



DIRTYCHAI

ISSUE VII | SUMMER 2015

REVOLT!

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ON THE COVER



“Cravings” by Eugenia Loli

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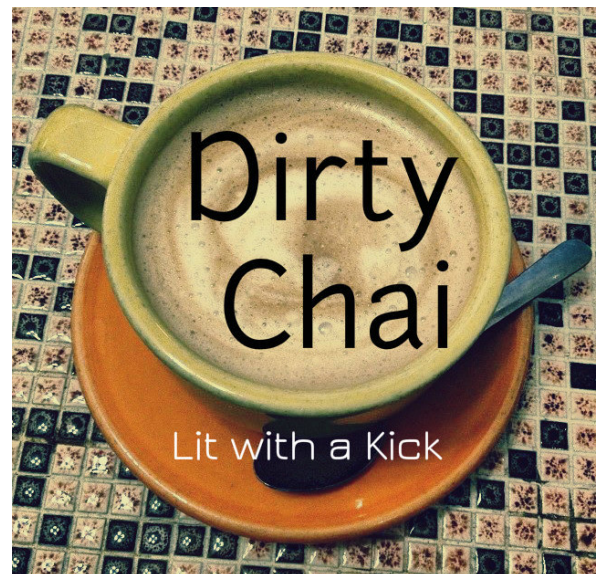
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FROM THE EDITOR

Hello!

I have to say, I think there is someone or something out there that does not want you to read this issue of *Dirty Chai*. In the three years since Sam and I started this press, I cannot recall a time that an issue had this many hiccups before publication. My only conclusion is that the work we've put together for you is important. Important things are usually hard things. Important things test your endurance. I can't tell you I've been graceful throughout this editorial process, but I can tell you that I put all my blood, sweat and literal tears into bringing Issue VII: REVOLT! to life. (So many tears, possibly too many or frustration is hard-wired to my tear ducts or something. Nonetheless, I'm embarrassed). But the work in this issue! It's good. It's better than good, it's fantastic. And the range of topics that are touched on, I believe you will be pleasantly surprised. To our contributors, thank you for trusting us with your work: it is an honor and a privilege to serve your innards to the public. To our readers, thank you for supporting small press and the writers and artists who contribute to them. And, to my editorial team: thank you for being B.A.M.F's.

Keep it dirty,
Azia DuPont, *Editor-in-chief*





MECCA NO MORE (OASIS OF STEAL) BY MARK ANTONY ROSSI

Once the land of Model T buzzing the newly paved roads that Henry Ford called an oasis of steel. Once a land nicknamed the Motor City since every man, woman and wombat were driving a new automobile. Once an enormous force of Big Union Labor changing lives and elections at the drop of a hall meeting. Once a middle class mecca and now a burnt out shell of its former self abandoned like a charred engine block bleached by an unforgiving sun. Ghosts of bankruptcy haunt the factories, the elderly, the left overs and left behinds of a landscape embarrassed and embattled to provide basic utilities to its citizens whom rightly should be called hostages in the history books written tomorrow--books undoubtedly written by angry grandchildren seeking to understand why a place of promise became a dream deliberately destroyed.

Mark Antony Rossi has fiction, poetry and nonfiction forthcoming in *Gravel*, *Ploughshares* and *Yellow Chair Review*. His most recent essay collection "Strength to Be Human" is available on Kindle in mid July 2015. Visit him at markantonyrossi.jigsy.com

JUNEAU

I sit in the recliner and call it, both, a night
and a life, feet propped up like my slippers
are resistant to walking around in a marriage
void of any sort of traction.

From my living room, I settle in and watch
every Alaskan reality TV show with the words
frontier, survival, and wild in their titles.
Because I am partial to parts of the world
that I will probably never visit,
freezing and dangerous landscapes that belie
my seemingly sunny, secure life.

I drink my Corona and watch bearded men
build log cabins from trees tall enough to
reach eternity, and live their lives off the grid
and land, killing their meals with the combination
of primitive, homemade weapons and bare hands,
eating and using every part of an animal body
that sacrificed himself, as if agreeing to participate
in some sort of earthy symbiotic relationship.

Each episode of each show provides me with
escape from a marriage where the temperature
is measured in degrees of speaking:
average conditions consisting of communicating
only when it concerns the kids,
coldest recorded temps occurring when we can't see
our breaths because no words in our vocabulary
provide a genuine comfort or warmth.

And how I want to stop shaving for an entire year!
And how I want to trade all the polos in my closet
for a wardrobe of flannel!
And how I want to craft something useful from
the junk in my garage to show that I am
man enough to make my way through this world
without relying on the touch of anyone else.
I live through these men I have never met.
Desire to move away to a state north of all my hurt.

As if the snow will insulate me from a union
that numbs my skin and guts,
and any trace of frostbite
will be forgotten.

THE BODY OF EMPTINESS

Insufficient volume creates unequal distribution, creates overcompensation, creates a lacking man. Protein only builds so much mass before the body notices a disparity in size concerning the depth of muscle versus the weight of contentment. Bodybuilders are the unhappiest people. Hoisting weight around like iron baggage that reminds them there is no such thing as hurt too big to hold on to. Malnutrition sets in when sacrificing for the sake of perception comprises a regular diet. I speak for the common man when I say starving your spirit is akin to gutting your dreams. I speak for myself when I ask how the rattling between my bones doesn't give it all away.

TWO POEMS **BY DANIEL ROMO**

Daniel Romo loves and lives at danielromo.net.

THROUGH THESE TERRIBLE PRECINCTS THE OLD ANARCHIST SPEAKS

BY SEAN DOUGHERTY

What is the name of the wind

as it blows against the panes,
a few voices enter. One voice

sings a lament in a language
not Portuguese, nor Spanish.

One voice enters the fire
and flames, one voice enters

the hallway and walks
with the feet of a child. One voice

shouts at a general spitting
an olive pit

on a corpse.

One voice is an olive tree.

It shadows the sheets
of the sleeping prisoner,

and the guerillas walking
along the river, along the barbed wire

where a word or two enters the ear
where the lost goats are bleating

on the mountain
on the small wind

of sound like our own breath
when we were young

hurling bottles at barricades
and once were fugitives

in black bandannas.

Anger for the Earth

BY NOAH BURTON

Green in the old mascara
on your eyes and on the pale
pears. As close as I get
we are apart. There is a rhino
in me: it walks. There is
a chimpanzee in you: it throws.
There is nothing that does not
grow on us. Over the field,
the stalks blow. We are standing
near a vined chimney
while night washes itself
with a damp clock.

Noah Burton was born in Kansas City, Kansas, grew up in Virginia, and is currently at home in New Hampshire. He studied philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University and received an M.F.A. from the University of New Hampshire. His poems have appeared in *Baldhip Magazine*, *Basalt*, *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*, and *Scapegoat Review*, among others.

Sean Dougherty is the author or editor of 13 books including *All You Ask for Is Longing: Poems 1994- 2014* (2014 BOA Editions) and *Scything Grace* (2013 Etruscan Press). Recent poems in *North American Review*, and *Best American Poetry 2014*. He works in a pool hall in Erie, PA.



ENCOUNTER IN CENTRAL PARK BY ROBERT ZURER

Thirteen Ways of Discussing an Eating Disorder

BY EMILY BLAIR

ONE: I attempt to blame my mother

My mother hates herself, and I love her, putting us at an impasse, dead stare, dry heave, because she will never love herself and I will never hate her. I have too much compassion to list in full what my mother hates of and in and on herself, and I don't know which placement she would most wish me use, as I don't know if, like me, she feels that her body is both essentially *Herself* (that is, she is no more than her body) and that her body is a foreign entity that she must battle.

In any case, in dressing rooms and at the pool and in front of her own closet, my mother spent years tugging at real or imagined lumps and wrinkles, exclaiming that she hated her neck, legs, anything. Her weight fluctuates and she takes dieting and exercising by turns, but at some point I must hope that she realizes that she is beautiful at every conceivable weight and frame—and that's a lie. Beauty is not universal, but my mother is universally beautiful because she is my mother and I cannot fathom her as anything but stunning.

TWO: My inaugural boyfriend, the rapist, exacerbates a preexisting condition

It would be a lie to say that my eating problems started with my first boyfriend, because they actually started a few months before I met him, when I was sixteen and un-kissed and *Sixteen & Pregnant* was first making headlines, a reminder that other people my age were having actual sex and I had never had another's lips on mine. I also realized that my growth spurts were likely over and, after years of growing inches then pounds, inches then pounds, I was two inches taller and ten pounds heavier than my older sister, who, I had been told since I was young, was gorgeous and very tiny—and who had been dating for years already because she was six years older than me. The age difference did nothing to

"In any case, in dressing rooms and at the pool and in front of her own closet, my mother spent years tugging at real or imagined lumps and wrinkles, exclaiming that she hated her neck, legs, anything. Her weight fluctuates and she takes dieting and exercising by turns, but at some point I must hope that she realizes that she is beautiful at every conceivable weight and frame—and that's a lie. Beauty is not universal, but my mother is universally beautiful because she is my mother and I cannot fathom her as anything but stunning."

halt my comparisons to her, internally or externally, real and imagined.

He could smell the slow-burning hatred for who I was failing to be. His first words to me were an insult about my, in his words, stumpy legs. My reaction to that (flirtatious, confused, flattered) showed him that I was ready for such a relationship, even though I never could have been.

In a time in which I controlled nothing, I controlled my eating. He took what he wanted from me with his hands, even when I asked him not to right then, in public, on the bus, around other people, in his basement, with his mother one room over. I remember so little from that year, but I remember tastes in the back of my throat, smells, cut lips, bruises on both wrists, images that would leave me paralyzed from flashbacks years later.

THREE: I deny everything

My mother's friend found a blog post on a Craigslist-like local forum about me, first and last name included, that sang to the tune of:

This girl is an anorexic bitch who thinks she's better than everyone else.

Eighteen, ready for college, ready to get out, it was true. But by weight-training weekly in order to play softball, and eating voraciously to maintain that rigorous exercise schedule, I didn't look or act anorexic—I like to think of my eating

problem as alcoholism or mental illness, because even for the months or years it is in remission, I must actively work to keep it that way, but I can operate normally for months at a time.

My mother was outraged and had someone at the website take the post down on the grounds of slander. I wonder sometimes what I had said in the face of such accusations, if anyone had asked me if there was any basis for such specific disdain.

FOUR: By the numbers

I've had eating issues for seven years, or about a third of my life. At my current height of five-foot-four, I've been down to 103 pounds after a particularly harrowing breakup (not eating for two days, puking Diet Coke into his dorm shower, refusing to leave his room, asking him to hit me if he really didn't care anymore, pretending none of it happened for the next year as we stuck around each other for the benefit of mutual friends, ignoring the obvious and exaggerated long-lasting effects of my previously abusive relationship) and up to 132 pounds after a four-month Nutella, wine, and fruit bender in southern Switzerland, where laundry was so expensive and the dryer so inept that my clothes slowly stretched with me through the semester.

I've counted calories to lose weight (800 calories at most a day when I was 16, pushing food around my dinner plate, throwing sandwiches in the trash, drinking only water, chewing two packs of gum a day) and counted calories ostensibly to eat enough. I've had two therapists and six actual boyfriends, worked my way through college and graduated summa cum laude — with something that smells like an eating disorder following along all the while. I've told friends, strangers, coworkers, and no family. It's easier this way.

FIVE: In an academic way

The study of the anorexic female saints of Italy is an actual academic exercise, and I have read all that I can on the topic, with titles like *Holy Anorexia* and *From Sacred Fasting to Anorexia*, and pretended it was not because I, too, thought myself better than everyone else for my abstentions and smallness and also pure and good for it, but just because it was an interesting topic.

I have poured over the numbers, watched the documentaries, read the introspective exposés, all in the name of understanding “these people” better, as if I am not actively establishing myself as one of these people, the Girls Who Don't Eat, the women with compulsions to rip flesh from bone and stick fingers between collarbone and neck and smile at the gap. This is where the academic becomes neurotic and where the breakdown of logic assures me, over and over, that this is truly a mental health issue, this preoccupation with being small and restricting and following arbitrary rules so that I may win some composure, because I am unhealthy. I am better than no one, but still feel like I have won something because I am not a statistic, but an outlier.

Perhaps there is something in my genes that makes me this way. Maybe it's hereditary. I think the rage now is blaming yourself on gut bacteria, all of which begs the question — if there was a pill I could take to make me eat normally, without guilt or disdain, would I take it? Of course not.

SIX: I attempt to blame the media

I can't remember idolizing thin women in the media while growing up. My two favorite living musicians were Little Richard and Stacie Orrico, a Christian pop princess that my mother deemed acceptable and proper. Otherwise, I loved '90s country and '70s groove, and our house was a haven for my sister and me, with TVs only turned to the Disney Channel or (male) sports or the news; all day.

I was a fat kid, no question. With chronically bad lungs, I was often put on steroids, which forced swelling in my face and hands. I was also just a fat kid consuming fast food and Little Debbie snack cakes and Pepsi. My mother drank two liters of regular Pepsi a day when I was small; my father was a diet pop junkie but loved everything from fried bologna sandwiches to bags and bags of potato chips.

None of this is about the media, and although I know that I must have internalized the sinewy, cellulite- and stretch-mark-free, perfectly toned bodies of models and actresses, I recall always knowing that these pictures were fake, Photoshopped, airbrushed, and not considered real so much as exemplary. You could try to look like

these women, but when you're thirteen and your butt and breasts and legs are already maps of the first of many violent and sudden growth spurts that will leave you riddled with stretch marks, you know that you will fail before you even try.

SEVEN: As an extended metaphor and a poetic device

Restricted eating lives in the same house as smoking cigarettes, cocaine use, alcoholism, wearing all black, and getting ironic tattoos in that it's something artistic people do in order to make themselves more interesting. Anorexia or anorexic behaviors allow me to remain terminally unique (you'll never know the pain I feel) and also comment on the hetero-normative patriarchal sexist misogynistic etc. etc. society in which I find myself and to which I feel that I can speak because of my eyes-wide-open, no bullshit, take-no-prisoners view of the world.

You see, the fact that I am so affected and afflicted that I would try to starve myself into oblivion means that I am deeply attune and, probably, more advanced than anyone without some sort of mental illness. Maybe you've seen the Vice article going around about how depressed people are more advanced than the rest of us because they see the futility of life, above the contented idiots with their small talk and happiness. Amid a crowd of pundits squawking about the obesity epidemic and the growing girth of industrialized countries, I sit smugly drinking Diet Coke.

I would like a piece of this entitled pie, please. I, too, would like to be better than all of you. I will show you all the hard, hard truth with my brittle bones and unhappiness alone.

EIGHT: As an independent pest

Thinking of my eating disorder as a parasitic entity that only resides in my body, "in" but not "of" me, helps absolve me of any responsibility when it emerges like a cold sore or a sun flare or any other unavoidable annoyance to disaster, depending.

When my sister, her two young stepdaughters, my mother, and I went to buy my sister's wedding dress, I found myself so stressed by my (toxic) relationship digging in my back pocket constantly, my phone, a weather vane for his unhappiness, that I couldn't eat. It was not that I

didn't want to eat, because I felt hungry and had already decided that I would eat lunch, but when food was placed in front of me, I froze. I chewed and chewed and chewed and nothing would go down. My mother was angry that I was wasting her money on food that I would not eat. The kids were wild that day, tugging on edges of clothes, rubbing ketchup everywhere, demanding more attention than we could have pooled even if we tried, and I wished that I didn't have to be there for all of this, wished that I could lie in bed and feel sorry for myself, wished no one could see me eat.

My body revolts and I must find creative ways around it. I can't eat anything squished together, so I get burrito bowls instead of burritos. I try to self-serve as much as possible so no one puts mac and cheese on my rice by accident, rendering an entire cafeteria tray inedible. I have learned that some foods are not worth fighting to regain, like Jimmy John's sandwiches that I would order when I was alone my freshman year, slathered in mayonnaise so thick I could barely get through them, or Chik-Fil-A sandwiches, or sausage links, or undercooked beans, or ribs, or anything else that has crawled back up my throat that I was forced to discreetly spit into a napkin because no one can ever know that I am insane.

NINE: As a figment of my imagination

It's entirely possible that I am making all of this up and, as with any work of personal and intimate nonfiction, people will feel lied to, both those who know me or think they know me, and those Google-searching me should this ever be published. Fact-checking your mental state is almost impossible, and yet, I'm sure that someone will say, "Well I partied with her when she was nineteen and she drank beer and ate a large slice of pizza," or, "She's not underweight," or, "I've seen her eat three times a day for weeks," or, "She lived almost exclusively off cheese sticks and wine for a couple months in 2014." They are all right, and these are all truths.

I think, especially as women, we are held back from telling our stories because we are not enough. I was not raped enough—he used his hands, his mouth, his influence, his strength, but never his penis. I am not anorexic enough—I prefer EDNOS because of its ambiguity and because

I know that I have, at most, anorexic tendencies, because of my physiological standpoint.

Whatever this is named, it is a sickness of my mind, and I find myself ashamed of my own mind because I am disgusted by overweight bodies and grow impatient when people claim it is not easy for them to lose weight, because if they really wanted to be thin, they would just starve themselves. This is a fundamental unfairness and judgment that I am not at liberty to make, but I do, because I have kept myself thin for years, and all it takes is hating yourself more than you love to eat. I look at obese women as a cautionary tale of what I will do anything to stay away from, and thus, I place myself in the voyeuristic and objectifying position that I so hate when directed at me, and when any man directs it at any woman. Can I be a feminist if I am so hypocritical, mean, selfish, self-centered?

And what if it isn't real? You could decide that this story is no longer true after poking at the soft edges of my public persona, and that would constitute a shared tragedy between you and me, because I will have sat with you at the table and told my truth, and you will have left not believing me, which is more painful than having never tried to tell the story at all.

TEN: I tell you the physical side effects

When I decide to eat very little meat in an attempt to "eat clean" (eat fewer calories in a way that even I can believe is a sincere effort to do something positive for a few days) and then eat meat again, I end up on the toilet with violent diarrhea for at least a couple of hours, if not the entire evening. If I've eaten less than 1,200 calories a day for a week and decide that I've earned what some might call a binge day, I do the same thing. I've spit food up from my throat often, especially in times of stress. When my blood sugar is low and the temperature or my personal emotional state is high, I pass out. It has happened at a concert, football games, and a handful of times in the shower, after attacks on my character by friends, lovers, coworkers, leaving me curled up on the floor until my vision and hearing come back, locked in my body. I'm so proud in that moment that I have been able to overcome my body's usual defenses in pursuit of perfection. My brinked body is a beautiful and powerful thing to

me, because it always survives.

These are the thoughts of an unwell person. These are the thoughts of someone who needs help, and knows it.

ELEVEN: I acknowledge the wholeness of this issue

Talking about eating disorders is never talking about eating disorders. Food restriction and anxiety is the fever of some other disease that is too slippery and dark to look at directly. My ideas about myself are wrapped up in my ability to control and do anything, even if it means that it will harm me in the long run. I attempt to validate my attractiveness and my space on this earth through interactions with men.

There is only so far I am willing to peel my skin back so that you might poke at these issues, only so far I will allow you to look before it gets too intimate, shit and tears and blood, sticky, gross, you look away from me in disgust, I attempt to hide myself with insufficiently small hands—but I think you get the idea. Eating disorders are about what we cannot talk about, either because it is too close to the deep nerves and muscles of our truth, or because we do not have the vocabulary. Only guttural screams and the ripping of flesh can describe some things, but passing on dinner seems easier.

TWELVE: I treat my body like a temple

My body is a temple simply because I have not burned it to the ground yet. I cannot tell if I want to inhabit and nurture this body or treat it as a burner, just a way to get me from here to wherever, but I have not killed myself, and I have not put myself in harm's way, and I have not done hard drugs or been hospitalized for my drinking, so I am counting these as signs of deference for something I hate, regardless. At times I cannot separate the two, Body and Me, and when my body grows I am bad, and when my body shrinks I am good; other times, it is the enemy, apart from my true self, and I can see my worth outside of this frame. Those times, though, are rare.

THIRTEEN: I attempt not to draw conclusions in the end

I hope to live until I'm seventy. This, today, might appear as a small order, but as someone

who has never seen herself living past fifty, it feels like a declaration that needs gas behind it. To live seventy years, you have to eat a lot of food. If there were ever a case for meal replacement shakes, like Soylent — besides for the literal starving people in impoverished areas of the world — it would be people with food problems. If someone could swoop in and assure me that I would maintain my current body weight through my whole life if I would just follow their meal plan, I would do it, easily, immediately, without question.

I'm afraid of gaining weight. I'm afraid of not being the thin one, of not being attractive, of being alone, of abandonment. The spiral is deep but tight for every pound I gain and the fears that follow. I fear being out of control, but paradoxically, I now am at the hands of an eating disorder. The irony is too obvious.

As with any addiction or mental illness, I cannot reason myself out of this bag. There is no way for me to stop hating my body as I attempt to regain control my surroundings. At best, I can circumvent my compulsions and find ways around them, to trick myself into eating enough calories without hating myself, to look at food as fuel instead of the enemy, to find food I enjoy and will eat enough of — because there is no way to go through this wall. There is only over, and around. •

Emily Blair recently completed an undergraduate degree at Virginia Tech, and is a rising Master's student of English at the University of Louisville. Her poetry has appeared in *Maudlin House*, *The Vehicle*, and *The Roanoke Review*, among others, and is forthcoming in *Otis Nebula* and *The New Old Stock*. A product of blue-collar Appalachia and all that entails, she enjoys the outdoors, except for squirrels.

HER FAVORITE REVOLUTION

BY GLEN ARMSTRONG

After the initial chitchat, move
on to her favorite revolution.

