



PVR 8

ISSUE 8 | SPRING 2014

POMONA VALLEY REVIEW



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**A special thanks to all those involved in promotion,
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Dear Readers

As the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin once said, “Poetically Man Dwells,” a truism, to be sure, which inspired Martin Heidegger’s own philosophy in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, claiming that poetry is the creative source for human perspective, and indeed “an indispensable function for human life.” The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard continues the metaphor of dwelling in *The Poetics of Space*, comparing words to houses: “To mount and descend in the words themselves – this is a poet’s life.”

So, with our eighth issue, and after plenty of deliberation and contemplation, we invite you to dwell poetically with us and to mount and descend in these words and images so as to harness the *poiesis* of human life, for so often we are inundated with our technologies and motion, our pursuits to elongate life and fill life that we neglect the *fulfilling* life, the “truth and beauty” of language, emotion, and thought, as Aldous Huxley says, as opposed to the “comfort and wellbeing” of a technologized society, so much so that Foucault questions whether the scientific establishments – such as

our institutions that industrialize and mechanize education and thought – have brought an end to “true life,” where poetry is a “life exercise,” a way of being in the world and caring for one’s self and one’s soul. And just as much as *poiesis* is creation, it is dwelling *in* that creation and drawing toward the truth of one’s existence.

We thank you for your contributions to this project of creating and dwelling, of moving beyond and drawing toward what moves us. Part of the reason we continue *PVR* is to dwell in new ways, to explore the corners of our souls so often neglected in our daily rituals; thus, we publish, unlike so many journals we have read, what moves us, what shows us something, and not what is lyrically complex but philosophically void. As always, we appreciate your continued support on this journey, and we hope you will enjoy *PVR 8*.

Thank You,

Ryan David Leack
Editor-in-Chief
PVR

DISCONNECT

This might be the most unromantic thing ever, but I wish you were an internet browser like Google Chrome or Firefox.

Hell, even Internet Explorer.

I want to be able to delete our history and bookmark only our happy memories.

There could be some apps that would liven up our dull, pathetic lives together.

Or maybe we could reconnect and see the wide world through a small screen.

Perhaps then there would still be a way for us to be compatible again, if only we could upgrade.

~ Amanda Riggle



“Walking on Light” ~ Joanna Madloch

CHILD'S PLAY

A blue hue,
freckles creating
a trail, my lips
follow.

The color of flesh;
the tinge of red;
the porcelain white.
Details are left.

One pair of scissors,
one sheet of paper,
a snowflake,
melted on my tongue.

~ *Melanie Figueroa*

A REASON

so often one needs a reason.

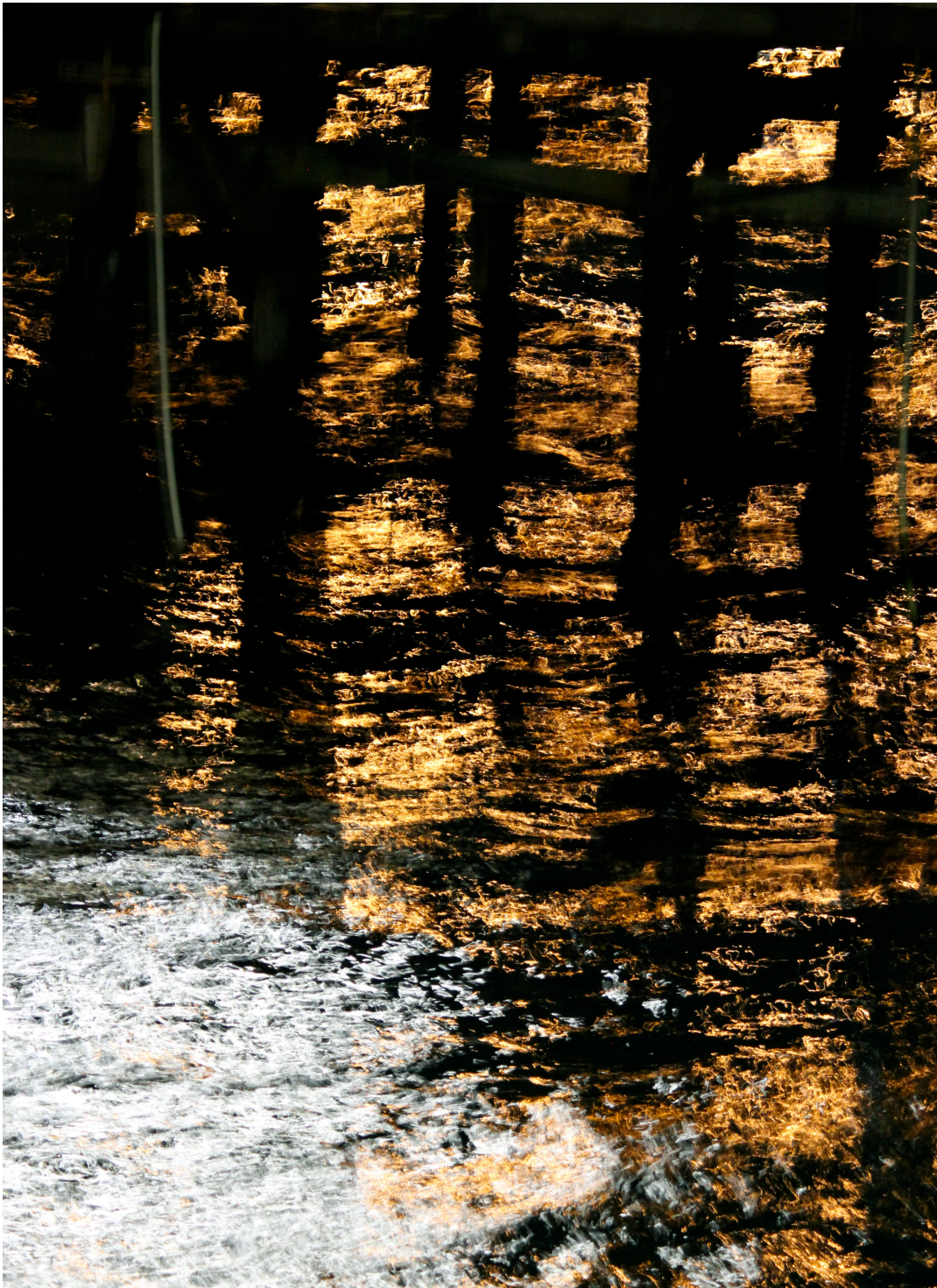
it's fires we fear, though
their contained clearing cleans,
though their burning plumes stock
the sky, sustaining the earth.

considering cartography, i grow
weary, finding lines — the vertebrae
of oak and water.

we go as the crow flies, and i wonder
if it's true — where the horse broke my rib,
it's believed stronger where the knotted bone curves.

meditating on brokenness, it unfurls —
some men are good to leave.

~ Erica Tom



"Pier Fire" ~ Anthony Rojas



"Gem Liquid" ~ Anthony Rojas

THREE DAYS OUT

"That was hell. I'm not in hell now, nor do I ever want to be again, at least not until I'm dead." Ridley said it like he really meant it and then spit overboard into the water. He looked far out into the horizon. The swells were large and foreboding and the fog prohibited him from seeing anything beyond a couple hundred yards.

"Are you sure this is the right direction?"

Gordon checked the GPS device. He could see their position on the small digital screen, a red dot on a map following the outline of the California coast, moving slowly along the right-hand margin.

"All is good," he said.

Gordon sat in the stern of the 30-foot panga boat, near the twin outboard motors, wearing a faded, khaki flannel shirt and sunglasses. He looked ahead as the bow sliced through the jade green water. Sarah, the one female onboard, was nestled beside her boyfriend Michael on one of the perpendicular benches. And Ridley sat precariously at the point of the bow.

"*The Secret* is what saved me," Ridley continued, his long brown hair blowing in the wind. "If not for *The Secret*, I'd still be in hell now."

"The Secret?" Sarah asked.

"You haven't heard of it? It's a global phenomenon. *The Secret*... the laws of attraction. If you have a dream and believe in it, the forces of nature will conspire to make it come true."

"Okay, maybe I have heard of it."

"It was my salvation... like a light bulb going off in my head, and the minute it came to me, I realized I could have anything I want."

"That's why you're on a panga boat in the middle of the ocean?" Gordon asked.

"It's like finding nirvana," Ridley said, ignoring the comment. "And with it, everything begins to fall into place."

"Tell me more," said Sarah.

"Hell is something you can eradicate from your mind. Heaven is something you can choose to have, here and now, if you want it. It's all a matter of controlling one's consciousness, and willing it."

"Yeah?"

"What do you think Gordon?" Michael asked.

"I think its bullshit."

"Let him talk," Sarah said.

"It's been around since the dawn of time. All the great minds of history knew about it... Plato, Shakespeare, Lincoln, Einstein."

“Then why isn’t everyone rich and powerful?” Michael asked.

“Most people don’t know about it. It was suppressed for many years.”

“Okay,” Sarah said. “Tell me how it works?”

“It’s the law of attraction. What you seek and what you desire will come true if you believe it and let into your mind, and concentrate on it. Look at me. A week ago I wanted to be a millionaire, and here I am now on this boat with all of you, soon to be one.”

“You just have to think about it?”

“Thoughts become things.”

“It seems too simple.”

“It works, trust me.”

Gordon tapped the side of the fuel tank with the sole of his shoe and it made a hollow sound.

“Hey Michael, pass down one of those gas cans,” he said.

Michael lifted one of the heavy five-gallon gasoline cans and carried it down to the stern, carefully stepping past Sarah and over the three perpendicular benches.

“I went to a conference in L.A.,” Ridley continued preaching from the bow. “I saw kidneys regenerated, cancer resolved. One man was paralyzed, mute, and on a ventilator after his spine and diaphragm had been crushed in a plane crash. He fully credits his recovery to the power of the secret.”

Gordon chuckled.

“You doubt it?” Ridley asked.

“I question it.”

“You’re a non-believer.”

“I believe in a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the power of positive thinking, but I think they have their limitations. I prefer to rely on my own know-how and perseverance.”

“You have to get the negative thoughts out of your head.”

“I’ll do that after we get this boat to its destination.”

Ridley turned his attention back to Sarah. “Quantum physics is a part of the Law,” he said, lighting up a cigarette. “Your thoughts actually send out magnetic signals that draw in what it is that you want. It’s a scientific fact.”

“And now he’s a physicist.” Gordon said quietly as he twisted off the fuel tank cap.

“He’s into the spiritual, mystical side of things,” Michael replied.

Together they poured in the additional five gallons of gasoline and then Michael returned to his place beside Sarah.

“It’s a power that we human beings have always possessed but have always suppressed. It’s been stashed away, hidden not only by those who wanted to keep it for themselves, but also by all of us who are unwilling to

accept it and acknowledge its power. For example, that GPS there that Gordon's got. It's a nice tool but you don't need it. If you have The Secret you can navigate this ship, or any ship for that matter, simply by using the laws of attraction."

"Come on," Sarah said.

"Really, most of the things we rely on in this world are just a substitute for what we can achieve on our own. Columbus didn't need GPS because he knew the power. He simply attracted himself to land just as a meteor attracts itself to the earth."

"You really think it works that good?"

"I don't think. I know."

"It would be great if life could be so easy."

It's all crap, Gordon thought. He listened to the humming sound of the two 90 horsepower Yamaha engines as they continued their way north at a steady pace of seventeen knots. He checked their route on the GPS. The screen showed a straight yellow line from the south, from where they had come, and a straight blue line etched ahead. He looked forward. It was late in the afternoon now and all their parkas were wet from the dew and fog. Sarah's hat flopped in the breeze generated by the forward momentum of the boat. She was a decent looking woman, he thought, daintily feminine but firmly confident. A college graduate in her mid-twenties with a full head of red hair, yet here she was with three desperates out in the Pacific on a smuggling mission.

He watched as she opened the ice chest and pulled out some packages.

"Dinner anyone?"

"I'll take one," Michael said.

"Me too," said Ridley.

She passed around pre-wrapped sandwiches and bottles of *AriZona* ice tea, and a *Rockst* energy drink for Ridley. They all ate as the boat continued on its northerly path.

"Too many people focus on the negative," Ridley said. "You must telegraph your thoughts and desires. You must manifest your dreams if they are to come true. You must create your own destiny."

They pulled shifts through the night, sitting in the stern of the boat, steering the small outboard motor and watching the GPS screen. Morning came and Gordon woke from a short sleep with his head resting on the rail. The light of dawn illuminated the ocean's surface and he could see the swells rushing past. The fog had broken and there were now dark clouds in the sky. He looked east. Even now with the visibility clear for several miles he could

not see land. He looked back to the stern. Michael sat there, holding the steering tiller in his hand.

Gordon climbed back to him and took a look at the GPS screen, positioning himself so that he could see it clearly without any glare.

“You’ve been keeping the nose on course?”

“Yes,” Michael said. “Why?”

Gordon picked up the GPS device and checked the longitudinal coordinates. The screen showed their progress, and the slow moving mass of land several miles to their east.

“Thought we’d be able to see land from here, that’s all.”

They both looked in the direction of land and saw nothing.

“I kept her on course,” Michael said.

“What time did you guys switch?”

“Around two.”

“Was Ridley awake?”

“Yes.”

“He wasn’t sleeping?”

“No.”

“Was he on course?”

“Yeah, he was on course.”

Gordon glanced over the side. The swells were zipping past. The twin outboards were still humming along nicely. The bow continued slicing cleanly through the water. “Take a break,” he said.

Michael climbed over the perpendicular benches to where Sarah and Ridley were curled up in sleeping bags near the mid-section of the boat. He found an empty space next to Sarah, curled up beside her, and pulled a wool blanket around him.

Gordon placed the GPS device back in its mount, took the pilot seat, and watched the screen curiously, holding the tiller steady. The red dot on the screen continued its forward progression; the digital image of the land mass to the east moved in the same manner as it did before. He looked in the direction of land, staring for a good thirty seconds, but could not see anything. He checked the distance on the small scale on the GPS screen. It looked to be about ten kilometers, which was strange, he knew, because the coast here was mountainous and easy to make out from a considerable distance.

Ridley was now awake and standing at the bow. He stood fully forward in the eave, facing the water and using the rails on either side to support his knees. He had a blanket wrapped around his neck and it was blowing backward in the breeze like a cape.

“I’m a magnet,” he said boldly. “Attracting the light of the land.”

Gordon heard Sarah's sleeping bag unzipped. Her head popped out and she looked up at Ridley and began to laugh.

"Look at him! It's like he's flying!"

Michael too, awake now from a brief sleep, looked up at Ridley. "He looks like a winged-god or something," he said.

"I am Osiris," Ridley clarified, "god of the afterlife. I'll bring you a continent, like the rays of heaven will bring you to the hereafter."

Gordon looked out across the water, to where land should be. "Hate to interrupt the entertainment, but I think we've gotten off course." He looked at the GPS device. "Yeah, I think something's wrong."

"What?" Michael asked.

"No worries, my man." Ridley spoke from the bow. "We'll find our way." He held his arms out in a flying motion and let the blanket fan fully backward.

"We should be seeing land from here," Gordon said. "And I don't see any land." He looked up at Ridley who was still pretending to fly. "Did you keep the boat on course last night?"

"I see land," Ridley said, oscillating in the wind. "I can see across the ocean and I can see land ahead."

They all looked past the bow and saw nothing. Then they looked at one another with doubtful expressions.

"There's no land," Michael said.

"Are you high?" Gordon asked Ridley.

Ridley did not answer.

"Swell."

For a moment there was silence. Then came a groaning noise from Sarah.

"I'm feeling sick," she said.

They all looked at her. Her head was tilted back and her arms were limply in her lap and she looked pale and dizzy.

"Hang over the side if you need too," Michael said.

"I'm not that sick!"

"There's some Dramamine in the tackle box," Gordon said. "You should take some."

Sarah opened the tackle box, pulled out two Dramamine capsules, and downed them with some tea. Gordon picked up a leather satchel he kept near the outboard and took from it a handful of papers, among which was the GPS manual and a sheet of paper with their coordinates. He checked the coordinates and reconciled them with the coordinates on the GPS. They seemed to match, which was odd, he thought. He maneuvered the bow in an eastwardly direction toward land, and locked the tiller there. Then he opened the GPS manual and began reading through it.

After twenty minutes, Sarah was still whining and moving restlessly. "Try lying down," Michael told her. "Usually that will make you feel better."

"I feel awful."

"Try lying on your back."

Ridley climbed back to her and took a seat beside her. "I have a little something," he said. He pulled out a plastic baggy and set it on the bench in between them. It was filled with an assortment of colorful pills. Using his fingers he pulled two turquoise-colored pills from the bag. "Take these. They'll make you well."

"What are they?"

"They are the tears of Osiris."

"Don't be giving her drugs," Gordon said.

"Don't mind him," Ridley replied, holding the pills in his hand. "It's *Nepenthe*, the drug of *no sorrows*. It'll make you feel better. You'll want to fly."

Gordon looked over at Michael.

"The Dramamine's not working," Michael said, shrugging his shoulders.

Sarah took the two pills and held them in her palm. "How long does it take for them to work?" she asked.

"Not long."

"Ridley, don't be giving her that stuff," Gordon demanded, and just as he said it, Sarah popped the pills in her mouth and swallowed them without water.

Gordon frowned and returned his attention to the GPS screen. Curiously, he saw that their proximity to the land mass had not changed, despite the fact that he had maneuvered the bow all the way to the east. In fact, the red dot on the screen seemed to have moved further away from it.

"Did you mess with this thing last night?" Gordon asked, looking directly at Ridley.

Ridley did not reply.

Gordon glanced back at the GPS. "You did, didn't you!"

"No worries," was Ridley reply. "We'll find our way."

"We've got problems," Gordon said.

"What?" Michael asked.

"Something's wrong with the GPS."

"What makes you think so?" Sarah asked.

"It's not responding to a directional change. In fact it seems to be going in the opposite direction."

