Dear Readers,

Grab a cup of coffee (or drink of choice) and take a gander at issue four of 3Elements Review! As always, our contributors are from around the world. This is our largest issue to date! We also have a co-written story (a first for us) and many other amazing and talented writers and artists. This issue is packed with unique photography and art.

For issue five, the elements are: doppelganger, bludgeon, and dirge. Submit by September 1st on our website!

We have opened up submissions for 3Elements Review Annual Mix and Match Contests, offering cash prizes in fiction and poetry. Fiction will be judged by Susan Tepper, and poetry will be judged by Ravi Shankar. Visit the “Contests” page on our website to learn more about the contests and the judges.

Lastly, consider submitting to our monthly publication Stories from Art. Each month we post a piece of art or photography and ask that you write a piece of flash fiction inspired by that piece.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read our journal. Spread the word. Submit!

Sincerely,
Mikaela Shea
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The Circus is in Town
Maraya Loza Koxahn
Carnival Girl
Kari Shemwell

She’s a carnival—
A mess of slender women swinging from her scalp
And a cultivated Bengal cat hiding in her mouth.

When she’s low,
Her bed is a boxcar in a freak show train.
She’s a fat lady, a moustache,
A sword-eater with a cleft chin.
She’s a sad spectacle on a pillowed stage.
They slip her candy corns
Through iron bars.
Between her breasts, an old ringmaster
Weaves maudlin tales of circus nights
About Siamese goats who shared one heart
And Russian dancers who shared one face.
But the residue of spotlight
Is itching in her hair
And her eyes are two halves
Of a woman
In a mirror box.

She’s a carnival—
Her skin is a wrinkled former acrobat;
Her knees are a walker on a wire.
IN the Summer of ’93, my baby cousin Maddy died because dish soap looks too much like honey.

My Aunt Marie slept through it, but she hasn’t slept since. She says Maddy cries at night. Then, in ’96, Maddy’s sister Bea jumped in front of a subway car. It was summer again. I was standing right next to her.

We don’t talk about depression in my family. If you’re sad, you go to church. You read the bible. You talk to your pastor. You pray and hope God hears you.

**

“You’re not old enough to go to the parade.” My mother clicked her teeth while Bea and I swarmed her hips and legs. “Besides, it’s nothing but a Yankee party anyway.”

“Yankee,” I repeated.

“Yankee,” Bea followed. Our families all had these thick Jamaican accents we loved to mimic. And when we visited the island—if ever—we knew we’d be Yankees too, Americans born
into Caribbean families.

“Stop that.” Laughter was sandwiched in the sternness of her voice. She wiped the wooden spoon she was using the stir the pot on the stove. She waved it at us like a wand. “Carnival in Jamaica--now that is how it’s done.”

“But what are the chances we’ll go to Jamaica any time soon?” Bea reasoned.

“Yes! Exactly. C’mon, Mom!” I pleaded. I wrapped my arms around her wide waist. Today was her day off, a rarity only because of Labor Day. A day off for her only meant that she could stay home from one of her two jobs.

“Ask your father.”

My father was an easy man. He worked a night shift driving buses in and out of the tri-state area. During the day he slept and read the newspaper. Sometimes I would go days without seeing his face, only headlines and cover photos.

“Meet your cousins there,” he told me and handed me a wrinkled twenty-dollar bill. Bea and I turned our wide grins to one another and escaped.

**

Every Labor Day, Eastern Parkway explodes with reggae and soca music. It is flooded with a rainbow of people: men with face paint on stilts and, women wearing enormous feather crowns like brown-skinned phoenixes. And our flags wave through the air, on our heads, on our wrists, in the back pockets of our jeans. We dance through the streets.

I couldn’t remember the last time I’d seen Bea happy. But she was wide-eyed now, moving her hips and waving her arms at the dancers. She smiled but she said, “This isn’t what I pictured.”

“Me either.” I was noticing the chipped paint and dirty streaks
on the floats. I was noticing the sweating, tired faces of the dancers, the lazy head nod of the DJs, the static in the speakers. The colors were a bit dull now, like clouds had gone over the sun. But Bea kept smiling. She looked happy.

***

In May, I saw Bea for the first time after she died. I’d taken to lying on the couch, my hot skin sticking to the ripping plastic, my mouth dry from thirst, my eyes dry from crying. They’d given me leave of school and with my parents at work so often, I went unnoticed.

My mother told my father, “Help her, don’t you see she’s mourning?”

And I thought that odd because I’d told her that Bea was suffering, and she had said nothing to my aunt.

“Come with me,” my father said near sunset one day. There was no room in his voice for my argument. “Get some fresh air.”

Outside, in our small yard of broken cobblestone and dry grass, he sat on the steps and went back to his newspaper. For a moment, I stood there, lost, staring at our one bush with shiny green leaves. “Catch some fireflies,” he told me. So I did.

The one that landed in my palm fluttered its wings and sluggishly crawled across my thumb like a man adjusting his jacket before walking out the door. I could’ve crushed it. I wondered if it knew. It was either stupid or brave. I could feel my father looking at me from the porch. I hoped he didn’t expect a smile; I didn’t have one in me.

I watched the firefly float and blink and I wondered how it had so much inside without exploding. I rubbed my chest. My eyes watered.

And then I saw Bea.
She was standing by the fence that blocked us from our neighbors. She wore the same shorts and striped camisole she’d worn the day she died. She smiled the same smile she’d paraded at carnival. She waved, and I did not wave back. I just rubbed my chest harder and clenched my teeth together. I knew she couldn’t be real. I knew it but still I opened my mouth. “Bea…” I whispered and when she didn’t disappear, I reached my hand out and took a step forward.

Suddenly she peeled away, all her skin coming off like a swarm of red butterflies. I could hear her laughing.

**

There are only two things to do at Carnival:. eat and dance. We spent my twenty dollars on mango slices in chili sauce, beef patties, buns and cheese, and a plate of ox tails over rice. At thirteen, we couldn’t drink. We could only dodge the intoxicated. We could only watch big, ashy hands reach for the bare flesh of summertime, listen to uncomfortable laughs and, words that slurred. We were young enough to see the police officers who had stopped for lap dances from some of the performers, but too young to see it on the news the next day, to understand them losing their jobs.

At one point, we sat on someone’s steps, watching a man get pummeled and dragged away by cops. “What do you think happens when you die?” Bea was licking gravy from her fingers. “You go to heaven,” I said.

“Bullshit,” she laughed. We’d been cussing all day, free from our chains.

“You don’t believe in heaven?”

“I don’t believe in God.”
Out of habit, I looked around for our grandmother. She was a strict old woman who’d taken in Bea and her mother when Aunt Marie proved herself unfit to care for Bea alone. She was so religious. It was dangerous to say you would be late for church. I feared her wrath if she heard Bea didn’t believe in God. “You’re serious?”

“Do you think God would let bad things happen? If so, then I don’t want to worship him.”

“So, what do you think happens?” I frowned. I thought, perhaps, Bea was asking because she needed assurance that Maddy was somewhere safe.

“I don’t know. I don’t even care. I know it’s better than this, though.” She handed me the foil tin of our food. “I’m glad we came. I always wanted to see Carnival.”

“Me, too. I can’t wait to go when we’re older, though.”

Bea didn’t say anything.

***

Before Carnival, Bea had been so maudlin that I had to say something. “She’s sad, Mom,” I told my mother while she knitted. The living room had been silent save for my dad’s rustling newspaper and her clinking knitting needles. “It’s like she hasn’t been able to move on after Maddy’s death.”

I knew better. We didn’t talk about Maddy anymore. I never understood why. She was gone, but I didn’t want to forget her. But maybe mention of Maddy brought attention to Aunt Marie, wandering the house at night trying to put to sleep a baby who wasn’t there.

“Mom? What should I do? How can I help her?”

“She has to get through this on her own. Sometimes you can’t help people.”
“Maybe she can come live with us. Her house is so depressing.” By depressing, I meant terrifying.

“We can’t feed another mouth,” my mother said. She was right. She was working two jobs just to feed me. Just to keep our half of the little two-family house in Brownsville.

“I’m worried about her.”

“Hush, child.” So I did. I stayed quiet the entire, sweltering summer. I just let Bea struggle and I never told anyone how much it scared me when she gave me her favorite brown leather jacket.

**

The second time I saw Bea after she died was around Christmas. We spent it at my grandmother’s house because she had enough space to fit over fifty members of the family, however snug. I was the odd one out; I always had been. I was tall and chubby and none of my fat had gone to the good places. I was darker than most of my family members, and they never let me forget it.

“Tanning in the winter, huh, child?” my Aunt Rose asked me. She was the color of the inside of a peanut—but Mom had told me it was because she used too much bleaching cream on her skin. I ignored her and kept to myself, watching the gifts under the tree pile up. I missed Bea. Three months after her death and I had slipped into a rebellious silence. There was no point in talking. No one would listen to me.

“Key,” my mother told me, “open one of your gifts.”

I moved to a big blue box, flat so I knew it was clothing. There was a pair of Parasuco jeans with the stripe down the side. I had never cared for them, but Bea had cried for months when our grandmother wouldn’t buy them.

“Do you like them?” my uncle Rupert asked. His voice was
shaking and I knew it wasn’t from the eggnog.

“You didn’t buy these for me,” I said evenly. It really was more of a fact than a lamentation. I knew Uncle Rupert. He loved Bea. He had probably bought the pants months before she died, possibly for her birthday at the end of September.

Uncle Rupert didn’t argue with me. I left the living room and went outside without a coat. The cold filled me instantly. I shivered. My teeth chattered. Across the street, red and blue lights illuminated the dark sky. The street lights shuddered out; the red lights grew wings.

They flew at me.

The bright butterflies formed a whirlwind around me. I hugged my shoulders against the wind of their storm. Bea flickered in and out of sight until, for a moment she was solid, in her summer clothes. Smiling. Maybe she was laughing.

“Bea? Why are you doing this?” But she didn’t answer. Her smile didn’t even waver. “Please Bea, stop! Stop!” I kept shouting stop over and over. Or so I thought. Later, they would tell me that I was just in the cold, in the old, frozen brown snow, screaming Bea’s name. This was the first time it happened. It would happen many more times.

**

Bea did it on the way home from Carnival. When the train went from Utica to Pennsylvania, she made me get off, said she didn’t want to go home yet. So we watched the sun set from the platform. It was hot. My t-shirt had grown heavy against my skin.

“Is it bad I’m hungry again?” I asked. “All we did was eat all day.”

She laughed. “You’ve always been a fat ass, though.” She was the only person who could call me fat without hurting my feelings.
“Come spit over the edge with me.” She leaned against the railing of the platform.

I came up beside her working saliva into my mouth. We hadn’t done this since we were kids, and I only agreed because I was tired and wanted to go home.

“Bet you I can hit the bald guy.”

“No, he looks like he’s coming upstairs.”

“So? The train is coming now. There’s no way he can get to the middle of the platform in time.”

“Fine,” I laughed and shot. I couldn’t see my spit make the trip, but the man looked up right as the train came, right as Bea disappeared from my peripheral vision.

Someone screamed. Maybe it was me. A few feet down the platform lay Bea’s discarded sneaker, flung free of her foot.

I went downstairs, hopped the turnstile and ran outside under the tracks. I had never seen a body in that position. Bea’s clothes were torn. Her skin was ripped open. Her blood was all over the asphalt, like a splattered swarm of dark red butterflies. I shook my head, a slow, uncontrollable rhythm of defiance.

Police officers drove me home and spoke to me the whole ride. I was quiet. Bea had been right next to me only hours before. I kept trying to wrap my head around the idea that I would never see her again. I should’ve been trying to deal with the idea that I would.

**

I am convinced the dead don’t leave. Perhaps Aunt Marie sees Maddy like I see Bea. Perhaps we do not talk about our dead when they are gone because we don’t want to acknowledge the residue they leave behind. Maybe we’re praying we can forget them. Maybe we put all our energy into making that work, even if
we are paddling upstream with our hands, and the water rushes right through our fingers.
Residue
Roman Sirotin
Her mother named her rising sun, Kaisra, the first half-hearted attempt to evade generations of misery.

Her first memory:
her mother staring
at a window empty-eyed.
Maudlin creases edge her lips,
her forehead, her cheeks.
Her reflection
a still life, unpainted.

Once tall enough, on tiptoe
Kaisra watched the carnival of spring through paned windows.
Cotton candy snowflakes weaved around the new limbs of old trees.
Her chest spun,
captured in the whimsy of air whirling by.
It was easier then, when she was almost happy.
Now Kaisra sits, a vase in the window, perched over the weeds that lick the moulting tree trunk. The rusted mechanical remains frame sanguine wildflowers, stunted where they stand. Catfish mouth gulping, she battles the urge to drown. Desperate to catch a glimpse of wonder, she squints to see past or through the residue of her mother in the window’s reflection. Cloudy again today.
Caribana
Marqus Bobesich
**Fast Don’t Say It**
Barbara Jean Walsh

**EVEN** now, just holding the red-handled paring knife reminds me of Vince. You remember Vince, the boxer. Tia Gina’s nephew. Back in the sixties, we’d see him drive by in that white Caddy with just the word “Boxer” on the license plate. Yeah, that’s the one. Vince.

I knew him. Oh, yeah. Like I said, he was Tia Gina’s nephew. Vince. Remember when I used to go out with Tia Gina’s little brother Frankie? Frankie Nappi? We were in a bunch of classes together at the college, and then we’d drink at The Gardens after, too.

Back then, I didn’t know much of anybody in town, but Frankie and I sort of paired off, out of necessity as much as anything. Everyone needs a pal. We liked each other okay, but we never made the stars come out in each other’s eyes. And we had some value to each other.

I don’t know what Frankie was even doing in school, except Tia Gina had raised him, and he needed to make her proud. And I guess that’s what I wanted to do to, make her proud. Remember
how she always looked so great? With her black hair up in that beehive? And she smelled like lavender and garlic? Her husband Tony would come home and just inhale her.

So, for Tia Gina’s eyes, Frankie and I we were dating, but in truth, it was a cover story: I was a good Catholic girl he could take home to Tia Gina. Not too pretty-pretty. No threat. Hair that might clean up nice. A smart girl who could help any future children with their homework. I made sure he kept up with his classes and always had a date on Saturday night, at least until midnight. A cover story.

That’s why you’d see me in the neighborhood so often, walking up the hill with a bag of groceries from Amato’s market. I spent my Sundays with Tia Gina while Tony worked overtime, and Frankie slept in at his place with one of his whores.

Then one Sunday, in walked Vince, and I was stunned. I knew there was some kind of family connection, but I’d seen him around, just out driving that white Caddy. As far as I knew, he was only at the gym or out on the boxing circuit.

Now I’d seen Tia Gina beam at Frankie before when he’d brought her a bouquet of flowers that he’d swiped from the farmer’s market, but I’d never seen the kind of light she cast on Vince.

“Hey, where’s Frankie?” he asked me, delicately turning away from Tia Gina’s hug. “You’re that girl, right?”

“Frankie had some work to do today,” I stammered. “He and Arthur Mott are fixing up the Camaro.”

“No problem,” he said. “I came here to cook, not to talk to Frankie.” Tia Gina nodded and slipped out the door to go tell her neighbors who was visiting.

Frankie, Arthur, and most of the boys I knew then had told
me how dazzled they were by seeing Vince’s hands in the ring. “Fast, don’t say it,” they’d tell me. And this at the same time that lightning was coming out of Cassius Clay’s gloves, turning him into Mohammed Ali. The landmark fight against Sonny Liston was only a few weeks away.

“Fast, don’t say it,” I’d thought to myself as I watched the ballet of Vince’s hands paring and dicing zucchini, spinning each slice in turn into a bowl of frothy batter and then skipping it into fragrant hot virgin olive oil.

“Yes, hot virgin,” Vince murmured to me. “This is an elegance of zucchini,” he chanted, waving the long, slender squash in front of my face. “This is elegance.”

“This is a boxer?” I thought, wondering if he could see me blush.

After dinner I helped Vince clean up as Tia Gina slumbered on the couch. “So,” he asked me, “is Frankie still seeing that stripper at the St. Regis?”

“Yeah, he is.”

“You can do better,” he whispered, his lips almost touching my ear. He flicked a last drop of water off the scrubbed paring knife and tossed it into the drawer with a flourish, then tapped the drawer closed with his hip. Elegance.

Soon after that, I told Frankie that I couldn’t be his cover any more. I needed to find someone to give me love, not just a trade-off. Maybe it was maudlin, but I meant it.

“That’s all right,” said Frankie. “You and me and Arthur, we’ll still go to the fights together, right?”

“Yeah.”

And we did. In fact, we were at ringside the first time any of us ever saw Vince lose a prize fight. And the next time and the next
time. The last time I saw Vince fight, he went down hard. I was right there, ringside, looking at him, when he winked at me – or maybe it was just a twitch. Anyway, he seemed to be saying, “You can do better. You.”

There were more fights, but Arthur found something else to do, and then I did. Frankie stopped calling, I moved out of state to get my bachelor’s, and Vince wasn’t a headliner anymore.