It puts a fiery heart
into the mix, a hint

that the skin is just a well
tailored suit,

that which you have
whispered to each other so far

just accessory.

You will soon know, in theory, how

to sweep the unsteady legs
of an entire city,

how to blacken the eyes
of statues grandfathered in,

left in the hero's stead,
bent toward the future.

Are we history yet?
she asks as you sit in the garden

eating cake and drinking tea,
rethinking the term suitor

and nervously laughing
at that which never blinks.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANARCHY BY GLEN ARMSTRONG

It is hard to talk about: By the time you describe a Molotov cocktail, for example, the description itself has imposed order upon and thus nullified its subject. A net cast over the ephemeral. An invisible dog prone to visible droppings. Harvest that crop of explosions, Fishbone. Bang the drum frantically, Hyacinth, until the stick is your shoe and the drum is your head. By the time you establish its timeline, it will be something else entirely.

Glen Armstrong holds an MFA in English from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and teaches writing at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He edits a poetry journal called *Cruel Garters* and has three new chapbooks: *Set List* (Bitchin Kitsch), *In Stone* and *The Most Awkward Silence of All* (both Cruel Garters Press). His work has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Conduit* and *Cloudbank*.



IMAGES: **SURREAL CITY 2 & NIGHT FLOWERS** BY KYLE HEMMINGS

SHINY SMILE REVOLUTION

BY MARY CROSBIE

When the price of chardonnay doubled, the ladies of our town revolted. They shattered their long-stemmed goblets against the face of the wine shoppe. They wore gorilla masks to church and demanded blood of Christ on the rocks. They sucked on rotted fruit in the orchard. They broke into the hardware store and sipped paint thinner. That damaged their brains a little, but they drank it all up.

Eventually, they became sober.

Then they saw how awful the town was.

The ladies stopped doing the dishes and just smashed them instead. They found they could get a buzz off laundry detergent, so no clothes got washed. When asked what was for dinner, they'd point at their smallest child and shrug.

One woman, Vicki Louche, even left our remote town, looking to see if it was the same story over the big hill. She never came back.

Vicki Louche was my Mother. I really wanted her to come back. I was only eight, and I still couldn't tie my shoes, so I tripped all the time. My drawings fell off the fridge. My cowlick sprouted into two horns and the nuns would yell obscenities at me.

I went to live with Aunt Hortense, but she had gone too far with paint thinner and burned her eyes on the toaster. She'd dress up feral cats in my clothes and send them to school with my lunch.

Then I stayed with my Aunt Eunice, and she was drinking straight from the toilet, but she had always done that. She thought I was her dead husband, back from the war to kill her. Every night she'd chase me around the block with a knife. My yelling was too screechy, so people intervened.

The town arranged for a wealthy couple to adopt me.

"But my Mother is coming right back! She's just on a wine run," I said to the wealthy couple as they stuffed me in a duffle bag.

They lived in a no-children building in the Big City. I had to be quiet, watch HBO, and sleep in on weekends. I needed an income and to put away for retirement. I couldn't call them Mom

and Dad. I had to refer to them as my Roommates.

"So am I an adult now?" I asked them over an endive salad with crumbled blue cheese.

"No," they'd whisper. But they'd nod their heads yes.

I needed to revolt, throw off the yoke of old age. Face creams felt yucky and bitter greens hurt my tummy.

At lunch break, I gathered Caitlynn, Brooklynn, and Alixx in the mini-pretzel factory yard. I told them about how we were going to revolt and be kids again.

"But what about our 401k?" asked Alixx, as he scrolled the stock market on his tablet.

"And who's going to insure us if we act like kids? I couldn't handle the premiums, frankly," said Brooklynn, swiping Tinder.

I went home discouraged. My Roommates were in their room when I got home. I ate alone in front of the television. I watched CNN's election coverage. I couldn't vote for another ten years. Maybe the Republicans would have a viable candidate by then. I switched to local news and saw the train derailment footage that happened right outside my old town. The train was shipping goods, and the stunned conductor described the impact they had made with a pile of shopping carts.

"It was like kra-bam!" reported the conductor.

The camera went to some wild shots of the train damage. One car was split open. Inside, I could see boxes of chardonnay; the kind my Mother used to drink with the drunk monkey logo on it. I sighed and went to bed. I would've cried but I was on medication for that.

The next day at the pretzel factory, I received my pink slip. Brooklynn had ratted me out. "Propagandizing" was the term they used for my dismissal. I had to leave straight away. Nobody even waved goodbye.

I couldn't go home. I had to hide my dismissal from my Roommates. They had already been threatening to replace me with a kid from Bangladesh who had a full beard and had aced his LSATs.

I walked around city hall for the rest of the day, trying to think of a snappy placard for my anti-adult revolution: OLD is MOULD. YOUTH is COUTH. HAS ANYONE SEEN MY CHILDHOOD?

I had no idea how to start a revolution, obviously.

But someone did.

Smiling at me from the bus stop poster was Dr. Ziplich. "SHINY SMILE REVOLUTION!!!" his ad screamed. His teeth were sparkly bright. Even the picture made you squint.

I headed to Dr. Ziplich's straight away, and what a beautiful office. Everything was gleaming chrome and glistening marble. I could see myself in a thousand surfaces.

The receptionist smiled at me, and I fell over blind.

"Are you here for your free consultation?" she asked as she pushed me into another room and locked the door. I waited for three hours and twenty minutes. Then Dr. Ziplich entered and it was worth the wait. Spotless white leather lab coat, snakeskin tap-crocs on his feet, he was a vision. And his smile? The sun.

"Please tooth meet you!" I blurted. I was blushing. I felt all caught up in something magic.

"Haha!" he chuckled, modestly, looking down at his hands which were sparkly manicured.

"I'm ready to join your revolution, Dr. Ziplich!" and I opened my mouth wide.

"Congratulations. Now you'll never need real reasons to smile. You'll just open your mouth and it's just like smiling."

I felt not only awed in his presence, but also safe, so I told him my story about my Mother, and the revolution I needed to start.

As he signed me up for full-tooth sparkling, he explained that I needed a victim to get my revolution started. He told me the tale of how Shiny Smile Revolution began. An old woman named Old Woman Joan had her teeth kicked in by some kids. Dr. Ziplich seized the moment and, using his sparkle technology, he fixed Old Woman Joan's teeth so well she became uber-famous and made a series of influential sex tapes.

"That's a wonderful story," I said to Dr.

Ziplich, and handed him my credit card. "But how do I apply it to my situation?"

"Simple," the good doctor said, "You make toilet water wine for suffering sober Moms."

"Why not use regular water?"

"People love recycling stories. Like, your new teeth are from rat bones!"

We high-fived, and I got to work.

It wasn't easy, getting the chardonnay just right. I stuck my only picture of my Mom, her Big Bob's discount card, on the wall of my lab, the restroom at the gas station. I strapped on goggles and unbagged my secret ingredients. I swirled in the Mountain Dew with the crumbled Doritos, and I think I got really close to the chardonnay of my town's vintage.

Then I made my debut. Free wine guzzling event in a parking lot. I got a lot of press. My sparkle teeth really made me feel confident and camera-ready.

Some women in gorilla masks showed up.

"Mama?" I cried.

One gorilla mask cocked her head to the side. Then she sucker punched me.

The women stole all my wine. Every last drop.

And that was the end of my revolution. I shaved my head to a balding pattern and went to work for Dr. Ziplich. I became his protégé. He offered my wine in the lobby and he appreciated how my tiny hands could work during procedures.

At night, I'd tell Dr. Ziplich about my town. How the lake was polluted but we'd all drink right from it. And then barf right back in it. And how many two-headed people I knew: so many.

Then he confided that he never went to medical school and that he was actually an eleven-year-old boy named Timmy who had participated in the teeth-kicking of Old Woman Joan.

We became Life Partners. We didn't know what that meant, but we both felt safe. •

Mary Crosbie is very wealthy with cats; she has seven cats. Are you a cat? Come live with her! You can look at her website, marycrosbie.com, and develop feelings for her.



IMAGE: QUEEN OF THE PARK BY TAYLOR IREZUMI



THE FIVE GENTLEWOMEN YOU KNOW

by jessica wiseman lawrence

"I'm not rich," grumbled Anna, tucking her dark hair behind her ears. "Stacy gets everything handed to her on a silver platter. The wrong people get everything. I'd do some real good with all of that money, not just lay around in a great apartment all day. I guess I'm lucky. At least I know how to work."

Melanie rolled her eyes in the grocery store. "Hey. My taxes pay for your junk food." She said to the woman holding an EBT card on one hand and a toddler on her hip. "Why don't you buy flour and eggs and make these brownies yourself? It's cheaper. At least I give my children healthy food."

Rachel sighed, thinking about the morning volunteer shift at the soup kitchen while she chewed slowly on the raisin bread she took for herself. At least she knew how to take care of her family when her children were young. Every single one of those homeless mothers should be forced to sell their wedding bands and cell phones before being allowed free food.

Cindy turned to the camera and said on national TV: "At least my mother taught me how to dress. These young girls wearing halter tops and shorts and walking around at night looking like whores are asking for it. They deserve to be raped. I certainly don't feel sorry for them."

Alexis typed a comment on a message board that she wished women would support each other.

A reply quickly came from June: "Hey- don't know where you come from, but support is earned. A lot of women just don't know how to act. They make us all look bad. You need to grow up, little girl. At least I have some sense."

Jessica Wiseman Lawrence studied creative writing at Longwood University, earning a B.A. and participating in the university's M.F.A program. You can find her recent work upcoming or published in *Origins*, *Antiphon*, *Calamaro Magazine*, and *Third Wednesday*, along with many others. She lives in rural central Virginia, where she works as an office manager.

PHENOMENOLOGY

BY ANNABEL BANKS

My body wants things. It asks non-stop
pain pills for cramps,
huffy at preparations unappreciated,
a failed surprise party for a birthday boy
gone somewhere else, some sweeter deal

swapped for a glass of water, or a bottle. Or a puddle,
the wanting wet lips and throat. My body takes new breath
every few seconds, even when I'm asleep
twitching to be left alone
in the downward stairtaking to sleep's flooded room.

Wants to be touched, but only until bruise or burn or bite
becomes too much and then retreats, a rear-guard action
made in the dark, because skin doesn't care for the politics
of love, just demands the satisfaction of mating
in so many words – it covets blisters, itches, cuts
from pitching forward onto spikes, tumbles into unprotected ditches

and my body cries sometimes when it thinks I cannot see
what I've done and what I've tried to do. It makes me feel
like putting my arms around it to sing it back to sleep
or distract with sky views, coastal walks – but it's best just to ignore
these performances or they'll never stop, they say – but one day

our bodies will push knives against our throats
and make commands through megaphones
claim back the eggs, the ripped out hair
the lost laughter. Build a fire. Dance, hip to naked hip,
to celebrate the bloody revolution.

An English writer of prize-winning poetry and prose, **Annabel Banks** is to be found writing up her practice-based PhD 'Poetry and the Archive', while lecturing in Literature & Creative Writing for Falmouth University. Recent work in *Envoi*, *Lockjaw* and *Junftak*. You can connect with Annabel (and hear her read some poems) at annabelbanks.com. She would love to hear from you.



My Hand to God BY SARAH SORENSEN

Inside of the fridge in their basement, the Russells keep potato salad, a case of Miller, a few Hershey bars, and my left hand. My hand is contained in a translucent orange plastic tub. It still wears my wedding ring, though I have been divorced for two years and be-handed (if that is a usable term) for about one year. The ring has a gold band with a trio of diamonds at the center. It was both of our third marriages. You didn't ask about that detail. But I think it might help you to understand me better.

We had thought that it was funny, that trio. Turns out it was mostly a testament to the fact that neither one of us had any clue what it takes to hang in, make a real commitment. But I kept wearing the ring afterwards because it seemed like a useful reminder. It was like a shiny beacon of truth, "Don't ever be this stupid again."

Of course, when you get your hand loped off for flipping the bird to an entire caravan of gentle Christians — that would be another reminder of bad choices. They could have chosen tolerance, or even the removal of only my middle finger, but no. They took the whole hand.

Well, the old man did. Not really the whole family. That's probably not fair to the rest of the Russells who, to the best of my knowledge, are not hand stealers.

However, the Russells had decided, as a family, that I was going to hell. I'm certain of that. They based this assumption on my failure as a marital partner to three different women, none of whom could stand me for more than a year or two. They also based it off of my drunken crying mara-

thons that lasted months after the door shut on me and my wives walked out.

The first wife was a mistake of youth, the second was a mighty love, and the third was a choice made because you start to realize nothing is ever going to last and it might as well be her for now. The third was my resignation marriage, the one that seemed like it just might work because neither one of us gave a shit about it anymore. Apparently, not giving a shit is not an effective marital strategy.

But back to the Russells. They were the kind of family that stuffed their lawn with signs declaring that Jesus was coming back any day now and most everybody was going to be sorry. Most everybody but, of course, the Russells. They were certain that they were Jesus' pet, that they would quickly be scooped up in a big fluffy angel wing and safely deposited down into a marshmallow cloud. From there, the Russells would watch the ragged wretches of the earth burning, toiling, and generally being assaulted by a plague of mythological beasts. The Russells would note the presence of their lawn signs, clear indicators that they had offered a path to redemption. They would be satisfied.

The Russells and I had never exactly been friends. For a few years we did an all right job of enduring one another. I tried hard to respect their space, not even letting my dog pee on their lawn during our neighborhood walks. Once, when a pop can was tossed into their yard by a child riding past on his bicycle, I picked it up. I'm pretty nice most of the time.

For their part, the Russells did not always call the police when I wailed in a drunken stupor on my back patio. I'd say they called the fuzz only about 55% of the time. That means that they tolerated me almost half of the time. I figured that was probably more tolerance than I got from my family members, who often referred to me as "mentally ill," "annoying," and "not my problem."

Anyway, you are probably wishing I'd tell you about the night I got be-handed. I had started dating again; this time the lady was a brunette with four Pomeranians. Amy. She'd brought these dogs over and we were fucking. It was our first time together. She had braided all of her ridiculously long hair into this tight plait and was attempting to spank me with it. That was something different, let me tell you. You can't really get much snap from a braid, but I'll give her points for creativity. She called me Tanya while she did it. I'm somewhat sure she knew that my name is not Tanya.

When it became clear that we could move on from foreplay, I went after her hard. I can tell you without shame that my left hand is my best resource for fucking. I tried to gauge how she wanted it, spread her open and stared into her. She was pretty between her legs. Things were starting to go well. Amy was rattling my bed and screaming.

Then the cops showed up. We were both covered in sweat and cum. The cops insisted on speaking to both of us before clearing me of a "domestic situation." I kept thinking about marriage number two to Mighty Love. I was missing her a lot. I missed her all through marriage number three. That was a part of the problem with three. I wanted both the cops and Amy to just go so that I could be alone.

When the cops finally accepted that we were fucking they left and Amy looked at me like she expected me to finish her off. I guessed that was fair enough, so I got back in bed with her. Then old man Russell showed up, right when we tried to go back at it. He was at the back patio getting an eyeful when I heard him pounding and wailing.

"You'll all go to hell!" he roared.

I'm assuming since there were only two of us to yell at, he was embracing gays as a whole. Amy and I paused and I pulled my hand out of her.

"You'll get there before me if you don't get the fuck off my property," I yelled back, after an initial moment of disbelief that there was a man standing there.

I'm still pretty proud of that response. I think it sounded tough, confident, the kind of thing somebody might say in a movie and then everybody at home cheers.

I got out of bed, leaving Amy to scramble under a sheet and hide while the Pomeranians ran in to defend her by barking on top of her. Mitzy, Bitzy, Ditzzy, and Gibley. Yes, I know. But she started showing me her tattoos at the bar and one thing led to another. Let that part go. Accept it. Amy is not

the point.

Completely naked and furious, I threw open the sliding door. Old man Russell paused.

"You heard me," I yelled. "Get the fuck out of here."

He probably hadn't heard me actually, but that's a realization that came later.

He was silent, in a hardened kind of way. He left, but I knew it wasn't really over. I followed him out to my side yard where I could see him getting into his minivan's driver's seat. I felt slightly awkward being naked in front of the remaining Russells, some of whom were children. I decided to cover for this embarrassment by showing heroic defiance. I flipped them the bird and kept it flipped, waving it all around like I thought it was a trophy. That bird was sailing everywhere and there was some yelling on my part. I was spewing a variety of expletives in keeping with my salute.

Old man Russell got out and opened the back of his van, removing something. It was some sort of hacksaw thing. I don't know tools all that well. What I do know is that when he came at me, he pinned me bare-assed to the grass and kept on sawing until he walked off with my hand. To Amy's credit, she eventually called me an ambulance. First, she had fixed her makeup. We did not continue dating.

I tried to go to the cops, but they didn't listen to me. They said I needed proof that it was him before they'd bother to stop by his place. Old man Russell sent me a photo of my hand about a week later. So, bingo, right? I took the photo promptly to the police.

"My neighbor sent this. I told you already that he did it. Here's the proof."

"Ma'am," said the cop, "this doesn't actually count as proof. There's not even a return address on this envelope that you claim it came in. How do I know that this isn't in your own home?"

"I'm missing my goddamn hand. This is a photo of a hand in a fucking plastic tub in a fridge," I hollered. "You want to check my house for it? C'mon over and look. When you find out that I don't have it, feel free to head next door — where my goddamn hand is!"

"Sorry, ma'am," the cop said.

"You're about to be!" I retorted.

I ran out before he could arrest me for being myself. Instinctively, I raised my left arm. I was going to bird him as well, but in my passion I lacked the insight to raise the right arm. I was just holding up my bandaged stump like I was a champion.

When I got home, the Russells were on their front lawn playing badminton. The lawn signs were taking a rest in a pile to make space for this wholesome family fun. I went into my house and sat down on my bed and cried. There are things you just can't ever replace.

I stood up, shaking off the pain like my dog letting his loose fur fly. I drank a beer on the back patio. Raccoons skittered along the edges of the lawn, picking at the pizza crusts I put back there for them earlier in the day.

Then old man Russell showed up at the side yard, picking up a lost birdie. The family was gathering up the game and packing it. The kids were repositioning their lawn signs. Old man Russell wandered over to my patio.

"Guess I'm sorry enough about the hand. Maybe the devil will give it back once you get to hell."

"Maybe he will," I said.

He snorted. His hands hung slack and bloated at his sides. He'd stuffed the birdie into his pants pocket and the mesh tail was protruding slightly.

"Maybe he won't," I said.

He shook his head.

"Best start repenting. Talk to Jesus."

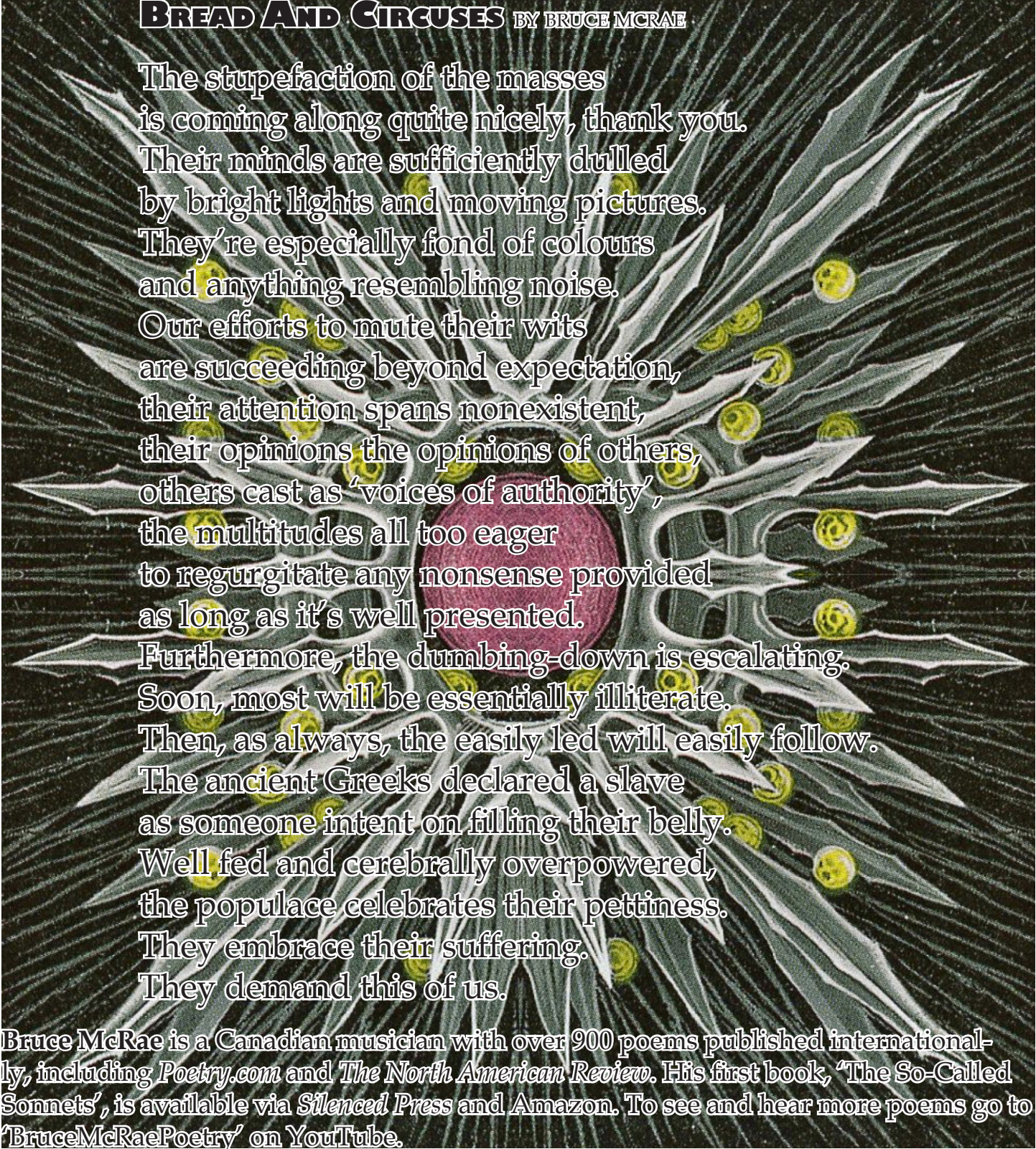
"I don't care what's next," I said, "because I am grateful for what I've had."

