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A Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

Welcome to issue 3 from 3Elements Review! In this issue you'll read and view the work of authors of multiple books, contest winners, a self–proclaimed college drop–out, literary journal editors, a *BuzzFeed* quiz guru and veterinarian, a farm girl at heart, teachers, professors, etc. The good news is—all of the work is lovely.

Also, I am pleased to announce some exciting news: we will soon be launching a bi–monthly flash fiction contest! The stories must be based on a photograph or piece of art that we will post. More to come on that shortly.

The elements for issue 4 are: carnival, residue, and maudlin. Send us your best work by June 1st!

Thank you for taking the time to read 3Elements Review. It means the world to us.

Sincerely,
Mikaela Shea

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The 10 Reasons Why Sacha Did Not Want to Go to the Party

Christl M. Caspar

1. The party was at a bar. There is nothing wrong with parties being at bars, generally speaking. Sacha would attest to this. He had been to fun parties that have taken place at bars. He had been at bars when parties have taken place and had not noticed a huge difference in terms of A) quality of service, and/or, B) quality of experience. The problem, in this instance, was that Bubba Skinny's Luxury Lounge & Tackle Shop, the windowless cement building across from the Happy TrailZ bus terminal and the Dairy Queen missing enough lights to have become D__r_ Q_ee_, had a ridiculous drink special that would cause a ridiculous man to drink a ridiculous amount. It would cause a normal man to drink an obscene amount, but he was not normal. He was the aforementioned "ridiculous." The last time he went to Bubba Skinny's, he wound up puking green bile on the way to the bus stop the next day. Sacha did not want to puke green bile. He'd done it once. He had the story tucked away in his sad–sack

story bin. He did not need another. To have another might make him look like he had a problem.

2. He did not want to do wash. His good clothing was all in a pile on the floor under a pile of books under a pile of cat hair. He could have dug through these piles and put them all in the washing machine in the basement of his complex, but that would have taken time and effort. Sacha did not want to take time and effort for anything. He spent much of his time thinking of ways to not exert either, which took time and effort in and of itself, but we will not go there. He was in significant denial on this matter and there's no use dissecting it.

3. Freya Veremchuk would be there. He knew that Freya would be there because she was always there. She was an undeniable presence. She was a force. She was an extrovert and she liked to go outside of her house. Freya Veremchuk was beautiful in a way that made Sacha want to punch the person standing next to him, or punch a wall, or sink his teeth into her neck and take away a chunk of her flesh and run away flapping his arms with the force and grace of a paraplegic stork. Hers was the type of beauty that he might be compelled to go up and speak to her at the party. He knew from prior interactions that the chances of her speaking back ran between 95.87% to 99.92%. He also knew that when he spoke to Freya, her pupils dilated and her lips parted. He thought it made her look like she was about to accept a great liquid strawberry.

He had a firm picture of the strawberry. The skin of it was hyperreal red and pliable. The inside was pure water: ice–cold and untouched by chemicals or human hands. He could see Freya

putting the strawberry between her teeth. He could see her biting down. Her mouth gushed. The image was hard to shake. It made him want to take her aside and confess his undying love for her. He would cite her gapped teeth as something he admired. He would say that he thought it was interesting that she was missing ¼ of her righthand pinky finger. Sacha was afraid that if he went up to Freya Veremchuk at the party, and they started to talk, he would pull her outside to the Bubba Skinny's dumpster alley and take off her clothes. She would then be bare and imperfect. She would awaken the darkest sexual fantasies of his mind's eye. He would do despicable things to her. Her mouth would gush.

4. Why should he?

5. Hyperion was planning Something Big. Sacha had known Hyperion since grammar school. He could have been counted as Sacha's best friend. At least he knew that Hyperion called him his best friend, but Sacha never made a case about it. He was not a man who liked to make a case of anything. They both knew it true and that was what mattered. Sacha knew that if Hyperion was asked if he would lay down his life for Sacha, he would say yes. Sacha also knew that if the situation would ever come to pass, it would be him who did the lifelaying, not Hyperion. That was what their relationship was like. He doubted it would ever develop, but his familiar chaos was a comfort.

Sacha did not know exactly what it was Hyperion would be planning. Hyperion never told him. He just knew it would be Big and when Hyperion said it would be Big, it would be. He was not a man who allowed his statements to float around with empty sentiment. Sacha tried to talk him out of it, but he knew his

intervening would do nothing. Hyperion did what he wanted without regarding how others would feel. For instance, Hyperion once said that the word cunnilingus was too boring, so they ought to make an effort to rebrand it "vagina cannibalism." That's the kind of guy he was. That's the kind of guy he always will be. Sacha had long ago accepted this, but did not want to be involved in the Something Big. He didn't like Something Bigs. He liked Something–Maybe–Kind–Of–Medium–Sized and a craft beer.

6. He did not like the night. He did not like what it held. He didn't like the idea of leaving his apartment when the world is at the space between light and dark. He did not like the uncertainty of it. He did not like that dropping feeling of dread when the world is not as it should be. It was only the darkness that could show this; it brought out the worst in people. It turned people into their other selves.

7. Like he was certain Freya would be there, he was certain Plastic Surgery Guy would be there as well. Plastic Surgery Guy showed up at all the parties of all the mutual friends. There was not one among them who knew how he got there. There was not one among them who knew where he was from. There were no records of who first met him or who first invited him to the first party. There were no records or corresponding evidence that he had known any of them growing up. There was no one who knew Freya growing up either, but Freya's breasts were supple, and she threw her head back when she laughed. She had a pass. PSG did not. He was a parentless, ageless figure. He was nothing and everything.

PSG had the same game every time. He would play it cool for the first half of the night. He would stand in a corner and hold a drink in his hand. He would never partake in the drink, but it would look as though it has been sipped at some point. There was no one who had ever seen him take a sip, but it is a definite fact that someone, or something, would've had to. He waited approximately 1.25 hours before he'd go on his mission. He would go up to every single woman in the bar and ask if he could give them a makeover. He would offer them whatever they could want. He would offer them a new nose, new tits, liposuction, calf implants, hymenorrhapy, and other words that didn't sound real. He would tell them he'd foot the bill. He would offer to let them move into his house after their recovery. They could stay longer than their recover if they wanted, but it was not required. If they elected to stay, he would teach them how to exercise properly. He would have them run on a treadmill in the nude.

PSG made everyone uncomfortable, but there was no stopping him; not on the night of the party, not now, and not ever.

8. The smell of the air at Bubba Skinny's. The smell of Freya's mint paste breath. The smell of Sacha's Valentino cologne contrasted against the memory of his father's Old Spice. The smell of people and their deodorant.

9. You and the way you flicked your cigarettes so they landed just outside the bucket of sand. You with your lacking.

10. There were not ten reasons. There were 6342 reasons he did not want to go. He had them numbered in a space at the back of his head. The space was titled, "The Crux Where Numbers Wait."

He knew the number 6324 by heart but he did not want to say it aloud. He did not want to think it. He did not want to feel it. He did not want to have anything to do with it. Sacha was afraid of the number in the same way he was afraid of everything else. He tried to block the number out, but the blocking out of anything results in thinking of it all the more. He frightened himself with his thinking. He kept himself in a verifiable state of terror through the ten reasons and all the dozens more. He wondered if it truly stopped at 6324 or if it went on and on, bucking up and outwards, finding its way through his brain cells and into the ether. He wondered if it would be there forever, trying to find him and trying to ask him questions on his fear of living and his fear of bars and his fear of Freya. That was unfortunate because he would not be able to answer whatever those questions were. Those questions would make him want to curl up or crawl into a hole. He would avoid them as long as he could. He would wander off into the desert and not be found, electing to be eaten by vultures instead of being confronted by the number infinite.

He could wait it out for a time, but it would grab hold of him sooner or later. There would be a day when he turned around and there it would be. He didn't know what it would look like, but when he closed his eyes on the night of the party, trying to make sense of it all, he could see. His thoughts and feelings were coming up in a crescendo of insignificance and space. The figures of his life made a mural. There was PSG carving his fantasy into Freya's flesh. There was Hyperion, morphed into a snake that had started the arduous process of consuming itself. His dirty laundry was up and walking around and covering everyone with smells and the memories smells carry. Freya was looking at him. Her mouth was gushing. Sacha was staring. His lips were parted, but nothing was coming out. His lips were parted, but nothing was coming out.

