

*Glass Mountain* is a literary journal edited by undergraduate students at the University of Houston. Dedicated to showcasing the work from undergraduate and emerging artists around the world, *Glass Mountain* publishes issues each Fall and Spring.

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# glass mountain

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# Letter from the Editor

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Dear Readers,

How often is one handed a legacy? According to Merriam-Webster, a legacy is something passed on, from one generation to the next. In a university setting, generations turn over quickly, measured in semesters rather than decades. At *Glass Mountain*, this handing down happens yearly, yet this year is different. This year brings to mind a larger legacy, for this is our tenth anniversary.

There is something about birthdays that bring people together. Old Aunt Phyllis sends her yearly card (and hopefully, a check), even the waitstaff at the Mexican restaurant gathers around to serenade on birthdays. Here at *Glass Mountain* we have been receiving gifts all year. Former editors have offered copies of early issues long lost to us, staff from the earliest years of the magazine have dropped by at readings to celebrate.

By taking the name of the journal from the eponymous story by Donald Barthelme, we carry forward the legacy of the genesis of the Creative Writing Program here at the University of Houston. We have not, however, remained where we were at the beginning. Just as old birthday pictures show how much we have changed, chronicling the journey from childhood to adulthood, thumbing through our “Policies and Procedures Manual” has brought to mind just how much the magazine has changed. Upon our founding, *Glass Mountain* was open to submissions only by the undergraduate student body here at the University of Houston. Now, we accept submissions from emerging writers around the world, from people of any age and background. Volume 3 is

sitting on my desk. It is a slender volume, beautifully put together, with a haunting photograph of a curving ascending staircase on the cover. It is 54 pages of primarily poetry, with just two pieces of prose, six pieces of art, and an interview. Also on my desk is our last issue, my first as Editor. Not counting the bios, this journal is 103 pages in length. It also contains poetry, as well as fiction and nonfiction, twelve pieces of art, and four reviews. There have been other changes through the years of the magazine. *Glass Mountain* now hosts a one-of-a-kind yearly writing conference. We are branching into online offerings. We attend the AWP Conference yearly, representing our journal to the larger world of writers. Our magazine has changed, even as our staff changes yearly.

The experience of caring for the legacy of *Glass Mountain* has also changed me, as a writer, and as a person. I have received far more from this experience than I could have ever imagined, and I am thankful for those who cared for the magazine through its early years, until I was entrusted with it. *Glass Mountain* is a legacy that I was proud to inherit, and I will be proud to hand this legacy to the next generation of students as they shoulder the responsibility for shepherding the journal through the next few years. I envision the linked arms of the early editors, through to the present and into the future. I cannot wait to see how much more we will grow in the coming years.

Thank you for coming to our party.

LeeAnne Carlson  
Editor, *Glass Mountain*



To the editors and staff of the first ten years who built  
the legacy that we now pass on.

— The Editors

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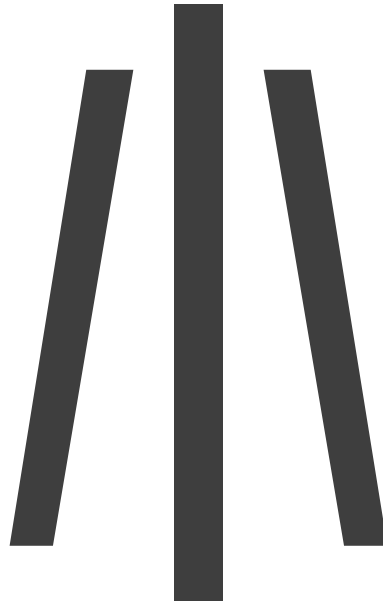
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Poetry & Prose  
Contest Winners

## Fajer Alex Khansa

Fiction Winner

Fajer Alex Khansa was born and raised in Lattakia, Syria and Tokyo, Japan. He moved to the United States in 2007, where he completed his studies at USC. His personal life and background honed a profound appreciation for diversity of perspectives, which he explores in his writing. Alex likes sailing and brainstorming, and especially enjoys debating questions of identity, origin and individual freedoms.