Then he took the birdie and went home. All of the Russells followed their patriarch back inside. I drank another beer on my patio, humming and smelling my fresh cut grass. For a moment, it all felt all right. I guess I'm trying to say something about acceptance.

Anyway, that's how it all happened. That's the story of the stump. Why are you looking at me that way? Well, I can tell you this, friend: if you didn't want to hear the truth, it would've been better not to ask the question. Now, raise up that beer I bought you. Cheers. •

Sarah Sorensen has most recently been published in *Cactus Heart*, *Embodied Effigies*, *Your Impossible Voice*, *Gone Lawn*, and *Monkey Bicycle*. She holds an M.A. in English from Central Michigan University and is currently completing a second M.A. in Film Theory. Her work is forthcoming from *Whiskey Island*. Find her at typefingertapdancer.wordpress.com.

BREAD AND CIRCUSES BY BRUCE MCRAE



The stupefaction of the masses
is coming along quite nicely, thank you.
Their minds are sufficiently dulled
by bright lights and moving pictures.
They're especially fond of colours
and anything resembling noise.
Our efforts to mute their wits
are succeeding beyond expectation,
their attention spans nonexistent,
their opinions the opinions of others,
others cast as 'voices of authority',
the multitudes all too eager
to regurgitate any nonsense provided
as long as it's well presented.
Furthermore, the dumbing-down is escalating.
Soon, most will be essentially illiterate.
Then, as always, the easily led will easily follow.
The ancient Greeks declared a slave
as someone intent on filling their belly.
Well fed and cerebrally overpowered,
the populace celebrates their pettiness.
They embrace their suffering.
They demand this of us.

Bruce McRae is a Canadian musician with over 900 poems published internationally, including *Poetry.com* and *The North American Review*. His first book, 'The So-Called Sonnets', is available via *Silenced Press* and Amazon. To see and hear more poems go to 'BruceMcRaePoetry' on YouTube.

LEARNING TO PRAY

Fall bruising kneecaps
it is here you are highest.

Bow your head shade
your crowded eyes

you do not need to see
utter whispers through chapped lips.

Remake yourself baptized
in fire and water identity is an effect

this is light blinding
out of the shadows of invisibility

it is thrust upon you taste
the freedom God has left behind.

Pooled blood drink
blessed are the first.

Release into the sky
out of your dissonant nature

Paige Edenfield is a poet in Georgia. Her poems have appeared in *The Blue Hour*, *Randomly Accessed Poetics*, and elsewhere. She hates cake.

TWO POEMS BY PAIGE EDENFIELD

WHIFFLE BALL ON THE ROOF

Collapse into shower
bumping bone bruising
singing (sort of).

I want to rise out of my asshole
self, become some sweet
specter because

the closest I ever get to
'I love you'
is thanks see you around
pour one more

having an arrow inked into
my arm with initials
a reminder of home.

But one night we're on the roof
hitting beer cans with a Whiffle bat
'Bottom of the ninth,' I say,
meaning sometimes we come so close

The problem is the space between
what we want to feel and what
we've come to expect

from certain situations
sometimes I think that space
is what it means to be an adult.

Streetwalker

BY JORDAN GOSSELIN

Don't look over your shoulder again; you'll look paranoid. Stop looking at your phone; it makes you look vulnerable. Don't stare at your feet; it makes you look weak.

There's another woman sitting alone across the aisle of the train. I consider making eye contact with her to make an unspoken pact that we'll walk through the dark streets together. She's leaning back in her seat and looking through the window with blank eyes, seemingly unaware that the number of men on the train vastly outnumber us.

The train is bumping along in the tunnel, nearing my stop. I don't get up until the train has stopped, the doors have opened, and many passengers have exited. If I stand up too soon before the stop, it'll let nearby passengers know where I'm getting off. It'll give that man across the aisle that keeps looking at me enough time to react. He could stand up and follow me off the train.

Even though it's midnight on a Thursday, lots of people still roam around Park Street Station. As soon as I step outside the station, though, the closed shops and poorly lit side streets offer me no protection. My dad always tells me to call him, day or night, if I'm in trouble. The uneasy child inside me wants to take him up on that offer. But he's an hour away, 45 minutes at best, and he can't protect me from the hooded men walking 10 feet ahead of me.

They don't turn around, but my nervous feet are bringing me closer to them than I would like. The three of us are nearing an intersection. I consider what I'll do if they approach me. I could scream, but there isn't really anyone around to hear me. I could run, but I'd have a lot of ground to cover before I reached a populated area. I could try to fight them off, but my 5'2", 110-pound frame probably wouldn't do much to disable the

two men that each tower about a foot over me.

They reach the intersection about 30 seconds before I do. I breathe a sigh when they turn left instead of continuing on the same route as me. As I continue down the darkening street, I take a quick look over my shoulder to make sure the men haven't started following me. Once I'm certain that they're gone, I glance down at the directions on my phone. Take a left on Hawley Street. Per my phone's instruction, I start turning down Hawley, but I pause when I notice the

"Even though it's midnight on a Thursday, lots of people still roam around Park Street Station. As soon as I step outside the station, though, the closed shops and poorly lit side streets offer me no protection. My dad always tells me to call him, day or night, if I'm in trouble. The uneasy child inside me wants to take him up on that offer. But he's an hour away, 45 minutes at best, and he can't protect me from the hooded men walking 10 feet ahead of me."

idling van at the end of the dimly lit alley. Cursing my phone's directions, which seem to utilize only dark alleys, I turn around and walk toward the subway station I just passed.

There's a man in a trench coat who's also heading toward the subway station. He stops at the top of the stairs, letting me walk past him, and continues down the stairs when I'm about halfway down the flight. If he grabs me from behind, what should I do? Do the Transit Police work this late on weeknights?

Would other passengers help me? I wish I had my keys on me; they'd make a decent weapon. I suddenly regret making fun of my friend for carrying pepper spray and the occasional knife when she walks through the city alone.

With unsteady hands, I add money to my transit card and swipe into the station. I don't see any transit authority. In fact, I barely see any waiting passengers. I've never been in this train station before. I try to avoid the train's Orange Line. It's old and outdated, and the majority of the route travels the areas of Boston that you rarely see on postcards.

The schedule tells me that a train is 10 minutes away, so I sit next to a couple who's smiling and holding a few grocery bags. They're deep in

conversation with one another and don't even look in my direction. I slide a little bit closer to them.

"Finders keepers," I hear a man's voice say behind me.

What does he mean by that? He was standing so close to me when he said that. Could he be talking about me? Is he claiming me for himself? There are so many cameras in this station; would he try to grab me here? Or would he follow me off the train and into the shadows of an empty street?

I turn to look at the man and realize he's talking about a sweatshirt he found on the floor. Breathing a shaky sigh, I look down at my phone and pretend to be busy until the train arrives. Several minutes later, the train pulls into the station, the rush of wind cooling my face. The now-crowded platform packs into the train. Although he was only claiming a sweatshirt, I make sure there are several people between that man and me, just in case he decides he wants to claim me as well.

As the train whips into the tunnel, blacking out the lights from the station, I research better walking directions to the bar. Google Maps should have an "avoid dark alleys, especially the site of past murders and muggings" feature on their search menu.

The train pulls into State Street Station, and the doors are only open for about two-and-a-half seconds before I'm excusing my way past people, edging toward the door. A man grumbles about my quick exit, but Google Maps tells me that I'm less than a mile from my destination. I want to be there already.

I do my best to look comfortable and familiar in this foreign subway station. I try not to let other passengers see that I'm reliant on the directions on my phone. I always shake my head at girls who aren't independent enough to navigate the city without staring at the directions on their phones.

Stepping out onto State Street, I feel a little like Macaulay Culkin walking onto 5th Avenue for the first time. I remind myself that I'm a 21-year-old woman in a city I consider home, not a 10-year-old lost in New York City. I walk the length of State Street before I realize it has turned into Congress Street, which means I'm circling back to Park Street Station instead of nearing the

bar. Hating myself for being the girl who's glued to her phone for directions, I make a U-turn and backtrack, passing the same man smoking on a bench that I saw a few minutes ago.

You are 0.4 miles from your destination, Google Maps tells me as it directs me into an alley with sparse streetlights and three men talking in a tight group at the end of the street. Ignoring the panic rising in my chest, I force myself down the street, deciding that this alley with its shadowy men is the only way to get to the bar. As I approach the men, I pass with enough distance so they couldn't touch me if they tried.

I'm supposedly 400 feet from my destination when Google Maps redirects me down a narrower, darker alley. A drunken couple stumbles by me, laughing to one another without a glance my way. I consider asking them to escort me the rest of the way to the bar. Instead, I grit my teeth, pull my shaking hands into fists, and continue down the alley.

I hear the music before I see the bar. As I approach the well-lit end of the street, I see the bar's strobe lights and people milling around the entrance. I almost let out a sob. My hands unclench and the knot between my shoulders relaxes. I shake my head for being so tense during my commute. Not everyone is out to get you, I remind myself. It's not unsafe for me to travel alone just because I'm a small female. I'm independent and I know the layout of the city. I'm at home in this city — it has never given me a reason to doubt it. I take a breath as I walk down the last 10 feet of the alley. I almost feel silly for the way I let my panic influence me tonight.

Until I think I hear footsteps behind me, and I pick up my pace, and I'm through the bar doors. •

Jordan Gosselin is an emerging writer with a focus on creative nonfiction and fiction. She begins her senior year as an English, Writing, and Literature major at Emmanuel College in the fall. When she is not attending school in Boston, her favorite city, she resides in Manchester, NH.

Noise Dilation

by larry eby

In California, a child ties a wasp to a string
and it orbits

 a fist. In Kansas, a beetle
digs into the Earth's
 crust and gravity lessens
a clock somewhere
quickens — wings

 once in tandem
beat offset against
time. God in leaves
drying against a heated sun,
 the wave of yesterday
 crested against today
a uniform
on a child with a gun slung over
a shoulder feels a weighty
 slow. It's hard to see, but
 there it is: relativity

carrying a stick
the size of the sun.

Larry Eby is the author of *Flight of August* (Trio House Press, 2014), which won the 2013 Louise Bogan Award and, *Machinist in the Snow* (ELJ Publications 2015). He is Editor-in-Chief of *Orange Monkey Publishing* and a founding member of *PoetryIE*, a literary non-profit in Southern California.



NON-CONSENSUAL TRANSFUSION BY ROBERT ZURER

STILL
Logen Cure



STILL HUMAN Logen Cure defines rebellion, dissects our collective desire to revolt, and discusses her forthcoming chapbook

BY ERICA JOY

Examine any piece of art through a certain lens, and you are bound to view it different-

ly: a symphony orchestrated to fit a modern context, a gloomy painting bathed in bright red light, a dancer's relationship between movement and environment. When what you experience as art changes based on how you interact with that art, an entirely new range of ideas, opinions, and emotions is revealed — a variety of viewpoints that may have otherwise gone unexplored.

The pages of Logen Cure's forthcoming chapbook, *Still*, beam with so many basic yet universal themes, but reading her words through the lens of the latest *Dirty Chai* theme offered some unexpected revelations. As I read and reread each of the book's 18 poems, I contemplated human existence in the present state of the world. What does it mean to revolt? How does rebellion manifest? Why are we, as a mortal collective, so drawn toward the very forces we find revolting — those that carry the potential to destroy us?

The driving forces in *Still* stem from Logen's own coming-of-age experiences. Growing up in a conservative town in West Texas, she struggled with her identity for much of her early life.

"I was absolutely trained to accept certain stigmas about being both a woman and queer," Logen says. "I was like... 'I obviously don't fit in, I'm going to have to pretend to be somebody else for a minute' — which I definitely did. And I think a lot of women do pretend to be something else in some way, like dress in a way they don't want to or smile all the time when there's nothing to smile about."

A stanza from *Still*'s opening poem, "Sixth Street," illuminates one of the more prevalent topics in the

work as a whole: How do we discover our true self, and in what ways can we use this discovery to foster healthy relationships with others?

**Then all at once it was clear: all suffering
can be bodily,
anyone who can touch me can make me
not alone.**

“In this case, the speaker’s attempts at authenticity are met with toxic and dangerous results,” Logen explains.

Poems like “Allen” — whose character is much more radical than the speaker — help us visualize the draw to the dangerous element.

**He never stopped at yellow lights.
He taught me how to ash out the window.
He and I had only one thing in common,
but it was the kind of thing that can get two people
pretty damn far: we just couldn’t stand being alone.**

But *why* are we so enthralled by the possibility of danger — the thrill of rebellion?

“I think that’s something we all do to grow up. We set different types of boundaries. And I think we’re drawn to people who do that in more overt or extreme ways than we do,” Logen says, “and that helps us to experience those things — if vicariously, or if by getting yourself involved with people like that. Particularly if you never rebel. If you never try to push those boundaries, you end up being pretty narrow and naïve.”

As we grow, though, we inevitably gain wisdom — as the speaker demonstrates in pieces like “Hometown,” “Residence or Refuge,” and the titular piece, “Still.” We grapple with the understanding that in order to grow into healthy adults, we must learn the art of balance.

“As you grow, you figure out some things about where you come from that are positive and that can be a part of your adult identity in a good way, and you have to figure out the things that do just straight-up hold you back — the ideas you were given that were not ultimately kind and loving toward yourself or others,” says Logen. “I chose *Still* as the title for the book because the collection is concerned with what persists even as we change — our memories, our stories, the ways we are shaped by our origins.”

And how is that tied to rebellion?

“When you rebel, it’s not because you’re unattached to where you come from,” she continues. “I think we’re all tremendously formed by whatever it is we feel the need to rebel against.”

Logen offers these lines from “Hometown” that allude to her Texan heritage:

**I’ve decided I’m the type of person
who wears cowboy boots proudly, and yes,
my decisions have been heartbreaking,**

"That's something the speaker...can be proud of," she says. "Not everything about where you come from has to be let go."

Although everyone deals with these same issues—self-discovery, balance, coming-of-age rebellion—the ways in which we deal are often influenced by factors like family, gender, and location. Some of us internalize our struggles; others are more expressive. For Logen, growing up in the South meant that she had to confront a particular set of expectations.

"There's a lot of pressure to be a certain kind of person and a certain kind of woman, and I'm not a lot of those things. None of us are really all of those things. For a long time, I just didn't really have a lot of self-worth. I didn't require other people to really care about me. So, you can imagine what a terrible mess that eventually becomes—if your standards in relationships are really low, if you don't require any of your friends or romantic partners to be nice to you," she says. "I had just accepted all these negative conceptions about myself, my identity—to the point where I let people treat me like I'm not a person. And as soon as I really started to unpack that for myself, everything changed. I lost a lot of friends. A lot of relationships I had started to significantly change because my standards for myself got a lot higher."

"I actually required people to be nice all the time!" she adds, laughing. "I think we're pretty conditioned to accept a lot of crappy treatment from people—especially as women. You know, we're told that our bodies are not our own, and that consent is not a thing, and that people can do whatever they want. And if you let people do whatever they want, they're going to do whatever they want."

She notes that once she started to address her internalized issues and phobias, she realized she had a lot of power to create boundaries and expectations—and that helped her navigate through the rebellion years and into a healthy adult.

"It's tremendously challenging to establish and maintain positive relationships, romantic or otherwise. It takes a level of maturity that people don't reach until they've survived all those formative experiences. Letting go of influences that hold you back requires being honest with yourself and others and valuing your own well-being enough to make hard choices," she says. "It's hard to be that honest, especially for women—it's difficult to feel like your feelings and opinions are valid enough, and to not say you're sorry about it."

As an academic advisor, Logen talks to college students every day—and she says she's had to tell many of her female students not to say "I'm sorry" in circumstances that don't require an apology:

"They'll start to say, 'I'm sorry, but I have another question,' and it's like, 'No, this is my job! You don't have to be sorry for asking me a question.' And that's not something that male students do at all."

During our conversation, I suddenly start to wonder how many times I say "I'm sorry" on any given day (for things I'm not really sorry about), and also how many times I have said to Logen, "Oh, I'm

"And I think, too, that the apology is a real and serious and important thing that you should be able to do when you need to, when you truly need to apologize to somebody. Because that's also really difficult—to own up to whatever you've done," she says. "When you are *trained to be sorry for having a question, or voicing an opinion*, then yeah, it's really hard to be honest enough about your feelings to have positive relationships."

sorry, but I have another question.”

Logen admits that she apologizes unnecessarily, too, like when someone runs in to her in public and she automatically lets out an “I’m sorry.”

“And I think, too, that the apology is a real and serious and important thing that you should be able to do when you need to, when you truly need to apologize to somebody. Because that’s also really difficult—to own up to whatever you’ve done,” she says. “When you are *trained to be sorry for having a question, or voicing an opinion*, then yeah, it’s really hard to be honest enough about your feelings to have positive relationships.”

Still concludes with a surprising handful of poems that leave the reader feeling hopeful—almost at peace with life’s struggles. Among them? One of my favorite lines from “This is not my first grey hair,” a poem that challenges an idea I’ve been thinking about a lot lately: that as much as I enjoy being alone, we are not actually designed to be alone forever. We are meant to find another who complements us so that instead of rebelling against age, we can embrace it.

**Though I admit I liked that bathroom mirror,
simply because we could stand in front of it together,
and I found it easier to look at myself
when I could see you, too.**

“While the struggle is real and messy and inevitable, all those risky decisions can lead to a better life,” Logen says, and I get the feeling this resonates with her personally as well as with the speaker of *Still*. “Being the type of person that is open to different types of experiences, even if they are risky, is just useful for you in a human sense. If you don’t risk anything, you don’t gain anything.”

In addition to an exploration of coming-of-age rebellion, *Still* offers some very human insight on how we are shaped by the relationships and experiences of our younger years. It’s as much about growing up as it is about getting old, from hanging on to letting go, what exists between the fervor of attraction and the silence of standing still—and how to rebuild ourselves with what is left when things fall apart. •

Still is forthcoming from *Finishing Line Press* and will be officially released on September 11, 2015. Visit finishinglinepress.com to learn more, and spread the word on social media with the tag #StillLogenCure.

UNPLUCK ME

BY DOMINIQUE SALAS

This won't hurt
a wit, they say. So
my skin-shade is shaved
from me to whip it
onto the floor so they can
giggle at the GLOMP-GLOMP
their boots make over it
again & again. My margins were not
forgotten: they take the fleshy
fringes from my mouth &
color them appropriate. They con-
struct something I cannot: My lips
gleam off an aria white, the tint
they've chosen. No stop

to the gallop of design:
they made sure
my eyes still rung out
an affected ding-ding—
a pitch that drives even
tired-throat'd canaries sing
along. The bank

of the day, my toes

hang themselves

off. They make my body mean to me

music specific. It really is beautiful
to the ears. From their lips
they still gale into the flexure
of my waist; and, while I wait
for them to tag the sound
unaware & reverberating from me,
I pretend to

hear what I want: the dizzy calamity chattering from my collar
bone; from the soles
of my feet, a gentle trill; the yell
swilled out of my swamp'd
aortas, stomping steady

Dominique Salas is an MFA candidate and instructor at New Mexico State University. A desert dweller, she was born & raised in El Paso, Texas. She has either recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Cutbank's* 'All Accounts and Mixture' feature, *riverSedge*, and *Dead Flowers: A Rag* | *Bohemian Pupil Press*.

IMAGE: WHAT SUMMER PROMISES BY BILL WOLAK

It takes just three
credit card purchases
to uniquely identify you
with 90% accuracy.

You've become collectible:
your Metrocard is linked to
your debit card linked to
your checking account, which
autopays the bill for
your cellphone, which
is always communicating,
even when you're not,
through global positioning
systems.

You have nothing to hide, you say.
You lead a lawful, boring life.
If anyone is interested
in that roman banal, they can read it.
They can fondle your sex
in the subway at rush hour, too.

They have so many hands,
they can do it with impunity.
Ever woman knows that.

No. Your life is a grape,
ripened on a vine in sunshine
on your terrace.

You should pluck it,
place it in your mouth, roll it
around with your tongue
and feel its shape,
bite into it, savor
its pliant flesh, taste
its juice, dribble it
down the front
of you, even
obscenely,
if you like,

without the lurid eye
of anyone's governance
,masturbating at the keyhole.

Veterans' Parade

BY BRAD GARBER

When you see a person turned
to chunks of flesh
before your eyes before you fire
indiscriminately into the forest,

When you see a headless child
and hold the rest of the body
in your arms hoping attachment,

When you hang from the ceiling
parts broken and missing
the passion of destruction
flowing across your naked body,

When the fetus of a dead mother
writhes in the dirt hands crushed
stream of blood pumping its last
from the cord of no more life,

When your child sent into this
returns on a cargo transport plane
lined like a cord of drying wood
with others sent to sacrifice,

When all of this is mere defeat
another bad decision off the field
there is no room for forgiveness
and no room large enough
to store the horror of it all.

Brad Garber writes, paints, draws, photographs, hunts for mushrooms and snakes, and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. He has published poetry in various journals and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2013.