The Places I Can't Get To

Damien Cowger

That's how it would play out. I'd win the prize trip to stay in Burj Khalifa so I could be on top of the world! *One catch though*, the man in the suit would say, *find the Union of the Comoros on this map*. The crowd would gasp and see my anguish. Can I ask my buddy? The host would approve and there my friend would be, backstage, on his phone, likely chatting up a tall, athletic woman who licks her rhubarb lips before and after she smiles. I'd try to get his attention with a whistle but, as usual, it wouldn't work. I'd run to him but he'd keep getting farther and farther away, and I'd worry that he and this woman were discussing my hang–ups. He'd try to emasculate me and tell her how I once punched a computer terminal out of frustration and that I can't impress my daughter with a simple three-ball juggling trick. *How pathetic*, he'd say into the receiver and look away from me. The gameshow host would remind me that I can take an alternate question, and the crowd would smell my doubt on the recirculated air. I'd nod, they'd laugh, and I'd shrink into myself. *Okay*, the smiling host would say, *What is the Fahrenheit equivalent of minus 40 degrees Celsius?* I'd look to my wife in the audience and she'd be frantically scratching her bare legs. She'd still believe fleas dominated our home, her own psychosis. I'd want her to mouth the answer to me but instead she'd uncharacteristically narrow her eyes and call out over the roar of the crowd, *How could you let fleas into my home?* An eviction notice written in leg scratches. My eyes would widen even as I continued to shrink, knowing that I'm going to lose the ticket to the United Arab Emirates because my friend is scheming against me and my wife is infested with worry. The crowd's

collective voice would swell to a terrible crescendo and when I try to yell, only a whoosh of air would come out, just like when I try to whistle. The crowd would look confused and in their perplexity, they would be hushed and my buddy would spin around and say, *Your mom says hello and that you aren't*–and I'd listen carefully because I really want to know what she thinks that I am lacking, one of 6,324 voids I've surely already found, but all I'd hear is a high–pitched ringing meant only for me. I'd fall to the stage floor and see spotlights above, highlighting me for the folks at home. The host's head would hover, dark with a corona of eclipsed light above my face, and he'd say, *Sorry, it was a trick question*. And I'd say, *Oh yeah. 40 below. It's the only conversion I can handle*.

Back to TOC

The History Books

Candace Butler

Miss Price has a terminal affliction,
love divided by hate.
She could write that on her blackboard
next to the 9 – 1x = 1 equation
that little Dan was about to solve
in front of the whole class,
the white chalk flying slowly,
crashing with a smug decisiveness
through the towering numbers
right as a plane hit
the first Twin Tower.
His hand smears a mistake,
covers the whole area
with dust, a cloud of regret
none of us have forgotten.

I like to think that one Syrian boy
from the YouTube video
has stopped crying,
that the memory card
in the journalist's camera phone
just ran out of space before the boy's
brother
emerged alive from the bombing,
alive in the sand and dust and smoke.

Back to TOC

And I like to think that Miss Venezuela
is now 63; the 24–year–old was not shot
and killed back in 2014–that no one was,
that Miss Price is there in Venezuela, too,
on vacation (because I don't think she ever got one),
and there she is, looking out a window
in Caracas, and a jet flying low above her
doesn't cause chill bumps on her bare skin
because no skyscrapers have ever fallen.
Every scientist who stumbled upon the idea
of bombs took their pages of scribbled equations
and calculations, and burnt them to ashes
over their stainless steel kitchen sinks.

Now the history books are smaller
because the violence never occurred,
the inventors and their inventions unknown,
and when such an event is found on a page,
and brought to the history teacher,
there's a "Thank you, Miss Hannah."
The teacher has the class turn to that page,
Oh dear, a typo, class, an error,
let's take out our black pens,
yes, the ones from your school supply list,
and let's just mark through those lines.
Just cross that out.
That never happened.

French Bulldog

Deirdre Farr

I just completed the "What Kind of Dog are You?" survey on *BuzzFeed* and discovered that I am a French Bulldog. According to the survey results, I am "friends with everyone and…up for anything. Adventure time? You're the first one people call. Party time? Doesn't start until you get there. Basically, you're the friend everyone wants around." Accompanying this description is a picture of a French Bulldog in a green turtleneck, sitting in a baby swing.

This is just patently untrue. I am not a French Bulldog and most definitely not a party animal. But I was bored and the narcissism that prompts us to fill out these surveys overtook me. The next thing I knew, there I was, a French Bulldog in a turtleneck.

The survey has been making the rounds on Facebook. Over the past twenty–four hours, a number of my Facebook friends have shared their own survey results. My daughter is a Chihuahua,

which is reasonably accurate. One friend is a mutt, another a Corgi. I am not really sure why it is that we are always trusting others, especially others like Buzzfeed, to tell us who we are. Is it because it is too difficult to figure it out for ourselves? Or is it because, when it comes right down to it, the question itself is meaningless?

In my thirties, I stumbled onto Zen Buddhism and became hooked. Zen is a practice through which one learns the nature of one's true self through a meditative lifestyle, both on and off the meditation cushion. With an intensity nothing like the fun–loving French Bulldog I really am, I read everything I could find about Zen. This, of course, is a paradox. Zen is an experiential practice and learning about it through reading is like eating a menu and expecting to enjoy a meal.

Initially, I believed the nearest Zen community was in Hawaii: not a bad place to go for enlightenment, with or without Zen, but also not terribly practical. Through a series of very Zen–like coincidences, I discovered a Zen Center in Minneapolis and, before I knew what was happening, I was northward bound. "You picked a good weekend to visit," the woman who answered the phone had told me. "We have a very great teacher coming." She also informed me that I would be staying with Teijo and Karen. I envisioned Karen, a pleasant middle–aged woman, serene and wise from years of meditation, and her Japanese husband, Teijo.

The Zen Center was a beautiful old house on Lake Calhoun. It was quiet and spare, with cool white walls and shining bare oak floors. I was told that Okamura–san, the visiting teacher, would be speaking that evening. I set off to find Karen and Teijo's apartment. Unlike the quiet grace of the Zen Center, the apartment appeared to be a place where the residents existed, but did not actually live. My hosts were out when I arrived, but had left the door unlocked for me. There was a small amount of well–worn furniture that had been placed in a "whatever" style of decorating, a tiny kitchen that gave the appearance of minimal use, and a few scattered mattresses.

Karen came home first. A forty–something woman, she was pleasant and non–descript. Teijo, it turned out, was a bald woman wearing a monk's robes. Her energy was explosive. She was deeply immersed in Shohaku's visit, and we exchanged hurried greetings before she burst out of the apartment as precipitously as she had entered.

As it turned out, I had picked a fortunate weekend to be introduced to Zen practice. When I arrived at the Zen Center that evening, it was packed with practitioners already facing the wall in meditation posture. The meditation hall, or *zendo*, radiated a peaceful silence. Candles and incense burned on the altar. There is a dance to entering a zendo and seating oneself in meditation, but I was new to the practice and had yet to learn the choreography and so I entered the room with a clumsiness all the more palpable for the silence. We sat quietly for forty minutes, the standard meditation period. Then, with the "ching" of a small bell, we stood and bowed to each other, hands palm to palm, and reseated ourselves on our cushions.

Shohaku Okamura began to speak. I had read hundreds of pages about Zen practice and had a vision of the stereotypical Zen teacher. Okamura–san was my vision on steroids. A good-looking, forty–something monk in the traditional Japanese robes,

his English, although heavily accented, was excellent. He spoke slowly and deliberately about *Dharma*, or the Buddhist path, and there was no question that his words came from the depths of his experience, and not from reading hundreds of pages of Zen books.

