

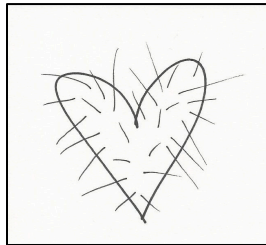


Cactus Heart

Issue #5 Fall 2013

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FROM THE EDITOR

Issue #5 is full of people—famous, infamous, mythic, all-too-human, historic and present-day—just take a peak at the table of contents and you’ll see. It’s an issue of ghosts, an issue of spirits, an issue of all the forces we rage against, fall in love with, go home to, run away from.

It’s fall here in the northern hemisphere, time of harvest and reaping, time too—soon—of All Hallow’s Eve and that day when the veil between the world of living and dead is at its thinnest.

As a writer, as the writers in this issue know, that veil is always a mere film. A skin to be broken. We come up into words through other words, through ghosts of artists and loved ones; we tell stories handed down to us over generations, stories we dream at night for no known reason, stories that rise from city streets and sonnets and jazz solos.

In this spirit of inter-cosmic conversation, I present to you Issue #5.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke underneath the name.



Painted Lady | Chris Rauch

Blue, Eurydice

Alana I. Capria

blue walls surround eurydice and she develops catacomb rashes just by pressing against aquamarine barriers. [this god should never have grown in my stomach,] she says and peels the blue irises back. when she walks, her cheeks turn charcoal gray. [where is the blue,] a thunderous stone interrupts. [i am the lapis lazuli snake.] the rocks bite eurydice's ankles and yank her blue veins out. [you are a dead girl so why are your fluids still circulating,] the sapphire fangs ask. eurydice surrounds her shoulders with blue insulation. [this asylum should be my marital husband,] she says and licks the walls clean of turquoise graffiti. eurydice finds her spouse beneath a radiator. the more she rubs his wrists, the bluer his hair becomes and eurydice lifts a blue shadow man out of his chest. [was this the old patriarch of our azure staircase,] she asks and tosses the shadow man out the window. he snaps and shatters. eurydice drapes her first husband's blue spine over her

back and drags her knees across the splintered floor. [this blue constricts me,] she says and pulls the blue asbestos out of the ceiling. eurydice digs a hole. eurydice makes a grave. she opens her stomach with a syringe and pulls out the blue snake that bit her, then dragged her thirteen hundred miles into the blue underworld. [where is your poison now,] she asks. [it lives behind blue surgical masks,] the snake hisses. its dirty tongue touches her cheek. the snake drills through her blue face. [you taste like blueberry dipped in windshield wiper fluid,] the snake says. it pushes its body across her tongue and down her lungs. [blue burrs,] the snake says. [did you cook your seedlings in a pot of blue water? because it tastes like the ocean but rancid with its fat.] the snake flips around to sun its blue stomach. [have you ever heard of the blue rooms,] eurydice asks. the snake crawls out of her shins. it sits on a bed of blue stained glass. [wasn't that the conjugal bed of the death man,] the snake asks. [no. it was the pipes poking out of the blue springs. and it stabbed me until my oxidized blood ran out,] eurydice says. she drapes her face with blue veils. [if you wrap so tightly, you'll leave constricted marks in thirteen blue shades,] the snake says. [if i wrap so tightly, i might be able to eat the blue skin from my long-lost husband. i

wouldn't be the first one to tear the blue from his head,]
she says. eurydice digs her blue nails into her first
husband's meat. she puts the blue steak in her mouth
and chews slowly. [like blue-flecked formaldehyde,] she
sobs, swallowing. the snake steals a blue toe. [it's more like
purple,] the snake says. it sews its tail to the underside of its
lower jaw. [blue string,] the snake whispers. it rips the
thread. [i am an infinite loop,] the snake says, rolling into
blue powder. eurydice climbs the blue walls. she hangs
down from the ceiling, strands of her hair dropping down
and leaving her blue scalp bald. [did you drown,] the snake
asks. [i was frozen,] eurydice says. [they're both blue,] the
snake says. [but there is never enough ancient ice,] eurydice
says. she opens her blue wrists and throws the strands on
the floor. [blue pipes embedded in our backs and tried to
steal the gray things out of us but we held those other
colors tight,] the blue snake says.

Sleeping with Trotsky

Susan J. Erickson

El Viejo. I called him El Viejo—old man—
because he was old. And because his goatee
and hair were white and wispy
like the old man cactus in the garden
at the Blue House.

And, I called him Piochitas—
little goatee—because I tugged
at that little beard when he shot
words at me as if I were a revolutionary
against the execution wall.

With the same rapid-fire delivery,
Trotsky, ex-commander of the Red Army,
made love like an item on his to-do list.
He should have enrolled in the History
of Frida and Diego's Love Life.

I could recite dates, names, battles, truces
of that ongoing war. Sleeping with Trotsky
was my offensive move for Diego's audacity
in bedding my sister. Should I have warned
an old man that Diego threatened to shoot traitors?

I sent El Viejo off for further study of cacti,
and to enlarge his collection of exotic species.

Let him admire their flowers, wrestle
with their spines, stay up late to see
the night-bloomers, watch them wilt.

Jenna Listens to Art Blakey's Drum Solo, 1965

Sara Biggs Chaney

Art Blakey played
with bared mouth
and raised eyes—
a man running
before a storm.

Something like a smile
pushed his chin to the ceiling
while the rest of him fell heavy
on the singing alloy.

He wasn't playing
but listening—
to armfuls of silver
down spilling
through a maze
of soldered glass,
with nothing but time
to break the fall.

When Jenna listens
to Art Blakey's drums
her mouth sings
easy sound, sweet innard

of a thousand little thunders.

She hears a bell path
of fingerprints,
her whole self
taut, ringing
against the pressure
of the drum's
everywhere voice.

when damien¹ tried to make the ocean

Dan Schall

the cremationist asks
fire or water?

fire is quick
equalizing

blood
tissue
bone
+ minerals
ash

water
preserves
each gets their due

damien chose water
formaldehyde
and a tiger shark

both end with an urn

¹After Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of
Death in the Mind of Someone Living*

All My Charms (Or, Why I Am a Witch)

Marin Sardy

The altars are about objects, the tangible detritus of lives lived and a world turning, and the echoes I can find in them. I find them on the ground, in the street, at trinket shops, or in the back corners of my drawers and boxes. Forgotten objects I once used are some of the best: a turquoise necklace I bought from a woman on the Plaza in Santa Fe, long before I ever lived there. Many were gifts: an amethyst necklace my brother gave me as schizophrenia was overtaking him. He believed the stones were vibrating with miraculous energy. It was not the last gift he ever gave me, but like a fool I gave away the red sweater before I realized that's what it was.

Sun Altar for Litha, 2011:

Yellow napkin with scalloped edges
Blue silk scarf with a crane flying across it
Large pillar candle

Discs: gold, mirrored
Turquoise necklace
Beaded necklace, broken
Chunk of myrrh
Swiss Army watch, no band
Clear quartz crystal
Goose band stamped with the code ♥K2
Pintail feather
Heart-shaped rock, painted maroon
Blue faux-antique chalice, containing water
Bouquet of yellow roses
Yellow rose petals, fallen
Green stone from a creek in Arizona
Red stone from a hill in New Mexico
Plastic figurine, tiger

When I make an altar, it's an improvisation. I read about the Wiccan holiday at hand and think about what it means. Once I have a feeling about what I need to express I dig around in my small dishes and boxes. These lie about on dresser and desk tops, decorative containers of lacquer or silk containing the pieces I use in ceremonies. Darting around my apartment looking for anything that feels right for what I'm trying to say, I sift through them and grab the things that speak to me. Next I build the framework of the altar: choose a cloth, find a centerpiece, decide how many candles to use, where to place the incense. Then I start arranging objects.

Litha, for instance, is the longest day of the year, the summer solstice, when everything is growing and full, and the days are warm and the sun is high. At Litha last year, when I looked at my mirrored disc (which I think was made to be a coaster), I thought of the scene in *Lawrence of Arabia* when he had to cross the brutal section of desert known as the “Sun’s Anvil.” In the middle of the disc I placed the plastic tiger figurine—my mother once sent it in the mail for no apparent reason—and felt that this represented me somehow. Then I thought no, the tiger needs a little help. So I placed the beaded band, which formed a kind of ladder, beneath him, and it seemed like a bridge across the no-man’s land. But the beaded band was tied to another string of pale green beads, which made me think of life’s soft beginnings, so I let that string lie in a loop at the end of the journey.

The other objects fell into place after that. The scratched-up watch was a nod to the passage of time. The bird band and feather suggested the sky, as I got them one summer I spent in a part of Alaska where the sun never set. The bouquet of yellow roses was an anniversary gift from my fiancé, which I repurposed as a centerpiece. After

nightfall, once the altar was in place, I held a ceremony and cast a spell that made use of the objects I chose.

Contents of Wooden Box with Red Heart-Shaped
Rock on Lid:

Business card: Ditch Witch, Erika Wanenmacher

Roll of extra-soft charcoal

Packets of loose incense powders: Love, Hermes,
Come To Your Senses, Road Opener, Lighten
the Load

Scented oils: anointing, Kyoto

Feathers: gray jay, parrot, peacock

Leaflet with instructions on how to use your spell,
and a definition of magic:

Will is the deliberate, original direction or intent
toward a goal.

Will works in partnership with imagination.

Magic is the art of changing consciousness at will.

Soooo, magic and spells work when clear intent is
focused by will and imagination.

Remember the 3-fold law—Everything you project
comes back X3.

Have at it!

Love, Erika

I am a bit of an oddball as a witch, because I'm also an atheist. I practice Wicca for the practice, for the repeated act of interpreting my life through its shrapnel, and for the way this forces me to examine and evaluate that life. It is said that the best time for spell casting is during an esbat, a

full moon. But I don't subscribe to any ideas about vibes or energies that are usually called forth to explain why this system is supposed to work. I'll cast a spell at any moon phase that seems symbolically appropriate to my goal. Taking Flight on a waxing moon; Getting Over A Broken Heart on a waning moon; Finding My Way on a new moon. I have cast spells for all these things. But the most important spell I ever encountered was not my own.

I came to witchcraft obliquely. As an editor at a magazine in Santa Fe, I had been put in charge of art reviews, and it was one of my writers who first mentioned Erika Wanenmacher, the Ditch Witch. She was a local sculptor who had a large piece in a show then hanging at the Museum of Art—*My Trick Ride*. In her studio she had built a steel-framed scale-model replica of a Stealth bomber, which she then tricked out in the style of a *nuevomexicano* low rider. The Stealth was coated in glittery pink auto paint decorated with large yellow and orange daisy designs. The open pilot hatch revealed plush pink leather upholstery and a speaker system. The writer explained that Wanenmacher was a witch.

"She calls herself a culture witch," he said. "She thinks of her sculptures as magic spells. Using art to change the

way people think, with the idea that this changes the world.” I decided she was a genius.

I came across her work a few more times in the next couple of years, but never got the chance to meet her. In the meantime, I was becoming a fan. I went to the gallery that displayed her work, stared at her impressively original sculptures—a black ceramic version of herself, nude, with glass eyes embedded in the skin all over her body; a huge metallic marionette head with a screw coming out the top. I felt at once baffled and comforted by them. They seemed to break open the fabric of the world and stitch it back together as something more stubbornly visceral and strange, and yet gentle. There was always something gentle there.

The thought of her came to me one December when my friend Emily, who had never mentioned witchcraft to me before, told me she would be doing a Wiccan Yule ritual. I suppose that’s why I said, “Oh, we should do it together!” I had no idea what a Wiccan Yule ritual was, but I knew Emily wasn’t, as we said in Santa Fe, “woo-woo,” so I knew that if I showed up she wouldn’t trap me in a conversation about how quantum theory proves psychic powers are real or how positive thoughts can change the

molecular structure of the water you drink. I had been in Santa Fe long enough to become adept at avoiding such conversations.

Most Wiccan sabats are familiar to people in Western culture, since they are based on Northern European pagan holidays that were subsumed by the Church or lingered on in some other form. Yule, on December 22, is the winter solstice and traditionally a night on which an enormous log is burned. In Emily's Yule ritual we lit a smaller, symbolic log. She led me through the simple ceremony, first casting a magic circle around us and invoking the four elements, then lighting candles, explaining the significance of Yule, and calling for a short meditation. At that point, Emily asked me to name a dream or goal I set for myself for the coming year.

I had missed Samhain—October 31, the Wiccan New Year and first point in its annual cycle—but I could easily name a goal for myself that was already in infancy: move to New York. I chose this goal because I was working my way out of a relationship, which was one year on and already dead. I had been drawn to this boyfriend, Will, for his steady gentleness, but our time together now seemed ruled by a precipitous kind of indecision. And lately my life in

Santa Fe hadn't been moving forward in any other sense either. The move, I hoped, would bust me loose from my personal drama while also launching a new phase of my life.

So I rolled into Wicca and somehow it stuck. A week after Yule I decided to host my own ceremony, a Blue Moon Spell Casting. I don't know what got into me. I had eight of my friends dancing in a circle on Will's patio, flinging their arms up toward the last full moon of the year.

Emily and I did another sabat ritual together. As the months passed, I held one with Will, one by myself. I found templates for spells and ceremonies online, at Wiccan sites full of information about pagan traditions. But I wasn't a careful student. I found myself making altars and rituals almost without thought, winging it, throwing the elements together, letting the basic form of the ceremonies and the objects at hand determine the direction. Sometimes I would be in the middle of casting a spell and make changes on the fly. Always, what came out made more sense than I had intended. On bad days, when I was so stressed and frustrated I could barely think, I immersed myself entirely in my rituals. Soon I noticed that the worse I felt the better my spells were. More original, focused,

honest. I began to understand that something enormous was driving me, something subterranean I couldn't name.

Contents of Russian Lacquer Box with Rabbit Lid:

2008 quarter, State of Alaska design, grizzly bear
with salmon

Silver pendant with star-shaped cutout

Pendant, crystals, shape of the letter M

Pin, shape of a panda

I would later see that I needed witchcraft because it suggested some way to project myself into the future; that I had never understood how to have a relationship to things in my life that don't yet exist. But at its core the need is even more basic, for a way to acknowledge the things that already do exist. Like everything else in my life, Wicca eventually takes me back to my mother. When I was a child, about ten years old, she suffered a drastic psychotic break from which she never fully recovered. Crippled by mental illness, she nonetheless tried to raise us. What happened instead was that when my mother lost her mind she took all of us through the looking glass with her. The world I had known fell apart completely, and never really reconstituted itself into something coherent.

As I grew up I had to learn how to figure out what was real on my own, and decide for myself what I saw and believed. When I was eleven I read *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, about a boy who has anxiety problems and whose doctor tells him he has a “nervous stomach.” In a flash of insight, I understood that my chronic nausea was caused by anxiety about my mother’s worsening paranoia and the chaos it created in our lives. But my mother had a way of bluntly disagreeing with everything I said.

I told her, “Mom, I have a nervous stomach.”

“Oh, poo,” she said. “No, you don’t. Maybe you ate something.”

I argued about it for a while, pointing out that it had been going on for months and that it wasn’t a normal kind of feeling. I knew it was worse when she left town or tore Dad’s head out of all the family photos. But she wouldn’t budge. This was the same summer she was checking in my ears to see if anyone had implanted a radio transmitter in my brain. She lived inside an elaborate set of delusions that flattened human beings into chess pawns and rendered my own little idiosyncratic self irrelevant or, worse, unreal. Often when I was talking to her I began to feel like a

nonentity. She was so utterly unable to see me that sometimes I wondered whether I was actually there.

Psychologists have a name for these experiences, which children of delusional parents are subject to. It's called "gaslighting." The term comes from the 1944 film *Gaslight*, in which a man attempts to drive his wife mad by telling her everything she sees is false. He turns down the gaslights, and when she comments that they're low he tells her no, they're the same as always. Then he turns them up and says the same thing.

My inability to integrate what was happening to her was such that I have precisely zero memories of being inside my mother's house during the year or two after the onset of her illness, when I was about twelve. My mind simply won't retrieve them. I lived in that house, a rental, half the time (alternating weeks at my father's house) for nearly a year, and I do not recall a single moment that took place there. What I remember instead are the many hours I spent playing outside, in our Anchorage neighborhood and an adjacent swath of state-owned forest—floating on a pond in an inflatable rowboat, slapping water lilies with my oar, watching moose stroll through the black spruce on the far shore. To protect myself from gaslighting I escaped

outside, into nature, which in Alaska was nearly everywhere. And to science, which revealed the order within it. In high school I read my entire biology text, even the many chapters that were not assigned, just to see what it said. Just to know.

I am still trying to make my world coherent. My objects help, especially in moments when my safety net fails and the reality I have built to keep me sane falls away. I am often still hit by an acute post-traumatic terror, and when it comes it takes me to another place—the Bad Place. Some event, usually the interpersonal kind, will recall those childhood days and trigger the old feelings and I'll fall into something like a flashback. It is more like re-immersion in a prior self. I am eleven years old again and I feel as I felt then—that the floor of the world has fallen out from under me. I am in a place of utter disorientation, like a scuba diver in turbid water who loses track of which way is up. It's pure, a kind of fear that usually only children feel, a fear not only for the loss of oneself or one's loved ones, but of the very structure of one's reality.