Don Hogle is a poet, blogger and brand and communications strategist living in Manhattan. *Mud Season Review*, *Minetta Review*, *Blast Furnace*, *Shooter*, *DoveTales*, *Outrider Review* and *Clapboard House* are among the journals that have recently published his poetry.

THINGS USED TO MATTER

BY JASON HALF-PIL-
LOW

I edited *Cock* – A Marxist Bi-Weekly back when editing a Marxist bi-weekly still meant something. Seeing the title of the bi-weekly on the page before me now makes me wonder about the time we were living through, and what we were doing.

It was a heady time, but the revolution we once thought inevitable seemed to be veering into a kind of fashionable kitsch. Remnants of the Black Panther movement still stood armed to the teeth every now and then on the Capitol steps in Sacramento, but dumb blond girls, who a mere three years earlier had just been surfing, were now overly preponderant in their coterie and monopolized most of the Panthers' attention at the parties afterwards. I questioned their commitment. I wore a beret myself and black gloves too, but my dad wouldn't let me walk around with his hunting rifle and called me insane for even suggesting it.

We all knew something had to be done to wake people from their stupor. Drugs weren't the

answer, but a lot of people seemed to think they were. Pornographic magazines were going mainstream right along with the revolution, but no one had put them both together, so we came up with *Cock*, which is what we all called the magazine for short. The full title was way too unwieldy a phrase to try using in the kinds of sectarian disputes that we had in our endless editorial meetings prior to finalizing our resolve to move



forward with our daring launch. We thought we could grab people's attention with Cock, that they would read it at first for sexual reasons, but the Marxist subtexts would stir in them a certain nostalgia that would bring them back to the Revolution they were abandoning left and right.

One staff member brought up the troubling point that having such a flagrantly penile title might raise suspicions that we were all gay and proposed calling the magazine Tits instead. None of us had girlfriends and there was a kind of latent tension within the staff that the magazine was supposed to both lead to revolution and get us girls. No one wanted to bring it up, but calling the thing Cock came to be seen as an impediment to the latter objective. Lurking even further below the surface was the unspoken belief that if any among us ever got a girl, we would abandon the revolution post haste.

In the end, we stuck with Cock — after I delivered a stirring oration about second-guessing being a sign that we lacked revolutionary fervor. Also, a group of Cal State Fullerton radicals already published a daily called Bazongas, and the last thing we wanted to do was look derivative. After ten straight hours of shouting, we agreed that no one would trust the construction of a whole new political, social, and economic order in the hands of a group who copied so readily its most important ideas from their rivals. Who could say that once in power we wouldn't copy the capitalists?

So Cock it was. We did, however, include the word "heterosexual" below our bylines. Unfortunately for one staff member, an errant streak of Wite Out covered the word in his byline, which led to a full day of paranoid speculation that we had been sabotaged by the FBI. In reality, it was just sloppy typing. The ugly truth is that for all the braless fervor of the era, it was still a deeply sexist time, and we were not immune. None of us really knew how to type. We grew up thinking that work was fit for a woman. Applying Wite Out required the same fine motor skills as applying nail polish, so no one wanted to appear too proficient doing that for fear of being thought less than fully heterosexual. In the end, we coped with all of our fears by overdoing our secretarial

incompetence.

Our inaugural issue got off to a less than perfect start. The first problem consisted of getting enough submissions. We got none, and the staff had to write all of our initial articles. They really dropped the ball and turned in last minute stuff that was totally incoherent. The pornography was gratuitous, and so was the Marxism.

Exemplary of the kind of garbage I had to slog through was a so-called story consisting of alternating paragraphs: one set described the progression of a blow job, which the main character couldn't see over the chick's huge Afro; the other, an alleged stream of consciousness narrated by the chick, in which she came upon the realization during the blow job that what was going on in Africa was an imperfect expression of the global proletarian revolution. Her tone was didactic and contrived; his narration was simply idiotic, neologisms expressing unbounded pleasure mixed with every conceivable synonym for the word "penis." It was obviously an autobiographical fantasy, and the idea that a Black Power chick twice as tall as him would ever consider sucking his dick strained every fiber of credulity I could muster as an editor. He stood over me while I read it and watched me go through a pantomime of headshaking grimaces and accused me of bias because I knew he was a virgin and had long thought his apologetics for the Mau Mau uprising a perverse contortion of dialectics.

Another story was just a series of Hemingway-inspired sentences by a guy that kind of looked like him and argued Hemingway's literature was proletarian because he was in the Spanish Civil War. "I fucked her, hard," the story read. "She took my dick, deep. She said it felt good and I agreed. Other things were moaned but I don't remember what they were. Her tits were big, like my cock, which was different than her tits, but big. She said it was to her liking. I moaned, but not loudly because it was day." The story went on like that for three pages until he "orgasmed" in the first sentence of the fourth — at that point I looked up from reading and shouted to the writer across the room that his diction was incongruous and said the character needed to "come," not "orgasm" —

he, too, accused me of censorship; the man said something like “ahhhhhh!!!!!!” and she said nothing, and then they got dressed and joined a topless anti-War march that just happened to be passing his ghetto apartment.

Their mere presence was apparently just the spark the “hundreds of thousands of marchers” had long been yearning for to finalize their resolve, and within days the tide of the movement somehow swelled so much that America not only pulled out of Vietnam, but, by the time the story ended halfway down the same page the narrator “orgasmed” on, there was already a US Embassy in Ho Chi Minh City, the Hammer and Sickle had taken the place of the fifty stars on the American flag, and a massive interracial, nude group wedding, in which all vowed to support the revolution in sickness and in health, took place on some giant grassy hill in San Francisco, and in the reception afterwards, “it was said that it wasn’t just wedding bells that were clanging.” By the third paragraph, both Russia and the US had totally disarmed, and hordes of white working-class men from “Philadelphia and other cities” were streaming into newly “disembargoed” Cuba and taking mulatto wives. I was called bourgeois for asking that he choose a real word instead of “disembargoed.” He accused me of revisionism when, seconds later, I crossed out “mulatto” with a black felt pen and wrote “rural proletariat” in orange crayon above it.

The story ended with these sentences: “The world had changed so quickly. She wanted to fuck again. I told her I’d come over. She said, ‘Can’t we fuck at your place?’ I said my friends were there, mimeographing things. ‘Which friends? Will they really mind?’ she asked. She ran her fingertip lightly on the top curve of her young breast—the left one. She was right-handed. I said I wanted to fuck alone and she agreed. That’s what I did. She came over later and asked me to marry her and said we should seal our vows with Chinese cock rings. ‘Maoist ones,’ she said. I asked her how she would wear one. She said she hadn’t thought of it. ‘I guess you’ll just have to wear two,’ she said. ‘Now be a dear and tell me if you like my hair up this way or do you prefer it down?’ ‘I’m bored,’ I said.”

He called the story “My Balls Toll For Thee.” He promised a sequel, and I made no comment.

Time was short, so we went with what we had, but I was furious with what they all came up with. I was especially mad with all their talk that the lack of structure in a story reflected the spirit of revolutionary spontaneity of the writer and was essential to our project of instilling it in our readers. Also, there was nothing at all sub-textual about their Marxism. I reminded them that people didn’t pick up free pornography to be lectured so crassly about the revolution. Our original intent had been to more subtly slip the ideology between the lines: Porn Now, Revolution Tomorrow! That had been our slogan, our mission, but they all lost sight of it, apparently, the second they sat down at their typewriters.

We laid the issue out on a table in a high-traffic area of the Berkeley campus to generate interest. The front cover featured some sketch art of a guy without a face being ridden by a chick without a face. The style was pretty much: police murder scene chalk outline. Her tits were big and very perky but she had no nipples. The word “Cock” blasted across the top, “A Marxist Bi-Weekly” written in less-obtrusive print on the bottom.

People don’t realize that Berkeley was actually a lot like any other college campus—most students were there to get degrees so they could get a job, and the campus was actually dominated by the sororities and fraternities. We spent the whole day in the Bay area October sun with sorority girls giggling at us as they passed and lots and lots of frat boys stopping by pretending to wonder about the revolution but really there just to flick us shit. One group of frat boys came back an hour after passing and flicking us a little shit, and they were drunk, some more than others. They had clearly planned the whole thing. One drunk guy with the school colors painted on his face raised a middle finger as he approached us, appropriating an iconic image of the early days of the campus uprising. He grabbed an inaugural issue from the table and turned with it and pulled down his pants. Then he stood there, tearing each and every of the five pages out and wiping his ass

crack with them.

"Ahhh..." He said. "Yeah..."

All four of us sat aghast but expressionless at the table. The remaining stacks of inaugural issues flapped steadily in the breeze, held down with big, round stones that I realized made it look like we were trying to censor the image of the couple humping. We were not Stalinists, I said, and stood up and moved the stones so you could see her tits.

The frat boys marched off, each of them turning and flipping us off as they mounted the rolling little hill that went back to frat row. There was not one point during the whole period of their departure when we were not being flipped off by at least one of them. They called us fags, which they would have known was not true if they had bothered to actually read the magazine instead of literally wiping their ass with it.

This was such a setback that the whole editorial board, save myself, resigned. I was left writing all of the articles, doing the dittoing and stapling, and begging art students to draw all of the sex pictures for free. The revolutionary images I cut from the stacks of Newsweek and Life magazines — such stuff I found at the main library. I took the magazines to the bathroom and ripped out the pages I needed in a stall, pretending I was taking a shit. The art students who I got high with the understanding that they would draw the pictures bailed. I told them the drawings would be anonymous but they insisted their professors would recognize their style. I had to go to some seedy corner store that got robbed a lot and buy some magazines and cut out the raunchy pictures and Elmer's-Glue the faces of revolutionaries on all the guys in the pictures. I was so tired the night before the next issue was due out that I used way too much Elmer's Glue, so the pictures were all crinkly and bubbled up. It was a lot of work, and I had to go to a place that had a copy machine, a Xerox, and make copies of the sex pictures and then staple them as a supplement to the already stapled piles of dittoed stories, nonfiction pieces, and my column.

It was pure shit and every ounce of revolution-

ary fervor I had just went away. Before the year's end, the whole revolution was in total tatters. Former comrades were taking acid and writing beat poetry, going to graduate school and writing their masters' theses on things that dampened revolutionary fervor as surely as saltpeter was once thought to kill libido among army recruits. I bumped into one and he asked me how it was going, if I had gotten laid yet, and other questions touching on petite bourgeois concerns. I told him that Angela Davis had recently been feted in East Germany, and said I was writing an article exposing how the bourgeois press was careful to make her afro look larger than it actually was in order to make socialism look like a doctrine fit only for circus clowns. I asked him what he was doing and he told me he was hard at work on his thesis on "the regional schisms that flowed from the build up to the War of 1812."

"Sounds bourgeois," I mumbled, and he laughed and said, "You think that's bourgeois..." and told me that the other former Cock members had all taken middle management jobs and moved into ranch houses all in the same area around Davis and started drinking a lot of beer and watching American football. I was so dispirited and disillusioned that I fell into near hopeless despair and wandered Berkeley with tattered copies of what was left of my unclaimed bundles of Cock flapping in the wind.

I mulled over their betrayal and decided that an example needed to be made of them. The ugly truth is, I wanted to strip them of their bourgeois accouterments; the even uglier truth was, I fantasized about showing up at their doorsteps as they were being dragged into SWAT team vans and humping their wives, and causing them to orgasm so intensely that they would slavishly dedicate themselves to whatever bizarre cultish ideology I proffered along with the promise of more of my rigid organ. Some part of me hoped they would write their turncoat husbands in jail and regale them with vignettes of my prowess and use the word "juicy" to describe my penis.

The first step was to rat them all out. I went to an FBI office and offered to spy on my ex-friends. I told the FBI guy that all of them believed violence

was not only acceptable, but an essential purging element required to rid society of its myriad bourgeois illusions; they believed it refined revolutionary resolve, and it was only a matter of time before at least one of them blew something up. I mentioned a bank they all hated. He was unmoved. I told him he had cause to take their derangement seriously, as he was, in their minds, an important cog in the security apparatus keeping the whole edifice of oppression upright. He found something amusing in my word choices and giggled.

He went back to inspecting a draft of a Most Wanted poster and turned it to me and asked if I thought the guy on it had kept his mustache. I threw down the first edition of *Cock*, opened to the masthead on page two, and said all the names he saw before him were names of men who had read Frantz Fanon; the guy unwrapped and started eating his sandwich and ignored the masthead and raised his eyebrows and nodded approvingly at a pair of tits in one of the pictures.

I grew flustered, and, in a gesture to try to make me feel better, he sat up and wiped some mayonnaise off the corner of his mouth and picked up a pencil and asked me as he started writing on the paper deli bag,

“So you say the guy we need to check out is named Franz Faggin?”

“He’s not a Hobbit!” I yelled.

dying at 80mph BY G.S. ALI

when i drive i think about crashing about how easy it would be to just barrel over that rail and into the mess of trees below but then i start freaking out because why would i think about that, who even thinks about that shit? i do. i think about that shit. i think about it all the time when i’m driving when its nighttime and all there is between me and that 18-wheeler coming right at me with its blinders on is a double strip of crusty yellow paint, just turn the steering wheel a few degrees to the left and close my eyes and nope nope nope – i think it’s too easy to die. god must be testing me because i think i think more about how easy it is to die than how hard it is to live and damn it’s hard to live when life is open and there’s a million damn things to do with it and I can’t even do one and that 80mph death-box passes by so close my bones start tapping rhythms against my skin.

G. S. Ali graduated with a B.A. in English/Creative Writing from the University of Southern California. She is now the managing acquiring editor for religion titles at an academic press and a freelance book reviewer for *Foreword Reviews* and *Underground Book Reviews*.

I burst out of my chair, and, for a second, I felt the same exhilaration I experienced when, as a sophomore the previous year, I had stormed out of the editorial collective’s office of *The Monthly Insurgent*, angered over a run-on sentence.

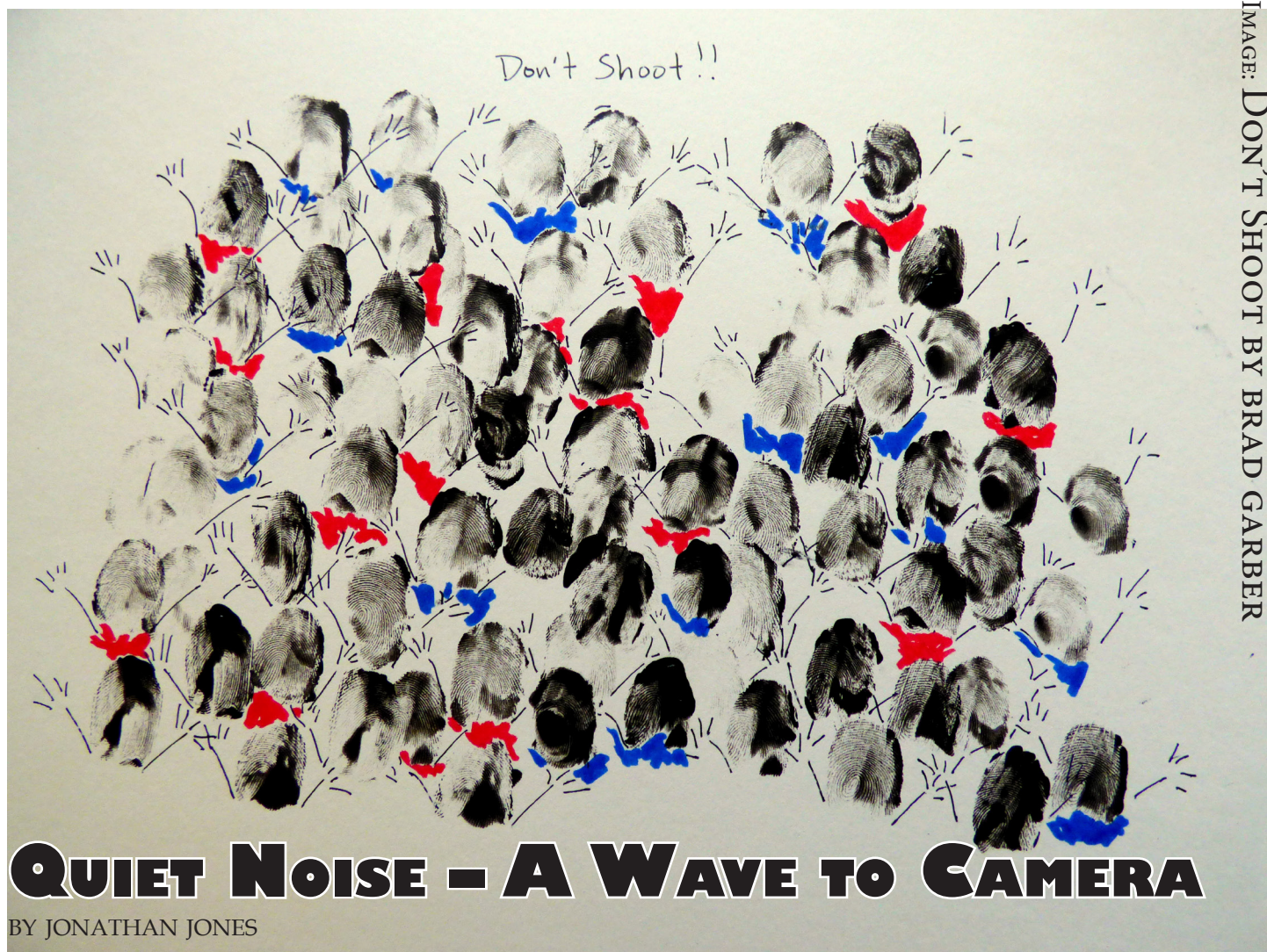
A lot of people didn’t know what a Hobbit was back then, so I was sure the agent felt unread and stupid. I now realize that not only did he not mind being unread, but, in that regard, he was representative of a large swath of America. He was as unfazed by his cultural ignorance as he was by his polyester short-sleeved button-up shirt and the huge ovals of sweat in his pits. I hovered, staring, and realized all was lost. I turned to leave, feeling my ankles almost give with each step.

The FBI door didn’t open easily and I knew that struggling with it was the last burst of energy I would give to the movement. When I finally got it open, I turned to look at the FBI guy; he just set his pencil down and said “OK” and started in on his sandwich again.

Even the enemy didn’t care anymore.

It was all over. •

Jason Half-Pillow’s writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Hobo Pancakes*, *Marco Polo Arts Mag*, *The Gadfly Online*, *The Satirist*, *Driftwood Press*, *The Iowa Review*, and elsewhere. He currently resides in Italy.



Nearly every day I see someone or other taking a picture. I expect to hear a click, but I don't. Two hundred years from now, say, it will all resurface—the birth of a brand new communications technology in a world where photography has long since become obsolete. Only they won't call it "photography" anymore, or "documentary" or "video." For now, it's too life-sized with faces that do not fit the frame. Everyone's doing the same thing, saying the same thing at the same time. So what are you trying to say, I ask myself, when the visual image is so paramount and yet, at the same time, strangely nondescript? How many could honestly say that they knew what it was when the time comes to remember?

"We've come a long, long way together/Through the hard times and the good/I have to celebrate you baby/I have to praise you like I should."

Directed by Spike Jonze and shot candidly in "guerrilla style" outside of a cinema theatre in Westwood, California, Fatboy Slim's "Praise You" loops into the current millennia with all of the sophistication of a handheld camera. The lyrics to the song, suggesting a joyful sense of having overcome the difficulties in a relationship, offer an odd, yet not entirely inappropriate, commentary to the final days of 1999. The queue of unwitting cinemagoers who witness the fictional Torrance Community Dance Group perform stand in a line which is continuing to move them along and, yet, at the same time, mesmerizing them with the spectacle of a strangely synchronized dance they are taking no part in. It is a dance, which breaks into the cinema queue occupying a physical space that cannot be ignored while at the same almost inviting people to do their best to ignore it. For someone watch-

ing the video fifteen years later, the penultimate year of the 20th century could hardly be better captured than in this dichotomy of a compulsion to watch and stand still, while at the same time being insidiously drawn toward another screen. The quiet dynamic between audience and participant, and the radical inversion of those roles which the video implies suggests not only a fantastic subversion of the MTV persona of popular culture, but also the potent latency of the way those final days of the 20th century combine both tension and acceleration. The fact that it was shot for reputedly less than a thousand dollars and yet went on to win the MTV video award the following year is its own statement of intent.

The overwhelming atmosphere of the video is one of innocent mischief and mayhem as Jonze and his dance troupe perform their amateur choreographed routine, which is itself a surreal mashup of ballet, breakdance, and freestyle. The brio combination of the life-affirming, lyrical, and bizarre converge in the crescendo of the gospel-influenced piano and vocal sample, as Jonze at one point imitates launching each one of his fellow dancers into the air. Jonze himself as the leader of the group constantly breaks off into a series of spontaneous moves that become increasingly extrovert as the video goes on. It is as though Jonze is wreaking havoc with the beauty of his own creation, striving to fight against the parameters of what the dance should be. There are moments when he appears to physically bounce back off the bemused spectators, yet never manages to entirely come into any real contact with them. There is only one moment in the video where the cinema manager himself breaks into their act to turn off the music, prompting Jonze to jump onto him and wrap his arms and legs pincer-like around the largely good-natured, and ultimately ineffective, censor. It's a convincing illusion, where one kind of audience is rendered innocent and almost as childlike in their reactions as the performers themselves. Only none of it is real.

"Both videos go beyond ironic commentary, each one illustrating the absurdity and ineffectuality of the modern gaze liberated and trapped by the dark screen of technology."

"All he did was break up a fight. And this is what happens for breaking up a fight. This shit is crazy."