"What does that mean?"

"It means it's not working."

"We're lost?"

"We should be able to see the land."

"We're lost?" she asked again.

"I think someone was too busy getting high last night instead of keeping us on course."

Gordon glanced skyward. It was overcast and difficult to make out exactly where the sun was, but in the direction that he thought should be west, he saw a bright spot.

"I think the sun is there," he pointed. He looked at his watch. It was 10:00 am. "If that's true, it means we're heading in the wrong direction. We're going southwest, not north. We're heading out to sea."

"That's not the sun," Ridley said. "It's over there," pointing in the opposite direction.

Both Sarah and Michael looked up into the sky. The clouds were full and dark and they could not tell where the sun was.

Gordon turned the steering tiller all the way to the right and the bow began making a wide, sweeping turn.

"You're wrong," Ridley said.

"Gordon's smart," Sarah said, sighing and holding her hand to her forehead. "He's the sailor among us. Listen to him."

"Gordon has negative thoughts."

"What do you know about sailing?" Michael asked.

"Nothing," Ridley said.

"Well then, let Gordon do his thing."

"You're just going to sit there and let him take us in the wrong direction?"

"He's gotten us this far."

"You mean lost?"

"I mean he didn't have to invite you along but he wanted to share with my friends."

"It's already written," Ridley replied. He lit up a cigarette and looked out across to the horizon. "Gordon is too focused on the negative. It's his problem. He's always thinking about what can go wrong, and *Wah-la!* It does. If you let him take us in the wrong direction, we are all going to die. We need to rely on our built-in barometers."

Michael and Sarah exchanged curious glances.

"Ridley, you need to listen to Gordon," Sarah said. "He's been our leader from the start. And he's been a good leader."

"He's wrong," Ridley said. "I can feel it. We're heading in the wrong direction."

"The Secret is telling you so?" Michael asked.

Gordon locked the tiller in place, heading in the direction he believed to be east. He opened the GPS manual again and began thumbing through it, again trying to figure out what was wrong.

“Who’s the real leader here, anyway?” Ridley asked, puffing quickly on his cigarette.

“I vote for Gordon,” Michael said.

“Gordon knows his stuff,” Sarah whimpered.

Then Gordon made a spontaneous noise. “Someone reversed the hemispheric settings on this thing!” He looked up at Ridley. “You messed with this last night, didn’t you!”

“Rely on your inner being,” was Ridley’s reply, “That which the spirit created, not on some man-made device.”

“Shit!”

“No worries,” said Ridley. “We’ll all be rich in a day.”

Everyone was quiet now. A brooding feeling came over the boat. Sarah lay in the aluminum hull, Michael sat quietly on one of the perpendicular benches, Ridley puffed away on his cigarette, and Gordon continued to fiddle with the GPS device trying to reset it back to day one. If they had been going southwest all night, he thought, they had gone far out to sea. The curvature of the California coastline would have taken a southbound vessel considerably west of land, he thought. He looked out across the water. A good eight hours worth.

Another twenty minutes passed before he finally recalibrated the GPS back to the correct hemispheric settings and he re-entered the proper coordinates. When he finally looked up at the others, he saw Sarah standing at the point of the bow, much like Ridley had been earlier, with her blanket wrapped around her neck and blowing back in the wind.

“It’s marvelous!” she proclaimed. Then, pointing to a bright spot in the clouds, she said, “There’s the sun!”

The three men looked up to where she pointed.

“I thought you were sick?” Michael asked.

“Not no more,” Ridley said. “She’s right. It’s right there... which means I was right. We’re heading in the wrong direction.”

Gordon looked up at the spot. It was bright all right, but there were other spots in the sky that were equally as bright and it was impossible to tell exactly where the sun was especially now that it was nearly noon and the sun was high. He looked at the compass reading on the GPS.

“That’s not the sun,” he bluntly stated. “North is that way.” He pointed to his left.

“Can’t be,” Ridley said.

“Well, it is.”

“That’s the sun!” Sarah said, pointing back to the bright spot, wobbling now like a drunk. “Look! There!”

Ridley climbed over the perpendicular benches back to Gordon, grabbed the GPS device from its mount, and stared into the screen.

“It’s fixed,” Gordon said.

Without forewarning, Ridley tossed it into the water, doing so nonchalantly in the same manner as he discarded his cigarette butts. It hit the water with a splash and quickly disappeared beneath the surface.

“What!” Gordon yelled, reaching for it.

“What did you do that for?” shouted Michael.

“We don’t need it,” Ridley said.

“That’s just great,” Gordon said. “That’s just fine.”

He pushed Ridley aside, not wanting to start a confrontation, and reached for the leather satchel behind him. He grabbed it, took a seat on the back bench, and began writing on a note pad. He wrote down the time, and wind direction, and the direction and the intervals between the swells.

Ridley looked curiously over his shoulder

“Gibberish,” he said. “Don’t need it.”

Gordon said nothing.

“I think Ridley’s right,” Sarah said, fanning her blanket at the bow.

Michael looked at her. “A minute ago you were telling Ridley to listen to Gordon?”

She shrugged.

Ridley climbed back over the benches up to the bow. He stood there beside Sarah, scanning the ocean.

“That way!” he said, pointing to his left.

“He’s high,” Gordon said.

“Listen to him,” Sarah said. “He has the power of *The Secret*.”

“My God,” Michael moaned. “You too?”

“They’re both high,” Gordon said.

“He knows which way to go,” Sarah said, truly believing it.

“Come’on, Sarah,” said Michael. “Really now!”

Gordon shook the fuel tank and could hear the swash of fuel low at the bottom.

“Bring another one of those gas cans, will ya?” he asked Michael.

Michael lifted one of the cans and brought it back, and together they began dumping another five gallons into the fuel tank.

“Who brings their girlfriend on a drug run?” Michael asked Gordon as the fuel poured in.

“I told you not to bring her,” was Gordon’s only reply.

“This is crazy, desperate shit,” Michael said.

They both looked up at Sarah. She stood there beside Ridley, standing tall and confident now, looking like the carved figurehead of an old sailing ship.

The boat continued eastward, or at least in the direction Gordon believed to be east. Making up for lost time, he thought.

It was late afternoon now and the sky was very dark and one could not make out where the sun might be, or even if there was a sun. Gordon looked at his notepad. He had logged in the wind, and the current, and counted the time intervals between swells, every half hour, but now he was unsure if the wind had changed its direction, only that it had increased in velocity and that the water had become choppy.

Ridley and Sarah sat in the first bench near the bow, they were talking, but Gordon could not make out what they were saying. He saw Ridley pull out his little plastic baggy again, pop a couple pills in his mouth and then hand Sarah a couple, which she too quickly swallowed.

Ridley turned and looked back and saw Gordon and Michael watching them.

“Want some?” he asked

“What is it?” Michael asked.

“It’s good stuff.”

“What kind of stuff?”

“Amazing stuff.”

Ridley held out his hand, exposing a couple of the pills.

Michael shook his head.

“Think of the best place you’ve ever been,” Ridley said. “That place on a beach with the woman you love, when life is easy and everything seems like magic. Do you want to go back there for just a moment? You can be there now, in a matter of seconds.”

“Don’t listen to him. He’s crazy,” Gordon said.

“Magic is a moment away.”

“If it were that easy, the entire world would be at peace.”

“Such a disbeliever,” Ridley scoffed.

“Come’on Ridley, stop screwing with them.”

“Gordon thinks he’s king, but he’s not your king. He’s only king of his own crazy world.”

“Don’t listen to him. He’s full of shit.”

Michael looked over at Sarah.

“What can I say?” she shrugged, smiling broadly. “I’m not sick no more. In fact I’m feeling pretty good.” She looked out across the ocean in the

direction Ridley had pointed earlier. "I think Ridley's right. Gordon's got it wrong."

"I'm going to need your help, Michael," Gordon said. "I'm going to need you to pull this off."

Michael nodded his head. "I know."

"That's where we need to go," Gordon said, pointing off the starboard bow in the direction the boat was heading. "We've got to keep her in that direction."

"Okay. Don't worry. I'm with you. I'm just tired. Just need some sleep."

Michael climbed over the rear benches to the place where the hull was flat and widest. Gordon watched as he pulled out his sleeping bag, crawled in it, and zipped it shut.

Through the night Ridley, Sarah and Michael slept up near the bow of the boat. Gordon stayed in the stern, awake and hoping for a glimpse of starlight by which he could navigate, but it never came. It remained overcast with flurries of sprinkling rain. He spent most of the night listening to the waves slapping against the hull. He had plenty of time to think about this whole adventure. A damned crazy one, he thought. Their cargo remained secure, in its waterproof bales tightly fastened to the aluminum bulwark, lining the entire ship except for the stern. He could see that Ridley and Michael were using the bails as cushions, their heads resting against them now. They looked comfortable and it made him wish that he could sleep too. Except for a few moments when he knew he had passed out, he had kept his eyes open and vigilant all night. Now the pale light of dawn came across the ocean's surface, a dawn with no sun, and Gordon struggled to stay awake and keep the boat pointed in the direction of the swells; the direction in which he hoped landfall was not far. But in truth, he did not know, and though he searched the horizon in all directions, he could not see land.

He felt his head bob, and he went out, for how long he did not know, and when he looked up he saw Michael standing in the front of the boat with no shirt on and his arms stretched skyward.

"Can you take a shift?" Gordon asked.

Michael turned back and looked at him, but did not answer. Then he resumed his forward gaze.

"I need to sleep, Michael. Come on back here and take the tiller."

Michael turned again without speaking.

"Hey man, I really need to sleep."

And when Michael failed to answer a third time, Gordon realized something was wrong.

"You feeling okay?"

"Fine," Michael replied. "It's a beautiful day."

Gordon stared at him for a moment. He seemed distant and disconnected.

"Did you take some of those pills?"

"You shouldn't be so serious," Michael said. "You need to relax a little."

"You did!"

"Sorry buddy."

Crap! Gordon thought. We're floundering and I'm the only sane one left. He looked up at the sky. It was not cooperating either. You should have never let Ridley get to them. You should have never let him pollute their minds with his bullshit.

"You should try some, Gordon," Michael said, wobbling as he spoke. "It'll make you feel great. You'll get your energy back and be able to see everything clearly."

You're going to have to do this on your own now, Gordon thought.

Ridley then rose from the belly of the boat with his hair all disheveled.

"Good morning *El Capitan*," he said, looking at Gordon.

Sarah poked her head out of her bag now too, and then pulled herself completely from it. She went to the ice chest and took out a drink.

"Look at Gordon," she said, with a little smile.

Gordon realized he must have looked like *hell*. His eyes were dark and swollen, and he was hanging over the tiller as if it were the only thing holding him up.

"He looks silly, doesn't he," Ridley said. "How's the log coming along?"

Gordon glanced down at his notepad and realized he had completely lost track of time. It had be some hours since he had made his last entry.

"He's suffering from exposure," Ridley said, lighting up a cigarette. "Are you ready to get us on the right course?"

"Listen to Ridley," Sarah said. "He knows what he's talking about."

"Ridley's high," Gordon said. "He's crazy."

Sarah and Michael exchanged doubtful glances.

"He's ridiculous," said Ridley.

Gordon held on to the tiller, barely keeping his eyes open. Three long days with little sleep had caught up with him, he knew. You can do this, he told himself. You have to do this! You can manage another day or two, can't you?

As the hours passed, Ridley, Sarah and Michael remained in the front of the boat, seated together on the first bench; Ridley in the middle, talking and exchanging laughter and occasionally glancing back at Gordon.

"Come join us," Sarah said. "We're talking about *The Secret*."

Gordon could feel his eyelids growing heavier by the minute. The constant drone of the outboards had become his own sedative. He felt his head slip off his hand, and his hand slip off the tiller. He found himself having to catch himself, again and again, sometimes falling completely off it.

"Can't you see?" said Sarah. "We're no longer lost."

"You need some sleep, buddy," said Michael. "Try some of Ridley's pills. They'll put you in the right state."

"What are you doing?" Gordon asked.

"Nothing. Come on, take some."

"You're crazy," Gordon said.

"No, you're crazy," Sarah told him.

"You all need a reality check."

Gordon straightened his posture, holding his head high. He shook his head and tried to focus his eyes. Can't give in, he thought. Have to remain focused. He looked up into the sky. If only the clouds would break, just for a moment, then I'll get this thing in the right direction. Just need some time for the skies to clear.

He dosed off again, and when he awoke he saw the three of them still seated on the front bench.

"I'll go first!" he heard Ridley saying.

He watched as Ridley stood up, pulled his iPhone from his back pocket and held it high in the air.

"Oh great digital device," Ridley spoke like a great orator, "man's pinnacle of technological evolution, I hereby condemn you to the sea," and with that, he tossed the phone into the ocean. He turned back and looked at Gordon. "Don't need it anymore," he said.

"I'm next!" Sarah shouted. There was a tone of excitement in her voice and a spring in her legs as she stood up and took her smartphone out. She held it high in the air in the same manner as Ridley had done, and announced; "Be gone yea chain of worthless connections and stupid applications!" And she wheeled her arm way back and threw the phone far. It sailed through the sky and splashed into the swells some thirty feet away.

Michael then stood with his smartphone in his hand. "I paid three-hundred dollars for this!" he said, staring at it for a moment. Then he quickly threw it off the bow, adding, "But I don't care! I'll buy a thousand more in a day or two."

The slumber overwhelmed Gordon again, and when he awoke this time, it was to the sound of yelling.

"Look at that!"

"Marvelous!"

“Yeah! Over there!”

He looked up and saw Ridley pointing off the starboard bow. He looked in the direction he pointed but could not see anything.

“What?” Gordon asked.

They all turned back and began to laugh.

“He can’t see it,” Ridley said.

“He’s delirious,” said Sarah.

Gordon looked again, far out across the water and saw nothing but choppy swells and dark clouds, and a vague line that marked the horizon.

Sarah began giggling. “We’ve been talking about you.”

“Let him be,” Ridley said. “He’ll come around.”

The sleeplessness was muddling his thinking process, pulling over him like a veil. He could not remember what time it was, and when he looked at his watch, he was surprised to see it was nearly mid-day. The three remained seated forward, their backs to him. He saw them talking and exchanging more pills. He checked the steering tiller. It remained locked in place. But in what direction? He felt his head bobbing again and he let it down on the tiller again.

When he awoke he found his face pressed against it and his arm draped over it. His entire upper body weight was supported by it, and before his eyes was a hand, a few inches from his face. In it were two turquoise-colored pills. He looked up and saw Michael’s face.

“It’s *Adderall* on steroids,” Michael said. “A double espresso of the highest form.”

Gordon pushed the hand away.

“Take them. They’ll make you feel better,” Michael opened his hand again, revealing the two pills. “They won’t hurt you.”

“Give him time,” Ridley said.

After forty minutes passed Gordon awoke again and saw them all looking back at him, smiling.

“Ridley drew a map in our heads,” Sarah said. “Land’s not far off, just out there,” she pointed.

Gordon lifted his head and surveyed his surroundings. They were still at sea, all right, and there was no land in sight. Above the sky remained overcast with no indication of letting up. The steering tiller was still locked in place, heading to nowhere. Insomnia will make you crazy, he thought. What good will you be then? Can you navigate a ship if your mind’s not working?

He opened his eyes once more, unaware of the duration they had been shut, and took a moment to focus them. Once more he saw the hand before his face; the two pills nestled there in the indentation of the palm. Above was Michael’s sympathetic face.

“Come on, buddy. Take them. You’ll be fine.”

“Join us,” Sarah said. “We want you to be with us. We want you to see what we can see.”

Gordon stared at the pills for a good twenty seconds. They were insignificant enough, he thought. What harm could it do?

“We want our leader back,” Sarah said.

Gordon slowly reached out and took the pills into his hand.

“What did you say they were?”

“*Nepenthe*, the drug of *no sorrows*,” Ridley said. “The drug of no pain.”

“I just need some rest,” Gordon said.

“These will do the trick,” Ridley replied.

Some rest, Gordon thought. Then I can sail this thing back to land.

He looked up into the dark clouds. There was no sun, but the sky seemed overtly bright. Then, in a quick motion, he slapped the pills into his mouth and tilted his head back, swallowing them both. He could feel them going down his throat.

He crawled down into the flat spot in the aluminum hull, leaned his head against the cushioned cargo bales and stared up into the clouds. He closed his eyes and felt a drunken elation. The brightness of the sky began to fade.

Just need some rest, he thought. Then I can navigate this thing. Once the clouds break, I’ll get us back on course. Yeah, I’ll get us back on the straight course.

The panga boat came ashore, capsized, in a remote area along the rugged California coast near Piedras Blancas. The cargo was still strapped to the aluminum bulwark, but there were no signs of life, nor of the individuals who sailed it. The authorities found the fuel tank empty; all the fingerprints had been washed away by the sea.

~ Frank Scozzari



“goettlich | divinely” ~ Monika Mori

Sixteen white identical holes, slots for shoes to fill--
the sight I stared into when the nurse called
merely two hours after I left my "routine"
appointment.
So cold, so clinical: "you have a sexually transmitted
disease."
I hid in the closet.
The expanse of my room
was too big for this kind of news.
I cried when she gave me the type (it has a type?)
one I never heard of before.
It thundered deep in my worried mind.
I felt trashy, stereotypical, and unclean
like a biblical leper must have felt.
I had two strains of HPV.
I *immediately* called you
repeatedly until you picked up.
You had to know;
I could have given it to you.
I apologized profusely.
You were upset, obviously.
It was my fault.
I brought this upon myself..
Before you, I found pieces of myself in other men.
Apparently when you are broken,
you glue yourself back together
with false compliments and semen
until you are a reassembled mannequin
of false hope and self hated.