In November, I was home for a visit and thought I’d do some Christmas shopping at the mall. Me and eight million other people. Including Vince. I saw him just ahead of me in the crowd, but no, I didn’t try to catch up. I saw him go into Zale’s Jewelry. I walked on by to cruise Sears and then headed back out.

I hit Zale’s again just as the cops were leading Vince away. Again he looked at me. Did he know I was me? Doesn’t matter. He gave me that wink. That “you can do better than this” wink. Only this time the emphasis was on “better,” not on “you.”

On the evening news, I saw his battered and scarred face. Embarrassed, battered, and scarred face. Still as handsome as he was that night in Tia Gina’s kitchen, though. You just had to overlook the scars and the sorrow. The lines. The welts. Outside of that, he was still The Champ. At least I knew it was still him. Other people? They may have thought he looked guilty.

The news guy said Vince had been under surveillance at Zale’s. He’d been in the store a few too many times, asking prices, trying on rings. The sales staff still called him Champ, but they wouldn’t accept his credit card anymore.

Then Vince tried to switch a diamond ring for the one in his pocket. The cubic zirconia, worth about $24.99. And the store had him arrested.

A coupla summers later, I was home again. Showing off my
new boyfriend Hal to my family. They all liked him. Hal was a good Catholic boy I could take home to my family. Not too pretty-pretty. No threat. Hair that might clean up nice. A smart boy who could take care of me and our future children. A cover story.

We drove out to the beach for a drink and a walk near but not in the sand. The pier and boardwalk were throbbing with neon, and all my favorite summertime smells—french fries, pizza, cotton candy, and Colt-45—conspired to fill my head with some happiness that my heart did not feel.

Hal was skipping around a bit, trying to avoid dog poop and lost ice-cream cones as we negotiated the boardwalk. The carnival atmosphere made him want to go get a drink someplace else, any place else, so we were headed to the parking lot when we paused in front of a fast-talking salesman so Hal could check the soles of his shoes for any unsavory residue.

The barrage of noise behind us seemed to be about kitchen knives: turn a watermelon into a whale; turn a whale into a watermelon. Then I heard the speakers crackle out, “Fast, don’t say it.”

I whirled around and looked up into the eyes of Vince, the boxer, The Champ. His hands flew over a huge zucchini carving it into a thousand different shapes before my very eyes. I saw the history of the universe embossed into squash. My feet turned into roots. Zucchini roots most likely.

“Hey,” said Hal. “What’s wrong with you? We don’t need any knives, Baby. We don’t need any knives. We’ll eat out. It’s safer.”

As Hal tugged me toward the car, I glanced over my shoulder just in time to catch Vince’s wink. The one that said, “You can do better.” Emphasis on “can.” And the next day, the FedEx guy showed up at my door with a whole set of those knives for me.
No, no card. But you know, these knives are a great value. And you can’t buy them in stores.
Raindrop Residue
Candice Trimble
Dear Mom, I’m sending this postcard to you on the other side. It’s of the Ringling Ca’ d’Zan mansion—the place you called a carnival that gilded Venetian palace octogon paintings on the ceiling, black and white tiles on a floor, a skylight that seems to be fifty feet up, a bar room with stained glass hunting scenes, stone lions outside by Sarasota Bay, the lavish bedrooms you climbed the stairs for, saying, “I just have to see them,” even though it took you fifteen minutes. You could not believe the opulence, you became teary-eyed, maudlin, you who lived in that attic apartment, and then, when you could no longer take the stairs, moved three floors down to the basement rooms, mercifully called a garden apartment. I found the card in the back of a drawer, a residue of your visit to us years ago. I’m mailing it. I hope it arrives and that it takes you back.
JAQUE is having a boy. He’s in her tummy, developing neurons and muscles and organs, but by the end of December he’ll be one more boy beside his brother. He’ll be one more boy risking it all to grow up in the battleground of Falet.

Falet is a strange place to live. This slum that crams together houses along a landslide-prone hill in Rio de Janeiro’s oldest neighborhood. It’s a strange place to come back to, but I promise Jaque’s mother I will. I promise Jaque’s mother I’ll return when my volunteer work in Salvador ends. I promise her I’ll be there to welcome Jaque’s future boy into the world.

I miss his arrival by a month. When I return, three weeks before carnival, João Pedro is a small, screaming infant, perpetually irritated by all the sound and sweat and distraction that surrounds his tiny house.

I hold him to my chest one night as Jaque, sprawled out on a mattress in the other room, snores through a serum of exhaustion. Miraculously, João Pedro’s wailing ceases. He presses his nose
into the soft part of my neck and his mouth shape-shifts from a scowl into a pucker. I kiss his forehead and watch him sleep. I think about Jaque’s older brother, who almost died in Falet when he tried to leave the drug traffic behind. I fall asleep with the baby on my chest as gunfire laces the air with patterns of distant conversation.

***

“In Rio de Janeiro people break up with their partners just for Carnival and get back together when it ends, so that there’s no guilt when the festive spirit...well...takes you over.”

Jaque’s mother, Vall, details the standard protocols of Rio’s iconic two-week party while patiently pressing strands of my hair inside a flattening iron. With my head cocked toward the glassless window I can hear the beginning rumbles of music and fireworks as my nail polish dries under a welcome breeze.

My heart was recently broken and skewered and charred by a Brazilian man I met in September. I say that I don’t want to go out, but Vall insists.

“Sadness must never triumph during Carnival, amore. Never.”

When she’s done ironing, my hair is warm to the touch like clothes fresh from a dryer. Vall lines my eyes with glittery black pencil. She shades my lips with sticky rose-colored gloss.

João Pedro bounces against Jaque’s hip and gurgles as she pauses in front of my stool to look me up and down.

“Don’t let a foolish man ruin your party,” she says.

***

I foolishly call him. I leave a maudlin message in a haze of desperation after drinking two strong caipirinhas with Vall at a concert.

The next morning I remember the message and all the strings
of grammatically slaughtered Portuguese I uttered tearfully into the dirty payphone. I tell Vall I can’t get out of bed. She tells me I have to.

“I need your help,” she says.

Vall took a pregnancy test and it came out positive, although positive is not an apt word for the scenario she’s facing.

“That part of my life is done.” She cries softly, head in her hands, back pressed against the concrete wall. “Even if I wanted to have another baby, I don’t have the strength to raise a fifth child in these circumstances.”

I hold her hand and my break-up angst levels down until it’s only reverb.

Abortions are illegal in Brazil. To safely seek one out, we have to ask around with tremendous tact. We have to inquire about women’s clinics that specialize in women’s cancer treatments. We have to guess at the hidden meaning underneath the hushed tones of our allies. We have to hope we end up in the right place.

***

I lay beside Jaque whispering in the darkness. João Pedro sleeps on her chest and his brother and sister curl around her legs.

“I still miss him,” Jaque tells me. “I still miss him everyday.” She’s talking about the father of her first-born. A drug trafficker who ended up in prison and will remain there indefinitely.

“He chose a life that’s not a life.” She clucks her tongue and traces the chubby outline of João Pedro’s cheek with her index finger. “Why did things end with your boyfriend?” she asks me.

I pause in the unusual stillness. No radios blaring, no machine guns cackling, no fireworks erupting.

“I cheated on him. Then he cheated on me. Then he fell in love with another woman.”
“The heart is crazy,” she whispers as tears push through my lashes.
João Pedro stirs and his eyes open into slits.
“He’s not used to the silence.”
“Why is it so quiet tonight?” I ask.
“Perhaps the guns are out of bullets.”
***
I scream into Vall’s cell phone, summoning every slang word I know. Her boyfriend’s voice trembles on the other end.
“Just tell her I can’t see her. Not after the abortion. I don’t want to see her.”
You tell her, you coward.
The phone clicks and the dial tone resumes. Vall looks at me from the couch, eyes as round as quarters. I sit down beside her and sing a slightly off-key verse from a song she loves. Jaque comes in from the other room with João Pedro, who’s smiling as a string of drool falls from his chin onto the floor. She nestles him against me and pulls my foot onto her knee. I stroke the baby’s face as Jaque opens a bottle of polish and paints my toenails a blazing shade of red.
***
“I miss you,” he says, at the bus stop outside of the park.
I miss you like crazy. Still. I miss the way you smell and sound and taste.
I fix my eyes on the row of palm trees across the street.
“I miss you too. I’m sorry we broke everything.”
His bus arrives. He grabs my face and kisses me once, right before running up the steps to find a seat. I wait on the bench as the bus pulls away. Guilt and anger rush back and forth inside my ribcage until there’s nothing left but the residue of longing.
João Pedro will walk by the end of December. I miss his first steps by two months. When I return to Rio he’s transporting himself with a wobbly strut, as if he already understands the confident posturing of men.

Vall and I sit across from each other, holding our arms out as João Pedro totters between us, squealing.

“I’m so happy to be a grandmother,” she smiles. “I’m so happy to see all of this from a new perspective.”

When João Pedro gets a few inches from my open arms I snatch him up and he giggles as I lift him in the air.

Just after dinner he falls asleep in my lap. I close my eyes and silently commune with the powers that be.

Help us understand how to nurture this boy into a man capable of both courage and vulnerability, I ask. Help us create a place where boys become men who are valued for the understanding they offer instead of the triggers they pull. Help me hold up my end of the bargain. Help me be fair and fierce and honest.

March sends a smoky, floral breeze between the window bars and Falet rattles with the uneasy rhythm of nighttime activity. I cradle the boy that will become a man and wait for the gunfire to quiet into echoes. Then I close my eyes and join his restless dreaming.
Untitled
Natalie Lopez
Giant teacups sit in us
at the carnival while we wait
for the spinning to stop
our heads. Fat lady
clouds gulp down our throats
and the Tunnel of Love
circles around and around us.
One unshelled peanut breaks
the scale, the carousel plays
a hymn and grinning pumpkins
turn maudlin. When we pay
a pretty Penny to play
ring toss, tears streak
leaving pink residue.
Our two bands of gold
tilt-n-whirl away.
Now it’s all nonsense, making sense of nonsense, turning sense into nonsense, making sense that looks like nonsense, calling the sense nonsensical. That’s what I think.

Alexander Drost
INSTEAD of a goodbye kiss at the door, I pull Adam out into the heat. He looks behind him at the still-open door, at the dishes, the creamy remains of egg and pan-softened potato already sticking to the plates. I’m not yet used to leaving this place, and not sure where I am going.

Let’s walk. I yank his hand.

For the first few minutes my mind plays over the progression of my breakfast down into the gut. How will my eggs respond when greeted with the bile produced by last night’s concoctions—with violence or capitulation?

Where are we going? he asks.

I don’t answer. Something about my suggestion must have made him sense I had a purpose. I know this from his silence, and the way he follows.

I watch Adam’s green eyes as they travel over the convention of grasses, grown long on the pathway down to the creek, obscuring the trail. They curve together in clusters with the wind,
shifting shoals of colour from dark yellow to light. He opens his mouth, but I can see that the thought that comes is interrupted by another, one that advises the mouth to close again. I wait for a moment, but then I realize it won’t be what I want to hear.

We walk to the creek’s edge and Adam takes my hand. We look at each other for a short while, then I release his eyes and glance at a cluster of seeds dangling above his head like a bunch of flattened grapes, the juice long extracted.


I laugh. No. Not a spider.

The creek runs fast—foamy caps of water are dragged away seemingly against their will. We walk along the path with the white line running down its center, one side for walking, one for biking. It might still be perfect here if I hadn’t seen the man last night. This is still inside. I’ve no way to release it yet, no synopsis. I need a summary of this experience, need to make sense of things for the sake of others and in a sense myself, or I remain alone.

Instead of finding a story, I concentrate as we walk, on the striking difference between the parts of the trail that are already baking in sun, and the parts still fresh in shade. The shadows will shrink later today, but won’t disappear completely.

Adam knows it’s something, but his obligations to me are no longer what they used to be. We’ve already had those conversations, but the result was a promise of friendship, and I need him to keep the promise. Most people tell me it would be better to sever myself at this point, but how do you do this after four years? For now, neither of us has found anyone else, so days like today, nights like last night, could happen.

Your hand is shaking, he tells me.

I want to tell him everything, but I can see that his being here,
at this moment, is no more than an act of generosity.

Adam stops and looks at me. Tell me.

I force the trembling back into my body, shake away the heat of tears.

I suppose I shouldn’t have taken the trail home. I was heading to Adam’s place...my place. Too much to drink. The nostalgia of a bar-played song, liquid courage.

Disorientation.

Adam pulls me close. He is tall. My head rests in his clavicle.

Are you okay?

I tell him, and perhaps myself, a short version: he was just a homeless man. Angry about something. He only pushed me once.

He waits for the rest.

I tell him that at first it was like being at a carnival, confusing sights at every angle. I was shocked, paralyzed, but only momentarily, until I hit the ground.

I don’t tell him that in that instant, the leaves and sticks crumpling under my weight shook and dislodged the residue of memory from the skin under which it sat.

I tell him that I got up, shouting something I don’t remember.

That he ran, then I ran.

Are you telling me everything? Adam wants to know.

I’m fine, I say.

He’s shaking his head. I know you too well.

I want to be known. Want the familiarity of last night. As it was, but without what came before.

We’ve left the forested part of the trail. The creek is now behind us and the trail head is in view. I want to keep walking, up and up.

Let’s turn back, Adam says.
But I won’t walk back that way.

*

I have a memory of being alone. Long before Adam left.

Meredith and I were nine and philosophical, at least that’s how I prefer to remember it. When I say that though, I feel the flatness of a lie.

Out of the signs we found littering the construction site across the street, Meredith and I fashioned a cemetery in my front yard. The provocative monotony of late summer crickets, cloudless dusk. But it was always this way with Meredith. Something different.

Your life is over, she said. It’s time to bury you now.

We’d already positioned the signs as our headstones. Now for the graves. We used my mother’s gardening tools to dig into the cedar mulch around the base of the oak tree. We tossed aside rocks as we dug, and Meredith tried to hit the curious butterflies with them.

It took us awhile to dig our graves. When we finished, I stood and stared into mine, felt something shift.

Get in, Meredith said, motioning toward the grave with a sideways nod.

You first.

We’ll do it at the same time. Ready...one, two, three.

I climbed into the hole and pulled wood chips over my body. I couldn’t see Meredith, but I could hear her doing the same—we had discussed procedure beforehand.

Are you in? I asked her, trying to make myself comfortable.
Yes, I heard her muffled response, the displacement of wood chips to allow for more words.
Imagine you’re nothing now, she said. The funeral is over and everyone’s gone home. You have to stay here alone.
I’m scared.
Just relax. No one’s going to ask you to do anything. No chores, no little sisters.
Meredith was an only child.
I could still see fading light through the spaces in the wood chips, so I closed my eyes and tried to imagine resting, like a stone, in one place. I don’t know how long I did that, but for a small moment I felt less afraid. It was so silent, in a way my life had never been. What if I’d never existed? I let a few moments pass in this way. Then came the maudlin thought of tiny creatures emerging from the soil to remove what was left of me.
Too much.
Meredith? I called out. She didn’t answer.
Mer? I called again.
Nothing. Pushing the wood chips out of the way, I writhed and twisted out of my grave and into the remnants of sunset.
She was gone.
When I ran back to the party there was a moment where, despite my relief at being back among the living, I felt that I had irrevocably removed one part of myself from them. I found Meredith, her thin body squashed alongside her mother’s in an adirondack chair. She was eating chips.
Why’d you leave me? I asked her.
Her answer was, not unlike Meredith herself, disengaged from truth.
I got bored.
But I was terrified. And I could see that she was too. For a long time after this I felt betrayed. I think my parents must have noticed this, because soon I was seeing far less of Meredith. Eventually we went to different high schools and she became nothing more than the subject of an annual report when our mothers met, and then nothing at all.

Adam becomes Jared, and Jared becomes Richard, then Michael.

When I remember the men, although there weren’t many, really, sometimes I don’t recall who said what or with whom I did what. Who came with me to Hyder, Alaska? Who liked bookstores? Who wrote the thesis on bipolar affective disorder? There is almost no common thread binding one person to the next. There is with each of them, however, a distinct, low-level hum of incompatibility that circles my ear like a stupidly persistent mosquito. I do admit this (now). I find dark things in all of them. Except Adam.

When I am with someone, the man at the creek somehow always returns. Some things stay with the body. Time’s membrane is thin, offers only the assurance that each of my partners will eventually become memory, and that the man will fade. For a time. I don’t believe in things that don’t end.

As for the alone place, I still feel it. It’s nothing like love.
Maudlin
Roman Sirotin
Did you think our relationship was simply chemistry? We weighed each other out, everything in balance: Your luscious smile, piquant lips, my warm sensitive touch. We carnival’d the day, oxidized the night. No problem. Catalyzed, we slipped in over our heads into a solution. Stirred. But then, heat was applied, blue flames licking the glass vat we were swimming in. It didn’t take long before I discovered I was the leftover, the residue of a sordid reaction. It’s what you precipitated: cardinal particles of my heart—suspended in organic solvent—suction-filtered through a piece of muslin cloth. No maudlin eyes left, no lacrimation. Just a discard. But you, the precious product, remain as a ghost in ether.
SHE had these toys, my daughter, like action figures but animals instead of super heroes. A bald eagle with outstretched wings. An African dog. A meerkat litter on hind legs, stuck to the same plot of plastic land. They didn’t start out as a collection, but that’s what they became. When asked what she wanted for her third and fourth birthdays, it was an easy answer. I appreciated the gender neutrality of animals. Clydesdales, not ponies. Jackrabbits and grizzlies, not bunnies and teddies.