## Counting Lights

Call me psychic, but my mother is going to call at nine to wish me a safe drive before she goes to bed. Victorious she will call me. That's what my name means in Arabic. No one else calls me that. They choose a shorter sleeker name—"Uber." They don't say it so much like a greeting as they do a question when they approach my car window; "Uber?" I always answer back with another question, "Toyota Camry 9469?"

People jump in the wrong car, thinking they're the only ones that ordered a cab at their hotel or nightclub. They almost never are. And they're not the only drunk ones at two in the morning, or the only clever ones with arrow tattoos instead of infinity symbols, or—in this passenger's case—the only ones who have been to prison.

"What's that for?" he stretches one finger toward the blue glass bead dangling from my rearview mirror.

"We call it 'Evil Eye' in Syria. It's a charm that protects us from envy."

It's only fitting that a guy called Victorious would protect himself from envy. I was named after my grandfather. His only victory was getting married to a woman that gave him seven children.

He nods his head in a gesture that carries a million judgments.

"Are you a refugee?" he asks.

I want to tell him about the hundred thousand Armenian refugees that Syrians took in after the genocide, and the over one-million Iraqi refugees Syria hosted after 2007, and the

Lebanese and the Circassians. Instead... I just say "no" with both hands on the wheel pretending to focus on the road. You know, like a liar.

I follow the driving directions; I'm not supposed to find my own way. He fiddles with his fingers then speaks to me again, "I met an Arab when I did time. He was good at poker. Do you play poker?"

"I don't do poker," I say as I reach to my phone to ignore my mother's goodnight call.

"Well, what do you do?" he asks.

I like to count street lights. That's what I do. My favorites are the vintage lamps over the L.A. River. But I'd count any lights really—all two hundred and ten thousand of them in Los Angeles. Sometimes, I count stop lights—all forty-five thousand. And parking meters—all ten thousand of them.

I don't tell him that.

I don't tell him I'm unhappy with small-talk. Unhappy with living on auto-pilot. Unhappy with picking up my mother's white hair by the handful when I take a shower.

"I just like to drive. What about you?"

"Just drink and talk shit," he says.

I pull over at his destination. "What's this place like?" I ask him.

“It’s a bar called Black Sheep. They play good music.”

I look at my phone which keeps flashing my mother’s picture. I dismiss her call and turn off the car engine. “Maybe I can check it out with you.”

He shrugs, “Sure. I’m Sam by the way.”

We go in. The bar is modeled after the 1950’s or 1960’s, except there are no slacks and ties—only a flag with happy colors and handsome faces lit up by their phone screens. Sam tosses a shot of vodka between his lips. I do the same. He dances off and I stay at the bar. A tall younger guy puts his empty beer bottle on the counter and admires himself in the mirror. Nodding his head to the beat, he looks at me and says, “What’s up?”

“Not much,” I yell over the loud and weird music.

“Is that your boyfriend?” he asks.

My hand starts shaking and my mouth goes dry. “No,” I answer.

He brings one hand to my arm, “You don’t have to be alone.”

I try to respond, but my memories drown my voice. I have been alone for ten minutes now, or five years, depending on how you look at things.

“You can talk to me,” he says with confidence in what I need.

The abundance of everything and everyone I had comes flooding back to me like some scene in a movie where images flicker past you in microseconds, but it seems like time is standing

still.

“I’m good,” I tell him as I drain another shot of vodka.

He picks up another beer, the same kind as his last. As he turns to walk away, he whispers, “Asshole.”

I tap him on the back and punch him. I wait for him to double over so I can kick him in the face. I want my knuckles to feel cold, as cold as the snow before the spring. I want my heart to burn hotter than dead trees. I want to chirp the way falcons do, like the one on our Syrian coins that went extinct centuries ago. He doesn’t double over. He doesn’t even move. He punches me in the mouth. My blood tastes like loss and complacency.

He keeps punching me: jaw, lower belly, upper belly, rib cage, everywhere. Just everywhere. I want to hit back but my hands hurt. I’m getting more familiar with the idea of how weak I am. I shout. I shout out loud, all in Arabic. I get louder like I want to lose my vocal cords. I want to scare him. I want him to stop. He looks confused and drunk.