~ Michelle Lekkerkerk

SENTIMENTAL LOVE POEM

It feels like knots,
the tangled loops of freeway
overpasses weaving
above Los Angeles,

my head full of gas,
ready to explode;
a nebula. The remnant
of an ancient star's

last breath of life.
The way a trumpet
player's body uncurls
as he blows the last notes

of a slow jazz tune.
One made for you.
Like each imprint your lips
left is a crumb

of bread, and I'm trying
to find my way back.

~ *Melanie Figueroa*



"Reality Check" ~ Patrick Quinn

She peers at me over tortoise shell glasses
The kind the 90s made popular
And now I'm not so sure of myself
Not sure of anything, really
Except the biscotti I'm
Contemplating and the deep
Mysteriousness of her eyes

The fear of being incredibly dull is
More than a likelihood
I wonder what I seem to be like
According to her
We tread through this alliance
Murky waters; mudstone

Tangled among limbs, sheets, words
I'm like a child when she turns away
Her back to me, heels dug into my shins
Refuse to acknowledge our polarity
Shove your head into the sand

My shadow moves away from me
Tired of being pinned down
I read all the people she's never
Heard of

We're too young to feel this old

~ Jennifer Carter



"In Conversation with My Art" ~ Dr. Ernest Williamson III

THE CISTERN

The cistern we step into that swirls around our feet
Is boiling with the toxic weeds that have set it all ablaze
The thickened soup of waste we made with jealous recipe
Thrown in carelessly with rage, envy, revenge and sloth
A dash of perfect vanity we thought at first was good to taste
Stubbornly we continue to stir the deep well we fill
Until so bitter neither to immerse nor partake can we
Draining the cistern washing with virgin cloth of lamb
Scrubbing with harsh reality, dirty liquid fills from cracks
Never ending the task at hand we created at our risk
To revolutionize our views of how to proceed and
Let unpolluted water rise into the place we waded into
So much harder now to turn the tide we fought to surf
Seeking to cleanse the water and ourselves of all grief
Beginning again, with just the drop of one pure tear

~ Jan Niebrzydowski

THE LACE IN THE MIRROR

Falling into the pattern of the curvatures
Its intricate swirling delicate spiral cuts
Have cavalcaded upon the reflective glass
Extending left and right as far as I can see
No clarity or smoothness of one unifying face
The tessellations so brilliantly placed for effect
Eyes squinting with dedication to create bypass
Cracks and scars, detours and labyrinths abound
Its beautiful delusion traced with faulty hand
At first glance, pleasing the workmanship it plied
Now a gritty, porous mind field of stray bullets find
I look again with curiosity, prying apart the silhouette
I shake my head again with wondrous scrutiny
The clean unencumbered visions I was once enabled to see
Now unrecognizable to me

~ Jan Niebrzydowski



"Amid The Asian Snow" ~ Dr. Ernest Williamson III

One of my earliest memories was given to me long before I was an old man. My younger brother would follow my friends and I around town, seeking our approval in the confusion of his adolescence. In my own ignorance, I would punish him for this and for many other of his habits that I found troublesome to a social image.

One afternoon, I walked through the kitchen door to find my brother sitting shirtless on the tile counter and icing the bruises and welts I strategically placed under his clothes. My father sat smoking a cigarette and sipping bourbon at the table across the room. His eyes never left mine as I stepped towards the empty chair he held open for me. I sat in front of a tangible glare.

At this moment, my father was a different man, almost physically unrecognizable by his posture. Without a breath, he took the collar of my shirt and slid the cotton up from my waist and over my shoulders. He took off his belt, and my eyes glazed over. His left hand grazed my hair over and over. He loved me, but when his palm fell idle, he seized every strand. He dug his wristwatch into the back of my neck, and put my face into a picture of my younger brother that hung below the kitchen window. He told me to keep my eyes open. After several minutes, I fell to the floor, but before I left the picture, I noticed that I was also in the picture, holding my brother.

Stepping away from me, my father dropped the belt, and when I managed to look at him, I noticed, between his rigorous breathing, that he was crying too. Through the trembling of his lower lip, he said, almost choking, "Look at him, he is your life. Everything you do is for him, and everything you want is for him. He was brought to this life after you, and he will leave this life after you. Anything other than this is unnatural." He said this, turned to me one last time, looking at me with that tangible glare, then to my brother, and walked away without grabbing his belt.

~ Alex English

SPEECH LIKE GLITTER

When words fall from the curve of your lips they don't die,
she said.

Because death is for the mortal and the weak,
the loveless and analytical.

She plays her cigarette
like a harmonica and glitters in the sun because no
rain can put her out.

Words can slosh around.

She chews with her mouth open to speech,
words can build worlds and you can paint an atlas with your
own creations.

And her letters get caught on your sweater
and they stay, dangling like wind chimes, like silver bells in
winter.

I want to be a doctor because I want to explore the
words inside you.

Her feet bent inwards with her words,
every heart beats to a story.

And she beat her boots on the pavement and each scuffmark
is a map to her destination because
she isn't from earth, she merely survives here, and the book
in her chipped black manicure is just another portal, and she
laughs with her hips and smiles with her soul because she knows
it's only life, not something to be scared of at all.

~ *Alicja Madloch*



"Samba Heat" ~ Rubia van Roodselaar

SERENADE ME

The stage lights shine on you.
I notice you tuck your long hair
behind your ears.
You speak about old girlfriends,
how you had more of a relationship
with Tom Waits' albums.
You latch onto his lyrics
not their voices.
Instead of you holding them
when they cry,
you hold onto the melodies of
San Diego Serenade.
With a small laugh,
you finger the black and white keys.
I can feel your eyes staring out
even though I wish they focused on mine.
You sing *I don't love you*.
The crowd claps for you.

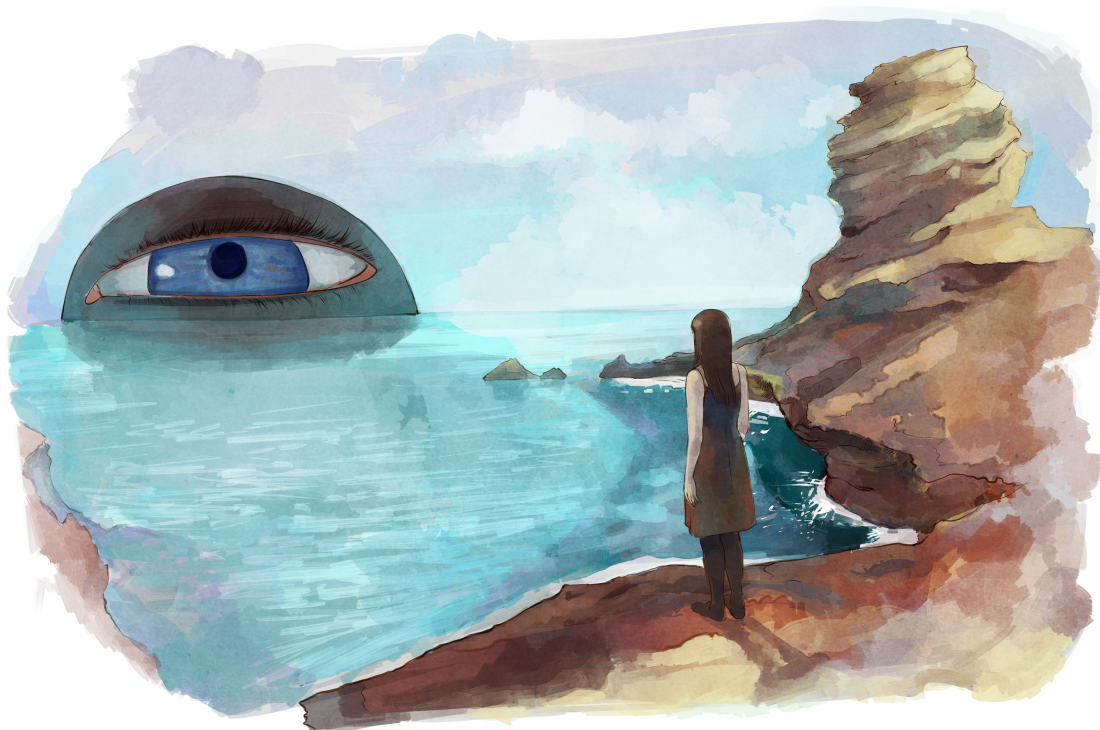
~ *Noel Lederer*



"Lourdes Stares Back" ~ Rubia van Roodselaar

These windy San Francisco streets
curve into every end except
home.
I walk from 17th to 3rd.
Only a few people in sight.
Their furrowed faces ask
Are you lost?
but the quickness of their feet walk away.
Red streetlights flick on then off
They wait for cars that never come.
I stand in front of AT&T Park.
The yells and fly balls are gone now.
Its silence echoes to the stars.
I take a deep breath,
stare towards the Port of San Francisco.
The dark night sky gives away to Sunrise.
I settle on the grass to wait for a taxi.

~ Noel Lederer

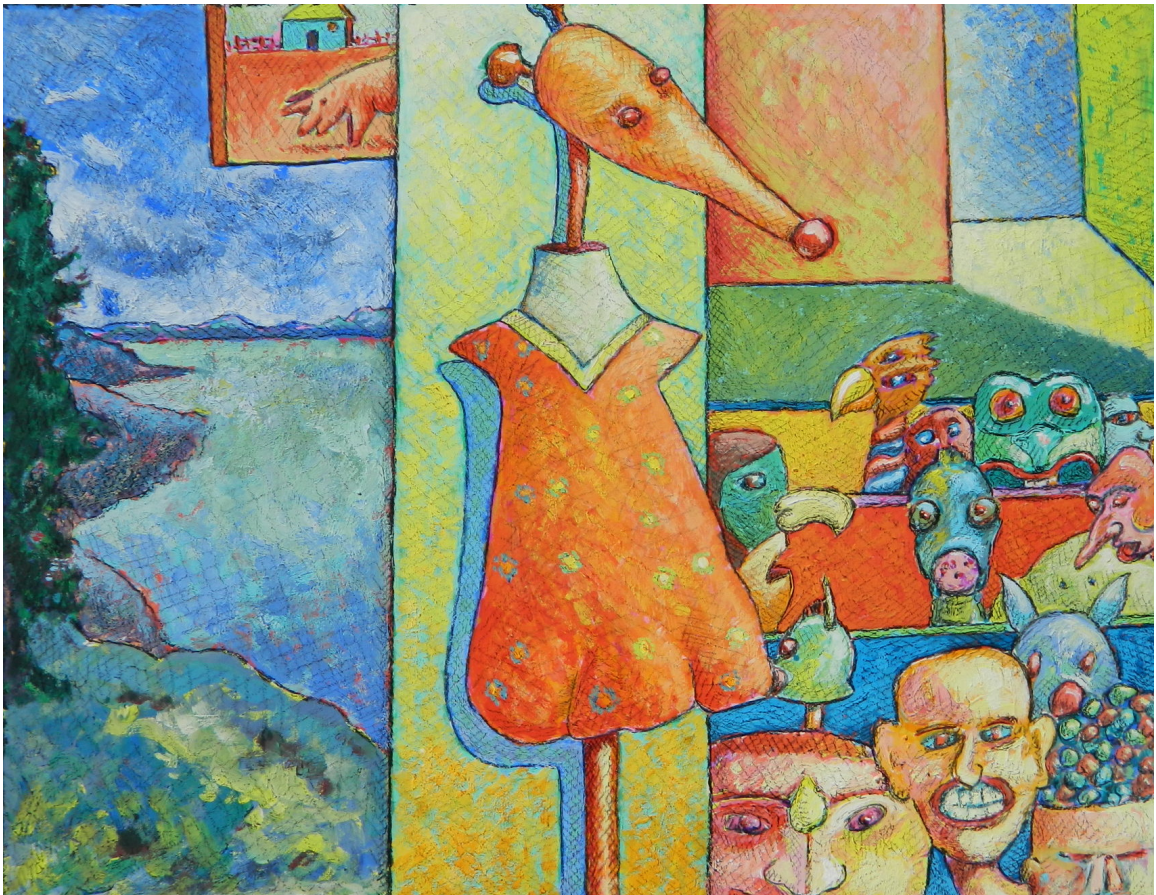


"Untitled" ~ Hal Preece

LIFELIKE ACTION FIGURE

I just drove past him,
Lying there in the street.
He looked like a discarded toy
protected by a plastic helmet,
covered in strawberry jam
and left on the floor with his head
twisted 'round the wrong way.
His face was frozen in a blank synthetic sleep
that would be pushed into the shadows
with other forgotten playthings.

~ Amanda Riggle



"The Other Side" ~ Ronald Walker

GOOD NIGHT, PRINCESS

“Did the camels smell?”

“Hmm? Did they smell?”

“Yeah.”

He laughs. “Ellie, I took the time and stopped my kids at the camp to take a picture of the camels so I could mail it to you. And you are disappointed because I didn’t go closer to smell them?”

Daddy calls the troops his ‘kids.’ I forget about that sometimes. I guess that’s cool, because then I have all these brothers and sisters. Just as long as I am his number one kid.

I give him a smile. “Mhmm. You should have smelled them.”

Daddy looks at the photo of the camels that I’m holding, and then looks back at me. “You smell it.”

I stick out my tongue. “Ew! Gross, no!”

“You want to know what they smell like? Then smell them!”

He noogies my head, and I shut my eyes and laugh. I miss these moments. I want to hug Daddy right now, but he wants me to smell the camels. So, I smell them.

Daddy watches me as I put the camels to my nose and sniff. I know they’re not real camels, but I can still smell them, I think.

“How do they smell?” Daddy asks me as I frown.

“Yuck.”

After he laughs some more, he begins to rub my back. “My kids were smelly, too. That’s what happens over there. It was hard for us to take good showers.”

“You missed the shower, huh?”

“Yeah.” He looks at me. “But not as much as I missed you and Mommy.”

“I missed you, too, Daddy.” This time, I hug him. I think that is when I’m happiest, in his arms. I can even feel him breathing. It’s warm and safe, like a house. It’s a feeling nobody else can give, not even friends in school. “Can you tell me more stories?”

“Tomorrow, Ellie. Okay? It’s getting late. You got to go night-night now. I will, too. I’m getting tired.”

“Okay. I’m excited!” I jump off of Daddy’s black sofa and run to the door that leads to the living room. It’s weird that Daddy has almost the same bedtime as me now. But it’s fine, as long as he sleeps, and has nice dreams.

“Love you, Daddy! Good night!”

“Love you, too. Good night, Princess.”

I finish my multiplication homework early so I can see Daddy again. Last night, he promised that he would tell me more stories. I hope he didn't forget.

I head to the garage. Daddy's in there, watching the Lakers probably. Before he left, Daddy would be in the living room with Mommy and me. Even though he spends way more time in the garage now, I guess it's still cool because at least I always know where he is.

I enter the garage and walk to where his sofa is. Because the garage is a big, white room with a lot of stuff in it, this means that I have to turn left and walk past all the boxes first. I don't know what's in most of them, but I can see the 'Christmas stuff' box that we will open in a couple of months. Holidays are going to be awesome this year.

I then walk under all of his uniforms on the rack hangers near the ceiling. He has so many uniforms, and I try to remember all of them. I haven't seen them in a while, but I do know that the green and brown one is the one he wears when he goes to the base in Port Hueneme. The white one is the one he wears when he takes Mommy out to that Navy ball every year. The black one with the pins is the one he wears in all his fancy pictures. And the light brown one is the one he wore in the desert. I know that because of all the photos from his letters.

As I walk, I feel the cold from the cement floor under my feet. Man, I forgot my slippers again. But it's okay. There's carpet where Daddy's sofa is. I then see the back of his head looking up to watch the Lakers. "Daddy?" He suddenly jumps, scratches his head hard, and grunts.

I stop. "Sorry, Daddy!"

He rubs his forehead and spots me. "Princess? It's alright. How's it going?"

I walk to the sofa and sit right next to him. "I'm done with homework."

Daddy stares at me. I wait. Then he smiles. "I have a good one to tell. It's funny."

"Yes!"

He breathes in and out a couple of times, and then turns the T.V. sound lower. "One of the days over there, I was Cadence Caller."

"What's that?"

"It's, you know, when one guy says, 'I don't know what I've been told,' and then everyone else repeats it."

"Oh, okay!"

"So, I was Cadence Caller, and it was really hot that day. I wanted to have a little fun with my kids. So, instead of saying, 'I don't know what I've been told,' I said, '*There she was just a-walkin' down the street.*'"

I start to laugh. I know that song! "Really?"

Daddy laughs, too. That makes me happy. "And so, well, the kids then repeat, *'There she was just a-walkin' down the street.'*"

Then both Daddy and I sing, "*Singin' doo a diddy diddy dum diddy doo!*"

I laugh again, so hard that it sounds like I'm hiccupping. "So, did the rest of your kids have to repeat it?"

"Uh huh. They all sang it."

"That sounds so cool!"

"Then we got in trouble."

"Oh."

"Yeah, we're not supposed to goof off like that. But hey, sometimes they need a laugh to get through the day, you know? I do what I gotta do to take care of those kids."

He looks at me with a face that isn't worried. I would have been scared if I was going to get in trouble like that. But Daddy is different.

I look at him back. His hazel eyes look the same. His hair is shaved off a little but it still looks the same. His eyebrows look the same. And maybe in a week, the same mustache will come back. Good thing, too. Then all of my drawings of him will look right again.

"What's wrong, Ellie?"

I shake my head. "I was daydreaming. Oops, hehe. I really liked your story, though. I'm sorry you got in trouble. You sounded like an awesome Cadence Caller."

"Thank you. It's night-night time, right?" He pulls me closer and kisses my forehead.

I get up and prepare myself to walk on the cold cement again. "Mhmm." I frown. "See you tomorrow, Daddy! Then can you tell me another story?"

Daddy gives me a smile. "Sure."

"Yes! Good night, Daddy!"

"Good night, Princess."

"Hmm...why don't I tell you about the time I broke the rules and bought chicken?"

I tilt my head and raise my eyebrows. "Okay?"