My initial encounter with Zen practice only whetted my appetite for more. I next attended a beginners' retreat at Hokyoji, a retreat center associated with Minnesota Zen Center located in Middle–of–Nowhere, Iowa near the Minnesota border. There I met Teijo again who suggested I attend the sesshin, or meditation retreat, the following month. There was a great Japanese teacher coming and it was a unique opportunity. There is no one more enthusiastic than a new convert, and I immediately signed up. I had no idea what I had done.

Sesshins are intense meditation retreats, usually silent. The idea is to sit with the constant newsreel of your thoughts for so long that you can finally see them for what they really are: just thoughts; not reality. This sesshin, with the important Japanese priest, was Mega–sesshin, not the best place to start if you are a novice. It began on a Friday evening and ended at noon the following Monday. It was at the Middle–of–Nowhere retreat center. Bed was my sleeping bag and tent. Toilets were the kind that didn't flush. The morning wake–up bell was at 3:40.

Zazen, or mediation, began at 4:00 a.m. The last meditation period ended at 9 p.m. In between, we did more meditation. Lots of meditation. Silent, seated, staring at the wall meditation until I thought I would crack. We had meals on our *zafus*, or mediation cushions. There is a ritual to eating at sesshins called *oryoki*. Each of us had a set of three bowls, nested like Matrushka dolls, wrapped in a cloth that was also used as a placemat. There are also utensils and two other cloths, one a napkin and one a drying towel. There is a complicated choreography to serving and being served that involves lots of bows, gestures, and chanting. A beautiful dance if you knew the steps, but to my sleep–deprived, meditation–depraved mind, it was chaos.

I happened to be seated next to one of the Japanese teacher's long–time students. The story I later heard is that she was a flutist who had gone to see her sister in Japan six years previously, visited the monastery, and never left. Her monk's name was Dayu, and she knew the dance. She also knew Japanese. During the Dharma talks that the teacher gave each morning in Japanese and which were translated by another student, she would softly react seconds before the rest of us heard the translation. Her movement through the zendo and during meals was exquisitely graceful. I, on the other hand, spilled tomato sauce on my cushion. I hated Dayu and harbored thoughts of toppling her off of her zafu as she sat in serene full lotus.

The periods of seated meditation were interspersed with walking meditation, work periods, and a few short breaks. But mostly we sat, a pleasant experience at first, but within the a few hours I was bored and my knees hurt. Because it was inappropriate to look at one's watch, I developed several tricks to learn how to gauge a forty–minute zazen period. If I counted 100 breaths ten times, that was forty minutes. Also, a forty–minute sitting was the equivalent of one entire silent rendition of "Ninety–Nine Bottles of Beer on the Wall." At first, it was easy to stay on track with the numbers of bottles, but as my exhausted brain wandered closer to psychosis, I would lose track of my bottles of beer. I would start at 100 and

Back to TOC

suddenly, without knowing how I got there, be at 63…24…10… and then back again to 30. Was this the path to enlightenment? Counting bottles of beer?

By the post–lunch break on Sunday, I was starting to hallucinate. I stood in the field where our tents were pitched and started to see swarms of butterflies, colorful and light, dancing and following me wherever I went. I told myself that if I weren't so detached from reality, I would have the sense to get in my car and escape. But the energy it took to rebel was gone. I did later learn that, in the middle of her first sesshin, Teijo had simply stood up and walked out. In any event, I finished my break, and the butterflies and I returned to the zendo.

Noon Monday arrived and the interminable became terminal. We did the end of sesshin chanting, bowed to each other, and exited the zendo, free at last. We took pictures and said our good–byes. I got in my car, steered towards civilization, and decided to pollute my spiritual experience at the first McDonald's.

This was not my last sesshin, but without question it was the most formidable. I came to love the dance of the ritual, the silence, the opportunity to look within in an attempt to discover the truth of who I was. I spent ten years facing a wall, seeking answers. And who knew? The truth was in front of me all along: a French Bulldog in a green turtleneck.

Self-Portrait

Colby Cotton

I'm Melting

Nora Frazin

Lumpen moons, the snowbanks
hunker down,
pucker
lumberingly
        like a woman's thigh-
backs
        as she wades
        out of
        Lake Michigan
on a day in July.
She splashes
water
off of her legs;
        cloudy like meninges.
        Skull runoff
        sluices
        through the alleys
into the street's gullet.
Down the hatch.
Salt crusts
adulterate
        the sidewalk, pallid
white,
        immodest.
        Woman,
        bundle yourself.
Standardize, quantify;
loveliness
comes in
tiny doses
        (we cannot tolerate
        more, no we
        cannot
        abide too much).
The grit in the snowbanks
mascara
running
down your gray face;
        the boulevard grass brown,
        matted as
        your hair.
        Look at yourself.
To the touch, the bare brain
would feel like
pudding,
not like Jell–O:
smeary, won't hold its shape.
A snicker
flicker
thought darts straight down
from spine to phalanges,
fingering
nerve ends,
frayed terminals.
        You only get one life;
        you'll live it

molting,
shedding. Sloughing.
The ice splits in quiet
shock. The street,
the gut,
the cold hard sun.

An Alternate Memory or Double Truth

Amanda Joyce Kimmerly

wherein two artists get tangled up in green sunlight:
I didn't know the drugs would be so heavy
I didn't know the glare in the moon would appear
as its own ghost, reflecting our ghost
past, I shake off the reality that the universe
is not ours anymore, time dipped
and sunk into a place where you are
serving me strawberries, and I got
a glimpse of it, this other life, population: a dim
6324, plucking lilies in the garden for our
wobbly–legged table, the elegant finger–picks
of the guitar's easy hum. There,
you weren't a singer, except in the quiet moments;
you held my head, and made due with words
like multi–colored threading of a patched–
up quilt; I'd escape into that quiet
accidentally, tunnel through
its curious terminal into the same
tousled bedroom, where I bend
a bare ear to another man who sings out
for some me I haven't known.

Another True Story about China

Ron Riekki

WHEN I lived in China, I decided I wanted some Chinese food. That shouldn't be hard to get, I thought.

I stepped outside and figured I'd walk into the first restaurant I saw. But the first one was American. And the second one was French. And the others, the actual Chinese ones, were all full. It was a Saturday. And I didn't speak the language. I left one restaurant and went to the next and the next. Each one was just as packed as the one before.

I stepped outside again and a toothy man dressed all in black–actually the whole country seemed dressed in black, like Johnny Cash addicts–waved me to go upstairs, to a top floor of a building. He escorted me down an alley. I followed, feeling weak, sort of drugged, which of course I wasn't, but maybe it was the Beijing pollution, maybe the wooziness of being a foreigner in a land made of wooziness. There was a garage, bare, dirty, as if grey were the only color in the world; walls like it had made it through D–Day. And in the garage, an elevator. It had the feel of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* if the book were written by Samuel Beckett and had much more concrete and sorrow... and was set in a garage. I got in. The door opened, and I said, "*Ee*, er, *san*, *shi*?" My awful Chinese. The man made of teeth yelled, "*Wu*!" The terrible look of his terminal–disease face. I pressed five. The doors closed. I could smell pot. Or incense. Or pot and incense. And mold. But not any mold I'd smelled before. Like mold for cooking. Like a gourmet mold. The doors opened on *wu*.

Inside was a building within a building. It was a hundred businesses all on one floor, most the size of closets, all illegal. A stolen shoe shop. A billiard room filled with stolen billiard tables. A stolen flower shop. You could tell everything was grand thefted. You just knew. Price tags still on them from other stores. And the looks on the store–owners like they were proud, like the more stolen it was, the more each thing was worth. An entire massive shop of DVDs of U.S. movies, all made from holding a camera up at a TV or a film screen. All for 9 RMB each, two for 17 RMB. Almost free. A woman took my arm, dragged me into a store that wasn't a store. It was a room, empty. Room #6324. Were there more than six thousand rooms in this labyrinth?

She closed the door behind me. Suddenly, fifteen girls entered the room, most in black–a gaggle of girls, a crash of girls, a funeral of girls.

"Anything?" she said.

"Anything what?" I said, "You speak English?"

"Anything you want."

"What do you mean?"

"Anything you want, we do. Anything," she said.

"What do you mean by anything?" I asked.

"What do you think anything means," she said. "You speak English?"