It mattered because of my son, Dylan. He was two years older, born breached. From the beginning, he did things the hard way, like me. The kids’ dad had been two vials of frozen, so it was my midwife holding my hand while the surgeons sliced me open below the curtain. Afterward, while I’d been busy refusing blue blankets and sports-themed nursery décor – and asking why every boy’s onesie had to have an emergency vehicle on it – he’d been busy turning the tables on me. I sent him to preschool in the purple pants he loved and loudly lectured every three-year-
old who said “Boo” to him about it. “Purple,” I said, “belongs to everyone.” When my son asked Santa Claus for a Barbie, I relented. When he refused to let me cut the bangs that’d grown over his eyes, I picked my battles. But when he wanted the toy makeup kit, when he asked for everything in pink pink pink, when he demanded a carnival of ponies and bunnies and teddies, I lost my resolve. I cut him off.

I wouldn’t turn my daughter into a princess; why would I do it to my son?

And like any thwarted princess, he was pissed.

He moped around in the solid green and yellow t-shirts I insisted both kids wear, the brandless, adjustable-waist pants. He scowled from below the bowl cut – not long, not short – I gave them both. He drew elaborate tattoos on his hands with pen, barbed wire and thorns. He hunkered down in the basement to watch age-inappropriate medical reality shows, one after the other. Extreme Plastic Surgery and Hospital Horrors.

“You kids are getting lazy,” I said and signed them both up for soccer.

While they were at practice, I picked up an extra shift at Raggedy Riches, a consignment store that traded beat-up excersaucers for vintage high chairs, where I spent the day hanging clothes for girls on one side of the store and boys on the other. Maddening, but the employee discounts were great. Money was tight; the two vials of frozen that worked had been preceded by seven vials that didn’t, each round going on plastic until I’d maxed out three cards. I’d stopped paying two of three. My phone rang all day long.

It was easy, at work, to pick up soccer cleats. There were so many piles of clothes around all the time, it was easy to set aside
a winter coat, a pair of rain boots. The strollers were parked right out front. It was easy to stash one around the corner by the dumpster, to be picked up after work. Easy, too, when the box of animal replicas came in, to transfer the toys to a shopping bag and fill the box with someone else’s clothes.

“Look,” I said when we were all home after practice, Dylan sulking in shin guards. I dumped the shopping bag onto the floor: a toucan with a berry in its beak, a flying squirrel, a red-eyed tree frog. A whole pile of them that Jules, my daughter, immediately set to organizing. This was how she played. She stood them in categories – forest animals, jungle animals – and then, when she was done, changed the categories – vertebrates, invertebrates. She never made them talk or hoot or roar. There was no plot to her playing. Just infinite methods of categorization.

Dylan picked up one animal and then another, turning them over, studying them. “How come we don’t have real toys?” he said.

I pulled a container of eggs from the fridge to start dinner. We ate a lot of eggs. “What’s not real about these?”

“For one thing, the cows don’t have udders,” he said, holding one up to show me.

I studied it, too. He was right.

“What’s the other thing?” I asked.

“The other thing is that these toys suck,” he said.

I gave the cow to Jules, and she set it next to a flamingo. I watched her for a while before asking about the category.

“Normals,” she pointed to a mountain goat and wild boar, “and weirds.” The red-eyed frog, the udderless cow.

Dylan swept her piles together. “They’re all weird,” he said. Jules went right back to organizing. Dylan left the room. I
scrambled the eggs and put them in the pan.

If Dylan had been the one to come home with the new animals, I wouldn’t have been concerned. I expected his anger; I expected him to be bullied. I was ready to fight him, and I was ready to defend him. I would lay down my life to support his right to be who he was, but I’d be damned if I’d let him be a stereotype. This was the push and pull of daily life with Dylan. So if he’d shown up with a melted half-hyena, half-peacock in his bag, I would’ve punished him for destroying his toys and ordered a heart-to-heart about gender conformity and the value of a dollar. “Do you know how much those toys cost?” I would’ve asked, though I didn’t know the answer.

Instead, the mismatched animal parts started showing up in Jules’s backpack, and she acted just as surprised as I was to see them there. “Cool,” she said the first day, lifting the hyena-peacock and squinting at it. “Whoa,” she said the second, holding an elephant’s body with the melted-on heads of a tyrannosaurus, a cobra, and an okapi. “Mom, look,” she said the third day, and showed me a winged jellyfish.

I watched Dylan closely. I checked the house for lighters and his fingers for residue, ash, or oil.

But I didn’t ever remember us having a jellyfish.

On the fourth day, Jules stashed her backpack under her bed and acted sick, without the fever. Shrugged me off when I asked about school. I sent her down to the basement with snacks and Dylan to watch Flu Bachelor and The Uninsured.

While they were in the basement, I went through her backpack. The ubiquitous replica was wrapped in a towel. I
expected half-lion, half-armadillo. Half-loris, half-tapir, with a daub of glass frog.
    Instead half-test tube, dotted with doll head.
    Half-vial, half-girl.
    Half-dad, half-mom.

    First I talked to Jules, then Dylan, then their teachers, then the vice-principal. The vice-principal stared at me over his desk. Raised his eyebrows when I described the replicas.
    “Has Jules been tested for autism?”
    “This isn’t about Jules. This is about someone doing something weird to my kid. Bullying, that’s what it is.”

    Mr. Fletcher picked up a pencil sharper shaped like a dachshund. “Inanimate objects don’t bully children. Children bully children. I’ve seen plenty of bullying, and this doesn’t qualify. I’d say you’re the proud parent of a daughter with an overactive imagination.”
    “I’ll sue,” I said. We both knew I was lying.

    That night, television voices whispered from beneath the floorboards. We ate breakfast for dinner, mouse head pancakes with butter and syrup.
    “Kaitlyn Binkle says we should be a gluten free household.” Jules speared a mouse ear with her fork. “She says gluten smears up your guts like paste.”
    “Kaitlyn Binkle is a coconut crab.”
    “Dylan! Don’t be mean.”
    “I’m not. Coconut crabs are cool. Kaitlyn can hang off the climbing wall for a really long time.”
    Jules poured syrup on her fingers and smeared it on her lips. “Lipstick.”
While I was trying to decide whether to tell her that lipstick was tested on bunny rabbits and that she could grow up to be either a doctor or a firefighter, Dylan smeared syrup on his lips, too.

“Boys don’t wear lipstick.”

“It’s not lipstick, it’s food.” Dylan pushed his chair away from the table, then dropped a crumpled piece of paper on my plate. “Hey Mom, I forgot to give you this.” Both kids disappeared down the basement stairs. I sat at the table smoothing pink paper. In perfect cursive:

Dear Beatrice,

I miss you.

Faithfully,

Faith

Faith-Loretta had perfect handwriting. She had perfect lips and perfect breasts that swayed when I fucked her from behind on all fours. We both wanted children and picked a donor together, but before I got pregnant, God showed up at our door.

God was otherwise known as Harlan, head of a megachurch sprawled in Spokane. He’d disowned his daughter when we moved in together. Kicked her out of their church, said she’d never been born.

Six years later, he knocked on our door – the father who’d said she was dead to her family. We both hoped he’d found PFLAG or a compassionate God.
“He has to apologize. To you and me both.”

Harlan stood on our stoop, hat in hand, eyes averted. His daughter half-in, half-out of the frame. She missed her mother and six sisters and brothers. She missed Nine Mile Falls and the hymns from their church.

After Harlan drove off in his truck, Loretta went into the bathroom and ran the tub. She stayed inside a long time, not taking a bath. That night I helped her pack a bag.

“Just a long weekend,” she said, “to see if they’ve changed.”

I waved from the driveway as she drove off in her truck. That night I made frozen pizza and watched TV for hours. She called around midnight. “I’ve got new nieces and nephews. They’re cute and they love me. I’m so glad I came.”

The next night she missed me, and the night after that.

“We did house rounds today. You know, neighbors in need.”

The next time she called, I heard songs in the background.

“Rachel’s on piano and John’s on guitar.”

A week went by.

“I’ve got things to take care of. My mom needs me on Friday. I’ll come home after that.”

Saturday, Sunday. She called Tuesday night.

“We sang the night’s prayers. Even the kids.”

Two more weeks and her mailbox was full. I drove to Spokane in a blur of unease. Calvary Star Covenant of Abundant Fellowship took up an entire block surrounded by asphalt. Hundreds, maybe thousands of cars circled a long row of double doors, each set divided with a cross down the middle.

“Loretta,” I mumbled, “what have you gotten yourself into?”

Inside the lobby there were brochures and water fountains and free coffee and two middle-aged ladies with bouffant hair in
green uniforms sitting behind a green-and-gold desk.
“May I help you?”
“I’m looking for Loretta Almgren.”
“Pastor Almgren’s daughter?”
“His oldest.”
“Of course. She’s probably home cooking with her mother right now. She’s come back to the fold. Baptized last Sunday.”

Turns out Loretta was missing, all right. She took the name Faith when she went underwater. A few weeks with her family and she was reborn. Our commitments unsealed, our history rewritten. Loretta was gone, replaced by Faith, who sent Christmas cards signed Your sister in Christ.

While I was grieving, I bought the first of the vials. If I wanted a child, I’d have to do it myself. Five vials in and I was pregnant with Dylan. Four vials later I was pregnant with Jules.

By the time I realized I needed a lawyer, I had two young children and a custody suit. Loretta who’d wanted a baby was dead, replaced by Faith, who believed in the devil. Her lawyer stalked me and discovered my kids. Traced the vials to our joint account. It never occurred to me to split up on paper, since our commitment ceremony wasn’t legally binding. I’d paid for the vials with credit cards linked to an account under both of our names. Her lawyer claimed the vials were joint property.

Half-Dylan, half-Jules.
My whole heart froze.

And so in the middle of the night, we moved. I stuffed what I could into garbage bags, strapped the kids in their car seats, and took off down the highway. Picked a small town when gas money gave out. Took the first job that would have me, Raggedy.
Faith was a stranger. I missed Loretta. She’d been bitten by a
dog when she was ten. The wound healed into a scar, quiet until I
found it. Subtle, the difference between damage and skin.
That night I asked Dylan where he’d gotten the letter.
“Faith gave it to me. That lady who visits.”
“Does she visit your school?”
“After school on the playground.”
“Sweetie, you aren’t allowed to talk to strangers.”
“Faith’s not a stranger. She’s friends with Jules, too. She has
hair down to her butt and wears long skirts all the time.”
Jules piped up. “She gave Dylan a pink t-shirt. He’s hiding it
under his bed. It’s the kind you won’t let him wear.”
“Shut up, Jules. You promised Faith not to tell.”
“But you got a shirt and I didn’t.”
“She gives you stuff all the time.”

There are Bible stories about splitting a baby, King Solomon’s
wisdom undoing a thief. A week later Faith showed up on our
stoop in a long denim skirt, her hair wrapped tightly around her
head in twin braids. She sat on the sofa, arranging her skirt like a
blanket. Then she started to cry.
I sat on the other end of the sofa, which was how our
relationship had started years ago in college.
“Does anyone from church know you’re here?”
“No. I told them I was visiting Aunt Kay.”

The house darkened around us, maudlin music rising from the
basement. I wanted to say her name, but wasn’t sure which name
to say.
Los Angeles
Greg Molesky
I. jade-colored eyes multiply within the maze of fun house mirrors; distortions create cracks in perception: [Mary: solitary, confined] pieces of flesh, exposed reality twisted; she is “something” unnerving vibrations – carnival rides, terrifying screams – the carousel upon which her sadness circles

II. staggering through – the metallic taste of blood – tragedy forming on lips, but she, will not scream will not scream will not scream. the contortions within cracks scrape her [inside];

_Miss Mary Maudlin, do drink your poison and turn away_,

but she will not turn away; she must resist; she must _persist_. She is everywhere; absinthe eyes – they are everywhere watching her – waiting, cracking, breaking. her – shattering, glass; only shards remain: an eye here, a hand, a finger there; the residue of blood on fingertips; but the tiny reflections, they still contain her.
III. around a curve, down the hall, she, catches a glimpse of golden hair; a tiny figure in ghost white. The figure moves swiftly, disappearing behind the twists & turns, disorienting her; she races to catch up but the bone white skin is always just out of reach. Lost, she turns around and around and around and she is there. She cracks a smile: Her eyes: the reflection of green pastures.
Desert Carnival
Marqus Bobesich
THE girl says her name is Annie. She says she’s part of a carnival—the girl they throw the knives at. Or maybe she swallows fire. I can’t remember. Wasn’t paying attention...I was mesmerized by her hair.


Her nose ring winks at me. Like it’s saying hello.

“Pick your poison,” Annie says. Her breath smells like last night’s bad decisions: liquor and cigarettes and anonymous kisses. A residue of regret. “A shot of whisky or a shot of vodka?”

I think I may need both.

LOVE ME BADLY, says a tattoo on her neck.
I’d like to think she mistook me for THE WORLD’S STRONGEST MAN. She probably thought I was THE WORLD’S SMALLEST GIANT. Truth is, I’m somewhere right in between. I’m average height. Average strength. I have an average face—not too ugly but not really handsome, either. Kinda cute: Girls have said that about me. Average shoe size. Average IQ. Average stamina.

I’m right down the middle. Call me the Median. That shall be my identity.

“Let me tell you the future.” Annie takes my hand.

“Can you read palms?” I ask.

She nods. “And talk to ghosts.”

How cute: The Median and the Medium. A match made for Hell.

“My name’s Annie Oakley,” she tells me. “A sharpshooter reincarnated.” Then, without missing a beat: “You have a very short life line. Could be you’re about to die.”

I don’t think Annie knows how to read palms, but I like the tingle of her fingernail trailing over my skin.

“Have you met any interesting ghosts?” I ask her.

“Edgar Allen Poe told me he wanted to die.”

On her wrist: A tattoo of a dagger stabbing a screaming heart.

She thinks I am THE BEARDED LADY. And she is drunk. After her third shot—or maybe it’s her fourth—she leans close, and I can smell her breath. The stench of last night’s mistakes has been
replaced by the smell of tonight’s promises. Her eyes swim out of
the dimness and swallow mine. For a second, I’m convinced she’s
about to kiss me.

“Interestingly, your heart line crosses over your life line,” she
whispers.

“What does that mean?”

“You spend too much time clenching your fists.”

Above her right knee: A tattoo of zombie Tinkerbell with a
word bubble sprouting out of her mouth. NEVERMORE, it says.

“The thing about ghosts is they never die,” says Annie. She’s
explaining why she prefers them to humans. “They are creatures
of passion. Think about it. They spend all of eternity fixated on a
single person or a place. They pour all of their love or their anger
or their sorrow into an ideal forever and ever. Can you say the
same thing about yourself?”

“I don’t know,” I reply, the words staggering off of my suddenly
clumsy tongue, which is no longer nimble enough to deliver my
thoughts across the threshold of my teeth. “I’ve always thought
of them as a nuisance. Unwanted guests, and what’s that old joke
about guests being like fish?”

“Unwanted guests begin to stink if they hang around long
enough. But ghosts are noble.”

“They’re maudlin fools—a sentimental thought that refuses to
be washed away...a stain...the skidmark of humanity.”

“You’re an asshole,” says Annie. “Here I thought you were THE
SNAKE CHARMER.”

“You were hoping to be Eve?”

“I was hoping to be your last mortal sin,” she whispers,
blinking back tears. But is she really upset or is she just drunk? Hard to say. I have a feeling this girl gets her heart broken at least once a day. “I thought you’d want to die right now and live in this moment forever.”

“I just wanted a beer.”

Above her left breast: a tattoo of a raven with a word bubble sprouting out of its beak. NEVERLAND, it says.
Carnival
Roman Sirotin
the sky asunder
is tired of romantic poems.
its insistence on inescapable charcoal overcast
is a purposeful hostility
to flowers, which drown
maudlin in the downpour.

in the last storm
i biked downtown, squinting
through the sideways wall of bullet-shaped water
until i reached the flower store
tucked timidly in one corner of the mall.

i bought a bouquet
of unpronounceable blue
and ferried them back home
the petals shivering and dancing free in spats
like cornflower carnival acrobats locked in tumble
or thick tears in the hush
of an aftermath tumult.
by the time i reached your place
the bouquet was barely there;
stems which held the residue memory of blossoms—
but you kissed me anyway
lips to torrent-pummeled skin;
a new mark
where the fingerprints of close-fisted rain
had just begun to fade.
Feathers and strings of beads littered the quiet streets. In the distance, drums and raucous laughter as the troupe moved towards the town center.

Grace stood on a little balcony above the street, from where she had watched the parade go by, enjoying the hush that settled now. This would be her last Carnival.

Her grandfather sat on the low sofa in the room behind where she stood. His eyes were closed, a snore threatening to escape his lips. He knew her plan to leave and supported it.