The garage is noisy tonight because we are washing clothes, but I am still able to hear only Daddy's voice. He adjusts himself on the sofa and places one hand on his knee and the other hand on my back. "Over there, we didn't really have any good food to eat. They filled our stomachs, I guess, but there was nothing that really reminded us of anything else." I see him lick his lips. "Well, there was a village near where our camp was. And because of...um, circumstances and things, we weren't allowed to buy food from anybody who lived there."

I nod.

“But there was one place where they sold chicken. And I really wanted some to share with my kids.”

“Uh oh.”

“But, of course, we weren’t allowed to buy from them because maybe they might do something bad to the chicken.”

“Oh?”

I can see Daddy breathing hard, but he continues his story. “So, I go up to them to buy the chicken, and I tell them, ‘Hey, I know where you live. So don’t do anything bad to my chicken.’”

“What did they do?”

“They made good chicken.” He laughs and rubs his belly. “Though I got in trouble again. But it was alright. After a week, everyone started buying that chicken. And it was all good.”

I like this story, too. But I am kind of confused by it. Why would Daddy be worried about them making bad chicken? Villagers always seem like nice people.

“Princess?” Daddy says. “Why so quiet? Do you like the story?”

I don’t know if I should ask him about the chicken and the village. He already looks tired, so maybe he doesn’t want to answer questions. And I’m pretty tired, too. So I say, “Oh, I do! I was just thinking of you and your kids buying all that chicken.” I was, though. I’m not lying.

And then he says something else. “You know, I’m sorry I missed your birthday.”

At first, I frown. But then I shake my head. “You said ‘Happy Birthday’ to me in one of your letters. So you didn’t really miss it.”

“I missed your party. It was at the park, huh?”

“Mhmm.”

“Did your whole class go?”

“No. Only a couple of friends came.”

“I wish I could’ve been there. If only I came home in August instead of September, huh? Then I could’ve made it.”

I shake my head again. “Oh, it was just my 9th birthday, Daddy. When I’m 10, then it’s going to be very important because of double digits. And I know you’ll be there.”

“Yes.”

He gives me his smile, and then rubs my back again. It feels good, and even though he has been rubbing my back every night since he came home, I still think about how much I missed it.

He yawns, and then I yawn. “You tired, too?” he asks.

“Mhmm.”

“Maybe we should all go night-night now. Can you tell Mommy I’ll see her inside in about 5 minutes?”

“Okay, Daddy.” I walk back to the door. “Love you. Good night.”

“Good night, Princess.”

Mommy is helping me with a project for class tonight. I asked if my friends in school could work together on them, but they kept saying no. But it’s okay. Mommy’s helping me again. She is good at arts and crafts, way better than me, so I’m glad she can help me out. We have to make a miniature Mission. I’m not sure if all Catholic schools have to do this project, but St. Anthony’s does. It’s pretty boring. But I shouldn’t complain. There are worse things in school than this.

I sit in my usual seat while Mommy sits in hers. Mine is by the window, and Mommy’s is by the counter, where the telephone is. We chose these seats when Daddy was gone, and this was where we spent most of our time. We even started a sketchbook together, since we both like drawing. I would usually draw Daddy. Him playing basketball, him dancing with Mommy, him being a superhero in a cape. And we would always leave it on the table for the next day. But for now, we had to move it to my room, to make space for all the paper and cardboard for the Mission.

I continue cutting up some paper when Mommy says that she needs the glue gun. She tells me that it’s in the garage, and asks if I can get it for her.

I say that I can and run into the garage. I forget my slippers again so my feet are now cold.

Because the garage is so cluttered, the glue gun could be anywhere. And since I’ve never used it, and only Mommy uses it, I don’t know where it is. Oops.

I hear the T.V. on my left. Daddy’s in here. I run to the sofa and wave my hand at him.

“Hey, Princess. How’s it going?”

“I’m good. Mommy needs the glue gun for my Mission.” I look around. “Can you help me find it?”

“Oh, yeah.” He gets up from the sofa and walks to the messy desk next to the T.V. He opens the top drawer and takes out a yellow and black glue gun. Wow, it even has a trigger.

He says, “Be careful,” and hands me the gun.

I wrap my hand around it, with my index finger on the trigger. “This is weird.”

Daddy glances at me, then at the T.V., then back at me.

I almost feel cool holding the gun. It’s like I’m going to go and save someone, just like in the movies and T.V. shows.

I spin around and point the gun with both hands at Daddy. And I yell, "Freeze! Put your hands up!"

Daddy sees me, but then I notice that something's wrong. His eyes grow bigger. He shuts his mouth. His chest rises high and sinks low, really fast.

"Daddy?"

He slowly takes one step away from me. He's breathing so hard that I can hear his voice wheezing.

"Daddy!"

He shakes his head. Nothing's wrong, he wants to say. But I know there is. He shuts his eyes really tight, and then opens them back up again.

"Daddy, are you okay?" He ignores me. He slaps his hand on his forehead, and I can see sweat everywhere on his face. "Daddy? Daddy?"

I shake my hands. I let out a cry. My voice cracks as I shout, "Mommy! Mommy! Help! It's Daddy!"

Mommy rushes to us, and her face is almost as scared as Daddy's. Before she touches him, she turns to me and says, "Ellie, go inside. It's okay. Go!"

I can't move. I start crying. "Daddy, what's wrong?"

"Ellie, go!"

Without looking at them, I run to the door and into the living room. Behind me, I can hear Mommy. "Honey, honey? Honey, what's wrong? Sit down. Honey?"

I don't hear anything from Daddy.

I stop, and tiptoe back to the garage. I peek my head through the doorway, but all I can see are Daddy's back, and Mommy holding his shoulders and trying to look at him. She places her hands on Daddy's arms. I turn away. Daddy's arms. That's where I want to be right now. I see Mommy's head move toward my direction, but before she can spot me, I'm gone.

I wouldn't want Mommy to see more tears.

I sit at the kitchen table, and wait for Mommy or Daddy to come out of the garage. It's getting late, but I don't want to go upstairs. It doesn't feel right.

Then I see Mommy, but she doesn't have Daddy with her. I wipe my eyes some more.

"Hey, Sweetie," she says, and joins me at the table, in our usual seats. "How are you? Are you okay?"

"What happened to Daddy?"

"He..." It looks like she's thinking hard, and her eyes are searching for something. Then she says, "He had a little episode, Sweetie."

"Episode?"

"Well, yes..."

“Is it because I pointed the glue gun at him? I’m sorry, Mommy! I didn’t mean to—”

“Sweetie, please, don’t. It’s not your fault. He’s okay now. So don’t worry.”

“He couldn’t breathe right.”

“I know. But now, he’s okay. He’s breathing fine now. So please don’t worry about him. Daddy’s strong, remember? Troops are strong people. You know that.”

I want to shake my head and say no. “Mhmm.”

She kneels down and gives me a hug. I hug back, but only because I have to. I don’t know if Daddy is that strong anymore, and I feel bad for thinking like that. But if Mommy thinks he’s still strong, then he probably is. What do I know?

“Why don’t you go to bed now, Sweetie?” Mommy then says, sweeping away the hair out of my face. “We can work on your project tomorrow, since it’s the weekend. Night-night.”

I am sitting on my bed in my pajamas when I see Daddy at my door.

“Hey, Princess.”

I stare at him. “Are you okay?”

He nods. “Yeah, I’m okay now. I’m sorry, Princess. What about you? Are you okay?”

I nod. He then sees the open sketchbook on my lap. I close it and hide it under my sheets. A tear runs down my face, and I turn my head away.

“Oh, Ellie.” I hear Daddy walk to the bed and sit beside me. He wraps his arms around me, and rubs my back. “It’s okay. It’s all okay now.”

“No, it’s not. I didn’t mean to.” I cover my eyes with my hands. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to point the glue gun at you. I was just playing. I’m sorry.”

“No. No, don’t say that.” Daddy tilts my chin toward him. “You didn’t do anything.”

“Yes, I did.”

He frowns. “Uh...I want to tell you a story. Another one, from the desert—Iraq.”

I look up. “You do? Right now?”

“You want to know why I acted like that downstairs?”

Do I? I want to know a lot of stuff. I want to know why Daddy’s tired all the time now. I want to know why he worried about bad chicken, and why he’s always in the garage. I want to know... “Yes.”

He breathes in and out again. I hold tight onto my bed sheets.

“I was at Camp Hope with my kids. It was hot, and we were all stinky and tired, like usual.”

I nod.

“Then, I see a guy who’s not in uniform. I go closer, and I see that he’s holding a gun.”

I see sweat covering his face again. “Daddy, stop.” I can feel my hands shaking. “You look like you’re—”

“No, no. Let me tell it. I need to. I, I trust you.”

“...Okay.”

He turns away so he’s not looking at me. “I shout out to the guy, ‘Hey! You! Stop right there!’ And the guy turns to me, and I see that he was a boy. A young one, some years older than you, probably from the village. And I don’t know if he was holding a real gun or not, but that didn’t matter because he and that gun were not supposed to be there.”

I start breathing fast.

“So, I go to him, and I say that if I see him in our camp again stirring up trouble with that gun, I will shoot.”

I gulp, but I try to make it as silent as possible.

Daddy continues to frown. I’m not liking this story.

“A couple of days later, I, I see him again, with that gun.” He closes his eyes. “I tell him to get away. He doesn’t move. So, I take my gun and I point it at him. I tell him to get out of here. He doesn’t listen. I yell even louder, Ellie. I yell at him to get out of here. But then he raises his gun and aims it at one of my kids. And then I ...Remember what I said, Ellie? The other day?”

I stare at him.

“I gotta do what I gotta do to take care of my kids. I couldn’t take any chances. It was my job to bring my kids back home to their families, and I promised them that.”

“Daddy...”

“So, I shot him.”

“Huh?” I bite my lip. So I don’t let out anything.

He rubs his forehead and his mouth. “That’s why I reacted that way when you held the gun.” He turns to me, but it looked like it was hard for him to. “Ellie, I’m sorry you have to go through this. I thought that,” he shakes his head, “that you should know. Why I am a bit different now. Why everything is.”

I’m not looking at him anymore. I don’t know what to think. I don’t know whether to be mad or sad. I don’t know.

“Princess?”

I feel my lips shake. “I hate war.”

Daddy sits closer to me and kisses my forehead. All I do is stare at my hands. “Princess, please look at me.”

My head doesn't move, but I let my eyes glance at him. I thought I was going to see him, in his light brown uniform, pointing a gun at the boy. But...I see just Daddy.

"I'll," he then says, "I'll see you tomorrow. I'll let you go now."

He lets me crawl under my blankets, and then he walks to the door and just stands there. Daddy looks the same, but he says he is different. I'm afraid to leave him alone.

"Good night, Ellie."

The lights are turned off, and he walks away. It's so quiet. I don't think I can go to sleep now. But I also don't want to be awake when it's so dark and quiet.

I can't be alone like this again.

How am I going to get through this? Mommy will just worry if I talk to her. She's had enough worrying for months. And my friends at school are probably too busy with other things.

I need to be strong. I need to be strong like—

Oh.

The sun is just about to come up. I walk down the stairs very carefully. Mommy is still asleep, but usually Daddy is awake by now. With my slippers on, I walk into the garage and to the sofa. The T.V. is on, which means that Daddy should be here.

And there he is, with his arms crossed, and his chest moving up and down, slowly.

When I'm near the sofa, I stop. This time, I make my voice soft.

"Daddy?"

His shoulders shoot up, and he turns and looks at me. "Ellie? Why are you awake so early?"

I step on the carpet and sit by him on the sofa. "I want to talk to you."

Daddy raises his eyebrows.

"I wanted to talk about what you told me last night."

His shoulders sink. "Listen, Ellie, I—"

"It's time for me to tell you a story now."

He doesn't say anything. All I hear is the sound of breathing by both of us.

"About 8 months ago, while you were still in Iraq, I was in school. One day, some of my friends...classmates...wouldn't let me join the club they made, and they told me to go away. So, I just waited for Mommy to pick me up. I didn't stand up to them. And I felt weak, and alone." No, I'm crying now. That wasn't supposed to happen. I have to keep going. "And, and that was when I really wanted you to be there. And the cool part was that I think you

were. I tried to be strong for months. Because you're strong, Daddy. You try to do the right thing and you're not afraid to get in trouble for it. And now I see you're hurt because of it. But you're still my daddy. I still love you. And, it'll be okay."

I turn my head and take a look at him. He stares back, right into my eyes.

"Thank you for the stories you told me. All of them."

After I catch my breath, Daddy gives me the biggest smile he's made since he came back. He raises his arms to give me a hug, but instead, I reach out and place my hands on his tired shoulders, and I kiss his forehead.

The sun's light comes in from the living room. As I give my biggest smile back to him, I say, "Good morning, Daddy."

~ Genielysse Reyes

SMOKE

You wanted
to go to a winery
and I was my usual no-fun self.
“We don’t even drink,” I said
and you got that look on your face
the one where you’re wondering why you stay
and why I don’t just go.

I relented.
“It’ll be interesting.
We’ll take some pictures, have lunch,
Maybe get a sketch or a poem out of the deal.”

You drove.
A jazz station cut in and out among the dusty hills
I thought about us walking hand in hand between rows of dusty grapes,
the sweet jammy smell sticking to us like resin,
the bees humming,
the sun beating down on us,
and laughing at the wine snobs but secretly wishing
I cared
that much about any one thing.

But on the turnoff to the winery,
a gray dirt road, dry and cracked with summer heat,
I spotted a twisting column of black in the distance
and smelled smoke.
Cars ahead of us made sloppy U-turns on the hard packed earth,
a thin layer of ash clinging to their hoods.

You fought back glistening tears.

I rolled up the windows
to keep out the smell,
turned the air conditioner to its highest setting,
and put my hand on your cheek.

You pulled away.

But you let me take your hand.
I pressed your cold knuckles to my lips
and whispered,
too low to be heard
too low to be believed over the sound of the blowing air,
“It’s going to be okay. It’s all going to be okay.”

~ *Charles Payne*



"Two Trees" ~ Doina Ciobanu

the lights and tables and seats of the library
were welcome
after the darkness and the rain so
i scribbled in a spiral notebook
played solitaire
browsed the twenty-five cent book cart
and read a short story by Stephen King
before wandering the musty stacks
like a bored ghost

we were all turned out at 9:00
after the speaker announced
the library would be closing so
check out your books
apply for your cards
pay your fines

outside
the rain had stopped
my breath made little clouds as i
picked my way down slick sidewalks
to the beach
wrapped in a trench coat
armored in gloves in a scarf

one of the guys who lived on the street
and slept in a doorway took one look at me
shook his head
and laughed to himself

the street lights were out

the latest storms had reclaimed the sand
gouging out truckloads of beach
washing it out to sea
back to the bottom of the ocean

the horizon hung, a black expanse
that hurt my eyes to look at
and made them water
or was it stray rain
or was it something else entirely

~ *Charles Payne*



"Surveying" ~ Matthew Felix Sun

A ROARING SPASTIC WIND

A roaring, spastic wind you are
Fair lady, with a smile as gentle
As the bay breeze lowing.
Laughter like silent rain that softly sambas
To the distant beat of thunder.

Oh God! Ossify my foolish
Thoughts that rumble within
My head like tiny marbles
That bounce inside a jar.
Bright and flashing, lured,
Queer, Evil and even good.
Oh Man, who creates wisdom
With his hands while my
Mind does think like feet.
Stumbling, roaming, hastening,
There and here and never finding peace.

I have cause, please lend
Me keep of that dear blossom.
A fragrant flower of yawning
Yellow and blushing blue. If
This, my master, you do not
Grant, the love I have
That towers tall as the giant
Totem shall soon fall down
To meet my knees or trees
Of winter do lose their
Leaves to rid themselves bare
To the cold the cold that freezes.

~ James Ford Jr.



"November" ~ Doina Ciobanu

THANKSGIVING, NO THANKS

1979

Timing is everything—and juxtaposition.

If something bad happens followed by something good, the good takes the sting out, like if you get an unexpected bill that you can't afford to pay followed by a check in the mail you didn't expect. The opposite happens too and is much, much worse. For example, your girlfriend is thirty and still lives with her mother. She won't stay overnight 'cause she's got to get home before dawn. Like I said, she's thirty; I'm 31 and haven't done this dance since I was a teenager, I want her to move out. Her younger sister who is already out wants her to move out. After six months of long rides driving her home—she lives in North Jersey; I'm in Queens—she agrees to move out. I'm happy. I rent a truck, and we ask her sister to help out and we move her into a two bedroom Apartment still in Jersey—no more long drives in the middle of the night.

After we finish, I'm smiling. She's not smiling.

She says, "What's that stupid grin for?"

I figure she's kidding; she's not.

She says, "I suppose you're gonna want a key now?"

This cannot be real. I bust my back moving her in and now this.

She said, "We're over!"

She brushed me off like a piece of white lint on a dark sleeve. In essence, she told me to get lost and that I could remove the knife in the back myself. Her sister is still there I guess as a witness if I try to kill her. A band tightens around my head. I can feel its pressure at the temples. My inner temple is now a sacrilegious abyss where pride and ego have been buried alive. I cry, I beg. The pitiful wails are unbearable because they are mine. Her face is unyielding; there is hatred there. Could there be a crueler ending—move her in and get dumped. That was it "We're Over!" She stepped on my corpse with six-inch stilettos to make sure I was dead.

The Blue Angel is a woman. The Blue Angel is a Devil. The Blue Ice is her heart. The Blue Lips are for the frozen kisses. I'm next to death, no heartbeat, no rhythm, no music. I groveled and begged, and tasted the sweat off the floor. It was bitter, like your words. Before, you'd said I was the lover you'd always wanted. Then the moon went full five times and I went from undisputed champion to bum of the month. How will I ever recover from the humiliation? My pride went down with the ship, tangled in sea weeds, sadness, and a little madness as well.

While I wept and begged, she said... "So what that I told you how wonderful you were! So what! It was six months ago; I changed my mind."

