read those words from the Bible himself, but that was what Christine used to say when they were young parents and the mundane duties of a family man would pull him from his studio, or one of the children would look at the product of months of work and say, "That doesn't really look like Mom." A prophet is not without honor, but in his own house and his own country or something.

The film crew moved out in three weeks. It was less of a crew, actually, than a team, Flagg thought when Theresa Nesbitt and her three assistants stood before him one raining morning in the tall, many-windowed entry to his house.

She picked up on his surprise. "I'm a recent graduate of –'s film program. This is my first film, post-grad. We have a very small budget. This is Tim Washburn, Tim de Soto, and Rodrigo," she said, pointing in turn to each of the three men at her side, who carried suitcases, boom mikes, and cameras. Then she showed him the shooting schedule. Flagg was nervous. He didn't think he could talk about himself and live a film-worthy life for that long.

The first day, Theresa, Tim, Tim, and Rodrigo pinned a microphone to the collar of his plaid shirt and followed him around with a camera for ten hours. They filmed him making soft-boiled eggs in the morning, driving to the rec center pool for a swim (which he rarely did anymore), putting his bed sheets in the washing machine, and making a bologna sandwich for lunch. By four o'clock

in the afternoon he had run out of things to do for the camera, so he sat down in the den and turned on Jeopardy.

"You really don't have to film this part," he said.

"It's okay," Theresa said.

"Usually my son comes over Tuesday evenings, but he has a presentation to make at work tomorrow."

"It's okay," Theresa said.

Flagg was in the habit of calling out the answers when he knew them and the contestants didn't, which was often. He hoped Theresa would include these shots of him, confidently murmuring "What is the Boxer Rebellion?" and "Who is William Tell?" He sat in a swivel chair next to his computer, and when someone gave an answer he knew nothing about, he searched for it on Wikipedia, which Frank Flagg considered the greatest invention of the twenty-first century. Today, when the answer to double jeopardy was "Leni Riefenstahl" Frank typed the phrase into the search bar, reading and clicking hyperlinks until dinnertime hunger gnawed in his swollen old man's gut and he had to prepare a microwave dinner. Some, like his own son Sean, distrusted the information supplied by online encyclopedia articles that anyone could write, but Flagg had never been misled. The scope of its knowledge, the dedication of its editors astounded him.

Theresa and the crew had made reservations at a hotel downtown, but Flagg said there was plenty of room for them in the downstairs bedrooms. More room than he knew what to do with. "I won't bother you down there," he assured them. "I don't even go down the stairs because I can't get back up." At first, they politely refused, but the lure of free lodging was too strong to resist.

Flagg did not worry about his children putting him in a home. He had insured himself against that, unintentionally, by being a famous-for-a-time artist and building himself a one-of-a-kind house. His son would never make him sell it and his son could not afford to buy it; the house rested securely in Flagg's possession and was unquestionably willed to Sean. It didn't matter how incapacitated he became; Sean would wait it out; Sean would drive out to nurse his father every day, move in with him if he had to; Frank Flagg would die in the house he built. He refused to think about whether the house had more value to Sean as a piece of his heritage or as a Frank Flagg original.

He changed out of his plaid shirt and into his plaid pajamas, and they filmed him getting into bed and switching the light off. They said, "Thanks, Frank. Good night." When they and their cameras and soft puffy microphones had left the room, Flagg had a prickling, guilty urge to do something he had always avoided with ease. In the dark he stumbled out of bed and switched on the computer, clicked open Internet Explorer and typed in the search bar, "Frank Flagg." He clicked on the first link that appeared.

The Frank Flagg Wikipedia page was surprisingly long. He read, "Franklin Flagg (1925–) was a painter and central figure of the abstract impressionist movement and the New York School. He has been cited as an influence by many painters including Mark Rothko.

"Frank Flagg was born in Brooklyn, New York, USA. He attended Columbia University as an architecture student for two years and spent his third year studying visual art with professor Walton Trimble before dropping out in 1946. He married folk singer

Christine McLeod in 1948. Flagg spent the next ten years as a prolific painter in New York City and then began a teaching career at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he worked and taught until 1964. He and his wife then moved to Seattle."

There was more, about how much people adored his work. It was almost funny to read, Flagg thought. It was like an obituary, and it could have contained the exact same information had he died in 1964. He flicked off the computer and crumbled back into bed.

The next day was set aside for interviews. Theresa, Tim, Tim, and Rodrigo spent the morning repositioning armchairs, paintings, and knick-knacks in the living room, opening and closing the blinds on the floor-to-ceiling windows to create an interview corner they must have hoped movie critics would term "visually arresting." Flagg made himself a soft-boiled egg and changed into his nicest plaid shirt.

"This is how it's going to work," Theresa said. "I have a series of questions I'd like you to answer here. I'll ask them, and you answer. Don't worry about rambling or anything; of course we'll edit it later and keep only the most important things. Say whatever comes to mind. Ready? Three, two . . ." And the little red light on a Tim's camera glowed.

"What is art?" Theresa said.

"What is art?" Flagg repeated. "Well. You get right to the point. Art is a method of expression, I suppose. Self-expression. Art is—was a hobby of mine. And it has to look good, when you hang it on a wall."

Theresa waited for more, but Flagg had said everything he could think of. Names flew to his mind, prominent names, artists that had tried in their ways to define art; he had studied them in his single year of art school at Columbia, but he had never really agreed with any of them then and now he barely cared what they'd said. "What is your art?" she pressed.

"My art is all of those things. I don't know. I painted because I liked it. I wasn't trying to start a movement or change anybody's life. I wasn't trying to influence anybody." He choked on the word influence; would they be able to tell he'd been reading about himself on Wikipedia?

Again, she waited. Silently, Rodrigo scratched the beard hairs that grew all the way down to his t-shirt collar.

"Okay," she said. "In your opinion, does life reflect art, or does art reflect life?"

"Both," he answered.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well. I think that artists strive to represent the things they see around them—sometimes in abstract ways, like in my case. In that way, art reflects life. But people also get their ideas of what life is like from the representations of it that they see, and conduct themselves accordingly. So in that way, life reflects art."

She asked him about the role of art in the world, the role of art in his life. She asked about abstract expressionism, about its supporters and its critics. He hadn't thought about these things in years. Maybe he had never thought about them—but then he knew that he must have. It would have been impossible for him to give that much of his life to something whose purpose he had

never contemplated. But now he could not conjure up a word to say about any of it, and he wondered if his mind was finally going or if he just did not care anymore.

Theresa turned her head, just slightly, toward a Tim, and the red camera light flicked off. "Okay, Frank—you're doing really great. This is great stuff. Just remember—these questions are really simplistic, I know, but they're just a starting point, a place to jump off of. Don't be afraid to go wherever you want with them."

They took a break for lunch. When they returned to the interview corner, the questions were different.

"You used to spend a lot of time with Milton Resnick, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline. Tell me about that."

"They were older than me. They were already well established, it seems like, when I was getting my start. I admired them—Resnick, especially—I thought his stuff was really beautiful. They hung around Tenth Street at some of those galleries where I hung around, and we all really admired them."

Theresa waited for a moment, leaned forward in her chair and fixed her intense gaze on Frank. Frank looked past her, into the green beyond the windows. "Do you remember any specific encounters with them, or anyone else whose work you admired?" she said finally.

Flagg knit his eyebrows; it was as if he could feel the teeth of a comb going through his brain, searching desperately for a bit of a conversation, a glimpse of a face. Surely he had picked off the ground and stored away forever a precious word fallen from the lips of an idol, a friend, but there was nothing there. "No . . ." he said. "No."

The only thing he remembered clearly now was Christine, and seeing her for the first time on stage at the Village Vanguard in October. He didn't remember which of his artists friends had brought him there, and her music was not the kind of music he liked, really—he preferred avant-garde jazz or something to her banjo-accompanied protest songs. But her voice was so pretty and she was so nervous; she hid it well behind her smooth face and black curls that didn't move as her head swayed with the music, so Flagg felt like perhaps he was the only one who knew how secretly nervous she was, and then he felt like they were friends already. After the show was over, he waited till the crowds had dispersed a little and then approached her to tell her how much he had enjoyed the show.

"Thank you," she said, and then sighed, "I need a drink."

The opportunity had handed itself to him, fallen upon him like rain, burned him from the inside out. "Let me buy you one," he said, and they were out the door, shuffling down the Greenwich Village nighttime streets. He let her walk a little bit in front of him so he could study her shape with his artist's eye: full skirt jutting out from the waist and a black banjo case on her back. He had forgotten the friend that brought him to the show. They stopped for drinks at a place he recommended; she admitted she didn't know where anything was here yet. She'd just moved from Tulsa, she said, and he laughed at her. Tonight was her first real show. He feigned incredulity. He was a painter, he said. She wanted to play with Pete Seeger, she said. "I'm Frank," he said. "I'm Christine," she said, and he said, "I know."

By the end of the night, Frank would later tell their children, they were in love. By the end of the year they were married.

Frank had forgotten then that Theresa had asked him about Kline, de Kooning and Resnick, not his wife. "Christine read the Bible," he mused abstractedly. "Every night. She believed she was going to heaven, and that's what makes it difficult for me not to believe in heaven now that she's gone. You know, I guess some people lose their faith in times of trial, but me . . . I don't know. I guess you could say I'm going the other direction. She took good enough care of me while she was here that I didn't need a god." He chuckled. That was what serious people did when they said something revelatory, right? To take the revelatory edge off. "All I know is she's gone from here, but she's gone somewhere . . . As much as she was, she couldn't have built heaven herself when she left the earth the way that she and I built this house when we left Chicago. You see? I don't know. It's far-fetched, I guess, but anything less seems a little unbearable."

Theresa asked more questions about the Village, the Tenth Street galleries, teaching in Chicago. There wasn't much to say about any of it; only facts, which Flagg couldn't remember.

"Cut," Theresa barked finally, and offered Flagg a rigid smile.

The next day they wanted a tour of the studio. Flagg hesitated, in part because he didn't think he could ascend the staircase. Tim took one arm and Tim took the other; Rodrigo and Theresa carried the equipment.

The studio took up the whole top floor of the house. The whole north and west walls were a pane of glass, and the sprawling wood floor held them up among the top layers of the Connecticut forest.

Mostly the room was wide and clean and empty, with only one large easel and one smaller one, and a pile of blank canvases in one corner he had stretched and cut decades ago. "When was the last time you used this studio?" was Theresa's first question when Frank was prettily situated in the right half of her shot, beside an easel. Her voice had had a good night's rest; it was eager and interested again, where it had been thin the previous afternoon.

"1969," Frank said, pulling year from his head that sounded about right.

"Why haven't you painted in over 40 years?"

Then, oddly, Frank was able to pull words of wisdom from a professor all the way out of 1945, his single year of art school. You know you're an artist when it's easier to paint than it is not to paint, or something like that, and upon hearing it Frank had heaved a sigh of relief, instantly validated, because that described him. From age seventeen to age forty, it was easier to paint; he couldn't not paint. Every sight and smell and feeling he longed to expel from himself and flatten on canvas; each bubbled up and out of him and took on round and sharp and big and small forms in color on a white cloth. Now they demanded no expulsion. For a while afterward he had pressed forward anyway, pressed his brush to canvas anyway, tossing out things that were very bad and very self-indulgent and he knew it. So he stopped, and he didn't feel bad or empty.

"I don't need to. I used to need it, and I don't anymore."

"Did you . . . Do you think something else took the place of that?"

"Well, perhaps. I couldn't say what, though." He passed his eyes over the light wooden floors and the corner of canvases and said, "I

suppose I had my house, and that was like a work of art, I thought. But I couldn't say."

"I don't suppose there's anything here you could show us," Theresa said.

"Look for yourself. It's pretty bare," Flagg chuckled.

Theresa shuffled quietly through the papers in her lap, and then looked up at him and dropped the papers to the ground. "One of the things that I've always loved about your work is what it portrays about the artist; there's this churning, this inner life, this perspective that is so evident. Churning is the word I'm always coming up with for you, right," she said with a grin, and Tim, Tim, and Rodrigo nodded their assent, "I'm always saying, 'That's churning—it betrays a real churning.'"

She waited for a response, and Flagg said, "Well. Thank you."

"My favorite painting of yours has always been Exodus. That whole series, I think, is incredible; among all of the abstract stuff of that period, that series really stands out. It's beautiful. Can you tell me your feelings about that series? What inspired you?"

Flagg cleared his throat laboriously. "I . . . someone else always named my paintings for me. I called them all *Untitled*. I don't remember that one."

Theresa's face twitched, and Flagg thought he heard Rodrigo murmur something under his breath. "The monochrome series," Theresa said. "The peachy, kind of salmon one . . . Exodus . . ."

"Right," Flagg said, aching. He read in her face the strange disappointment of having to explain his own artwork to him. "The idea of monochromes intrigued me. How to differentiate those shapes without a whole lot of contrast. Exodus was about a

journey," he tried, but he had no idea why that pink painting had been called Exodus. Theresa ran her hand through her hair.