“Go to the United States, girl,” he had encouraged, “but don’t forget old Grandpa, eh?”

Mama was a different story. Things had been strained between them since Christmas, when Grace had announced she was accepting Aunt Louisa’s invitation to stay with her in Jamaica, Queens. Mama had been angry with her sister for even suggesting it.
Now, they just did not discuss it and got on with the day-to-day. One night, feelings of guilt overcame Grace as she spotted her mother through a crack in the door, indulging in the maudlin act of holding Grace’s baby blanket to her face. The guilt and the longing to leave engaged in a constant duel. It was exhausting.

On the day Grace was due to leave, she spent the morning on the little beach near where she had attended primary school. She rubbed the sand into her skin, hoping the residue would embed there, so she would not forget.

Later, up above the clouds, she tucked her memories of Trinidad deep in her heart, and her eyes followed the plane on the satellite map, edging toward New York.
Blue
TJ Lloyd
I remember...
Standing on wooden logs
Making a yoga pose in your high school sweater (my toes sandy and cold)

And the drum circles outside the dorm
The guy with the afro who played violin in the stairwell
Your roommate’s crush—the girl with the tangled blonde hair who listened to him play guitar
Eating Cup-O-Noodles on the ground
The roommate who picked his name from a phonebook when he moved from China to the US
His name was Alex

I remember walking barefoot
Through the quad past kids hula hooping
And the shaggy boy with the plaid button-ups blowing his trumpet at 4:20 pm every day (“It’s four twenty people!”)
The Porter forest with hundreds of banana slugs under blue tarps on 4/20
Dripping cold rain, smoke filling the space beneath umbrellas, the smell of pine and marijuana,
Kids on patterned blankets, the goody-good kids from lit class too

I remember wearing my white ski jacket, running up the hill to the theatre
And sitting on top of the Porter Squiggle, that red statue on the meadow, trying to find Monterey
Taking pics by the pool next to Mackenzie (warm grass shooting up from the bottom of the frame)
Using my toes to hold string as I braided friendship bracelets,
Looking over at you in that tie-dyed shirt, the pink and yellow one

Your old house on Robleda Rd., “The Palm Tree House”
Sneaking out through the window
Watching the Leonids in November on a golf course
Chugging energy drinks

Drinking at “Loveshack” ’til we were touchy then kissy then maudlin
’Til we passed out in hoodies on a patio lawn chair
And Skyline Drive
Racing and winding up the hills blasting techno music
Horses at Westwind Barn by Lizzy’s old house on Esperanza Court
The sandy-colored horse named Daisy, petting her mane

Your 2003 Mitsubishi Montero, limited edition
When we both fell asleep (en route to the mountains)
I remember the sound of the melody before our eyes shut
Before we smashed into the divider of the highway
We spun around, so slow
It all happened so fast
The windshield shattered and I peed my pants
The guy at the auto shop, “Heard it on the traffic report, my god, you kids okay?”
“We’re fine”
And I remember your tie-dyed tee

Carnival rides at the boardwalk,
Screaming at the top of the Big Dipper before the drop

Rainbow flip-flops,
On the beach at the US Open of Surfing, 2012,
I got your sandal autographed by Kelly Slater (I remember we
didn’t have paper)
That you refused to wear them again, we both went barefoot
Callouses are good— you said, I agreed

$400 on sale, a brand new fish, my Rockin Fig surfboard,
Huntington Beach, 80 degrees, tank tops, no makeup, beach
pants and flip-flops, smiling
All the way back
To the car with my new board
The sticky residue of surf wax on the railings

Pitching a tent in San Onofre, burning my feet on the fire pit
Wishing the berm wasn’t there so we could see the ocean
Remember when we used to wear tie-dye together?
When we packed sandwiches? And Casa Sanchez fresh salsa,
tortilla chips—always the Scoops! kind
In a blue cooler, in the back of the trunk
We parked by the sand and pulled out the “sandwich makings”
I remember you called them “sandwich makings”
I remember when we pulled to the side of the road,
Did a quickie up against a wooden railing, and that I was wearing a dress (on a cliff overlooking the water)
We pulled to the side of a railroad, did it again
I dared you to run naked on the tracks
(You did and I took a pic of you flexing backwards. Your butt looked hella big)
Do you remember that sunflower field?

The raspberries at the fruit stand on I-5, “Cherry Pit Stop”
Pulling over on 17, “I’m sorry, what am I thinking? I love you”
Clipping beach towels in the windows, throwing clothes on the dashboard before we’d hop in the back seat and get the car real steamy
The smell of plumerias when we said "forever"

Remember that hotel room in downtown San Jose? A true California king bed
Your face as the bathroom door slid open, naked and smiley

Zipping up your wetsuit
Watching you hurl yourself off the rocks by the lighthouse (Steamer Lane)
Bikini rashes
And rubbing Aloe vera on your shoulders
Searching for you
in 20 ft. waves with a stranger’s binoculars
Grubbin’ at the Aloha Island Grille, ahi poke bowls, the smell of sesame oil
The smell of sand and salt, feet and Sex Wax in the car, windows down

How could I forget Manresa, the dolphins there
And seaweed everywhere, “Look out for the sea monsters!”

I remember you
Holding on to the side of my board,
Salt stuck on your eyebrows, saliva, your face,
(Smiling, bobbing and smiling)
Dark waters beneath, infinite stretch of ocean but not so infinite, stopping
At the horizon,
Holding your hand,
My feet on the dashboard, cranking up my mixed CD and smiling
It Was a Beautiful Place to Throw Our Ashes to the Wind

Alexander Drost
It Was a Beautiful Place to Throw Our Ashes to the Wind
“I see a man in your future. And somewhere, death.” Two houses down the beach, Sabine’s friend Cecilia pores over a veneer coffee table wearing a long skirt made from faded bell-bottom jeans with a tie-dyed peasant top and red bandana around her forehead, focusing. “Not in the immediate sense, you know. It could be someone around you. Or even a tree on your property.” She looks up.

While Jules works long hours with his surgery clients, Sabine has taken to walking the kids down the sunny beach to neighbors’ houses where the girls spend afternoons sharing macaroni and potato salads and Jell-O molds, selling Tupperware ensembles in an endless stream of daily get-togethers. On the days they don’t trade Tupperware, they take turns painting on oily pink lipsticks from mini tube dispensers, matching the Avon lipsticks with butterfly shades of eye shadow in sky blue, marigold, raw sienna, and burnt umber. With Jules paying off his boat, more upset about money than ever, and threatening to put the house on the market,
Sabine tells herself at least she is contributing something. She needs to make some money and thinks back to Alan, the high school sweetheart-turned-entertainment-lawyer she ran into on Sunset weeks ago. “Meet me at the Forum,” Alan said before he sped toward Wilshire.

Day after day this month, the girls have been meeting in the long hours away from their husbands to read tarot cards and talk about stopping the Vietnam war, to sit Indian-style in their living rooms smoking hashish and listening to The Doors much too loud; the kids run out to the beach or ride bikes along the sun-drenched path of the PCH. Last week, the kids put together a lemonade stand and sold seventy-eight cents worth to neighbors without Sabine coming to check on them once.

“Yes, but the man,” Cecilia starts to talk again. “He’s a dark man. I see a knight. I’m not so sure you can trust him, though. The part about the death, I don’t know. You smoke?” Cecilia takes another drag off her joint, squinting.

In the night, Jules turns up the television and adjusts the antenna. Sabine looks out at the moon and thinks of the day she met Alan.

“What happened? Mom says you married a doctor,” Alan had said to her in the sun, skin fresh after a shower, fingers strumming his shining red Stingray. “You still model?” Alan lowered his voice to a whisper then watched as if trying to solve some complex puzzle. “Or has married life taken you off the circuit?”

“When I can.” Sabine cleared her throat. “I need to break into the design business.”
“Hey, Zeppelin’s down at the Forum this month,” Alan said. “I’ll be there with clients.” Alan’s car blended into the mass of colors that made up Sunset, leaving behind it a mixture of memories and longing.

People want to see my work, Sabine reminds herself.

She thinks of Jules. Even on the nights that they eat together, which they seldom do anymore, he is yawning. “You’re in bed every night at ten except New Years. By 10:01, you’ve shut out the light,” Sabine says to Jules, trying to get his attention after the kids are off to bed. Jules shrugs and turns up the 9 o’clock news. “Nixon’s on.” He holds up his hand as if to call a time out, makes no eye contact.

Even staying up to watch the moon over the water together never happens. On the hottest nights she watches it alone, falls asleep on the deck lounge chair wrapped in only a towel, and dreams of her designs, of bringing her brother Ritchie home from Vietnam, of somehow escaping all this.

But as she lies on that deck and looks up to that moon, those words keep ringing through her, that vision of Alan in the sun. “Sure, we can we hook up. Bring the dresses.”

The feeling whispers on her skin, that fresh wind of arousal and mystery, the thoughts of how far she can go with her art, how much she can do with it.

When she wakes alone on the deck in the morning, the Santa Ana winds blowing on her face and through her hair, Sabine thinks again of selling her dresses, of getting to that concert with Alan.
“Don’t care for loud rock bands,” Jules says at the beach house at six, the early evening sun turning broad. He picks over a dish of mixed nuts and settles his martini on a crystal coaster. “Or for concerts. You go with the girls.” Jules waves Sabine away before his eyes float back to the six o’clock news, blue silk shirt noticeably tighter around his midriff. “I’ll stay here at the beach, watch the kids.”

When Sabine shows at Cecilia’s door wearing her turquoise ruana, Cecilia swings the door open in a gold flared bodysuit and shimmery bangles, laughing with a tray in hand and whispering as she blinks to reveal sky-blue eye shadow. “Some swanky guys stopped by. Come in if you can—” Cecilia’s Gypsy Moon perfume trails onto the porch. “I just can’t make it out tonight, hon.”

Sabine waves a rash goodbye then rushes into the taxi, smoke billowing out from the back of the car.

At the crowded LA Forum, Sabine steps inside past the bell-bottomed, long-haired masses, feeling like she’s stepped into a stoned-out carnival for wayward teens and adults that never want to grow up. In her self-designed turquoise blouse, faded denim skirt, platform boots, hair pulled back high to reveal her large cat eyes, Sabine wanders squinting past the smoke-filled crowd, barely able to make out the stage or hear the Misty Mountain Hop.

Far away, Robert Plant crosses the stage in a wild rhythm, a tiny figure writhing in faded hip-huggers and tall red boots several feet away from Jimmy Page. In the smoke-filled air, Sabine squints to make out the long-haired beach types in dirty bell-bottom blue
jeans without shirts. They flail past her in the flashing lights to keep time with the organic momentum. *Where is Alan?*

In the distance, Plant writhes rhythmically across the stage, a mystical figure in faded bell-bottoms patched dark at the crotch. The charismatic singer spins as he elongates his torso, shaking his exaggerated mane and displaying his naked chest. His voice from heaven or the gods, Plant keeps unreal time with Page, who plucks the strings of his guitar, wearing a full white suit and sending celestial power from his hands, an hypnotic magic that brings Sabine to forget her world, the night, the reasons she is there.

Teenage girls in hip-huggers dance freely through the crowd, shaking pale heads of hair wildly as they imitate Plant. Sabine closes her own eyes to forget the smoke and falls into the rhythm, the trance, the electricity of the night; she loses balance when her ruana falls to the ground. A group of stoned-out fans starts to dance past her. They flail their arms above their heads. Sabine leans to pick up the ruana, and her world grows dark. She feels a large hand glide against the back of her hair.

“Alan?” she spins around, breathless in the dark, hoping to see the entertainment lawyer.

The man stands above her, half-smiling with hazel eyes and a strong unshaven chin. He wears a dark leather jacket. “You drop this, girlie-girl?” In his low-cut dress shirt, the man is alluring and dangerous at the same time. He towers above her and reaches out to give Sabine her ruana, his large dark hand brushing hers, then lingering a moment. But he isn’t Alan. “You alone?” He reaches out toward her shoulder to straighten her hair.

“I’m just—uh, waiting for a friend,” Sabine shouts above the Misty Mountain Hop. When the song fades to a close, Sabine tries to make out the stage, to forget the alluring stranger. She looks
first at the musicians and then to the crowd to search for Alan. But the stadium is still filled with the smoke of stoned-out fans who wave bottles above their heads and shout toward the stage.

“Some friend that is to take off on a drop-dead gorgeous gal like you,” he calls, distracting Sabine and leaning closer so that she can hear him before the next song. “So, you a model?” He reaches toward her again. “I mean, because if you are, I mean, I’m a photographer. I’ll do your pictures.”

Sabine looks toward the man’s hand when he holds out a business card. In the dark, she squints to make out the words, “Nick Stankovich – Photographer: 876-8885. Van Nuys.”

“I—I’m a fashion designer,” she calls back over the crowd. She likes the sound of it. Even if Jules condemns the title and she can’t find Alan, she still needs to make connections.

“Bring the dresses. We’ll photograph them.”

Plant and Page dance like musical gods from the heights of Mount Olympus. The half-dressed teenage groupies scream back at the stage. When Page picks up a theremin, smoke rolls past the stage. The teenagers exchange hits of LSD and joints, and one claps repeatedly as she shouts, “Feel the night! Feel the love!”

Plant falls to his knees before he rolls across the stage. When he lifts himself, he struts slowly past Page to pull open a large box and release twelve white doves. One by one, the doves rise out of the box to then soar above the audience several minutes. One returns to land on Plant’s hand, and a teenage girl points high above her head and screams before she falls into the crowd. A random teenager wearing no shirt and faded bell-bottoms starts to kiss her, and she kisses him back.

“Do ya feel it?” Plant calls out to the crowd, resembling Dionysus himself. “Do ya feel the buzz?” The music starts again.
The music is so loud and the air so thick that Sabine finds herself swept up in the power of the swaying crowd, the music, the moment. She moves in time with the new photographer named Nick and forgets to look for Alan, the words and tune to Whole Lotta Love synonymous with the night, with the getting away that seems so imminent.

“Way, way down inside, honey, you need it./I’m gonna give you my love...”.

At the Biltmore lobby after the show and several sips of his brandy, Sabine steps with Nick into the large glass elevator, and he presses the button. Nick is taller and thinner than he looked in the dark at the concert. With an unexpected charismatic appeal, he moves in closer to her, his laugh very deep—the sort of laugh that reminds a woman she’s far from home. Sabine laughs and backs up into him. He reaches under her mini skirt and slowly runs his finger along the lace of her panties. She feels the outline of his slim hips next to her, thinks of how they fit so well next to hers. With Jules, there is still an awkwardness when they try to fit together. But not here, not with Nick.

When the elevator chime sounds and a well-dressed older couple steps in, the lady in a black-and-white hound’s-tooth suit lined with sky blue, Sabine tries to hide the erupting laughter and realizes they’re already halfway to Nick’s room. She feels the buzz from his brandy and wants more. She wants to forget. She wants to forget the horrors of ‘Nam, the fights with Jules. She wants to forget that she has no way to bring Ritchie home. In this moment of her wanting to forget, Nick guides her out of the glass elevator
and down the hall. When the door closes much too slowly, Sabine feels the couple's watchful eyes and hopes that the woman is not one of her husband’s clients.

Inside the room, Nick pours each of them a brandy from his snifter. Then he gets on the phone and dials a number. Tipsy and off balance, Sabine sits on the bed and closes her eyelids.

When she wakes, his large hands are on her feet, wanting and expressive. He sits at the foot of the bed and wears no shirt. She can hardly make out his figure in the dark except to see the outline of his hair, much longer than Jules’; she sees that his torso is younger and much slimmer. She can see Nick continuing to look at her with wanting intensity. Jules hasn’t looked at her this way for too long. And even though Nick is the wrong man, his attention makes her blush. She doesn’t remember blushing this way. He wraps his hands around her feet. His eyes focus on her intently.

Sabine extends her legs, not knowing how to react to his stare. In her moment of half-waking and half-sleep and in this desire she hasn’t felt for too long, it seems hard anymore to draw a clear line between right and wrong. Vietnam is no enemy, she thinks. And Ritchie is no fighter. He never has been a fighter, and now is too late to start. None of it makes sense. And now she and Jules are fighting all of the time. Either fighting or not talking.

When Nick hands her his joint, she simply pulls closer, rests when he gathers the small of her body into his. She feels the tingle of his large hands that cross her back, running themselves along the expanse of it. And when she realizes that all he wears is a pale towel, his full wet lips are seeking hers.

Very early into the morning, Nick is spread across the large
hotel bed, sleeping lengthwise in the nude. Not able to find her aquamarine ruana in the dark, Sabine brushes aside her long dark hair, damp with sweat and smelling of hashish, and snaps the clasp of her Dior purse closed. She searches again at the foot of the bed, lifting his bell-bottoms to discover a wallet that falls open to the Nevada license displaying the name Stan Moore with a picture of Nick. Next to the wallet, a faded gold band has fallen out, along with several red and yellow pills.

Sabine tiptoes out of the room, giving up on the ruana. She rushes downstairs to catch a taxi back home, then shivers in the cold outside and avoids eye contact with the stiff bellman.