With the video of Eric Garner, an unarmed black man being choked to death in July 2014 by NY police officer Daniel Pantaleo, a "guerrilla style" of filming is again evident; only here, the handheld camera is replaced by a smartphone as a smaller crowd stares at the outrage taking place in front of them. Five police officers surround Garner, while Pantaleo with an illegal choke hold restrains his victim on the ground who in his death throes repeatedly cries out, "I can't breathe. I can't breathe." The same cinema audience who unknowingly watched and took part in the video of "Praise You" fifteen years earlier now views this crime over the internet and on mobile devices, where the moral as much as physical space that cannot be ignored is occupied by an innocent black man being publically executed by police. Just as Jonze's "Praise You" celebrates the breakdown of boundaries between the forces of authority and nonconformity, the video of Eric Garner's murder represents a grotesque moral inversion of American society's latent awareness of its own role as "audience," where the boundaries between legality and illegality have completely broken down. Both videos go beyond ironic commentary, each one illustrating the absurdity and ineffectuality of the modern gaze liberated and trapped by the dark screen of technology. As Garner's dead body is finally being stretchered to an ambulance, Pantaleo directly waves at the camera as though to draw applause.

Writing for *The Atlantic*, Robinson Meyer observes, "If the cellphone camera inspires wonder and gratitude—as it does for me—it's because it has helped documentation supplant testimony. It has turned a paradigm dependent on trust, which can be confounded by racism and institutional authority, into one founded on synthesis and witness." Taking Meyer's point, there would certainly appear to be a new political and social awareness of the radical potential of social media to take the form of civil resistance now embedded in the racial fabric and cultural debate of contemporary America.

Yet the act of bearing witness itself serves to highlight an unsettling distance between the nature of individual conscience and a more troubling social indifference to what the camera reveals. Is it “conscience” or “audience” that is being addressed when a man like Pantaleo plays up to the same camera, which has literally just identified him as killing a man in cold blood? What cannot be denied is the clear fact that this man is waving to *someone*. To ignore the implications of that gesture is to disregard the words of Henry Thoreau as he observes in “Resistance to Civil Government”:

Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice . . . The mass of men serve the State thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, &c. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones, and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well.”

“Fear of being arrested or being physically mistreated with the same kind of savage contempt by men apparently incapable of human empathy, and therefore, common sense, would appear the obvious mitigation. Few people would judge those who were present for not attempting to intervene as Pantaleo’s wave continues to hold its captive audience with the implicit accusation of death’s own gesture to camera. As though there was nothing less sinister in the thought that it is simply a lack of courage that dictates a decision. As though death were anticipating its own reaction in playback.”

Since Eric Garner was killed a year ago, the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in November 2014, and more recently the death of Freddie Gray due to spinal injuries while in police custody in Baltimore in April 2015, have triggered well-documented protests and riots, which remain at the forefront of mainstream and social media coverage. Although no footage exists of Brown being shot by Officer Darren Wilson, video of Gray being arrested clearly indicates excessive force being applied, as he is dragged away by police. Here, there is no line to conveniently edge the world forward as though the madness just seen on the street was no more than an accidental distraction to watch and acquiesce. While Spike Jonze’s video for “Praise You” offers a means of social expression, and even empowerment through the immediate proximity of the audience and performance, both the video of Freddie Gray’s arrest and Eric Garner’s death highlight a very different dance as the police close ranks as though to dispel any moral imperative to challenge what is happening. Fear of being arrested or being physically mistreated with the same kind of savage contempt by men apparently incapable of human empathy, and therefore, common sense, would appear the obvious mitigation. Few people would judge those who were present for not attempting to intervene as Pantaleo’s wave continues to hold its captive audience with the implicit accusation of death’s own gesture to camera. As though there was nothing less sinister in the thought that it is simply a lack of courage that dictates a decision. As though death were anticipating its own reaction in playback. •

Jonathan Jones is a forty-year-old freelance writer currently living and working in Rome. His main influences are Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, Saki and Yann Martel. In 1999 he qualified with his M.A. in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University College and in 2004 with an MRes in Humanities from Keele University. He now teaches writing composition at John Cabot University in Rome.

SCRAP ATLANTIC: A FOUND POEM*

BY SPREE MACDONALD

language is the only homeland
the contagious vernacular
voice borne up by what ailed it
our growing heavy furry tongues

it is the language in me that must change
until all light in the world has the oneness of the ocean

darkness doesn't refract it twists you
do you know how it feels to have your tongue
shaped from a dead man's name?

like a scar that runs through you
and comes out your face
the slum must be inside you
an invisible light is shining right through you
the flame is solitary and splendid in its upright judgment
of heat the years of green sleeping in the volcano
as if to say it was once water
the water of sunlight

I have a mind to confuse things
I died alone without the benefit of fire
there is more smoke in the world than ever before
I choose must choose my father's words

IMAGE: UNTITLED BY ANA PRUNDARU

Spree MacDonald lives in New Orleans and is the Chair of the Humanities Department at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. His poetry has been published throughout the world in journals such as *New Coin*, *Transition Magazine* and *Berkeley Poetry Review*.

#99 Bus Women

BY THEA SWANSON

In Seattle, large women in gray fabric board the #99 bus and stand. Cloth surrounds their heads and necks. Cloth hangs from their waists and lands on top of their black shoes. The #99 bus women grab metal poles. Their stomachs protrude into faces of men who wear shorts and sit with open knees. The women look straight ahead and do not blink. They do not move. They could stand for hours. For years.

At Bell Street, the women reach above the uncombed heads of the men and pull the string. The women's sleeves brush the noses of the men. The men's nostrils twitch and their eyes water. Thin lines of blood trickle from the men's noses, but the women do not see. They are already on the sidewalk, gazes down.

In a row, the #99 bus women walk. Past Dan's Belltown Grocery, and they are there. They hold the door open for the one, and the other, and the other. It is midday. Inside the entranceway, they bend down and tuck their bodies next to the walls. They place their foreheads to the floor, their stomachs on their thighs. They tell their god that he is the best. They ask forgiveness for all they've done wrong.

Hey, ladies. You almost ready?

The #99 bus women rise. Yes, they say. We are.

In the changing room, the #99 bus women unravel their layers. They remove bags they have hidden in front of their bodies like sleeping newborns. They take off their clothes until they are naked. They stretch their arms up and gather their long hair into high ponytails with raspberry fasteners. From their bags, they pull pink sports bras and tank tops. They pull pink workout shorts striped with black. Their sneakers are neon green.

When they tie them tight, their husbands claw at pains in their chests on the other side of town. The #99 bus women swoon as air tickles the hair on their bare arms, as they adjust the straps of their tanks, the rims of their shorts.

The #99 bus women leave the changing room and step onto the springy dance floor. They stand in the front row, right behind the Zumba instructor, right in front of a row of men. The #99 bus women lift their chins and spread their legs. They grab their waists. The music begins.

Instructor Karin jumps in front with a glowing smile. The women beam. Karin marches to Baile Privado. The people follow her command. Karin points an arm to the left, and the people go left. Karin pumps her forearms and pelvis hard to the rhythm, and the room pumps in rhythm. It is a dance and a march and a party.

The #99 bus women are fervent in their dance. Their arms swing wide and bare and side-to-side. Their eyes close, and they rise from the floor. They rise to the ceiling. The other dancers gaze upwards in admiration and wonder.

On the other side of town, the #99 bus women's husbands burp and belch. They throw up their food. They throw up their blood. They throw up their semen. •

Thea Swanson holds an MFA in Writing from Pacific University in Oregon. Thea's stories can be found in numerous journals, most recently in *Dark Matter*, *The Sonder Review* and forthcoming in *Black Denim Lit*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Toad Suck Review* and *Gone Lawn*. Thea has taught English from middle-school through college, but she can't afford to teach anymore, so she does other things.

VOICES OF DISSENT

BY JASON ARMENT

Iowa, winter of 2011: With the caucus a few months away, my state of corn fields, hog lots, and small factory towns became politically charged.

Rick Perry walked across my computer screen, self-assured. He spoke of gays openly serving in the military in a derogatory manner. The first floor of the rickety old house I rented as an apartment filled with rapid clicks as I tried desperately to skip the ad. I couldn't. The YouTube ad wouldn't disappear. I became an unwilling audience to hate speech as I watched the ad replay over the course of several weeks. I wondered what gave Rick Perry the right to malign LGBT members of the military, especially since he never served. In the Marine Corps, I'd been too busy as a machine gunner in a combat zone to worry about the sexual desires of my brothers in arms.

I sat on my front porch smoking a cigarette and drinking coffee. The weather was cold, but not cold enough to keep me cooped up inside. Another viewing of the ad had forced me to take an adult time-out. That's when my phone rang.

The voice on the other line belonged to my friend Andrew, a recent university graduate turned cab driver.

"What are you up to?" I said.

"Did you know that Rick Perry will be coming to a coffee shop on Main Street in a few weeks?" Andrew asked.

"We should do something," I said, still charged from my latest YouTube viewing.

After saying goodbye, I stood on my porch for a while and watched leaves dance in the lawn, curious when winter's teeth would sink into fall's jugular. One last, long drag of my cigarette before I ground it out under the sole of my boot. Students walked by, headed toward Iowa State University's campus just a few blocks to the north, past rundown bars and restaurants. I watched the young and beautiful who didn't care that a contender for the Republican presidential nomination freely espoused the persecution of anyone engaging in behavior outside of heterosexuality. I wondered how many of them agreed with his views. I walked back into my apartment, making certain to lock the door behind me.

I needed to look up where Rick Perry would speak. An internet search indicated he'd be coming to a small coffee shop, as Andrew had mentioned. I called and was told Perry would be giving a short speech; whether or not questions would be taken at the end was a mystery. The small rally fell on a Sunday morning, which meant the barstool activists would be too hungover to attend. I sent messages to a dozen people politically minded enough to care. Of those people, only one — Chris — ever got back to me. Chris called and said he wanted to talk more in person over drinks.

The Friday before the rally, I met with Chris and two other friends at Welch Ave Station, a staple of the local university's bar culture. Being an Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran made me older and more disillusioned than the college kids, most of whom still held their parent's ideas as their own, so all my friends were senior to me in age. Chris was in his late twenties, a staunch socialist pursuing a teaching license. Our mutual friends, Bart and Luke, sat with us around a pitcher of suds, sulking about the recent influx of politically motivated college stupidity around campus.

"Did I ever tell you about the time Andrew and I were out photographing the swans on Lake La Verne in front of the Memorial Union building?"

Luke's voice had a slight tenor that made his silver hair and horn-rimmed glasses all seem to make sense. He was a computer technician at ISU who graduated from the college many years before. As a mid-thirties disenfranchised libertarian, he hated the socially conservative ideas seeping into town, brought by giant four-wheel-drive trucks, muddy from fields where people still feared God. Luke went on, his voice like a Catholic choir.

"It was the night they killed Osama bin Laden. You know how we found out? Thousands of rednecks swarmed the Campanile clock tower. They were waving flags, stumbling drunk from the bars," he said. "I think you've seen the photos, right? Did that look normal to you? No. That wasn't normal."

I remembered the photos. In a small college town in middle-of-nowhere Iowa, it was hard not to hear about the flash mob that made national news after appearing in the middle of campus to celebrate one of America's villains being shot in the head.

"Ames is the place where gay marriage was legalized in Iowa, by Judge Hansen. I'm not surprised it's a hotbed of politics on both ends of the political spectrum," I said.

Chris nodded grimly in agreement.

"Yank politics are so droll," Bart said, looking down into his glass. "The Right parades about under the name of God and Country, pandering to fringe religious beliefs. I guess I just don't get it. What's the point?" Bart hailed from Winnipeg, Canada, to pursue his second master's degree. A combination of loving Marx and hating the British Torres made Republicanism repugnant to his sensibilities.

We sat for a moment in sullen silence as the bar-goers drunkenly caroused around us. None of us could think of a point, at least not one good enough to explain the recent influx of confederate flags on trucks around campus. Bart had been part of Canada's Anti-Racist Action movement in years past, and the mere sight of the crossed lines of stars on the old southern flag made him seethe.

"Do you know the name of the ranch Perry owns was named for years," Luke started, his eyebrows raised above his horned rimmed glasses, "Nigger Head Ranch. Nigger Head. That's the kind of people we're dealing with here."

"Are we really going to let this guy come to our town and get coffee on Main Street without doing something?" I asked, my half-shouted voice fitting in with the obnoxious college crowd around us.

"Give me a call tomorrow and tell me what's going on Sunday. I'll go," Chris said.

"I, unfortunately, cannot attend," Bart said, then downed the rest of his gin and tonic. "As a noncitizen of this nation I don't want to be deported. Sorry boys, gotta think of my family."

Bart stared into his empty glass for a long time, rattling the ice cubes around like a child with a broken toy before tossing it on the table.

"I probably won't be able to make it either," Luke said. "My job at the university might

be jeopardized by a political stunt. But I hope you give him hell."

With that, the meeting broke and we turned in early. So far, I had Andrew and Chris who would go with me, possibly more if I sent out a mass text message the next day and got a positive response. I still didn't have a plan. When I woke, there were less than twenty-four hours left to the event.

"Rick Perry will be at the café on Main Street tomorrow. Myself and a few other concerned citizens are going to speak our minds. It would be appreciated if others would attend," read the text message I sent out to fifteen people. After I waited a few hours for responses it sunk in that help wouldn't materialize. We were on our own.

Andrew and I showed up within minutes of each other, obstinately riding our motorcycles until winter's ice made it impossible. Chris showed up about fifteen minutes later. We moved from one foot to the other impatiently waiting for the Texan, Rick Perry, to arrive. He was late. Glancing around the small coffee shop revealed a crowd of gray heads and the ISU College Republicans. The café was small, with a little platform at the far end for Perry. We opted to wait outside.

"Any idea when Rick Perry will be here?" Andrew asked a man who was pacing the sidewalk in a trench coat and mirrored aviator sunglasses, an ear piece jutting out of his head. "Because, frankly, I don't know if I can vote for anyone that doesn't show up to his own rally on time."

The crowd inside murmured. Perry had gone in through the back door and taken the stage. We missed the first few seconds of his speech, but made it for the parts about "economic freedom" so "businesses can compete" and how "this nation was formed under God." Younger supporters in the crowd hooted and hollered. My blood boiled.

I glanced over at Andrew. His eyes were flashing back and forth between Perry and his supporters, as if deciding which scared him more. They wanted the rest of the nation to be just like them. Andrew's jaw line bulged as he fought to hold his tongue.

I was going to interrupt his speech; that was the plan. Rick Perry kept talking on his plat-

form, and I waited for just the right moment to bellow. His tone shifted, and the speech quickly came to an end, too quickly for me to find the perfect moment to announce the presence of opposing ideologies. I didn't want to turn around and face Andrew; I felt responsible. It had been my idea to come down here. I should have taken the initiative and let my voice ring out.

The crowd recoiled from someone in the front. A trembling voice raised itself.

"Why are you demonizing gay people?"

A dam broke.

"Why do you hate gay people?!" My voice pierced the air.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," Andrew declared.

Necks twisted in the crowd, turning faces to peer at us. I saw some of the university's Republican club staring. Their silly looks made me even angrier. These young men and women who claimed to be conservatives stood by while others struggled to be free? I could not abide.

"Why can't gays compete in the military?"

I played off something Perry had said about less regulation so businesses could compete. When he'd talked about it, that moment was the closest I'd come to interrupting.

The crowd turned on us. Our little corner of the building seemed to grow as people stepped away to be with the crowd. I kept my back to the door. Chris was back there somewhere with Andrew. The crowd stirred in front of me.

"They can't compete because they are too busy being gay," a short, fat man with rosy cheeks said.

"You don't know a goddamn thing about the military," I said.

The man's sneer twisted into a scowl.

"My father was in the military," he replied, tilting his head back as he finished, as if pointing his chin at the ceiling helped drive his point home.

"I don't care," I said. "You let the military do what they do, and you stick to whatever it is you do best."

He tried shouting something at me, but as soon as he started I continued.

"Someone has to stand up to these people, and it's not going to be you, is it?"

A man walked out of the crowd during this

exchange and shouldered toward me, being sure to take up as much room as possible. He was an older gentleman, his youth in the distant past. He wore a thinning head of red hair with big patches turned wispy tan. The man stood several inches taller than me and had great girth from many nights of rich food and drink coupled with a strict exercise regimen of escalators and elevators. Because of the way he was deliberately throwing his weight around, I could tell he was used to not only getting his way, but also people getting out of his way.

I turned my body, pivoting on my boot heel, making room without giving any ground. The older gentleman stopped right in front of me, his wife behind him. He slowly gathered his bulk to its most upright position.

"You can't say those things!" he thundered, rearing back.

"I'll say whatever I want to say. This is a public place."

He started to walk past, but when he was abreast me in his route to the door, he turned and tried towering over me — though he couldn't quite manage with the great weight of his stomach forcing him to lean back or fall over.

"You need to leave!" His voice quivered.

I imagined him bullying his wife. I knew his kind. My eyes grew wide and my neck muscles bulged as I addressed him; I strained to keep some semblance of composure that had long since evaporated.

"I'm not going anywhere, and you aren't going to make me! So you just walk out that door, you fascist!"

I said fascist with an angry hiss, my teeth bared.

People gasped, especially the older ones with heads of white. It was incorrigible, unimaginable, that I would use that word. But I did. It wasn't a matter of polite conversation anymore, of academic banter concerning the political process and different party platforms. These people had congregated to support a man who openly wanted to use the government to discriminate against a group different than himself. Their motives were written on the wall as far as I was concerned, and I couldn't un-see it. The man waddled away muttering curses, not being prepared to remove me himself and finding no one running

to volunteer. Andrew looked respectfully at the ground when he passed.

I turned back toward the crowd but the energy that had manifested so quickly diffused just as rapidly. We were no longer alone in our little corner of the coffee shop. Andrew and I stood at the focal point of a large quarter circle-shaped mass of people who weren't making any moves to come toward us or leave, even though the rally had ended. It's something I can't forget, something that exists forever in a stream of time with other moments: pauses in the rate of fire of machine gun ranges, my car floating through the air after being broadsided, looking at the ceiling and realizing I didn't see a left hook coming, finding out someone I served with had died in the line of duty. I felt dizzy and wondered if the place would still serve me some coffee, or if I would need to go across the street and get a beer from a bar, maybe smoke a cigarette.

But my little bubble in time was interrupted.

"What's your name?" a woman said. She seemed to materialize out of nowhere and stuck a microphone in my face. Behind the microphone she was my height in her heels, with brown hair pulled tight to her head in a bun.

I answered with my name, then spelled it. By the time I finished spelling my name I was surrounded by reporters and journalists. Where there had been one microphone now floated five. How old are you? Twenty-four; I was twenty-four. Where do you go to school? What is your major? I kept answering, not really sure where it was all going. Someone asked, Are you gay? "Are you hitting on me?" I replied. It was the first question I answered with a question.

Were you in the military? I was in the Marine Corps. Do you live in Ames? I lived in Ames, right off of Welch Avenue. Are you gay?

"I'm not sure. I've never tried it."

This made one of the reporters holding out a voice recorder chuckle. She was a younger woman with a small smile on her face, seeming genuinely pleased by the morning's events. The man who I'd answered looked unnerved and perplexed.

"But seriously," the man said. "Are you?"

"No," I said, dismayed my sexual orientation had become a focal point.

"What made you come down here today," an authoritative female voice commanded my attention.

"I watched his ad on YouTube, and found it extremely offensive and insulting to service members."

People scribbled furiously on little notepads. The swarm paused for a moment. I could hear Andrew answering a similar battery of questions a few meters away from me.

"No more questions. I have to smoke."

I pulled a cigarette out of my pack and held it out in front of me to ward off news people as I shuffled out of the café's front door. I walked about halfway down the block back toward my motorcycle before I started smoking. Chris appeared with a smile on his face, then Andrew. Andrew had been interviewed by the local paper pretty thoroughly, he told us. As we stood talking more media personnel appeared. We gave them a brief rundown then scurried to our vehicles like hunted rodents.

I did my best to go through the usual routine of my Sunday. I hit the gym, did homework, cleaned. I couldn't help but check and see if anyone had picked up the story. It turned out a few had. The LA Times, LGBT Nation, MSNBC, just to name a few. I felt high. We had met the enemy on the field of battle and won. Well, I was chalking it up as a victory. The little raid we pulled off at the coffee shop probably didn't even count as a sortie in the larger scheme of things, but maybe it counted for something. I checked my email before turning in for the night and there was a message from a local television station's news woman. She wanted to do an interview the next day. I agreed.

Time blurred by. We'd planned to meet outside of the university's Memorial Union. A fountain coupled with high volume of foot traffic in the area would make for good television even if I didn't, and it would give the impression that I was speaking for more than just myself. I waited in the veterans' lounge, looking out a large window that gave me a view of the fountain, expecting a news van to pull up. In my head it was a white news van. It turned out to be a white SUV and a beige minivan. The news woman was friendly. We exchanged pleasantries while the cameraman situated his equipment. That night I ran on the five- and ten- o'clock news explaining

how I wasn't comfortable with people "legislating the Christian version of Sharia law."

They kept asking me if I was gay. I couldn't make them understand that I didn't need to suffer with the gays to know persecuting them was wrong and must be stopped. •

Jason Arment served in OIF as a Machine Gunner in the USMC. He's earned an MFA in CNF from VCFA. His work has appeared in *Narrative Magazine*; *Lunch Ticket*; *The Burrow Press Review*; *War, Literature & the Arts*; and is forthcoming in *Chautauqua*; *Hippocampus*; *Gulf Coast*; and *The Florida Review*. Email him at jason.arment@gmail.com.



STRESS TEST BY EUGENIA LOLI

THE RED HEART ON YOUR LICENSE

BY VICTORIA

GRIFFIN

"Ma'am, I'm sorry, but the state of Alabama doesn't care about your art or your students or, honestly, your life. You signed on the dotted line."