"It's beautiful," she said flatly. Rodrigo, Tim, and Tim shifted uncomfortably.

She cast her lines for anything about the other paintings and, catching little, asked about his house. Flagg offered his joke about the house as an insurance policy. Finally she directed Rodrigo to switch off the camera and stalked toward the stairs with her eyes on her shoes.

"What are we filming tomorrow?" Flagg asked casually. "I just like to know in advance."

"Well, that depends, Mr. Flagg," Theresa declared, turning the full force of her gaze on him.

"On what?"

"On whether you'd like to say anything or not."

Flagg was accustomed only to her passive aggression; he wasn't sure how to respond, and he seemed unable to summon his cantankerous old man persona in his defense. "I'm sorry," he began, "I know I'm not a good talker."

"It's not that. Terseness I can handle; shyness I can handle; simple speech I can handle. If it were simple and profound, Mr. Flagg, that would be a dream come true, that would have been expected. But you have nothing to say. I don't understand. I was prepared for a crotchety old man; I was expecting an inaccessible, reclusive artist; that I could have handled. That at least would have been something to watch on film. But you have nothing to say."

"I'm sorry."

Theresa let out a sigh, quick and percussive. "No. I'm sorry." It seemed as if the words were causing her physical pain. "You've been great to let us into your home like this. It's just, I've graduated, and I'm worried, because I could have picked anything and I picked this. This is my project, my film, you know, and—"

"Well it's his life, Theresa; it is what it is," a Tim said.

Flagg felt a brief gush of gratitude to Tim that quickly gave way to aggravation. Flagg didn't like hearing his existence dismissed so readily by a man who hadn't changed his t-shirt all week. "Shut up, Tim," Theresa breathed, and resumed her determined trek out of the studio.

That night, Flagg showered and put on his pajamas and stood looking at himself in the mirror as it slowly unfogged itself. Surely that face was too old to be his own. It was like someone had taken trimmings of skin and draped them over him, pinning them up in the corners of his eyes and mouth like curtains. It was not fair that his face should have to become unrecognizable.

How old am I? he wondered, and Christine, he thought, supplied the answer: eighty-six. Well, Picasso lived to ninety-one, he told himself, but I am not Picasso. Flagg was old, he was going to die, and so he understood why Theresa was mad at him.

In the morning Theresa informed Flagg that she was out of money and had to take an editing job in California. She and the crew would be back in a few months to record Flagg's narration. He did not expect they really would come back. They didn't.

Except a Tim came back, only a moment after he had left the house, claiming to have forgotten his razor. Flagg was standing in the living room, where the crew had left him. "Will you tell Theresa

I'm sorry," he said again, before Tim could leave the house for good.

"Don't apologize. You're good, man. Making boring movies—it's an occupational hazard, I guess."

But it wasn't just that he was boring. Flagg knew that now. "I'm dying. She wanted to catch me before I expired. She wanted my conclusions, my lifetime worth of wisdom, whatever I've been brewing up out here in the woods by myself all this time."

Tim had been backing slowly but surely toward the door. Now he was almost outside. "I don't know, man. Maybe. She never told me that, but. . ."

"Perhaps if I died now, it would be better. Then all my boring words would have a little value and you could make a cent off all your hard work, huh?"

"Aww, no. Don't worry about it."

Flagg's feet ached from standing. He leaned against the end table by the sofa. "Well, thanks, Tim."

"Hey—see you around," Tim said, but that was a lie, and he offered Flagg a farewell wave from the side of his head, like a salute.

Flagg switched on the computer in the den while the rain dropped outside, pulled up Wikipedia, and typed his own name in the search bar. When his obituary article came up, he clicked "Edit" in the top right hand corner and erased everything. Then he typed "Frank Flagg (1925–) lived his life in two halves. The first half (1925–1964), in retrospect, seems largely a waste, and as for the second half (1964–), he does not have much to show either." Then it seemed that something was missing, and so he added, "On

December 30, 1948 he married Christine McLeod," and clicked "Save".

He looked over his handiwork, proud to see his own words immortalized in pixilated type behind the hard clear wall of his computer screen. He turned away from it and leaned over as far as he could to reach the TV remote. "Christine," he whispered, and something full and wet seemed to rupture in his eye. Two tears slid over his puffy old face and settled in the crease that connected his nose to the corner of his mouth while the Jeopardy music played.

He woke up the next morning, made a soft-boiled egg, and while he ate it longed for the satisfaction of rereading his words, now forever a part of the growing, living, nurturing Wikipedian organism. But when he typed in his name, angry words in a yellow banner at the top of the screen announced, "Your edits have been classified as vandalism," and all the former bibliographic bile had taken its place under his name.

In a different way, though, that was satisfying.

AM ABEND

by **Michelle Oakes**

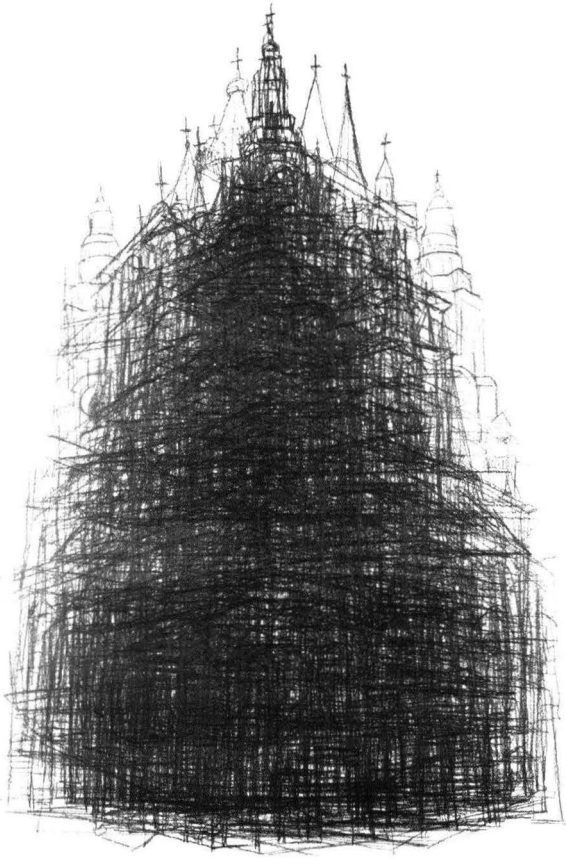
In the evening, little black ants trickle out,
shiver your fingers, tickle your throat,
disperse in your hair
like curls of smoke.

A man on the porch with his slow cigarette
romances the porch-swing.
His false mustache
is the color of smoke.

You must play the piano.
Little black ants, the sheet-music's notes,
itch like forgetting.
The man on the porch—

do you know him?
He watches for bombers, little black bats.
He treadles and smokes.
Just play the piano.

Bombers, like black little bats, itch out,
curl your fingers, shiver your throat,
disperse in a mustache
discolored by smoke,
Am Abend, Am Abend, Am Abend.



WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

by

Phoebe Cook

You could talk about your trailer park home, or upstate New York, or your very large family, and that would be the truth.

But then he might think about dirty, moldy trailers; abusive parents; laziness; mud and that episode of Hoarding: Buried Alive that he saw once, featuring a crusty old man who lived in a trailer filled to the brim with deer heads and lethal weapons.

Instead, you might change it to New York—New York City that is—and your modern apartment with a loft and your fashionable two-child family, and your parents who both work at international law firms and drink soy milk. But you might not be able to pull that off, you think, looking down at your slightly faded jeans and five-dollar t-shirt.

You backtrack, remembering how much your mom valued cleanliness and how she would come home from long days at the Laundromat and scrub the vinyl kitchen floor. You remember her scrubbing—sometimes scrubbing so hard she couldn't hear you over the swirling suds. You were trying to tell her about your science fair project that went to district and she merely nodded in time with the circular motion of her sudsy hands. You recall trying

to cover up the fact that you couldn't buy new clothes by always wearing clean ones and tucking in your shirt. You always felt a little more stylish when you tucked in your shirt. Then you look at him.

His shirt is new; you know that because you saw it in a catalog blazoned with the title "New Fall Fashions for 2013!" You know it is new because you did not buy anything from that catalog. His jeans are pressed. His shoes are the white of newly whitened teeth, something else you know all about because it's something you've never had. But he looks earnest, maybe even interested in talking to you, or perhaps, in being your friend. He looks like he might not judge you for living in a trailer home instead of a clean, white house with a picket fence, like he probably did, or maybe he didn't.

Would he understand what it's like to walk home in the dark across a city wreathed in cigarette smoke? Would he understand what it means to work at a gas station in order to have enough money to pay the fee to be on the basketball team? Has he ever worked in his life?

Maybe he would understand if the trailer were a small home. It wouldn't be much, maybe one with a yard in front and a couple of trees. Maybe you could change the number of your siblings from eight to something more understandable, like maybe six or five—still big, but not something that would contract a television series on TLC. You could refer to your clothes as "thrifted" or "vintage" instead of third generation hand-me-downs. You could tell him that you were on the tennis team in high school and that you like his shirt. Maybe if you told him you were a mechanical engineering major, he would understand how much you love solving problems.

If you said you were twenty-three, maybe he'd understand how mature you are, but maybe he wouldn't.

So, you just say, "New York."


35
M.P.H.

AN EVENING STORM AT UTAH LAKE

by **Truedson J.S.**

The dock rocks up
& down & back &

forth like my grandma's
antediluvian chair

& my shirt flaps like a pennant
as the girl's collar is caught by the wind

graciously giving me
a glimpse of her bra

& I blush & look away
as the waves continue

to smack
spraying us—daring us

to be thrown
to be swallowed

to be released
in their wild & deep & green

waters that wash our feet
& lick the sky as the rain

begins to fall:
because He sendeth rain

on the Just & the Unjust
that sit on this unsure dock

but still I need to tell her
that she doesn't need to talk

that we can be silent &
that is OK but instead I listen

to her & the wind & the water
& the nervous & then tell her

that her surety makes me
uneasy because I'm not

sure of anything anymore
–as though the jaded

waves are inside of me

& the waves are wild &
deep & green & the waves

are God & He is raging
a whisper as though to breathe: child

ANADROMOUS

by

Trent Leinenbach

I saw the man through the years and watched how he grew older. He had small eyes and a large nose and a large mouth and, when I first knew him, black hair, slightly gray at the temples. It was autumn and he brought me an autumn fish he had caught, and he offered to clean and prepare it. Not knowing the man, I declined. Every year, he returned like a fish returning to a gravel bed, and the gravel bed was my home. Always he offered me the fish and always I said, No, thank you.

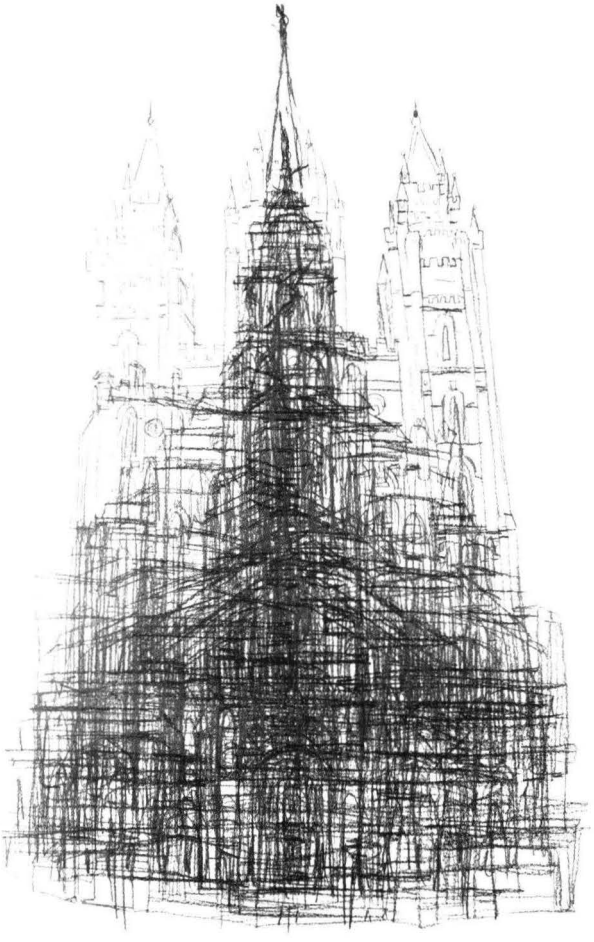
When I was married he came to my wedding reception and wore a black felt suit, worn white at the elbows and knees. His tie was poorly tied and stuck out from the collar at the back of his neck. He was beginning to stoop with age and his hair was worn like his suit, but the fish hung from his hand, and I politely reminded him that fish was not on the menu but told him I was glad he came—that he should come in and enjoy the dance. I believe he did come in and dance—what he did with the fish I don't know—but being preoccupied, I quickly forgot about the old man and returned to dancing with my wife.

And the next year he returned and he was older, and the next year, older. And when my daughter was born the next year he returned again and I sensed some urgency in his posture as he offered to clean and cut the fish for me, and for my wife. He told me how he would prepare and cook and garnish it, and he looked into my eyes as if trying to prove his honesty. I knew my wife did not like the man coming around year after year—we never had an explanation for why he came—and I finally told him, Thank you, no. We don't need any fish right now, but you should prepare and eat it yourself if you'd like. I half expected him to argue, but he did not—only turned, disappointed, and left.