When this happens I do whatever I can to get by until it eases up, passes over. And it is in these altered hours, when my mind is not rolling on its usual tracks, that I find myself

picking up the objects in my house. A stone I plucked from an Arizona river. A feather Will's son brought home from the park. I roll them in my hands and between my fingers, and at the touch of them my skin tingles, pulls me back into myself a little bit. I become aware of my body again, and I am a little more here and a little less back there. I begin to remember that I'm going to be okay.

Contents of White Enamel Cup:

Two heart-shaped stones painted with nail polish,
 one maroon, one yellow
Ivory walrus tooth
Figurines, plastic: monkey holding a banana; tiger;
 golden baby; duckling; panda; pigeon sitting on a
 trash can
Figurine, glass: white rabbit with a broken ear
Pendant, crystal snowflake
Figurine, ceramic: sleeping cat
Coins: Australian, platypus; American, Sacagawea;
 Mexican, eagle with snake and cactus
Oval rabies tag, heavily worn
Pin with logo for Taos Coyotes hockey team
Amethyst, two chunks

For me and for all witches, the craft is not a prayer—we are not asking some greater force to change the world for us. We are changing it for ourselves. I had already decided to apply to graduate schools in New York, for instance,

when I announced my goal of moving there. The acceptances that came a few months later weren't so surprising. Officially, however, Wicca acknowledges a higher power, and nearly all other witches I have come across believe in some type of deity. Most take their craft far more literally than I do, seeing their spells as working through spiritual forces within the fabric of the cosmos, guided by what's usually referred to as the Goddess. In rituals I replace this term with Nature.

Wicca is actually not an ancient religion but a modern one, founded in the twentieth century as a hodgepodge of Northern European pre-Christian traditions—everything from Druidry to folk magic. It is nature-based and it has no real center, nor does it have a strict dogma. The Wiccan calendar takes nature as its only guide. It follows the sun but hugs the shadows. The Wiccan Rede, its cornerstone creed, accepts elements of any pantheist or polytheist tradition. The only real rule is that Wiccans practice no black magic. We are good witches not bad witches.

The Wiccan year is divided into eight solar holidays, the sabats, and twelve or thirteen less important lunar holidays, the esbats. The sabats divide the year evenly and mark turning points in the earth's path around the sun, including

both solstices and both equinoxes, plus four “cross-quarter” holidays at the midpoints between them. Holidays begin at dusk and witches perform ceremonies and cast spells at night. At each stage you symbolically act out your thoughts with your objects, arranging them, burning them, altering them.

Beginning on Samhain—Halloween, traditionally the night when the veil separating the living from the dead is thinnest—you begin to follow the seasons through an annual metaphorical journey that leads first underground. In late fall you sink deep into yourself as the leaves decay into the earth. You ask a question, What will I attempt to *do* this year? And then you wait. You let the answer rise to the surface of your mind on its own. At Yule, you announce the aim you’d like to pursue, and ask yourself how you’re going to actually make it happen. And as before, you keep it in the back of your mind and wait for an answer to emerge. At Ostara, the spring equinox, you announce how you’re going to achieve your goal. By Litha, your plan is in full swing, and when Mabon, the fall equinox, comes around, you celebrate what you have reaped. Then the cycle begins again.

As an Alaskan I easily intuited the value of the cycle-of-nature structure of the Wiccan year. Growing up in a place where it never gets dark in the summer and winter days last from around 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., I had an intense awareness of the sun's travels. Alaskans spend summer manically fishing, drinking, dancing, climbing, boating, and hiking, often at 2 a.m. Then in the winter, night overtakes you and its mood seeps in. You grow quieter and you wait for the sun. When my father drank his coffee in the mornings after the shortest day of the year had passed, in the pitch-black of 8 a.m., he would open the newspaper to the weather page and read aloud how many minutes of sunlight we had gained in the past twenty-four hours. "Six more minutes of daylight, guys!" he would announce, beaming. Winter was a slow climb out of darkness. I can't remember ever not being aware down to my marrow that the planet is turning.

I should say also that I do not come from a place where activities like hoarding bones or burning things are considered strange. Alaskans collect pieces of nature almost by accident. My bald eagle feather was a gift from my sister; it fell from the bird that was living in the tree above her tent one summer. A friend pried my ivory walrus tooth out of a carcass rotting on a beach. Alaskans collect these

fragments and we tend to get metaphorical about them and about such things as life and death. One New Year's Eve in my early twenties, my siblings and our friends and I all made paper dolls of ourselves and built a tall man, a kind of Father Time figure, from two-by-fours. We stood him up in the snow in the backyard and taped clumps of newspaper to him to form a body, and at midnight my brother stood on the balcony and shot Roman candles at him until he went up in flames. Then we threw in our paper dolls as an offering of our past selves to the forces of change. This is just the kind of thing people do in Alaska.

I don't know where we got that idea but this was long before Burning Man, and when I later moved to Santa Fe I found the same habit of mind among the people I met there. In Santa Fe art is something many people live and breathe, and every gathering is an excuse for a ceremony or display. Santa Fe even has its own man to burn. Every year during the annual city-wide Fiestas, a fifty-foot-tall scowling figure named Zozobra is erected in a downtown park where citizens gather to end him. Invented by the artist Will Shuster back in the 1930s, Zozo is a kind of bogeyman in a bowtie, who gets stuffed with thousands of scraps of paper on which citizens write their "gloom." He is then set

ablaze as the crowd chants, “Burn him! Burn him!” It seems an old vein in western counterculture, this mode by which people create their own rites and rituals as a matter of course.

Contents of Silk Box with Embroidered Chinese
Symbol:

Six rings, three silver, three gold
Charm bracelet with six charms: megaphone, cross,
heart, ulu, crescent moon, key

I buy objects when I need them for particular functions—candles, small plates, incense—but the rest I prefer to find. I prefer to feel that they have come to me. “This is so witchy,” I’ll say of a trinket, and put it in my pocket. Most of the items I use were given to me—gifts or small knickknacks left in my car by road-tripping friends, boyfriends, sisters. One, a strange fragment of rusty iron, literally fell out of the sky and landed on my apartment windowsill. Many are remnants of my childhood before my mother became ill, chance survivors or rescuees of her repeated purges of possessions (hers and sometimes mine), which took place periodically until she had no possessions left.

Who knows how the charm bracelet she gave me when I was four, to which we added a charm every birthday until I was ten, has stayed with me. I don't remember what lucky events kept it safe and close through all these years. I hardly noticed it until a few years ago, when it occurred to me it was perfect spell-casting material—and I was struck by the use of the word “charm.” The charm bracelet: a kind of spell, a string of talismans for love, success, protection. In some sense I suppose that's exactly what my mother meant it to be.

My mother has always been a keeper of small boxes and an appreciator of things miniature. In my childhood she had them around on side tables, piano tops, window ledges, wherever. I never consciously imitated her, but as I grew up I found that I had a growing collection of small boxes, which I needed because I had things to put in them. Rings I no longer wore but loved too sentimentally to give away. Coins from foreign countries, too pretty to hand off. The broken arrowhead one boyfriend gave me; the nautilus fossil I bought from a camel-trek guide in Morocco. My cauldron, where I burn incense, is actually a ceramic drinking-chocolate bowl a friend brought back from Oaxaca years ago, which I keep half-filled with dirt. Before

I moved to New York I went out in my backyard in Santa Fe, grabbed a couple of handfuls of earth, and threw them in a Ziploc. When I first got to Manhattan I put the dirt in the bowl and placed pieces of incense charcoal on it to safely burn things indoors. Living six floors above the ground, sometimes it helped just to know that dirt was there, on my shelf.

Over the first fifteen years of my adult life I accumulated objects I could never let go when I cleaned out my car or packed up my room to move again. In that time I lived in Alaska, Oregon, Wyoming, Montana, New Hampshire, and New Mexico. In that time I traveled to the Mediterranean, the Sahara, the Himalaya, the Galapagos, the Great Barrier Reef, and points between. What remains are pieces of my life I couldn't let dissolve into memory—at least the ones that were small enough to carry, move after move. I'll never be back on the Yukon Delta, where rotting walrus carcasses were part of the scenery. I'll never again see my first boyfriend who gave me my first heart-shaped rock, picked up from a beach in Chile.

But more than that, what gives my objects their power is that I was once a teenage girl who could find no words for her own life. Who was still unable to speak the hated

name *schizophrenia*; who turned to nature to find an existence that made sense. That I was once the woman in her twenties who couldn't bear losing her brother to the same illness. Who, when words failed a second time, turned to colors and shapes and abstract sounds, dying her hair blue and playing guitar in rainbow-striped pants and thick black eye-liner and a t-shirt, found in a thrift store, emblazoned with the word ASYLUM.

There is always something that comes before words, before we find the words, and it is in that place that my objects mean everything. I have them when words fail me, escape me, betray me, misrepresent me, misconstrue me, or silence me. I have created my own language from these objects. Each is a slippery signifier with meanings and resonances that only I know, and when I pull from them to make an altar or a spell I create a web of meanings for things too inchoate or painful or frightening to speak. This is the edge of language, and I use it when I find myself at the edge of my world, when old trauma takes me there. These objects anchor me to my life when I forget again that I am real, that anything is real; when I forget that this is now and not then; when the structure of the world collapses into shards, and there is only madness and

madness and madness. These objects are the fragments I
have shored against my ruin.

Contents of Vintage *Alaska: The Last Frontier*
Porcelain Tray:

Dried out chunk of myrrh
Pendant, resin, Tlingit wolf design
Chambered nautilus fossil
Necklace of small turquoise beads
Flat gray pebble
Figurine, ceramic, very old: cat playing with yarn

If altar building is an act that occurs before language, spell casting happens at the point where language begins. It is through language that I, as both a witch and a writer, might reclaim some control from the shadowy monsters in my mind—those unconscious memories, those black fears. Every spell has a verbal component, which must be either stated aloud or written down. This is an absolute requirement that is fundamental to witchcraft. It seems, too, somehow fundamental to humanity. “In the beginning,” reads the Gospel of John, “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Even as an atheist I feel this like a ripple across my skin. Words as entities inextricable from the power they wield.

Spells are rituals in which you state your intention while symbolically acting out what you would like to see happen. And they will not work unless you focus your intent into words, preferably rhymes. Rhyme, according to the Wiccan Rede, binds the spell. (I take this as an excuse to indulge in writing whole verses of bad poetry—all examples of which are so wretched that I'm too embarrassed to reprint them here.) For a Letting Go spell, for instance, you might cast something into a fire while chanting a rhyme, and save the ashes. Through this process the spell becomes contained in the ashes, which you keep close by and look at often. For me casting spells is about focusing my mind and staying present with what I want.

This is how witchcraft became an obsession my last few months in Santa Fe. My involvement with Will had begun the previous summer with highest hopes, and fell to earth six months in. Will had at first seemed an antidote to my past, and at times he was the most soothing presence in my life. But he also had a drinking problem and an ex-wife who still inserted herself into his life at every opportunity, and he was in denial about both. He wanted to be with me, then he wasn't sure, then he wanted to be with me as long as that didn't involve too much being with me. We settled

into a cycle of coming together and slipping apart, which triggered my old fears and sent me often to the Bad Place. By February I was sure we were a hopeless case, but I was cripplingly in love. I cast spell after spell, waiting for the new moon, the waxing moon, Litha, the full moon, taking advantage of any opportunity to conjure some Personal Power, Guidance, or Letting Go. By summer, after trying and failing to dump him twice, I couldn't wait to get farther away. There was no question that he wouldn't come to New York with me. He had a job and two kids.

Someone told me about the Ditch Witch store. Erika Wanenmacher had opened a shop. I knew from her artist statement in her previous year's gallery show that she called herself the Ditch Witch. She had written that she lived near Baca Street and every day she walked her dog on a path that followed the Acequia Madre—the Mother Ditch, Santa Fe's centuries-old irrigation canal that runs through the oldest part of town. On her walks, Erika found all kinds of objects on the ground around the ditch—crack pipes, heroin spoons, bits of porcelain, rusty tools, heart-shaped stones, weather-worn bottle glass. She collected the ones that appealed to her and took them back to her studio, where she used them to make her own style of spell. She

selected a few objects, rimmed them with silver so they suggested stained glass, soldered small hoops to them, and tied them together on strands of black twine so they hung as long clusters on the wall. Her spells were sculptures.

I saw a dozen or so of them hanging on the wall when I stopped by the shop. It was just a corner of a larger store that sold art glass, and it was lined with shelves loaded with pillar candles, incense, and items pulled from the Ditch. Erika was out. “She does custom spells, too,” the storeowner told me. “You can ask her to make you one if none of these are what you need.”

Time folded in on itself that summer. I was freelancing as an art critic, and when Erika had a gallery show I reviewed it in my column. At her opening I saw her but was too shy to walk up and say hello. Meanwhile, Will said he didn’t know if he was in love with me. I told him he was a fool. I was getting things done by just forcing myself to not stop moving. Fill these boxes. Buy this packing tape. Visit this art show. I was living on hubris and a determination to not let my friends see what sorry shape I was in. I started selling off my stuff, winnowing my possessions down to necessities and what fit in my little boxes. In a weird twist, the guy who showed up to buy my

bike was Will's ex-wife's new boyfriend. He wanted to give it to her as a gift. Stunned, I told him that was fine with me. Gone. Done.

Earlier that summer finches had flown into the storage room in the house I shared with my roommate and nested in the hanging plant beside my bathroom window. Every day I would sneak up and stand on the toilet to see the baby birds in their nest. When they fledged I stared at the empty nest for weeks, full of angst. Then one day I took it down and set it in a corner of my room, and as I sorted my stuff and prepared to move, whenever I came across some small scrap of paper or other piece of detritus, I tossed it in the nest. This would be my last Santa Fe spell—the Taking Flight Spell. On a night lit by a waxing moon in late July, in my sister's yard, we set the nest inside a big fireproof bowl, lit it on fire, and then jumped over it as it burned. As I jumped I held a feather, the container for the spell's power, in my hand. Goodbye, Santa Fe. Goodbye, Will.

Moon Altar for Taking Flight Spell, 2010:

Sky-blue tissue paper
House-finch nest
Found paper scraps
Three pillar candles

Four elements: pile of dirt (earth), feather (air), red
candle (fire), cup of water
Moon discs: mirrored, mother-of-pearl, silver
Feathers
Necklace of turquoise beads
White handkerchief

I called Erika. I wanted to buy a custom spell. We set up a time to meet and talk about the details.

She was a rectangular middle-aged woman in a tank top and worn jeans, with cropped hair, a thick nose, and tattoos of flowers and birds winding over her shoulders and arms. Above her hung marionette-like felt sculptures she had carefully hand-stitched into living forms—a tree, a dog. As I sat down she started talking, and didn't stop. "The word 'witch' comes from the Old English 'wych,'" she said. "W-Y-C-H. It means 'to bend.' What I do is try to bend people's perceptions, just a little bit." As she spoke she gestured as if bending the air in front of her, as if it gave resistance and she had to really tweak it. She didn't make much eye contact with me, and her manner had the geekiness of a computer programmer. I suspected she was used to spending her time listening to what appeared to be a near-constant stream of thoughts, and translating those

into code—not HTML but a personal lexicon by which she sorted her universe and rendered it as art.

“I’m moving to New York,” I said, “and I’m terrified. I need a spell for a soft landing.” I paused. It was time to put the rest into words, to make it real. As I had done when I first said “schizophrenia” out loud, and then cried at random times for months while it sunk in that refusing to say it hadn’t made it disappear. Now would be the time to turn away from chaos, from inaccessibility. And from Will, if he brought something similar with him. “And—I want a partner,” I said, “someone who wants to build a life with me.”

She wrote my words down and looked at a glass cabinet behind her, which was full of old boxes and worn bottles and bowls full of amulets. “I think I know where I can start,” she said.

When I came back for the finished spell, she had it inside a refurbished wooden box onto which she had glued a red heart-shaped rock. She held up the glinting spell and explained each of the items, all of which came from the Ditch. A red porcelain shard meant love. The large rock was me and the small one was the partner I would find. The pencil and the slate she put there because I am a

writer, so she thought I might want to write something of my own onto the spell. “Hang it up near you, someplace where you’ll see it a lot,” she said. “And read what it says on the flyer. Magic is the art of changing consciousness at will.”

Contents of Erika’s Custom Spell:

Clear glass lid, no handle
Coat hook, bent, rusty
Copper disc with a pentagram painted on one side
and LOVE, ERIKA 2010 on the other
Glass bottle with cork lid, filled with dirt, incense,
and blue “magic sand”
Shard of blue-glazed stoneware
Shard of red-glazed porcelain
Shard of green-glazed stoneware
Shard of white porcelain with red deciduous-tree
design
Large heart-shaped rock
Small heart-shaped rock
Short yellow pencil
Flat piece of slate
Copper tag engraved with words articulating the
spell:
Marin
Partner in All Aspects
Soft Landing

I have an idea that love is less a feeling than an action,
or really a long series of actions that intertwine to form a

kind of web, and the web is life. I perform acts of love for the people I love, and so create my world. In the same way, practicing Wicca isn't a system of belief so much as it is a series of acts of imagination and will. These are the acts by which I build a life where madness does not reign.