A random person plants both hands on my back and pushes me forward. This seems to give other strangers what they need to chime in. I’m tossed around from one person’s hand to another’s elbow. I bounce off the first row of guys, all cheering or watching through their cell phone cameras. One guy extends one foot in front of me. Another guy swings his arm. His arm swings his fist. His fist slams my face. This funny pose—one shoulder forward, head pivoted in the same direction as mine, one arm’s length between us, both at Black Sheep by choice, both under the same light, but no eye contact, only fist-to-cheek contact.



I fall down. Still waiting to chirp like that falcon, I just lay there and look at the ceiling lights. The guys don't stop. It hurts so badly I stop hearing them. Then I stop seeing them. The next thing I see are Sam's big tattooed arms peeling them off of me like you would do an artichoke looking for its heart. It looks so effortless; he can easily be drinking a cup of coffee or reading a newspaper at the same time. The other guys look like chopsticks next to him.

He reaches his hand and pulls me up. I feel like something less than whole.

The crowd is looking at us as if we were on television. But where are the cameras and the lights? Sam rotates his head like he is looking everyone in the eye, "Cowards. Ganging up on a little refugee?"

I punch him in the stomach. He doubles over. I don't kick him. I walk out. My car looks the same as it did when I left it. I don't. I jump in. My hands are still shaking. My phone is flashing a picture of blonde hair on what looks like a mannequin. His name is Oscar, Uber says. It doesn't give a last name. Ever.

I look at the stars. They're many and bright. I wouldn't mind counting them. I don't know why I never have. I wouldn't mind asking my previous self that. But he wouldn't hear me where he is—February rain is heavy and loud.

I pick Oscar up. He's with a couple of other guys, and he has an accent. But it's different than mine; it sounds European—Swedish maybe.

He looks at my pretty face and asks, "Had a rough night?"

"Yeah."

"It makes for good stories," he says.

"I don't do this often," I confess.

"What then? What do you like to do?"

He's cute: Fair baby skin, light eyes—blue almost grey, big forehead. Without consulting my brain, my lips say, "Drink and talk shit."

He chuckles, "Oh yeah?"

I take a drag of my vapor, "Yeah. You 420 friendly?"

"Yeah, yeah. What do you got there?"

"Cinnamon," I say.

"Can I try it?" he asks.

My left eye is half shut. My lip feels bigger than a baseball. I can't move my cheeks, but my eyes smile as I let my arm leave my body, for what feels like the first time in my life, and reach out to offer him my vapor.

I can tell him about my theories on the economy, and about politics. For some reason, I don't. Maybe because I'm not the only one who lost a brother in the war, or the only one whose mother is going through chemo, or the only one with an engineering degree, or the only one who drives an Uber and counts street lights.

## Jonah Brunet

Fiction Winner

Jonah Brunet is a freelance and creative writer from Ottawa living in downtown Toronto. His fiction has appeared in NYU's *Minetta Review*, Carleton University's *In/Words Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *Sewer Lid Magazine*. He's very happy to be here.

## What We Do To Be New

It's just another street sliced-through with alleyways, white graffiti block letters on a puke-green dumpster, SUPPLY or SOPLY or something—you keep pace with the hatchback in front but your foot twitches on the accelerator, thankfully too tiny a human gesture for the big metal hulk of car to understand. It's just a man on the sidewalk, oversized t-shirt, oversized jeans, sagging and bunching up, leaning on the brick, backpack looking like he might have something for you—*No! Never mind!*—your hands tightening around the wheel, white knuckles spider-webbed with red crack-lines, dry skin in the dry Phoenix heat. It's just the distant wail of a Phoenix Police Department Crown Victoria siren (you perk your ears and listen for how distant; what is that, four, five blocks?) and has probably nothing to do with you or your sedan, streaked down the side with jagged, greyish, paintless-steel stripes of what happens when you sideswipe a parked car then flee the scene of the crime.

It's just a scratch. And besides, it wasn't you.

It's just the last, most difficult step of a two-year recovery process: “New people, new places, new things,” which involves not only turning against the drug you once devoted yourself to completely, something that though technically lifeless felt alive in the way it mingled with your tired consciousness to create a whole new person, somebody you loved to be—*Forget it!*—but turning against your triggers and enablers, too: family, friends, the dead-end post-industrial town in which you had the misfortune of being born and raised, the girlfriend with whom you pooled under-the-table cash wages from restaurant jobs you each hated in a mason-jar shrine to the drug. You spot two women on the sidewalk dressed appropriately for the hundred-degree heat and think about that one entire Sunday you

two spent in bed, thin sheet and one pillow on bare mattress, wonder where she ever ended up, what she's doing now—*No you don't!*—the red light spotted last-minute and stomping, screeching to a stop a quarter-inch away from the hatchback's rear bumper. It's just traffic clogging the highway on-ramp, which you weave your way up, en-route to the desert. Nowhere in particular, just deep into it. You figure you'll know it when you see it.