And to think I had been looking forward to great sex tonight!
I felt like a martyr. Reality check: No one wants to know martyrs.
I stumbled away, got in the car, drove off. The booming bass I heard was my heart reaching through the windshield of the desperate night in front of me. Pedal to the metal I screamed. Primal rage. Final betrayal. 70, 80, 85—welcome to a high speed nervous breakdown. Death wish/death kiss/kissed off/did I have the balls to kill myself? No! Too bad!

“You’ve changed.” her sister had said to me just a month before this apocalypse, meaning my jovial self had degenerated into self loathing since I began seeing this calculated bitch. I’d become a valium head being jerked on a chain. The only sight more pitiful than me was how much the bitch enjoyed her whip. The more I shriveled up into a quivering slinky; the more her horns grew. The loss of my pride was the rise of her power. She enjoyed it. It was get even time.

On me? Nooooooooooooo.....On the nightmares only her sister and I knew about. The hate harbored against the vicious past that robbed her sleep and from this her barely subconscious wish was to get even! Never put your hands on her neck, even with affection.

The fear on her face, the cold sweat, her hand slapping my hands away, the welping “No!” like a child frightened by a spider in a nightmare. I’d only done it that one time; the reaction assured no second. I didn’t know why, and I didn’t ask. I’d find out from her sister.

Twelve years earlier, a virgin Catholic innocent, eighteen, away from home for the first time at Marymount College outside D.C. Warm night, open dorm window, she was asleep. Two hands choke her throat; two hands cover her mouth and tear at her Mickey Mouse pajamas. Four hands end her childhood. Now she was a statistic. Catholics don’t get therapy. Catholics don’t tell anyone. Catholics stop going to church because they’re ashamed. The shame gouges out the heart, scarring it, hardening it. Twelve years later, don’t touch her throat. Only her sister knows.....and me. Too bad! The craziest thing was that she was wild for sex—animalistic. Her sister said she had not been that way before me. Go figure—any theories?

There better be pot at home. God help me; this is the easy part. We’re over. It’s a forty minute drive. A long time to scream!

Oh did I mention its Thanksgiving.

I’m home by Midnight, take the elevator to the forth floor in this pre-war building with walls as thick as Hitler’s bunkers. That’s what I needed now, a bunker for my siege mentality. From the bedroom I could hear the rabid traffic rumble below on Union Turnpike. Honking horns, cutting off, screeching brakes, cursing mouths, these were terrible sounds. The grace of

Turkey Day and the imagined concomitant good feelings had a legacy lasting no longer than the five minutes it took to resume the manly art of dodging potholes. This outside franticness was not helpful. People are nuts—and mean too!

For some Thanksgiving meant empty homes. “Holy hypocrisy, Batman!” “Robbin” was a high art form. Most certainly on a day and night when many homes were vacant—burglars know this. Come home to that nightmare sucka and let’s see how far good will goes!

Meanwhile, from my fourth floor tower of a room, the clear view of the Manhattan skyline seemed a matte backdrop rather than any reality I knew. It was fake. An image glamorized by distance and Frank Sinatra: “Start Spreading the News.”

What News? Frankie’s news was like so much of New York, a jello glimmer that faded up close into so many grimy cells of solitary confinement in distant APART-ments or for the trek on the steel cages of the A Train--Duke Ellington had it wrong too—*don’t* take the A Train filled with the other smelly cattle who made their way to the corporate slaughter where the “going green” had nothing to do with ecology. They sit with their feet stepped on, asses in their faces, no room to open a newspaper except to hide behind. Others escape into rows of headphones to ward off the deafening roar of the train in the dark tunnels. Yet, the woman next to me had said--after getting my attention--“You know, I can *hear* that,” as if she preferred the tunnel beast’s roar to Springsteen. What a moron!

Thanksgiving alone is a helluva bone to chew on-----or smoke. I chanted: *Cannabis stupendous, profundus humungous*. I’ve got a Ziploc bag and plenty of matches. *Hey, Mon!*

GANGA !!!

McLuhan’s Wasteland beckoned. Click, Click, Click There’s nothing on the idiot box but *The Waltons*: (“Goodnight John-Boy; don’t jerk off too much or you’ll go blind.”) What a mood breaker! I eviscerate them as the TV screen goes black. I need a dark womb.

Instead I’ve got maniacal drivers and family viewing. This will not do.

I find a line of heavy bass on the stereo. I fondle the Ziploc bag with the special stash. I won’t be moving for a while. Don’t think! Especially of **HER**. Puff! Puff! Puff! Puff! **Lionel** got no choo choo train better than this. Why am I not passing out? It’s not for a lack of trying. The bass is inside me now--**Senssurround**--tingling down to my fingers: My left fingers. The pounding bass was riding me hard, syncopating with the dissonantly enraged car horns now manically enhanced by the Doppler Effect:

A door behind me unseen opens a crack; a voice calls out.
“An ambulance is coming.” and slams shut.

I’m prone on the cold stone-tiled floor. I’m on ice, waiting to die. My head reflexes a mantra: “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

Over and Over. My eyes are closed. My eyes are open. Light green EMS tunics hover over me like I’m a frog in Bio I. Condemnation registers on their faces.

I thought. “What an inconvenience I am.”

I cough out. “I’m sorry.”

Over and over.

“Tell my mother I’m sorry. Tell my mother I’m sorry.”

One EMS said. “Oh shit, here we go.”

In that uncompassionate instant I realized I wasn’t going to die—how humiliating.

Later:

“Do you hear voices?”

“Do you speak in tongues?”

“Who is plotting against you?”

“Do you think of suicide?”

“Are there people you want to harm?”

I thought but did not say, “Get on line!”

(Which brought to mind a short list of potential victims, Judy who was a *new* woman, fresh minted from EST--Erhard Seminar Training—where she learned that she could demand what she wanted. If no one would say “No!” to her scorched earth incursion that was not her responsibility as in (only semi facetiously) *If I ask you to jump off a cliff and you do it, that’s your problem, not mine*. I taught her to drive stick shift and she drove me hard. Barbie, who just dumped me, denied that she ever said she loved me, and that I shouldn’t let the door hit me on the ass on the way out; my ex-wife who had given me the clap—*any* of my bosses past or present.)

They’d done an EKG to confirm what I already knew: I’d smoked myself into a psychosomatic heart attack and nervous breakdown.

The Dr. said. “You know you need therapy, don’t you?”

“Verily.” I thought. “No shit!”

I knew. I'd always known, but guilt and denial are formidable warriors against truth. My brother came and I cried in his arms. Then I went home again--alone.

~ David Garrett Izzo

BEACH MANAGER BLUES

Slouching on
my bony ass,
making toe jam
castles under nasty
K-Mart umbrellas,
feeling nothing but
sorry for myself,
because I got
me a job

peeling used
maxi pads
off stalls,
hosing turds
to the fence,
retrieving wads
of nappy hair
from the drain,

just one
of the many
they tell you
about, finding that
94% job placement
after graduation,
neglecting to say
what in.

~ *Natalie Dorfeld*

FOTHERING

douse my sails to stop a leak in the messy old hold?
oh aye better to founder on pink coral drift the day away adhering to flotsam
observing the level sky and sea unchanging in these latitudes
there always there and nothing else a ship perhaps a ship

~ Christopher Mulrooney



"Going Home" ~ Eghosa Akenbor

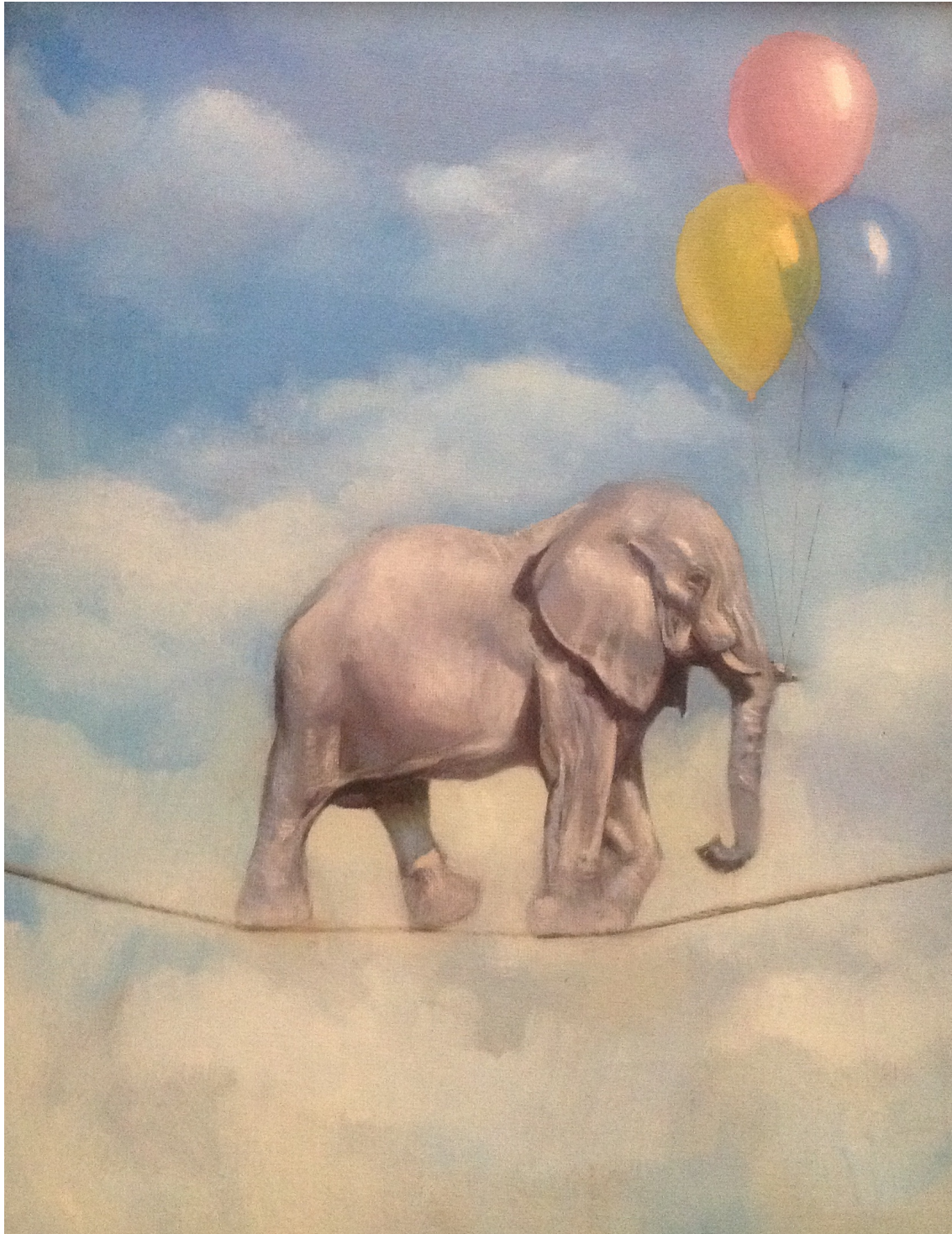
is it to demand anything in polite tones
as who should say milady give me your thingum richly endowed
or is it to beslut her and place the ban upon her brow
that warrantees lengthy service in a brigand's quarters
dishing up his slop and finally cast out to perish
a stratagem and a device these heavy thinkers
bow the head with the weight of withal

~ Christopher Mulrooney

TRUST

You gulping life by the handful
Me thin-skinned and white hot flash of a warped core soul shrinks back
 feeling all this healing bleeding needing and haunting wanting
 it spills out your heart through my eyes
so I'll hold it at arm's length
a balloon on a string
where I can't feel a thing
Autopiloted intellectualize unplugged and serene
 contemplating abstractly, whitely and blackly – matter of factly
avoiding the passion tethered above
bobbing gamely yet grounded in love
 with your sticky mess of real
like some grim residue I can't wash off
 demanding that I feel
I reel
you back in...
 and trust:
a little less likely to explode
when touched.

~ *Carrie Nassif*



"The Balancing Act" ~ Jannelly Herrera

CHEW ON THE PEACE

sit with a cap of dripping whip hair
spit-quick lightening slashing clean through

the bullet-grey mist
webbing the moon to the roof to us

breathe in cold thin rain-pavement perfume
as the gutters below slowly swallow the
slick skittish sidewalks gurgling

eyes of the storms tap pattering stillness
along streetside goosepimpled puddles

chew on the peace the constant drums beat
in the deluge until it is gone

~ Carrie Nassif

TWO MEN AND A GUN

It's hard to say exactly how I ended up in this dreadful situation, although I could easily put all the blame on the *Thomas-Cook* train schedule. If they had made their timetables a little easier to read, and their columns more evenly aligned, I may have never ended up on this midnight train to Athens. Yet here I was, sandwiched in among all the dissolute of Southern Europe in a third-class train compartment, trying to figure out how I was going to get some sleep.

It was bench seating only, benches that faced one another with such little space between them that one had to sit straddling the knees of the person opposite you. There were smells of human body odor and of middle-eastern cooking, *zeera* and black cumin, the mixture of which was not a pleasant thing. I couldn't imagine someone could be cooking in such confined quarters. I looked around but couldn't make out where the smell was coming from.

Across from me was a sinister-looking character; a man in his mid-thirties with narrow-eyes and high cheekbones. I assumed he was from North Africa, although one could never really be sure about this kind of thing when traveling along the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. He had dark skin and an angular face and he was carrying a canvas satchel with Nubian markings. He was a man of mixed races, and a man who could not be trusted, that much I knew. Call it experience or traveler's intuition, after logging many miles through third-world countries one acquires an instinct for this kind of thing. I had encountered this type before; trouble, not in size, but in opportunist nature. And I saw in his eyes, the furtiveness and cleverness of an accomplished thief. He was filthy and unshaven. His clothes were soiled. Among the many odors in the train compartment one was particularly strong and I assumed it came from him.

And in the instant I was thinking this I caught his dark eyes studying my carry-bag. The satchel, which I kept on my lap, had a shoulder strap securely wrapped around my neck. In it were my most valued items; my passport and credit cards, what few euros I had left, and some souvenirs I picked up along the way. His eyes went from the bag itself, to the attachment latch, and followed up the strap to where it disappeared around my shoulder. When he realized I was watching him he quickly turned his eyes away. He had a satchel too, and when he saw me looking at it, he pulled it closely to his side.

I brought my hand thoughtfully up to my chin. It was only then that I realized I was likewise filthy and unshaven. Perhaps it was I who smelled of

body odor? I discreetly took a sniff of my underarm but could not tell if the odor was coming from me or not.

It had been nearly three days since I had taken a bath. Having crossed by ferry from Brindisi the night before, arriving in Corfu in the early morning hours, there was no time to shower or shave. By the time I reached Patras, sleepless and exhausted, I was desperate to find a sink or washbasin. But the train station had only the old, European-style bathrooms with a launching platform, no running water, and a bucket for a flush.

It was an uncomfortable arrangement no matter how you look at it. And despite the lack of accommodations and the desperate guy across from me, sleep, I knew, was what I needed most. I looked around the car. It was completely full. A group of young *Europass* students had already commandeered the one small piece of floor space and were sleeping there, piled on top of one another.

I pulled my carry-bag close to me, keeping an eye on the man across from me, and I tried to get comfortable. In shifting my body weight I accidentally bumped his leg.

“Excuse me,” I said.

He did not reply.

He was sleepy too, I could tell, and as tired as I. His eyes were bloodshot and his eyelids looked heavy and like they wanted to drop. He also shifted uncomfortably and likewise pulled his satchel in close to his side. Then he curled his hand around it and held on to it like it was filled with gold. It made me wonder what he had in it. Maybe he’s a gem trader? I thought, or the thief of a gem trader?

If only he would fall asleep. If he would sleep, then I could do the same. And almost exactly when I thought of it, I saw his lids beginning to drop. Go down, I thought. Yes. Let them go down. Let them drop. But then the thought crossed my mind: What if he’s faking? Lulling me into a false security, so that I would sleep, only to wake up hours later and find my carry bag gone, cut from my shoulder with a knife.

We both exchanged guarded, hard looks, and bouts of drowsiness. His eyes would close, and his head would bob, and then he’d snap himself back awake. And I, in one instant, lost all consciousness, although just for a few seconds, awaking to see him glancing at me with a little smirk on his face.

Not so easy, I thought.

I caught him pinching himself, and then shaking his head, trying to shake out the drowsiness.

You’re going down, I thought. I can outlast you. But each time I saw him struggling, I found myself struggling too; fighting off the inevitable sleep that I knew would eventually win over my body.

The night wore on. The vintage train rattled over the tracks. The noise and motion helped kept us both awake. Still, as the hours past it became nearly impossible. The accumulation of three bad nights had caught up with me. The weight of my eyelids were feeling like lead shutters, ready to close for a long winter. I did everything I could to fight it. I tilted my head back, and then sideways. I scratched my side though I didn't have an itch. The good news was that he was not doing much better. I watched his head bobbing. I watched him fighting it, and clinging to his pouch more protectively.

And finally I saw him unclasp the middle button of his shirt and reach his hand down deep into it; down along his side. His eyes gleamed at me. He gave me a little grin, and a head-nod, letting me know that he had something, a knife or a gun perhaps? It didn't matter what, I realized. He had a weapon of some sort, down there in his shirt, and whatever it was it brought him fresh confidence, confidence enough to sleep.

And now his eyes began to close and his expression was sure. I watched him with one eye still open, watching me.