When I took home Erika's spell I didn't mention it to Will. He knew I had ordered one but I never told him what I asked for. He seemed in a state of suspension, behaving as if we would be together forever and yet as if we were not together at all. "Once I'm gone," I told him, "it's over, you know. For good. I can't ever come back to this."

"Yes," he said gravely, "I know." But there was something in his face that revealed it wasn't sinking in.

One week after I got to New York I told him I needed to stop the phone calls for a while. Okay, he said. My landing, it turned out, was blissfully soft. In my new apartment I hung the spell on the wall above my bed. I took a look at OKCupid and on Facebook I changed my relationship status to "single."

That did it. I marvel that what it took to convince a forty-four-year-old man that I was *really* breaking up with him was a change in status on Facebook. But it hit him like a train. Three days later he wanted me back. No, I said. On

one side of the slate I wrote, “Someone who wants to build a life with me.”

No, I said, and kept saying it. He kept calling. He’d had an epiphany, he said. “Bullshit,” I said. “It’s too late.” He would repeat himself, and I would say I’d wait and see. I told him this would never work unless he took control of his life and figured out what he really wanted. Regularly I glanced at my spell, fiddled with its pieces, reminded myself that I believed in what it represented, that such a partner must exist, be capable of being found. Something about the spell’s own object-hood, its concreteness, made that imagined future seem more probable. Even likely. The future as that which can be touched. On the other side of the slate I wrote, “Someone who can lead. Someone who knows himself.” And at night I sighed in relief for the many miles that kept me from driving to his house and climbing into Will’s bed.

We went on like this. As we talked I would lie on my bed and look up at my spell. One night as we Skyped I showed it to him, and read him its tag, and read what I had written on the slate. He looked as sad as I had ever seen him.

When he quit drinking, I was floored. Then he came up with a plan to leave his editing job and split his time between New York and the Southwest, working as a freelancer. He said he could make it work. It seemed the determined, devoted man I had once believed he was had returned. And become more. “Who are you and what have you done with my boyfriend?” I said.

“This *is* me,” he replied. “This is me being me.” He told me he wanted to be the small heart in my spell.

I said that if we were going to try again, we needed to work through all the things that had gone wrong that first year. We typed up a long list of memories, good and bad. When it was finished we cut the list up into scraps of individual recollections and separated the good ones from the bad. Over the next six weeks we went through the bad memories one by one, discussing and sharing until we felt each one was resolved. He kept those in a pile and on New Year’s Eve we burned them.

That spring we hung the spell up in our new apartment, inside an old gold-leaf frame my grandmother once gave me. It would be glib to say the spell worked. I worked. Will worked. The world remained as wild as ever, of course, and does still. But we found a new way to do things, by way of

that spell. So sometimes I still pause in the dim hall where it now hangs, and touch the red porcelain, and take the slate in my fingers and turn it so the graphite catches light from a window, and feel the magic of the words.



Rest | JMB

Dry Mill Road

Zachary Lundgren

She fell out the back of the pickup
and split her skull
at the edge of the gravel road.

Her warmth stained over dirt and grass
and baby's breath, but giving life?

We planted a cross for her. That roadside
converted to a shrine
to a scar to a bleached bone.

A year after, I took my first girl there in a riot
of summer. Angels do not

soften in dew so I knew she could
knit the cotton discord
covering my chest, grass and breath.

We finished and the air returned,
I lay back and the sun, gravel fell out

of her hair, retreating back to the soil
that will not hear this plea. The road
will not take us back

Skirting the Four Corners

Agatha Beins

Along Route 160 each trading post
billboard, each woman draping beadwork
in her long straight black hair

or a man's palm blooming frybread.

You eye the map and count the miles.
HBOCABLECOFFEE in red and black

letters backlit beneath a smaller sign:
American Owned, and an American flag
sticker glitters against headlights.

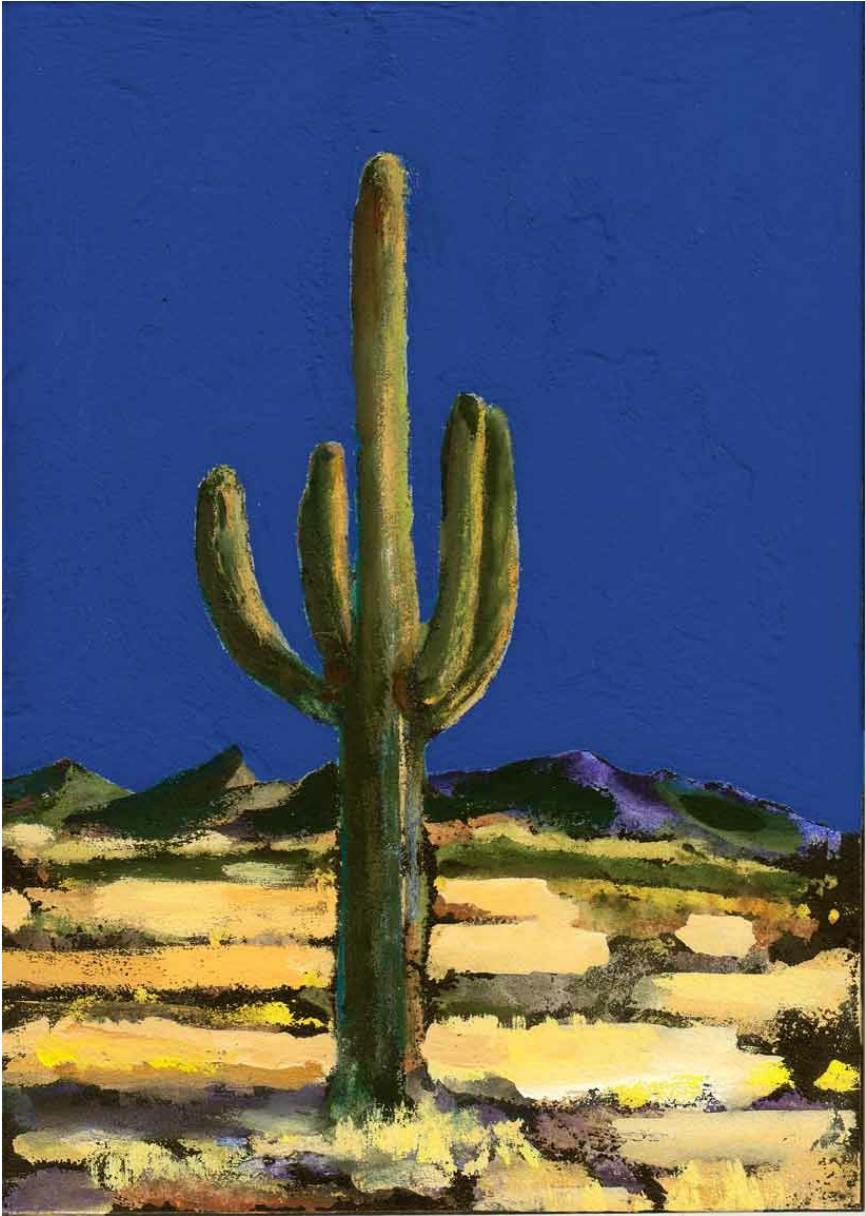
In passing the Thunderwind Motel
curtains turn people into shadows
and we know just enough
to find the beauty in it.

Pistachio shells grow soft as skin
inside our mouths. Old coffee sloshes
into sweaty bent-necked dreams.

At the one-pump gas station, a small
dot against the brown and dun
and the subtle distractions of late summer,

the attendant gives us a plastic
dashboard Jesus and kisses my cheek.

Your voice keeps me awake this night
we own the road and the world
opens only to our light's edge. Please,
tell me the story I will never hear again.



Cactus | Susan Solomon

Lacuna

J. Kirk Maynard

~ for A. Cook, Whitley County Indiana

Deputy, please say again
it don't do round these parts.
 Say do not do. Say round parts.
 Say if there's a groove in the road
 my wheels fit right in, how long does it take
 to make a groove? Tickets, quotas, winters?
 Say I don't do round. Say I prefer
 a hard mattress, the kind you find
 in dingy one-bedroom basement "flats,"
 where the wainscot is broken.
 Where after all these years I still
 stub my toe, say, or never feel the soft side
 a house lets you sleep in.
 What do you sleep in? What do
 the kitchen knick-knacks mean to you?
 Would you let me in your house? Please?
 I may be in love with you.
 The mirrored lenses of your aviators
 hold me in a convex. I can look into your eyes
 and meet my eyes and isn't that all
 we want in love? When I pulled out
 on the highway your flashing lights faded,
 I saw you watch me driving away.
 I saw myself in your sunglasses drive away,
 and I felt like the only pin left standing

between Warsaw and Fort Wayne.
And I missed you, or myself in your eyes,
how dangerous I could be, what menace I may
in fact be. Where was I going? I wanted then
to rob a bank. I would hand the bank teller
a note that says *I'm harmless, but sound the alarm,*
anyway just so I could be surrounded by you,
to surrender to you, and not to leave. I'm always
leaving, before I watch the patches in the road
with no more interest than the road itself.

Welcome to the Song

Jack Caseros

I took your hand and helped you over the amplifier cabinet. I didn't build this fort of instruments, it sort of just happened. The amps provided stability and the glinting guitar wires provided the intimidation. The hi-hat shone like a fractured flag. // You added to the collage of instant photos taped to the inside walls of the fort. The clear-cased kick drum was still bare. You clipped spirographs into the negative spaces of the photos so that the light could shine through. // There were enough musical weapons leftover from jam sessions to frame the solid fortification. Altogether there was enough room to lay down and still light incense without fear of waking up in flames. // Not that sleep happened much inside the fort. It was an awake place, which is why I came here to hang out, even if I wasn't playing. There are some places that have the inkling of familiar vibrations; the fort could actually carry those vibrations. // I heard it in the cymbals that hummed

periodically. They sizzled then silenced. // The piccolo held a low whistle whenever the furnace kicked on. // And the egg cartons on the walls held it all together in an empty shell. // Excellent acoustics, of course; that wasn't a mistake. None of the instruments were out of place. Everything was arranged for consonance. Maybe that was the source of the preternatural calmness that held the whole basement in its breath. // You pointed at my feet and noticed I wasn't wearing socks. I told you it was so I could feel the music better. // But why? you asked, nobody is playing. // I think not; I think it true. // *Wha-haba-t?* you giggled. I think we've had enough of this incense. // Of course. We would never get deep. There was no profundity in cunt, but we tried anyway. I wanted you to join me beyond that: to where the instruments chorused along to your climax, and the light became brighter, and an enormous animalistic shudder transposed between two people. // 'There. There. There. // 'There you go again, getting all weird. Is the band still playing? You tapped on my temple. Is that what you hear? You said it to me quietly, but fiercely. Intimacy is an excellent way to devote two people to each other, whole-heartedly and mad. // It was getting late but time only exists in the light, where things

happen and people work up enough heat to stay naked, and shuffle around the rug trying to somersault. // When you crashed you took out the entire drum set. Cymbals shrieked. The kick drum clumped and held the note, the photo collage hissing on its vibrations. // All hissing on vibrations. // You sounded like you were going to cry. You were bleeding. It was bad, so I crawled towards you, trying to help you out of the wreckage. You were stuck in the snare drum. You bumped up and down, tunk tunk tunk. // And everything was still in its right place, harmonizing along. I liked you there, in the fort wall, trying to turn your snuffle into a simper. // Finally you helped yourself stand. With the dramatic introduction of a clumsy princess you curtsied through the hole in the fort wall. // In our kingdom, where the symphony sang even after the drums stilled. // The peasants revelled. Welcome to the song. // It was late, but in our fort there was only light and something happening, something that sweat and bled all over us, something whole-hearted and mad.

Longing: My Drug of Choice

Cheryl L. Rice

I dreamed of giving him my kidney. Or bone marrow. Or any expendable body part. I offered him Mary Oliver poetry, homemade cupcakes, a white gardenia, passionate sex, and a basket of Honey Peanut Balance bars, his favorite. I even proposed, at my expense, to repaint and decorate his melancholy waiting room.

I wanted to be vital, necessary, and forever connected, and if it took a life-threatening condition to accomplish this, then so be it. I was in love.

His name was David. David was my therapist.

I started treatment with him after my mother's chillingly swift death in April 2010 from a six-month bout with cancer. She was my closest friend. I was with her nearly every day she was ill—coordinating her care, tweezing her chin hairs as I'd promised, and feeding her Wendy's chocolate Frostie's when nothing else appealed.

Her death left me broken open, bereft, and bewildered. I felt alone in my grief. My father provided little comfort. In fact, the emails he sent me shortly after her death proclaimed his eagerness to also die so that my mother “wouldn’t have to be alone.” And in these same notes he reminded me to cancel his magazine subscriptions and to sell the house in the spring when the dogwoods would be in bloom.

Additionally, despite the best efforts of my husband and me, our three-year-old marriage hadn’t quite found its footing. We were a freshly blended family with kids and cats, and I had been the self-appointed healer-in-residence. Now my wounds needed healing.

Not only that, despite being a dedicated self-improvement junkie, I felt an unprecedented urgency to finally get life right—to live bolder, brighter and better than ever before—though I had no idea what that might look like at the time.

So I began therapy with David hoping for a psychic sanctuary. What I didn’t expect was to immediately find myself obsessively thinking about him between sessions, planning the outfits I’d wear to my appointments, and

wondering if he preferred chocolate chip cookies with or without nuts.

As my free fall into grief deepened, my infatuation with David flourished. Three months into our work I walked into his office, sank into his loveseat and blurted in a soft, staccato voice, “I think I am in love with you.”

Without missing a beat he replied, “Wow. That’s a big deal feeling and an even bigger deal to share with anyone, let alone your therapist.”

I felt my face redden. I wanted to run away but before I could move David continued. “Cheryl, look at me” (my eyes had fixated on the lid of my coffee cup) “I think you are very brave, self-aware, and smart. You are a beautiful person with many attractive qualities.”

I knew his next sentence would not be good. I knew it would include a “but.”

“That said, I don’t have affairs. And even if I someday get divorced and you get divorced, we still would not be together. In fact, there are no conditions that will ever allow us to have anything other than a doctor/patient relationship. But I will always be here for you as your therapist.”

The tears that had been welling up in my eyes spilled down my cheeks. I reached for a tissue to lightly dab at my eyes—not wanting to ruin my make-up or add to my humiliation by openly sobbing or blowing my nose.

Before the interminable session was over, David reminded me about transference—the tendency for patients to project childhood feelings for parents on to their therapist. He said mine was “thick”—the depth of my feelings for him represented the depth of other unfulfilled longings in my life, especially those from childhood. David proposed I commit to our work for at least another ten weeks. Not the proposal I had wanted but a proposal nonetheless. And I accepted.

I hoped admitting my longing would diminish it. It didn't. I had a serious case of what I called “therapeutic chicken pox,” a condition so distractingly itchy I agonized over when it would end, and what scars would be left when it did.

A few months later, after our 10-week contract had expired and been renewed, I confessed, to my best friend Jane, my pent-up desire to run into the woods with David and make love for three days. I was convinced that doing so would be more healing than talking. After she stopped

laughing, she asked why I didn't fantasize the Ritz Carlton. But making love atop a soft bed of leaves, sheltered under a canopy of pines, spoke to the primitive and untamed nature of my longing.

At my next therapy appointment I told David my Garden-of-Eden fantasy. And with great equanimity he said, "I think your desire is a statement of the aliveness that wants to be born in you."

Hmmm.

Before I could respond he asked one of the questions I dreaded most: "Does this remind you of anything?"

I paused, rolled my eyes and asked if the picture on the wall was new (it wasn't). Then I glanced at his clock and looked at my watch—convinced the clock was slow and our time should be up (it wasn't).

At which point David asked again:

"Cheryl, does the longing you are feeling so strongly for me remind you of anything?"

I sheepishly confessed: "OK, so I did spend a great deal of time as a child, and a teenager, and a young woman, imagining the day I would fall into the welcoming embrace of a man who longed for me as much as I longed for him.

And it would be wonderful. And it would feel gobs better than this.”

Damn. I was busted.

But I was also on the threshold of breaking free of the deeply embedded belief that my worthiness and healing would come from outside of me—in the form of a man’s love—which was always contingent on my being good enough, pretty enough, and kind enough.

My longing for safety in the arms of a man took root during a childhood that looked good from the outside but felt emotionally bankrupt on the inside. My parents were barely adults themselves when they had me. My father was so traumatized by his own abusive, chaotic and impoverished upbringing that even the most natural parent/child intimacies like eye contact, playing, and hugging seemed out of reach. And my mother, having left her home country of South Africa eighteen months before I was born, promptly nicknamed me “poppet,” which means doll in Afrikaans. She instinctively clung to me to ease her homesickness and isolation.