When my daughter was to be married, I was not a young man myself, but the old man with the fish was like a little relic and the suit hung from his body like a beaten flag and the hand that held the fish was a pockmarked claw. His eyes were dim and watery, but they conveyed something like desperation. I saw myself in the mirror as he walked into the reception hall and I knew what to do—had known for some time, actually—and I directed him to a platter on a table which had been specially prepared for his fish. His face registered neither surprise nor excitement, but he earnestly drew his fileting knife and set the fish on the table. Many of the guests stopped to watch this unusual scene, but my daughter was dancing with her husband and most of the crowd was watching them with smiles and murmurs of, Do you remember, and, Ah how the years fly.

His hand worked inevitably around the fins, the spine, the gills, and he worked with his arms and his frowning mouth, and as the man worked, his joints loosened and his bones loosened like

shrunken spokes in a wagon wheel, and the man began to dissolve. The fish was cut and the man cooked it and the man's body was like a whisper, issuing up from his feet in waves, and he garnished the fish and was not a man anymore but an idea. When the guests finally smelled the cooked fish and began to eat it, the man was a memory, and we ate until we were satisfied, and the memory was the color of autumn. We bit into the years and chewed them slowly and swallowed them until we were warm enough to let a few tears fall and full enough to laugh, and when we had done these things, there was music, and my daughter's husband took her up to dance.



THE CAPTAIN'S POEMS

by **Parker Smith**

1.
Dusk at the beach or later.
Waves fold over themselves
then crowd around my ankles.
A fly caught in a mug of froth wishes
only that the lights will dim.
Don't pity him: he's drowning
in his own piss. When the waves
empty off the sand they take
grains with them that drift
together into new kinds
of lifelessness. Each to a unique
abyss and none unlike
the one proposed by this poem.

2.
Raise your hand if your dad
has pretty thick lips,
now that I mention it.
This doesn't always mean,
that he is or was
an alcoholic or locked
your mom in a closet
so he could show you
his yo-yo tricks in private.

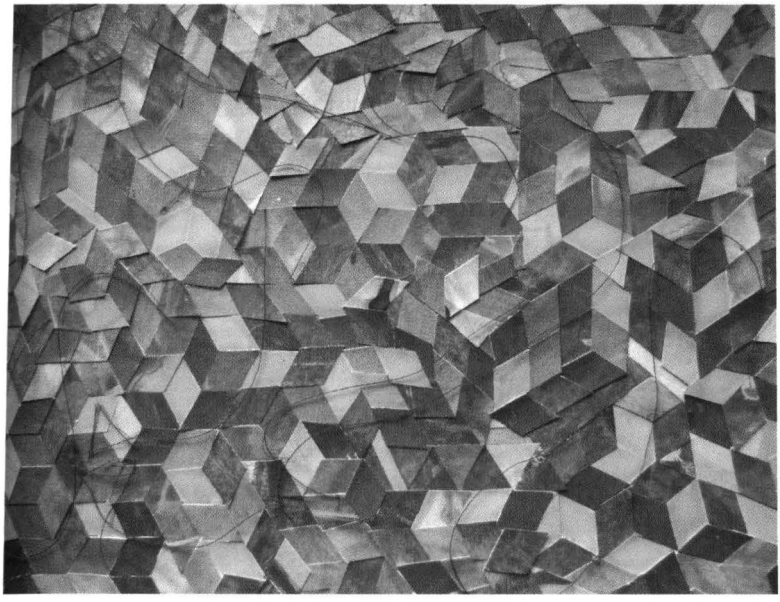
But the buzz of the axle
spinning in its slipknot!
The string, a floating contrail
looping parabolas around his
fingers until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!

3.
Nothing more to say except
sometimes a voice speaks
and I never know whether
it's weather or whether
or whether or weather.

KINDLED LIFE

by **Estée Arts**

Aged with budded spring
Born in the carcass
Of a charred wood



SELKIES

by Maddison Colvin

I saw your head peering at me today, over the waves.
Were you waiting for us to leave,
with our bright scarves
and our rubber feet?
Were you waiting for that little beach to empty again
so you could roll in with the tide— brown and shining
drag your bulk up the sand to some grey slab of stone
upon which you could rub your whiskers,
press your chest to one sharp edge or another
and, shufflingpeelingsquirming,
tug your young woman's body from the bulk of yourself
so you could fold this blubber-fur-suit into a shining package
and stow it safe from suitors' eyes in the contours of the cave just there.
You could climb up the sea-blue boulders then,
past the black cliffs, past the green hills
to the long-dead bones of high and windswept castles, where,
perching, you can stare down into fitful seas
spy dark, quick shapes a hundred feet beneath,
seals still shifting within their skins.

WETLAND

by

Allison Hill

Small and weathered-white, the Enumclaw farmhouse on Mud Mountain Road stood at the corner of a three-acre piece of triangular land, which was wet and green through most of the year. In the winter, the ground froze and left the cow pies hard as bark. During the summer the fields were supple and pleasant and should have been even now, one month before fall. But the first patch of fog had drifted in through the night and was so dense that when Mike Fogaras leaned his belly against the farmhouse kitchen sink and squinted out the window, he grumbled: a hazy-white wall covered his pasture. Fog meant early rain and early rain meant that everything outside was wet and would stay wet through the season. Mike's Prussian eyes and golden bangs lightened a shade in the fog's brightness, but the creases in his cheeks sank deep into shadow as he tightened his lips, a habit that had replaced smiling a few years back when he realized he was no longer married. The habit aged his thirty-year-old face by several years.

Mike sighed, his voice gruff and sudden, and wet his mouth and throat with warm goat's milk from a mason jar. He clicked his tongue against his teeth. What a mess. The clippings from the pear

trees and blackberry vines, which he'd hoped to burn while still dry, were still packed behind the shed. He'd have to remove the mesh and burn the branches and leaves before lunch.

Mike threw back his head and swallowed the last bit of milk from the mason jar when the kitchen door hinge squeaked, sharp, and he withdrew his eyes from the fog. He spun around and wiped the milk that dripped from his lips.

A boy stood under the door frame still gripping the knob, which was high above his head. His eyes were blue and startled-big; the periphery skin was pink and swollen from crying. His hair was platinum blond, frizzy over the ears, and his waistline crooked.

With a muddy feeling that rose in Mike's chest and retarded his day's motivation, he remembered last night: Mr. Kacvinsky's long white face at the front door, mumbling the words, "Wife sick. No better place for the boy," and the boy's sleeping, heavy body dropping onto Mike's shoulder. There was no time to protest.

The previous times Mike had seen the boy now flashed through his memory: last spring at King's Hardware, the boy was squatting in the screw and nail aisle, stirring bolts with his fingers while Kacvinsky bustled with King about Hoover and agriculture. Then two summers before that at the Farmer's Picnic, the boy was eating peanuts from a paper cone while watching the baseball game. And two years further at the Buckley bakery, the boy was a squirming baby in Mrs. Kacvinsky's arms, reaching for warm Babovka pound cake. Each time Mike had seen him, the boy had stared back, quiet and transfixed. Mike felt his heart would drop to his boots each time, and he'd leave before a response was necessary.

The boy looked at Mike now in this manner, lips wet and open.

"Hey," Mike blurted. His voice was rough, unprepared. "Has been some time? Eh, kid?" The boy stared. "How old are you now? Fou—no. Five years?" Mike walked forward, steps wide and quick. He crouched in front of the boy and straightened his waistline with one jerk. The boy's hands dropped from the knob. "Has been four." Mike clicked his tongue. The boy blinked. "Well. C'mon."

Mike led the boy to the kitchen table and lifted him to a chair. "Fire's out in the stove," he said and walked to the gas range. "Got to take care of the wood today. The oats and milk are still warm, so you can have some while I'm outside." Returning to the table, he set a jar of oats and milk in front of the boy. "There," he said. The boy peered at Mike through the clear glass of the Mason jar; his brows and mouth were squiggled shapes, but his eyes were a fixed line toward Mike's face. Mike hesitated to move. "Stay there," he said. "Drink that. I'll be outside." The boy stared at the jar, unmoving, while Mike spun around and exited the kitchen and then the house.

The screen door sprang back and clapped shut. Mike marched down the front steps through the fog, following the pebbled walkway that led to the yard. The haze cleared around him as he walked, and he could see only ten feet of wet, green grass in all directions. He thought of the boy. How much his face took the shape of his mother's: the same pink cheeks and long, graceful nose and dip of the eyes' inner corners.

The air was cold and wet in Mike's nose and lungs. The lawn was muddy and clung to his boots; it grabbed his soles as he walked toward the shed where he'd crammed the foliage between the back of the shed and the barbed-wire fence. The long and knotted

branches from the pear trees and blackberry vines now clogged the space with its thick and thorned twine branches.

Mike gloved his hands and pulled a group of branches to loosen the mess, but it stayed fixed. He pulled again, and the branches threw him back. "Damn it!" he said. They'd been shoved too deep and too tight into the narrow space and their stubborn response triggered a fit of anger in Mike's chest. Taking a breath, Mike leaned on the branches, and, while the scent of wet grass filled his throat, he thought of her again. He thought of how he'd wanted to give up on her because the timing wasn't right, but she'd called him a stubborn idiot. She knew that being nervous and emotional was part of who he was, but giving into it wasn't worth it. She said that if he waited for everything to be right before he enjoyed life, he'd always be miserable.

He remembered how he'd tried to force himself to overlook the mesmerizing effect she had on him, the convincing powers: distractions he'd never experienced before. At first she had seemed frivolous and easy to overlook. She was a girl who was too comfortable anywhere she was at, and it made him nervous. During wartime she'd chat through her sanitary mask with Dairyland Market clerks about petunias and *Alice in Wonderland* and Transparent Pie. Trivialities. But he was surprised when she'd proved him wrong.

He thought of the boy, the penetration of his simple countenance. He recalled his cheeks, which were dimpled, too. Like Anna's. But hers dipped down on both sides of her mouth, just under the pinks of her cheeks, at the slightest motion of her body. He remembered how her blond hair would shake over her face

when she got riled up, but her dimples always peeked through. Beautiful, Mike had finally admitted.

Mike shook his head and went back to work. With two hands he grabbed the center of the bush wall and pulled, rotating his shoulders and pulling again, hard, until the foliage unraveled, dirt fell onto his boots, and the mesh loosened enough for him to drag a pile of it to the center of the yard, an unraveling tail still stretching back to the narrow passage, and drop the bulk at the rim of the fire pit. There the boy stood, now wearing a thick, green cardigan and unbuckled shoes. Mike's cheeks twitched.

"Boy—I told you to stay inside." He yanked the trailing brush, and when it unloosened quickly, unexpectedly, he fell forward; his boot stuck in the soggy grass.The boy remained quiet and still as the fog.

"Do you speak? Don't the Kacvinskys speak to you?" The boy stared.

For a moment, Mike didn't move, he only wondered what the boy was thinking when he looked at him that way. He wondered how far back the boy could remember. What he might say if he opened his mouth. How his voice would sound. Mike felt that if the boy did speak, the ground would rise with the sound and suck Mike's boot and body into the earth.

The boy opened his mouth. "What are the trees for?" he asked. His voice was light and raspy and stung the nerves.

Mike twisted his boot from the mud. "Burning 'em," he said, sniffing loudly.

Gathering the whole group of branches, Mike dragged them over to the edge of the hole and shoved everything in. The dry pear

leaves shook and rustled, several drifted off, and the boy caught one between his palms, giggling again. Mike's throat flinched, and a short laugh, like a hiccup, pushed through his lips.

"This here," he pointed to the pit, "is a fire pit. It's to keep the flames in one spot." The boy's eyes danced over the pit and branches. He crushed his leaf in his fist and wiped it onto his sweater. "The hole helps keep the flames in one spot—" Mike raised his hands in front of him. "Keeps the fire kindling and moving. Growing." Mike motioned the spreading of fire with his fingers, and the boy's head moved from side to side. "So, now what do you think's next, kid? To burn this? We need one more thing."

The boy sucked his bottom lip, and, with a soft, firm voice, he said: "Fire."

This surprised Mike. "You gunned it, kid. Fire." Mike slapped his leg. The boy let out a rolling laugh and his eyes dipped in and glistened.

From his chest pocket Mike withdrew a small, red box, slid back the lid, and lowered it to the boy's chin. The boy peered down at the compact row of blue-headed stick matches. Mike pinched one from the box, held its nose under the boy's. "Smell that?" The boy sniffed. "That's phosphor. Means it's fresh." Mike swiped the head against the lid, and a warm, orange flame burst from the blue tip. A sneeze of smoke whirled upward. The boy watched the flame roll down the stick, golden blond with a blue, hot base.

Lowering the burning match to the branches, Mike lit the parameter under the brush in three spots and repeated with a second match. The small flames caught and climbed up the wood.