"This is not what I signed up for."

"The document states quite clearly —"

"Oh, bullshit."

"— that if you're over the age of sixty-five, the state has the right to —"

"Nobody has the right to do this!"

The officer sighed. He let the handcuffs dangle from his hand and reached into his pocket for the Taser. "Look, ma'am, I'm just doing my job. This isn't what I look forward to in the morning, but it's part of the gig. You get that, right?"

"Like hell, I do!" Clara stamped her foot into the sidewalk, her pink purse swinging from her shoulder. "You're a human being first, a cop second. Part of your job, my ass. Just let me go home."

"Here's the thing, ma'am. You don't have a home. That property is now in your daughter's name, as per your will. In the eyes of the state, you're dead. You've been dead. If you would just stop running —"

Clara broke for the mall entrance. If she could just make it inside, she could get lost in the crowd. Maybe she could find a phone, call her daughter, straighten all this out. There had to be some mistake. Her purse fell to the concrete, and her loafers clapped against the ground like a duck. She hadn't run in thirty years, but with adrenaline coursing beneath her wrinkled skin she didn't even feel the pain in her knees, her back, her lungs.

She felt the Taser, though.

Electricity ran through her body as though she was copper, and she dropped to the ground, her jaw and shoulder both shattering against the concrete. Her brittle bones splintered like glass ornaments, and she felt pain drip into her blood and surge through her veins. Through all the hot pain she felt cold metal on her wrists, and then the gray sidewalk became black.

Clara woke up slowly, the world bleeding in a little at a time. She heard the beep of the heart monitor, the clatter of steel instruments. She saw bright lights like two suns floating overhead and white coats orbiting her still frame. The room was so clean it smelled stale, like an unused kitchen.

"She's waking up."

"Put her under. Don't let her move."

Her vision staggered and lurched, slowly bringing the world into focus. She tried to move her hands, searched for them under layers of numbness, the drugs' effects, but she couldn't feel anything, not even her eyes rolling around in their sockets. She tried to speak, but her mouth wouldn't move, and her vocal cords were still like frozen power lines.

A man with a syringe stepped toward her — she caught the glint of it from the corner of her eye. He had black hair like her ex-husband's and a scowl that made her insides cringe. He reached for her IV bag.

The syringe fell to the floor.

Hands banged against glass to her left. Flat palms struck the windows, sending echoes through the room and vibrating the fine equipment scattered around her. Clara was too high to be afraid.

But with every passing moment, that was changing.

"Would someone take care of that?"

"Security —"

"Is not doing their job." The heart monitor beeped angrily. "And I can't do mine with those

goddamn idiots pounding on the glass."

The black-haired boy passed across her field of vision toward the sound. The figures were made of shapes and colors, the whites of their eyes looking like they were taken from swatches of their coats.

The man who'd ordered the boy, the man holding a shiny instrument between his fingers, looked at Clara like a stranger at a funeral peering into an open casket. Her eyes were open, but her body was stuck to the bed like a fly in tar, and her mind could barely process —

"Mama! Mama!"

She heard the voice, barely, like through a layer of static. The words rolled over the sound of crashing doors and bodies falling against tile, like waves rolling over a man caught in their wake, his feet ripped out from beneath him.

"Mama, can you hear me?" A girl stood over her, dark hair falling over her ears and onto Clara's neck. The smell of it, so familiar.

Two more figures entered behind her, walking stiff and slow —

(Was that a gunshot?)

— like sleepwalkers. The girl lifted a sheet from Clara's body, splotched red like daytime fireworks against a cloudy sky. The girl's mouth fell open, and her fingers clutched the sheet tightly —

(like she used to clutch her baby blanket)

— and Clara's vision evened out a little so she could see the two men pacing behind the girl (her daughter), their fingers turning white as they gripped the barrels of their rifles.

"Jennifer? Is that you?"

Clara's own voice startled her. It sounded like a dog trying to speak, drawn out vowels separated by muffled consonants. The sheet fell over Clara's body once again as her daughter leaned in close and put a finger to her lips, chipped black nail polish over chapped flesh.

"It's alright, Mama. Don't try and talk. I'm gonna get you out of here. Billy! Billy, come help me."

One of the boys behind her — he was a boy, not a man — slung his rifle over his shoulder and approached Clara's feet. "Jesus Christ, is that blood?"

"Shut up, Billy. You grab her feet. I've got her head."

"We're never gonna get past —"

"Just do it, would you?"

Clara felt her body lift out of the bed like she was levitating. A soft ache melted through her abdomen, and she closed her eyes, feeling her daughter's fingers press into her back. Clara's head rested against her daughter's stomach like Jen's head once rested on her own belly. Her body once fit into the crook of Clara's arm. Now that baby girl was carrying her mother out of danger like a soldier on a battlefield.

She opened her eyes. Bright lights flashed above her. Footsteps echoed through the hallway — two sets on either end of her body and more stammering in the distance, through the maze of hospital rooms, equipment, patients.

Patients? There were none. The hall was empty save for abandoned IV poles keeping watch outside cracked doors — and the two scuttling down the hallway, clutching a seventy-two-year-old woman with a sheet draped over her body.

It smelled like blood. Clara could almost feel the scent of it lining her nostrils, overpowering the sanitary odor emitted by the floor and walls they passed. "Jen. Jennie..."

"Mama, shh, don't try and talk. We'll get you out of here, almost there."

"What's all that blood, Jennie?"

She could see it, barely, if she looked down past her nose. The sheet covering her body looked like the walls of The Night Café. She couldn't tell —

Pain. The pain was a red hot flash, a glowing ember, fireworks released from her insides up through her skin and into her mind, buzzing around her brain so that everything was on fire.

"Mama! Mama, what's wrong? Billy, stop for a second. Mama?"

"We gotta keep going, J. If they catch us —"

"Jesus Christ, Billy, it's one second."

"It's okay, Jen. I'm okay, just —" Clara ground her teeth together. "Just keep going."

What have they done to me? What have they done to me?

The pain subsided into the ache, stronger than it was before, but bearable. Clara had thought that she would pass out from the pain, that surging pain. It would have been better if she had. The drugs were wearing off, and time was slowing down. No more jumping from minute to minute — she had to bear the entire sixty seconds now.

"We're almost there, Mama. Just a few more steps."

The sun flashed above her, stronger than the whiskey she'd had on her honeymoon. It was so dark in there. She hadn't noticed. It had seemed bright after the blackness of unconsciousness. She heard wheels, the roar of an engine. Diesel.

"I'm sorry about this, Mama, but it'll only be a few minutes. Just hold tight, okay. I'll be right here with you."

Clara would have spoken, but before she could Billy and Jen had her hauled into the bed of a truck — silver, she could see glints of it in her peripheral vision. It smelled like gas fumes and the inside of a tackle box. The truck bed was hard, but her daughter's voice was soft, and she held Clara's hand, pressed it between her callused palms like a rose between the pages of a book.

"Jen..." Clara began to speak as the truck's wheels gripped the road, picking up speed. "Your dad... He didn't leave us."

"I know, Mama."

"You know?" Clara's eyes opened wide, then shut again as the sun threatened to blind them.

"He called me a week ago. Told me they were looking for you, what had happened. He told me everything."

"His causes, his crusades were putting you in harm's way."

"It's okay, Mama."

"I had to protect you."

"I understand, Mama. What I don't understand is why you didn't call me when you got the letter, why you kept me in the dark. You know that the work I do —"

"Already puts you in danger. I couldn't add any more risk."

"This is your life. It's worth any jail sentence they could give me, you know that."

Clara's lips were so dry they felt like they were sewn together. The truck hit a bump, and they ripped open. "Girl, you're naïve if you think we're just talking about jail time." Clara couldn't see her daughter's face. It was shrouded by the sun, a black outline of a person. "They'll kill you. They've killed people for less, and I'm sure I don't know half of what you've done."

"I haven't done anything that wasn't right."

"I didn't say you had." Clara sucked in a breath. The pain bore through her stomach. Her eyelids closed tightly, her lashes intertwining like creeping vines. Her voice was a hoarse whisper. "What did they do to me, Jen? What did they take?"

"We're gonna take care of you."

"What did they take, Jen?"

Her daughter's face was still hidden in darkness. Her neck arched upward, her hair flowing toward the tail end of the truck. "Everything. They took everything."

Clara tucked her chin into her neck, looking down her body, still covered by the bloody sheet. Slowly, she pulled the still-white corners out from under her body and lifted them so that the wind caught the sheet and carried it out of the truck bed, floating like a dying kite into the middle of the road.

She was open. Like the half-empty jars of peanut butter Jen used to leave on the counter, the lid on the other side of the kitchen. As though her body had been robbed, everything was gone. Her

lungs, her liver, her kidneys. It had been a long time since anatomy. She wasn't sure where everything went, but she knew it belonged inside her body.

Th-thump.

Her heart was brown, dark like paint mixed with complimentary colors.

Th-thump.

It moved like a rabbit's footsteps in her chest. As she watched, it beat faster. Her breathing came in short bursts (How am I breathing with no lungs?) and her vision turned to glass – seeing reflections everywhere, slippery, flat. Nothing looked real.

“Am I alive?”

The truck had stopped. It was parked under something – a shed or an overpass – that shielded the sun so Clara could see her daughter's face. She could see her daughter's tears.

Jennifer nodded. “Yes, Mama, you're alive.”

“How?”

“Technology. Magic. They need to keep people alive until the last second so they trick your body somehow. Billy knows. He did the research.”

“But it's not real.”

“No, Mama, it's not real.”

“Sit me up.”

Clara felt her daughter's hands on her back. They were shaking. Jen pushed her upright so that she could see over the tailgate. She could see the back road they'd landed on. She could see the lake to her left and the forest to her right. In the distance, the plant pushed out steam, and phone towers rose from the hills. Squirrels darted in and out of trees, and birds twirled lazily among the clouds. The smell of lake water was just softer than Clara remembered. The green of the grass was a shade less vibrant. It was fading. She was fading.

“The world looks so much the same. But it's so different.”

“I know that, Mama. That's why we're fighting.”

“They're right, you know. The leaders. This heart is worth so little in me. How much would it be worth in a baby child fighting for their life? What could they grow up to do?”

Jen was sobbing, now. It was in her voice. “That's not true, Mama. That's not true.”

“It is true. Look at me. I'm dying. What's it worth now?”

“They did this.”

Clara sighed. “This is your fight, baby. It's always been your fight.” The sky was a little darker. The sun didn't hurt her eyes anymore. “You fight it well, and then you come join me.”

“Mama! Mama, don't leave me. Please, we can...”

Clara closed her eyes and listened to her daughter's voice. Even with pain and hurt woven into her words, it still sounded sweet. She thought about Jen's father, the way he had loved her. And she forgot all the rest. It didn't matter, not anymore. She guessed it never really mattered.

She thought of a baby girl who needed her heart.

Then, it stopped beating. •

Victoria Griffin is an East Tennessee native, currently studying English and playing softball at Campbell University. Her work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *Apeiron Review*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Mash Stories*, and *Zeit Haus*. Find her fiction and blog at victoria-griffin.weebly.com.

STEAK KNIFE

BY RICHARD KING PERKINS II

My little brother must have been about four and had gotten ahold of a steak knife while in the Schaeffer's front yard. He was impressed with himself for causing so much shock and concern among his friends and siblings. He was holding the knife by the blade, pointy end aimed pretty close to his heart. I was eight and saw about a million tragedies play out in my mind so without hesitation I ripped the knife from his fat, sweaty hand. The surprised look of pain on his face was exceeded only by his sense of betrayal. "I'm sorry," I said, "but this is what big brothers do." His hand and sad eyes bled into my shirt as we walked away and didn't stop until long after we got home.

Richard King Perkins II has been writing poetry for six years and is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee whose work has now appeared in more than one thousand publications. He has poems forthcoming in *The William and Mary Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Plainsongs*, *Free State Review* and *Milkfist*. He was a recent finalist in *The Blue Bonnet Review Spring Poetry*, *The Rash Awards*, *Sharkpack Alchemy*, *Writer's Digest* and *Bacopa Literary Review* poetry contests.

Global warming flare-ups make a riot of difference.

"Nobels are awarded to writers judged to have universalized the marginal."

— Louis Menand, *New Yorker*, 11 May 2015

Can you believe it, middle
of the morning middle of the week,
despite Beverly Hills' noise ordinances,
sombbreroed gardeners and their weed wacker
racket become evident between tennis courts
albeit we're slammed in our mega hot tub
buck naked?

Hmmm. I need to get out to tinkle
as my ignoble husband shoos/shouts,
Arrgh them Mexican boys, even Ishmael,
don't have common laborer courtesy
to feign American language back!

That evening, wading through turdlets
on emerald front meadows, Mayor Julian Gold
(I kid you not) & his Taser-wielding drought police
knocked to report anonymous callers ID'd herein
occupants as water-wasting scofflaws while TV
crews shamed us live top of the 10 o'clock news.

How We Get Our Kicks

-- inspired by 17 year-old Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai,
2014's youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner ever

Klicks east of Jerusalem
or Fallujah IED clicks
near where civilization
is said to have begun,
alley pregnant,
Alibabá and alley baby
traded to big man
for cattle and heroin; no school, she had rebelled
to become a human rights lawyer or
Peshawar's Diane Sawyer.

TWO POEMS BY GERARD SARNAT

Gerard Sarnat MD received his education at Harvard and Stanford. He's established and staffed clinics for the disenfranchised, been a CEO of healthcare organizations and a Stanford professor.

CONCEPTION

BY MICHAEL P. ADAMS

The first time I tried to kill myself was on the way down the birth canal. I grabbed that umbilical cord, wrapped it around my neck, and prayed I wouldn't have to see daylight.

It didn't work. Damn doctors interfered. Fucking God complexes.

There were three other attempts: one when I was fourteen and tried to hang myself in my closet—the bar broke—then another during my freshman year of college, when my roommate was away for the weekend and I took what I assumed would be a lethal dose of sleeping pills, chased them with a few beers (which was all I could get my hands on, on short notice), and woke up a day-and-a-half later thinking the Devil had made my dorm room my own personal version of Hell. Then I realized I was still alive.

The third, well: I don't know why I've always had a preoccupation with death. Maybe some people just aren't supposed to be on this planet. At least that's what I told myself before I survived a 220-foot jump off the Golden Gate Bridge last year, my only injury a broken arm. I'm not a religious person, but it certainly seemed like a higher power was conspiring to keep me from offing myself.

I tell all of this to the nice couple sitting across from me at Starbucks. It's the answer to their question: "What made you want to be a sperm donor?" I finish by saying, "Maybe the reason I wasn't allowed to die was because I'm here to create life. You know, a way to turn darkness into light. It's hokey, I know."

"Have you had a psych evaluation?" the husband, Kyle, asks. He's got a bit of cappuccino foam on his mustache. I savor the irony of being asked about my mental state by a man who's literally foaming at the mouth.

"I wouldn't be here if I hadn't," I say. "You two have nothing to worry about."

"So our baby won't come out—" the wife, Melinda, begins.

"Like me? I've never been diagnosed with any hereditary mental disorders so, no, your baby shouldn't follow my suicidal path."

We met on this matchmaking website—like Match.com for people who can't conceive. The recipients get a free sperm donation and the donors, well, the donors have all kinds of reasons for doing this, but mine at least is altruistic. I put myself through a battery of tests to show that I was worthy of siring a child: STD panels, genetic testing, psych eval, physical fitness, the potency of my swimmers. I have exchanged several emails with Melinda and Kyle over the past few weeks, but this is the first time we're meeting in person. I'm the fifth potential donor they've met so far; I get the impression that I'm the leading candidate. Melinda seems concerned, though, since hearing about my suicide attempts. Makes sense; no woman wants to willingly inseminate herself with troubled seed.

"Are you dating anyone?" Melinda asks.

"Nothing serious."

"Does she know you're doing this?"

"He. And yes."

"You're the gay one," Kyle says, as if something just clicked in his brain. "Sorry, I guess everything's starting to blend together a bit."

"Is my sexuality a problem?"

They smile at each other, then look back at me. "Not even a little," Melinda says.

How are we gonna make those horses fly? That's what my dad used to say whenever we found ourselves in a difficult situation. It was his way of saying, Don't give up; we'll figure it out. That's what he said to me after I jumped off the bridge, the only one of the suicide attempts my parents ever knew about.

They thought it was because I was struggling with being gay, but the truth was I'd had no problem with that. While I wasn't the out-and-proud type, I also wasn't the type that hated myself

for how I was born. I hated myself for being born, but that's not really something you can tell your parents without crushing them. So I tried to make the horses fly, which for me amounted to making it through the day without taking a meeting with the Grim Reaper. I pushed any pain away until all I felt was numbness, a take-it-or-leave-it attitude that I could take or leave.

Since the bridge incident, my parents are always checking up on me, even though I tell them I'm fine now. Note to all you friends and parents out there: when someone tries to commit suicide, the last thing they need is to have you constantly reminding them that they tried to commit suicide.

Three days after our Starbucks meeting, I get good news from Melinda and Kyle. Because the site discourages people from conducting business in their homes, they've booked a hotel room and ask me if I can meet them that afternoon, when Melinda is at peak ovulation.

When I arrive, there's a weird energy in the room. It's more than just the nervousness that we're all feeling; there's something else coming from Melinda and Kyle.

"We weren't completely honest with you the other day," Melinda says from the bed. "We don't just want your sperm."

"What else do you want?"

"You," Kyle says.

"I don't understand."

"We've heard that the odds of conceiving are higher through intercourse than they are with the turkey baster method," Melinda explains.

"You want me to have sex with you? I'm gay."

"That's where I come in," Kyle says. "Melinda's been wanting to introduce another guy in the bedroom for a while now. I was hesitant at first, but got curious after a while. You're the best-looking one of the bunch we interviewed, so I figured what the hell. I'll get you going and you can finish in Melinda."

"I think I should go," I say.

Melinda gets up, starts toward me. "No, no, wait now. We don't mean to scare you off. We're not crazy, I promise. Just a couple people looking to take full advantage of the situation." She touches my shoulder as Kyle puts his hand on my chest.

I wonder what it says about me that I'm intrigued by this. It's not like I've never experimented with a woman before—and Kyle's not a bad looking guy, except for that stupid mustache. Would Dad tell me to make these horses fly?

The one thing that everyone who survives the jump from the Golden Gate Bridge (and there aren't many of us) says is that the second they stepped away from the railing they wished they were right back on it. Everyone says that—except me. In the six seconds it took for me to hit the water, the only thing I thought about was how great the view was, how wonderful the cold, salty air felt on my cheeks.

I'll spare you the details and just say that we did it. In fact, it became a regular thing during Melinda's pregnancy. Once Melinda was with child, though, I left her to Kyle and focused my attention solely on him. Along the way, I also helped two more women get pregnant, but those exchanges were of the standard variety: basically me beating off into a cup and hitting the road. After Melinda had the baby—a boy—she decided she didn't want me around anymore, said it would be too confusing when the kid got older and started asking questions about why he and I looked so much alike. This, despite the fact that she had said they'd leave it up to me whether I wanted to be a part of the kid's life. I decided it wasn't worth pushing the issue, that I didn't get into this to bond with a child.

I enjoyed Kyle's company, though—and he and I continued seeing each other behind Melinda's back. Just yesterday, I even got him to shave his mustache, something Melinda had been unsuccessful at doing in the three years they'd been married.

"You look so much younger without that thing," I say. "At least ten years."

We're in a hotel room during Kyle's lunch hour, getting dressed.

"I'm going to leave Melinda," he says.

"That's my shirt you're putting on."

He takes the shirt off, tosses it to me. "Did you hear me? I said I'm leaving —"

"It's just the afterglow talking. Give it a few minutes."

"She's the reason you and I are together. I never would have done this if it wasn't for her."

"Never? Something tells me a slight case of denial may be involved in that statement," I say.

"I didn't really want a kid anyway. That was mostly her. And then it was her who wanted to bring you into our sex life. I mean, she practically forced us to fall in love."

"Whoa, love? Nobody ever said anything about that." I miss a button on my shirt, have to do the whole thing over again, which means this conversation will last that much longer.

"Oh, come on. What have we been doing for nearly a year if not falling in love? Or does that not fit into your master plan of trying to singlehandedly populate the world?"

"Insulting me isn't going to win me over."

"You're right. I'm sorry."

"Look, Kyle, you're confused. You've got a lot going on — exploring your sexuality, a new baby, sleep deprivation. This is not the time to be making this kind of decision."

"You don't know —"

"I know, okay? I'm the guy who tried to kill himself a bunch of times, remember? I know a little something about making rash decisions. Trust me, you don't want to do this. Besides, I'm not even sure I'm capable of returning those feelings."

"I don't buy it," he says. "You're just scared."

"Of course I'm scared. Every day I wait for the moment when I'm going to snap and try to do myself in again. The last thing I need is to have someone else to disappoint when it happens."

"I thought you were all right."

"Are any of us ever all right? Who the fuck knows what's going to happen when we leave this room or drive down the street or, I don't know, take a shit."

"I have to say, this is not where I imagined this conversation going," Kyle says.

"Yeah, well, that's what love'll do to you. Go back to your wife, Kyle," I say and walk out.

Make the most impact with the least resistance. That's what I thought when I came up with the idea of becoming a sperm donor. I could've gone the anonymous route, but no, I had to do the trendy thing, the face-to-face meeting, the freshest sample possible. There wouldn't be any messy legal battles, no muddled relationships, I told myself. Just drop a load and go. And that's how it's been with the other two couples. But this one...