Raised to be selfless that’s what I became—less myself and more of what others needed me to be. I believed if I was compliant, nurturing, and kind enough I could take

away my parents' suffering. And if I did, they would love me as I needed to be loved. I had inadvertently jumped on a compelling yet treacherous treadmill of longing, and magical thinking. I was desperate to get it right, terrified at even the thought of being away from my parents, yet overwhelmed and deeply lonely when with them. So beyond a little girl's Disney dream of a rescuing prince, it was my deep and abiding yearning for a boy—and later, a man who would see me, hold me, and heal me, that buoyed me. I wanted David to be that man; I wanted him to love me into wholeness.

But instead, David was the first man I didn't have to fix, flatter, or fuck. And I hated him for that. He didn't need me. If only he would tell me his life stories, share his favorite movie, or accept my gifts; *then* my worthiness would be won and my longing would subside. But he steadfastly refused, noting that even if he did tell me his stories it wouldn't be enough to quell my desire—in fact it might even fuel it. And he reminded me again that he wasn't rejecting me, he was maintaining boundaries—so many that I called him Boundary Man and imagined him in a crimson cape with gold lettering.

One late summer day about eighteen months into therapy, my husband, Alan, and I were dining al fresco at our local sushi restaurant. Just as we began reading our menus I glanced up to see David walking into the restaurant with his wife and young daughter. He must have seen me first, as he had a relaxed smile on his face when our eyes met. On the outside, I, too, appeared relaxed and nodded politely. Alan, who actually introduced me to David (but at that moment in the restaurant knew nothing of my feelings for him), offered up a hearty “Well hello there David.” I prayed Alan wouldn’t be his naturally gregarious-sometimes-to-the-point-of-embarrassing self and initiate a conversation. Thankfully he didn’t.

Waves of nausea coursed through my body. If this were a scene in a disaster movie it would be the moment when the bad guys break into the nuclear power plant and set off an alarm loud enough to alert all citizens to take immediate shelter—or else.

But this wasn’t a movie. And there was no place to hide my alarm. So I burrowed my flushing cheeks inside the menu hoping Alan wouldn’t notice my mounting anguish.

As the waiter served our tuna rolls, David and his family left the restaurant carrying their take-out. With a quick

wave towards Alan and me, David reached for his daughter's hand and departed.

I didn't cry until the next morning when I told Jane what happened.

Now I understand why eyewitness testimony is considered unreliable. For months I'd wondered what David's wife and daughter looked like, perhaps I'd already passed them in the co-op or drycleaners without knowing it. But if they were to walk into my house this very moment I wouldn't recognize them. Yet I had seen them with my own eyes. I could no longer deny they existed. These were the people David belonged to and who belonged to him—the people who didn't have to pay for his time, hand, or love. Something inside me came undone.

That out-of-session collision was wrenching, but I survived. And I realized that not only was David never going to run into the woods with me, but even if he did sooner or later we would have to leave the woods and it would be a complete disaster. It would not be healing—it would be horrible.

And even more than that—even if I had David the way I thought I needed him, unless I changed my ways, the longing would come back, as always. It was all I knew, and

all I believed I was worthy of. Longing was the life force that saved me when I was a child, but it was hurting me now. Longing was not living. Longing was not loving.

Longing was my drug of choice.

David asked me once what would be the worst part of giving up my longing for him. And I replied, “Well then I’d have nothing.” But a week later, fully recovered from the scene at the sushi restaurant, I realized that was a lie. I was nonchalantly emptying the dishwasher when my step-son, just home from college, gave me a quick kiss on the cheek and offered to help. Then my step-daughter ran into the kitchen seeking my opinion on a new dress, and ten minutes later Alan walked in the front door proclaiming, “The luckiest husband alive is home.” And it dawned on me that I actually had all that I longed for—not in the ways I had dreamed, but in the ways I had created. I could no longer let longing eclipse the love that was available—scary and messy, imperfect but available.



Her World | Matt Dahl

I Want to See Your Rampart Smile

Pattie Flint

I pirated Julia Roberts' smile for
years ever since her legs in Pretty
Woman, but they call me Cheshire.
People go, stare at me like: *Shit.*
What's she pretending to be happy
about when she's so so sad?

I look at them with horned eyes
and piqued mouth and say,
Don't worry boys; I got this. You
see these scars I turned into tiger
stripes the way an American
Spirit turned Dean Martin into
an idea bigger than life itself
I created an amnion out of this
set of teeth; can you see it in
the way I let my lips grow wide
like a California fault line I'm
shaking. I'm in your older sister's
drawer with two pink lines on my
forehead but hey I lived through
it see the way I chipped my hip
so that when they find my bones
one day they will identify me as
a mother of one. And even though

I held him for less time than it took
Apollo 13 to crash back onto earth
I am mother; I birthed honesty
out of cheap beer and stained boat
cushions on August nights so
that I can smile as bright as
matinee performances let out early
and you will feel the love I still
have in me; I'm not done yet. I may
be sad sometimes but hey it rains
a lot in Seattle and I'm used to
going without umbrellas. I ain't
pretending; no. I knew love, enough.

Chicken Love

Elaine Handley

When he appears, she hops
down from her perch to follow him around,
purling and muttering her chicken love,
telling him everything, *everything*.
He feeds her scraps from dinner.
This summer she was just one fluffy chick
who came in the mail.

Come the snowstorm she waits for him
feathers glistening with ice.
Frigid blasts and sleet do not deter her.

Cooped up with fowl company,
she dreams of how she will stalk him,
trail him into the garden, cluck to him
at the woodpile, settle on her perch
again by the back door.

These cold February days there is no one there
when he takes stale bread to the feeder.

What accounts for who loves who,
who erases the sorry aches
of loneliness, who makes a place
feel like home?

I, Ophelia, Am One of Many Savannah Sullivan

Penelope, age three, sits beside me twiddling a baffling pink flower between her fingers. My breath catches in my chest. She is cross-legged and dwarfed by the exaggerated plush of the forest green leather couch. I imagine how I must look beside her childish perfection: my heavy hips spread wide across the cushion, my boring white tennis shoes betraying their cheap construction through cracks near the toes, and my blunt mousey bob a little uneven front to back that I cut all by myself with a hand mirror and kitchen shears.

I imagine that this ineffective camouflage would go unnoticed were people to somehow glance across me, were they to look in my direction. They wouldn't not see me because I have finally, after all of this time, become invisible. They would see something else entirely. They would see green, layers upon layers of green cascading from my chest; long, grassy blades heading straight out and then

down over my knees, sweeping the ground, and more wrapping all the way around us, child and stranger. If they looked right at me, chances are they might glimpse my cheeks burning hot red beneath the tangles of the braided verdant locks, and their eyes would follow its circular flow around Penelope, see it wrap behind her shoulders and behind mine, the frayed tails finally ending by my right, upturned hand. Penelope, disappearing in the vibrant emeralds of the couch and that mess of vines, would look still more consumed by her observance of the delicate pink petals softly in her grasp.

This is the revelation, and I am stupefied.

Flashes of the past four years surface in waves, each hitting harder when I recognize that *I just didn't get it*. I soften the focus on my eyes; the harsh outlines of the colorful world in my presence blur into blobs of green and pink and toddler. I think back, before the tumble of grassy blades, before the pain of extra weight, before the bloom that sent me into this daze.

BY REQUEST

In the big city, a big nameless city full of nameless stores, full of nameless people, and I am not one of them. I

am here by request, by the ardent clicking of some five hundred thousand Facebook fans, five hundred thousand people who will pay as much as \$300 a pop to sit their family of four in the front row and see me. I, Ophelia, have come here by request because the mothers and fathers of some five hundred thousand Midwestern toddlers want to see Dottie the Dancing Poppy and Her Crew of Wild Flowers live and on stage, and I will sing for them. I will put on my petal hat and my face paint and I will sing about flowers and friends and being good for Mom and Dad and they will pay me and love me and clap for me and ask for more. And when the show is over, it will still be early, and all those poor parents will have to take their kids home, and I will take my payday and a sparkly dress and hit the town, standing taller than the nobodies around me who came here because they had to and not by request of adoring fans. And I will pick out one of those lonely, sad faces and take him home and show her what wildflowers are all about.

TEXT I

can i crash w/ u and the mrs 4 a few days? weird show last night. don't get on youtube.

DAVIE'S REACTION

“Dave, I don’t understand why you can’t just let her work for you. She’s smart and reliable and good with kids—you already know all of that.” Kim is being much too nice.

“You’re being much too nice,” Davie says, and even though I’m thinking it too, I want to remind him that *I’m right here, Davie*. “Being drunk enough or high enough or whacked enough to do what she did in front of twenty-five thousand kids and families and all of God’s holy internet is not smart, or reliable, or being good with kids. She needs to be okay, and she’s not okay, simple as that.”

I wish he’d stop freaking out and we could all be adults about this, but I feel the rage in my chest churning faster with each syllable he unloads. “I’m right here, Davie.” Good. That was firm, loud and forceful, but not the default, childish scream.

“Goddamnit, Ophelia, I know exactly where you are. You need to hear it more than anyone else does. Do you honestly expect me to be dumb enough to give you a job scheduling psychiatric appointments for children? I have a whole new wave of patients after your show last weekend. What do you think that’s about? You need help, Ophelia,

and if you want to stay here, you need to get some. And a job. But not with me.”

At this, I am silent and stare into space. Kim is saying something about how I’ll never get out of their basement if I don’t get work and how the kids will never know it’s “Dottie” but I’m not listening. I’m trying to remember what happened that day, trying to capture the parts no one got on their iPhones, trying to remember anything.

FLASHES

Day drinking.

Day puking.

Driver driving.

Dressing room.

Cheering fans.

Screaming fans.

Darkness.

FIRST MEETING

“Hi, my name is Ophelia, and there’s nothing wrong with me.”

BABY SHOWER IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM

New job, new responsibilities, and Kim is bursting with baby. For some reason that means all her coworkers, including me, have to skip lunch to stick our noses in soiled diapers and decide what it is that the “baby” deposited—crushed peas, coffee grounds, melted candy bars. Hard to believe this is tradition in the office lunch-time baby shower; hard to believe civilized people find this fun or funny or appropriate on any level. And then Kim thinks she’s going into labor and you’d think it’d be hard to think of anything else but somehow I’m left wishing I could be somewhere I would never remember, and then I wouldn’t have to recall the looks of confusion on coworkers’ faces when I don’t respond to their suggestions that I call Davie because instead I’d just rather sit quietly in the corner and let them handle Kim and her contracting uterus. I am about to be an aunt for the first time but, blindfolded, I have just stuck my nose in a pile of ground beef in chocolate sauce for the sake of celebrating someone else’s success, so I ignore the hubbub of impending baby and take a spoon to the ice cream, now melting and alone in the conference room.

They may miss the dessert, but I refuse.

It won't matter after all when Kim is back at work tomorrow despite her doctor's orders to stay in bed until the baby actually comes, won't matter to her that they all gushed and predicted and waited while she was not delivering, won't matter to any of them that I'd rather not remember any of it at all.

STATE VS. MS. OPHELIA MEADOWS

DATE: 1ST of May.

NAME: Ophelia Meadows AKA Dottie the Dancing Poppy.

CHARGES: Indecent Exposure, 1 Count.

Public Intoxication, 1 Count.

Endangerment of a child, 20,023 Counts.

FINDING: Hung jury.

CONSEQUENCE: Lawyers fees. Bankruptcy. All assets seized.

PUBLIC OPINION VS. DOTTIE

DATE: 1st of Infinity.

NAME: Dottie the Dancing Poppy, you know, that children's show?

CHARGES: Crimes against humanity (& children. CHILDREN!).

COUNTS: 250,000,000 hits and counting. Almost as many dislikes.

FINDING: Guilty on all charges.

SENTENCE: Interminable alienation.

BUBBLE

Why the hell am I out here? When the hell did I become one of them? I'm not one of them. Look at them: stringy hair, wrinkled leather faces, twitchy eyes, untrusting. In this haze of secrets and smoke, just in view of the cars on the road, I imagine the drivers must all know exactly what we're doing: the same thing all large groups of smokers outside of churches at 9 p.m. on weeknights are doing.

I light up a cigarette off the remains of the one before it.

That one pushy old broad, the one you'd never expect to see here, with the delicate gray curls pinned up to her crown, pudgy made-up cheeks and overall sense of having-shit-together, she keeps giving me her number and I keep ducking her. I don't need her help and it's like she doesn't get that. Fine, fine, I can't get away forever. I've heard your

story, but tell me again anyway. Maybe this time it will fix me.

And then she's telling me about how, now that she's sober, she just eats ice cream and calls her sponsor when she's jonesing. How she remembers what it was like to not *need* help. Still talking but I'm not listening. More like nodding and repeating *blah blabs* in my head to entertain myself. Oh wait, oh god, please don't lean towards me. Please don't hug me. No, no, no, get out of my bubble get out of my bubble GET OUT OF MY FUCKING BUBBLE.

My wild, untrusting eyes, the fine, vertical wrinkles around my lips crinkling, pieces of my hair coming out of my scrunchie and the resounding of their pathetic, peaceful voices going in one ear while the other is plastered to her fat old cheek, "Keep coming back, it works if you work it, and let it begin with me."

BLACKOUT

Drudgingly clicking through page after page of the database, double and triple checking the information my comrades keyed in, I feel nearly mechanical and imagine I must look it, as well. A crash of thunder outside barely

sounds in my cubicle, and the fluorescent lights don't allow even a hint of the lightening flash into the bleak interior of the office. The power, however, is rooted in the outdoors, and falls victim to its only natural predator: its undomesticated cousin. The monitors flick off, and the ever-present sound of dusty PC fans disappears, their very existence only remembered in their absence.

“Grab the ice cream out of the freezer, and some spoons, quick before they all melt!” Kim is the first to think of this, but I watch the shadows of fifteen heads pop above their cubicle walls as they follow suit and rush toward the kitchen. Lucky for her, that first trip to the hospital was a dry run and she's still pregnant enough to dodge judgment for midday ice cream. Lucky for them, I had put down the spoon after bowl three and while Kim was being checked out and sent home, the cream was regaining its composure in the freezer and I was rechecking database pages.

Kim sticks her head in my cubicle and bats her eyes. Her dry tone has a distinct way of being flirtatious even when it doesn't mean to. “Ophelia, aren't you coming? It's ice cream. Rocky road, toffee chip, come on. It wants you.”

“I'm good,” I say, and fix my eyes to the wallpaper samples I have tacked to the inside of my cubicle for the

reno I can't afford of an apartment I will never own. Not after the lawsuits. The outlines of pink cabbage roses are just visible in the dimness. Listening to the shuffle of clothing and plastic spoons yards away, I pretend to relax in my desk chair and hope someone else comes to invite me to help save ice cream from certain death-by-melting in the blackout. No one does.

SOMETHING STINKS, OR BLACKOUT CONTINUED

In the dim of the powerless office, the murmuring of coworkers in the background, the click of plastic spoons in plastic bowls, the discussion of babies and ice cream and labor pains, I catch a glimpse of myself in the dark monitor of the computer and something is off. Straining to find the difference between the reflection of myself this morning and the image before me now, anxiety creeps in and I instinctively put my hand to my heart.

Something feels cool and slippery beneath my palm, but before I dare to pull back my hand to see what it is, Kim comes in and sets a bowl of butter pecan in front of me. "Yummy yummy in your tummy!" she says, her mommy voice practically perfect before she's even had the baby.

I angle my eyes so I can see her, swollen and swaying in the door of my cubicle with a plastic spoon balanced delicately on her nose. She is giggling, and now she's not. She tilts her head to release the spoon and catches it in one swift motion, turns her nose up and sniffs. "Oh God, something smells rotten."

Coworker Kate slows outside my cubicle and says, "Your pregnant smeller a little off?" And then her face is crinkling. "Oh wait, no, I smell it. That's disgusting!"

Even in this lighting, I can see Kim's cheeks are turning green.

I peek beneath my hand, still frozen on my heart, and a thick, pungent odor like the smell a dog brings in when he rolls in something dead in the woods assaults my senses. Oh shit, is it really coming from me?

I angle quickly back at the computer. "Kim, get out of here. I'll figure out what it is." Now that I smell it, I'm wrapped in the scent.

"Okay, thanks, I'm off," Kim is saying. I can tell without looking she is holding her nose as she says it, exaggerating the nasally voice for effect. I sniff my hand. It reeks. I look down at my chest and see it: the tiny hole, black and moist, goes through the center of my shirt and

into my chest cavity. Bravely, I touch it with my index finger. The dark parts feel cold and mushy, and I gag silently and then clench my lips to keep out the taste of rot. For all of its blackness and even beneath the weight of my exploring finger, I feel no pain at the wound, and though I find it odd, I am mostly embarrassed. Probing a little further, I push my finger a quarter, then a half, then the whole of an inch in to the hole, reeling inside as my fingernail disappears into my chest, and then reappears with a slimy coating speckled with grits like sand in the gelatinous black goo, making a texture combination that borders on repulsive even apart from the odor.

What do I do? What do I fucking do?