Inside the taxi, Sabine looks out at the early morning lights that cross Wilshire, sighs, and starts to sober. The talkative driver is wide awake for the long drive in the middle of the night and assumes she isn’t from LA, probably because he just picked her up at a hotel.

When they finally reach the outskirts of Malibu, the sky is starting to grow bright, and the driver inches slowly through the dense fog of the PCH toward the beach house, where she hopes Jules is fast asleep. “A lotta wealthy folks in this neighborhood. There’s a fine Hollywood surgeon lives up here. Treats a lot of celebrities.” The driver studies Sabine through the rear view mirror. “I’ve taken ‘im home a couple times. He likes to get out now and then.”

“You can drop me here,” Sabine says abruptly and points as the taxi nears Cecilia’s ranch-style beach house.

“I’ll wait ‘til you get in.” The driver takes his time counting
the change in the shivering cold, the taxi lights much too bright and the motor running loud enough that he’ll attract too much attention at four in the morning.

“It’s ok,” Sabine says and focuses hard in both directions for lights coming on in the houses. “I—I don’t want to wake the kids.”

“They’ve got kids or you got kids? If you’ve got kids, you coulda fooled me. I mistook you for much younger.”

“Uh…my friends’ kids.” Sabine shields her eyes. “I’m in from out of town.”

“Well, thanks for the twenty spot.” The driver tips his head and takes a moment to study her again.

As the taxi pulls slowly back into the fog of the PCH, Sabine walks barefoot in the cold so as not to attract attention, and searches the cramped Dior handbag for her key.

When she locks the heavy door that accidentally slams closed with the wind, Sabine creeps into the downstairs bathroom where she tears away her turquoise blouse and mini skirt, still smelling of stale smoke and brandy and stained with the residue of Nick. She hides them in the bottom of the vanity drawer then switches on the hot shower.

Upstairs in the room without a change of clothes, Sabine creeps into bed, still in the damp white towel when Jules stirs and leans on his elbow, thick gold chain catching the dim moonlight as it crosses his bare chest. “That you?” His voice is deep with sleep. “I was starting to worry. Started calling people.”

“The show with the girls ran late,” Sabine whispers, confused as she counts through the hours to keep track of the lies.

“You drinking?” Jules’ voice rings in the dark. He rests back on his side.

“We had a few after.”
Jules is snoring before Sabine can say more. And as she lies in the darkness all that night, maudlin, listening to the bluffs beneath their window and watching the moon that crosses the water, Sabine wonders where her life is heading.
Fire Cloud
August Bramhoff
None the Wiser
Gary Glauber

After your appointment as foreign secretary our alumni mag published a short synopsis of your impressive career trajectory, an uncannily powerful, intelligent woman, ever eager to give back to a desirous world. It didn’t mention the long list of disposable friends, and there was no residue of irony in the gracious quotes from peer associates.

Nobody called me.

I was an early consequence of your fast-tracked social growth, some carnival detritus abandoned in haste, behind the back of that double-wide trailer. I was your clown shoes, your loudly striped pants, your embarrassing phase with reckless abandon, a close brush with artistic independence.
You had me at hello.

From the cloistered hallways of this fifth-floor walkup studio I choreograph my dreams into expressive movements designed to awake the limbic regions of unsuspecting audience members. The dust stirs; the music awakes a certain maudlin sentimentality.

We have outgrown each other.

Those were your parting words, long before your transfer, your meticulous plan put into effect. At every performance I scan the seats looking for your face, embracing inevitable disappointment, but always scanning regardless.
IN Paris, they keep their dead buried in tunnels underground. My dead are kept alive, buried in homes with poetic names—“Aspen Grove,” “Elmwood at the Springs,” and “Oak Wood Manor.” I work in a home with the auspicious name of “Magdalene Manor.” Those of us who work here call it “Maudlin Manor.”

Day 90, last day of probation.

I arrive for the graveyard shift wearing periwinkle scrubs, cross trainers, and emo eyes with THC on the brain. From the outside, everything looks so calm, so serene, so normal—a perfect façade for the bodies that slumber inside. From all corners of the parking lot, my co-workers and I silently make our way towards the employee entrance, steering clear of the street lights where the bats congregate, pinging us with their sonar sounds. Joe, my partner, is waiting for me at the back door, the hero, the testosterone among all the estrogen. He punches in the codes to the back door. Inside slumber all the mysteries of our profession.

“Are you ready for this?” Joe asks in the elevator as we ride
up to the 3rd floor, Teal Trails, the quad floor, the worst of the worst, the living zombies. The elevator opens to a quiet floor lit with muted lights. As we walk to the locker room, ventilators hiss in syncopation from the recesses of rooms, a high-pitched bass line. After a quick report from the departing shift, we deposit our personal effects inside lockers and prepare ourselves for the tedious, twisted carnival that has become our lives.

“Let’s get the show on the road,” Joe says as he snaps shut his locker.

Disguised as mild-mannered night aides, we make our way from room to room. Our first stop: Maggie, stroke victim, feeding tube, unresponsive and incontinent. We glove up and approach her, standing on opposite sides of the bed. Pulling back the sheets, Joe rolls her onto her side and peeks at her bottom.

“You never disappoint us, do you, Maggie?” Her legs are clamped together tight, protecting her private parts—even with limited brain activity, she knows this is not normal. We roll her back and forth, wiping and changing mid-roll. When all residue of fecal matter is removed, we each take a side of her lift sheet and roll her onto her left side. We wedge a pillow under her back and push one between her knees. Then I pull the covers up. After washing our hands, we leave her to her dreams, turning down the lights and leaving the TV on low. I deposit the dirty linen in a laundry basket we left in the hall.

We move onto our next room. Dotty, contracted soul, unresponsive and incontinent. Dottie hums all night long, her eyes open, her breath rank. She clamps down on the swab I run over her teeth, resisting my efforts to freshen her breath. After Dotty there’s Ryan, donor cycle accident who refuses to die. His brain atrophies along with his heart, lungs, and kidneys, leaving
nothing left to donate when he finally makes the journey to the light. Ryan moans all night, long Chewbacca sounds that Joe answers in character.

We repeat our routine twelve times, cleaning, rolling, and turning twelve residents.

We save Tom for last, our newest, a freak accident on a football field.

We suit up in isolation gear before we enter Tom’s room, yellow paper gowns and white facemasks that hide and protect our mouths. Even before we enter the room, we can smell Tom—his intestinal infection is explosive tonight, his weakened immune system leaving him vulnerable. His bed is a mess, he is a mess, I am a mess, not wanting to witness, to discover how a person can live, can survive all loss of dignity.

“Let’s get him in the shower now,” Joe decides, breaking all isolation rules. “He needs a thorough wash.” I strip Tom naked while Joe disconnects his tubes. Together we sling Tom into a shower bed and haul him to the shower room. I scrub him down while Joe cleans up his room. Tom smiles throughout the shower—he always smiles, especially when I wash his genitals. Only 22, I wonder if perhaps he is a fellow virgin.

“If I ever get this bad, kill me, okay?” Joe says when he returns to help me transfer Tom to his chair.

“You’ll never get this bad. You’re blessed.”

“Yeah, right.” We wheel Tom back to his room and tuck him into his triple-padded bed, where he will shit continuously until intestinal balance is restored. There’s nothing to be done about it; our work is only a stopgap gesture.

When our charges are warm, dry, alive and relatively shit-free, we sit behind at the nurses’ station waiting for the next round. Joe
grabs the chart with our nightly duties on it.

“So who should we get up in the morning?” he asks.

“You decide,” I answer. I am his assistant, his second; I don’t make the decisions. As Joe fiddles with the paperwork, I open the cupboard where personal grooming items are kept. I find the manicure set and begin to remove the deep purple polish on my blunt nails.

The elevator chimes as I begin painting my nails a bright pink color, an ironic contrast to my dark demeanor. Dana, the Charge Nurse, exits. She smiles as she sees Joe sitting there, then pointedly frowns as she notices my grooming habits. She sits down behind a stack of folders.

“I see the Grimm Reaper was disappointed again,” Dana says as she reads a chart. “We’re getting a new resident.”

“What’s this one?” Joe asks.

“Remember the guy that jumped off the bridge last month?”

“He’s coming here?”

“He’ll be here tomorrow.”

After our 2 a.m. round, Joe and Dana send me off the floor, instructing me to go outside and check out the “spectacular” Orionid, the seasonal celestial show that only night workers and insomniacs can appreciate. I shiver under the meteor shower, a lonely bystander observing the marvels of God’s creation while the bats frolic around the parking lot lights. I feel a deep, unshakable emptiness. This job has saved my life, allowing me to sleep all day and giving me a reason to get out of bed after supper. I took this job out of desperation but discovered I enjoy the solitude of a night shift. I also discovered I care for my residents. They rely on me—without me, what would become of them? Yet
in the parking lot under the starlight, I am alone.
   I ride the elevator back to the floor, incapable of spending thirty minutes alone with my thoughts.

   At 5:00, we enter our busy time, our final round. We do quick checks on our residents, then wash, dress, and hoist Maggie, Dottie, and Tom into their wheelchairs and park them outside the nurse’s station. At 6:00, the day shifters arrive and finish morning rounds. At 6:30, Joe and I are in the elevator, riding down.
   I have survived my probationary period.
   “Thanks for your help,” Joe says as we separate in the parking lot, the daily farewell.
   “No problem,” I respond.
Untitled
Alexandra Shubin
hello, my name is poem, and i’m an alcoholic

Philip Gordon

--for nemo

when i first made counsel of carbon-hydroxyl
it was in the obligatory maudlin tempest
of loss. inexcusable tears from a klein bottle;
pity in peach-schnapps perpetuity.

how cliché
i told myself, stretching nights
into rum and rumination
or carnival-flavoured cider
elements to trip the trap-jaw of hereditary misery
in just the state that belongs
in a best-selling memoir.

still;
even knowing you’ve become a narrative fixture
doesn’t fill the hole that blooms
from something ripped away.
remorse, the outcry might say at times;
my love, my counsel, my irreplaceable
separate self
or
fuck your cat
to death.
he wasn’t worth the metal residue of gin
the black sunday tumble to the toilet bowl
uprooting the toilet paper fixture
to leave a ragged gap in the wall
for the purpose of metaphor, perhaps.

he used to sleep at my feet
waiting for the turn of my chair
before echoing the axle squeak
with his own grey-furred whine.
no matter how many nights go by
the taste still makes me sick:
the collective sourness of rusted nails
and everyone in a small room
missing something.
Maude Lynn
Marqus Bobesich
The world was all messed up like meat without salt, so I called my old high school history teacher.

“Hey, do you think there is any reason to go on under the pretense of being a happy person when most of the things I think about have to do with things I don’t have?”

He told me that he wasn’t sure how I got his phone number and that Sparta would have been like Rome if it weren’t for the Spartans.

I didn’t know what that meant, so I called my mom.

“Don’t worry about it, honey, you were always good in history,” she spoke into the phone before I even said anything.

I started to wonder why everything seemed to look right-side-up when I knew full well that my optic lens flipped it upside down, and my brain organized the residue to look the way it did, so I called my journalist.

“Hey, did you ever do any beat reporting for an optometry trade magazine?”
He said something about all his eye-doctor work being off the record, and that eye docs were like broken records when it came to the inherent value of vitamin E, and this was why it was at the top of eye-charts.

I didn’t know what he was talking about, so I called my mom. “You’ve got twenty-twenty vision, we made sure of that,” she proudly announced into the phone before I asked her a question.

I wondered if she had prenatal cataract laser surgery done to me, or what the hell else she could have meant by making sure I had perfect vision.

“What does it matter if all I see is lacking and hurting and despair and people wanting to switch skins with other people as their own perfect skins get saggy and die off!” I yelled to no one in particular, and started wondering if 20-30 was nearsighted, or if it was 30-20 that was farsighted, so I called the operator.

“You have to help me,” I wheezed, “I just don’t think anybody cares, I mean really cares about the weather, but it’s all we fucking talk about!”

She mumbled something about not being allowed to acknowledge maudlin obscenities, about how that’s what 900 numbers were for, and she told me it was windy in Chicago and blowing out of left field at Wrigley, not that it helped Cubs fans any, and I started wondering if she was really a baseball fan, or if it was just the way that she tried to bond with men who called her up cursing sadly on the phone, and I got so perplexed that I hit a couple of the number keys and ended up with my mom again.

“See, I knew you’d come back!” she exclaimed.

There were tears in her voice, if that is possible, and they oozed through the phone and hit me in the cheek, if that is also possible.
“Mommy?” I asked, “is it possible to move away from the one person you love more than anyone else in the world, the person who actually made you?”

She said she had waited a long time for me to ask her that.

“I always knew you’d come back,” she wept.

I got a sensation through my body like there were no questions in me, and I felt like I was going to ooze out of my eye-sockets, and I panicked and hung up the phone, ran to the window, stared at a tree, and then came back to the phone.

I held the phone against my chest and hit the redial button four times. Each time the phone got through, I heard my mom’s voice vibrate against my heart and then I hung up.

On the fifth time, I held it there for a while, and her muffled voice sounded like it wasn’t surprised at all. I could recognize it even through the layers of cotton and skin and bone. For a moment, I just paused, and felt the spirit behind the sounds surge through me.

Just then, it didn’t seem like the world was all that messed up after all.

I hung up the phone and went back to worrying about how people no longer seem to cultivate meaningful relationships with anything but objects. I dictated my feelings on love into an audiotape that I converted into an mp3 file and attached to an email that ended up in my mom’s spam folder.

“Have you been sending me pyramid schemes about starting a carnival again?” she wrote to me that spring on a postcard that spring, with a photo of Bill Clinton shaking the Dalai Lama’s hand on the back.

“I think they’re called get-rich quick schemes, Mother,” I said to myself softly as I lay in bed, thinking about bit coins and the
price of gold and how devastating it is to have a high fever.

I sent a telegram to my high school history teacher: “I was just following up,” I stammered.

The following spring, while walking along the beach, I saw an old bottle of Coca-Cola, in Mexican glass. I opened it up, and there was a curled-up note from my history teacher: “This isn’t a job interview, son, and by the way, the Dutch pulled the same deal with the tulips. You know,” his words continued into the letter next to a stain that smelled of chewing tobacco, “if you were still in my class, I’d have failed you.”

I called out to the universe for some justice. “Why does it take DNA evidence for us to free the wrongly incarcerated?” I boomed at the top of my lungs. A seagull flew by, on his way to a rock, and gave me a look that said: “I guess what you’re saying is that we all have to grow up and that means giving up on our fixation with the perfection of the human heart?”

“You’re a wise bird,” I mumbled toward him from his dizzying heights. But he couldn’t really hear me. He was already in the past.
The Pollinator
Candice Trimble
How Much is that Neon Lime Green Bikini in the Window?

Allison Thorpe

I never wanted anything more.

It sang to me like a thousand sirens.  
For the moment it belonged  
to a curvy blonde ponytailed  
mannequin holding a beach ball.  
Two hunky plastic males  
were sitting on a blanket  
staring up at her in admiration.  
Someone had scattered sand  
on the showroom floor for reality.

I babysat all June and July,  
carted home groceries for Mrs. Wilson,  
cut grass and washed windows  
until I had that bikini  
in my hands.  
I couldn’t wait to wear it,  
dazzling all at the shore.  
That grand day of unveiling  
I walked the beach,  
my short brown hair  
in a somewhat ponytail,  
no curves—
I was flat as a Kansas prairie—
but I carried a beach ball
and a flirty smile.
All afternoon I strolled the sands
like I was at a carnival
admiring the booths and stalls
of seashells and driftwood,
dipped my toes alluringly
in the gentle waves,
 flaunted that neon limeness,
ignored all the looks in my direction,
fended off two annoying kids
who tried to grab my ball
until a woman pointed at me and said,
Maybe you should put on a shirt.
You’re getting awfully red.
But I was having the day of my life,
the day I had spent months
dreaming about and didn’t listen.

The walk home was agony,
clothes rubbing my skin raw.
Even my hair cut into my neck.
Finally at home, each shower droplet was a knife stab, the air a dull scraping razor blade. I looked with loathing at the soggy neon lime residue huddled on the bathroom floor, now no longer needed. The sun and God had seared its image onto my throbbing skin like some tragic mask in a Greek drama.

For weeks the image of that suit haunted my scorched body, ached the sleepless nights, and tensed daily movement. I wore a thin baggy dress and stayed in my room. My eyes could afford no more tears. Maudlin, abandoned, I became friends with the moon, inhaling that kind silver coolness and wanting nothing.
Either Progressively Healing or Self-Destructive Efforts at Removing the Residue You Left Here

Yaro Shon Neils

**ATTEMPT #1.** Wipe gently by camping alone. Hike nine miles to the campsite because if your car is accessible, you will drive off in the middle of the night when you cannot sleep. Sing loudly as you walk to scare off bears. In your head, a song about impossible love. Feelings of indifference when you actually see a bear.