"You mean like you'd kill someone if I wanted you to?" I said, joking, feeling like I'd been given birth into lunacy. The room was all orange, a Japanese aesthetic, a sick orange, something malignant about the color, a fistfight orange, a sleepy fistfight.

She leaned in, touched my leg. "You want to kill someone?" She said it serious, as if she was begging for me to say yes.

"No," I said, "I don't. At all."

"Why you here?" she said.

"You pulled me in."

She took my hand, pulled me up, led me to a back room, down a hall, all of its sliding doors closed, went into a back room, an empty room, sat me down. The girls had disappeared, stayed behind, those puppies, those thin, fragile, home–seeking corpses of what I think were supposed to be girls.

She sat next to me.

"I'm hungry," I said.

She opened the door back up. She clapped her hands. She yelled in something that wasn't Chinese, that I don't think was Chinese, that sounded Tolkien, that sounded elfin, that sounded made up. A moment later, there was a knock. The door slid open–a tray of tea, rice, buns, some sort of meat (maybe pork, maybe not pork).

"No, I don't want to eat here," I said. "I'm looking for a Chinese restaurant."

She counted money. I felt my pocket. She was holding my wallet. How and when did she get that?

She took all the money in it. 424 RMB, somewhere around there, maybe more. She handed me the wallet back. I checked to make sure my credit cards were there, my IDs. They were. I think all of them were. If not, she knew which ones to take that I wouldn't remember.

"Eat," she said, "Relax. Next time you come, the same. Anything you want."

"I just wanted Chinese food," I said.

"Sometimes they want Chinese food. Sometimes they want us. Sometimes they want death." She looked at me, toe to head, as if she were memorizing my body. "You haven't been in China long," she said. "Stay here. We take care." She motioned for me to eat.

I took a tiny bite, wondering if it was poisoned, if I would fall asleep and awake chained in this place. But something in the way she looked at me told me it was just food. It was just what I'd requested. My hunger would be gone soon.

"I love you," she said and slid the door closed.

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Geode

Elizabeth Koch

seventeen years of hearing
you are not worthy
built a mountain of belief in my head

truth bared in your eyes
my soul excavated
seeing what they never did

each of my 6324 days
a layer of terminal pain
blasted away by three words

words that never existed
until you invented them
with whispers in my ear

you call me your geode
I've cracked open
but only for you

Bare

Cristina Chopalli

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Her Letters Home

Amanda Joyce Kimmerly

are thin, terminal
like the girl I once starved.

like them, no one wanted all that white
space.

6324 bare
pixels

peering into a big wide
nothing;

folded again, and
twice over

into the tiniest possible
square,

bitten at the crease

The Tea Party

Ron Riekki

has a meeting. They are concerned about their name.

"It's not a tea party!" the Unabomber yells in back. "We're warriors. Cultural warriors."

"Exactly," says Burl Ives in the front row.

"Mmhmmm," nods the Yale Grad.

"Then why are we all wearing dresses and drinking tea?" says the Oldest Man Alive.

"Because it's the manly thing to do!" the Unabomber says in back.

"No, it's not," yells the Oldest Man Alive. "Maybe there's a generation gap, but we would all have white capes and *Spy vs. Spy* caps and crosses the color of rape when I was growing up. We would make ghosts afraid of ghosts." The Oldest Man Alive's voice feels like he is falling from a building, plummeting at terminal velocity.

"Exactly," says Burl Ives in the front row.

"Mmhmmmmm," nods the Submissive Soccer Mom, her bare

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Erin Brockovich cleavage neatly showing.

"Then let's take off these grandmother bodysuits and infant Easter bonnets!" the Unabomber whispers in back.

"We can't. We're against nudity. It would be incredibly homosexual to have so many men nude in one room."

"Except when we shower at the gym," says Burl Ives.

"Except in boot camp," says the MBA Who Tells Everyone He Has An MBA.

"Except when we sauna together at the country club," says the Manic Jesus Freak.

"Exactly," says Burl Ives.

"Mmhmmmmmmmm," nods the Child Who Thinks Mormons Are Not Christians.

The clock on the wall says it is 63:24. The clock on the wall is broken.

"I think," says the Unabomber, "we've found our new name."

"What is it?" says the Man Who Wants To Kill All Iraqis.

"Someone here has already said it," says the Unabomber. "Yes, indeed, someone here has already said it."

And they all nod their Easter bonnets in unison. Twenty–nine Easter bonnets all making the same motion as if they were praying to Mecca in a mosque crammed full of the suns and stars of paranoia–the loveliest thing ever.

Hotel Room 6324

Brennan Burnside

Four bare stone walls, cream–colored bedsheets, red carpet coffee stain, dark–blue curtains, two small orange Bibles, open window, *The Terminal* by Brian Keene, light breeze, panties with yellow trimming, white plastic bedside table, planner with green cover, the month of April ripped out.

Back to TOC

Bunker 6324

Brennan Burnside

Circular white wall, wooden crate, stack of seven small green Bibles, *The Terminal* by Brian Keene, page six, “My wish was that this would all be a dream. It couldn’t have been real, could it? Maybe the doctor was wrong” underlined, small red smear on bare lavender mattress.

Lotto Number 6324

Brennan Burnside

Television, broken screen, bare mattress, bedside table, green ashtray, large white Bible, smoldering cigarette, ripped maroon curtains, white French doors, red Eastpak backpack, three stacks of one–hundred dollar bills, *The Terminal* by Brian Keene, cover ripped off, sound of toilet flushing, mattress on fire.

Ah, to Burn

Ron Riekki

IT'S pure economics–they realized that if you paid one tenure teacher $30,000 a semester to teach three classes, you'd save a hell of a lot of money by having five adjunct professors teach five classes (one class each) for $3,000 a semester. You saved ten times the money. And the adjuncts had just as much education. The best part was you didn't have to give them any benefits. No health insurance, no vacations, no access to printers on campus. It was perfection for the Dean who was making $300,000 a semester and needed to show that the university was a moneymaker.

But then the Dean got an idea. How could we make even more money?

He realized if you had students teaching, you could pay them nothing. Minimum wage. Maybe a subtle scholarship, something that really amounted to about $300 a semester.

And that went well, too. Especially when they hiked up the tuition.

But the Dean wanted more. He realized there were incarcerated PhDs, prisoners with terminal degree MFAs. Not sex offenders and murderers, but marijuana dealers and chronic reckless driving aficionados. Harmless, useful, sitting there in jail when they could truck them in, have them earn their keep. The local prison was surprisingly receptive. They'd had a recent riot, something that made national news, and they needed a publicity stunt to save their image. They trucked in the shoplifters and vandals, the trespassers and the one–time convicted prostitutes. The classes filled. In fact, there was a waiting list for Sex Ed with a whore. An actual whore for your teacher. There were lines to get into a course on Islam with a convicted terrorist. Well, a terrorist with only a misdemeanor for trespassing with intent to graffiti pro–Al Qaeda slogans on a school bus, but close enough to being a terrorist for college pamphlet advertising.

It was innovative. It was daring. It was costing the university next to nothing and pocketing big bucks.

But the Dean wanted more. He wanted teachers to pay to teach there, ones who needed to build up their resume. He settled on getting a goon squad to force certain Cornell and Dartmouth profs to either teach a course there and pay a "one–time love donation" of $6324 a semester, or certain members of their family could come into harm's way. And there was a lot of harm that could come into your way these days if you think about it–trees falling on houses, cars falling into rivers, heads falling into soups.

The Goon Method didn't go as well. It ended up costing more than expected, paying off judges and cops and politicians to not follow–up, to not investigate the university, to not close it. You ended up paying so much for people to not do things when it was better to pay them to do.

But the Dean wanted more. He was making $30,000,000 a semester now, but he knew a Dean in Qatar who was making $300

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million a semester and he wanted that. A third of a billion. And still have van–loads of money left over for the university.