All I know is I have to contain this stench, immediately. I need to cap this hole, I need to strangle this smell at the root, I need to keep it from getting outside of my cubicle and contaminating the office. My eyes dart aimlessly around my desk and without forethought pause on a pen. I rip the lid off and bring the white shaft of the BIC breast-height. A brief pause, and I know I can't think about this much longer. I plunge the pen into the hole. The first two inches go in quickly, and then a pause and resistance from within. Jiggling it around, I can hear the deep hollow of my

chest and feel the pressure on my heart. A little shove further and the pen slides the rest of the way, making a subtle scratching noise as it grazes a vertebra. Snug inside me, the pen rests with the ballpoint tipped in blue ink sticking out the front of my sternum. As an afterthought, I cautiously peek back to make sure no one was watching, simultaneously reaching my arm behind me and between my shoulder blades. My fingers catch a feeling of cool, slick skin and damp fabric and then settle on another half-inch of pen sticking out behind me.

THIS ISN'T HAPPENING

I almost don't believe this is happening. If it weren't for the point of the pen that sticks out from between my wide-set breasts, the tightness of the fabric of my shirt that hugs close around it, and the shocking new profile view I glimpse in the mirror, I wouldn't believe it at all. Maybe I still shouldn't.

I look at the mirror and force my eyes away from my chest and towards the reflection of my forehead, my cheeks, my nose, the whites of my eyes, green-gray irises, and worried, dilated pupils. My body is framed as normal in the mirror, hovering over the bus-station style sink,

between the matching stainless dispensers that dribble droplets of pink antibiotic soap. Everything is normal, all the way down to the underwhelming smell of bulk air freshener. Everything is normal except this damn pen.

I breathe heavily and watch myself shake. “You look like a crazy person,” I say to that reflection. At this moment, all I know is that Kim can’t see this; my coworkers can’t know about this. I need to go home and change my clothes, my mind, my plans.

This can’t be happening.

VOICE MAIL

“Hi, Ophelia, it’s Kim. Listen, I didn’t see you leave yesterday and Kate says you didn’t go in today. Just checking in to make sure everything is all right. I’m at the hospital. My contractions are three minutes apart now so they think she’ll be here soon. By the way, the night cleaning crew found a rotten apple in the bottom drawer of your desk, the locked one that the lady before you took the key to? You know, so it wasn’t your fault, and it smells okay now. Please go back to work or at least call to tell them why you aren’t going, because I put my neck out for you and I really don’t want to get reamed for this especially

not while I'm out with the baaaaaaabbbbyyyhoooolllLY
SHIT THIS ONE IS STRONG.”

“Just breathe, sweetheart.”

“YOU BREATHE, GODDAMNIT.” Scuffle. Curses.
Click.

SICK DAYS

Too many days at home. Too many hours staring in the mirror. Too much time in this tiny apartment, the only place I could afford since Davie kicked me out, probably also the only place in St. Louis that still has avocado green countertops, checkered tiles, *and* shag carpet. I need out, and I need out now.

It's impossible to know what to expect on the outside. Do I still stink to high hell, even with this plug in place? I'll never know, never know unless I get out there and see how the public reacts. Where can I go?

All-Mart. All-Mart is always the answer; it is the everyman's answer for everything. What do we eat? Let's get it at All-Mart. Bored? All-Mart. Dirty? All-Mart. Naked? All-Mart. Coming apart?

Why not, right?

AFTERNOON AT THE ALL-MART SALOON

On the freeway, I glance at myself in my rearview mirror, my wild eyes only wilder with the added dimension of speed. It occurs to me once again at this moment that perhaps I have made this all up. I have always been one to enjoy fantasy, to delight in the unlikely and the unassuming, and I am painfully aware that there is little of this left in my own life, now that Dottie the Poppy is all dried up. “What if I’m just going crazy?” I say to the open road ahead, and grin a little. It is true that going crazy would not be ideal, but this explanation makes the whole thing a little easier. I can cope with being a little crazy, and maybe if I know that it’s only in my head, it will go away.

Nearing the All-Mart parking lot, my heart speeds and the tip of the pen is bobbing up and down with each beat. I giggle now, and then quiet myself, parking, pausing in one last moment to gather my courage to go inside. If no one notices my strange appearance, my hypothesis will be proven and I can go from there.

I open the car door. I set one foot on the pavement, and then the other. I pull my hips off the seat and close the door, feeling the movement of the air in my short hair. I squint with focus, and place one foot in front of the other,

deliberately setting this terrifying plan in motion. A stray cart squeals as it wheels down the gradual incline of the asphalt. In the back of my brain I hear a red hawk shriek and the crescendo of a tambourine, brass music and a Spanish guitar. I am entering the unknown, the brave loner on the wild frontier, soon to encounter endless and unimaginable challenges. I envision myself being filmed from below, looking in an upward angle through a flattering lens at my intense face set against a blue sky, war wounds in my middle and a slow but steady step towards the deserted battle ground.

Of course, it isn't deserted, a fact I recognize when I zoom out of my own gallant focus and onto the crowds of people that enter and exit All-Mart. I rescue the squeaking cart and enter the shiny haven. Pretending not to be terrified, I push the cart in, smile at the greeter and follow her eyes as she glances at my cart and then at my face and offers a cheery, "Good afternoon, welcome to All-Mart!" I manage to whisper a hello back at her. She hasn't seemed to notice anything strange about me. Motivated, I push forward.

CONSULT WITH DR. ME

Problem: Chest rot.

Hypothesis: I am insane.

Evidence: Insertion of object in chest cavity. No pain.
No apparent outside observation.

Examples: Kim says nothing. All-Mart says nothing. I feel fine.

Conclusion: I am insane. / There is nothing wrong with me.

Action: Take none. These things go away over time. This is just what we in the business call a “rough transition time.”

SIZING UP

The pen is no longer enough, a fact I realize in the produce section at All-Mart. A quick scan of the area and I convince myself no one’s looking. The pen slides out almost effortlessly and I push with a mighty burst a cucumber in its place. No one has seen; of course they haven’t. I head to electronics.

DEAR DAVIE

Dear Davie.

I know you want me to call you Dave now that you are grown up, but I can't because I'm your sister.

Because I'm your sister, you should also please let me come see the baby.

Love,

Ophilly (still silly)

P.S. Tell Kim thanks for understanding. I had stuff. I am back at work now.

BACK TO WORK

My cucumber and I go back to work, choosing to ignore the dreaded possibility that I'm wrong and I'm not crazy, that I truly have a cucumber sticking out of my chest. I stick to the plan: if I ignore it, it will go away. It will go away. It will go away.

I run into Kate in the hall. "You're back," she notes less-than-cheerfully. With a pat to my shoulder and tone dripping with pomposity she says: "Great to see you."

WINE BOTTLE

The funny thing about cucumber is that, when heated at 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit for two weeks straight, it essentially cooks down to a runny, translucent, not-at-all-

pleasant-smelling mint green gel. Its skin, if waxy and preserved enough, may maintain its form, disguising the stewing fluid within until eventually it breaks and liquid cucumber oozes out of itself, leaving a slick trail of ewww and seeds in its wake.

It is handy that I should learn this fact while in the wine section of All-Mart, considering again why I haven't yet chosen a sponsor, fondly touching each glass bottle and watching my fingers leave clean trails in the dust on their shoulders.

When the dam gives and the cucumber river springs forth, my fingers clutch a ten-dollar bottle as if they have known they would do this all along, and I lurch and stifle grunts as I work to fit it in my chest. I feel my organs conforming to its wide, smooth shape, my body quickly warming the cool glass. Once halfway inside, I start to feel the immense pressure I am putting on my spine, but I know there's no time to cap this geyser, so I keep on; I push all the way through and with a crack and a pop, the bottle is inserted. A stark white vertebra falls to the floor behind me with a splash of blood and skin rot dotting the high-traffic tile and my sea-foam green pants. With a

fleeting look behind me, I see the carnage and smell the fishy odor it brings, and then I flee.

“Clean up, Spirits,” a female’s voice repeats between gags over the intercom. I laugh out loud for the first time in over two years and skip out the automatic doors, then trot across the parking lot to my car, delighting at the added weight and top-heavy tipsiness I experience.

ANOTHER MEETING

When one accepts ones own insanity, one may then play with it. I find my own mental fragility to be a part of my charm, and I entertain myself immensely. At this moment, for example, I should be listening to the COO address my team but that would be boring. Instead, I am in the back row of the conference room playing with my wine bottle, gripping hard at first and then stroking slowly, and still slower, and then faster by tiny bit faster, imagining the cork shooting out at climax and a projectile ejaculation of body temperature red wine from the permanent erection that lives in my chest. The fact that I am my only audience makes this funnier yet.

I dare say, old chap, you’ve entered into a pinot noir without your prior knowledge. Tell me, is that blood on your face or are you just

happy to see me? I disintegrate in silent laughter and feel the plastic loops of industrial carpet beneath my fingers as I fall to the floor.

DEAR DAVE

Dear Dave.

Kim told me a while back that I could come for P's birthday if you say its okay.

Can it please be okay?

Ophelia

P.S. Tell Kim I understand completely and that she doesn't have to apologize. The severance was generous and I qualify for unemployment.

POTTED PLANT

The potted plant is apparently the most permanent solution. I know because the roots broke through the ceramic and took hold of my interior, becoming so much a part of me that, from time to time, a bone-white root makes its way out from beneath my fingernail and wiggles independently like a tape worm in stool.

Old broad was right. Too lazy to even turn the kitchen light on, I grope for a mug—no, not that one, a bigger

mug—and a spoon and the ice cream. I fumble in the darkness and a scoop falls off the spoon. I bend to pick it up and throw it in the sink. My hand grazes edges of grass near my midsection as I bend. God, it has gotten long.

I sink the spoon into my mouth. The cold of the metal stings my tongue. One step in the darkness towards the light of the TV in the living room and I trip over something, the edge of the carpet, maybe, or the impossible length of my own green appendages.

HAIR CUT

Unemployment is the pits, but so is dragging yards and yards of weeds with every step. I know I must ignore them but moving has gotten to be exhausting so I'm mostly chatting dirty online with lonely men; still have a way with them, only now they pay me based on quarter hour rates and turns.

There truly is a man for every type, a fact I have well proven. Because even though my hair is as long as the weeds in my chest and my hips have only gotten wider under three years of ice-cream therapy, people still hire me when I show up uninvited on their screens.

Screw that, though. Screw this heavy load on top. I leave in the middle of a session and hear a tinny male voice chastising me for doing so. I waddle into the kitchen, the foliage trailing behind and wrapping around my legs. Kitchen shears in hand, I return to the computer and chop off six feet of my own hair in one snip. The client does not get off.

TEXT II

U can come as long as u dont bring up the poppy issue. i don't want her knowing about that ever. period.

PENNY

“Penelope, where did you find that flower?” I finally ask her, never before so scared to talk to a child.

She points and grins. Her sweetness and innocence are more compelling than I want them to be as she reaches through the thick of my plant. She pulls away blade after blade of green, and in so doing reveals a patch of pink flowers that are growing underneath, in an area I can barely see and can't reach for the strength of the roots in my arms.

My eyes are still misty and my gaze is still settled on the flowers that Penelope is now tenderly petting a matter of inches from my once-brave breast when I see the outline of Kim in the doorway. My eyes focus on hers, down-turned.

Davie comes in. He won't look at me. I can't blame him, now that I know.

"Say bye-bye, Penny."

"Bye-bye," says Penny, and waves one hand while squeezing a pink flower tightly in the other.

Alcohol Apology Poems #12

Still Wearing My Ruby Slippers

Barbara Jean Walsh

By mid-winter in Oz, the bar had become my living room. I was easy to find, fourth stool from the door; a Boston fern to my right, fringed lamp to my left. And just past the burly bartender's shoulder, a smoky mirror held up to me the epic poems I've never written, and the faces of friends who simply walked out to their cars and drove away, leaving me to face the winged monkeys alone.

The Cakebread Caste

Tabitha Blankenbiller

Mark was a master at the art of belittling his inferiors, and in his eyes I was a tiny tick above the guy who polished his John Lobb shoes. Mark was short with strange bulk, and looked like the bad boy Lollipop Guild Munchkin from *The Wizard of Oz*. Whenever I saw him his skin was flushed a shade of marinara, which seemed appropriate since whenever I was around he seemed irritated. I was a fresh addition to this marketing department he had directed for upwards of a decade, and as earnest as I was to help, I had not been treading lightly. Back then, fresh out of internship-dom, I still tried to race up the ladder. I thought succeeding in cube-land was a matter of raising your hand first, throwing out the newest ideas, being the loudest new voice. *If I can just convince these guys I'm awesome, my academia logic went, they're bound to love me!*

During my first meeting with Mark I sat down in his private office, decorated from computer mouse to

magazine rack in his beloved MOMA-style primary colors, basic geometric patterns, lower-case Helvetica text. He especially loved that neon pea green shade that screams radioactive produce. Nowadays I would have approached the conversation in the safe underling-under-the-radar method I honed through years in a cubicle: agree, consider, agree, ask a question so they don't think you're brain-dead, agree. But when Mark triumphantly slid a new tri-fold brochure proof across his desk, the cover awash in an even pattern of circles alternating in red, green, blue and yellow, I had something to prove. "This kind of looks like our last catalog," I pointed out. I referred to the new design book I'd just ordered on Amazon. "There are so many fresh ideas in here!"

Mark's hairless dome flushed, and with the years of paying dues now behind me, I can almost make out the apparition he must have been staring down: green, clueless, BA degree's ink still smudging, set out to conquer and feast on his foundation. In the same light, from his chair, I would probably hate that doe-eyed bitch in front of me, too. "Really," he mused, taking the paper back. A few weeks later 7,500 brochures arrived at our office, minus my further consultation.

A year into my job as his Marketing Coordinator I was standing just feet away from him at the copy machine, waiting for the Reagan-era relic to spit out my advertisement proofs. I heard him right behind me, chatting with Bill. I didn't care for Bill, either—Bill was that sweet, unassuming nerd in your high school class who your tough-guy boyfriend threw dodgeballs at in gym class. Instead of growing up into a sweet, unassuming adult enjoying the success his intelligence eventually wrought, Bill chose the pretentious asshole path. His articles were mired in so much scientific jargon and Scrabble word masturbation that I could barely edit them; not that he accepted changes. He would turn in copy moments before deadline, as the idea that his work would contain a mistake was ridiculous.

“That dinner was a-*maz*-ing,” Mark said in his almost-southern drawl. He was born in Alabama, but forced himself into a flat Northwest accent. “How about that wine?”

“That wine!” echoed Bill, swaying in the recollection of ecstasy. “The wine was the best part. And that’s saying something, considering we were at Bluehour and all.”

I turned. It was an instinct, my friendly nature and enthusiasm kicking on at the mention of something I knew and loved. I knew better than to try and engage either of the exclusive men in any kind of conversation, but the Pavlovian whistle had been blown. If I kept chipping, I thought, maybe they'd crack. "Ooh, what kind of wine was it?" I asked, all eager smiles and wide eyes.

They looked me over from sweater top to heeled toe with the same expression they'd likely use if I were on the corner of 1st and Broadway asking them for change. "It was a very exclusive vintage," Bill said, his gaze just above my head.

"Well, what was it called?" I could sense the condescension in his voice, but I was in too deep now. "My dad has a huge wine collection, so I may have seen it."

They shared a quick gaze, wondering what they could get away with. Could they tell me to fuck off? This was an office, and HR was a few doors down. "Cakebread," Bill finally admitted.

"You'll probably never try it," Mark said. "It's very exclusive...and very expensive." Looking back I can sniff the insecurity, the need for this aging creative to hold

something over the new model. But at the time, I was crushed.

The copy machine had fallen silent, and without another interjection I slunk away into the safe respite of my padded cubicle walls. I couldn't even focus on my screen, I was so consumed with indignation. They had no idea the tasting rooms I'd been in, the treasure still crated in my parent's house. *Cakebread wine*, I fumed, picking up my cell phone and storming into the break area. *Sounds like shit*.

Dad answered the phone in his mail delivery Jeep, and I could hear the sound of his wheels churning down the road in the background. "Have you ever heard of Cakebread wine?" I asked.

"Cakebread Cellars? Sure."

"Is it any good?"

"Well it's not bad," he said. A standard California commercial winery with international distribution to restaurants and grocery stores. It's an enjoyable wine, he noted, but it's by no means rare.

A week later, I found a small UPS package on my doorstep. It was addressed to me, with Dad's name in the return address. I ripped the packing tape off with my fingernails (scissors are for pussies) and removed a bottle

of 2006 Cakebread Cellars Chardonnay. A bottle served at Bluehour's table costs \$90. One could walk an extra five blocks up to the downtown Portland Safeway and pick up the same thing for around \$30. I drank mine with grilled salmon and couscous. I used the leftovers to make spring pea risotto.

Fifteen years before my Cakebread dinner Dad had stood at a heavy oak counter, his forearm propped on the marble top. A vortex of mahogany-hued Cabernet Sauvignon whirled into a fury at the will of his fingertips. As the sea of wine settled, he tilted the glass in the light offered by the sun setting over the vineyard, slivering in through blind slats. "That's got an almost nectarine color to it," he said, lifting it to his lips and taking a whole-hearted drink. No tiny sips, no tentative sniffs. "Definitely taste it there, too. Nectarines and just a tiny bit of olive."