It's just the problem of that first fresh start, the fragile blank-canvas feeling that one small slip could ruin this all at once. It wouldn't even have to be relapse, could be bad thoughts, entirely in your head, what your sponsor used to call “stinking thinking” in his tinny, moustachioed, sweater-vested way that irked you to no end, regardless of whether he was right. It's just the delayed realization of how exhausting it is to be—*Constantly! Censoring!*—your own private thoughts, straining to outwit your cerebellum.

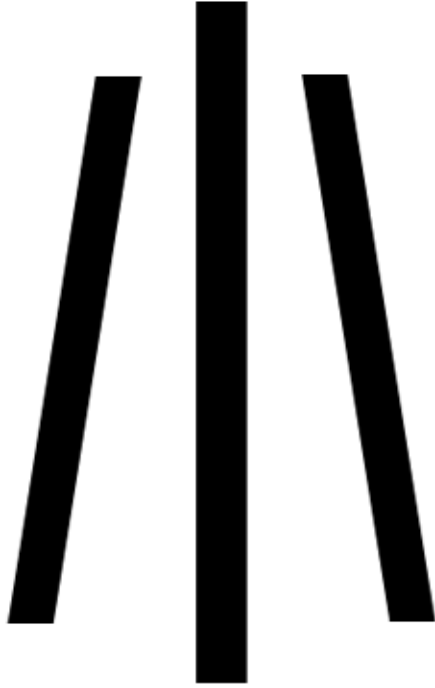
It's just the things, you decide, every little thing a reminder the way we anchor memories with possessions—you look around the car: jacket with the hidden inside pocket, one of her sappy singer-songwriter CDs, stolen sound system, cigarette burns on one side of the passenger seat. You didn't think you could afford to leave everything behind having long since lost the job, shattered the mason jar and blown the cash, and how expensive interstate relocation turned out to be, the new job falling through, bankrupted by first/last on a bachelor apartment and living on a bank loan coerced with your sob story from the kindest-looking female twenty-something teller you could find. Afterward, you smirked at the irony of starting your clean slate saddled with debt, atypically cheery because it'd been three days

since you thought about—*Nothing!*—and figured you'd finally kicked it for good.

It's just going to happen again—just a matter of time.

You swerve. It's just the kind of wide, dry, lifeless expanse you were looking for, once you pull off far enough from the road. And just in time. You can't stop thinking about it now, the way you can never stop thinking about something you're focused on not thinking about. You lurch out of the car, fleeing the thought like a swarm of bees, waving your arms around your head. It's just the heat, which hits you all at once, blocking every direction like a wall you're built into. You tear off your shirt and use it on your sopping face—it's just another in a long line of hand-me-downs carried over into adulthood because you always hated shopping for clothes, particularly after becoming drug-poor. You rip the shirt down the middle, cutting the thick wasteland silence, and you—*Wait! What are you doing?*—wrench off the gas cap, fling it across the sand and stuff the shirt into the hole. (You saw this in a movie once.) They're just objects, just final stubborn traces of the life you ruined, all sentimental and ready to infect. You can always get a new one. It's just a matter of finding the Zippo buried in the backseat now and—*Stop!*—lighting the ragged end of the ripped shirt hanging limply in still desert air before—*Think for a second about what you're doing!*

Finally, it's just you.



## Gerald Smith

Poetry Winner

Gerald Smith grew up in Yokosuka, Japan as well as San Antonio, Texas. He mainly writes absurd short fiction or free verse poetry. Currently, he is studying Creative Writing and French at the University of Houston. He has traveled through much of western Europe on a couple of occasions, but mainly travels to the Netherlands and France when he gets the chance.