Mike leaned his head toward the boy's. "You like that?" he asked. The boy nodded. "Want to try it yourself?" The boy withdrew his eyes from the fire and fixed them on Mike's. He nodded again, his eyes round as rocks. Mike saw his face reflected in the boy's irises; it was white and creased.

He thought of the night the boy was born, and the smell of the wafting smoke mixed with the memory of gin on sour breath. He remembered looking at the doctor's trail of slush that his boots had left when he'd staggered through their house and into their bedroom, puzzled at the smell of alcohol but ignoring it. Mike remembered sitting at the kitchen table during the birth, comparing the fine grains in the wood to the fine grooves of his thumbprint to distract him from the moans, but wanting to go in when Anna's voice turned to pleads for help. He remembered imagining himself slamming down the bedroom door and boxing in the doctor's ears, but convincing himself it was just part of the labor. He remembered Anna's words shortly after their marriage: "Don't give in. Don't sit under the flames if Rome ever burns," which echoed in his mind the day he handed Mrs. Kacvinsky the baby, having convinced himself he was not fit to raise a boy alone despite what he knew would be Anna's objection. And he remembered, as the baby cried, turning his inner ear from the things he knew she would most likely tell him.

Now, watching the blaze, he could hear her words somewhere in the back of his mind, fighting back.

Soon the underside of the pile in the fire pit was bright and burning. Flames curled around branches and foliage. Leaves sizzled and turned to ash. Mike's cheeks burned. The boy looked

small in front of the flames, his hair frizzing and waving in the wind of the smoke. The boy stared at Mike, waiting for direction to strike his own match.

Mike's throat stiffened and he swallowed hard, nearly choking on the smell of charred wood. He squeezed the boy's shoulder. "You're too young to do it yourself," he said, and slid the red box back into his pocket. "Maybe next time. Maybe."

The boy nodded, and he and Mike returned their eyes to the fire. They watched the flames rise, the branches and vines slip and give way, and the leaves flutter and drift into nothing. White smoke rolled upward from the pit and spread out, pushing back the walls of the fog until much of the land was visible: the house and the shed, the wet, green pastures, and Mike and the boy: two hazy silhouettes by the fire.

OH NO

by **C. Dylan Bassett and Summer Ellison**

Me and my secret lover meet in a diner
which is our bathroom. Toilet seat table.
Fountaindrink sink. I bang
on the pipes while my lover laughs, splashing
the bath water. My name is Franz.
My lover's name is Kafka.
We make our love a secret:
When the door opens, we scuttle
under the rug. We do not love a light.

POOL OF BETHESDA

by

Nick Jones

The flies came in on Sunday morning when we had a breakfast party. The door open for much of an hour, people coming and going. Or at least that's when I began to notice them, darting from the pile of unwashed dishes in the sink to hover over the scrambled egg residue in the nonstick pan by the stove. A pair of flies had wandered into my room by Monday morning; I spent the better part of ten minutes tracking one of them down. I swatted it out of midair, unsure of my success until I spotted it twitching on the surface of my desk. I crushed it in a sheet of toilet paper and raised my arms in a triumphant salutation for Caesar after tossing the vanquished into the trash can. "Are you not entertained?!" The plebeians bumble toward the concession stands.

The other found its way into the death trap between the window pane and the blinds, where it buzzed as I typed away at an application essay. In this way we were united by problems—matters of life and death.

Mine: raise the blinds to kill the fly, the fly flies before I can kill it. Leave it there and it will die eventually, but not before it rattles against the glass at intervals of seven seconds, on and on, trapped

in the eternity of a static moment. Soon I am left to wonder at how it, weighing less than an ounce, could possibly bring me to my wit's end. Undone by a fly, pushed over the edge by buzzing wings. Ultimately, an embarrassment.

His (Hers? Its?): What appeared to be access to the outdoors and all the rotting crabapples and canine waste a housefly could ever want is actually a transparent but unbreakable barrier. A fatal disappointment. Behind it an opaque barrier that explodes with a resounding smack at intervals of fifteen seconds after the guy behind the barrier quits pacing the room and decides to initiate a campaign of terrorism, smacking the blinds against the window with frustrated fanaticism, hoping to keep the fly in an uninterrupted state of flight in order to exhaust the fly and thereby cause its untimely death without having to risk opening an avenue of escape by raising the blinds.

But this is only half of the story. The groundwork for Sunday's invasion had been laid the Friday previous, when I was again typing away at said application essay and I heard the splat of something fallen. I came out and saw Billy with a towel mopping up the floor under the spot where his trusted talisman had been tacked to the top of the jamb. A plastic bag filled with water, something Billy had picked up while living in Georgia. Supposedly, the light hits the water held in the bag and reflects back in ways that confuse and demoralize flies, gnats, and mosquitoes. "No way I'm going over there," they say, keeping their distance from the house that emits this eerie glow.

I like to maintain a healthy skepticism toward these Southern customs and voodoo tricks, but for the month that the sandwich

baggie stood guard over the kitchen I can't recall a single gnat finding its way inside, despite the clouds of blurry dots hovering above the overwatered lawn outside. And now, with our defenses lowered, though the flies from Sunday have either been hunted down or gone on to the great compost pile in the sky without my assistance, I wait for the arrival of flies thick as locusts. Such a fragile balance at play here: some meager plastic and refracted light, and I stand to lose so much.

Even though they aren't there, I hear them buzzing in the window pane as I lie down for the night. The endless droning continues, low enough that I think it might just be tires against road on University Ave. or power lines murmuring in the dark.

Or, in simpler terms, I can't sleep tonight.

* * *

I went back to Hungary this summer. The first night found me at the Lowcostel, on the northern edge of the main city park, because my flight got in late enough that I didn't want to impose on friends. A British kid made conversation with me for a half hour longer than I wanted to be awake; he was friendly and on the last leg of a tour through the main cities of Eastern Europe. He spent his time walking up and down the tourist streets, walking up and down the hills of Buda and across the bridges that span the Duna. I wanted to tell him to go to mindenféleképen try some paprikás csirke, and to stay away from hurka and disznó sajt, and, if he was feeling brave, to go to the kinai piac and watch the crime lords strut

around with stacks of American dollars while the ware hawkers play dice on an upturned cardboard box.

But he was just passing through and could see the city only as a short, shapeless dream. A blur of old brick and steel bridges, fast water moving through and out of the city, down through the heart of Europe and into the depths of the sea. I've seen this river so iced over, that on the banks it didn't move at all—the chunks broken off and floating in the center, they turned like dancers on top of the dark water. With the Chain Bridge lit up at night, and Buda Castle above it glowing soft yellow, the water is like a bottomless pit between the stars. Nobody knows where it leads, but at least it goes somewhere.

We used to drive around at night with the windows down, listening to Jay-Z and feeling great—the city and the flashing lights of traffic and clubs so alive, we thought it the very picture of freedom. But as you wander through Pest in the dark, buzzing from one place to another, you can see the castle on the hill watching motionless through the night, and all the monuments of stone unwilling to join in your festivities. And then you come crashing down, the excitement of the night collapsing in on its own gravity, and every street is the same as you've walked before, and all the people carousing through the city aren't moving in any significant way relative to the vastness of the universe, and you could reduce the journey of ten years across unknown continents to a mere aberration well within the margin of error; an illusion of movement, of progress toward the outer limit of time, a limit you never reach because it is not there, and you think you are straining toward it, but in reality, you are another statue cast in bronze near the Parliament

building, watching the water slip away but never able to take that step over the edge of the bridge, nobody to help you into the water when the time is right. I've heard that the current is so swift that it pulls the bodies under and they don't pop up until a few kilometers downstream.

I lay in bed half asleep, listening to groups of other travelers stumbling in throughout the night, trying at first to place their languages and relationship to each other, then later in the night barely managing to discern their number or gender. I was up before daybreak. I gathered my things, walked out onto the street, and dropped the door key in the mailbox by the gate. I wandered through the park, already sweating beneath the straps of my overladen backpack, trying to step lightly past the drunks slumbering like peaceful, bearded babies covered in dirt on the ground next to bushes and park benches.

I stayed with Hajnalka on my second night in Pest, at her flat on Dohány Street. She'd moved up from Szeged recently with her teenage brother. At just twenty-four, she was playing mother to him, making sure their family of two stayed on their feet in the big city. At night she took me through the center of Pest, past crowds clustered around the restaurant patios where they watched the Spain-Portugal match. We made it to the river, where the city becomes quiet. Across the water, Buda is just a picture to look at, the castle lit up at the top of the hill. She took me to what she said was the oldest tree she knew of in the whole city. Its massive trunk was almost parallel with the ground as it groaned over sideways, propped up at its center by an iron pillar. Hajnalka pointed out that, despite the sorry state of the trunk, the tree still put out new branches and

green leaves. "They used to execute people here when the tree was young," she said, "and people say the blood flowed to the roots and made the tree strong. The blood still keeps it alive today."

She left for work early in the morning, only a few hours after we had marveled at the tree. I woke briefly when she came over to where I slept and draped a blanket over me, touching my shoulder for a moment before she left the room. I kept my eyes closed, unsure whether I was actually awake, almost embarrassed to witness the kindness she meant to do in secret. A few hours later I woke to the noise of cars on the street and the smell of cigarette smoke drifting through the open window. I left a note and a seashell that I had brought from home on the pillow.

* * *

Leinenbach and I decided that the best use of our day in Budapest would be to spend a few hours at the Széchenyi Bathhouse, if only so we could get a few pictures with the old men in Speedos who spend the day playing chess while chest-deep in the mineral-infused waters of the main outdoor pool. We were leaving that night for a month in Romania doing research in the boonies, and it seemed a good idea to wash away the stress of a transatlantic flight before embarking on an all-night bus ride.

From the onset, it was clear that we were out of our element. Hordes of old folks with leathery tans trudged around in every direction without seeming in any way lost, dozens of pools that looked the same but were somehow different, packs of foreigners just as confused as we were making up for their lack of familiarity

with the place by confidently wandering off through unknown doors. After having lived in Hungary for two years I felt like I knew most of the rules: don't stare at people on the metro, even if they're staring at you; know what you want at the bakery before it's your turn in line, and pay with exact change or be prepared for the death glare from the cashier; don't ask for water during meals. But the bathhouse had its own set of rules, policed not by the "obviously you're not from around here" stares from strangers, but by actual whistle-blowing lifeguards who, given the linguistic confusion of a bathhouse packed with Anglos, Russians, Italians, and Germans, delivered their chastisement not with a verbal explanation of the wrongdoing but instead with one outstretched arm, like a sports fan expressing disgust with the officiating crew. "I can't believe you think that's a foul," they seemed to say.

We sat in one of the lukewarm pools and examined the chart on the wall showing the mineral content of the water. Gyogyvíz: medicine water, the old folks come here on the doctor's orders. We leaned back against the edge of the pool, talking about how ridiculous it was to march off to the mineral baths daily in an effort to live forever, as if the water were infused with bits of the true cross. "Just let the gyogyvíz heal you, dude," Leinenbach told me, first half-laughing, then closing his eyes as if in deep contemplation. We stretched out our legs, letting the water work its magic on muscles sore from plodding around Pest on foot, since we were too cheap to buy a metro pass.

Gradually we pieced the rules together: no swimming in the cold pool without a cap, no drinking beer while in any of the pools, and no hoisting girls onto your shoulders while in the pool, Mr.

Ill-advised Tattoos, even if she is your girlfriend. And beyond the whistle-enforced rules there seemed to be a prescribed regimen for bathing, one that denounced our method of going from pool to pool randomly and instead elevated the bathhouse experience to a highly structured art form. Time limits varying with the temperature of the water, stricter time limits for the saunas and steam rooms, silence in the sauna, strange stretching rituals that the old folks perform in the water. I felt like I was in a Kafka novel when a heavy, older man came into the sauna room, faced the wall and started jogging in place. His pace was slow and rhythmic, almost delicate, as if he were trying to tread grapes without splashing the juice on his legs. He jogged at least ten minutes straight, never looking away from the wall that was less than a foot from his face.

* * *

I lie awake wondering how long I've been lying awake, calculating what time it could be and how much longer I have until I should be up and about, how much time I could sleep if I were to fall asleep right . . . now. The moment at which the alarm clock will sound is a sort of unbending boundary against which the hours I could be sleeping shrink down to minutes, then seconds. I am too aware of how the grains fall through the hourglass, too busy with my calculations to let go and fall out of myself and into the dreams that collapse time into some strange fable that seems possible but not likely.

It can be so quiet in the house at night that I wonder whether I could be at that moment capable of speech. If I keep still, stare at

the wall instead of typing or fidgeting or flicking the light switch on and off, and if my right eye stops twitching, nothing moves. The house stands guard over the world as we left it until we are ready to pick up where we left off the next morning: the mug left on the coffee table, the backpack against the chair, the books thrown across the couch, the dime left in the middle of the carpet. The tree falling in an unobserved forest could be completely silent as far as I'm concerned; it is of greater importance to know whether time exists in the moments when no trees fall or even sway in the breeze and all the animals lie motionless in their dens and treetop nests.