"There's quite a few orchards with peaches and nectarines just down the road from here," said the tasting attendant. She had long blonde hair that fell soft on her bare tanned shoulders, bleached almost white from the sun. In her tank top and capris, she looked ready to run right outside, down the hill from this brick-laid palace of tasting

to bushel up grapes. We were the only visitors here at Silver Oak Vineyards on a Thursday night just minutes before posted closing times: a high school football player-turned dad, and a petite Snow White doppelganger mom trying to entertain two little girls that were getting sidetracked on their way to Disneyland.

“Did you hear that, Kath? We could get some nectarines for you to can! They’re probably dirt cheap at the farmstands.” He was trying to draw her into this world he’d detoured into, but my sister Brianna and I were sinking her with our loud, fed-up needs.

“I don’t think crates of nectarines are going to stand up very well in the trunk of the car for a week to come home and can,” she said, snubbing the invite into his world. Brianna clung to her arm and swayed back and forth, making a makeshift carousel.

“Why can’t I try a glass?” I wanted to know.

“Because it’s wine. You’re too young.”

“But it tastes like nectarines!”

She sighed, begging Dad to get his case and go. A case of wine, a logo-ed glass, his standard takeaways from these detours. How many wines were left in this flight, she asked herself, glancing at the list on the counter. *Speaking of flights,*

that's what we should've done, she murmured under her breath, *we would've been to Anaheim ten times over by now*. The car trip was their way of saving money on a big trip for four, but looking back I can see her logic: how much were they really saving once you bought the case of renowned Cabernet Sauvignon, the extra gas to coast up and down the spiraling dirt detours, and divided by the square root of sanity slipping away with every tug and twirl and whine and beg of two wildly excited children?

The attendant glanced up at the clock, behind her shoulder, and then, quietly, brought a bottle up from a hidden crevice below the counter. She'd be locking the doors in a few minutes, she explained, but last night they'd had a winemaker's dinner on the premises, and they'd been raiding the cellar for the best vintages to show off. "This is a 1985 Silver Oak Alexander Valley," she said, her voice hushed despite the emptiness of the large granite-laden room. "It's like a dark cherry bonbon. I'll sneak you a taste," she offered, poising the bottle over a fresh glass.

Dad looked at Mom for a moment, and for that second she was the mother of three giddy little kids, waiting for their dreams to come true. And like the graceful mom she

was, she knew when to relent. “One more,” she granted, bringing Brianna to a halt with a hug.

As Dad savored his bonus glass, the woman turned her attention over to us. “You’ve been such good girls for waiting,” she praised Brianna and I, inquiring about our plans and listening to our tales of what we were going to ride first. She then handed us each a handful of unused wine labels, printed on metallic silver paper with the winery’s signature water tower etched in the field. I thought it was a watchtower, where they kept a lookout for crows and rival vintners out for superb grapes. It was an image stuck until just months ago, when I asked Dad about it. “That’s the water tower,” he said. I think I prefer to remember it my way: soft hair, watchtowers and notes of nectarine.

Any spoils of wine touring were brought home and unpacked directly into our house’s wine cellar. It was no custom feature built into some mansion, but the foundation crawlspace, accessible from the kitchen pantry, that Dad built racks and shelving into. It was hidden safely beneath cans of condensed soup and Goldfish crackers,

along with his stories of spiders the size of rats that he'd spotted down there, eyeing his case of Palmina.

The secret cellar is kept all the more clandestine by its unassuming benefactor. Nothing about my dad's everyday appearance suggests wine fanatic. His faded government-issue postal carrier uniform suggests the most obvious label. The clothes radiate faint scents that burrow into the fibers throughout the day. Coffee, omnipresent, frequently spilled. Ink, blotted on messages from a thousand destinations, whirring along in slick-oiled machines before each passes through his dry, teddy bear paws en route to their final resting places. The 30-year-old wedding ring and wallet of faded photos are clues to his family man status, and he's always quick to brag about the lot of us.

His interests span decades of fascinations that have flared and dimmed, with hundreds of mementos packed and stored along the way. Brave a trip into my parent's cluttered garage and you'll find yourself surrounded in faded obsessions. Seattle Sounders programs from 1979. Clinton/Gore 1992 yard signs. Mint-condition Beanie Babies.

When Dad is collecting something, he will not stop at second-best. He must have the most intricate vintage

postcard, the hardest heirloom tomato to cultivate, the Franz china that was only processed three times before the mold incinerated. When we were in grade school, my sister and I fell in love with the McDonald's Snow White toys accompanying our pint-size burgers and fries, and longed to have every one of the seven dwarves. With the resolve of a Kamikaze pilot my father fought his way through a barrage of Happy Meals, raiding every McDonald's in Auburn, Federal Way and Northeast Tacoma. He'd act on tips, embarking on cashier espionage. "I hear Marginal Way #384's got Dopey," a teenaged informant divulged. "Yesterday Pacific Highway had some Prince Charmings, but they're going fast. You didn't hear it from me." An entire week he came home late, each time bearing two of each character, one for each Disney-crazed daughter.

The same tireless rules applied to wine. Although he couldn't have *all* the wine in the world, he could fit the *best* wine in the world down in the crawlspace cellar. He combed *Wine Spectator*, *Wine Enthusiast*, *Food & Wine* and, when it emerged, the Internet for tips. Our vacations to Disneyland, Eastern Washington cowboy towns and Canada's Okanagan were dotted with detours to wineries. He'd chat up the winemakers and tasting room hosts,

learning the culture from its source. At home he wrote personal letters to Sea Smoke, Calera and Au Bon Climat, earning himself space on allocation lists that had long since been closed to new buyers. His humble charisma and sincerity made people talk; whenever we went to sports games together he'd always end up engrossed in a conversation with the guy in the seat next to him. They'd agonize over rosters, bad calls and the season thus far, parting with a hearty handshake. When I asked who the man was, the answer was always "Oh, I don't know; he was just sitting next to me. Just met him."

One of his early obsessions was with the Kenwood Artist's Series, a yearly release of their acclaimed Cabernet Sauvignon with a label designed by an annually-featured artist. Each year's edition was available for a limited time in a small allocation. In 1984, the year I came into the world as my parents' first child, Dad had to mark the occasion. According to Kenwood's description of the resulting wine, "The grapes from the 1984 harvest are classic Sonoma Valley vintage, marked by a moderately warm growing season and optimum levels of grape maturity and composition."

A standard 700 milliliter bottle just wasn't exuberant enough. Gently pulling his cultivated strings he secured a Double Magnum version, a mammoth jug containing the volume of six normal wine bottles. It lived in a branded crate in our pantry, nailed closed to protect what was to become a substantial investment. Even the most carefully stored wine can be corked, a term describing a spoiled seal. The sight of a stained, soft cork hints at a musky, cellary, undrinkable inside that can affect wines of any varietal or price point. Storage, temperature changes and general hard-knocks of existence exacerbate the potential for flaw. Hoping on the odds that he'd received a healthy bottle, Dad made sure it stood level, was undisturbed, never glimpsed sunlight.

The wine collecting didn't interest me much while I was growing up, not being close to drinking age and all. The only bottle that piqued my interest from childhood was the mysterious crate-bound Kenwood I was told would someday be mine. Every once and a while when I was poking around in the pantry, trying to find where a bag of Goldfish crackers had been tucked, I'd brush a foot or calf against the crate—now accompanied by a 1987 bottle for my sister, and a later 1994 release in honor of my brother.

I'd squint down at the mysterious pine coffin, aching to see what kind of beverage could possibly be so precious. "Can we open up that crate?" I'd ask, crackers forgotten.

"Not until your wedding," Mom would say, undeterred from vacuuming or marinating chicken thighs.

I tried to puncture her plan with all sorts of apocalyptic scenarios. What if I never got married? What if it went bad before then? What if we forgot we even had it, and wasted a perfectly good opportunity that was presenting itself *right now*? We'll cross that bridge when we come to it, she'd say with a shrug.

It was maddening, like a Barbie doll in her pristine plastic sarcophagus. What did it look like? Why was it packaged up so carefully? If it was mine, why couldn't I even touch it? It was my destiny, after all.

Despite my childhood restlessness I did fall in love and set a wedding date, and in those first thoughts of *I want the poofiest dress ever!* and *I've gotta call Mom and Dad!* lived *We're crackin' open the Kenwood!* Instead of the actual wedding reception we opted to serve the bottle at our rehearsal dinner the night before. The Roman jug-sized bottle would serve about 20 to 30 people; a good crowd, but much

smaller than our actual wedding day's guest count. By delegating the birthright wine to the event's eve, we ensured that only our closest friends and family would get a glass—rather than, say, a co-worker chasing six bottles of Coors Light.

Just a month before my wedding I found myself without a job. I'd left Mark and Bill behind for what I thought was a brilliant move up. I never did pick up much tact for being a successful underling from Mark's department, and repeated stepping on the toes of my new set of managers. I was under-qualified and expendable, and in six months my position was eliminated. I was unemployed in 2008, just as the recession was hitting full-force. My days alone in the apartment were consumed with self-loathing, and I was mortified at the thought of appearing in the bridal spotlight as such a conspicuous loser. I could hear what I was certain everyone would be thinking: *Nice flowers. Wow, a string quartet? How are they paying that off on her zero-dollar-a-year salary?*

Regretted or not, the deposits and invites were all in place. On that warm, designated Indian summer night the wine was brought, crate and all, to the Rheinlander German restaurant. Thirty years before, Mom and Dad had been

serenaded by the resident accordion maestro on one of their first dates. The aging musician had popped out of retirement to grace the Rheinlander with an encore performance weekend coinciding perfectly with our reservation.

Under Dad's watchful eye the restaurant sommelier corked the wine with the steady, patient hands of an archaeologist chiseling his way into a lost pharaoh's tomb. All three of us stepped back, allowing the wine to take its first new breath in two and a half decades. The sommelier turned the thick cork around her palm. "It doesn't look corked at all," she said, and Dad and I both sighed in relief. With the help of a waitress she lifted the jug up to pour a sample glass, presented to Dad for approval. He shook it up and as it sank back down, tilted it in the light of the sun tinted amber through a stained-glass window filter. A gulp, a smack of the lips. "That's done pretty well," he declared, "not bad for 23 years in the cellar."

A small herd of waiters prepared the glasses, balancing the bottle between each other to fill enough for the toast. The accordion player belted out Edelweiss with all of his heart, egging Matt's high school buddies and my new in-laws and my high school English teacher and best friend

from college to sing along over our plates of jagerschnitzel and sauerbraten. “Eins, Zwei, G’Suffa!” our crowd sang along, swaying the toasting glasses in time with the lurching accordion notes.

“Zhank you, try ze veall!” the accordion player joked with a bow before sneaking off for a break. Dad stood up, thanked everyone for coming, introduced our special guest the Kenwood.

“We’ve had this old bottle tucked away for 24 years,” he said, “waiting for the day when my little girl grows up.” I wish I could remember more of what he’d said, or that I had a YouTube post addict in my crowd. I remember the rare tremble in his voice, the sentences clipped by a gulp—sniff, then pause to regroup. He leaned on the glass of wine, glanced down into it as if the words could somehow bubble along the surface. In our tight band of family, I was his first goodbye. In that moment I wasn’t a former employee or future professional, no sum of resume buzzwords and certifications and stats in or out of an HR database. I was his daughter, and he was wishing us the good life in his footsteps.

Although it seemed like an age, another dead-end, soul-annihilating job came along. It was run by the same kinds of men who boasted in shouts and name-dropped gratuitously, but who couldn't transfer a phone call without help. This time, I began to change. Slowly, chugging alongside snubs and snark, I learned my place. I kept my mouth shut when I overheard my new boss gush about how well Hershey's chocolate kisses paired with "pee-not nore." He was frequently duped by Olive Garden waiters into splurging on their house special Chianti. I burned to jump in, tell them all about Theo Chocolates in Seattle and how divine their heritage cacao tasted next to a cherry-noted Pinot. I wanted to bring in a wedge of Fromage d'Affinois, let it cozy up to room temperature and share oozy bites over a Viogner, chilled and refreshing as lemonade. I adored my delicious world of food and wine and love, and wanted so badly to share it. *They don't care about what you say*, a newly sprouted voice inside would remind me.

How could he stand it, I wondered, marveling at my father's decades of service with the post office. Twenty-five years—6,500 weekdays!—through the same doors, around the same hallways, into the same truck to drive up and

down the same route, dealing with the same petty bullshit that was just as reliable as bitter coffee in the crusty break room carafe. Power-hungry management was impervious to Dad's brand of natural, outgoing charm, and they consistently clashed. Their bureaucracy warred nonstop against his stubborn ideals ("I don't care if it violates vehicle packing codes; we're doing a food drive!"). I was only a couple years into the grind and felt as if I would snap between the gears. I hated feeling condescended to by diva executives and spoiled customers, and mourned my identity. Who cared about Tabitha the spice hoarder, canning fanatic, Oregon Trail amateur historian and nonfiction writer? I felt like all I was to the world could be summed up in colorless drudgery: copy collator, phone answerer, wrangler of Southwest Airlines frequent flyer miles.

So I asked. How have you dealt with being the eternal delivery man? Doesn't it infuriate you being bossed around by bureau-brats, hassled by old women who are waiting on a QVC package, barked at by kenneled dogs?

He didn't so much as look up from his laptop where he clicked away, sleuthing out Wine Commune for the latest Napa auction score. "It's just a job," he said.

It's just a job?

All of those years living at home, Dad was never consumed with work. He went every single day (the government sent him a pin to commemorate ten years without taking a sick day), worked a few hours of overtime if it was essential, and then he was back to me and Mom and collecting Sounders soccer cards and driving us around to find Beanie Babies and stocking a cellar that would put Seattle's Canlis to shame. He was never caught in a board meeting or skipping out on dinner for a conference call. When he was home, he was Dad.

Watching management-climbers like Mark warrior through their work weeks, I began to see that their lives were not independent of how they earned their paychecks. Nearly every waking hour, they *were* the company. They didn't leave the office to go spend time with family and friends far removed from the office. Their social circle almost exclusively consisted of clients and partners, combining business with pleasure to squeeze a tiny bit more influence onto their bottom lines. Hobbies and interests were whittled down until they almost disappeared, unless they could somehow be combined into entertaining potential revenue sources ("I love Blazer games! Say, you

guys want to sit in the suite with me next time?”). No wonder they had no real knowledge of fine pursuits; they only had time to indulge in what a fussy waiter or store stocker thought might be okay. It took dedication to learn to love and understand something intimately, and they’d sold that passion to corporate. Blackberries were welded into their palms, constantly checking that last email, taking this one call. When I was there, I was below them, but aside from those 40 hours a week—I was free.

Dad turned his computer around and beckoned me to take a look. “Remember that list I told you about?” he asked, pulling up a website for Scarecrow Wines. Scarecrow Winery was cultivated on property that had been owned in the 1940s by old-Hollywood MGM producer Joseph Cohn. Only 470 cases of their first vintage were produced, and raving word-of-mouth had them instantly snatched up. Dad went his usual route of handwriting the winery, like a proper suitor in an Austen novel, requesting permission to purchase. After five years of waiting he had finally been granted the honor of ordering a maximum of three Scarecrow 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon wines at the market-adjusted price of \$275 per bottle. “I promised Mom I’d sell it,” he said, an effortless task given the wine’s status and

scarcity. His eyes twinkled with mischief, mimicking the logo's minimalist winking scarecrow, satisfied that once more he'd cracked the code. "Still, it'll be on that counter for 48 hours before FedEx picks it up again!"

A few days later he sent me a photo he'd snapped of the branded crate perched on Mom's dark granite countertops, neighbored by the wine rack sagging with other bottles. The Scarecrow winemakers had whimsically packed their wine in straw, which poked out from the wood's crevices and gave the package a charming pastoral façade. There it was, his fleeting, sip-less brush with the top, the allocation he could not keep.

Perhaps if he had worked a few more hours during the week, pushed back for that supervisory position, played the game, climbed the ranks. That might free up some Scarecrow cash. But I know that he knows what he'd be giving up: the weekends at the Sounders games, the uninterrupted dinners at Mom's table, the freedom to work within parameters and live boundlessly. He knows no sip is worth that ransom. I clicked *delete*, and the FedEx man arrived. Let the powers drink—we'll take more of that good life.

kinds of walking

Megan Gendell

1. “fuck” under the breath with every footstep
the hans christian andersen telling of the little mermaid
2. whimpering every third step, silently
getting the hang of these legs but not sure the prince is
worth it
3. i don’t think i am limping anymore
the animators show her as interested in silverware
actually she is trying to understand the knives

Jim Morrison's Cub Scout Uniform

Alan S. Ambrisco

There it is, encased in glass, well-pressed
and lit up at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame,
some vestigial remains from the third grade,
unremembered as a tailbone,
as popular as an appendix.
So this is how it happens:
cocaine lullabies and paroxysms of despair
giving way to merit badges and square knots,
a mother's last revenge on the boy who renounced
her with hip-grinding and acid flashbacks.
We all look at it and shuffle wordlessly away,
preferring to contemplate Madonna's pointy bra
and David Bowie's kabuki-like straight jacket.
'That's how we wish to remember them—
fierce as wrecking balls
poised for demolition.