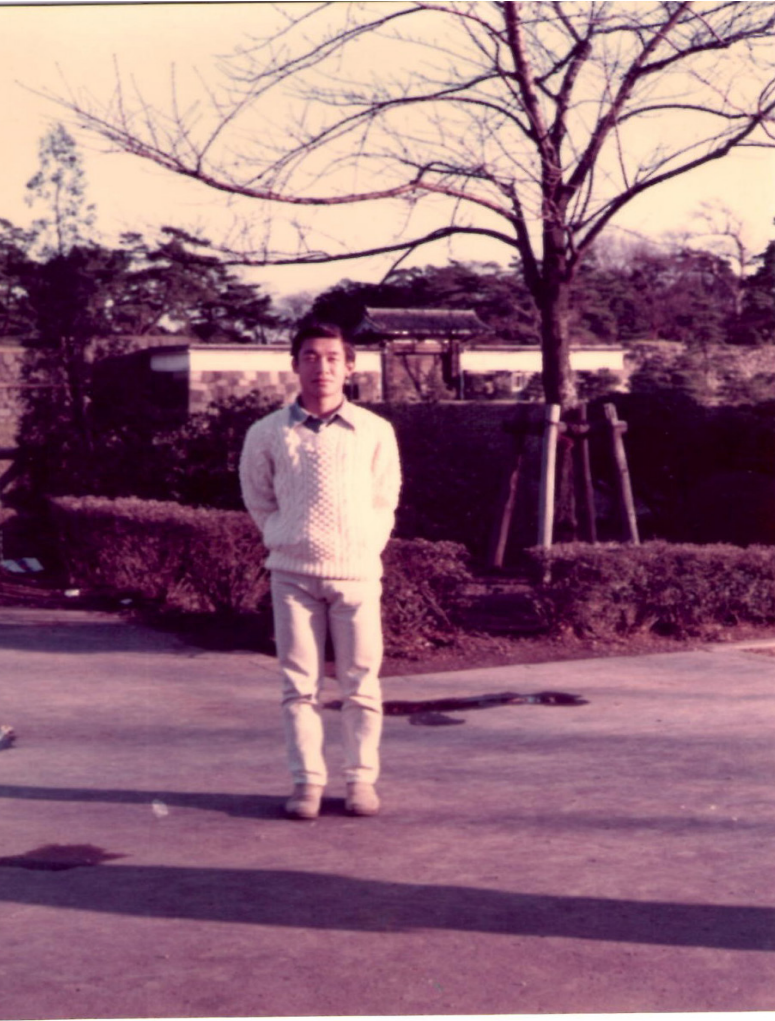
I drive out to the Golden Gate Bridge. I haven't been here since my attempt. Every time I see the bridge on TV or in a magazine, I can still appreciate its beauty. Now though, as I stand looking down into the water below, the water that was supposed to take me out of this world, I regard it with contempt.

Ask someone what their happiest memory is and they'll tell you about the day their kid was born or the moment they fell in love for the first time. Ask them to dig a little deeper for their most vivid memory and, more often than not, it'll be something painful. Death, injury, abuse, heartache — this is what defines us. Pain is who we are, as difficult as that is for me to conceive. •

Michael P. Adams is a native Californian and a graduate of San Jose State University's MFA program. His fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Reed Magazine*, *Cardinal Sins*, *Crab Fat*, *Nomadic Journal*, and *Mosaic Art and Literary Journal*.

MY FATHER LOOKS LIKE BRUCE LEE

BY SOPHIA E. TERAZAWA



He was arrogant. He was spoiled and cold and disciplined. But he was my father, too.

Hajime listened to Bob Dylan. He loved everything with a stamp of “These United States,” not because he needed to, was colonized to, was convinced to, but he adored his New York blues simply because it was the next best thing to Tokyo life—and Tokyo life bored him.

My father, named Hajime, never had a chance when he met me.

I was pimply and red-faced. Arrogance painted the mask of my rage. I was Yellow in Amerikkka, spoiled with the safety of not being Black, cold from the myth of a Model Minority, and disciplined enough to destroy as much as possible from the inside.

**

First, the nuclear family had to be splintered. This included my father.

Weapons at my disposal were small and few, but at least I knew what my hands could do.

For example, a human body could stay afloat in the Mekong. It could pass as a raft, even after gunfire. This bullet-stuffed body was mine.

I choked with the sounds of sugar canes burning, and such hands, they flailed.

My mother allegedly “won” when she married Hajime. Thank God he was not Vietnamese like me, she said. A few weeks ago in Kolkata, a Chinese-Indian asked what kind of Asian I was, so I answered, “Vietnamese-Japanese.” Japanese, the auntie repeated. Good for you, she said.

**

“My father looks like Bruce Lee,” I used to say.

His photographs were handsome and mechanical, like a blood-brain barrier in Akihabara, where he once scavenged for transistor radio parts under a bridge. He sang to Simon and Garfunkel, too. Was it foolish to believe in my father’s silence, even if he looked like kung fu?

He did not believe in self-defense, my father, so I did not know how to survive him.

The word “honor” became a joke after so many uses. *Gaman shite* because honor. Do your best because honor. Never talk back because honor. Meditate on the complexities of empire in a transnation-

al, Google-eyed age because honor. Keep a clean bathroom because...honor!

**

After every thunderstorm, *Kaminari-san* would steal my belly button just to teach me a lesson.

I resented this God who took my hole, no bigger than a pinkie print. He gave it back every time, but

I continued to stick my finger inside to make sure that the little guy still fit. My father treated these storms like divine comedies, and I wondered if he had struck a deal with *Kaminari-san* to make my missing belly button the punchline.

It was impossible to explain a religion with so many demons.

My favorites were the ones without bodies. They did not steal insignificant things, like coins or children's fingers. The ones who fascinated me took much, much more—a firstborn, your tongue, the ability to walk upright, hope and dignity, belief in mankind. Often, these demons wore a woman's face, and she was my grace, my holy matrimony. •

Sophia E. Terazawa is a poet and performance artist. A witness at the crossroads. Her work appears in *As[I]Am*, *Kalyani Magazine*, *As/Us*, and other journals. <http://www.sophiaterazawa.com/>

The Trenches

BY JAIMIE EUBANKS

A hospital McDonald's can be the saddest place you ever go, but for us it's a reprieve. It's just past the lobby, and the smell of fries overpowers the smell of sick people. All the doctors flock there on their breaks. I have trouble finding a place in line, letting doctors in dark blue scrubs cut in front of me until D'Andre pushes me forward and gives everybody trying to cut in front of me a look. They back off, and I order the number ten value meal, which is chicken nuggets.

As we find our seats, Michael tells us that he bought an old Atari on eBay. He's been playing it with his son. I've heard of Atari, but I've never played. Michael and D'Andre are older than I am. They're boys. Also, I'm white, which they're kind enough not to point out. We all have the same job now, and we act like my being white doesn't mean I grew up different. All I know is Michael won't sit with his back to the door, and when we get to the booth, he tries to so I won't notice that he can't. He takes his seat, and D'Andre says, Are you OK? Michael says, Yes. D'Andre asks again, No. Are you OK? He asks with emphasis on each syllable, because he really cares. Michael says yes. I don't know what it was that happened to Michael, but I know it never would have happened to me.

I throw a fry at Michael, to keep us from sitting in silence, shifting in our chairs, searching for something else to talk about. Then he throws two—one at me, one at D'Andre. I'm hit, and I make a big to-do about brushing the salt off my nursing scrubs like I'm a priss. Michael gets up to get me some napkins, and I steal his seat while he's gone. D'Andre doesn't understand how to not draw attention. When he gets back to the table, it'll be me, sassing him, having stolen his seat like we're pre-teens flirting in the cafeteria. It doesn't have to be a conversation. Everybody knows Michael's deal. When he gets back, he sits by me anyway. He scoots me into the booth and slides in next to me, our shoulders brushing. He slouches down low into the booth. It would look relaxed if we didn't know that he was taking cover. •

Jaimie Eubanks lives, works, and writes in Minneapolis and Miami. Her work can be found in places such as *Bartleby Snopes*, *Gloom Cupboard*, *Thought Catalog*, and *Word Riot*. To read more of Jaimie's writing, visit jaimieeubanks.com.



Modern Day Lavinias

For the murdered women of Ciudad Juarez: ni una más.

Stubs still itch
where my hands used
to braid long black hair

Mis dientes sueño
de la lengua
que frotó ellos limpio ¹

Fragments
left to imitate
the whole
won't do

Aliviar la tensión
que se encuentra todavía
en mi cabeza,
en mi coño ²

Take their seed
from between my thighs
& build a path
right to their busted motors,
their limp flasks

Asegurar mis hermanas
el cuerpo que ha encontrado
será el ultimo
ellos ruina y enterrar ³

1-My teeth dream language that rubbed them clean
2-Relieve the tension that is still in my head, in my pussy
3-Assure my sisters the body that you found will be the last they ruin and bury

Disposal

3200 waste wells
deep in Okie sand

3200 waste wells
drives an oil state mad

3200 waste wells
doting the land from left to right

3200 waste wells
the latest heartland blight

3200 waste wells
once disguised as new jobs ad

3200 waste wells
making quakes hit bad

3200 waste wells
leak frack water sprites

3200 waste wells
make our water taps a burial site

3200 waste wells
planted deep in the earth

3200 waste wells
how much are condemned planets worth?

**As of April 2015, there are 3200 waste water disposal wells buried in Oklahoma and they are continuing to add more each month. Waste disposal wells are known to cause earthquakes, which also make the wells leak the contaminated water they were meant to keep from reaching the groundwater supply.*

TWO POEMS BY SHAUNA OSBORN

Shauna Osborn is a Comanche/German mestiza artist, wordsmith, and community organizer. She is a 2015 Artist in Residence for A Room of Her Own Foundation's Writing Retreat and has received the Luminaire Award from *Alternating Current Press*, a National Poetry Award from the New York Public Library, and the Native Writer Award from Taos Summer Writers' Conference. She is working on a series of indigenous comic books based on Comanche folk tales, a memoir, and a book length choreopoem. Her work is available in issues of *As/Us*, *Adrienne*, *Cultural Weekly*, *Hueso Loco*, *Mas Tequila Review*, and *Upstreet*. You can find her online at shaunamosborn.wordpress.com.

IN THE SEASON OF BLACK FLAGS

BY NOLAN LEIBERT

In the Season of Black Flags, chaos reigns.

I believe in order.

Every morning, Mom makes me a peanut butter and honey sandwich, fills a thermos with rum-laden coffee, and packs them, along with an apple, in my lunch tin. She kisses my forehead before straightening my leather jacket, giving my hair an extra coat of hairspray, and handing me my black flag. "Go make some trouble," she says. What she means is, "Try not to get killed."

When I walk out my door, I'm greeted by the parade: the cold smell of death, a hundred kids armed with spray paint and Molotov cocktails and butterfly knives. All of them banging on doors or knocking over trash cans or putting cherry bombs in mailboxes that were replaced just the week before. Some of the guys take turns pissing their names into the snow. Nobody has seen a friendly letter or an unwanted bill for at least a month.

I join them, in my own way. I skip down the street, waving my flag, screaming, my heavy black boots digging deep into the packed snow. At the end of the block, I swing the flag in a wide arc and knock down a couple of kids, already too drunk and too manic to see it coming. They're on the ground, one laughing, one crying. "Good one, mate," says the laughing kid. "Right," I say, and crack him again with the pole of my flag, knocking him unconscious. I don't help the crying kid. I run away.

In the Season of Black Flags, the natural order is our education.

I run all the way to the old golf course. Down by the ninth green is a garage, or what used to be a garage. Now it's my school. I knock on the door, knock, knock knock, and the bouncer lets me in. I try to ignore his gun as I sign my name on the register by the door, but it's there, all chrome and death. He checks my lunchbox, pats me down,

and finding no weapons, waves me on. As I walk down the rows of old tables and desks and golf-cart canopies toward my seat, I wonder if he'll ever have to use the gun.

Callie is waiting for me. "Glad to see you," she says. What she means is she's glad I haven't decided to skip school and join the troublemakers. She tells me she gets scared sometimes, and I tell her I don't, but she never believes me. I tell her I'm glad to see her, too, but she should know by now I'd never join them. Forgetting is easy when so much is being destroyed.

I remember the first ten digits of Pi, Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18," my childhood phone number, and the smell of Callie's perfume when she kissed me after class last week. I have forgotten what it was like to shower daily, to watch a movie in the theater, to hear crickets and cicadas at night instead of screaming.

In the Season of Black Flags, history will be rewritten in bonfires and blood.

The books say it's not supposed to be like this, not complete chaos in the streets, not bodies beneath the snow to be buried in the spring. People are supposed to return to some semblance of order. But the people who wrote those books didn't live here, didn't live now, and if they survived long enough to see the chaos, their comfortably soft asses were probably the first to go.

That was Dad. When this whole mess started he told me, told Mom, "Don't worry! Within a month, when the worst of the rioting and looting is contained, everything will start turning around." He swirled his wine glass and took a sip. That was his last dinner with us.

When he went to collect his computer from work the next day, the building was set ablaze and everyone inside died. Dad's secretary told us the news, about how the punks with their flags showed up, how she watched them through the

window of her car as another thug held a gun to her head and forced himself on her, how their shadows grew with the flames, and how their white grins had gleamed through the smoke as they shot anyone lucky enough to get out of the building.

Sometimes I wonder if the bouncer and his gun will be enough when the tidal wave of black flags comes to swallow us.

In the Season of Black Flags, love is rebellion.

After school, I walk down the overgrown cart trails with Callie. When we reach the clubhouse, she smiles and kisses me, and I kiss her. This quiet moment, when the screams are just distant echoes and we can imagine the city alight with neon instead of fire, makes me feel human. And I know Callie feels it, too. "Don't die before tomorrow," she says, before ducking under the ruined chain-link fence and running toward her house.

And she means it.

As I walk home I wonder what it will be like one day to not wear a mohawk, and when I get there Mom hugs me. I tell her about tangents, infinite numbers of lines converging on the edge of a circle. I tell her about Thomas Paine and Gandhi and Che Guevara, the history of revolutions. I tell her about kissing Callie again after class and the perfume, all sharp, sweet apples. She smiles. "I love you," she says. What she means is, "I love you." And I tell her, "Love you, too."

In the Season of Black Flags, I am a revolutionary. •

Nolan Liebert lives in the Black Hills of South Dakota with his wife and children in a house, not a covered wagon. His work appears or is forthcoming in *An Alphabet of Embers*, *freeze frame fiction*, *Lockjaw*, and other publications. You can find him editing *Pidgeonholes* or on Twitter @nliebert.

SURREAL BY STEPHEN GIBSON

In Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images*, we see a brown pipe, the phrase under it says it is not a pipe; it's a work of art, not a pipe.

Chicago's killer-clown Gacy loves performing at children's parties; running out of crawlspace, he stuffs body parts down a drain pipe.

BTK (Bind Torture Kill) Rader murders for over a decade; stops; resurfaces as a city code enforcer, charts which house, whose windpipe.

Paris, Le Moulin Rouge, 1910, Le Petomane (Joseph Pujol's stage name), plays O Solo Mio from his anus, blows out candles with farts, and smokes a pipe.

Pujol permanently retires from the stage, witnessing the horrors of World War I: gas clouds—blistering, choking chemical agents (for a start) in human windpipes.

Stephen Gibson is the author of five poetry collections: "Rorschach Art Too" (2014 Donald Justice Prize, West Chester University), "Paradise" (Miller Williams finalist, University of Arkansas Press), "Frescoes" (Lost Horse Press book prize), "Masaccio's Expulsion" (MARGIE/IntuiT House book prize) and "Rorschach Art" (Red Hen). "Surreal," the poem in this issue, is from a new collection, "The Garden of Earthly Delights Book of Ghazals," forthcoming from *Texas Review Press*.

The Kitchen Poem

for Adrienne Rich

BY FRANCES DONOVAN

A kitchen is where a woman belongs sometimes
not because I should cook for you

but because here when one sits at the table
with a bowl of something one realizes
what it is to slow down

Because here there is always food
and yet I can go hungry

Because there is a smell of things cooking,
and the smell is good.

Because I can spread tablecloths
and be unmolested.

Because God loves a kitchen
and I feel powerful here.

Because a kitchen is where civilization began.

Because some men are shy of the kitchen
and those men I can do without.

Because kitchens come in many shapes and sizes.

Because Allen Ginsberg never wrote a poem about a kitchen.

Because in a kitchen, a woman can take what has been
dismembered,
 forgotten
 and remember it.

Because in a kitchen we put things together
that have been cut apart
and call it food.

Frances Donovan's work has appeared or is upcoming in such publications as *Marathon Literary Review*, *823 on High*, and *Gender Focus*. She curated the Poetry@Prose reading series and has appeared as a featured reader at numerous venues in the Northeast. She once drove a bulldozer in a GLBT Pride parade. You can find her climbing hills in Roslindale and online at gardenofwords.com.

THE GEOMETERS

by thomas n. mannella

Our mathematical protest began at midnight
in the middle of Rocket Run,

me giving the radius segment tension and orbiting you,
who staked the other end of the fifty-foot climbing rope

into the ski slope snow in Naples, NY,
a quarter of Earth's circumference

from Baghdad, Iraq, where the March moon
that illuminated our trespasses had already been

replaced by the desert sun and billowing oil smoke,
the scream of F-117 Nighthawks and cruise missiles –

unimaginable horrors we aimed to prevent
by marking the linear distance around the closed curve

of Gerald Holtom's desperate semaphore,
a crater-sized plea in blood red Krylon.

Thomas N. Mannella III earned a B.A. in writing from St. Lawrence University and a Masters from St. John Fisher College, both in New York. His poetry has most recently appeared in *Dark Matter Journal* and *Sippy Cup Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *The Cape Rock*, *Cacti Fur*, and *Gival*. Currently, he teaches English and Environmental Literature in Naples, NY, where he lives with his wife and sons around the corner from the house he grew up in.

BREAKING NEWS

BY ALICE BENSON

Lucy clicked off the television, proud of her self-control for not hurling the remote through the screen. Anger tsunamied through the room, and she bodysurfed the waves. Sonofabitch. She was certain the City Council would vote to keep funding for the Library Reading Program. Everyone nodded and smiled during her presentation. She knew they understood the importance. Without this money, the program would end. Literacy rates would plummet. More kids would struggle with their reading. Without this funding, her job would be in jeopardy. Goddammit. This program was specifically aimed at kids who had learning problems. If those kids fell behind, they'd never catch up.

Heat sliced the top of her head. She shoved the loveseat across the room, narrowly missing a

rocking chair that she dragged back to replace the loveseat. Why would they cut this? She grabbed her laptop and clicked on the Sentinel Tribune. Scanning the news, she saw the quote from Mayor Johns. "We're in a fiscal crisis. This is a program that taxpayers can no longer afford. I would be shirking my duty to our city if I let this pass."

"Why do self-righteous idiots with no idea of the value of the program get to make the decision? Damn, shit, damn." She kept rearranging furniture and swearing. Saying the words out loud seemed to help. "Shit, damn, shit. Just once, I'd love to have something happen, so those assholes would understand."

One week later, her boss caught Lucy in the break room. "Good news," Ginny said. "The city put the funding for the Reading Program back in the budget."

"What?" Lucy was shocked. "That's amazing. Oh my God." Tears pricked. "This is wonderful. Do we know what happened?"

Ginny shrugged. "No one's sure. The rumor is that the mayor just found out his granddaughter has a learning disability and she's been utilizing a program similar to ours."

"Really? That's great." Lucy flashed on her words. "Well, not great. Of course it's not great for his granddaughter. You know what I mean."

"I know." Ginny smiled "It's not like we wished it on her. Good timing for us, though."

"That's true. If it had to happen, I'm glad it happened now."

Lucy loved Saturday mornings. Sleeping late, coffee, donuts, the morning paper. Unfortunately, this morning's headline story made her choke on her coffee:

"David Boyle, Republican Senator from Kingston, quoted as saying: 'Legalizing gay marriage is a slippery slope that may lead to polygamous and interspecies marriages.'"

Lucy stared at the paper. That's so stupid, I wouldn't even dignify it with an answer. She finished her donut, and started talking out loud; the sound of her voice soothed her. "What's wrong with him? Doesn't he realize how hurtful that is? Why are narrow-minded bigots making news? Just once, I'd love to have something happen, so those assholes would understand."

One week later, the morning headline again made her choke on her coffee, but this time with laughter:

"Senator Boyle's son comes out as gay, challenges his father's views on gay marriage."

Lucy read on: "Senator Boyle could not be reached for comment, but his son believes his father is re-thinking his stance on gay marriage." Lucy shook her head. It must have been hell for that poor kid, growing up with a father like that. Still, it was good. Maybe now, that asshole will understand that what he says has an impact on real people. Maybe now, he'll understand...understand? Lucy picked up a blueberry-filled donut. She brought it to her mouth, then set it back in the box.

How weird is that? Lucy remembered her rage-induced rant of last week. She realized that twice over the last few weeks, she'd wished understanding on people, and twice, those same people were hit with something in their lives that should, at the very least, start them on the journey. Weird. But surely a strange coincidence. Lucy snorted a laugh. Are you thinking you have super powers? You have the ultimate understanding of everything, so you get to bestow it on others? Get a grip.

Tuesday morning, the phone rang at seven. Lucy slipped on the wet floor as she hopped out of the shower and hurried to answer it, "Hello?"

"Our funding got eliminated from the county budget last night." Janice, Lucy's good friend and director of the local domestic violence shelter, sounded close to tears.

"Oh, no." Lucy dripped back to the bathroom and grabbed a towel. "Will the program be able to handle that?"

"I don't know. I doubt it."

"What happened?" Lucy asked.