Were I more coordinated, I would consider taking a walk up to campus and back while standing on my hands. Just to break the world from its trance, to get the whole thing spinning again as it balances on the turtle's back. At two in the morning there isn't anyone to see you trudging down the sidewalk doing a handstand, nobody to tell you that you look silly or that you're upsetting social order by insisting that the world turn itself upside-down for a few minutes. I could look down at my feet as they tiptoe through the stars and imagine falling off the globe, into the darkest nothing, eventually spaghettified as I'm pulled into a black hole. Pulled thin, threadlike as I approach the gravitational singularity, I wonder if I could become ribbon enough to tie a bow around the universe; an infinitely long strand for an infinite mass, I could wrap the whole thing up to be placed under the tree for Christmas.

I have not faith enough to sleep; I don't know enough of its mechanics to trust it. Whenever we experience sleep we are by definition incapable of observation, so in a sense I have never slept, or at least I have never experienced sleep as a self that I recognize. My

sleeping self is a stone statue on the ocean floor, with kelp swaying above it, blocking out all light—no sound, no warmth. Sleep has its conquest one way or another; if I do not present myself as a willing subject while the sun hides and I lay wrapped in blankets, it pulls me under during class or as I read even the most engaging books. The professor paces at the front of the lecture hall, explaining how to calculate the present value of an annuity, and then, suddenly, I'm gone.

* * *

The one time I've ever passed out completely, I was at my cousins' house during summer vacation. I hadn't drunken enough water, had skipped breakfast, and wasn't used to the dry heat. I stood up after sitting on the couch for an hour catching up with the family, and then everything faded. I remember looking at the piano when I came to and trying to match it, like the Rosenbergs' Jell-O box, to something I had known, something that seemed seven lifetimes ago. My mom says I fell backward and hit my head on the piano bench and then lay on the ground, twitching slightly. But I know that I fell down, down into the dark until I was floating there, alone, working on a poem for years (I don't know what it was about), arguing with myself over word choice, reading the lines out loud until I became aware of some swelling chord as if out of a broken church organ, building in an awful crescendo until it pulled my eyes open.

Perhaps in the moment of death we lose our grip on the here and now and drift into the dream of another life. We are born so

completely into the new world that we forfeit all awareness of our dying moments in the world we left behind. And as months of time are compacted into the short seconds that I lay twitching on the floor next to the piano, we live an entire lifetime within what is a second or two in the life that contains our truest death. But we never reach that first death, drifting into another existence as we lie dying at the conclusion of the second life. If the y-axis were "real" time, the time that ticks away in the base reality, the one we left when in the process of dying for the first time, and the x-axis were time as we experience it regardless of what layer we occupy, we could experience infinity within the final seconds before our death. We could follow x-values ad infinitum and never reach the y-value we aim for, the moment of death. The last breath, multiplied into endless lives and worlds, like light split into a full spectrum, expanding, filling an entire range of values from one end of endlessness to the other.

I've heard that our souls were never born and can never die, which leaves us stuck in the middle of infinity, stationary, hamsters turning wheels forever.

* * *

After venturing inside to discover the indoor pools, we found the steam room. The steam was thick enough that when I first stepped in I thought it was empty: silence and a curtain of mist. But with a few steps toward center, figures materialized like foreboding apparitions; what appeared an empty room was in fact packed with patrons. They lined the walls, the mist obscuring their faces, a herd

of unidentified limbs and torsos. The hot air burned in my lungs, sharp with the scent of eucalyptus. My head, like a bottle uncorked, all the tension out.

If I could run fast enough that everyone else on the soccer field seemed to be walking, then oozing from one place to another, then not even moving at all, my tendons might dry up and burn away; my muscles might boil into vapor, gone into space. It seems to be a question of will, of mental energy. My legs would move when I told them to, as fast as I told them to, until they reached a speed at which the legs protested and the mind started to take the protests seriously. It would consider easing up when instead it should push harder, to the true limit of how fast a leg could move. Because we'll never escape if we quit once the pain starts, once we see we're approaching the outer limits of normal. We need to get past it, we need to be a blur; I know it's frightening to think of what lies beyond, outside of material existence, but it couldn't match the thought of the stillness of night unbroken by a ticking clock; noiselessness between the stars; heavy coins in a coat pocket; houses buried to the roof in post-flood mud, wire pulled thin thin thin never snapping, buckets never hitting the bottom of the well. I think that if I could run fast enough, I could burn up into nothing.

* * *

Leinenbach and I rushed out of the steam room and into the coldest pool, empty, the water icy still. It was a sort of joke. Run in, run out, a quick dip like the Finns do when they break through ice in the stream outside the sauna. Like manly Finns. But we stayed

in the pool, legs pulled to the chest, up to our necks in the water. It was almost a pleasant thought, almost something to smile at. My heartbeat slowed slightly, calmed as if by divine command, and I thought it might stop altogether, it might just stop and I'd drift away. I know it's quite funny; I can be quite funny sometimes.

We chatted in short statements, drawing breath like inverted coughs. Our English brought a stranger to the pool; he wanted to know if we were Americans. He was from Maryland, probably the same age as us, and seemed to be there alone. I wondered what he was doing near the cold pool of the Széchenyi Bathhouse alone, and why he was talking to us. I had never met someone from Maryland before.

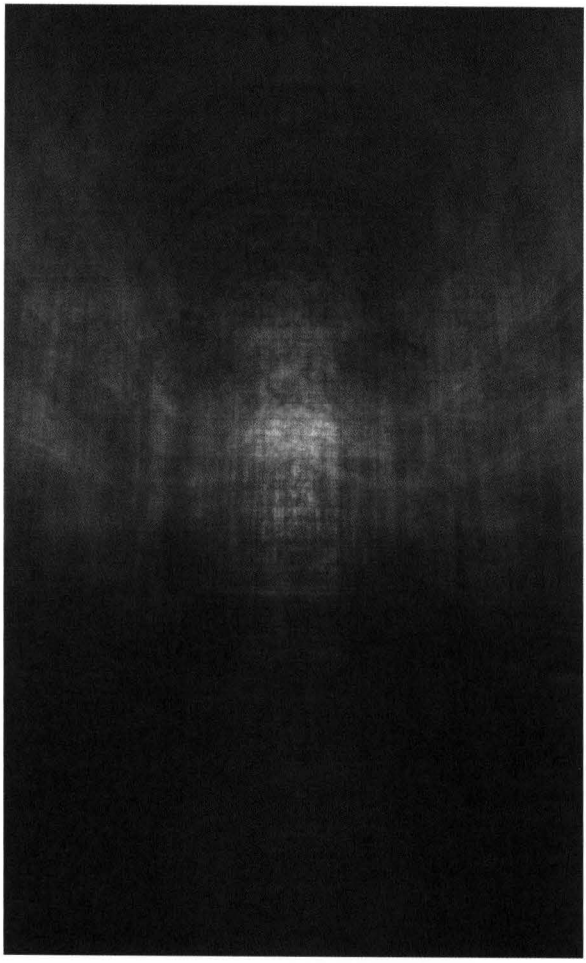
I thought about the ship scuttled at the end of the pier at Seacliff State Beach, south of Santa Cruz. I saw it when I was a child, the ship at the end of the pier, filled with concrete, low in the water. The waves rolled in but the ship didn't move; it never moves. Inside the exposed hull strange currents swirl, dark water topped with foam. There was something terrible about that ship; I wanted not to run away, but to have never seen it, to have never thought of the possibility that it could exist, anchored down just below the surface of the water. What mountain of a wave could move that ship? What wall of water, of skyscraper height, could break the will of stone and iron sunk in water?

For a moment I dip below the surface, fully immersed. The buzz of conversation gone, the bathhouse now cleansed of all its foreign chatter, of the Americans and Spaniards and Poles and Turks. It must have been my chance at a moment of healing, beneath the

silence of cold, my pulse whispering through the water in a timeless language.

* * *

I drove through the night to get back to school after a weekend at home in California. The illuminated dots dividing the road moved along faster and faster until they blurred into a solid line, but the dark outline of mountains on the horizon seems stationary, as if the road rolling beneath me was just the belt of a treadmill. After hours of driving, I can't tell what's been done with the last ten minutes, and whole cities slide past me unnoticed; I grip the steering wheel thinking that it is the external manifestation of my fatigue and if I can choke it dead, outside of me there's no danger of slipping off the road and crashing into the side of a hill. When I can't hear the engine I know I've faded too far; I grip the wheel more tightly and look for some sign of light on the road in front of me that can prove my eyes are open. Moths illuminated by the headlights dart toward me, halted when they splat against the windshield. Help me through the night.



POEMS

by **Estée Arts**

These things don't happen in daylight
Or when you're watching
They're shy
Or perhaps too respectable
They lurk, prowl and sigh
Playing with children
Then drinking bourbon.

STATEMENT :
SUBURBAN SUNSETS

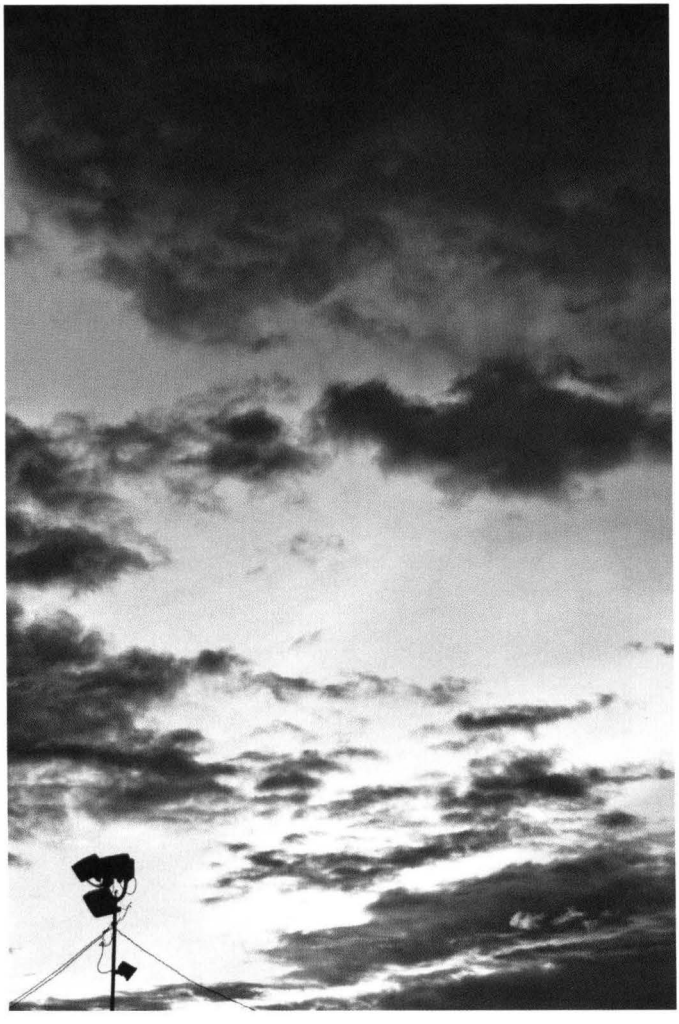
BY CLARK GOLDSBERRY

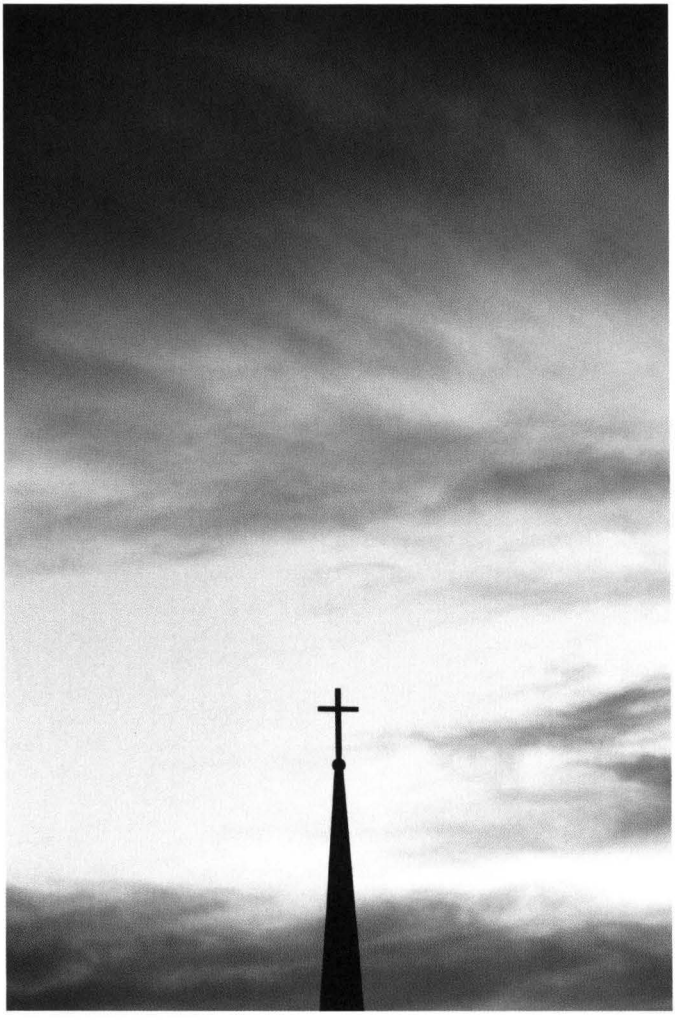
The world is full of perfect, almost beatific, contradiction.