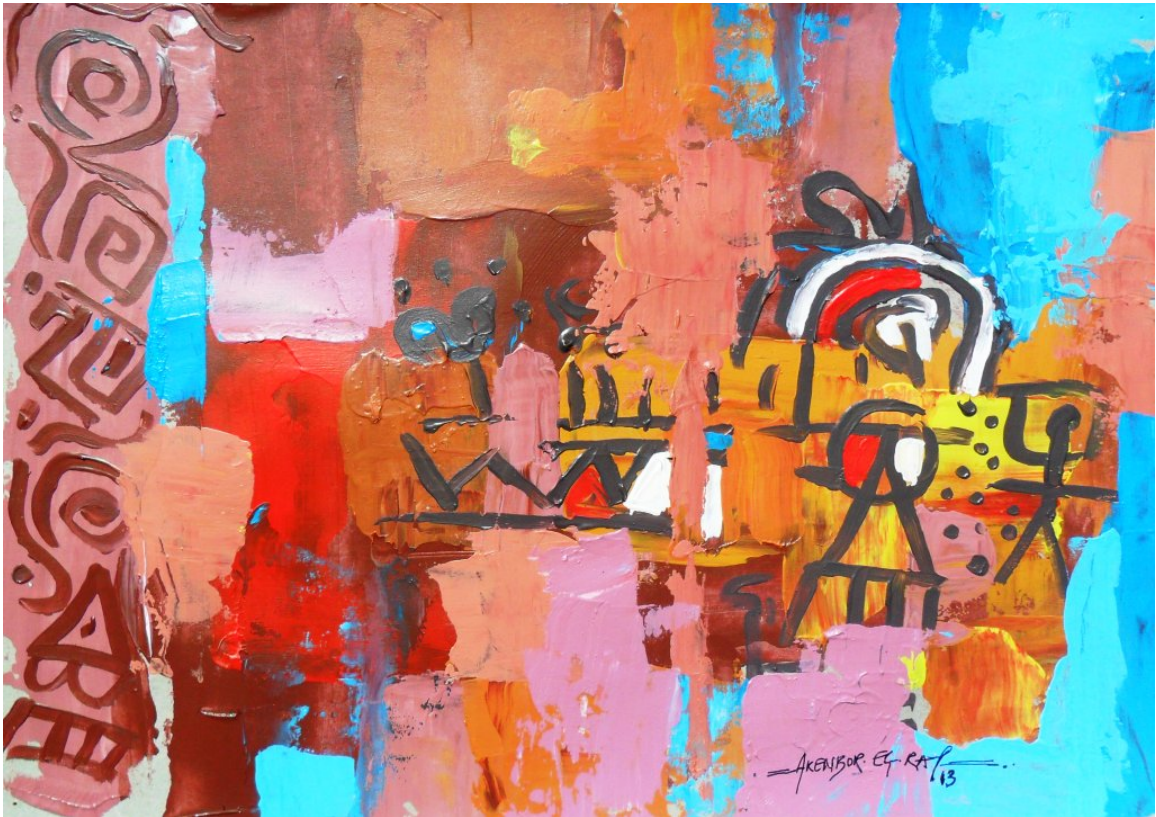
And he's probably a light sleeper, I thought, with a hair-trigger finger that's equally light and fast.

It is unfair, I thought, as my eyes, too tired and too heavy to fight it any longer, began to close. There is no justice. This scoundrel would have a peaceful night while I would suffer from frequent awakenings and sleep apnea.

Then it dawned on me that I had a similar option. The idea seemed too obvious, yet likely to work. I unbuttoned an opening in my shirt and reach down with my hand, down along the side of my chest to where I kept nothing. I left my hand there, warm against my side, and I watched him, his one eye still open, watching me, but fluttering closed.

Okay, I thought, *détente*. And I smiled at him; a little smile; a warning smile, and I closed my eyes and slept.

~ *Frank Scozzari*



"The African Poetry" ~ Eghosa Akenbor

DROWN

Opening the window,
I stick my hand out into the wind,
slowly arching it down,

letting the rush of air push
it towards the clouds.
Like that sinking feeling,

before the air trapped
in your lungs floats your body
back up towards the sun's

reflection on the water.

~ *Melanie Figueroa*

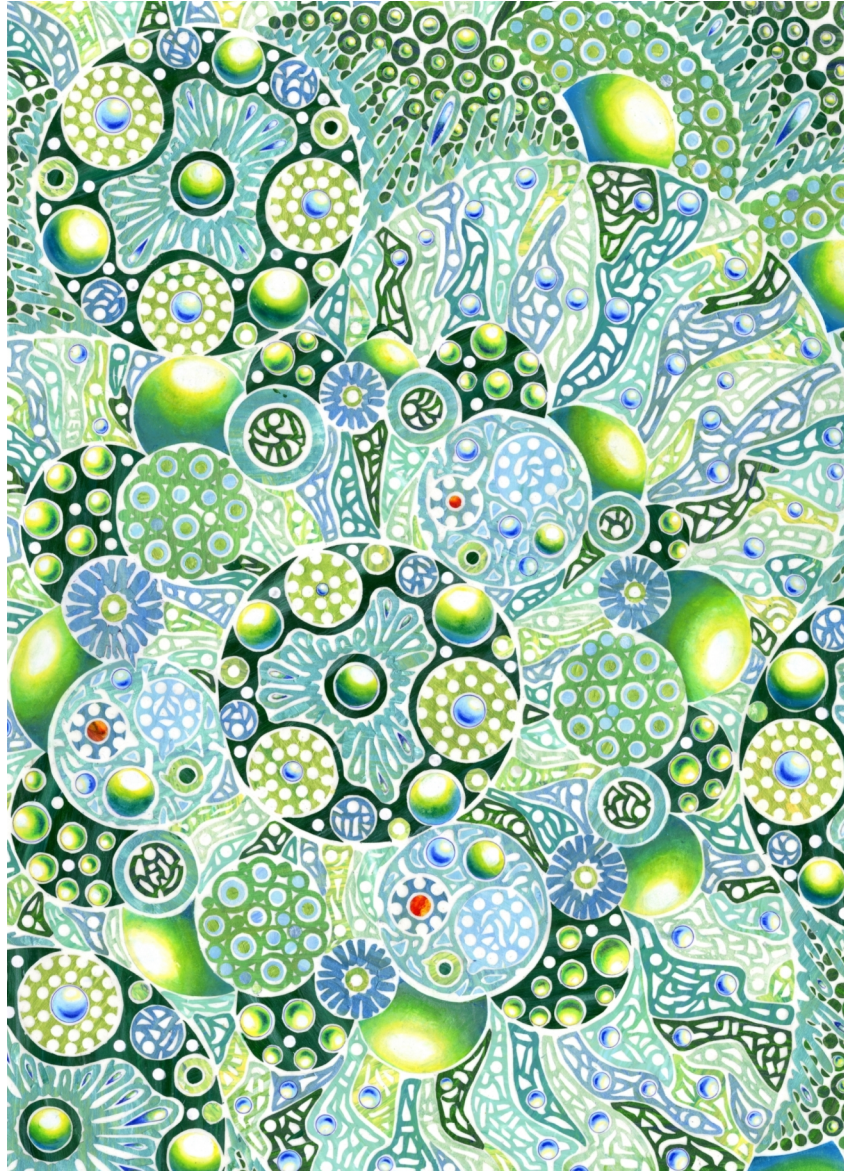
Shakespeare's starlings fly above—
specks of black against the blue.
The murmuration parts

like the red sea, like an open book.
Soft flutter of wings, guttural song,
slap of river hitting shore. Halved,

they move in unison. Mimicking
movement—sound. Moving outward,
inward, what was scattered, meeting

in the middle, rolling like the ocean's
currents. A dance learned in Europe,
hundreds of years ago.

~ *Melanie Figueroa*



"Primordial Soup" ~ Reza Hashemizadeh

SPRING QUARTER

You break my senile slowness with your erotic mind laughter to prolong the zenith of my slope, the phoenix of my decline without luminous fissures, childhood and winged wheels, beaches sliding down my eyes and eternal dark aura.

-

Warm memories, emetic, full of splinters of innocence, merciful points where I fell tormented by the flight of a blind butterfly.

-

Outbreaks of nerves lagging before the matrix, an eye drowning, unable to learn how to drink tears. A you without me, blocking the starry way. A me without you, hot signs nailed in my ice. Goodbye forever.

~ Cristina Perez Arranz

FALL QUARTER

Smoke in my lungs that taste of you. The morning lurks behind the moon, I love you when the wind blows against the sunny days.

-

The calendar is the bonfire of our oxygen, our heart is redder than ever and it does not matter. On the beach of your womb I cheerfully buried my destiny. The waves will never touch us down there, as warm as the weight of your hair on my thighs, as romantic as a song half sang, as beautiful as the sunrise of your smile in Venice.

-

Pieces of feelings spreading through the white of my eyes. Tingling in the tips of my fingers, thirst of the creature of your skin. A lip curved towards the corner of a turbid kiss, passionate as the red of a cherry on the cake of a virgin. Love between the clouds, tattered roses under the tongue, geraniums behind the open gates of your heat.

~ Cristina Perez Arranz



"Wildflowers" ~ Matthew Felix Sun

YOU.

I linger on the precipice of dream and waking. Woven in the breeze, gently mingled is
your scent.

And there you are...all warm smiles and inviting arms.

I make my way to you—try to grasp you with sleep slackened fingers...

But then I wake, tears in my eyes, buried beneath the softest of down dunes.

And under the whirl of the ceiling windmill there is no scent, no warm touch...
no you.

~ Jade Lum

A WILD, GENTLE THING

milkweed — green.
i stood looking, longing,
for the taste of light (alloy).

one sweeping, soulful
attempt at cotton, at palpability — i go on.

flying wasn't what i imagined;
dark wing-ed creature
that i had held.

my dear, will you wish or whisper?

couldn't say, didn't he know:

whatever i wept for was a wild, gentle thing.

~ Erica Tom



"Merely A Peony" ~ Tracy Tran

MY TRUE LOVE GAVE TO ME

On the first day of Christmas, Jerry's true love sent to him a partridge in a pear tree.

"Now why did she do that?" Jerry asked. "She's already bought a turkey at the Pathmark. What am I going to do with this dumb bird?"

Jerry stepped out of his slippers and into his shower as he pondered the problem.

"It sits there on its favorite branch, feathers plumed, humming this ridiculous melody and leaving bird droppings. I could kill it. But Missy is already committed to turkey."

He stepped out of the shower, drank two cups of coffee, and got dressed for work.

On the second day of Christmas, Jerry prepared to fly to Philadelphia from New York for a business meeting. The bird began eating all of the pears. A card arrived from Missy along with a package from U.P.S.. Inside it were two turtle doves.

That night, Jerry boarded his plane as dense smog hovered over the airport terminal. Jerry couldn't stop thinking about the partridge. He ordered a drink. The businessman to his left was reading the evening paper. As the plane lifted from the ground, noxious layers of smoke and gas spilled past the plane. The man turned to the stock market listings.

"Even AT&T is plunging down, down, down. What is this world coming to?"

"Please, no smoking," the stewardess said to the man. He frowned and put out his cigarette.

Suddenly Jerry was aware of the translucent beauty of the sky, a deep darkness lit by the quarter moon, stars and distant lightning. They moved above the smog. Jerry felt full of sky, full of moonlight, darkness and vast space, like a vase holding fresh carnations. He would bring some home to Missy.

The voice of the stewardess brought him out of his reverie. She was reciting safety procedures. Jerry thought of Missy's legs. But only the spindly legs of the partridge appeared in his mind.

On the third day of Christmas, Jerry slept late, ignoring the cooing of the two turtle doves and the incessant munching of the partridge. His business deal had fallen through and he considered giving up real estate for a literary career. So he ordered the complete works of Balzac through the Book

of the Month Club, all sixty volumes of *La Comedie Humaine* in French with English translations. A mailman appeared at the front door with a package marked "Special Delivery." Inside it was a note and three French hens. "I heard you have taken an interest in French literature," the note said. It was signed "Missy."

Jerry put aside the note. He considered roasting the three hens in the microwave and then set them underneath the half-naked pear tree. He sat down to begin his first volume of the great masterpiece.

"What is love but a fluttering sensation?" he wrote. "One may feel as much from underdone poultry: a tickle in the belly, a muddle of emotion, a hankering ghost in the recesses of a dream. What is love? A burp in the belly? A blip in one's atoms? A shadow in the cave eluding definition? Sonnets, theology, songs, and psychology have all dedicated volumes to love. Shakespeare and Dante, Chopin and Rossini probe the music of love. The I and the Thou. The You and the Me. Medieval courtly romance and scientific investigations into human orgasm all yearn for the elusive definition. Is love a way of self-discovery? Is it knowledge of another? An arduous path to God?"

He tore it up. It became a ball in his fingers. It landed like a foul shot in the garbage can.

Birds. Love is for the birds.

Jerry abandoned his literary career. He abandoned writing all those things about love and intimacy. He opened the package from Missy. Inside it was a cage. Inside the cage were the three French hens. He could almost hear a memory of her voice through their clucking. "See how much I love you?"

It was now the fourth day of Christmas. Jerry inched open the venetian blinds and looked out at the sunlight glowing on a distant hill. The sky looked so blue and full of puffs of cloud.

On his way to work, Jerry drove through aisles of traffic, pulled into a parking garage with six or seven hundred other cars, and hurried to an elevator. From the elevator to the lobby he walked, his right arm swinging his briefcase, his left hand waving.

"Hello, Kevin. Hello, Tom."

His shadow fell in the hallway. He closed his office door. Now he could toss the forced smile, hand his hat on the coat rack, take a gloomy look out the window at the snowflakes gathering in the sky. His reflection in the window mocked him. His hair was a scarecrow tumble. Meanwhile, four calling birds began calling on his doorstep at home on Gilcrest Avenue.

On the fifth day of Christmas, the front doorbell rang five times. A little man with a chilled face and a mustache stood on the steps. He handed him a

side order from McDonald's and sang, "Five golden rings!"

That day, Jerry rode the D-train from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Evening had come. Its shadows fell across brick building after brick building as the train tracks rose up toward the Brooklyn Bridge. Over stockyard and shipyard and one hundred fifty or more years of walls, over the Sweeney Manufacturing Company founded in 1870, sailed the train. It went out across red-orange-yellow-blue Christmas lights. The bridge lunged toward Manhattan, where Wall Street towers rose and the windows were sparkling jewels. A necklace of headlights wound below as the dark night descended. Jerry thought of the five gold rings.

The sixth day of Christmas was flannel gray. The flannel looked like it had been worn for six years. Jerry took a bus into the city. Gulls swirled around the stone walls of the bus station. The gas was awful. In a gift shop window he saw a statue of lovers tangled in a passionate embrace. A half pint of Bacardi rested on the concrete ledge under a rusted metal grating. He sighed, remembering Missy, last New Year's Eve. He went into the shop and bought the statue for her.

In the coffee shop next door, a big breasted waitress swung between the tables past the old men. Fixing food, taking orders, she shuffled her feet, tossing change in her hand.

"Here yuh go..."

She had coffee pouring down to a science. Her left hand grabbed a plastic spoon, scooped for sugar, tossed it into the cup, squirted milk into it. Then came flips at the coffee valve with her palm, the coffee pouring, the steam rising.

"No, I don't know where Jimmy is," she was saying. "Maybe he got a woman last night."

Her voice rang like an announcement. She tugged on some faded garland above the counter.

"It's Christmas," she said. "The sixth day of Christmas. But who's counting? The decorations weren't my idea."

Jerry carried his coffee outside. It sent steam into the chill air, smoke mist twirling, time evaporating. Puffs of vapor from his breath dissipated.

Jerry saw that he was standing across the street from a church. The sunlight shone across its doors, through the bare nets of the twigs of the trees, Bishop McNulty, set in bronze, had his arm wrapped around a boy. Birds from a tree crapped on his head. There was a Christmas wreath over the door.

Night settled, tossing over his head an expansiveness of stars. Walking there at night he felt like a pioneer exploring new trails, Odysseus in the wide world, a Whitman wanderer feeling for the song in himself, some larger self,

abundant and amazed.

The air felt fresh and cool on his face. The sky was white and night seemed to sing upon this white blanket of space. His coffee sent steam into the chill air. The moon, a pale blur, became lost in the clouds overhead. The hospital walls stood silent. The construction machinery lay still. A long metal truck lay toothless in the dirt, a metal fence winding around it.

Jerry passed by windows, pretty hairdressers behind one, tumbles of floating hair. A thin streetwalker asked for quarters. Bundled under a ski cap, he walked away. Jerry cut through an alley. The sky was cold and clouded. But the moon peered through.

On the seventh day of Christmas, Jerry visited his grandaunt Sylvia at the Bowdoin Nursing Home. Sylvia's son, his uncle Sid, had died four years before. Without him, Christmas was a lonely time for Sylvia. Each time the radio would play "Silent Night" she would cry.

Jerry left there thinking that there must be hundreds of other people like Sylvia. He looked across the rim of the valley toward the city. The valley was speckled with house lights. A person could get lost in that blaze of light, Jerry thought.

Before going home, Jerry delivered a bottle of Scotch to his brother Bill's house. Bill was married to a lovely Italian-American woman named Bianca Bocci and it was Bianca who greeted him at the door. The house smelled of cookie dough and baked goods. Their ten year old daughter Anna was baking cookies. Anna was blonde and pretty and quiet.

"I put some jelly in this one. See?" she said, smiling.

"Yes, that's a pretty one."

Anna decorated the sugar cookie. Her teachers at school would get some. And Mrs. Vera down the block would get some too. And there would still be enough leftover for Sharon and Cindy, when they came to visit.

Jerry ate some of the chocolate chips. He began thinking of Bianca's sister Patricia and her brother Tony. They lived near the Verazzano Narrows Bridge on the Staten Island side. Their house was one of those little castles you see there to the right of the road. His mind flew out across the evening sky, like a balloon arching high over the New Jersey Meadowlands, along the bend of the turnpike, past Newark and its airport. His thoughts raced past the headlights and up along a ridge with a commanding view of the Manhattan skyline blinking, the top of the Empire State Building coated in holiday green and red light. His thoughts flew like a joyous Santa with his reindeer, narrowly missing a Boeing dipping its wings over Newark toward the airport... Then on Dasher, on Dancer, on Donner, and Blitzen. On toward Bayonne.