Who's Toni Morrison?

Pablo Piñero Stillmann

One morning during our trip to California my older brother Don woke up in the set of *The Golden Girls*. We were staying with Stan “The Serpent” Saltamontes—a stuntman who also happened to be my father’s college roommate—and a six a.m. call from the police woke us up. *Sir, are you related to one Donald Thurpin?*

Stan drove us to the police station in his yellow pickup and there was Don, happy as a clam, playing cards with a female officer. He wore a cowboy hat and a little cowhide vest, neither of which I’d never seen before. Mom did that movie-mom thing of crying and slapping him around and hugging him. “Don’t you ever again, etc.” Dad kept it cool for Stan.

That night we had a serious family meeting at Denny’s. Don—who at eleven had already earned the reputation for mischief that followed him to adulthood—assured Mom

and Dad he'd sleepwalked all the way to the studios on Cahuenga.

"Then where'd you get that hat and vest?"

"Dad," said Don, "it's called *sleepwalking*. How am I supposed to know what happened?"

"Are you going to wear them for the whole trip?" It was clear that the cowboy getup unsettled Dad.

"Joseph!" said Mom. "We don't even know if we can continue this— He could've been—" Her Midwestern upbringing instilled in Mom the habit of speaking in incomplete sentences.

"Please," said Dad, "the kid's saying he sleepwalked. My sister's a sleepwalker. These things are genetic."

"I've heard of children who— There was this thing on *Dateline*."

"Stop that," said Dad.

"What thing on *Dateline*?" said Don.

"Nothing," said Mom. "Just a— It's not important, but—"

Don again: "*What?*"

"Your mother thinks you were—"

"Might've been!"

"—might've been...well...molested."

“Gross!” said Don.

“What’s molested?” (I was a late bloomer.)

Don assured our parents that although he remembered nothing of the previous night he was certain he hadn’t been molested. And so to Santa Barbara it was.

Later, in our motel room, after a quick primer on molestation, I begged Don to tell me the truth about what had happened.

“Listen, Beanhead,” he always called me that, “like I said: I was sleepwalking. You think if I had a night out on my own in Cali I’d dress up as a cowboy and go to the set of the lamest show on TV?” (We were fans of *Quantum Leap* and *Coach*.)

“The vest is pretty cool.”

Don was flipping through the movie channels hoping to find a naked breast. “There is one thing I didn’t tell Mom and Dad,” he said.

My eyes ballooned.

“Whatever happened last night gave me the ability to predict the future.”

I told him I didn’t believe him even though I did. “Then predict something,” I said.

“I haven’t predicted anything yet except that I’ll be able to predict the future.”

That following year Don predicted the entry of Monaco to the U.N., Eduardo Frei’s electoral victory in Chile, Vince Foster’s suicide, and other things of the sort. No sports, however, which was the only thing we actually cared about. But Don had no control over what he could predict. One day he’d come out of the bathroom, toilet still flushing, and tell me Denmark would finally ratify the Maastricht Treaty. Or we’d be tossing a football and, “Toni Morrison will be the winner of this year’s Nobel Prize in Literature.” To which I’d respond, “Who’s Toni Morrison?”

Then one day the premonitions stopped. By then Don had quit relaying them to me since they were all so boring and the novelty aspect of the whole thing was gone. In fact, I don’t think either of us thought much about it for the next seventeen years. We each continued with our lives as any two brothers would. After college I got married and joined an ad firm in Phoenix. Don worked for a tech company in L.A. We were pretty bad at keeping in touch, so it came as a surprise when my wife handed me the phone that Saturday morning and said it was my brother.

“I have a friend,” he said. “An independent filmmaker. He’s making a little movie and wondered if I would play a small part in it. Just for fun.”

“That’s great,” I said, chewing on bacon and eggs. “Everyone always thought you’d make a good actor.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he said. “Guess where we’re shooting?”

I had no idea, of course.

“The studios on Cahuenga. Where they used to shoot *The Golden Girls*.”

“Oh,” I said. “I’m sure it’s brought—”

“Shut up for a second, Beanhead.”

“Sorry.”

“I’m playing the part of a cowboy. A freakin’ cowboy. I’m standing here,” he said, “in the set of *The Golden Girls*, wearing a cowhide vest and a cowboy hat.”

My wife smiled at me from across the kitchen table.

“I understand,” I said to my brother.

“Do you?”

The Forgotten World

Jennifer Vera Faylor

Exists right alongside ours. It is populated
with the people who've been forgotten.
They eat the loaves of rye bread we've neglected
in the back of our cupboards.
The mold spores are their delicacy.
They love the people we forgot how to love.
They kiss in the ancient way
where lips have no memory
and are touching everything for the first time.
All day long, they work 9–5 jobs
filing the lost memories of our world.
They read books written in the languages
we no longer speak.
All of the extinct animals wander
in the forgotten fields,
and howl the songs of our repressed memories.
Every door has 1,000 forgotten keys
and all of the lost lovers
pace along the horizon
looking out for the boat
that would bring them back to our world.

Friedrich Speaks

Kirby Wright

The apocalypse has been cancelled.
There will be no smell of death
Wafting over the plains.

Wildflowers will still bloom.
Forget a blaring of trumpets
Announcing the end of days.

It will be dark soon.
Last kisses? Nonexistent.
I will be planted Catholic

In a plot on a green lawn
With a view of the sea.
I will be remembered

As an obstacle to the blade
Of the lawnmower man.
Sparrows dance on my headstone.

Poem Composed Entirely with Last Lines in Diane Wakoski Poems

James Valvis

when I was young:
100% chance of winning,
berries, caviar, chocolates, hot blintzes,
glory, glory

the glasses now all empty

instead of moonlight
a crumb of cheese to refresh you
just like the new moon
crumbled

the unspoken language of desert flowers
could make a shadow
like a flower against a bank of river
like peonies in the rain

with giant spreading wings
Monarchs and Cabbage Butterflies
might play dice with the universe
silently

I wouldn't have any luck at all

twenty years
driving away
from the morning's radiance
into the distance

I don't think there is a place called home



Pining to Relax | Karen Boissonneault-Gauthier

Rivolta al parco

Daniele De Serto

C'è qualcosa di sbagliato nella spinta che mi stanno dando. E' evidente che non sono in sincronia con l'altra altalena. E pensare che ho armato un tale putiferio per farmi portare qui al parco. Perché non mi fanno andare a tempo con l'altra altalena? Ma chi poi? Chi è che mi sta dando la spinta? Non ricordo adesso. E' che questa bambina a fianco mi acchiappa. E' solo per lei che ho fatto i capricci. Sono due giorni che viene al parco e andiamo sull'altalena insieme. Adoro il modo in cui i suoi capelli accompagnano il dondolio. Ha le labbra lucide e una fascia elastica poco sopra la fronte. Poi sembra indifferente a tutto. Guarda fisso in avanti con il mento sollevato mentre disegna traiettorie fantastiche con le punte dei piedi. Estende e piega le gambe a intervalli regolari. Che poi è quello che mi sta chiedendo di fare mia madre. Ah è lei che mi sta spingendo allora... Ma io non ho mica capito come devo fare. Sembra dipenda tutto dalle mie gambe. Il fatto

che l'altalena non prenda il ritmo sperato dipende da loro? Ma dov'è che sbaglio? Non mi state spiegando bene quando le devo piegare queste benedette gambe. Io pensavo facesse tutto l'altalena. Cos'è questa storia? Così ci faccio una pessima figura ragazzi. Sento che potrei ricominciare con i capricci da un momento all'altro. Di certo non può andare avanti in questo modo indegno. Mi costringete a creare un diversivo, tipo fingere un mal di pancia e piangere a dirotto o cose del genere. Già sento affiorare dei bei singhiozzetti... Guarda te in che situazione mi sono cacciato, e io che avevo fantasticato di fare avanti e dietro in perfetta sincronia con questa mia nuova conoscenza per tutto il pomeriggio, mi ero figurato pure un finale da solista in cui le davo mostra di quanto in alto potessi arrivare, a toccare quasi il cielo con i piedi, con tale sprezzo del pericolo che non poteva non rimanere incantata. Ieri non c'erano mica stati questi problemi tecnici. Poi non capisco perché questo tipo alto e biondo se la porti via sempre sul più bello. Anche ieri lo ha fatto. Le altalene erano ferme e il biondone parlava con mia madre. Si lamentava delle maestre dell'asilo menefreghiste e col doppio lavoro. Io invece guardavo di sottocchi verso l'altra altalena quando di punto in bianco questa bambina di cui vi

parlo se ne esce con un “buongiorno”. Buongiorno capite? Mi sa che io non l’ho ancora mai detto buongiorno. Al che io prima ho fatto finta di non sentire e mi sono girato dall’altra parte in direzione dello scivolo di legno. Quello con la struttura a castello e la corda di risalita. Ho simulato un certo interesse verso il movimento di bambini che si organizzava per arrampicarsi sopra. Poi in preda a un impeto incontrollabile le ho allungato Randy. Randy il koala intendo. E lei lo stava per prendere. Stava proprio tendendo le sue manine deliziose verso il mio Randy e che succede? Succede che ti arriva il papàbiondone e se la porta via. Ma dico io, se cominciamo a ingranare non puoi mica metterti in mezzo così! Comunque c’è sempre qualcosa che va storto. In questi tre anni di vita quante volte le cose sono andate dal principio alla fine come volevo io? Quasi mai. Si potrebbero contare sulle dita di una mano se solo qualcuno si fosse già preso la briga di insegnarmi a contare. E’ normale che poi metta i piedi con tutte le scarpe sotto la fontanella. Cos’altro dovrei fare? Accettare di non avere mai nessun potere decisionale sul corso degli eventi. Ogni volta c’è qualcuno che decide per me, che mette a soqquadro i miei piani. A ogni modo ora mi sparo tutto il perimetro del parco in fuga e vediamo se lo scardiniamo

questo schema, almeno per qualche secondo. Tra l'altro ormai posso contare sul fatto che l'equilibrio e l'orientamento spaziale nella corsa sono capacità pienamente acquisite alla mia età. Mi spiace per voi ma sono già nella fase in cui posso slalomeggiare tra gli ostacoli senza troppi pensieri. E' con la velocità che ancora non ci siamo, non sento la spinta propulsiva giusta nelle gambe. Sono questi sandaletti di merda che non vanno secondo me. Li odio. Bianche le voglio le scarpe. Bianche. Tutti gli altri colori non sono ammissibili. Come diavolo faccio a farvelo entrare in testa. Eppure non dovrebbe essere difficile. Non - Sono - Ammissibili - Altri - Colori. Ci siamo? Ora queste, che sono blu, fanno la stessa fine di quelle di ieri: sotto la fontanella! Devo solo trovare la forza di arrivarci. E' tutto quello che chiedo. Sento già il fresco scorrere dell'acqua dentro i buchetti, soltanto pochi metri e ci sarà uno zampillare divertentissimo da queste parti. E qualcuno ci penserà due volte a mettermi ancora i bastoni tra le ruote. Evidentemente a quel qualcuno era sfuggito il minaccioso tribale che ho impresso sull'avambraccio. Perlomeno non fate la vigliaccheria di prendermi alle spalle proprio quando sono vicino alla meta. Sono un bambino con una missione, non scordatevelo, lo capite da voi che è

ora di rivederli da capo certi modelli pedagogici. Servono punti di rottura! Segnali forti! Per questo devo riuscire ad arrivare a quella maledetta fontanella prima di essere intercettato!

Mutiny at the Park

translated from the Italian by Tiziana
Rinaldi Castro

There's something wrong in the way I am pushed. It's evident I'm not in sync with the other swing. And to think I made such a riot to be taken to the park. Why can't I keep up with her swing?

And who is pushing me anyway? I don't remember. The thing is, this little girl beside me intrigues me. It's only 'cuz of her that I put my foot down. It's two days now that she's come to the park and we swing together.

I love the way her hair follows her. She has shiny lips and a headband on her forehead. And she looks as if she doesn't care about a thing. She looks ahead with her chin up, drawing imaginary trajectories with the points of her feet and extending and folding her legs rhythmically. Which is what my mother is asking me to do, by the way. Ah, so she is the one pushing me. The fact is, I forgot how to do it. It looks as if it has something to do with my legs. You

mean, the swing keeps the desired rhythm because of my legs? What am I doing wrong? You aren't telling me when I have to fold my damn legs. I thought the swing did everything. What is this about? I am making a fool of myself, man! I'm about to have a tantrum any moment now. That would be most undignified! I'll be forced to find a diversion, faking a bellyache and crying out loud or something like that. I'm already feeling misty... look at the situation I am in... and to think I fantasized going back and forth in perfect sync with this new acquaintance the whole afternoon, and I even imagined a solo grand finale in which I would show her how high I could get, almost touching the sky with my feet, in spite of all danger! She could not have been unimpressed! Yesterday we did not have these technical problems.

Also I don't get why this tall blond guy comes and takes her at the best moment. Yesterday he did it too. The swings were still and he was talking to my mother. He was complaining about the nursery school teachers, uncommitted because they are moonlighting at other jobs. I, on the other hand, was furtively looking toward the other swing when out of the blue the little girl says: "Good afternoon."

Good afternoon, can you believe it? I don't think I've ever said *good afternoon* yet.

So, first I pretended I didn't hear her and I turned to the other side, in the direction of the steel slide. The one with the castle above it and the rope to climb. I pretended to feel interest toward a group of children about to go back up on it. Then, prey to an uncontrollable impulse, I handed the little girl Randy. Randy the koala, I mean. And she was about to take it. She was outstretching her lovely hands towards my Randy and what happens? The big blond daddy comes and takes her away. I mean, come on! If we are about to hit it off, you can't get in between us like that, man!

But what else is new? Something is constantly going wrong. In these three years of my life how many times have things gone as I wished? Almost never. I could count them on the fingers of one hand if somebody would be so kind to teach me how to do it.

It's only natural then that I stomp my feet with my shoes on in the sprinkler. What else should I do? Resign to forgo all power of decision in my life? Somebody always decides for me, shaking my plans.

Well! Now I'm going to cover the entire perimeter of the park and let's see if we can shake the status quo, for a few seconds at least. By the way, I can count on the fact that balance and spatial orientation while running are abilities fully acquired at my age. Sorry for you, guys, but I'm in the phase in which I can zigzag around obstacles effortlessly. Speed is still a problem, though. I don't feel the right propulsion from my legs. It's these shitty sandals, I think. I hate them.

I want white shoes! White! All other colors are unacceptable. How the hell am I to put this in your heads? It should not be so difficult, after all. Other-Colors-Are-Not-Admissible. Understood?

Now, these sandals, which are blue, will end up like the ones yesterday, in the sprinkler! I only have to find the strength to get there. That's all I want.

I already feel the coolness of the water running through the little holes in my shoes. Only a few feet and there will be real funny splashing going on. And somebody will think twice before throwing a monkey wrench into the works. Evidently the threatening piranha tattoo impressed on my arm did not speak loud enough!

At least don't be cowards! Don't grab me from behind right when I'm close to the goal. I'm a child with a mission, don't forget! You understand yourself that it's time to reassess certain models of child psychology! A breakthrough is needed! A strong signal! That's why I've got to get to that damn sprinkler before being intercepted!

8th & Agony by Rich Ferguson.
Hollywood, CA: Punk Hostage Press, 2012.
\$15.95. 135 pp. ISBN 978-0-9851293-6-1.
Reviewed by Crystal Lane Swift

All the times I stuck something up my nose and couldn't get it out: 2.
All the times I said "Under Dog" instead of "Under God"
when reciting the Pledge of Allegiance as a kid: 41;
15 by accident; 26 on purpose.
All the times I made prank phone calls to bowling alleys: 59;
to bars: 68;
to some random schmoe I picked from the phonebook: 197.
—Rich Ferguson, "All the Times"

Rich Ferguson's debut book of poetry calls in to being the usually unspoken, that which ordinary folks hide away, sometimes never notice, or what the more exceptional may only whisper about. Ferguson is an L.A.-based, well, "artist," as Bob Holman puts it in his introduction to *8th & Agony*. "I think what I find most fascinating about Rich Ferguson is his absolute ease with his being. I think what I find most fascinating about Rich Ferguson is his absolute ease with his being uncategorizeable," Holman writes. It's apropos, given Rich's many hats: radio show host, author, spoken word artist, drummer, yogi, fifth grade teacher—just to name a few (though there's only one that ever adorns his head—his signature wide brimmed straw hat).