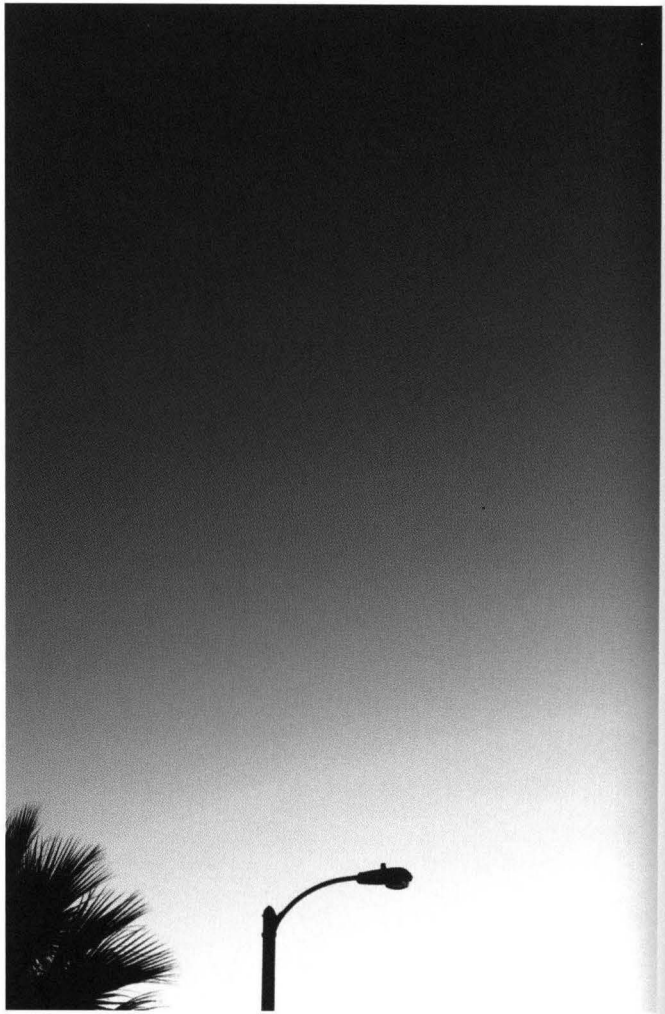
A year ago, I began looking for visual paradoxes in the world around me—equivalents to soothe a conflicted mind. My worldview was expanding and I needed to make peace with the truths I had been taught since childhood. In testing their efficacy and utility, I was torn between counterpoints.

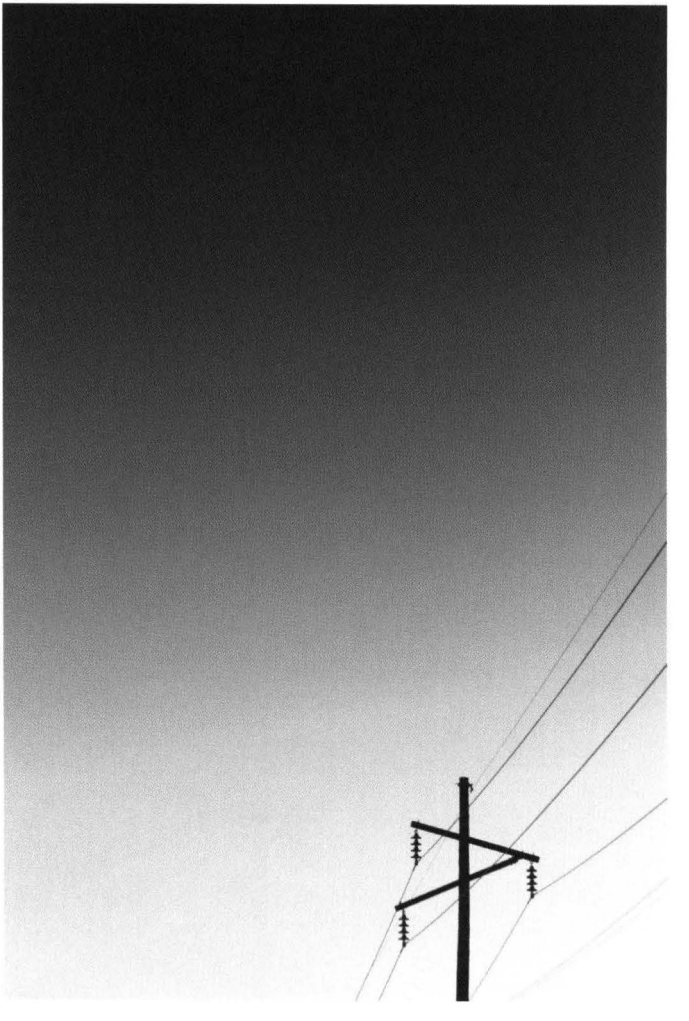
In that process, I began noticing visual juxtapositions in the landscape around me. And I used a camera to capture them at twilight, the midpoint between day and night. They became self-portraits, demonstrating my own pull between safety and exploration, the known and unknown, the natural and unnatural. I added to the project daily for over a year.

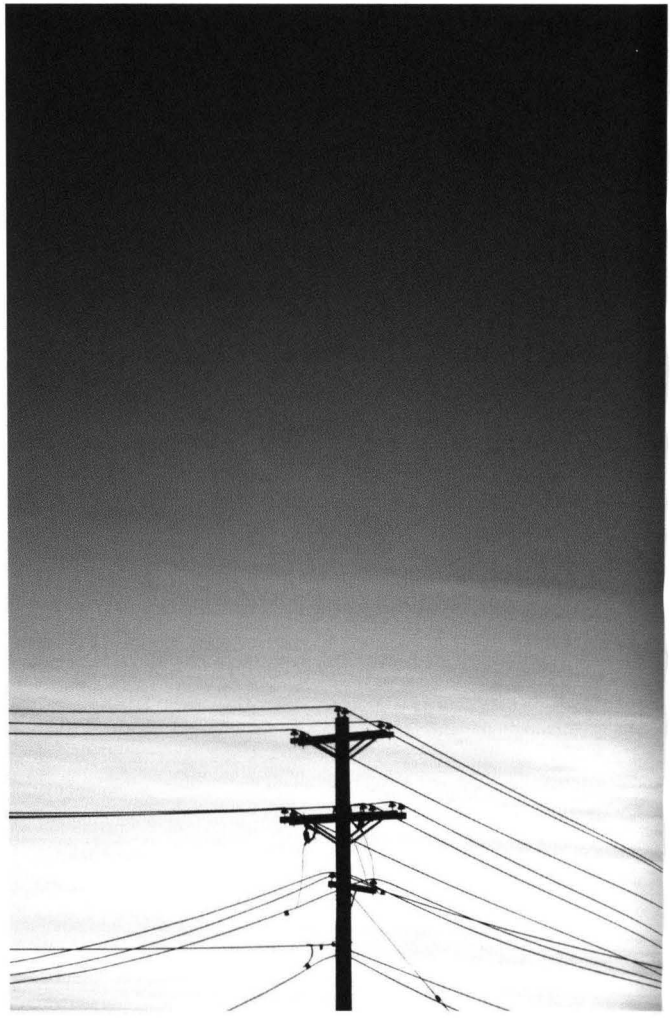
The images aren't about absolutes. They're about the interplay of opposites—how they fit together and compliment one another. To me, these paradoxes became pristine. I've realized that I can still function in society even when assurance is the exception and ambivalence the rule. Ultimately, they have become an exercise in confronting and embracing duality—acknowledging that there is an opposing thought for every impression and ideology, and yet, there is harmony and wholeness in opposition.











PROSAIC

by **Truedson J.S.**

There hath passed away a glory from the earth.
—William Wordsworth

walking down 8th
I can't help but notice
people on their porches
with sunglasses firmly
situated on sweaty noses
some doubled up, others
masked again with cardboard
slits staring downwards
at those stars
that are shaded
by the earth
only from her sun's
lonely rays. Because
only the little kids are
brave enough to
look naked-eyed
at the beauty mark
we call Venus as she
transits for the last time
in any of our lifetimes
that enormous Elysian
field of UV radiation.

But I am no longer
a child I think as I
stop in front of the old
Campus Plaza anyway
& contemplate the
mundane crowd
that stares & stares &
stares everyone looking
up at the sky as if a planet
& a star weren't all the
most normal things
in the universe.

SIGH 001

by Maddison Colvin

You rest in my mind there
at the base of stairs
the dark corners of rooms
in dreams

I see you then in verses
Neruda's gentleness
the fingertips Ondaatje lifts
the open air of Eliot
you wait in blank end-pages
wordless
unfolding

SUNDAY'S BABY SHOWER

by **Estée Arts**

Balloons bouncing back and forth
Taped under the ceiling fan.
Baggy blue couches stained,
Brown spots, white patches.

"I shouldn't be smoking with the baby"
She says,
Standing outside
"but I am."
A large blue poster,
Big black writing:
It's a boy!

A fly explores the cake,
Climbing solid white frosting
To reach the blue cursive rivers
That say
'Congrats!'

Guests in brightly colored tank tops
Gone a sour yellow under the arms,
Tight around big bellies and overgrown breasts.
Hiding not much skin, but every secret.
Round young cheeks,
Heavy makeup- tired eyes,

Children
Wander. Sometimes falling on the carpet.
Dirty feet, dirty hands, screaming.
A pacifier rubbed off and stuck back in place
By fingers that fumble
Hairpins and yesterday's curls.
She comes back
Inside
"Sorry,
"I was just talking to my husband."
We wait.
"We heard he's doing good,"
Someone says.
"Taking some classes in there to stay busy."
"Yep."
She smiles.
We're all proud.

SIGH 003

by Maddison Colvin

I wake up in morning light
stretching, luxuriant,
feeling as though my limbs could reach
through my window,
through the city,
over seas,
around the ends of the earth
and in the antipodes
find each other softly.
I stretch farther
and grow paper-thin.
Without you there
to form a ring around me—
circumscribing the hollow of my back—
my shoulders, waist—
framing my body's margins—
now, alone and ill-defined, I fade—
borderless against the sheets.

SUGAR LOAF

by **Garrett Root**

The red rock may be a huge heart.
May be God's,
May be mine,
May be yours.
And it has been worn by wind and water.
If it's God's then the wind is our sins.
If it's mine then the water is a woman.
If it's yours then both are experience.
But I can't imagine the red rock without its
Sensuous slot canyons and jagged cliffs
So let the water flow and the wind blow.

THE MAN FROM ST. GEORGE

by **Truedson J.S.**

An antique dining chair
props him up or at least!
what's left of him
& he sits inverse
with one hand on the spine
& an elbow on the shoulder
& he wears a heavy canvas jacket
that he's pulled over his head
–lots of pockets & zippers
that hold a thousand mystere–
& the temperature is unbearable
as I can only see my reflection!
in his big focals
but not in the eyes
that peer from within
his canvas cave
& he tells me a story
or more a narrative
about circles & life & age
& I listen carefully
because I know he can
tell that I can tell that!
he is important
because he comes
from another August

& a different America
but the same Red Hills
& Black Rock
& Snow Canyon
& he tells me that
life is one big annulus
& that every voyage
every wandering
every pilgrimage
every rite
is really but a return!
to the sensuous hills
that curve around us
blushing bright red at the
touch of that river Virgin
& I am still a virgin
he whispers!
with the senselessness!
of old age & the honesty!
of someone who is still
returning

THE LEATHERBACKS AT MATURA

by **George Handley**

For Gary

Yearn for a time when no one knew
the tide rises on the coast at midnight.
When breakers moaned alone and wind
belied a world in the dark, denied
all things their will to disappear.

Wait long and still under the stars,
with eyes open, dreaming that your eyes
are just shells, beaming
through the dark sand to the sky,
because to lie still is a prayer for birthing.

Darkness emerges from the foam, lurching
in shapeless anonymity, riding a rhythm
with ancient and silent tears.

You will fight the urge to stand, to sing,
because if you accept that you are nothing,
she will furrow the sand and leave.

You won't watch as she slips
into the breakers because you trust
that in time you will peck away

at those holes, break this world
and fight your way to light, water and blood.

THE ETERNAL RETURN

by Kylan Rice

I love it downtown, bought flowers.
Eight little theaters showed the same movie
In which nobody died: a noir film whittled
Down to a hatbrim only, a svelt gat,
Down to leg-work rape and grapefruit.
Afterward, we paired up, had fun
Buying peaches, day dates,
Wolfish oranges.
Joy always humps
Out of the corner of my eye—then, when I look,
Wings become meat in a bucket.
With that I'm back, lashed to my sea.
I go downtown, fill out forms, store porn,
Greet the would-be light
Bumming under Xerox screens.
We rendez-vous at the druggist's
You tell me, *too bad, so sad.*
I sit on your lap and yank on your dress, hoping it's real;
It comes off in hunks. The movie
Blazes with children and trebuchets.
I sit behind you, throw kernals down your shirt.
You tell me I haven't changed a bit. I burn
In this city, where the lighting has always been perfect.