So he decided on genocide, not really even thinking of how much money it would make, because it wouldn't make any. It just became indeterminate massacring. Absolute chaos. The Dean referred to himself as *Dekan*, found himself marching with high John Cleese leg–kicks, eating wienerschnitzel and human arms, chewing on *sauerbraten* and someone's bare feet. Somehow, the university did well. They even won an SEC football championship. Of course, they went back to adjuncts. (Not full–time faculty—are you kidding me?) But the sun rose like a victory every morning. The halls of the university shown like courageous plantations. They were proud.

And it's amazing how fast people can forget—if they ever even knew at all.

Meteor Shower

Angela Ostley

The way you speak is as clear
as the saltwater dripping from
my eyelid ends
and the cicadas wings that beat
an odd, off rhythm
against my bottled brain.

I sometimes get jealous of you
and the spiders on the windowsill
of apartment 6324
with your rippling black–gold bodies
and your steady legs
that will always be far more elegant
than the bare, pale knobs
I have for knees.

And sometimes I let the smoke
linger in my mouth a little–
trying to taste the storms when
they stood your hair on end
as we kissed,
and sometimes it only ends up
burning me –
like a terminal disease –
from the inside
out.

I remember you saying
my feet were dragonflies
and all I could think was how
they weren't quite strong enough
to get me off the ground.

And I still tie strings to kites in the dark
and imagine I've caught the stars.
I would only have to tug once
to pull the whole sky down on our heads.

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Bare

Cristina Chopalli

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A Human Document

Brittany Ackerman

It takes six years to find yourself back where you started,
Three years to earn your masters in whichever genre
you choose to bare your work, you collect
papers and stories and ideas on napkins
and tickets from other times– you couldn't help
being torn between two cities. If you take
the connecting flight, you will amble down
at least four terminals before you arrive,
because you're all out of money, the good stuff,
but you will find that you will not care
what they think about the pieces of you
that have made it back to where you are.

Goblin Ticket

Pamela Hill

AFTER work last Friday, I went to the Goblin Market, a restaurant where goblins sat scattered among books on shelves. I took a seat at my favorite table close to the balcony doors, though there was no balcony. The doors were a facade for an illusion of beauty beyond the goblins. If I had opened the doors, surely, I'd have fallen two stories down into dumpsters or on a slab of broken concrete or on a rock pile.

Miguel showed up. If I had moved to another town, sooner or later, he'd have found me. He always found me. I went out with him once because he said he was terminally ill. But, he wasn't.

"I have a surprise for you," he said and sat next to me. He opened a box of cards. "Tarot reading?"

I'd been watching goblins on the shelf above my head and sipping chardonnay. Difficult to look away from those agonized faces.

I glanced at him. "No."

Miguel placed tarot cards in some odd pattern near candles

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across the white tablecloth. He looked like he knew what he was doing. But, he was good at appearing that way.

"No. I don't want a tarot reading," I said again.

He shrugged and presented a death card, an image of a skeleton. A faint glimmer of fear stirred within me, though Miguel said the card meant transition, a new beginning. I wondered if a new beginning meant the end of something else.

"I have a present for you," he said and dug around in his pockets. "Wait. I'll be right back."

I was drinking too much wine, smoking too many cigarettes, and became aware of my heart pounding. My doctor advised me to get rid of my vices but doing so would give me only a few more months. So why should I suffer withdrawal?

Miguel rushed back through the restaurant toward my table. I could hear him, that fabricated laugher, excusing himself as he maneuvered around tables.

He sat back down and put a small gift box in front of me.

"Open it."

I knew if I didn't open it, he would nag me. It was a ring, a diamond ring.

"Will you marry me?" he asked.

I couldn't believe it. How many more ways were there to show him I wasn't interested? I'd already tried 6,324. Even the goblins were stunned. I could sense the muscles in their bare bodies constrict.

"Miguel," I said. "I'm dying. Soon I won't be any fun at all."

His eyes fluttered. Then, a slight smile appeared. "Oh, you're kidding, right?" And he laughed that infectious laughter until people sitting at the next table laughed along with him, and people at another table joined in, and so it went.

6324 Kejonuma

Alejandro Escudé

We could live there. You with your sun belt
And me with my serrated mustache.
We could take the second to last ship
To leave from Terminal Mars
And settle there with our collection of dolls.
The slipstream of the space geese,
No gravitational pull. Only the lull of the creosote
And the deluge of ammonia waves.
We'd live in the quiet eastern caves
Away from the centaur, and Mother Beast.
I'll make you hotcakes and tea with honey.
No one will ever know. How could they?
There would be no dust to contend with,
No colors, nothing for the light to reflect off of.
We could dine on protons the size of melons.
Our only mail a set of three numbers repeated
In infinite combinations. Could you want me there?
Could you speak to me in long sentences?
"I am ready," you said. Ready for what?
The only place we could exist would be on
6324 Kejonuma, a minor planet on the asteroid belt.
No Ceres, but large enough for our hydrangeas.
I could take your bony hands, I could listen
To the symphony of your little boots.
Only there, would my desires be translated
Into the language of the spheres. No course

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Corrections and no fears, only the void
That exists between our bare bodies, boundless,
Three–dimensional, a hard vacuum of
Hydrogen, helium, dust, and cosmic rays.

Possibilities

Cristina Chopalli

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Behind 6324

Josie Noa

The door with “6324”
once caged a gentle man.

It was where the word “ours”
was first uttered
and it was where our dreams lived.

A man that has since left me bare.

Left me with nothing but
day–old tears and ripped clothes.

What was “ours” had become terminal, and now
I’m left to find “mine.”

Safe

Christina Tang-Bernas

DIALING a number long–since memorized, Patricia responds to the inquiring voice on the other end, “I’d like to report my mother missing.” She gives practiced answers to the resulting questions, and then sinks into the overstuffed armchair with a cup of steaming chamomile tea to wait.

It isn’t long before her phone rings again. “The janitor found her in the supply closet.” Only forty–five minutes this time. Not bad.

She pulls up to the local high school. Good thing her daughter doesn’t attend here anymore, she thinks, the pang now almost–automatic. A couple of cops, most likely partners, hover in front of the closet’s doorway. “Hi, I’m Patricia Lowell. My mother?”

The haggard older woman is crouched in the very back, almost hidden behind a large industrial–looking vacuum. Her arms are wrapped tight around knobby knees, chin tucked against her chest. She takes no notice of the blue coat draped over her shoulders, the rest of her body bare underneath. Instead, she’s muttering

underneath her breath, "…6322, 6323, 6324 –"

"Hello Melinda." Patricia grimaces. She's never become used to calling her mother by her given name. The person she's talking to, though, has never birthed a daughter named Patricia. The term "mother" would only confuse her further, something Dr. Lin has cautioned against. "What are you doing?"

"I have to count to a million before I leave the closet," Melinda whispers. "To make sure it's safe."

"Honey," Patricia whispers, "it'll take you over eleven days to count all the way to a million."

Melinda frowns as she considers this piece of unexpected news, even though Patricia has told her this fact over and over. She shakes her head, "You've made me lose count. Now I'll have to start over."

Patricia pushes down the sigh fermenting in her chest and smoothes down the gray curls spilling over the wool coat collar, "No, you were at 6324."

"Thank you. 6324, 6325, 6326…"

"C'mon, Melinda, I'm here to drive you home."

Melinda shakes her head, "I haven't reached a million yet. It's not safe."

Patricia sags, before straightening. She tiptoes, the way cartoons tiptoe, to the door. Peering left and right, she tiptoes back, kneeling beside the shaking woman. "It's safe. I just checked."

Melinda uncurls enough to peek at Patricia with her droopy green eyes. "Promise?" "Promise," Patricia answers, pasting on a smile she hasn't felt in a very long time. She leads Melinda outside, the coat still bundled around the slight figure, and into her waiting car. "Hey," the cop says, laying a warm hand on Patricia's shoulder blade as she thanks them and apologizes for any troubles Melinda might've caused, "It's going to be okay."

Melinda might've caused, "It's going to be okay."

Patricia blinks back the useless moisture gathering behind her eyelashes, and if her voice is too–sharp, it doesn't matter since she's probably never going to see this particular cop again anyway. "It's a terminal illness which dissolves all her memories into brain mush. Of course it's going to be okay eventually." She shrugs away and slides into the driver's seat, pretends she can't hear Melinda still counting underneath her breath the entire drive home.