## Urban Universality

There's always an echoing whirring  
In the city, always some men  
And children underneath an overpass  
With heirlooms in a shopping cart. There's  
Always some exhaust in the breezeways  
Of skyscrapers. There's  
Always cheap rent on the Southside,  
There's always some rain on a Tuesday,  
Always a cardboard sign, always gods and  
Blessings. Always cans to be kicked  
Under a 2 AM streetlamp  
After a Greyhound bus ride.  
Always a mother  
And four kids in a food mart. And always passengers  
On the evening tram passing around blunts.  
Always blossoming women because without them,  
There's nothing, and always late night dancing  
Because we need to fool around  
To fall in love. Always  
Love in peculiar stride coming towards us  
And turning the corner before we can say Hey,  
You. Always an apartment,  
After a bar, under the moon, with a connection  
To the jungle, and there's never  
Separation from a palm tree and  
A steel beam. Always a silent collectivity  
Between men in dusty ball caps  
On the same sidewalk as those in suits. There's  
Always want in some bellies and in some eyes,  
And jello in our bones and in our souls, concrete.

## Alexander Castro

Nonfiction Winner

Alexander Castro is a freelance writer and journalist based in the Providence/Boston area. He regularly writes for publications like *Big Red & Shiny*, *Newport Mercury* and *Art New England*. His writing has won awards from Rhode Island Press Association and *Glass Mountain*.  
BoyJourno.com



## Magical Boy with Bleeding Guts

**ONE.** My first smell memory wafted out of the procedure room, where my young body was drugged to sleep and a snaking camera shoved up my intestinal tract. The remembered odor was sharply sterile, stinging the nostrils with a faint hint of grapes. At random times this scent would return me to the operating table and its attendant amnesia. In hindsight, perhaps anesthesia was the culprit. Midazolam is known to cause semi-consciousness. Did the stench creep out from this twilight zone, from the rift between a painless world and a scorching one?

I'm 24 years old, diagnosed with Crohn's disease since age nine. I experience its symptoms as a seismology. The body anticipates quakes: Excessive bowel movements. Gastrointestinal pain and upset. Gas and diarrhea. Hematochezia, or bloody stool. Loss of appetite. Malabsorption of nutrients. I have no stomach fat to speak of. (I look great in a crop top.) Active Crohn's disease is metaphorized all-too-accurately as a "flare." The goal of treatment is to extinguish flares and achieve remission—which, in my experience, is always a temporary state of being.

At times my diagnosis has included colitis, meaning disease activity in the colon. Whatever it is, wherever it is, I know it by the destructive path it weaves. The disease motors through the entrails, planting mines along the way. A munitions expert, armed to the fucking teeth and god help me if I tempt its artillery with caffeine. Invoking speed can stimulate bleeding, the symptom that continues to spook me the most. The most obvious reminder of my sickness. At a flare's height, the toilet might contain no solid matter, only liquified red. Bright, punchy carmine. Brown is an underrated color. In 2001, a stomach bug was the initial suspect. I was in a pediatrician's office, different from the one I usually visited. The clinic was packed. The

doctor got upset at a parent demanding quicker service: "This isn't a McDonald's." I took a stool test. More investigations followed. The clinical gaze fell upon the intestines, the colon: pink, puffy, fleshy tunnels, pulling and yanking on themselves, contorted like slaughtered acrobats.

Therapy began. First, a doctor in Providence, then one near Boston. Endoscopies, colonoscopies. The Providence doctor vouched for Old Country Buffet as a means of gaining weight. The digestive tract was interrogated with pharmaceutical fairy dust, sprinkled with tiny white beads of mesalamine from a turquoise capsule I couldn't swallow. Then, azathioprine, a stronger drug from the Boston doc, one to dampen an immune system that presumably couldn't shut up. That one worked until 2011, when, as a college freshman, a flare hospitalized me. I went on infliximab infusions.

My current treatment options are narrowing, and a supplementary opinion is needed. In a few weeks I'll consult a new gastroenterologist. I've spent most of 2016 in a flare. As I write this, the disease is contained by my old and reliable friend prednisone: 40 milligrams a day, swallowed with vigor and near awe. Corticosteroids are miraculous, way better than Communion wafers. They quell the inflammation, though it's said they enfeeble the bones.