PLOTTING IN THE SECRETARIAL POOL

by

Angie Pelekidis

"Here's what you do," Kathie tells you. She rolls her chair away from her desk and closer to yours, covertly scanning the large office space you share in the basement of Montauk Middle School in Borough Park, Brooklyn. Last year, you were evicted from your office on the first floor so that that space could be used to create additional classrooms to house an ever-expanding population of students. Kathie's glance returns to you once she's established that no one important can overhear her. A boy named Anton sits in one of the wooden chairs lined up against the wall on the other side of the long counter that divides the room. From where you sit, all you can see is the top of Anton's head, but you can hear his sniffles. A few minutes earlier, Marian, the school nurse, had brought him down to the basement to wait for his mother to pick him up. Kathie is unconcerned with his presence and keeps talking. "Set up a fake online profile on that dating site Bern's using. Find a picture, maybe of your cute niece. The one from her 18th birthday party where she's wearing a short white skirt and heels, right? You've been a secretary for what, ten years? So use all your skills to write this profile. Call yourself something like "Girliegirl1983."

You feel, for a moment, like you should be writing this down, in shorthand maybe. Like it's Principal Melman dictating an important memo you need to forward to all the teachers, who buzz above you between their classroom cells while below them you and Kathie do the drone-work of school secretaries. Kathie's fifty-three and twice divorced. A woman of the world. She's taken you under her wing ever since the break up with Bern, who teaches English at Montauk. Leaning back in her chair, Kathie hoists one leg over the other then grabs hold of her ankle to keep it in place. In this position, her thick thigh tests the seam and tensile strength of her poly-rayon pants. You look away from her to the counter where an open box of chocolate-covered donuts, courtesy of Kathie, offers itself. But you've already eaten two this morning with your coffee and can't afford to have anymore. Not with the seven pounds you gained in the last month.

She goes on with her plan. "Girliegirl is twenty-four years old and your opposite: petite and thin, curvy yet athletic. You know the type. Bern's fantasy girl. She's young, dumb, and up for anything. And not complicated like he said you were, remember?"

How could you forget that, or any of the other reasons Bernie gave you when he broke up with you five months into it. You were too demanding and you suffocated him. All this after you called him four times in two days. But you had legitimate reasons for doing that. You needed to know if he liked celery in his tuna salad for the lunch you were preparing for both of you. And if he needed you to pick up his dry cleaning on your way home since it was more convenient for you than him. Gosh, you were just being nice.

A nod from you gives Kathie permission to go on. "Then you wait. You delete all the unwanted winks and emails that come your way from men as deluded and dishonest as he is; fifty-year-olds who think they've got something to offer a woman half their age, men desperately reaching back to their youth by reaching out to you. You wait for his username, 'Mrknight,' right? to show up in your mailbox. When it comes, you spring like a cobra after a rat."

Kathie's clawed hand lashes out. You blink involuntarily, as if she's going to hit you.

Her face relaxes from its almost-snarl and looks thoughtful. "If he doesn't take the prettily packaged bait, wink at him. If that doesn't work, email him. Find one little thing in his profile that Girliegirl has in common with him and send him a short, chatty note. Something like: 'OMG! I don't believe you only drink German beer! Me too!'"

Kathie's voice and body rise as she says this, and she wiggles her upper body in her chair before settling back down into her Buddha-like torso. "That'll be enough to show your interest without sounding desperate. No guy, not even Bern, likes a woman who's needy."

Inwardly you cringe. Three months into your relationship you wanted to see him during the week and not just on the weekends, maybe even stay over at his place instead of only yours. That's when Bernie told you he needed to take it slow. Because he still wasn't sure about getting into another serious relationship only two years after his last one with Harriet West, the school's former history teacher (who was now married and a stay-at-home mom). It had ended when she cheated on Bernie with her current husband. That

type of heartbreak took a long time to recover from, he told you, and you couldn't help but understand, having experienced it for yourself on numerous occasions in the past.

You watch Kathie as she unhooks her leg to squash a gray-brown spider that crawls out from under her desk. She wipes her shoe on the floor then looks up at you. "He responds and you write back. You exchange several emails and write things like, 'I can't believe all the books you've read. You must be so smart.' Make it the type of writing that drives an English teacher like him crazy when it comes from his students but that he forgives instantly in someone like Girliegirl. He's gonna think he can teach her a thing or two. Life hasn't jaded her like it has women our age."

You're nearly twenty years younger than Kathie, but don't point this out. You think about Bernie's profile, which you've memorized by now, though each time you read it feels like a knife in your heart knowing its purpose. Sure, what Kathie's advising is one huge lie, but does Bernie really "give 100% of himself when he gets it back?" And is he "truly ready for the real thing" like he says? Or is it just that what he had with you was a "fake thing?" A not-quite-real thing? Too bad it was all real to you. Would you be feeling this awful if it wasn't?

"Miss? Can I have a donut?" Anton asks. The tall counter turns him into a disembodied head that talks in a nasal and faint Eastern European accent.

Kathie rolls her eyes at you, but before she can make some sort of snotty comment, you take a napkin out of your desk drawer and walk over to the counter. "Here," you say, handing the boy a donut wrapped in the napkin.

"Thanks, Miss," he says.

"Try not to make a mess," Kathie tells him as he sits back down to enjoy his snack. "Where was I? Right. Eventually he'll ask Girliegirl for her number or send his. Of course you can't talk to him. So what you do is suggest meeting over coffee at the Barnes and Noble on Seventh Avenue in Park Slope. There's plenty of hiding places to watch him from in there, and he'll agree. He'll show up all eager to meet this girl who he already imagines in his bed, as his trophy date for the end-of-term party. Just imagine his face as the whole thing goes down." Kathie nods her head slowly and satisfaction contorts her mouth into an ugly purse.

You study her closely, the puffy skin under her eyes, the deep lines across her neck and forehead that no amount of makeup can conceal. You remember that at least one of her husbands left her for another woman. She looks tired, and suddenly you want to weep for her, to hug her tightly. Because you're afraid that one day you may become her. Except you can't even get someone to actually marry you. You hear your father's voice in your head, warning you that time is passing, that you'll be thirty-five soon without having produced a grandchild on whom your parents can transfer their hopes, since all your potential has led to a job as a school secretary, not even a teacher. You are unthin, unmarried, unlovable, and unlike your good-looking older sister, the CPA. Everything is un, but you are not unkind.

The sound of ragged sniffling intrudes on your thoughts, and for a moment you imagine it's you, but then you remember Anton sitting on the other side of the counter. When you look over at him, he's using his forearm like a violin bow below his nose. Chocolate

smudges around his mouth make him look like he's made out with the donut, and you have an urge to take another napkin and clean his face. Bernie was once that young. What did he look like then? And what kind of boy was he? One who loved books more than sports. Who was teased for being overweight and wearing glasses. A lot like you.

Kathie points an accusing finger at your head, and you defensively smooth down a long strand of your ash brown hair. You've been growing it for years and it's the only beautiful thing about you. "Make sure you wear your hair differently than you normally do. Get those dead ends cut off so it looks healthier. I'm just saying. Put on some sunglasses and a hat, maybe even a raincoat. Watch his humiliation as he checks his watch, looks toward the entrance over and over, and evenutally gives up on his fantasy."

Can you do this? Is it in you? This morning as you circled around the school trying to find a parking spot on Borough Park's crowded streets, you braced yourself for the day ahead, which was filled with the potential that you might see him in a hallway, though you made it a point to never leave the basement, not even during lunch. After you parked your car, you saw a short man in a trench coat walking toward the school and thought it was him. And you felt sick from the fear that he would turn around. You ducked behind a tree to avoid that possibility, hiding from Bernie while wanting nothing more than to be with him. It occurred to you then that this must be the feeling mothers have when they give their newborns up for adoption.

Kathie is still talking. "Imagine what he looks like on his way home. He might even cry a little. He's a crier, right? Oh stop! Don't

feel sorry for him. Did he feel any pity for you? When he was canceling dates at the last minute? When he refused to hold your hand or claim you as his girlfriend at the Christmas party? Didn't you hear him tell his buddy Sal you two were keeping it "caz?" Or how `bout his flirting with the new teachers fresh out of college the last time we went out for happy hour, like he had the slightest chance? You saw how cocky he got. All you're doing is bringing him back down to earth."

Kathie slowly lowers her hand, palm down, until it's only a foot off the ground. You look away from her set face to your niece's graduation picture on your desk. With Gabby's slender waist and long legs, she has all the weapons she needs to win the dating wars. She will never have to resort to the type of strategy Kathie is outlining. Men are already pursuing her as though she is a celebrity, a situation you have never experienced, only shy overtures as if the man was half embarrassed of his attraction to you. And you are so jealous of Gabby that you hate what you look like even more than you normally do. But even worse, you hate her too. And the God that made you so average.

"When he gets home, he'll find one last email from Girliegirl waiting for him. It'll say, 'You really should use a more recent photo.' And that he's blocked from ever writing to her again."

Kathie must see from your expression how cruel you think this is. She puts a hand on your arm and softens her voice. "Think of it this way, you're teaching him a lesson. To lower his standards. Nothing `gainst you but you know he doesn't deserve a Girliegirl."

That may be true but you know him better than Kathie does. Remember the time you went out to dinner at that nice Italian

place in Sheepshead Bay? Had that waiter actually been rude when he took Bernie's steak back to be cooked more? Or had Bernie used this as an excuse to leave the man a bad tip? It's hard to say. You tend to think not, which is why you snuck back into the restaurant using the pretence that you had to use the restroom in order to put another $5.00 under the saltshaker. You can almost hear Bernie telling Sal about his online adventure with Girliegirl: "She was obviously psychotic. I'm lucky I got out of it."

But maybe inside he'll admit this isn't the truth. Maybe in time he'll even realize what a mistake he made ending it with you. That he was fortunate to have someone who loved and desired him in spite of his paunch and the fifteen strands of hair on his head. Someone who enjoyed cooking for him, sleeping with him, listening to him vent about how stupid his students are and how crazy his fellow teachers. He'll come to you, a humble man desperate to have you in his life again. One who recognizes you as the type of woman he needs.

"So are you gonna do it?" Kathie asks you, an expectant look on her face. You realize she sees herself in you, and Bernie has become all the men who have ever hurt her.

You shrug, which Kathie takes as a no. She snorts out a contemptuous breath through her nose. "Whatever," she says, turning back to her desk, writing you off as a fool.

You smile at Anton and ask him if he'd like another donut.

Interview with Matthew Batt

Matt is the author of *Sugarhouse*, out now with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. It's the harrowing story of renovationg a Salt Lake City crack house and his life along with it. It's a very serious book. No really, it is. Except for the funny parts.

His fiction, creative nonfiction, and reviews have appeared in *Tin House*, *The Huffington Post*, *Mid-American Review*, *fifth Wednesday*, *Quarterly West*, *Western Humanities Revies*, *Woundings East*, *The Isthmus*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salt Lake Magazine*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and in the anthropology *Food & Booze: A Tin House Literary Feast*, which the LA Times said was "Pure fun, pure joy, every last honey-colored 80-proof, diet-be-damned every one of them."

And he's almost finished with *The Enthusiast*, a collection of compulsive essays about obsessive subjects: baking sourdough bread, fixed-gear cycling, rock climbing, spelunking in third-world countries, beef-eating, parenting, and other fairly unreasonable things.

INSCAPE: How would you describe your personal writing style?

MATTHEW BATT: I would say a little bit recklessly obsessive. I find this style is what I'm better at. Some people are really good at restraint. They write like people setting fine jewels, and you don't do that with a wad of mud and a slingshot. You need a jeweler's loop and tweezers, I guess, but I find that I really need to be able to give myself permission to do really indulgent, messy drafts and then to revise twenty or thirty times. If I don't, it remains an unrepentant

mess, but I don't mind that. I like that it puts me in a position where I never feel like I have writer's block or could even get it. I know that whatever I'm putting onto the page may or may not be good, but it's more so through the revision than in that first act.

INSCAPE: What was it like to make the transition from writing short stories to a full book?

MB: I definitely started out as more of a short story writer, and I really struggled for a long time to write in a way that I could fully recognize myself in my writing. I always felt like the literary equivalent of a cover song; I could hit the notes okay, but it just didn't feel like me. And then I think it was in really the first couple of chapters of writing this book where I finally started to recognize myself in print. I was doing them episodically, not really with a book project in mind. But then I was given the advice—one of those tacky, publishing marketplace pieces of advice I wouldn't necessarily give to most of my students, but I felt like I needed to hear it at the time—which was: you either can make a collection of essays, or you can make a book. I decided I wanted to make a book, so I worked for a long time to take them from episodic, singularly focused essays into threads that run throughout. It was definitely a super challenging thing, but I think ultimately it made a big difference.