“I think Anna put a half a pint of Scotch in those chocolates,” Bianca said.

On the eighth day of Christmas, Jerry awakened and remembered the secret of life: creativity is the breath of the divine breathing in us. He couldn't remember where he'd heard it. But he recited the words groggily and let them spill forth with his first cup of coffee like a morning prayer.

Breathing the caffeinated vapor, the thought came to him: “What the world needs now is more oxygen. Why, with all the polluted air we're racing headlong to destruction. The world is running out of breath.”

Missy's gift that day took his breath away: Eight maids a milking. They were dressed in French ruffles, like fluffy croissants. Unfortunately, they were more attached to their work than to Jerry. And their work meant the unwelcome presence of eight dairy cows. The bovine creatures drew flies which they swatted with their tails. Jerry ordered the cows into the backyard but one of the maids refused. She wasn't properly dressed for the weather, she said. Neither was her cow. “Besides,” she said, “what will your neighbors think?”

She said it in French. Jerry didn't know a word of French. But he could read it in her face. She was milking her cow in the living room and that is all there was to it. The French hens concurred.

The calling birds fluttered in the den.

The turtle doves cooed.

And the partridge nibbled on the last of the pears.

In the West, a rim of pale orange sunset concluded the ninth day of Christmas. A vertical streak of white light passed through it, crossed by a smoky black cloud.

It is all a matter of perspective, Jerry decided. From where I stand, I see the sky and it looks that way. But if I stood somewhere else it would look differently. That is how things are. This world is the same prism seen from different angles.

Then as he walked into his house he forgot his insight. Nine ladies in Capezio tights were swirling through the rooms. He heard Tchaikovski, the Nutcracker Suite. He was entranced by the sound of harp strings, like feathers being plucked.

On the tenth day of Christmas a gentle snowfall softened the atmosphere. Jerry gazed out the window. The house on Gilcrest Avenue was calm for a moment. Then the doorbell rang.

Ten men were standing on the steps, tracking snow into his living room.

They bowed and joined in dancing the Nutcracker. Over the sofa one leaped and the others followed. Ten lords a leaping. Soon they had leaped on all the nine ladies dancing. Jerry was very bummed out.

The eleventh day of Christmas brought eleven pipers piping. They were badly out of tune. The shrill sound began grating on Jerry's nervous system. He sat up in bed with a pint of Rocky Road ice cream, a pint of Dewar's Scotch, and a paperback novel. He was still unsure of the book's title. Missy's dog had chewed off the cover and the table of contents.

Missy would arrive on the 7:00 train. He could picture her now: brunette curls under a plumed square hat, lipstick smudged across her front teeth. What have you brought with you this time, Missy? She would toss her arms around him and he would have a lipstick smudge on his cheek and be dazed and totally unprepared for her next surprise.

The evening was brisk, the air cold on Jerry's face. He stood by a yellow brick wall at the train station. There were crushed cigarette butts at his feet. A hunch-backed silver cube of a diner blinked its pink "Open" sign across the tracks. A man standing on the platform was reading a newspaper. He looked cold.

Now a train whistle blew. Three long whistles echoed off a row of houses. Jerry gazed up the tracks. He saw headlights, steel, steam. The whistle blew again and the train hissed and rattled forcefully into the station.

The man with the newspaper waited for a young man wearing eyeglasses to step off the train. The young man was followed by a portly woman swinging a gaudy green handbag. Then came Missy. Her eyes beamed and she waved from the top of the steps.

"Hi, Jerry, dear!"

"Come on, Missy. This gentleman is waiting to get on the train."

"Oh, but I've got a surprise for you, Jerry," Missy said.

Missy peeked back into the train. The conductor, a thin man with sideburns, stepped out.

"They're ready, ma'am," he said.

"Wonderful," Missy said. "Okay, boys!"

Suddenly the train appeared to quiver. There was a rumble, like many restless fingers tapping. Then came the drumming. Snare drums echoed: rat-ta-tat-tat-tat! Like a wooden soldier came the first drummer, his blue uniform sparkling. The drumsticks in his hands moved swiftly to the drum strapped to his waist.

Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat!

Twelve drummers were drumming. They came in single file from the

boxcar: blue uniformed, square shouldered, wrists and hands, feet and legs in motion. The man with the newspaper dropped it. He backed away.

Rat-ta-tat-tat-tat! They marched down the stairs, twelve drummers drumming, the last of them a short, chubby fellow banging on a bass drum with his mallets. As he reached the platform, the man waiting to get on the train rushed up the steps. The drumming stopped.

“They’re not coming home with us!” said Jerry.

“But Jerry, I promised them,” Missy said.

“Missy, I can’t take it. The swans in the bathtub, the lords a leaping, the ballet in the living room. You’d think our house was a combination of the Metropolitan Opera and the Central Park zoo.”

“But Jerry dear...”

She tossed her arms around him and smudged his cheek with lipstick.

“Jerry, I have a plan,” Missy said. “I have invited the preacher to dinner. He will marry the maids a milking to the lords a leaping and the ladies dancing to the drummers drumming. Of course there will be a few here and there that we can’t match up just now. But they will each get the bird of their choice and go home happily. And while the preacher is there, Jerry, we will have him marry us. We’ll use two of the five golden rings and we can sell the other three and go on our honeymoon.”

Jerry was stricken. This tumble of amour sang to his senses, calmed his battled nerves, and subdued his complaints. He hugged her.

“But Missy, what about the partridge?”

“We’ll have to have a wedding feast, won’t we?”

For the first time in weeks Jerry smiled.

“He’ll probably give both of us indigestion,” he said. “But God knows, he’s had it coming all along.”

~ Robert McParland

TIME-TABLE

I watch the city fly by through a pinhole
Reach into my pockets and turn out dust
Short changed and trumped
I slump a little farther down in my seat
Pretending not to notice the man
Singing to himself, loudly, excitably
The woman clutching nervously at her purse
Next stop: far from here

The doors wheeze open as I duck
Battle oncoming gusts of wind
Clawing at my neck, my ears, my lips
The space between our worlds
Pretending not to notice your bent form
Sliding along the cracked plastic beside me
There's not enough room in this seat
For me, my Id, and you

~ Jennifer Carter



"Rorschach Trees" ~ Carrie Nassif

WHAT'S LEFT BEHIND

The accident on the freeway altered the plan.
She didn't intend for him to read her journal.
The box of letters, she'd meant to shred.
It was all unfinished work—
like incomplete crosswords
and invitations lacking RSVPs.

She can't change what's been left behind.
She can't mend what's broken or hinge together what's been unhinged.
What's undone will remain so.

The checkbooks need to be balanced, the mail sorted.
Her name in bold Helvetica is too hard to read.
He plays her voicemail message, then plays it again and again.
Each time, he hears something different—
sharp Vs, silent Ps,
the pause before a breath.

It wasn't the right time, he thinks.
Her shampoo bottle is full. (He opens it and smells her hair.)
She's meeting a friend for coffee. *Tomorrow? Or was it today?*
Time is unmovable and yet moving too quickly.
He longs for stagnation.

The milk is sour. The towels, musty.
It's true that her jobs are now his, but he wishes for the lie.
The jewelry needs to go. *Her mom? Her sister?*
He'd always hated the pictures on the wall,
but now he feels guilty for it.

If she hadn't taken out the trash.
If he hadn't insisted she walk the dog.

If they hadn't bickered over dinner plans.
All it took was one decision. One lapse in judgment. One minute.

Was I her last thought?

It is his ultimate worry.
He distracts himself by looking for hidden treasures—
Christmas presents with him in mind,
notes in the margins she wanted him to read;
a declaration of sorts, confirming what he knows to be true:
their love is infinite.

When it's right, he'll put away the photos, but—
Their trip to the vineyard
Crossing the state line
Their first Christmas together
—those can stay.

The apologies will quiet down, the awkwardness will still.
Denial, while once a gauze, will be shed.
He will feel lighter and heavier,
enough to tear open her envelopes,
pull out a calculator,
and resist her message.

He'll wonder if life is meant to be temporary
and how long he has left.
He'll remember all he meant to say to her
and say it aloud,
hoping that she can still hear him.

He knows she can.

~ *Erica Russikoff*



"Expland" ~ Rubia van Roodselaar

POSTAGE DUE

Richard had said: “She would haunt my thoughts and dreams.”
He was right!

A little slip was placed in the brass mailbox:
A package at the Post Office: Postage due—\$1.75,
Why the hell can’t some people add right?
Probably a book.
Off we go to the post office.
The nice Chinese lady fades into the back.
(In a minute or less I will fade into black.)
What will it be?
When she comes out with it, the upper left says Townsend House.
I take a wrenching breath. Townsend House is a very bad memory.
She asks for the \$1.75—twice.
I pay. I leave.

Townsend House was the last stop before that which was imminent,
The place my mother would be going.
“I don’t like it here, too many old people.”
She included.

The package has a book all right, a high school yearbook—
Newtown 1936, my mother’s yearbook that she’d kept for sixty-four years
With pictures that do not tell a story;
Now comes this book left behind by eyes that didn’t want to see what was left behind,
and ears that didn’t want to hear about yesterdays.

I know she’s in there—under “F”—Fiorentino.

I can’t get it open;
the cover is too heavy;
My hands are too heavy;
My eyes are too heavy.

When the Salem persecutors pressed Giles Corey,
they piled boulders on his chest to hurt him into lies.
This book weighs even more.
I feel his pain.

~ *David Garrett Izzo*

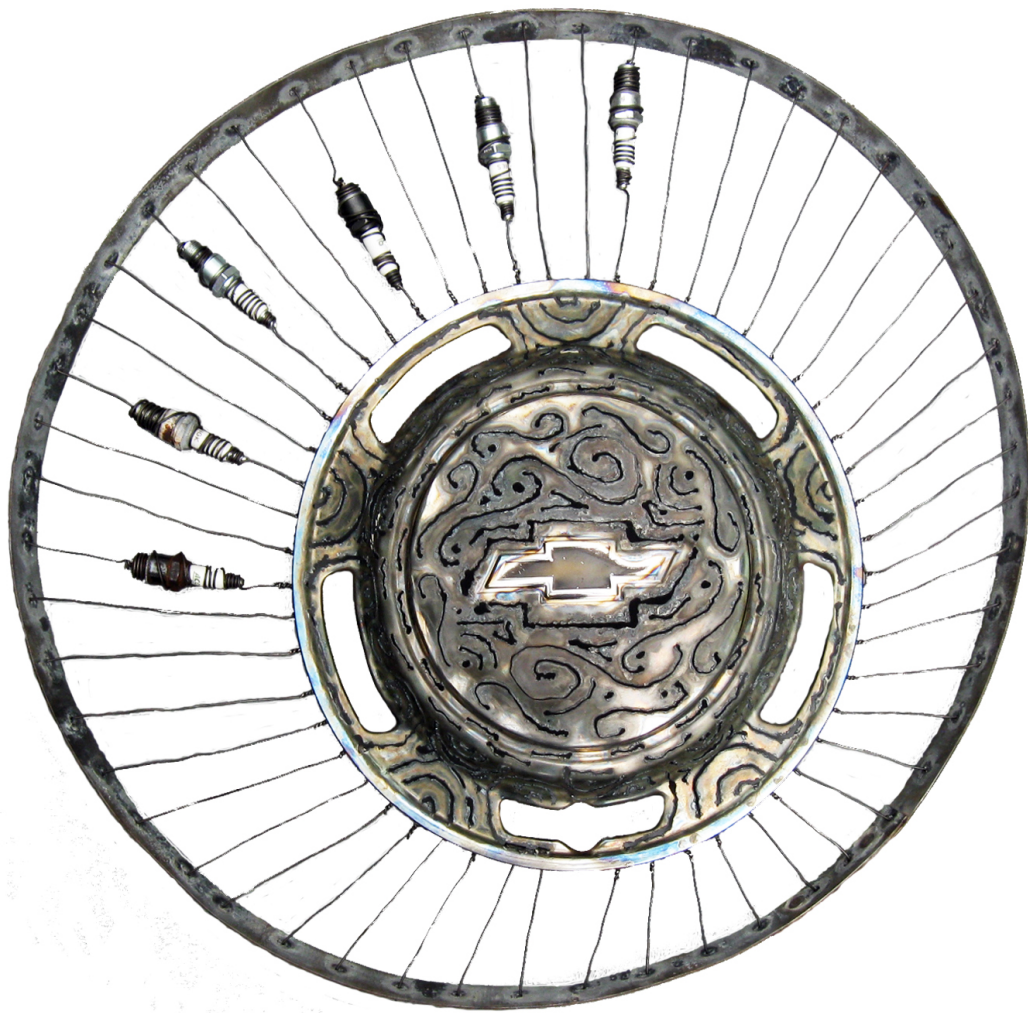


"Barbie Q." ~ Ronald Walker

LUMINANCE

I climb in through your window
Tangled in your curtains, I scrape my knee on the sill
Toss a jar into the darkness, lands on your bed
Say, "This is all you need to conquer the world."
Settling into your mattress, I pull my knees tight into my chest
My eyes search for yours through the dim cold
I grasp for you but you pull out of reach just as you unscrew the lid
Say, "A jar full of starlight" and toss the contents onto the ceiling
We lay back, feet entwined, thinking of missed connections and frenzied appetites
I look up and drift towards the stars
You keep me tethered to your wrist
Say, "I can't ever let you go. You smell of old books and chai."

~ Jennifer Carter



"Spark of Life" ~ Patrick Quinn

SHUT UP!

"Stop driving so fucking slow! Who the fuck goes 75 in the fast lane?" Jay was practically spitting on his windshield as he sped up and flipped off the young woman in the car in front of him. This is just how he is when he drives. "I can't believe you have slept with ten fucking people. You fucking whore," disdain seeped from his lips. "Have you no fucking shame? I can't believe I stuck my dick in you. God knows what kind of diseases you are crawling with. I swear to God if I have herpes or some shit..." He turned and faced Leslie who just sat in the passenger seat aghast. With each word, Jay got louder and with each increase in decibel, the speedometer stretched toward 90 mph. He was half looking at the road and half starring at her in pure contempt for her lack of virginal purity. Scared, Leslie grabbed her arm rests and stared straight ahead: silent, white, and frantically twitching every time Jay swerved in and out of the lanes. He went on...one hurtful word after the other....Leslie just sat there, a stone pillar of inner conflict.

Clarissa was tired, not just tired, exhausted, depleted, a dismal shadow of her former self. Her newborn had practically been crying since the moment it exited her womb three weeks ago. Nothing would soothe it: warmed bottles, new diapers, pacifiers, rocking chairs, soothing music, lullabies, nothing. This distraught mother even thought about slipping her child a bit of whiskey just to shut it up. Finally, reaching her breaking point, she managed to half put on clothes, and strapped the wailing kid into the car seat.

"But you asked me..."

"Shut up. I wasn't expecting you to be such a whore. Were they one night stands? I bet they were. Jesus. I just can't believe it." He shook his head woefully.

"If you call me a whore one more time..." she said matter-of-factly.

"What? What are you gonna do? Throw your crabs at me?"

She was at a loss for words. He wanted no explanation. It didn't matter if these encounters were meaningful expressions of love, or drunken exploits in the back of a club. Sex with anyone else other than him was vulgar, wrong, and not permitted. A whore is a whore –no matter of number or intent.

Stopped at a red light before the freeway, Clarissa looked at her little boy red-faced in her rear-view mirror. *What is wrong with him? What am I doing wrong?* she thought. *Maybe I wasn't cut out to be a mother? Maybe my mother was right? Maybe I am missing that maternal instinct?* She reached back and

stuffed a blue pacifier into her son's mouth. Finally, a moment of reprieve, *Ah...Silence*, she thought, as the light turned green.

"I don't have crabs," she muttered under her breath. "I don't have any..."
"...common decency? Yeah, we established that already." He cut her off.
Tears started to fill her eyes. She was amazed how a simple conversation, a simple Q and A with the guy she had been dating for a couple of months, turned to this. She fell numb and just sat there, being screamed at, sinking further and further down into herself.

Her eyes drooped. There was something relaxing about driving. Perhaps it was the hum of the road, the rhythmic sucking of the pacifier, or maybe it was the fact that, for once, there was silence...pure, unadulterated silence. Either way, Clarissa was drifting away in an exhausted daydream where babies were silent and boyfriends stuck around.

"Stop crying or I will give you something to cry about!" Leslie whipped the tears from her eyes onto her cardigan. A black smudge now stained her sleeve.

"Can we just go home? Please," she whispered.

"Why? Sick of being in this car with me?" And with that, he reached over to the door handle on the passenger side and started to tug.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?! You are going 90 mph and you are going to open the fucking door?" He reached further over and prised the door open. Hissing air rushed into the cabin, and Leslie immediately shrieked and grabbed the wheel Jay had carelessly let go.

Clarissa snapped back awake when the baby started to wail again. She checked the rear-view mirror. Where is that blasted pacifier? With one hand on the wheel, she felt around the floor of the backseat—nothing. "Shut up! Shut UP!" Clarissa yelled, obviously frustrated. Then, she spotted it. The shut-upper was in the small crevice of the seat-belt buckle. After taking a deep breath, Clarissa stretched as far as she could. No luck. It was just out of reach. After checking her mirrors and taking a deep breath, she loosened her seat belt, turned, and shimmied herself half over the center console, grabbing the pacifier. She stuffed it back in her child's mouth and smiled a half smile.
Ah...silence.

When Leslie frantically grabbed the wheel, the car immediately shifted lanes on the busy highway...

When the police arrived at the scene, it was a mess. A two-car pileup, smashed into the center divider—one car on top of the other. Only one survivor. The first car had the passenger side door ripped off, airbags deployed, and the couple inside was dead on impact. The man's neck had been snapped from leaning over and the force of airbag, and the women had apparently hit her head hard on the door before it snapped off --all in all, a bloodied mess of tangled, broken bodies.