The other interventions are more dramatic: two syringes. Injected at least two inches distant from the belly button, or in the thighs. Flick the glass and watch the air bubbles ascend. Now jab it in. Certolizumab pegol. The third biologic agent to enter my body in an attempt at correcting its inborn lack. It's failing, as did adalimumab. Infliximab worked, but once you discon-

tinue treatment, antibodies develop, and you can't go back. I was foolishly optimistic when I went off it in 2013, convinced I could make it sans medicine. I denied the severity of my illness. As a teen, I denied that I liked boys, too.

Once, upon explaining a string of recent absences to my high school chemistry teacher, he asked, "You're sickly, yes?"

I hadn't thought of it in that phrasing before. I didn't think I was sickly. I didn't think I was queer, either. In a non-denial denial typical of this era, I wrote in a 2009 journal entry: "Obviously not that I'm attracted to a guy; I'm pretty sure I'm bisexual."

The Crohn's is inalienable, biology's inheritance, but I cultivated my queerness. I first noticed boys around 13, but these desires were too rudimentary to yet be labeled. Nascent lust was expressed as mimesis: I wanted to look like boys who looked 'good,' an even more ambiguous criteria. (The word I groped for fruitlessly was 'cute' or 'hot.')

But to express a stronger desire of possession, not emulation, was still taboo. Around 14 my fantasies were more graphic (thank you, locker room), but I didn't identify as gay. This emergent period developed into an ambiguity where people often wondered but couldn't prove I was gay. I said nothing explicit but was suggestive in ways awkwardly self-assured. In actuality, during high school, my body went untouched. Inside, the tremors continued.

After high school, I still desired girls somewhat but my meager efforts of making out never satiated the viscera. I began to identify as bisexual, but gay guys were rarely warm to this idea. They wanted a purebred, even though my straight desires were consistently auxiliary. Unconfident in dating (and ignorant

of Grindr's existence), I ascertained this libidinal hierarchy through porn. Straight porn wasn't just aesthetically tedious but often demeaning. In high school I was a budding feminist; straight porn was patriarchal, a fantasy inimical to everything I was learning. And gay porn? It was excessive, vulgar and rewindable, an orgiastic junk food. Within it, fragile queers like myself could relish both brutality and benevolence. Yes, it employed the usual laudatory lexicon of masculinity. The testosterone and aggression were founded on a mutual pushing and grunting toward satisfaction, however—not the subjugation of women witnessed in straight porn.

With men, I could switch between softness and insatiability, prehistoric hunger and plushy sweetness. Or so I imagined. My first college semester, spent in the frozen blackness of Burlington, Vermont, offered few opportunities to test this theory. My anxiety, depression and social isolation were debilitating. I could barely find friends, much less hookups. I began attending school in my home state of Rhode Island, and became more openly queer, largely thanks to my local friends who provided safer terrain to develop my being. As I embraced my queerness, the body asserted itself with a new vocabulary. A subpar sex life deprived me of adequate bilingualism for some time. Sick body, sexed body: a translator was needed to mediate. Straightness, with its own set of rituals and codes, was another tongue entirely.

Eventually my preferences crystallized in potency, and I now consider myself exclusively gay. My eyes only fall upon dudes, but I readily acknowledge that things were not always this way. Recognizing this malleability becomes a political act. I am bolder now, more vocal about sexuality's grayness, and I caution people against sloppy binaries. So I call myself "queer," a word

that encapsulates a great, undifferentiated libido, something outside mere taxonomies. It signifies those identities that cannot be unadulterated, identities unwilling to disavow the past, identities germinated at least partially from choice—a more radical proposition, I think, than believing that one arrives from the womb with a money-back-guarantee of ontological certainty.

For some gays, it might be easier to imagine identity as pre-installed. For me, identity was one of the few places that granted the freedom to play. Why quash this vitality with determinism? Crohn's had already schooled me in inescapable materiality. I cannot deny the blood or the inflammation, but I can resist their dominion, and queerness is as much my counterattack as is biomedicine. Failure could result, but that's OK. *Afinal, o viado é um Garoto Mágico*. I'm a sick queer, a Magical Boy.