"It was that moron, Thomas Piercy. He's only been on the county board for a year, but he's garnered a lot of power. People are really panicked about budget deficits, so he capitalized on that. It wasn't just the shelter; they slashed funding for every social program across the board," Janice said.

"Hold on." Lucy wrapped the towel around her sodden hair and grabbed a bathrobe. "God-dammit, that pisses me off. I know budgets are tight these days, but why does anyone think it's okay to balance them on the backs of the most vulnerable people? Your services are critical."

"You don't have to tell me. But you know these idiots. They really don't give a shit," Janice said.

"I'm so sick of their smug faces mouthing meaningless buzzwords; just once, I'd like to see something happen so these assholes have some understanding of what it's like for people who aren't so fortunate." Lucy felt froth on her lips and almost smiled. She was so mad, she was literally spitting.

"I know. Me too." Janice sighed. "I'll let you get ready for work. Sorry for calling this early, but I had to tell someone."

"No problem. You take care, and I'll talk to you soon." Lucy hung up.

One week later, Lucy's phone rang again as she was stepping out of the shower. For Pete's sake. She grabbed a towel and managed to get to the phone without slipping. "Hello?"

"Did I wake you?" Janice said.

"No, I was up." Lucy towed one side of her hair. "Not more bad news, I hope."

"Strange news," Janice said. "Have you read the paper today?"

"Not yet." Lucy switched ears to towel the other side.

"Thomas Piercy's sister was hospitalized with injuries from a severe beating. Her husband was arrested for aggravated assault."

"Holy shit." Lucy's towel dropped to the floor.

"I know. I can't believe it. Obviously, I'd never wish such pain on anyone, but this couldn't have come at a better time. Piercy's already changing his mind about the shelter's funding."

"Holy shit," Lucy repeated. "But it was happening to her anyway. It's not as if someone caused it to happen to her. It just became public at a good time." Lucy hoped that was true, then her stomach lurched with another thought. "She must have been pretty badly beaten for him to get charged with aggravated assault."

"I think so," Janice said. "I don't know anything more than what was in the paper."

"God." Lucy swallowed acid. "I'm sorry for her, but I'm glad the shelter will get the money."

Lucy hung up and slowly wiped her body, pondering. Three times in a row, Lucy made a wish, and it came true. Three times seemed like more than a coincidence. But that was crazy. It had to be a coincidence. Either that, or some crazed fairy godmother waved her wand and gave Lucy the power to control the world. Well, not the whole world, just the sick fucks who need controlling. Lucy grinned. Maybe not so bad, after all. There was some appeal to bestowing understanding on those who needed it. She was tired of all the smug assholes running the world, and it would be fun to at least have some say. Too much happened that was controlled by idiots. She wouldn't mind teaching them a thing or two. Then she laughed. Quite the superiority complex.

Lucy paused. What if she wasn't being ridiculous? She looked at the lottery ticket pinned to the kitchen bulletin board. Well, it couldn't hurt. "Just once, I'd like to win the lottery, so I have enough money to do what I want and not have to care what all the assholes think."

One week later, disappointment pinged through Lucy's belly as she checked the lottery numbers on her computer, shocked to realize that subconsciously, she truly believed she was going to win. She crumpled the lottery ticket in her fist and stared at it. Probably just as well, super powers were way too much responsibility.

Lucy laughed out loud and stretched her whole body from her toes to her fingertips, like a cat lying in the sun. Then she swept all the super power speculation to the broom closet in the corner of her mind, slammed the door, and went to work.

Lucy sat in the break room with a cup of coffee and her second donut of the morning.

"God, how can you eat that crap?" Ginny asked. "It's nothing but sugar and fat."

Lucy shrugged. "Doesn't seem to bother me."

"And you're thin as a fashion model. Life isn't fair." Ginny tossed a news magazine on the table. "And speaking of not fair. Have you seen the new law they passed in Georgia? They're calling it a pro-worker bill, because it gives hospital workers the right to not participate in certain procedures."

Lucy rolled her eyes. "I know. Senator Griffin in Georgia championed a bill that forced some hospitals to require that doctors withhold treatment until they can't hear any fetal heart tones, even if waiting can put the woman's health at risk. These laws are just more and more blatant attacks on women's rights and access to health care."

"I thought these battles were fought years ago – and won." Ginny sighed.

Lucy slapped the table. "Did you hear about that one guy, somewhere in Mississippi, I think? Comparing women to farm animals?"

Ginny shook her head. "That guy was misquoted. I read another article that explained he never said anything like that."

"Really?" Lucy paused for a moment, but she was on a roll and couldn't be derailed by facts. "Still, he must have said something stupid. Just like that fucking Senator Griffin. God, just once, wouldn't it be nice if something would happen to assholes like him to make him realize how damaging these laws are?"

One week later, Lucy was having her morning coffee with Google News. A headline in the far right corner caught her eye:

"Senator Griffin's daughter hospitalized after breakdown."

Lucy clicked on the story. A stock photo of a young woman at a luncheon for a children's charity. A warm smile and kind eyes. The article made Lucy sick.

Barbara Clancy, daughter of Senator Boris Griffin, R, Georgia, was hospitalized yesterday after what was described as a "nervous breakdown." An anonymous source close to Mrs. Clancy reported that Mrs. Clancy has been depressed since she suffered an ectopic pregnancy several weeks ago. "The hospital postponed treatment, and her fallopian tube ruptured. She had to have surgery, and now she is unable to get pregnant."

Lucy stood up and walked away from her computer. I wouldn't wish that on anyone. Poor woman. Lucy dropped onto the couch. But I didn't cause this. I didn't wish this on her. What happened to her happened because of him and his stupid laws. Lucy tugged at a loose thread on a cushion. It's not my fault. If they listened to me, she'd be fine. He's the one who's wrong, not me. I can't help that he's an idiot. Lucy worked hard and convinced herself. Then she caught a glimpse of the picture on her computer; blonde hair, a sweet smile. Coffee roiled through her guts. She made it to the bathroom just in time.

By morning, she felt better. She couldn't be causing this. Look what happened with the lottery ticket. That didn't work. But maybe this situation was different. Maybe she couldn't use the power for personal gain, only for the common good. And Lucy believed without hesitation that her understanding of the world and how things should be was the common good. So, if she was causing this, she wasn't going to feel bad. These people deserved what they were getting. But when Lucy looked at the coffee pot, she hesitated. Maybe some tea with the morning news.

The headline story reported that Mathew Ravens, businessman from Oklahoma who was considering running for president, stated, "I'm not worried about the very poor." Lucy almost spit her tea across

the room. What? Easy for him to say, the rich bastard. God, to have no understanding of other people at all. He should lose all his money. Wouldn't that be funny? He should. Lucy felt righteous indignation burn through her chest. She glared at the television. "You, yes, you, asshole. Just once, you should understand what it's like. You should lose all your money and have to be one of the very poor yourself."

Back on Google News that afternoon, she clicked on another story about Matthew Ravens, just to fuel her self-righteous zeal. The story, detailed and comprehensive, effectively squelched her indignation. Oh my God. Oh, no. Out of context. The previous news story had taken his remarks completely out of context. They'd deliberately distorted his meaning. Oh, shit. "I'm not concerned about the very poor, because they have a safety net. And if there are holes in that net, we should repair them." Damn. It was kind of a stupid remark, not really thoughtful, but not cruel, not callous. Not deserving of retribution.

God, what was going on with the news? Just yesterday, Lucy was outraged over a newspaper story that claimed a major corporation paid no taxes in 2011. She fumed about it all day, until a co-worker pointed her to a fact-check website that showed the story was distorted and inaccurate. So frustrating. Lucy tried to get balanced news reports. Although she tended toward more liberal sources, she really wanted news that was fair and truthful. Now, she was beginning to wonder if an unbiased news source was even available.

Lucy read the Matthew Ravens story over again. Fuck. It didn't even matter — conservative, liberal, they all distorted their positions and pushed their own views. Mostly, they just wanted to make money, draw in viewers, readers, advertisers. Lucy began talking to her computer. The words poured out in desperation. "I didn't mean what I said before. He shouldn't really lose his money, nothing should happen to him."

Sweat beaded her hairline as she paced through the house. "What is wrong with me? This is crazy. I shouldn't have this kind of power. This isn't right." She fell onto the couch. "Stop it. You don't have any power. You're being ridiculous. Nothing is going to happen."

Ten days later, Matthew Ravens was dead. His wife, Catherine, gave a press conference. Standing at a podium, perfect posture, three teenagers by her side, she spoke with dignity and grace about her husband who was the victim of a Ponzi scheme. They lost everything. Tears welled in Lucy's eyes as his wife talked about her husband — a kind, generous man, devoted husband and father, who suffered a massive stroke just hours after learning of their financial losses.

Lucy watched in horror. She watched it over and over, and when it was no longer on television, she found it on YouTube. She felt Catherine's eyes pin her to the wall, eviscerate her. Her guts ripped out every time, but she couldn't stop watching.

She was so sure that she was right. Always riding the ethical high horse, always feeling morally superior. She knew what was best for everyone, didn't she? So smug, just as smug as all the assholes she wanted to correct. But she was wrong about this, so wrong.

Lucy called in sick to work. She clicked off the television, shut down her computer. Lying on the couch, curled around a pillow, she slept for sixteen hours.

When she woke up, she focused on convincing herself this wasn't her fault. After all, she was only operating on the information she had. She wasn't responsible for the inaccuracies reported. Every single news channel twisted the facts; they just put different slants on the distortion.

For six months, Lucy avoided the news. She cancelled her newspaper subscription. She changed her homepage from Google News to Games on Mindburst. She went to work, completed her assignments, kept to herself, and avoided her co-workers as much as possible. When they tried to engage her, she feigned illness or family issues. Her boss, especially, had trouble with Lucy's avoidance of controversy and kept bringing up politics in every conversation. Finally, Lucy concocted a story about high blood pressure and orders from her doctor to avoid conflict and that seemed to have an

impact. After a while, even Ginny left her alone, and Lucy was glad. At home, she spent her spare time playing Bubble Tap and watching sitcoms. She fast-forwarded through all political commercials. One night, she fell asleep, watching *Casablanca* on Channel Nine. She woke up to a protest at the state capital. Union busting – really? What the hell? She couldn't stop watching. My God, how long has this been going on?

She went to her computer to bring up the local paper. Her hand hovered above the mouse. Leave it alone. Let it go. Lucy pulled herself to the kitchen and made coffee. Ten deep breaths. She rummaged through the cupboard for something sweet. More deep breaths. A stale cinnamon roll and two cups of coffee later, she played her favorite game. She lost once, browsed a few others, then she could no longer stop herself; she clicked on Google News. Two stories and, once again, she found herself fixated. What kind of an idiot had we elected? Really, I think he's too stupid to live. She clapped her hand over her mouth to keep the words in. Of course, he's not too stupid to live. Lucy was careful to not talk out loud. She turned back to her computer and watched more clips.

The governor was speaking, "This is the only way we have to balance the budget. There are no alternatives and nothing further to discuss. This is what the people want."

What people want this? Who wanted this? Certainly, she didn't want this. No one she knew would want this. There must be other things that could, at the very least, be talked about, explored. Lucy clicked on another article. Opposition leaders were quoted as saying, "We'll never back down; this can't be negotiated." God, now both sides are saying the same thing. What the fuck was wrong with people?

It seemed they'd all decided, no negotiation, no compromise. Maybe I was right. Maybe politicians are too stupid to live. Maybe people would be better off if every one of them would just die. Her stomach clenched. She couldn't say that out loud. That's insane, she didn't mean that. Or did she? Lucy felt the old indignation flame through her body. She paced the edges of the room and hugged the righteousness to her like a long-lost friend. Why can't we work together, even a little bit? Did no one remember the '90s? Newt Gingrich and Bill Clinton. Two politicians with similar iffy morals and opposite political beliefs, but they managed to broker some very good deals. Good for the country. Good for all the people, right and left.

Maybe chocolate will help. Lucy rummaged through her cupboards, shoving aside soup and spaghetti sauce, finally settling for a granola bar, but it didn't calm her nerves. She threw away the wrapper and began unloading the dishwasher. It seems as if no one cares about the country or the people anymore. They only care about their own point of view. Their own ideology. Just draw a line in the sand, no matter who it hurts, stick to it without considering others, without even considering facts.

Lucy went back to her TV. She kept watching the news. Switching from channel to channel. Please compromise. Please listen. Please work together.

Lucy felt the constant lies on both sides, sharp as shards of glass in her guts. Maybe all the politicians needed to die. Maybe a clean slate would end all this polarization. What would it take? A flood? Lucy smiled. She liked that image. A plague of locusts? Or maybe a bomb. These people are stuck. We need new leaders, new attitudes; a new start. Both houses of congress. Both parties. They were all beyond help. The world was spiraling out of control, and they didn't care. No one would ever change.

Suddenly, Lucy knew. She stared at the television for five full minutes.

Then she opened her mouth and started to talk. •

Alice Benson lives in Wisconsin with her partner and their dog, Max. Alice recently retired from a job in the human service field; previously she spent over thirteen years working with a domestic violence program. Her short stories have appeared in *Delta Women Ezine*, *Annalemma.net*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Epiphany*, and *Shooter Literary Journal*. Her first novel, *Her Life is Showing*, set in a domestic violence shelter, was published in January, 2014, by *Black Rose Writing*. Visit Alice on her website at <http://www.alicebensonaauthor.com/>

FILLING THE SEA

BY REBECCA PELKY

No one wants
to be beholden,

even just to the coal stacks, steam
rising flush in the earliest sun.

With every speck of black dust
plucked from my knees, I beg

to be stronger. Or at least
madder. I want to say, no

part of you made me.
I fall asleep with this

and wake with a dead fish
on my pillow. I dreamed I was

a heron, and I filled in your grave
with mouthfuls of gravel.

Rebecca Pelky lives and writes on the south shore of Lake Superior where she also earned her MFA at Northern Michigan University. Before going back to school she spent thirteen years working as a zookeeper, where she was once run over by a giraffe. Her work has recently appeared in *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, and *Dunes Review*, among others.

OTHER PEOPLE DIE

BY JERROD SCHWARZ

A toddler's hands toss the manhole
cover – lid from that seven mile
hole in Russia – like a paper plate. A third
grader turns multiplication tables
into a pair of gloves, knee pads, and back
muscles strong enough for a slower
slide down. A teenager's first wet
dream and his most sincere *fuck!*
sharpen elbows into two spikes
that spark against the tunnel's sudden
limestone. A creative writing degree
rusts your bobsled's wheels from luge
speeds to crawl. When your wife's
miscarried fetus *thlimps* against
the toilet bowl, ancient roots like rebar
clothesline your stomach, suspend you
at the halfway mark,

And all those obsidian tattoos along
the way – *yours, his, other people* – jolt

into simpler smears – *my, I, end.*



SCIENCE AS SAVIOR IN THE 21ST CENTURY BY MARK ANTONY ROSSI

I often wonder about the backgrounds of scientists urging NASA to design new space missions to Mars and other distant galactic destinations. I think about how they critique Congress and the American public on spending levels for super-expensive projects that have so little bearing on our daily lives.

Hardworking taxpayers are deemed insignificant, unable to digest grand scientific schemes doing more to satisfy the proclivities thrust upon tenure and academic isolation than making relevant complex experiments and costly expenditures. The reasons behind consistent (and sometimes willful) communication breakdown revolve around the repeated charges I have made throughout my examination of science whenever it orbits the seductive body of money and machine. The crippling conditions of vanity, arrogance, shortsightedness, and denial of ethical consideration do much damage to the reputation of modern science as a potential savior.

I question the backgrounds and motives of modern-day scientific dreamers precisely because I see horrible tragedies (by design and by accident) when people focus so intensely on the heavens until the ground is lost. The ground is Earth; Earth is Humanity. It is humanity that Science must serve and not the reverse. Yet attempt any such debate with many of today's scientists and you are bound to face a barrage of jargon meant to call up the ghost of Orwell, while some lab coat lackey in the corner is keeping score and ensuring credit and fame are jotted down on the historical dotted line.

I wonder about the backgrounds of these scientists, since they seem to lose a sense of social impact as if their experiments and galactic discoveries will always make a difference on Earth. Whether a black hole sucks all energy in its vicinity or simply winks at our existence, it holds little clue to how we can survive long enough on Earth to one day travel to distant stars and planets. I wonder if these scientists, regardless of field of study, might hail from some idyllic paradise I am not allowed to enter. How is it possible for them to detach the social dilemmas of today from the work they claim will benefit us tomorrow? We may not be here tomorrow. You know the story well: "that's someone else's problem," "not in my backyard," "leave it for preachers and politicians to figure out." Sadly, few of these figures historically rate well in moral courage—or the social awareness department, either.

Social change continues to arrive on the bloody backs of a handful of individuals making the ultimate sacrifice. Science, the preeminent philosophy bound to guide the 21st century, consists of flawed humans—people who are vain and arrogant and possess shortsightedness and every other kind of dysfunction. Ironically, these very same character defects cause wars and famines and various wholesale destruction. In the next millennium, humanity will begin to assemble the technological pieces required to explore and eventually colonize the moon, Mars, and other distant planets. But this progress is irrelevant until we have instituted human and social progressions. Technological progress

is usually external and superficial; thus, it has little bearing on the human character unless it's used to greatly help or tragically harm.

Progress in the human character is what humanity needs. Without progress, humanity is destined to export its prejudice and war-like behavior to heavenly bodies innocent of our hostile history or perhaps tired of its own violent past. This very notion seems to consistently elude great thinkers as they design vehicles for our future. Do they have so much faith in human survival to ignore these fatal flaws guaranteed to be transported to the stars? Or are they blind men and women chasing after glory and answers to ancient mysteries? It makes me wonder — as it should you.

Good intentions do run throughout science and scientific thinkers. Many scientists honestly believe in the validity and nobility of their profession and its astounding achievements. I share in some of their optimism (believe it or not). Humanity has witnessed progress both external and internal in the past two centuries. The abolition of slavery and the creation of the airplane are clear examples of each progression.

But it remains to be seen, even in the great Democratic Experiment called America, if humans can live and cooperate with each other in such a way as to begin to solve complex and resistant social blemishes. I view these past two centuries and the 21st as three unique social reform-minded segments. The 19th century was a moralist century with full understanding of man's corrupt nature. It tried and failed to produce societal progression through religion. Instead of refining mores and men, it maddened and divided them through orthodoxy and prejudice, culminating in justifying slavery through religious doctrine. Its successes should be noted, for it did bring about mental health reform, better personal hygiene, and a modest measure of temperance.

The 20th century was a political one, dedicated to removing unreliable superstitions and demented dictators in order to erect strong institutions capable of directing masses toward high standards of liberty and justice. It erected hallowed halls and stable governments, but is considered partially successful in moving humanity toward a fair and fruitful existence. At the close of the century, racial hatred and societal decay are only slightly improved from five decades ago. Politics, the 20th century's bet on advancing progression, was found to be fickle, too reliant on half-truth, testy emotions, and age-long deferment to an insensitive majority.

Social successes seem greater in the present, but I predict it shall be judged harshly in the future. Racial minorities and women found a hazy equality and a questionable destiny; nuclear war became an afterthought due to the collapse of the Soviet enemy, yet has resurfaced with the introduction of nuclear programs in North Korea, Pakistan, and Iran. And even though medicine has increased the health and life of the average person, it might have a terrible price if pill dependency is merely extending life and not truly improving it.

Mankind has relied on religion and politics to make the world a better place and will surely expect science in the 21st century to invent or discover new methods capable of reducing war, hunger, hatred, and general social discord. As in the two centuries before it, the 21st century will have its successes, but whether or not we as a species behold a 22nd century will be entirely determined in the hands of the average person. Ironically, the answer to man's misery dwells within the bus driver more than the biochemist. It's hard to find unity when you live separate lives. And it's difficult to make common purpose through a great divide. I suspect the ultimate betrayal of mankind is our stubborn belief someone will save us rather than accepting that we've always had to power to save ourselves. •

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Eugenia Loli originated in the technology sector, but she left that impersonal world behind in order to build new, exciting worlds via her art. Her collages, with the help of the title, often include a teasing, visual narrative, as if they're a still frame of a surreal movie. The viewers are invited to make up the movie's plot in their mind. You can find her online via eugenialoli.tumblr.com

Robert Zurer was born in New York City and has lived and worked there all his life. He is primarily self-taught and has been drawing and painting since childhood. His work, artist's statement and contact information may be viewed at robertzurer.com

Kyle Hemmings has art work in *The Stray Branch*, *Euphenism*, *Uppagus*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Black Market Lit*, *Red Bird Press*, *Snapping Twigs*, and upcoming work in *Convergence*. He loves pre-punk garage bands of the 60s, Manga comics, and urban photography/art.

Taylor Irezumi is a Saint Louis native currently residing in Fairfield, Iowa where she attends MUM as a double major in their Art and Creative Writing programs. Her work focuses on social commentary; Primarily the politics of gender, classism, racism, and bodily autonomy from an intersectional feminist perspective.

Bill Wolak is a poet, photographer, and collage artist. He has just published his twelfth book of poetry entitled *Love Opens the Hands* with Nirala Press. Recently, he was a featured poet at The Hyderabad Literary Festival.

Ginna Wilkerson has a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from University of Aberdeen. Her first poetry collection, *Odd Remains*, was released in 2013. Currently, Ginna is making a transition from poetry to prose, working on mixed media art, and looking forward to art residencies in Canada and Finland in 2015. Her work has been shown in Spain, Scotland, Canada, and the US.

Ana Prundaru, who resides in Zurich, is a photographer and writer. She hopes to learn underwater photography in the near future and spend the day observing sharks and jellyfish. Previous publications include *A-Minor Magazine*, *Wilderness House*, *Red Fez* and *Citron Review*. Find her at anaprundaru.com

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