The second car was underneath the first. The front tires crushed the trunk and half of the backseat of the second car. They found a young women, pinned horizontally between her smashed roof and her front seat--severely bruised and broken, but breathing. Underneath her, laid a lifeless carcass smothered by his mother's contorted body.

Despite the blood gushing from her ripped limbs and gashed forehead, all Clarissa could think was, *Ah silence...*

~ *Michelle Lekkerkerk*

PANDORA'S BOX

I've spent too much time in Pandora's Box
On Porter Street in Fullerton
The brown oak door is more like a lid
Encasing histories a son should never know.

But open the door and search
Looking for answers to questions I never asked.
File cabinets jammed close,
Sealed, stuffed, packed with Court Cases.

Paystubs, Taxes and Social Security Cards.
Death.
Debt.
Divorce.

This couch is mine now, I thought.
So is this table, this watch,
The dresser, the hot dogs in the crisper.
The cats--
And the secrets.

~ Chris Baarstad

JOHN LENNON ON LSD

When Fathers die and Children cry--
When a pack of wolves find the Alpha is lost--
What are we to do but crumble?

But Ah, the absence conjures more clarity
than John Lennon on LSD ever knew.

~ Chris Baarstad

WHERE MY GRANDMOTHER FORGETS MY NAME

1

Eucalyptus grows tall where my grandmother
forgets my name, the crooked evergreen

we passed on walks chopped down long ago,
no longer leaning over empty street, worn

with tire tread and age. Yet Greenwood Park
remains, glimmering grass laid low with

heavy steps and bicycle tracks once mine in days
of ease, under shade of ever-climbing trees.

2

Warm sun cascades down driveway in
familiar ways, old camper concrete-bound

for how many too-long days, collecting rust
and summer dust. Toward pale yellow door,

past usurps present, steps grow timid in
pace, suffused with sights and smells

now null, for kindred spaces intangible.
I pause on porch in remembrance.

3

Half-open kitchen window catches ocean
breeze, white curtains dancing with

decades-old grace, beholden to this place,
carrying themselves in how many far-off dreams.

Summer wind whirls through yard and garden
uprooted and replaced with waning echoes

of spring-worn space, yielding release to
aching hands and knees, fatigued and heavy

from century-long gravity, heavy still,
pulling us to the earth in years.

4

Bird feed falls beyond redwood fence, tumbling
through sky and finding rest in tufts of grass

where we played croquet, mallets laid fallow
in a garage of measureless memory. Will we

stand again in summer sun amidst smell of soil
and seed, swinging mallets near leaves of

Mandarin tree, snow peas sprouting on white
lattice, yellow daisies in full bloom?

5

Will we watch the greenhouse gather light
come mid-afternoon, wisps of clouds

withdrawing into sky? Will your white hair
be taken with wind as we sight sparrows

perching on telephone wire?
Will we grow old and never tire?

6

I reach pale yellow door where my grandmother
forgets my name, knuckles knocking softly.

Even in touch there is remembering. Thought
encumbers being. Time augments itself in years.

Days emerge behind us. Memories, gone with
generations, sink with light of setting sun.

~ Ryan David Leack

A DREAMER OF DWELLINGS IN A HOUSE OF MEMORY

1

Outside, roots grow strong in the yard where
my father was raised, the Mandarin bearing

oranges every summer when we visit, blades
of grass like time, stretching to the heavens.

Once we harvested sweet corn, devouring nearly
all but husk come yellow summer dusk.

Carrots broke ground, broccoli rose from seed,
accompanied by birds in native tranquil sound.

2

Inside, white hanger rests on door where my
father was born, heavy with the weight of years.

I had once turned the knob below it softly, as not
to wake him, creeping out in morning light to find

my grandparents drinking coffee, mugs warming
fingers, early hours bearing conversation.

3

With light breeze came still afternoons, and
long naps on the couch with my grandfather,

birds never tiring all the while in a yard with
its full weight in bloom. We rose from sleep

to sun-drunk room, garden bathed in ethereal
light, skin summer-warm, rose blossoms in flight.

4

Were we to lie down forever, we could never
number each bird who calls, nor each note that
transcended walls in our near-immortal slumber.
We could never bear witness enough to the drift
of sun on wood, peering through panels, hollow
knots like apertures filtering lambent light.

5

We would never think to notice time moving
like the model train in the sun room, passing
stations like years, arriving here where we
harvest thoughts of home in too many memories
to be made known. We would never worry or
aspire, never think to lift warm quilt from
rising chests, content to bury regret in
river-long rest forgetful of desire.

6

Where have summer naps gone, wind caressing
bare skin? Morning coffee awakens a growing
grandchild in whose house, drawing him toward
conversation? Over which father's home has
the sun risen, and on his door what hangs still,
becoming the memory of a new generation?

~ Ryan David Leack

BIOGRAPHIES

EGHOSA RAYMOND AKENBOR

Eghosa Raymond Akenbor a painter/designer from Benin city, Edo state in Nigeria, inspired by experimenting found objects and techniques to create new art.

A published artists at the international contemporary artists vol. 6, a textile/fashion designer who draw cloth patterns and paint on cloths. And a creative art teacher in a missionary secondary school in Nigeria.

For more information about my Art check: www.artpalour.com

CRISTINA PEREZ ARRANZ

Cristina Perez graduated in Translation and Interpretation (SP, ENG, FR) from C. E. S. Felipe II de Madrid in 2010, acquiring a major in Cognitive, Generative and Systemic approaches to English Grammar. She also graduated in English Philology from Universidad Complutense de Madrid in 2011 with a double major in Angloamerican Literature. Cristina finished her Masters in Literary Studies at Universidad Complutense de Madrid in 2012, where she majored in Urban Literature and studied New York City across the social perspective of Jewish and Galician immigration and multiculturalism.

She has also conducted research on European approaches to American modernism and post-war Romanian literature. Cristina is currently a second

year Ph.D. candidate in Literary Studies at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain specializing in new science and pseudosciences of the late 18th and 19th centuries, their impact on the work of Edgar Allan Poe, and their influence on modern science.

CHRISTOPHER BAARSTAD

Christopher Baarstad, ostensibly known as Chris, teaches Basic Writing and Composition at Riverside City College in California. He also teaches international 7th and 8th grade students at his local junior high school. He enjoys reading Norse mythology, dystopian novels, and writing for no reason at all.

JENNIFER CARTER

Jennifer is a writer, poet, and German-English translator from the San Francisco Bay Area. Her passion for academia stems from the interconnection between her many studies, her inherent love of reading, and culminated in the founding of The California Journal of Women Writers in September 2012. Her work has appeared in the UC Berkeley Comparative Literature Undergraduate Journal and is forthcoming in The New Union and various other capacities. Her research has been presented, or is forthcoming, at conferences by CSULA, RMLLA, and Ryerson University. She has a BA in English, with an emphasis in Women's Studies, and an MA in Liberal Arts & Sciences, with

emphases in Literature, Ethnic and Women's Studies, and Media and Popular Culture. She divides her time between California and Germany and can be found online at <http://tcjww.org/>

DOINA CIOBANU

I am a Southern California painter favoring landscape and abstract art. You can see symbolic references to prominent impressionistic painters of the 19th century like Monet, Manet, Matisse and others and their artistic vision in my own art. Most of my paintings are mixed acrylic/oil. Capturing the California light is extremely important to me, as I think that it is only here that you can find all these shades of green and blue that I try to render. Other paintings can be seen on my website at: <http://doinaciobanu.weebly.com/>

ALEX ENGLISH

Alex English was raised in the house his grandfather built on the Campbell Citrus Ranch in Corona, California. Although the ranch was uprooted by the contagion of urbanization when he was still young, the value of simple living has never left him. His works are half-truths, a mix of fictional events constructed around the moral lessons of his childhood. Alex is an English major and will attend Cal State Long Beach in the fall to study rhetorical analysis and composition.

MELANIE FIGUEROA

Melanie Figueroa is a graduate student in Portland State University's Writing and Book Publishing program. She holds a BA in

English Rhetoric and Composition and a Technical Writing certificate from California State University, Long Beach. She currently works for PSU's creative agency as a copywriter, and she is also the creator and editor of the literary blog, The Poetics Project. In the future, Melanie hopes to make a living working as an editor at a publishing house and to continue writing creatively.

JAMES H. FORD JR.

James H. Ford Jr. has been a professional storyteller for over twenty year. His career includes both oral and written stories. He holds a BS in Psychology from Tennessee State University and a MA in Clinical Psychology from Texas Southern University. His stories and technical writing has appeared in The Rainbow Magazine and The Best Stories from the Texas Storytelling Festival. He is the 2000 winner of the John Henry Faulk Award for excellence in storytelling.

REZA HASHEMIZADEH

My work investigates the dynamics between humanity and progress, and its impact on the environment. I create collages made up entirely of recycled paper, mostly junk mail. Man-made materials and insignia of consumerism that directly correlate to endless human consumption with no regard for its outcome. The never-ending fractal-esque nature of my abstract designs are meant to replicate the very same never-ending nature of humanity's constant need to waste. The aesthetic outcomes of my hand made collages is meant as a juxtaposition of what could end

up in a landfill having the potential of being something 'otherly' than just discarded waste of humanity.

JANNELLY HERRERA

Jannelly Herrera is a tattoo apprentice living in Lafayette, LA. She received her B.F.A in Drawing and Painting from the Academy of Art University in 2007. For the last seven years her works have been shown in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. In addition to drawing and painting she has experience in other art forms such as face painting, henna, pyrography, printmaking, sculpture, martial arts and tattooing. She also has a strong connection to mathematics and science.

DAVID GARRETT IZZO

Dr. David Garrett Izzo is an English Professor who has published 17 books and 60 essays of literary scholarship, as well as three novels, two plays, a short story, and poems. David has published extensively on the Perennial Spiritual Philosophy of Mysticism (Vedanta) as applied to literature. He is inspired by Aldous Huxley, Bruce Springsteen, his wife Carol and their five cats: Huxley, Max, Princess, Phoebe, and Luca. Two of his novels are fantasies with cats as characters: *Maximus in Catland* and *Purring Heights*. www.davidgarrettizzo.com davidizzo@hotmail.com.

RYAN DAVID LEACK

Ryan David Leack is an English Ph.D. student at UC Riverside, where he studies rhetoric, composition, and the philosophy of space and place. He teaches English at Cal Poly

Pomona where he received his M.A., and has been published in journals such as *Pif*, *RipRap*, *Contemporary World Literature*, *Strong Verse*, and *Word River*, as well as in *Pomona Valley Review*, of which is now the Editor-in-Chief. He lives a quiet life with his wife in Pomona seeking Thoreauvian tranquility and harmony with words.

NOEL LEDERER

I am currently an undergraduate at University of California Riverside with a concentration in Creative Writing. When I am not writing, I enjoy baking and old vinyl records. My favorite poets are Gary Soto, Sharon Olds and Anis Mojgani.

MICHELLE LEKKERKERK

Michelle Lekkerkerk is an adjunct professor at National University and a Writing Consultant for Ashford University. In her free time, she writes short stories and poetry.

JADE LUM

My name is Jade Lum and I am resident of Claremont, CA. I have just recently finished my undergraduate studies in English literature from Cal Poly Pomona and am interested in writing. I love to read, attend concerts, and spend time with my family and friends.

ALICJA MADLOCH

Alicja Madloch is a junior at Newark Academy in Livingston, New Jersey. She has received recognition for several pieces of writing, but writes mostly for herself. In addition to writing she enjoys reading

fiction and taking photographs. She believes that alternate realities are often preferable to our own and chooses to explore them.

JOANNA MADLOCH

Joanna Madloch lives in NJ with her husband, daughter Alicja (who is also a Pomona Valley Review author), and a dog named Poppy. She is a photographer, author, researcher, and university instructor. Both in her photographic and scholarly work, she has made a problem of seeing and being seen a primary topic. She published numerous papers dedicated to photography and various aspects of visual and textual communication. Currently, she works on the book dedicated to the picture of the photographer in literature.

MONIKA MORI

Monika Mori was born in 1960 in Moedling, Austria, and has studied with Prof. Anneliese Beschorner. Since 2008, her work has been exhibited worldwide and is included in major and private collections.

CHRISTOPHER MULROONEY

Christopher Mulrooney has written poems in *Or*, *Futures Trading*, *Epigraph Magazine*, *Auchumpkee Creek Review*, *The Germ*, *Red Branch Journal*, *Decanto*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, and *The Criterion*.

CARRIE NASSIF

My photography frames the spiritual in found object abstracted compositions I stumble across like totems. I carry them home in my pocket, raw and ragged, to polish like a worry stone between thumb

and forefinger. I've had photography place in regional competitions, accepted in fine art shows, and accepted in AIPF's 2014 anthology.

JAN NIEBRZYDOWSKI

I am a copy editor working on the research book, *Practical Analysis of Composite Structures* by Dr. Brian Esp. I am a poetry contributor to *Sacramento Free Press* (*Poems for All* Chapbook) *Pomona Valley Review #7*, *The Voices Project*, *The UK Poetry Library and Prose and Rhyme*; short story to *Prose and Rose* and *The Book Patch*.

I am the author of *Poetry From Behind the Curtain* (Madison Kent pen name) and the romance novel *Sweet Sins*.

CHARLES PAYNE

Charles Payne is a guy who lives and programs and writes in Southern California.

HAL PREECE

H. Preece is a BA Illustration graduate of Falmouth University in Cornwall, England. He has a long-standing interest in the blending of traditional and digital media, and produces many images in correlated series, narratives and comics surrounding a theme or character. More of his professional and personal work is available on his site hpreeceillustration.com.

PATRICK QUINN

I am a Mixed-Media artist who works mainly with found objects and salvaged materials. The work tends to be raw and

emotional. A vintage suitcase can serve as a canvas. An old photo can tell a new story. My work will often mix traditional Assemblage elements with different mediums. Stained glass techniques, metal sculpture, and ink printing have all been incorporated into different pieces. I am currently a member of the Los Angeles Art Association and live in the city of Eagle Rock, California. If you would like to see more of my work, please visit my website at www.patrickquinnartist.com

GENIELYSSE REYES

Genielysse Reyes is an undergraduate Psychology and Creative Writing Double Major at UC Riverside. Ever since early childhood, she has immersed herself in the obsessive habit of doodling and story-writing. In her free time, she authors and draws her own web comic series, and continues to jot down the stories that invite themselves into her head. When not in school, she lives behind an eraser shaving-infested kitchen table in San Diego, and lives off of the inspiration given to her by her parents and her brother, Marco.

AMANDA RIGGLE

Amanda Riggle is currently a Cal Poly Pomona student majoring in English under the Education option. She is also a Managing Editor at ThePoeticsProject.com, an online poetry and writing blog. Her main inspiration in life comes from her friends and her younger sister. In the future, Amanda hopes to become a teacher and inspire her students to be avid readers, writers and critical thinkers.

ANTHONY ROJAS

I'm Anthony Rojas, a graphic design student attending Cal Poly Pomona. Recently, I've started exploring different kinds of photography and photo editing techniques. The themes and ideas I've gravitated towards are usually ones involving mood, mystery, obscurity, and the like. I've photographed fairly mundane subjects like water or trees, but tried to present them in ways that hopefully adds a unique perspective and feeling for the audience.

ERICA RUSSIKOFF

A recipient of the Ted Pugh Poetry Award, Erica N. Russikoff obtained Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from Cal Poly Pomona. She has taught ESL at the university, as well as at the community college level and internationally. Since 2008, she has been an editor for an educational publisher. Erica enjoys noodling around at home with husband Matt and dog Ollie Mei. She is influenced by Lawrence Raab, John Green, and monte cristo sandwiches.

FRANK SCOZZARI

My fiction has previously appeared in various literary magazines including *The Kenyon Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Folio*, *The Nassau Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Ellipsis Magazine*, *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, and *The MacGuffin*. Writing awards include Winner of the National Writer's Association Short Story Contest and three Pushcart Prize nominations.

MATTHEW FELIX SUN

In depicting life frankly and critically as visual surfaces and interior qualities, Matthew Felix Sun reaches toward historical and social commentary. Art ought to be both from life, and above life, revealing what is behind. Sun has exhibited in several national competitions and his work is collected in the US, Canada, and China. He has been building an Apocalypse Series of paintings and drawings since the US was poised to invade Iraq in 2003. Growing up in China's repressive culture and atmosphere formed the foundation of his world view and his work. His portfolio can be viewed at matthewfelixsun.com.

ERICA TOM

Erica Tom is a poet, an interdisciplinary scholar, and educator of embodied learning. Her co-authored chapter, "Pasture Pedagogy: Notes from the Field on Embodied Learning" in Mira-Lisa Katz's edited collection "Moving Ideas: Multimodal Learning in Communities and Classrooms", analogizes embodied communication with horses and multimodal teaching in traditional classroom settings. Her poetry has appeared in *Volt*. She is currently pursuing a PhD in American Studies at Rutgers University.

TRACY TRAN

I'm an aspiring graphic designer. I am a student currently attending University of California, Riverside. I did a couple of drawings in spirit of spring, and I often use pen and ink as my choice of medium.

RUBIA DALBOSCO VAN ROODELAAR

I was born and raised in Brazil, where I trained as a Jewelry Designer in my teens and became fascinated by the magic of producing wearable pieces of art. I first emigrated to Canada and later to the United States, earning a degree in Architecture from UC Berkeley. I have also studied art at the College of Marin, California State University Bakersfield and the Glassell School of Art in Houston. My artwork has been exhibited in Texas, California and Thailand. I work in a variety of themes and mediums, including sculptures and acrylic portraits in bold, contrasting tones that remind me of the faceted brilliance of gemstones. I am inspired by the rich colors of the Brazilian rainforest and the contrasting natural elements of the Canadian landscape.

DR. ERNEST WILLIAMSON III

Dr. Williamson, an Assistant Professor of English at Allen University, has published over 400 works of poetry and visual art in online and print journals. His poetry has been nominated for the Best of the Net Award three times.



Thank you for reading