By the time she hears the squealing of brakes, it's no warning at all. When she blinks her eyes open, the first thing she sees is Melinda crying, silver trickles down her papery cheeks as she rocks back and forth. "I told you it wasn't safe. I told you. I told you it wasn't safe."

The pressure in Patricia's chest squeezes tighter, and she coughs a wet gurgle of hot liquid. "No," she gasps, "no, we're safe. We're gonna be safe. What–what number are you at?"

With a shiver, Melinda says, "7863."

Patricia tries to take a breath, but something's not working quite right. Still, she draws in enough to choke out, "7864. 7865. 7866."

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Denver Airport Marathon

James Rodgers

Race to terminal
Flight 6324
Bare teeth, flight cancelled

Bear at Terminal Awaiting Flight 6324

Chad Horn

French Kiss

Sherry Beasley

I was flying to France. Terminal 6324 I kept repeating,
not being a fan of numbers.
I wanted to write the number on
my hand, but I am not a cheater, except
that one time in fourth grade. The first question
on the geography test: What is the main export
of Ecuador? I left it blank, carried the test to
the teacher's desk where bananas leapt out
from the top line on another child's test.
I wrote bananas on my test, but the teacher
in the hall at the time, saw me – and of course
there was that time I cheated
on you but that's another story.

I was flying to France. In France, a man
told me, you get kissed a lot. Kissed and kissed, both
of which sounded good to me.

A kiss on an excursion boat sailing down the Seine,
Notre Dame cathedral on one bank, black wrought–iron
railing on the other with an ice–cream vendor selling
cones of vanille au chocolat. Suddenly, a gorgeous man
appears behind me, and turns me around. You know
what happens next. No one told me
I needed to know the man, or that I should bring
him with me.

In first grade, I wished a fairy
would fly through the open window and work
my Math problems for me. I sat at my desk,
air wafting cool across my bare arm. I was so
frustrated,
it was all I could do not to cry.

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What's On?

Nick Petrone

What's On?

for all our efforts and clever phrases
we are terminally fleeting

it's true
no abstraction
you don't take a breath it's merely borrowed
and discarded
until there's nothing left in the bank –
there are 6324 gods and goddesses
in my head alone
devoted to diminishing this fear
of standing bare in the waning light.

so breathe in and breathe out
and reach for the television remote.

Departures and Arrivals

David Armstrong

PAL hesitated at the edge of the platform, testing his balance. The train was a long way off—he couldn't hear it—and looking at the tracks below gave him a dizzy, nauseaus feeling, the same helium bubble he felt in his stomach while looking out from the observation decks of very tall buildings.

"Stop that," his mother said. She pulled him away from the edge still speaking into her phone. "No, not you. It's Pal. Eight–year–olds. Especially boys. Always testing the limits, pushing your patience." She led him back to the bench and released his arm.

He wandered toward the edge again. His father had been gone nearly nine months. That's how long it took to make a baby. He knew that much. Maybe his father had been reincarnated as a woman's egg and was just now getting ready to pop his head through some lady's "downstairs area."

He imagined what his father might look like as a newborn. There'd be black hair certainly, and a prominent nose, even for a baby. The doctors would snip a purple, slimy cord. The doctor

would smack his father's bare behind, which would make his father cry. That'd cinch it. He'd recognize his father's yowling because it'd be a baby version of what his father used to do in the bathroom, when he locked the door and ran the water and thought Pal didn't know he was in there. That'd be the thing. The crying.

Pal knew what newborns looked like because he'd seen them on television. His mother was forever watching shows about medical procedures, plastic surgeries, anatomical anomalies, births, deaths, and autopsies that seemed to make a mockery out of any sort of television rating system. You couldn't say *dick* or *pussy*—Remie had taught him those—on regular television, but you could show a real corpse's gray matter dribbling onto the sidewalk. This made him think of his father again.

He felt the edge of the platform beneath the arches of his feet. He turned to see if his mother was watching. She wasn't. She was still talking on the phone and staring at a poster of Daniel Craig. In addition to the gory, medical reality shows, his mother liked Daniel Craig. Pal knew that, too.

The terminal was empty. A few weeks ago, Pal had stood like this where the platform ended, pretending to be a man on a cliff. Below him, only a few feet down were the tracks. His mother hadn't been looking then either, but a fat man with the transportation authority had tromped over and grabbed him roughly by the shoulder. The man had scratched at his big, jowly neck as he marched Pal back to his mother. The man's eyes were wide with anger. He looked nothing like Pal's father, whose eyes were always sad. The man had given Pal's mother a few stern words, then walked away and disappeared into a door that said AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL.

Pal's mother had said, "What a grouch," then gone back to talking on the telephone.

Pal heard the train. It was sliding around a bend in the hill beyond the station, flowing like a silver snake out of the trees.

"I'll have to call you back," his mother said. She beckoned for Pal to come to her, to wait with her by the bench. "Daddy's going to be super surprised."

This was how it had gone nearly every day for nine months. At 4:15, he and she stood upright, holding hands, awaiting the crowds to alight and swell like riverwater blasting forth from a broken dam. Every afternoon, the two of them, like rocks with the fluid people and their expressionless faces sluicing past in a scuff–shoe shuffling and whisper of clothing.

It was only the first day that had been different. That day, she'd picked him up from school. His first day as second grader, in fact. It had been his mother's idea to meet his father at the terminal. "He'll just be getting off the train from work. It'll be a surprise," she said. "Would you like to go see your dad?"

Pal had shrugged. "Sure."

"And then get pizza?"

His face beamed. "Really?"

"Really. All three of us."

When they'd arrived, his father was already there. His father looked thin and his gray–checked suit hung on him. His red tie shot up in the wind and licked his face like a tongue. There was a crowd that day, people waiting to leave from a large church gathering across the street. His mother didn't see his father at first. Pal was about to point him out, but the local was just coming in. A big, glowing number was on its front: 5181, the train his father was supposed to be on. His mother stepped forward into the crowd, already searching the windows. People blocked Pal's view so that all he could see was the top of his father's head.

Then his father's black hair was gone, and a woman was

screaming. The train stopped in a herky–jerky way. The people in the windows lurched forward. The woman kept screaming. People banged on the doors from inside the train. The doors swooshed open.

But that day the crowd didn't dissipate or turn to water. It oozed on to the platform in a single, slow mass. The commuters huddled together as if gelled to one another.

"Stay here," his mother said. She sat him on the bench. "Don't move." She waded into the throng. People began shouting, but no one ran, no one backed away, no one retreated from the train in panic. His mother returned, her face ashen.

"What happened?" Pal said.

She seemed not to know what to do with her hands. She ran them down her thighs, placed them on her mouth, then pushed her hair back from her forehead. "A man," she said. "Some poor man threw himself onto the tracks. He got run over by the train." Her hands dropped to her hips, then reached for Pal's shoulders.

"The man died," she said.

"Not daddy?"

"No no no," she said. "No, sweetie. It wasn't daddy. Daddy didn't get home on the train today. He's staying in the city. He's working late. We made a mistake." She pulled him from the train station, the two of them passing through the empty tunnel and up the stairs to the main street.

An ambulance arrived as they pulled away.

Now everyday they waited. Nine months. She picked Pal up from school. They drove straight to the train terminal. His father did not arrive. "Guess it's the city again," she'd say. And the two of them went home for the night.

Nine months was a school year, too. He'd be finished

with second grade soon. He wondered what would happen in the summer. It'd had been a year of learning—cursive and multiplication—but also a new and secret kind of education, of how to know and how to pretend not to know. When his mother that first night met the men at the front door, Pal had stayed in his room. She'd wept down there in the living room, more loudly than his father ever had in the bathroom. His mother hadn't yet learned how to keep her pain secret by running water to drown out the sound, to stifle her hiccups for air in a towel, or to wash away the moans that came from the gut by flushing the toilet. Even Pal knew how to do that. He'd learned from watching his father through the keyhole.

That night, the first time his father didn't come home, and after the men had visited their house and his mother cried in the living room, she'd entered his room. A waxy, unbroken smile kept her lips pinned against her teeth. Her cheeks had gone blotchy from strain.