INSCAPE: What part of the writing process do you enjoy the most?

MB: I think probably the first drafts. Especially when I'm into something that I know I just need to get the whole thing on the page, I really like writing a big piece of something in as close to one sitting as possible, so sometimes it's a big fifteen or twenty page chapter in one big day. And then it's just a complete wreck and it takes months to untangle or make some kind of sense of it, but those are fun. Those really make you feel you're a writer and not just an editor. I really like that a lot.

INSCAPE: Do you try to convey specific themes or messages while you're writing, or do you just kind of go with the flow and see what happens?

MB: Definitely not in a premeditated sort of way. I really love the French definition of the word 'essay.' In French it's a verb and it means: to endeavor, to try, to attempt. I think it can be a noun too, but I like the fact that it's a verb and it's more of a stance of engagement with your work. I try to do that, and bear in mind that I'm hopefully taking on a subject that I haven't mastered or even fully understood why I'm writing about it, and for me that gives me a reason to care and to explore it. I know, a lot of great writers know the end before they start, but for me it's much more "getting the old pith helmet," and I'm Indiana Jones and I'm exploring. It's fun for me. I don't really have a pith helmet, but I'd like one.

Interview with Mark Strand

Mark Strand is recognized as one of the premier contemporary American poets as well as an accomplished editor, translator and prose writer. The hallmarks of his style are precise language, surreal imagery, and the recurring theme of absence and negation; later collections investigate ideas of the self with pointed, often urbane wit. Named the U.S. Poet Laureate in 1990, Strand's career has spanned nearly four decades, and he has won numerous accolades from critics and a loyal following among readers. In 1999 he was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his collection Blizzard of One.

INSCAPE: Can you tell us the difference between a poem and a prose piece and how you decide which is which?

MARK STRAND: Poems are divided into lines and stanzas, and prose is the question of sentences and paragraphs. The pressure on individual words in prose isn't as great as it is in a poem. One reads a poem and lingers over individual words, whereas in prose one moves right along following the characters, the plot, etc. For me, writing poetry just wore me out. I just kept beating my head against the wall, and the results were never what I ever wanted them to be. It created a life of some degree of anxiety. To get up in the morning and work on something that I didn't wholly believe in—I'd believe in it for a little while and then lose heart and finish it. Increasingly, the pleasure of writing poems diminished. Even if I thought I'd written a good poem, a month or two later I would look at it and think, "It's just another one of my poems." Well, what else was

it going to be? I wish it were someone else's poem sometimes. I wrote prose quickly, and it was a relief. I wrote maybe one or two drafts, and that was it. It was fun, and it was also a way of using up old, rough ideas I had for poems. I didn't worry about the line, cadence, meter, rhyme, etc. I enjoyed getting up in the morning and writing them. I didn't have high expectations. My notions of poetry were rather high and rarefied, and this isn't to say my ideas of prose were so lowly, but I felt some relief doing them. And if I thought I was writing poetry, I wouldn't have written these. You have to fool yourself sometimes into believing you're doing something else. While you're beating your dog you're saying, "Well, he's going to be a better dog afterward." That's why I have no dog.

INSCAPE: What is your view of the function of poetry in today's society?

MS: It's not going to change the world, but I believe if every head of state and every government official spent an hour a day reading poetry we'd live in a much more humane and decent world. Poetry has a humanizing influence. Poetry delivers an inner life that is articulated to the reader. People have inner lives, but they are poorly expressed and rarely known. They have no language by which to bring it out into the open. Two people deeply in love can look at each other and not have much to say except "I love you." It gets kind of boring after awhile—after the first ten or twenty years. I don't expect that from heads of state; I don't expect them to look at each other after reading a lot of poetry and say "I love you," but it

reminds us that we have inner lives. When we read poems from the past we realize that human beings have always been the way we are. We have technological advancements undreamt of a couple thousand years ago, but the way people felt then is pretty much the way people feel now. We can read those poems with pleasure because we recognize ourselves in them. Poetry helps us imagine what it's like to be human. I wish more politicians and heads of state would begin to imagine what it's like to be human. They've forgotten, and it leads to bad things. If you can't empathize, it's hard to be decent; it's hard to know what the other guy's feeling. They talk from such a distance that they don't see differences; they don't see the little things that make up a life. They see numbers; they see generalities. They deal in sound bytes and vacuous speeches; when you read them again, they don't mean anything.

INSCAPE: What do we need to do to best prepare ourselves to be great poets?

MS: You have to read. You can't be a good poet if you don't have some appreciation of poetry. People who say, "Oh, I don't want to read poetry because it'll destroy my style or my spontaneity. My innocence is golden," are never going to be poets. I think reading and patience and practice and keeping your eyes and ears open; paying attention is very important if you're going to be a poet or a writer of any kind. You have to pay attention.

INSCAPE: Do you have any patterns or rituals you go through when you write? Do you look out the window . . . ?

MS: When you live in New York there's always something going on out the window. If you look out of the window here, the mountain changes with different seasons. When I lived in Salt Lake, I wrote a lot about my surroundings. I wish I had some incredible rituals that I could sort of interest you in, but I don't have any. I just sit down and I work. If I get stuck, I open up Wallace Stevens, or somebody like that, and look for a word or something. Or I'll read a page or two of Proust.

INSCAPE: Judging by the "fire outside of the train" story, I'm sure you've received a lot of different criticism over the years. How do you decide which ones to take to heart and which ones to dismiss and write a funny poem about?

MS: I was young when I wrote that poem. I was still in my twenties and I took criticism very seriously. I wanted to get back at the guy, and I thought the best way to do it would be a poem because I didn't own a gun. But I stopped reading criticism. I don't read anything about myself. Sometimes if friends send me a review I'll read that, but I haven't read the books written about me. I just can't bear it. It doesn't seem like they're about me; it doesn't have anything to do with me. It doesn't interest me, finally. What I'm interested in is what comes out; I'm not interested in the other end. I'm very happy that people like my poems and buy my books and sometimes feel

moved to write about them, but on the other hand, I don't want to dwell on that sphere. I think one's life is in the bedroom, the living room, and kitchen, and amongst one's friends, and that's where my concerns are, ultimately.

INSCAPE: Would you categorize the way that you write some of these poems as the Wordsworthian spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion, or are they more premeditated, where you take time to work with the parts and things?

MS: I take time and work slowly and deliberately. The spontaneous overflow of emotion is something that doesn't happen when I'm writing poetry. It happens when I'm watching a ballgame, or eating a great meal, or something like that.

INSCAPE: You mentioned Proust and Wallace Stevens, who are your other muses?

MS: The most powerful ones are Kafka, Samuel Beckett, and Tommaso Landolfi. Wordsworth was important to me at a particular time of my life. Italian poets like Leopardi; in Spain, Lorca and Antonio Machado; and in Brazil, Carlos Drummond de Andrade. Elizabeth Bishop was very important to me. My current closest friend is Charles Wright. He is the greatest poet of my generation. Without him we'd be much poorer. I believe in Jorie Graham, too and a few others.

INSCAPE: What do you think the role of poetry in education should be?

MS: I think poetry can teach you to read. If we pay attention to the way poems work and what words can do . . . Writing is thinking; reading poems is a kind of thinking, too. That doesn't mean necessarily, that the reading of a poem is the paraphrase of a poem. To get some workable paraphrase, that's one thing, and understanding a poem is part of responding to a poem. The experience of a poem is something else. One can experience a poem and not necessarily understand it. One can respond to a poem. One can respond to another human being without understanding that human being. We fall in love all the time with somebody we don't understand, and then twenty years later, after we're married, when our understanding is complete, we get divorced. Just kidding, of course.

CONTRIBUTORS

Nick Jones was born and raised in Ventura, California. He served an LDS mission in Hungary and transferred to BYU from UCLA afterward. He is majoring in English and is currently working on a collection of personal essays as a senior project. He plans to attend law school next fall.

Maddison Colvin received her BA in painting from Whitworth University in 2008, and will graduate from BYU with her MFA in Studio Art in 2013. Her art spans a variety of media and explores the limitations of knowledge and relationship between scientific and religious experience. Her writing is much less ambitious and proliferates whenever she travels.

Phoebe Romney Cook is from a little canyon in Salt Lake City called Emigration Canyon, where she loved to explore nature growing up. Currently, she's a Humanities Major and English Minor. She likes to spend time cooking meals for her wonderful husband, playing folk music, running, and being outside in general.

Angie Pelekidis Prior to switching to creative writing, Angie Pelekidis worked in public relations in NYC for nine years. In 2004 she quit her job and moved to upstate New York where she received her MA and PhD in English with a creative writing emphasis at Binghamton University. IN 2012, Ann Beattie selected a story of hers as the first-prize winner of *New Ohio Review*'s Fiction Contest. Other stories have appeared in *The Alembic, Chrysalis Reader, The Battered Suitcase, Drunken Boat, The MacGuffin,* with another to appear in an upcoming issue of *Story Quarterly*'s online version.

Trent Leinnenbach is 24, from Vancouver, Washington. He does stand-up comedy for Humor U at BYU. In both his fiction writing and his joke writing, he is fascinated with the impact of language on our perception of the world. His favorite Biblical books are Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and the Song of Solomon.

Parker Smith doesn't work at Big 5. Although, for a time, he wanted to. He has never worked in the luxury food industry, the entertainment industry, the auto industry, or for a soda company. He would be temped to list the places he has worked, but that list would never fit in this magazine. That list would never in a thousand years fit in this magazine. If you saw that list, you would know why. Never in a thousand years.

C. Dylan Bassett 's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Columbia, Copper Nickel, DIAGRAM, the Pinch, Salamander, Tar River Poetry, Verse Daily* and elsewhere. He attended the Iowa Writers' Workshop and is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize, a fellowship from the Morrie Moss Foundation for Poetry, and three Pushcart Prize nominations.

Summer Ellison is an art student from Los Angeles. Her work has previously appeared in *Inscape*, the *Likewise Folio*, and the *Provo-Orem Word*. She is an avid rock climber.

Clark Goldsberry is a young artist living in Provo, Utah. He is the co-founder and former editor-in-chief of *HEX* Magazine, a weekly community-based publication focused on extolling the arts in Utah Valley. His artwork, along with his writing, can be found at *clarkgoldsberryphotography.com* and *hex-magazine.com*.

Jia Oak-Baker lives in Peoria, Arizona. She is the recipient of a Liam Rector Scholarship from Bennington College where she is pursuing an MFA in Writing and Literature. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Thin Air Magazine* and *Arizona Literary Magazine*.

George Handley teaches Humanities at BYU and is the author of *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo River*. He led a study abroad to Trinidad and Tobago in 2009 where the highlight with students was

watching sea turtle hatchlings at midnight emerge from the sand and return to the sea.

Alison Maeser is both a native of Salt Lake City and a junior studying English at Brigham Young University. Ideally, her future will involve gardening and writing poetry, short stories, and music reviews. She likes to wake up too early. Her interests include Judaism and heartrending 80s teen films.

Estée Arts is studying English and Philosophy at BYU. She loves poetry, Costco poppy seed muffins, and rock climbing. She is currently working on her first novel and doing research for an upcoming screenplay.

Kylan Rice has poetry published or forthcoming in T*he Examined Life, Thrush, decomP magazinE, Brusque Magazine* and elsewhere. He is the editor for *Likewise Folio*. He is studying English at BYU.

Garrett Root comes from the red rock deserts of Southern Utah. Since he loves deserts, he is a Middle Eastern Studies/Arabic major. After BYU, he hopes to attend medical school and later specialize in international emergency medicine. This is the kind of doctor *National Geographic* hires to go on expeditions and whose motto is, "All you need is an EpiPen and some duct tape." He and his wife hope to live and work abroad.

Michelle Oakes is an MFA candidate at the University of Houston. Her poems have appeared in the *Laurel Review, Rhino* and elsewhere.

Truedson J.S. is a St. Georgian currently living elsewhere. He writes about dirty rivers called Virgin and mud holes that pass for lakes because he likes ugly things. When not cycling, musing, writing, repeat, he works on a degree in English and sells himself to law schools.

Allison Hill was born in raised in T-Town, the Flamin' T, or, simply, Tacoma, WA. She spent three years studying fine arts at Northwest College of Art before going on to Pacific Lutheran University, where she graduated with a BFA in creative writing with an emphasis in short fiction, a minor in French, and a certificate in children's literature. After working in the fine arts arena for two more years, she went to graduate school at BYU, where she first obtained a TESOL certificate and is now pursuing an MFA in short fiction.

Jack Murphy is a philosopher.

Dr. Earnest Williamson III has published poetry and/or visual art in over 400 national and international online and print journals. His poetry has been nominated three times for the Best of the Net Anthology. The poems which were nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology were as follows: "The Jazz of Old Wine", "The Symbol of Abiotic Needs", & "The Misfortune of Shallow Sight". He holds the B.A. and the M.A. in English/Creative Writing/Literature from the University of Memphis and the PhD in Higher Education Leadership from Seton Hall University. Dr. Williamson teaches at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey and at Nyack College in New York.

ARTWORK

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