Rich dares us to face our past, present, and future as he does: with humor, with reflexivity, and above all, with honesty. *8th & Agony* is broken in to three parts: Origins & Sin, Journey & Suffering, and Destiny & Enlightenment. His poetic journey harkens and combines the spirituality of

Kerouac, the gravity of Plath, and the playfulness of Silverstein. He walks us through his life, living, and yet to be lived as a performative genealogy—so that past, present, and future are in constant conversation. There is a twinge of regret and wisdom with each sip of hope. Regret is not only present but ever-present in “My Beautiful Suffering”:

Last night I drove down,
down to Siren Town
to the accident scene.

You were there, my suffering
looking as beautiful as when we first met;
when I let you inside me, deride me.
Made my blood & bones your home,
believed you when you said
you only needed a place to stay for a few days . . .

We are along for Ferguson’s ride. We are granted the opportunity to bring our own beautiful sufferings with us for confrontation, and should we choose, eventual rejection: “right now there ain’t nothing more you can do or say to make me want you anymore . . . I’m feeling sick & tired of talking to myself.” The ultimate twist is the shared truth that our suffering is within.

There is also a classic romance turned on its head and back on its feet within this collection. Some of the romance is within the self, some with a Higher or Internal Power, and some in a boy-meets-girl, boy-longs-for-girl roller coaster ride—literally—in the case of “Grow Wings or Cease to Be”:

Screams, lights, tattoo, lemonade, sixteen. Screams: I reach for her. *Lights:* again. *Tattoo:* she is there. She is not. She is there again. *Lemonade:* her kiss. Bittersweet. *Sixteen:* hold taste on tongue. *Screams, lights, tattoo, lemonade, sixteen:* fall again, this time harder, faster than before. Say “I love you” a million different ways. A look in her eyes like letting go, letting go of me, letting go of everything. The boardwalk pulls out from beneath me. One last wish before the ground rushes back up to meet me—

grow wings or cease to be.

The false dichotomy in the title of this poem alone (and where Rich ultimately leaves us in that poem) sets the reader on the roller coaster of the narrator. Coupled with the cadence of the structure, repetition and—quite literally—concrete imagery, we are all taken back to our first unrequited—or at least all too short-lived—summer love.

If you feel, as I do, that while these poems are beautiful on the page, they really beg to be said—or maybe even sung, aloud—there is a good reason for that. One, the author has obviously woven a lovely rhythm in to his written words. He has a Leonard Cohen story-song quality to some of his pieces. Two, several of these poems have recorded versions—some with music and some without—including: “Where I Come From,” “Mistake,” “My Beautiful Suffering,” “Bones,” “All the Times,” “Because of Camp,” “world without dogs,” “Abilene Rising,” “Pouring Down Silver,” “8th & Agony,” “When Words Meant to Be Spoken are Bottled Up for Too Long,” “See How We Are,” “The Los Angeles Book of the Dead,” “I Wait for You,” “A

Dedication,” “Certain Things About Certain Women I’ve Known,” “If I Were a Bond Girl,” “On Becoming an Urban Legend,” “Find Them All and They’ll Say,” “No Animals or Insects Were Harmed in the Making of this Poem,” “With This Kiss,” and “we voice sing.” Most of these can be found on Rich Ferguson’s [YouTube channel](#).

It is an honor to take this poetic journey through the words of Rich Ferguson’s collection. He is a uniter in a divisive age. From “I Wait for You”: “For those fatal optimists, hope flourishing but cyanide of standby, I wait for you. Offer a taste of faith to you. *Gather fractured raptures, make whole, make one.*” His work is about coming together, overcoming, just coming as you are, where you are, in the stage in which you are. From “we voice sing”: “born from failure & faith/ crack cocaine & cornflakes . . . we voice grow/ we voice rise/ we voice feed/ we voice stand/ we voice live/ we voice sing” He continues to move us forward without demanding that we leave any part of ourselves behind. Thank you, Rich, for inviting us all to the corner of 8th & Agony.

Secure the Shadow by Claudia Emerson.
Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2012.
\$18.95. 80pp. ISBN: 978-0-80714-303-2.
Reviewed by Crystal Hadidian

Although *Secure the Shadow*, by Claudia Emerson, keeps a focused lens on destruction and death, it is primarily a book about life, searching out what it means to live in the aftermath of loss. Emerson is an American poet who won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for her collection *Late Wife* (57).

The book opens with the speaker in “Late April House Fire along Interstate 81” as she observes destruction from a distance and then is drawn to witness up close the details of the burning house noting the “chimneys that would survive, calm inside / the flames’ straight rush” (3). Already the speaker is aware of that which survives, and yet she does “not stop to watch someone else’s / tragedy” (3). After this opening poem the levels of irony unravel as the speaker reveals her own personal tragedies, as well of that of complete strangers, as in the title poem, “Secure the Shadow.” The epigraph explains that “secure the shadow ‘ere the substance fade” was a “popular daguerreotypist’s advertising slogan for the making of postmortem images of loved ones.” The series of haunting descriptions catalog very old photographs, mostly of children, and imagine narratives to surround each figure. Emerson highlights photos that portray details which suggest the family’s refusal to accept the death of their loved one. For example, a girl “dead nine days,” is posed with a book, “her left

thumb holding down the page, place marked/ as though in a passage to which she will return” (15). These eerie images are offered in a compassionate, thoughtful tone from a speaker who seems familiar with the strange reluctance of grief.

After directing the gaze onto strangers, the book makes a shift and the dying characters then directly resemble those in Emerson’s biography, her brother and father. The poems in these sections almost descend into bland childhood memories, however because of the satisfying images, rhythm, and simple insights they continue to effectively point to the book’s thematic pillars relating to the spectacle of suffering, rituals of grief and what it is to be a witness of decay and destruction.

In “Namesake,” a meditation on the brother’s early death, family memories are described as “the stuff/ of patterned lace, fragile, impractical” (33). Interspersed with this personal grieving, there are restrained yet timely critiques on the media’s narration of war and national disasters, of stories “misremembered, half-lie/ or whole” (5) and those experiences which “the image cannot document” (13).

Throughout the text, Emerson continues to employ the intimate, careful couplets of her previous collections. Although visually, the form rarely varies from poem to poem, the skillful line breaks and precise diction sustain the surprise and delight necessary to propel the reader through so much grief. Within these intimate couplets, the recurring images of homes destroyed, overgrown or abandoned, the power and limits of photography as a flawed medium of memory, and specific images of family create a subtle tension that builds into the question of how to thrive as a

survivor. The collection concludes with an image of birds resisting the speaker's theories and explanations, "abandoning/ themselves instead to the invariable/ bliss of what is, the fact of flying/ manifest in every changing figure" (70).



Be Patient, Grasshopper | Chris Rauch

BIOS

Alan S. Ambrisco is an Associate Professor of English at The University of Akron, and he specializes in medieval English literature. His poems have appeared in *Elysian Fields Quarterly*, *Heartlands*, *Plainsongs*, *The Red Rock Review*, and *Whiskey Island Magazine*.

When **JMB** goes out to shoot, he carries no boundaries. He often ventures into the wild unknown to look to see what to capture. The art of his work is not devised, structured or created with motive in hand; it develops on its own, like perception in transition. With JMB and photography the best things seem to happen when least expected.

Agatha Beins lives in Denton, TX, where she teaches women's studies at Texas Woman's University, bicycles around town, serves as editor of *Films for the Feminist Classroom* and volunteers at an amazing local farm. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The Laurel Review*, *Blackbird*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Newfound*, *Devil's Lake*, *Mandala*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *The Fiddleback*.

Tabitha Blankenbiller is a Pacific Northwest native who recently relocated to Tucson, Arizona. She graduated from the Pacific University MFA program in June 2012. She is a staff writer at PDXX Collective and Spectrum Culture, and writes The Wordstalker column for *Barrelhouse Magazine*. Her personal essays have been published in journals including *Owl Eye Review*, *Sliver of Stone* and *Brevity*. More information on Tabitha's current writing projects can be found at tabithablankenbiller.com or via Tweets at @tabithablanken.

Karen Boissonneault-Gauthier is a photographer and writer who's developed a real love for capturing life and forms with her camera. Her works have been featured in many varying forums, from national newspapers, fashion, portrait, lifestyle, horseracing, military, educational and literary journals to heritage museums. Karen usually

jokes she has a great eye for what the camera lens loves and that's why she rarely turns the lens onto herself. Most recently she's been featured in *Crack the Spine Literary Magazine*, *Jaw Dropping Shots*, *Dactyl*, and *Zen Dixie Magazine*, where she is a senior writer/columnist and photography contributor. You can follow her on Twitter @KCB_Tweets and find her column at <http://www.zendixie.com/karma-obscura-archive.html>.

Alana I. Capria (born 1985) is the author of *Hooks and Slaughterhouse*. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Fairleigh Dickinson University. Capria resides in northern New Jersey with her husband and rabbit. Her website is <http://alanaicapria.com>.

Jack Caseros is a Canadian writer and scientist. His first novel, *Onwards & Outwards*, was released in 2012 to zero acclaim. His newest novel is currently looking for a publishing house to call home. For now, it will have to be satisfied eating baked beans out of the can by a bonfire under the nearest bridge. You can read more (but not much more) about Jack at www.jackcaseros.webs.com.

Tiziana Rinaldi Castro is a published novelist, poet, and journalist in Italy, her native country. She lives in New York and teaches Ancient Greek Literatures at the University of Montclair.

Sara Biggs Chaney lives happily in small-town Vermont. She fears that she'll hit 40 without learning how to skip stones on the water. She holds a Ph.D. from Indiana University (which didn't help her learn to skip stones, no, not in the least.) Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *burntdistrict*, *Corium Magazine*, *Stone Highway Review*, *The Dressing Room Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. You can catch up with Sara at sarabiggschaney.blogspot.com.

Matt Dahl is a writer (*Butterfly Teardrops*, 2002) and artist (resident artist at Altered Esthetics in Minneapolis) who juxtaposes everyday items to refocus our attention. In 2007, Dahl's photos of homeless people were featured in the music video "Land of 10,000 Homeless." Here Dahl twists Andrew Wyeth's "Christina's World" to reflect the tension that exists between religion and gender equality.

Daniele De Serto was born and lives in Rome, Italy. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Granta Italia*, *Linus*, *Tina*, *Colla*, among others. He also worked as author for TV shows. From 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. he works in an aircraft maintenance centre and he can confirm that engine roars don't help writing.

Susan J. Erickson's poems appear in *2River View*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Museum of Americana*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Switched-on-Gutenberg*, and *The Lyric*. "Sleeping with Trotsky" is from her manuscript of poems in women's voices. She lives in Bellingham, Washington where she helped establish the Sue C. Boynton Poetry Walk.

Jennifer Vera Faylor is a New York City poet. She lives with her goldfish Edison and when not writing she's busy being a chocolatier. She has her MFA in Poetry from Sarah Lawrence College and her chapbook, *The Case of the Missing Lover*, was published by Dancing Girl Press. She blogs at: jenniferfaylor.blogspot.com.

Pattie Flint is an uprooted Seattle native toughing it out in New England and spends her days as an editor at Medusa's Laugh Press specializing in hand-bound books. She has been published in *InkSpeak*, *HESA Inprint*, *Hippocampus* and *TAB*, amongst others. She is currently working on her second young adult novel.

Born and raised in Portland Oregon, **Susan Sweetland Garay** received a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Brigham Young University, spent some years in the Ohio Appalachians and currently lives in the Willamette Valley with her husband where she works in the Vineyard industry. She spends her free time writing, growing plants and making art. She has had poetry and photography published in a variety of journals, online and in print, such as *Moon Hollow Press*, *Lady Chaos Press*, *Vine Leaves Literary Journal*, *The Solstice Initiative*, *Silver Birch Press*, *The Front Porch Review*, *Electric Windmill Press*, *Outside In Literary Journal*, *Deep Water Literary Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *Leaves of Ink*, and the *Camel Saloon*. More of her work can be found at susansweetlandgaray.wordpress.com. She is also a founding editor of The Blue Hour Literary Magazine and Press.

Megan Gendell writes poems, zines, and sometimes children's books; performs and teaches circus; and loves to copyedit YA novels.

Crystal Hadidian's [poems](#) have recently appeared in *Literary Mama*, *Calyx*, and *Word Riot*. Originally from Austin, Texas, Crystal graduated from University of California, Santa Barbara and received her MFA in Creative Writing at SDSU. She has won some other cool awards and stuff and would really, really like you to visit her website and follow the directions: www.CrystalHadidian.com Also, there's twitter: @crystalhadidian

Elaine Handley has published in a variety of magazines and anthologies including *Stone Canoe*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Dos Passos Review*, and *On the Other Side of the Mountain* (anthology). In 2005, 2006, and 2010, with writing partners Marilyn McCabe and Mary Sanders Shartle, she won the Adirondack Center for Writing's Best Poetry Book Award. Their latest book of poems, *Tear of the Clouds*, was released by Ra Press. Handley's most recent poetry chapbook is *Letters to My Migraine*, and she is completing a novel, *Deep River*, about the Underground Railroad in Upstate New York.

Zachary Lundgren received his MFA in poetry from the University of South Florida and his BA from the University of Colorado. He grew up in northern Virginia, but currently resides in Colorado. He has had work published in several literary magazines and journals, including the *Louisville Review*, *Tule Review*, the *Adirondack Review*, and *Barnstorm Journal*.

J. Kirk Maynard lives in Portland, Oregon with his wife Jessica and their dog Lucy. His poems and reviews have been published or are forthcoming in *Arch*, *Blood Lotus*, *Crack the Spine*, *Black Warrior Review* and *White Whale Review*. He edits the online journal [Work/Life](#).

Chris Rauch has always enjoyed photography in order to capture a moment in time. Candid, nature, and details seldom noticed are among his favorite shots.

Cheryl L. Rice is a professional speaker, coach and author. She has previously published essays on love and loss in *Cure Magazine*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and HelloGrief.com. Cheryl blogs at

YourVoiceYourVision.com and lives with her family in the Philadelphia suburbs.

Marin Sardy is an essayist, memoirist, and cultural critic whose creative nonfiction has been published or is forthcoming in *Post Road*, *LUMINA*, *SFWP*, *Phoebe*, *Elsewhere*, *Anamesa*, *Blood & Honey*, *Outside*, *Broken Bridge*, and the *Forum* at thecrookedhouse.org. Her work has also appeared in numerous magazines and two photography books—*Landscape Dreams* (2012) and *Ghost Ranch and the Faraway Nearby* (2009). Sardy is currently an MFA candidate in Nonfiction Writing at Columbia University.

Dan Schall teaches at Arcadia University near Philadelphia, PA, and is the University Director of the Writing Center. He has had poetry published in *Moria Poetry Journal*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Parody*, and forthcoming work in *streetnotes*.

Susan Solomon is a graduate of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. She loves, more than anything, to paint her friends' poems and is so darn happy to be showing this particular piece in *Cactus Heart*. The cactus painting is the companion piece to "Johnny on Thunderbolt," a poem by Todd Pederson. Susan is also the editor of *Sleet Magazine*, an online literary journal. If interested, more paintings can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/SusanSolomonPainter>

Pablo Piñero Stillmann has been the recipient of fellowships from the Foundation for Mexican Literature and Indiana University, as well as the Normal Prize in Nonfiction. His work has appeared in *Puerto del Sol*, *The Rumpus*, *Bodega*, and other journals. He lives and writes in Woodruff Place, Indianapolis.

Savannah Sullivan is a Nashville native currently living in Tallahassee, Florida with her husband and their two guinea pigs, Paco and Rico. Though she has always preferred writing to reading, she is decidedly better at the latter and thus is pursuing a Ph.D. in Spanish Literature at the Florida State University. Savannah is also a co-founder and editor for *Huesoloco Journal of Arts and Literature*, which publishes works in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Find out more at huesoloco.org.

[Crystal Lane Swift](#), PhD, is a communication professor at Mt. San Antonio College and California State University, Northridge and a Mary Kay Sales Director. She paints, sings, acts, models, produces independent films, and has published many academic articles and two academic books. Crystal Lane has published poetry in *Shangri-La Shack*, *Still Points Quarterly*, *PQLeer*, and other places. Her poetry collection, *God Bless Paul*, is out on Rosedog Books and her chapbook, *The Way We Were*, as well as her “Fourplay,” *Still Learning to Let Go*, are out on Writing Knights Press.

[James Valvis](#) is the author of *How to Say Goodbye* (Aortic Books, 2011). His poems or stories have appeared in journals such as *Anderbo*, *Arts & Letters*, *Barrow Street*, *Juked*, *LA Review*, *Nimrod*, *River Styx*, *Rosebud*, *storySouth*, and many others. His poetry has been featured in Verse Daily. His fiction was chosen for the 2013 Sundress Best of the Net. A former US Army soldier, he lives near Seattle.

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Kirby Wright was a Visiting Fellow at the 2009 International Writers Conference in Hong Kong, where he represented the Pacific Rim region of Hawaii and lectured in China with Pulitzer winner Gary Snyder. He was also a Visiting Writer at the 2010 Martha's Vineyard Residency in Edgartown, Mass., and the 2011 Artist in Residence at Milkwood International, Czech Republic. He is the author of the companion novels *Punahou Blues* and *Moloka'i Nui Abina*, both set in Hawaii. *The End, My Friend*, his futuristic novel, is forthcoming in 2013.

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