"Daddy's not coming home tonight," she said.

"You already said that," he said.

"Oh. That's right." She leaned down and kissed his forehead. She opened her mouth but seemed to lose whatever words were about to slip out. Pal waited, but nothing came. A breeze tickled the curtains in his open window, and he imagined the words escaping into the night before she could say them.

She stood up straight. "So," she said, "we'll just have to pick him up tomorrow. Sound good?"

This was the beginning of his secret knowing. An unsaid body of understanding lay between he and her, on the floor at their feet. He could pick it up and shake it and hand it to her and make her see it, make her see that it was there and that he saw it too. But he also understood what this would do to her. How it might send them toppling into the crack in the floor made by that body of

understanding, and how heavy the body would suddenly be. Heavy enough to drag them down to the center of the world where there was fire and molten rock roiling in lava pools. He'd learned that much in a science lesson and knew no people could live down there.

"Pizza?" he said.

"What?"

"Can we get pizza? All three of us?"

"Sure, baby. That'd be great."

Unlike his father, she hadn't hid in the downstairs bathroom. After the first day at the train station, she'd suddenly filled her time talking to other women on the telephone. She got in touch with old friends from high school. She helped plan events at a church she never attended. She ordered things, always over the phone, and always bland little housewares that cost more to ship than to purchase—a kitchen towel with a cross–stitched snowman in the center, scrub brushes, scented candles, tins of popcorn, a sheet set, and a small sign for the front door that said, "Dogs Welcome—Cats . . . Well, Cats are going to to do what they want anyway."

They'd never owned pets.

She spent hours with the customer service representatives deciding between blue or puce linens. And when she wasn't on the phone, she watched shows. The medical trauma shows came first. Ones with amazing tales of survival. A man mauled by an elephant who lived to tell about it. A woman who'd lost both ears to frostbite in the Yukon. Then to surgery shows, heroic doctors performing thirteen–hour surgeries to save premature twins, quick–thinking miners who'd stitched up wounds with thread from their jackets to survive their time trapped after a cave–in. When she stopped finding stories of survival, she moved on to anything medical, anything dealing with the human body. The gorier the better, and so Pal became quite familiar with the fragility of the flesh.

He tottered at the edge of the platform. Old local 5181 straightening out as it drew near. His mother called for him again.

He wondered now what would happen if he dove onto the tracks. He could imagine the way the steel would slice down through bone. He tried envisioning his own shoe lying near his body with the foot still in it. He thought about the unnatural way his arm might be turned, wrapped up his back and around his shoulder so it touched his ear from behind. He imagined his own face missing. His father's face. Missing.

He'd thought more about jumping in front of the train lately.

In the last nine months, on the days he didn't have school and their routine was broken, the air in the house felt like glass. These were the bad times, when school didn't provide them with a reason to swing by the station. 4:15 would come and go, and his mother would say nothing. On his days off from school, she wouldn't answer the phone or watch the television. Sometimes she looked at him funny as if she'd forgotten to mention something about his grades or dinner.

He didn't like her silent like that. Her hands started up with their pointless moving. They slid back and forth across the table or straightened antimacassars over and over again.

And summer stood only weeks away, a horrible mass of sunshine and schedule–less silence.

So he thought about jumping.

Train 5181 came closer. He could see the conductor now, a middle-aged woman in a dark, satin jacket. She was waving for Pal to move back. Her eyes were furious. She reached for the lever on

the control panel.

Pal felt the nauseous feeling in his stomach again. Summer. His father. The train station over and over. His toes hovered above the tracks. Then his mother's hand was around his wrist. She led him away as the train glided and released its normal hisses and metallic shrieks.

They stood by the bench and waited.

"Summer is soon," he said.

The two of them looked toward the train as it came to a full stop. She was quiet as the people came through the doors. She always was. Always searching through the windows.

The people passed them by. He thought of jumping onto the tracks tomorrow or the next day. Summer *was* soon. Summer and all its horribleness. Nine months he'd persisted with her, pretended when pretending was almost more than he could bear. Even when the men came to tell her that her husband had not, in fact, worked for their company for three weeks before what they called the "accident." Pal's father had been let go. Budget cuts. The men were sorry to say this. Pal had pretended not to have heard, knowing if he addressed it, she'd still insist his father was in the city. She'd tell Pal that his father had taken a new job and that his schedule remained unchanged. "Some nights he stays in the city," she would say, undaunted. "We just want to make sure we're at the station to meet him if he makes it home."

Over and over.

The flow of people dribbled away so that they were left alone, still waiting by the bench.

"He must have decided to stay another night," she said.

"Summer is soon," Pal repeated.

"Sure is." She leaned down so that she was speaking with him face–to–face. "You looking forward to no homework?"

"We'll stop coming here," he said.

"Sure sure," she said. She acted as if she hadn't thought of it. "Doesn't make sense to come here if I'm not already picking you up. Let your dad find his own way home." She pointed herself toward the exit. This time Pal caught her hand.

"Mom," he said. "Can we wait for one more train tonight?"

"I don't see—"

"Dad might just be late. On the 6324." Nine months, Pal had stared at the train schedules. Nine months, and he'd learned the numbers, too.

"I guess," she said. "You're right. He might be on that one."

"He might," Pal said.

But he wouldn't. The 6324 was an express. It didn't stop here. It would pass them by in a long, silvery rush. The wind from its passing would make them feel empty inside.

His mother looked at her watch. "How long?" she said.

"Twenty–one minutes."

He waited for her to pick up her phone, to call someone, but she didn't. It lay there in her lap. She considered the tracks and the terminal without its trains, without its people. She looked at Pal and down at her hand, still holding his.

He squeezed her fingers lightly.

She squeezed back, and met his eyes.

It seemed, in the sudden moment of quiet, she might say something.

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Terminal

Tim Skeen

The Astoria Line

Rosemary Starace

I lived at the terminal point of the double R,
in the morning stepping into empty cars.

The line had no imagination, every trip the same
stations—but that one great curve, the insane

approach to Queensboro Plaza—then the friendly
weather clock, and the descent past sycamores ungainly.

I fidgeted through blinking lights and glimpsed
the tunnel's tubes and wires, left by a smart imp

to guide us. If there were leaks, I didn't want
to know; the heaviness of the river overhead haunted

me. I dreamed deliverance, and of sunsets that would stain
the platforms upon return from my contained

hours in the steep canyons of that worldly world—
I would always get a seat at the Plaza stop, the wall

of others dispersed to Flushing. It was mild one night at 63,
Fahrenheit flashed, and then the time, and I was 24,

my way no longer rushed. I grew increasingly alone,
figured the rosary of stations one by one,

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until the doors opened at Ditmars, where
I disembarked to a stage quiet, nearly bare.

I knew it was a ride no different
than any before, yet I was fluent.

The breeze carried pizza and lilac.
Ahead was the absolution of the sidewalk.

Departure

Joshua Lindenbaum

Large neighborhoods are reduced to squares and rhombuses
(from this vantage point).
The bare space between the cellphone–shaped windows traps heat
(Pressing the back of my hand against it, especially the middle knuckle).

The corrugated, circular air terminal spews air at the point of a twist
(the same hand that felt the trapped heat).
A herculean notch holds up a tray
(your back is my table).

The squares and rhombuses revert back to houses, factories, and trees.
Reaching in my shirt pocket, I take out a folded piece of paper that reads:
6324 Vista Lane, Delray Beach, FL.

3Elements Contributors

Brittany Ackerman is an MFA in creative non–fiction student at Florida Atlantic University. “I believe that in our travels, we learn that searching means giving in to not needing to search, meaning that we could be searching for something with the resolve of knowing we may not find it, and when you make that resolve, you end up finding something else, something even better.”

David Armstrong’s recent story collection, *Going Anywhere*, won the 2013 Leapfrog Press Fiction Prize and will be published next year. His individual stories have won the Mississippi Review Prize, Yemassee’s William Richey Short Fiction Contest, the New South Writing Contest, Jabberwock Review’s Prize for Fiction, and Bear Deluxe Magazine’s Doug Fir Fiction Award, among others. His latest stories appear in the *The Baltimore Review, The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, Potomac Review*, and elsewhere. He is currently fiction editor for *Witness Magazine* and recipient of the Black Mountain Institute Fellowship at UNLV, where he is a PhD candidate in Fiction.