Attempt #2. Scrub it with a road trip to Great Falls, Montana. First stop, meeting a stranger in the bar where your grandparents had their first date. Valentine’s Day, 1951ish. Grandpa asked permission to bring his mother along so that she wouldn’t be lonely. More than sixty years later, you imagine not much has changed. The same strange carnival of Tiki Lounge sights and stale smells in this old motel. The 80-year-old woman playing the organ was probably there then, too. Probably a knock-out in her 20s. Maybe she even moonlighted as one of the mermaids swimming in the pool visible through the window behind the bar. The next morning, crying loudly on top of your grandmother’s grave.
Attempt #3. Dance classes. The elbow grease. Large sweeping movements with gusto to music you cannot stand.

Attempt #4. Soak in bleach through sex with someone you do not love. People do this all the time. You commend them for it even. But you do not, cannot? Apparently you can. Follow with four days in bed. Not with him. It’s not that kind of story. Fear becoming one of the maudlin characters in the cerebral French dramas you can’t stop watching.

Attempt #5. Burn it. Leave the state that you love. Give away most of your belongings. Say goodbye to friends and local aspirations and mountains.

A year and a half, two states later. Still there. But you’ve gotten kind of used to it.
The Carnival Chariot Team
John Lightle
The Essence of a Fig
Kristin Procter

Dirt-smeared faces dart
in and out
harvesting unripe baby tomatoes.
I lazily redirect the destruction
from my perch on the patio.
Teardrop condensation slides
down the maudlin glass
of freshly squeezed lemonade,
that tastes suspiciously of gin.
I try to sip, though I want to gulp.
Rosetta rounds up the kids,
offers respite from the heat:
snacks, lemonade and a video.
The glaze of late afternoon settles
over the children,
where they are curled
together in a pile on the carpet.
Rosetta gestures
Come, come with her fingers
and we escape into her garden. She picks at the bird netting draped over her fruit tree, a protective pashmina. She catches me gawking at the curve of the fruit, new to me. They’re figs she offers. I nod. She smiles with her eyelashes, plucks two from the tree then drags her fingernails over my hand as she places one in my palm. She bites into the other fig. Pulp covers her chin. The syrupy smell, the heat of her breath, insists I close my eyes.
I close my eyes.
The crooked edge
of my incisor
pierces the delicate skin,
plunges into the buttery pink flesh,
a carnival, dizzy on my tongue.
Each bite sinks deeper
until I feel the soft wrinkle of her
lips pulling back, leaving
only the residue of fig,
on my tongue.
The Halloween Party
Kelsey Dean
MAUDLIN was her name, and she wore it well. It was given to her when she was fresh and bright and pink, sustained only by milk and gentle cooing from indistinct faces. Her exhausted mother had uttered “Maude Lynn,” in her sweat-soaked hospital gown, and “Maudlin” had flown out of her mouth and stuck to the birth certificate of the screaming baby she cradled in her arms. “Maudlin,” people chuckled when they met her. “What a name for a baby like that.”

By “a baby like that,” they meant a sad baby. A tragic baby. A baby that cried and cried, choking on her ominous name as her mother sang it over and over again in her tiny ears, like it was a pretty word. Nobody realized that her name had woven itself into the stripes of her soft little baby blanket, settled right into the folds of her clothes, each strand of her hair, and the creases along her mouth. She cried because she had to, because her name demanded it of her.

But the tragic baby Maudlin didn’t stay a baby for long. Soon
enough, she was crawling, walking, speaking, drawing dark pictures in the corners of her notebooks. She watched cartoons and read storybooks, but they rarely made her giggle. Sometimes they made her cry. Soon enough, she was getting report cards that wondered about her home life, because her eyes always looked so sad in class, and she never raised her hand or her voice. She lingered in the backs of classrooms year after year and waited for graduation in a melancholy sort of way. She almost smiled when she moved the tassel on her cap and swished down the aisle in her gown.

After graduating, she floated through a sea of part-time jobs, and she learned the true value of dating; she spent the next handful of years giving up time and kisses in exchange for free wine. It got even easier when she finally surpassed the age of twenty-one, and she began to just buy her own wine rather than bother with people. They always disappointed her anyway, shying away from her clutching hands and her tendency to sob over old cartoons.

Her name loved the wine that she brought home. It grew stronger as she drank, and it conspired with heavy mascara and sharp eyeliner pencils to leave blackened tear trails on her cheeks when she was alone with it. Together, her name and her wine stained her lips and left marks on her sheets and pillowcases, residue that looked like blood and rot. Maudlin didn’t know it was her name’s fault, though. It was sneaky like that. It made her think that it was men with empty promises, empty bottles, banks with empty accounts, and jobs filled with empty hours that made her so sad. It hid in her too-small breasts and too-big feet, her too-droopy eyes and too-crooked teeth, and it made her look at all of her parts in the mirror, hating each of them as her name coursed
through her blood and her brain.

Sometimes on Tuesdays, Maudlin was dragged to speed-dating night at Roscoe’s Pub by a friend named Lisa. Lisa, unlike Maudlin, was desperately trying to find her soul mate in the corners of the bar. Maybe she thought he was using the bathroom, or running late, or lurking under a table whenever they were supposed to meet in the rotation of five-minute dates. Or maybe it was just habit that kept bringing her back. Regardless, it was the drink specials that convinced Maudlin to join her.

Though she didn’t see it or taste it, her name always saturated her gin and tonics, and smarted on her tongue when she bit into the lime wedge. It grew bolder and sneakier in the dim light and cigarette smoke. It danced when she scribbled it on “Hello my name is ______” stickers and let it linger on her chest, where nobody was surprised to read it after following her gaze to the glass she clutched with spidery hands. “Maudlin,” they’d say. “What an interesting name.” They were too polite to say that it was fitting, since she was no longer a little pink baby who was expected to cry.

Maudlin often skipped the dating part and just waited at the bar for it to end. Sometimes there were other sad people there as well, but they usually kept to themselves; the bar was a peaceful place to be when it was only populated with the sad ones. It was the angry ones that broke the stillness.

On one fine April evening full of gin and timed small talk, an angry one stormed past the tables where Lisa searched for Mr. Right and sat down just two stools away from Maudlin at the bar. He was tall, with a substantial belly and a baseball cap
shading his scruffy face. He ordered a beer with gruff ferocity, and the bartender was quick to pop the cap off and pass it over the counter to him. He sat in silence for a little while, alternating between swigs of alcohol and furious glares at his drink. Eventually he tired of mute interaction with his beer and looked over at Maudlin to take in her limp, dark hair, her full, dark lips, and her sad, dark eyes.

“Hey, why so serious?” he asked her abruptly.

She jumped and raised her eyes to meet his. Her expression was as empty as her desire to go join Lisa at the dating tables. He waited for a moment, but she didn’t respond.

“Not gonna tell me? Fine.” He turned forward again and drained his beer. She went back to contemplating ice cubes. He scooted his bottle toward the bartender and called for another, which he received and raised halfway to his lips before pausing, staring at Maudlin again.

“Wanna know why I’m so serious?” She shrugged apathetically without looking at him.

“My wife told me I needed to get serious,” he said. Maudlin gazed at a container of maraschino cherries sitting on the other side of the bar and took a sip of her drink. He continued talking to her like she was interested in hearing his story.

“You know that fair that was here last week? With all the rides and cotton candy and freaky balloon animals?”

Maudlin bobbed her head. “The Spring Carnival,” she said dully. “It’s here every year.”

“Yeah, well this year I didn’t care for it at all.”

“Oh,” said Maudlin, still looking at the cherries. The man gripped his bottle, letting the condensation numb his palm as he frowned at her. He waited for more of a reaction from her, but
he got nothing. It didn’t matter though. His explanation suddenly burst out of him like he was physically incapable of keeping to himself.

“My wife ran off with a clown. I got her an elephant ear and she got herself a clown. A clown! Because she wanted a serious guy.” He stopped talking and downed his second beer as Maudlin traced a finger around the rim of her glass, feeling distantly sad for all three of them: the betrayed husband, the contradictory wife, and the serious clown. None of them sounded very good at their jobs.

“What’s your name, anyway?” the man asked.

“Maudlin,” she said.


She finally looked at him. Then she looked at her nametag, where her name sat seeping into her heart through a thin cardigan. Maudlin, she thought. Drunk, sad, emotional, maudlin.

Then Maudlin—the woman who cried silent black tears into bottles of wine, who had lived her life haunted by a name—broke into a smile as she sat at a bar with a fuming stranger who hated clowns. She actually felt amusement bubbling up through her chest, thinking about the irony of it all; the man and his wife and the clown, her mournful name written out below her merry grin, and the fact that such an angry man had prompted such mirth in her.

With that smile, her heavy thundercloud of a name dissipated into string of seven simple letters. She laughed and laughed as her name cowered in the corner of a flimsy little nametag, realizing that it was nothing more than a silly name.
Shedding My Skin
Jessie Flori
Remnants of Red
Jesse Austin

We shame porous, like sponges,
teeth open like dogs.
We breathe madness in carnivals,
twist stomachs flapjacking,
smash wallpaper with daring,
dare careless down halls.

No carpets, no pillows,
maudlin secrets in bedding.
We are dialogues like candy,
sweet raucously dripping,
our jaws fleshed with residue,
the remnants of red.
JEFF Conroy had a recurring dream. That is to say, it was a dream in the sense that he experienced it during sleep. For its lack of fiction, it might as accurately have been called a memory, stubborn residue in the trenches of his mind. Two decades skewed some of the details, as had those subconscious machinations that only concerned people who read Freud and Jung, but it was an event from his childhood which truly happened. It was conceivable that others remembered it as well, if that was the benchmark for determining unquestionable reality.

The dream, or memory, came from kindergarten. There was a coloring contest and Jeff was given a picture of a grazing mustang. With a black crayon, he washed out every line in the image until all that remained on the page was an amorphous construct which Geometry couldn’t name. When it came time to pass their work to the front, he found himself holding another picture of the same, grazing mustang. This was the work of his freckled, red-headed classmate, Emily Graham. She applied every stroke of color with
painstaking precision, dutiful to boundaries and appropriate in hue. It wasn’t the fact that her work was superior which bothered him; it was the fact that it was so much better that its existence made his failure impossible to ignore. With the same black crayon, he scribbled lines across the width of Emily’s paper mustang. She saw him do it and complained. He denied it, but he still held the evidence, the only black on her picture. Jeff cried, the way that children do when they’re caught in strange behavior. His only answer to his teacher was that he wanted to make it ugly. Jeff seldom thought of that incident during his waking hours, but on a blustery night in late June, he reflected and drew parallels.

The carnival came to town that night. Jeff stood beside the merry-go-round and listened to the discordance of ambient music and over-stimulated children. A tepid wind persisted and for a moment, he fixated on the aroma it delivered: perfumes, hair gels and lotions of passers-by, the savory-sweet smell of hot pretzels and funnel cakes, the promise of rain in the lowering clouds, which disappeared with the last of the day’s sun. At booths, which flanked an old bike path, young men played games of chance and skill in the hopes of winning stuffed animals and feminine adoration. Along the midway, teenagers drank vodka, disguised in take-out cups while married couples held hands, exchanged candid glances, and pretended they didn’t notice. Everything he could see was amalgamated in fluctuating light, like a neon dawn and dusk beneath an achromatic sky.

The place typified exactness, as if no appeal to the senses was made without choreography in anticipation of the moment when the night became someone’s memory, a farewell or a first kiss. Only Jeff seemed out of place, an anachronism in an optimist’s dream of the future. As a living portrait of injury, he
was flawed. His slacks and white shirt were too clean and fit too well. His auburn hair bore evidence of a comb. No stubble marred the delicate, angular features to which his face owed its exotic charm, and the corners of his mouth rested flush with stubborn detachment. He stood static, neither enjoying his station nor moving toward a different one, and he stared at everything that loitered between his eyes and some fixed point in space.

Had he wanted to make this place ugly, to stain it with maudlin self-indulgence? Had he come, instead, to dissolve in the mire of peculiarity, to be a cheerless lyric to a buoyant melody? Jeff decided these questions served more of a purpose than their answers. He reached into his right hip pocket and ran his fingers along the velvet surface of a box, first with, then against the grain, stroking it as if it were the coat of a house pet. He tried to forget the ring inside, the way it looked earlier that night, when he expected alcohol to taste better and to be thankful for sleeplessness. The inscription was unreadable then, in the shroud of nightfall. The diamond stole moonlight and returned none of it. Omens were only clear in retrospect. Fate preferred mockery to forewarning.

Jeff managed to avoid picturing her face, but her words pursued him, less as though they rode the unrelenting breeze than had been its creator. "I’m not positive that it’s yours." Those were her words, a statement that answered his proposal before it was made. It was an admission that she spoke in a whisper, which became the wind in his ears.

"Are you angry with the grass or something?"

Jeff turned to find the source of the voice. It was a young man. He appeared to be in his early thirties, tall and solid with lean muscle. He wore his long, blonde hair in a ponytail and smiled as
though he rarely did otherwise.

The man reworded his question. “Trying to keep the grass from growing?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Jeff answered. “No, I’m just, well, I don’t really know what I’m doing, I guess.”

The stranger stepped closer. “That’s true of most people. Some of them just don’t like to say so, I think. They’d rather be wrong than unsure.”

Jeff abandoned an attempt to smile then settled for a polite nod. “You’re probably right about that.”

“It’s just something I’ve observed. I do that quite a bit; I like to observe people.”

The man’s taste in verbs unsettled him. To notice something seemed ordinary and casual, but observations implied purposeful action. It was an awkward opening to a conversation he wanted to avoid altogether. Jeff nodded once more then turned and pretended to watch a young woman thirty yards away at a covered booth as she tossed plastic rings around the necks of glass bottles. “Not to be rude, but—”

“I never understood why people do that,” the man interrupted. “You can’t negate an action with some verbal disclaimer. If I go into a bank with a gun and tell the guy behind the counter, not to be a bank robber, but this is a stick-up, does that mean I’m not a criminal?”

That allusion filled the air like creosote fumes. They were odd words for unfamiliar ears. Did this man intend to threaten him there, in such a public place? Jeff turned back to face the stranger. He stood as if supported by a coiled spring under pressure which would, at the pivotal moment, either break or fly off in some general direction, its fate to be determined by luck and physics.
“Look,” he said. “I don’t want any trouble.” Without personal experience upon which to rely, he chose his words from television and films.

“I’m sorry,” the stranger replied. “I’m making you nervous.” He extended a hand and stepped toward Jeff. “Carnies aren’t known for their social skills.”

Jeff paused to allow embarrassment to become the new source of his discomfort. If anyone were to attack him at the carnival, it seemed unlikely that it would be an employee. His evening of reflection and self-loathing rendered him melodramatic. He settled on that and took the stranger’s hand. For some portion of a second, it felt feverish. A sensation, something like a static shock began in his wrist and traveled up the length of his forearm where wisps of hair felt like Velcro hooks. By the time it worried him, the sensation passed.

“Are you okay?”

Jeff forced a grin that still resisted him. “Yeah, sure.”

“Well, that’s Madam Zara’s tent, down past the ring toss booth. Thinking of getting your fortune told?”

“No, I guess I was just staring.”

“There are worse women to stare at, I’m sure, but let me save you some time and tell you she won’t take her top off, not even if you ask nicely.”

When his phone vibrated in his left hip pocket, Jeff welcomed the interruption before he considered the obvious identity of the caller. It was Miriam, the woman who made his whiskey taste like dust and stole his sleep for the wrong reasons. He returned the phone to his pocket, unanswered.

The carnie stepped aside and stood abreast of his reluctant acquaintance. “That’s funny. You seemed like a guy who was
waiting on a call.”

The statement’s directness surprised Jeff and the encroachment restored his agitation. His core, again, became a coiled spring which groaned under its burden. “Nothing to say. It doesn’t matter. Look, I don’t know if I’m sending out a vibe or something, but I kind of want to be alone right now. No hard feelings.”

The carnie didn’t move. He stood, engaged but motionless, like a veterinarian examining a frightened stray. “You came to a carnival to be alone? Then again, I guess it’s more original than a bar. Lots of people mope in bars. The best you’d do there is inspire another bad country music song.”

“Seriously, I-“

“If you’re looking to vent your spleen, I’m headed over to work the high-striker. I’ll give you a free swing with the hammer.”

“Look, don’t interrupt. I’m trying to-“

“It’s the least I can do, since I don’t have a black crayon to give you.”

His internal spring snapped and disintegrated like dead leaves under heavy feet. He turned to face the stranger, but the wind reminded his knees of his weight. He staggered.

The carnie extended his arms. “Careful now.”

Jeff avoided his touch and managed to regain balance on his own. “What did you say?”

“Don’t freak out on me, Jeff. That’s a boring and predictable story that ends with a trip to the nuthouse and you on antipsychotics. Don’t be that guy.”

Had this stranger truly seen his memory? Charlatans ran these types of cons on people, didn’t they? They preyed on those, willing to take an observant eye for a prescient mind and this man
had professed an affinity for observations. Even so, what clue could he have given to convey such a specific thing? In the stupor, the stranger’s use of his name seemed unimpressive. Jeff stepped backward. “Who are you?”

“Theo.”

“I don’t mean your name. I mean, what are you?”

“When someone asks you who you are, what do you tell them?”

“I’d tell them I’m a human being if I gave them a reason to think something else.”

“Sorry. Theo’s what I’ve got for you.”