Sherry Beasley lives in southwest Virginia. Her poems have appeared in literary magazines across the country, and have won numerous prizes, including the Edgar Allen Poe Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of Virginia. She is currently working on a collection of her poems.

Brennan Burnside was recently kicked out of his apartment and lives with a dear friend in Bedford–Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. He dropped out of the graduate program in Engineering at SUNY Binghamton last year.

Candace Butler is a writer and artist living in her hometown of Sugar Grove, Virginia, a small town in the Appalachian Mountains. She is an MFA candidate at Antioch University of Los Angeles and is co–poetry editor of Lunch Ticket. Read more of her work at candacebutler.com.

Christl M. Caspar is a cross–genre writer and artist from Des Moines, IA. She earned a BFA with an emphasis in Writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012. She has been published in a number of independent literary magazines and received the Emerging Playwright Award from Curious Theatre Branch in 2012. Her interests in fiction include the reevaluation of the avant–garde, numbers, and supercilious descriptions.

Cristina Chopalli married her husband twice: once in Las Vegas and then in a Hindu temple in Andhra Pradesh, India. Cristina is earning her MFA at Texas State University, San Marcos. She is currently completing a nonfiction thesis which explores the collisions of American and Indian family values.

Colby Cotton is a student of writing and photography at Alfred University in upstate New York. His fiction has been featured in literary publications, and his photography and art have recently been exhibited in Western New York. He is a sponsored contributor in the Something Light Photography collective.

Damien Cowger’s work has appeared in various journals including *The Southeast Review* and *The Rumpus*. He was the winner of the 2012 Science Fiction Poetry Association’s Poetry Contest in the short form category. He lives in Harrisburg, PA with his daughter, Amalie, and his wife, fiction writer Ashley Cowger. He is the Managing Editor of *New Ohio Review*.

Contributors [Continued...]

Alejandro Escudé is the winner of the 2012 Sacramento Poetry Center Award. The winning manuscript, *My Earthbound Eye*, was published in September 2013. He received a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from U.C. Davis and teaches high school English in Santa Monica, California. He is also a recent Pushcart Prize nominee and among other journals, his poems have appeared in *Poet Lore, Rattle, Phoebe, California Quarterly, Main Street Rag*, as well as in an anthology entitled *How to Be This Man*, published by Swan Scythe Press. Though originally from Argentina, he lives with his wife and two kids in Los Angeles, California.

Deirdre Farr: When not spending her time as a French Bulldog, she is a holistic veterinarian living in Des Moines, Iowa who entertains herself by writing and answering the occasional Buzzfeed survey.

Nora Frazin is an educator living and working in Chicago. Her poem "Bone Candles" appeared on ChicagoPublishes.com in 2012 as the winner of the Morbid Curiosity poetry contest.

Pamela Hill lives in Florida with her husband. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Ping Pong, Thrush, Counterexample Poetics*, and other journals. She is currently editing her first novella.

Chad Horn owns an independent bookstore called KENTUCKYLIT in Harrodsburg, Kentucky which specializes in Kentucky authors. He has published three books of poetry and is currently completing his fourth. He has won various awards for both his writing and sketching.

Amanda Kimmerly is a poet, editor, and writing coach, as well as the co–author of the invented languages guidebook, *THE WAY IT GROWS: AN INTRODUCTION TO DVARSH*. Her creations appear in *Pear Noir!*, *Full of Crow*, *REAL: Regarding Arts & Letters, Storychord*, with poems forthcoming in *Mad Hatters' Review* and *Arsenic Lobster*. She blogs online at polishedpearcreative.com and lives in Austin, TX.

Elizabeth Koch has been in love with writing since her early teens, but has only recently attempted publication. Her work can be seen in the second issue of *3Elements Review* and on her blog libsdays.blogspot.com. An Iowa farm girl at heart, she currently live in the Kansas City, Missouri area with her husband, two kids, and a cat who doesn't really like any of them.

Joshua Lindenbaum's work has appeared in *Luna* and *Fahari Libertad*. He works as an Adjunct Professor at SUNY FIT, where he teaches English College Preparation. He has a M. S. in English Education and a B.F.A. in Creative Writing.

Josie Noa was born in Miami and now resides in Dallas. She currently holds a boring job but has a lot of exciting hobbies/interests for the rest of the time. "I love writing – and I am sure everyone who writes says that–but I truly NEED to write as much as I enjoy writing." She hosts a blog with all her writings sharingthesleeves.wordpress.com. It is a goal of hers to pursue writing and photography, and to enjoy that everyday.

Angela Ostley is married, has two dogs, and works for an incredible company serving adults with disabilities in the community with daily living and independence. She writes poetry as an outlet to help her truly appreciate all the wonderful and awful things that happen to her in her life.

Contributors [Continued...]

Nicholas Petrone's poems can be found in many places, including *The View From Here, Willows Wept Review, The Ranfurly Review, Poetry Superhighway, Word Salad, Analog Press, Epiphany Magazine, Everyday Poets, Weird Cookies*, and in overflowing boxes in his attic. You can also read his poems at winkingattheapocalypse.blogspot.com. He teaches American history in Syracuse, NY.

Ron Riekki's books include *U.P.* and *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (Wayne State University Press, a 2014 Michigan Notable Book). He's at work on a novel.

James Rodgers has been writing for two decades or more, and has had poems published in multiple publications, including "Ha!" and was a winner of the WPA Charles Proctor award.

Tim Skeen's "Pacemaker Ache" appeared in the first issue of *3Elements Review*. His second book, *RISK*, won the White Pine Press Prize and will be published in the Fall. He coordinates the MFA Program in Creative Writing at Fresno State.

Rosemary Starace is a writer and visual artist living in Pittsfield, Massachusetts USA. She's author of the poetry collection, *Requitements*, and co–editor, with Moira Richards and Lesley Wheeler, of *Letters to the World*, an international poetry anthology. Her work in both genres can be seen at her website: rosemarystarace.com.

Christina Tang–Bernas graduated with a degree in psychology, fueling her fascination with human motivations. Her work has appeared in *Vine Leaves Literary Journal, Still Points Arts Quarterly*, and a Sirens Call anthology.

Acknowledgments

We all would like to thank everyone for making this all possible for 3Elements Literary Review. To everyone who has came across our journal online, we truly appreciate your interest in us, as well as our journal.

We look forward ahead to many more issues.

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NEXT UP

Summer 2014

3Elements:

Carnival
Residue
Maudlin

Due June 1, 2014

Submission due dates are December 1, March 1, June 1, and September 1, for issues forthcoming January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1, respectively, unless otherwise noted on our website.

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.

In addition, we will only accept blind submissions sent to us through Submittable.

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 three stories per submission period. Poems are limited to five per submission period. In the event your material is accepted elsewhere, we request that you withdraw your submission from *3Elements Review*.

Visit www.3ElementsReview.com for more info.

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Staff - 3Elements Review

Mikaela Shea is in her thesis hours of her MFA in Fiction at Columbia College Chicago. She has published stories in *Midwestern Gothic, Foliate Oak, Hypertext Magazine, Columbia College's Annual Story Week Reader*, and a children's book, *Ib's Ice Age Adventure*, for the State Historical Society of Iowa. Mikaela is currently writing a novel and the editor–in–chief of *3Elements Review*. She loves her family, puppies, Paris, creepy things, running, coffee, cooking, and whiskey. Visit her website at www.MikaelaShea.com.

C.J. Matthews, a writing teacher by day and writing group facilitator by night, earned her B.A. at Cornell College and her Master's at the University of Iowa. She adores reading, writing, traveling, elegant food, bold red wine, and her two little dogs, Hercules and Hucklebee. C.J.'s most recent work can be read in *Spoilage Magazine, Cahoodaloodaling*, and *the In Gilded Frame Anthology* from Kind of a Hurricane Press.

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 Chicago–based web developer and designer 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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