Jeff scurried away. He passed the merry-go-round and skirted a line at a dunking booth. Fifteen yards ahead, a preteen boy played a losing game of whack-a-mole. Did anyone see him, marching in no particular direction with only distance in mind? Did he look strange then or had he before while he languished in deliberate solitude? Had the others lost interest in his strangeness?

“Why don’t you think it matters?”

Jeff heard Theo’s voice then realized he was, again, at his side. They stopped and faced each other. “Look, whatever you’re selling, just go sell it to somebody else.”

“I suppose I could do that. You’re not the only guy in the world under his own private rain cloud right now. There are plenty of miserable people tonight, but most of them are inspiring lame country songs, writing bad poetry or posting weepy nonsense on Facebook.”

“What do you want from me?”

“When I asked why you didn’t answer your phone, you said it didn’t matter. Why do you think it doesn’t matter?”

“It’s a long story.”
Theo nodded. “I know what you mean, but it’s not really a long story. You were going to propose to your girlfriend tonight. She’s pregnant. You would have popped the question but when she told you she had something to say, you let her go first. She told you the kid might not be yours. You flipped out, and for some reason, decided to come here.”

“How do you know all this?”

“See? That wasn’t such a long story. I barely had to ramble.”

Their conversation gained no outside attention. The line at the dunking booth inched forward with the pitching of a trio of off-target baseballs. The small crowd huffed and cheered as each toss edged its target and shook the backstop with a metallic resonance. At the whack-a-mole booth, the preteen boy lost his game and made room for a young girl to try her hand. The pair stood as goldfish in a waiting room aquarium, either unnoticed or beneath notice to people with their own preoccupations. Jeff wondered if they were imperceptible or uninteresting. He stopped trying to find his composure and instead decided to do his best without it. “What exactly do you want from me?”

“What do you want for yourself?”

“Look, I’m doing my best to not make a scene. Could you cut me some slack?”

“Okay, fine. You want to know who I am. Think of me as someone with a lot of time on their hands.”

“Time? And you can apparently see through time, that’s it, right? So, you want to maybe give me some lottery numbers or just leave me alone?”

“No, it’s not like that. Time isn’t some movie I can fast forward. It’s like a series of very elaborate equations. One thing that makes me special is I can do the math.”
“So do the math then. Tell me I’m headed up or down, going to be visited by three ghosts or whatever it is, and cut to the chase. You’re creeping me out.”

“I have that effect on people. It’s partly because you’re not sure you haven’t snapped. Tonight, you might go home, finish that bottle of Gentleman Jack, pass out and wake up thinking it was all a dream. Try not to do that though. That’s as boring as the loony bin scenario.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“To answer your question, it doesn’t work that way either. I mean, if I knew what was going to happen, why would I watch the show? If time is like a system of equations, your decisions are variables. Until you plug those in, I can usually only rule some things out, tell you what might happen, or once in a while, what will probably happen.”

“And what, you want me to decide to talk to my girlfriend, marry her, raise some other guy’s kid, is that what this is about?”

“Who told you it’s someone else’s kid?”

“She did, remember? You just told me my own story.”

“I didn’t tell you that and neither did she. She said she wasn’t positive that it was yours, not that she was positive that it wasn’t. And for the record, I really don’t care what you decide to do. I just think whatever you do, you ought to mean it.”

“So, wait. You know whether or not I’m the father, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“Tell me.”

“No.”

“Are you kidding? What are you bothering me for then? You have to tell me.”

“And how do you think trying to force me would play out for
you?”

His face was flat and his tone was one of derision, yet these words unsettled Jeff more than anything the carnie said before. They reminded him that he was powerless. He didn’t even know what the carnie was, but believed it must have been a thing that was less breakable than a man.

Theo continued, “Your kind is funny that way. You worship a god one day then you shake your fist at it the next. You yell at the weather. It must be a frustrating way to live.”

“Please just tell me what you want.”

“You want to know if it was just the one time that Miriam cheated. I don’t feel like letting you gamble with house money on that one, so ask her. If you can’t believe her, then you have your answer. Same goes if once is too many. You want to know if you’re the baby’s father, I’ll give you this: you are if you want to be. Get out in the world sometime. You don’t have to be Miriam’s husband to be her baby’s father and you don’t need to have DNA in common to be the man that child thinks of as what a man is supposed to be.”

“So that’s it? You did all of this to say all the things my friends would’ve told me if I’d just gone to a bar and cried in my beer?”

Theo stepped backward twice and stretched his arms at his sides, parallel to the ground. “No. There’s one more thing.”

Jeff did not collapse to the ground. There were no lights beyond those which had illuminated the fairground all along, no illusions or noticeable evolutions of any kind. A waking dream enveloped him without a transition or announcement. He envisioned a small girl, perhaps two years old, building a tower of pastel-colored blocks. She wore a purple dress over white tights and patent leather shoes on feet that looked too small to provide
stability. A tuft of russet hair gathered into a pigtail on either side of her head. The girl flashed a grin full of new teeth then gave a laugh which was loud and full enough to justify itself.

“She’s not just a thought anymore, is she?” Theo’s voice brought him back to the present as seamlessly as he had left it.

Jeff searched for something to say. He had questions but knew that he had received all of the answers he would be given.

Theo shrugged. “Be a husband or don’t. Be a father or don’t. I really don’t care. Just make a decision and mean it.”

Jeff watched as Theo turned and started off toward the high-striker or wherever it was that he knew he belonged, passing crowds of humanity without offering or receiving acknowledgment, threatening to evaporate with each equivocation of pulsing neon light. The phone in his pocket vibrated again. It was Miriam. Jeff considered answering it, then considered not, but he did not entertain the thought that it didn’t matter
POV-The Carnival
August Bramhoff
Fall Carnival
Allison Thorpe

All the summer music makers are tireless performers today—crickets, tree frogs, cicadas—tricked because this late October afternoon wraps warm and lazy like a balmy fantasy, some masked spectacle luring us with beads and masks.

Playful wrens swing from autumn’s gold to maple’s scarlet celebration in this ring of illusion.

Clouds juggle an aging sky
while the sun parades
its spellbinding act.

White-tailed deer dance
their scrunch and crackle
among the chatty pine cones
and dry leafy residue.

Even the forsythia,
simple believer,
is tumbling its yellow harmony
onto the lane like street theater.

In my shirtsleeves,
spring to my step and mind,
taming the wild
maudlin thoughts
of what lies ahead,
I, also, a fool.
Subway Sanghara
Larry Vazeos

I met a man once with 100 tattoos each one pointing toward salvation

and each one pointing in a different direction.

I wish I had his address
I’d send him a balloon

The end

I dreamed I was an orange
TIMOTHY Barkett is a connoisseur. Using only his finely honed senses of sight and smell, he can dissect and discern each ingredient of what is set before him down to the hint of spice. He can tell you the quality of the ingredients, the ratio of sugar to starch, and if the liquid gold used to fry the victuals has recently been changed. He can even go so far as to tell you the profile of the person who would enjoy such a meal—their gender, general age, and in some cases even their profession. With a skill of an auctioneer he can inspect, assess, and conclude specifics when given only a fleeting study of his subject.

Though there is no culinary class, glossy magazine, or entire cable channel devoted to his specialty it does not mean he is not an expert in his field. Granted, all his experience has been on the job and purely anecdotal, but you don’t go your whole adult life operating the Tilt-N-Spin without learning a thing or two. And while it is true he has never gone head-to-head in a competition to prove his prowess, Timothy Barkett is confident that there is no
one on this earth who knows more about vomit than he does.

Being a connoisseur of regurgitated food was not Timothy Barkett’s boyhood dream. Like many children, he would lie awake at night and hope for the day when he could run away and join the circus. He would join a life full of wonder and travel. Menageries of animals fearsome and intelligent, intrepid performers with nerves of steel and unwavering smiles net or no, the delight of a crowd whipped into a frenzy of anticipation for the spotlight to fall onto the next ring, the next chance to be transported to a world found only in the pages of books and bedtime stories.

Running away to join the circus might have been a fantastic experience for a lonely young man such as Timothy Barkett. The pageantry might have buoyed his spirits and awoken a seemingly nonexistent sense of purpose. The smell of roasting peanuts and animal musk might have inspired him to be bold and daring, jump from a platform into the open air, trusting his life to nothing but physics and timing. The longing for the comforts he never had at home might have brought him to share the bed of a girl with agile grace and skill who let him see her barefaced and scrubbed, assuring him the makeup was for the crowds but her skin was only for him; letting him believe.

The circus might have made Timothy Barkett happy. Unfortunately, the circus never came through Chesterfield, Iowa—but the carnival did.

The J.J. Riggins Carnival was a mid-Western institution back in its day. In the early ’40s, folks languishing over a hot, dry summer looked forward to news of the carnival’s return. School children, long since bored with the novelty of an endless stretch of summer, looked forward to the excitement of something new. Their parents, long since exasperated with the novelty of caring
for children with an endless stretch of ways to get underfoot, looked forward to sending them out with pockets full of coins for those few blessed days. Eager lines formed early each morning, hoping to make the most of their time knowing that all too soon they would move to the next town. One day you were riding high on the Ferris Wheel and the next the booths, rides, and miles of caramel and taffy would be torn down with efficient speed leaving only bald patches of grass and the lingering haze of powered sugar.

Timothy Barkett attended his first carnival the summer after his father died. Timothy Barkett, Sr. was found in his beat-up Buick the previous winter, frozen to death, too drunk to think of switching on the heat while sleeping one off beside a snow bank. His mother, bitter not with the loss of her husband’s life but the gaining of the unwelcomed responsibilities his demise brought to her, spent her days swinging and yelling at any and all who crossed her path. The carnival was due in town two weeks after school ended and Timothy was first in line for the recruiter sent ahead of the excitement looking for some local help. Broad shouldered, meek, and willing, Timothy was hired on immediately.

J.J. Riggins died sometime during the mid-'50s, turning the open road reigns over to his children. Finding the amusement industry clogged with giant parks and mega complexes, his offspring quickly sold it to a third party who turned around and auctioned the name and the equipment to the highest bidder. To say the standards had declined would be an understatement. Haphazard practices, deplorable wages, and questionable standards left the carnival with all the charm of a coin-operated dragon sitting outside a run down shopping mall.

While this degradation of a proud tradition was sad news for
the newest generation of carnival-goers, the quick turn over of disgruntled employees allowed Timothy Barkett to move up the formerly impenetrable hierarchy of the place and into the big leagues quickly. He manned the ring toss (a miserable job that sucked the money from the pockets of optimists and the soul from his body). He endured the corn dog station (a booth of horrors that left him with bright pink burns on his arms that never healed and an irrational hatred for wooden sticks). And when given the chance, he proved himself by running the small boxy train that took squalling toddlers on a ride to nowhere.

There was no glamour in the job. The pay was slightly south of fair and not always steady. The boredom of ill weather days was only slightly worse than the endless afternoons under a beating sun. Tensions flared between the seasoned hands and the seasonal help, leading to more than one late night brawl fueled by distrust and cheap booze. Grimy children ruled the day and mouthy teens prowled the night, looking for trouble and more often than not finding it where the previous night’s roving gangs had left it. However, Timothy Barkett was a realist. The world owed him nothing and he did little to earn the right to be angry about it. So with a less than stellar upbringing behind him, a lackluster future before him, and no friends to miss him, he made up his mind and when the carnival left town, he went with it.

Though there were plenty of opportunities to work in different areas of the carnival, once Timothy Barkett’s found Tilly, there was no going back. He was there early one morning when they brought her on as the newest attraction. The summer sun glinted off her delicate metal curves. The smell of new vinyl wafted from her amply cushioned seats. As he approached to get a closer look, she rolled along her tracks to turn a demure back to him, a
coy gesture he found as endearing as it was alluring. He put in a passionate bid to be her first operator. His wish was granted.

Timothy Barkett would never forget that first night. When the sky turned purple and night fell, he ran his hand over the thick silver box housing the switches that brought her to life. He deployed them reverently and watched in awe as the lights surrounding her popped to life. Music curled up from a hidden speaker, its tune lovely and playful with a hint of longing, as if it were composed by summer itself. Tilly began to twirl in time with the music. The sleekness of her body caught the lights as she moved with effortless grace. She spun before him leaving the smells of sugar and salted dough in her wake. He breathed them in, breathed her in, until a wonderful dizziness made him lightheaded but he watched her still. He had never seen anything so beautiful in his life.

Over the years he came to know every nut, bolt, and gear that kept her running. Like a parent, he needed only to look at her, to hear a change in the pitch of her rattle, to notice an edge not as sharp, to observe a slight list in her gait, and he would know she wasn’t right. He lovingly touched up her paint where the dusty Mid-Western winds abraded her shine. He carefully patched rips and tears in the vinyl seats with industrial strength tape he custom ordered to match her perfectly.

And yes, he painstakingly cleaned the partially digested stomach contents of those who underestimated the old girl’s power. Over the years his skill grew so much so that he could spot a potential defiler and deny them entry. He would notice the tinge of sickly green pallor of their skin, the sticky residue of hot pink sugar around their mouths, the purple stains on the space between their thumb and pointer finger where a snow cone
melted down. He could observe the small things other people might ignore and immediately refuse to take their tickets. This would often result in a heated argument and the occasional swing if the person had too much to drink (and wasn’t that behavior evidence enough that they were in no condition to ride?). In every case, the potential expeller marched straight to the bosses to give them their opinion on the matter.

In the early days, the higher-ups would listen to these complaints and come down hard on Timothy Barkett.

“It’s not for you to decide who rides and who doesn’t,” the inevitably red-faced and overfed overseer would say.

“With all due respect, sir, I believe it is,” Timothy Barkett would say. “Tilly is my responsibility.”

“Who the hell is Tilly?”

Timothy would remember he was dealing with an outsider and be choosier about his words. He would remind himself that to others, she was cruelly reduced to only her label. “I mean the Tilt-N-Spin, sir.”

They would stare at him a long time. They never much liked the man. He was strange in a way they could not quite put their finger on.

“We’re in the business of making money, son,” they’d finally say. “We can’t be turning away good paying customers.”

Timothy knew they would never listen to reason. They would never understand how the candy-colored biohazards degraded not only the machinery but Tilly’s dignity. They would dismiss his attempts to explain how the ticket wielding, sugar-sluggish, grease-injected, sticky-fingered time bombs were like parasites feeding from Tilly until she was worn down, her spirits corroded. They would never understand the real importance of his defense
so he put it in their terms. He spoke only about rusted parts and expensive repairs, liabilities and lawsuits. They relented. After a few years they no longer questioned him and let his judgments stand.

They were never apart, Timothy and Tilly. He was there for all of her performances, looking on in admiration as she danced under the twinkling lights. Each night she drew him further in, every revolution pulling him closer and thinner like a bobbin pulls the thread from a spool. He was bound and bewitched, wrangled and wretched, a helpless and hopeless man in love.

Not that the going was always easy. There were times when the task of catering to Tilly’s every need wore on him. The pressure to remove every last fleck of dirt and debris from her pristine cars was exhausting. The sweeping of wrappers and cellophane from her metal treads and wiping greasy fingerprints from her handles was a Sisyphean task. The sentinel-like vigilance needed to keep the would-be defilers at bay made his eyes dry and his patience thin.

Though he later cringed at the memory, there came a time when Timothy Barkett felt he could no longer take it. The demands were too great. Seeing her night after night with a parade of strangers huddled close to her while he was relegated to the side was too much. He traded with another hand one particularly languid summer and turned his back on Tilly in favor of the Sky Swings. He did not visit her, did not ask after her, trying his best to push her from his mind. He stared instead at the sneaker and sandal studded sky above him and tried to forget.

He lasted three weeks.

It was longer than he thought he could go, but by then the gnawing need to be with her again had eaten through his stomach.
and threatened his heart. He grew maudlin and bereft—there was no beauty in anything if it did not start with her. Simply, he missed her. When he finally approached her she would not turn to face him. Their bond was severed and she had moved on. Timothy Barkett prepared his goodbyes. He moved closer to her and his heart broke. Harsh black marks marred her elegant back; the paint dried mid-drip from hastily sprayed words.

He flew to her then. He spent the night scrubbing and buffing her surface until none of the evidence of his neglect and abandonment remained. That night he slept in one of her cars, his apologies whispered like a lullaby that soothed him to sleep.

On the eve of the carnival’s final day before winter forced them off the road, and the end of Timothy Barkett’s 60th summer since he first saw Tilly, he was called into the manager’s office. His arthritic joints ached as he sat in the hard plastic chair and listened to the baby-faced man explain that the time had come for both he and Tilly to retire.

Timothy knew this day was coming. Even a man blinded by love looks up from time to time to see the writing on the wall. While his admiration and devotion to Tilly was constant, it was not a universally held opinion. Tilly’s place at the carnival was first one of excitement, then habit, and as the years whirled by, her act became no more than nostalgia. The carnival became a place of automated noise and artificial colors. The music piped in over buzzing speakers was harsh and loud. No matter how she spun, Tilly always seemed a bit off-time with the beat. The lines to see her dwindled (though that may have more to do with the gruff old man who would noisily and adamantly deny you a ride for no greater sin than indulging your love of fried Oreos).

Dismissed, Timothy wove his way back to Tilly through the
deserted grounds. At this time of night the other workers had long since traded the electric noise of the carnival for that of the local bars. Timothy never craved that escape. This was his home. Tilly was his home. What would he do now? His head hung low, shoulders stooped with the weight of uncertainty. He should have made a plan. He should have been ready for this. He should not have to leave her.

As he criss-crossed through the shadows and over grass flattened by streams of thrill-seekers, Timothy Barkett heard a sound. It was faint at first but grew louder as he wound his way closer to Tilly. His knees ached as he doubled his pace, chasing the sound like it was a will-o-the-wisp, afraid it would disappear before he could catch it. A memory tugged at this brain as the sound became a melody. The tune was lovely and playful, with a hint of longing, as if it was composed by summer itself. It was the song he watched her dance to that day so many years ago; a song long since replaced and forgotten everywhere but in his heart. It was their song.

Her bright lights welcomed him to her, blazing a path for him to follow. He took a moment to study her. He drank in her tall, arching casing, her demure way of turning away from the outside, her endless expanse of smooth, flashing metal. He crept to her slowly and slid onto one of her smooth seats. The curve of her shell enclosed him like an oyster and he curled onto the seat, safe and protected—her pearl.

He settled back against her familiar form as she began her final dance. It was slow at first, smooth and steady. Timothy wove his fingers gently and lovingly around the bar across his lap. The gears he oiled and set for years slid under them noiselessly. Their song flowed into his ears and he hummed along with the wordless
tune. Tilly kept time with the rhythm, executing perfect turns.

The world spun faster and faster around Timothy Barkett. At first he could pick out the flavors of the carnival; the sugars, the grease, the starches, the meats, and the salts touched his tongue and burst. As the spinning reached a fever pitch, they blended, swirling at a breakneck pace, changing and distorting, becoming something new, something wonderful. Gravity pinned him to his seat. His limbs stuck uselessly to his side. His heart beat wildly in time with each circle sending blood coursing through his veins as it never had before. He gasped for breath, eager for each one, even as they became shallower and fewer, welcoming it into him as he became a blur.

Timothy Barkett and Tilly spun long after his breath was still, faster and faster they went, spinning and spinning their exquisite revolutions until it was impossible to distinguish one from the other.
New Joy
Emma Fiala
3Elements Contributors

**Cairo Amani** is a Spoken Word poet and Sarah Lawrence Graduate. She writes science fiction and fantasy novels with queer people of color as main characters. She aspires to diversify a genre she deeply loves. Some of her favorite authors are Octavia Butler, Ayana Mathis, Toni Morrison and Neil Gaiman- in no particular order. She currently resides in Brooklyn, and is a staff writer for both *Elixher* and *Emancipated Mind*. You can find out more about Cairo at about.me/cairoamani

**Jesse Austin** lives in Western Massachusetts where she spends the majority of her time writing. She has written all of her life and can claim to very nearly becoming an English major in college. This is her first publication.

**Gabriel Leif Bellman** helped start the *True Life* series at MTV and is the founder of the Frozen Film Festival. He is a regular of Omnibucket’s Action Fiction! literature performance series. His poems and stories have appeared in magazines and literary journals worldwide.

**Marqus Bobesich** received his BFA from York University majoring in visual arts. He has worked as a copywriter, comedian, playwright, and musician. As an actor/voice artist in Toronto he has appeared in 60+ commercial productions in Canada and the U.S. He’s the creator of the online cartoon *Candy & Lottery* and he’s currently developing three original animation pitches.
August Bramhoff was born in 1984. Her interest in graphic and technical arts started at an early age, as her father would often take her along on sales calls to local print shops. At the age of 14 she became entranced with photography, and by seventeen, she was hand-printing her own black and white fine art work. In 2006 she entered design studies at Lanagra College, and discovered how photography could be centered on community to become more engaging and interactive. Currently, she operates and instructs out of the Dunbar Community Centre’s Darkroom. Most recently she was an event photographer at the 25th annual Queer Film Festival.

Clayton Chandler is a freelance writer and former journalist whose articles have appeared in a number of publications. His fiction has appeared in The Storyteller Speaks: Rare and Different Fictions of the Grateful Dead (Kearney Street Books), 365tomorrows.com, TexasTechToday, and AnotherRealm.com. He won a Texas Associated Press Managing Editor’s Award for deadline writing, The Hearst Newspapers Eagle Award, and a Council for the Advancement and Support of Education feature-writing award.

Kelsey Dean received a BA in communications from Grand Valley State University in 2012, and has since worked in English education and academic publishing. She was most recently published in Weave Magazine. She will also have a portfolio of visual artwork published in Glint Literary Journal this summer.
Alexander Drost was born in New Jersey. He is a twin. He has a B.A. in Creative Writing and Sculpture from the University of Colorado. He currently lives and works in Boulder, Colorado.

Jocelyn Edelstein is a Portland-based writer and filmmaker. Her previous writing has been published in Best Women’s Travel Writing 2011, Best Women’s Travel Writing Volume 8, Best Women’s Travel Writing Volume 9, The Huffington Post, Redefine Magazine, Chronogram Magazine and Commonline Journal. She is currently a writer for TheGorge.com.

Emma Fiala is a professional photographer living in Minneapolis, MN dividing her time between two little kids, Olive and June, and her photography career. She comes from Chicago and is on her way to Seattle. She is forever trying to find her niche.

Jessie Flori is a self-taught photographer who enjoys macro photography. She likes using close-up shots to investigate the beauty in subjects that would normally be shied away from.

Philip Gordon is a creative writing student from Vancouver Island, recipient of the 2014 Kevin Roberts poetry award, and an editor of *Ash Tree Journal* and *Text* (launching in September, 2014). His work has been published in *The Puritan, Wax Poetry and Art Magazine, Passion Poetry, The YOLO Pages*, and in numerous other places. Philip is a romantic dork, lover of shades, and proponent of the Oxford Comma. He can be stalked at twitter.com/greymusic_ and grey-music.tumblr.com.

Jenny Griffin is 26, living in NYC but originally from County Tipperary, Ireland. Currently awaiting results of the NY Bar exam, she has always loved to write and has been published a couple of times in newspapers and anthologies in Ireland.

Carol Guess is the author of thirteen books of poetry and prose, including *Doll Studies: Forensics and Darling Endangered*. She is Professor of English at Western Washington University. Follow her here: www.carolguess.blogspot.com

Lisa Hossler is a reformed nurse’s aide living on the north coast of Ohio in the shadow of a nuclear cooling tower. She currently works in a library where she can feed her addiction to writing. As far as accomplishments and accolades go, well, there she is solely lacking. She’s had minor success with *The Voices Project*, who have accepted two pieces, one to be published in April.
**Maraya Loza Koxahn** is an artist who expresses with her camera when she travels.

**Katarina La Poll** grew up in Northern California and moved to New York last spring after transferring from UC Santa Cruz. She is a senior at NYU’s McGhee Division concentrating on Creative Writing. She never knew she loved writing so much until being apart of McGhee’s writing program and is excited to see where her newfound passion might take her! This year she was published in *Dovetail, NYU SCPS’ literary journal*. Besides writing, Katarina enjoys dancing whenever the mood strikes, outdoor adventures, traveling, and hanging out with her big, crazy family.

**John Lightle** is a photographer who works on a broad variety of art projects, from the overlooked, the ornate and the obscure, with an intrigue for migratory flight.

**TJ Lloyd** was born and raised in Trinidad and Tobago. He currently lives in Scarborough, Ontario with his wife. Listening to calypso music is his favourite way to unwind. He loves peanut butter and hamburgers, sometimes together. Another hobby of his is practicing funny faces in the mirror. He likes to take pictures and once in a blue moon, one or two turn out quite nicely.
Karen Loeb grew up in Chicago and has lived in western Wisconsin since 1988. She has also lived in Florida and had extended stays in Asia. Recent writing has appeared in Thema, Hanging Loose, Main Street Rag and other magazines. Her writing can be read online in Crania, Otis Nebula, Boston Literary Magazine and elsewhere. Poems are forthcoming in Nerve Cowboy and Edison Literary Review.

Natalie Lopez is an aspiring attorney and will be entering her first year of law school this August. She has a great attitude about life and strives for success. She enjoys spending time outdoors, with family and friends, and making sure each day is busy and productive. She loves the beach, exploring South Florida’s beautiful landscapes, restaurants and nightlife, exercising, travelling, attending music festivals, spending time with her beautiful pit-bull, and much more.

Kelly Magee’s first collection of stories, Body Language (University of North Texas Press) won the Katherine Ann Porter Prize for Short Fiction. Her writing has appeared in The Kenyon Review, The Tampa Review, Diagram, Ninth Letter, Black Warrior Review, Colorado Review, and others. She is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Western Washington University.
John C. Mannone has work in *Agave*, *BlazeVOX*, *Trickster Journal*, *Tupelo Press*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Poetica Magazine*, *Synaesthesia*, *3Elements Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Prime Mincer*, *Pirene’s Fountain*, *The Pedestal*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *200 New Mexico Poems* and others. He’s the poetry editor for *Silver Blade* and *Abyss & Apex*, and an adjunct professor of physics in east TN. His work has been nominated three times for the Pushcart. Visit The Art of Poetry: http://jcmannone.wordpress.com

Katie McElhenney has lived in four states in the last three years and can imitate the accents to prove it. She is now happily settled in Brooklyn, NY where she is hoping to write things people want to read. Most days you can find her at the public library typing away on her laptop hoping no one will notice she is actually making a dessert-centric grocery list.

Greg Molesky is a writer, recording artist, and photographer, born and raised in Detroit. He is currently living in British Columbia.

Yaro Shon Neils is an interdisciplinary artist currently residing in the desert of Tucson, Arizona. In high school, she was voted “Most Likely to Go to Jail for a Good Cause,” a feat she has not yet managed. She holds degrees in Photography and French from Arizona State University and an MFA from the University of Montana School of Art. A selection of her visual art can be seen at yaroshonneils.com.
Jim Plath is an author of fiction and poetry. He is currently enrolled in the Writer’s Workshop at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. His work has appeared in *Fine Lines Magazine*, *War, Literature & the Arts*, *Westward Quarterly*, *The Monarch Review* and *The San Pedro River Review.*

Kristin Procter lives in Massachusetts, was born Canadian, partnered with a Brit, and birthed Australian babies. She enjoys yoga, knitting and entering into conversations best avoided in polite company. Kristin has never been mistaken for polite company. Here is her email: kmprocte@gmail.com

Linda Quennec is an MFA graduate from Naropa University and holds a certificate in creative writing from The Writer’s Studio at Simon Fraser University. Her work has been published in *Cirque*, *Quills Canadian Poetry*, *DoveTales*, and *Emerge*. She lives in Vancouver, B.C.

Kari Shemwell is a recent graduate of Murray State University who will be starting a graduate program at Oxford in the fall of 2014. She was born and raised in western Kentucky, but now lives in New Orleans. She studied creative writing and Spanish, and is interested in women’s literature, gender studies, Caribbean literature, and magic realism.
**Roman Sirotin** is bringing forth the cold from St. Petersburg, Russia, and has been wandering the wastelands of North America for a little over a decade. His insightful works give a peek into imagination and his individual essence. Each piece is distinctive, imprinted with his own touch of insanity. Without resorting to HD and blank model whoring, bright lights and prime colors, his instinct leads us towards a more atmospheric space to inhabit the astral lens of your being, as to a distant memory. His work is uncompromising and pure, coming from deeper intentions.

**Anmarie Soucie** is currently finishing her bachelors degree in humanities through New York University’s McGhee division, with concentrations in both creative writing and literature. Apart from writing narrative fiction and poetry, she is also an experienced actor with training at the Lee Strasberg Film & Theater Institute. She is currently writing a series of short stories for a novel entitled *Broken Jade*, a collection of poetry, and preparing for an upcoming feature film. Her ultimate goals include: finishing her masters degree in performance studies through New York University’s Tisch division, publishing her novel and poetry collections, and continuing to work in independent film and New York based theater projects.
Anne Tammel is a Silicon Valley native who has devoted over two decades to the literary and writing profession. Tammel’s fiction, poetry, essays and professional articles have been published in a number of publications. Frequently called upon for speaking engagements, radio interviews, and as guest editor for literary publications, Tammel also runs Poets and Dreamers, leading the author’s network featured in CBS Los Angeles, which serves over one thousand writers throughout Southern California. Tammel began her branding career at the Silicon Valley’s highest-ranking public relations firm, Cunningham Communication. Tammel earned her MFA in creative writing at California State University, San Diego, and her BA in English literature / career writing at California State University, San Jose. www.annetammel.com

Marjorie Thomsen began writing poetry a few years ago, around the same time she started drinking coffee. Her poems have won awards from the New England Poetry Club and the Lucidity Poetry Journal. Her work has been published in Mobius: The Journal of Social Change, Haibun Today, Literary Mama, Poetica Magazine, and others. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Allison Thorpe is the author of one book of poems and one chapbook, she has appeared or has work forthcoming in a variety of journals, some of which include Vine Leaves Literary Journal, The Milo Review, Connecticut River Review, Poem, Clapboard House, Freshwater, Trickster, The Citron Review, Front Range Review, Kindred Magazine, and Foliate Oak Literary Magazine.
Candice Trimble grew up in the Shenandoah Valley surrounded by beautiful scenic imagery. Naturally this inspired her to photograph what she loves and knows best. Nature photography is her creative outlet as it combines her passions for the natural world, discovery, excitement, and inner peace. She hopes her images will touch and inspire others to appreciate, and care for, the world around them. Her photography has been featured by CNN, USA Today, and the Weather Channel. Several news stations across the country have shared her photos on air and she’s had two magazine publications so far.

Larry Vazeos lives in a very small room in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and he does whatever he can to make money to continue paying his rent, eating healthy foods, and working on his book Is My Being Here an Inconvenience, which he writes, illustrates, and hand letters.

Barbara Jean Walsh is a freelance writer and editor living in Alameda, California. She is also the co-host of It’s My Boat Radio, her latest venture in a long career in the marine industry working primarily for WoodenBoat Publications and IBEX (the International BoatBuilders Exhibition & Conference). She has also been a library director, English instructor, and newspaper reporter. She has a B.A. from the University of Maine and an M.A. from the University of Denver. She was recently appointed SF Bay Ferry “Artist-in-Residence” for a Day (April 7, 2014).
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There is no minimum word count, but please keep your fiction and nonfiction submissions under 3,500 words. Poems must be under two typed pages.

It is equally important that all three elements given for the specific submission period be included within your story or poem. Artists and photographers are only required to represent one out of the three elements.

For multiple submissions, fiction is capped at no more than two stories per submission period. Poems are limited to five per submission period. In the event your material is accepted in another publication, we request that you withdraw your submission from 3Elements Review should you decide to publish your piece elsewhere.

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Mikaela Shea is in her thesis hours of her MFA at Columbia College Chicago and was recently a writer-in-residence at Ragdale Foundation. She has published stories in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Copperfield Review*, *Waypoints Magazine*, *Foliate Oak*, *Hypertext Magazine*, *Paragraph Planet*, Columbia College's annual *Story Week Reader*, as well as a children’s book at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Mikaela is currently writing a novel and is Editor-in-Chief of *3Elements Review*. www.mikaelashea.com.

C.J. Matthews is a writing teacher from Des Moines, Iowa. She adores traveling, elegant food, bold red wine, and her two little dogs, Hercules and Hucklebee. Her recent work can be read in *Spoilage Magazine*, *Cahoodaloodaling*, and the *Kind of a Hurricane Press* anthology *In Gilded Frame*.

Parker Stockman is a writer, college writing instructor, and storyteller. He tells personal narratives with 2nd Story in Chicago, a monthly live literature event, and is featured on their website. Currently finishing his thesis for his MFA in Creative Writing—Fiction at Columbia College Chicago, he is at work on a novel. He writes a blog for his school’s program and works as a writing tutor. Parker plays rugby with and is the Vice President of Recruiting for the Chicago Dragons Rugby Football Club. He is excited to be part of the 3Elements family and hopes you enjoy the journal as much as he enjoys working on it.
Marlon Fowler is a Des Moines–based designer and web developer for 3Elements Review. He received his bachelor’s degree in Journalism with a major in Advertising from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. Marlon enjoys all things technology, making websites “do things,” running, reading nonfiction, sports, movies, video games, and Chicago food. He would really like to learn PHP and get back to Paris. You can check out Marlon’s portfolio at www.marlonfowler.com.

Carol Roh Spaulding is co–author, with Kay Fenton Smith, of Zakery’s Bridge: Children’s Journeys From Around the World to Iowa (2011). A Professor of English at Drake University, Spaulding teaches courses in writing and American literature. She is the author of several award–winning short stories, including a Pushcart Prize, best story of the year in Ploughshares, the Glimmer Train Fiction Open, and the Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction. Her new novel, Helen Button, tells the story of avant–garde writer Gertrude Stein and her life in Central France during World War II. Spaulding is also director of the newly–established Drake University Community Press. The Press produces attractive full–color, illustrated editions serving a community readership while providing students with practical knowledge of book editing and production using a cross–disciplinary and collaborative focus. She lives in Des Moines, IA with her husband, Tim, and son Jonah.
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