**TWO.** The intellect always provided escape routes, places where I could run from the corporeal, beliefs that would distract from the hard physicality of treaded earth. In 2011, after both an acute flare and a more open presentation of my queerness, I embarked on a naïvely spiritual phase, soaking up bits of gnosticism, Zen buddhism and Kabbalah. I was a lapsed Catholic by then, definitely areligious, but I found captivating the Catholic mysticism in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Julian's carnal language outpaces even gay smut as a medium of devotion and savagery. She depicts vivid flashes of Golgotha (widened wounds, dried lips, colorless flesh) alongside a daring formulation of heavenly love. She designated God as cosmic adhesive; nothing existed outside it: "I am so bound to him that there is no created thing between my God and me." She posed Christ as the Great Mother, with love, rather than punishment,

as creation's motivating force.

I still admire Julian's language but in the past few years I have become more earthbound, more appreciative of corporeality. On these terms I can better confront my illness. Better to stoically accept than fashion a fable to ease the pain. I could construe the bathroom blood as sacrificial. A tribute to whatever feared deity might find it usable for sorcery. Even this, however, is narrative. The blood is just blood, pointlessly lost. Still: having ached often, each drop of ecstasy I down is a thousandfold more potent. If I did not see my blood, if my bowels did not twist and shout, I might not be so ravenous for heady cocktails of grime and glory. Bottoms know this relationship between discomfort and pleasure. Initially it hurts. And then: the sublime. The deified breaches the defiled.

So why the guilt when I took ownership of my body in increasingly sensuous ways? Aesop gives a hint when he tells us how shame came to be. Zeus forgot to instill shame in humans when he created them, so he ordered Shame to enter the body via the asshole. Shame was irate at the request but Zeus persisted.

"Fine, fine," Shame reluctantly agreed. "But if anything enters the ass, I'm leaving."

Aesop thus concludes that sodomites are unrepentant.

It is true that, as a college student first gratifying urges, I enjoyed an evanescent shamelessness. Flesh rubbing, smudging, banging, colliding, slipping together—thrilling stuff, but sustaining jubilation was trickier. A generalized dislike for my body went unabsolved. Even excepting my Crohn's, I judged my body as unlovable, untouchable. I rarely weigh over

110 pounds. Despite exercise, my flesh is reluctant to acquire muscle. My slenderness has invoked others' repulsion as much as it has arousal. I've been told to eat hamburgers, or that I look like a meth addict —not exactly traumatic barbs, though they echo from my childhood, when clueless relatives policed my smallness as a failure of growth.

I seesawed on one question: was I a sexual being? In the deeper channels of depression, asexuality seemed highly appealing. My discovery of Grindr and OkCupid in 2012 inaugurated greater regularity into my sex life. Fucking finally mattered in my personal equilibrium, revealing its absence as the source of distress. Yet as I would later deny infliximab, I accepted this fact evasively. I deleted and reinstalled Grindr again and again. My current long-term relationship has reconfirmed the necessity of fucking in my life. My body injures itself, devours itself. I have to repurpose its intensity for more enjoyable ends, counterbalance its violence.

In the Crohn's afflicted queer, the butt is a site of paradox. Crohn's makes bottoming difficult, if not outright impossible most of the time. I once mistakenly thought penetration was the only worthwhile sensation. (I know better now.) Both the healthy and the straight can find Crohn's or queerness as invasively intimate with the rectum. Because the rectum is the source of human excrement (one of the lowest of all possible substances) the sick queer is doubly bound to these associations. Maybe that's the alliance between queerness and Crohn's. Rectal familiarity weakens shame, whether by penetration or the admittedly less exciting medicinal enema. Leave now, Zeus' lackey. I never invited you, anyway.

**THREE.** Two years after reading Julian, I encountered another

manifestation of celestial motherhood in jungles near Diamantina, in Minas Gerais, Brazil. During a modest ceremony honoring the Hindu goddess Kali, a holy man told me that, in another epoch, human blood was flecked with gold. Millennia of war and genocide sapped away this ancestral metal, turning our arteries ferrous. Crohn's patients are often anemic. Might my blood be aurific instead? Let me attempt a transmutation: *Ouro puro, ouro puro. Meu sangue é ouro puro, fervido no inferno.*

I can't remember when it happened, but that olfactory memory of anesthesia disappeared. In a recent colonoscopy, they gave me propofol: a strong, sticky liquid loaded into a cartoonishly big plunger, pumped into the veins like a searing milk. Its knockout powers were near instantaneous. As slumber began its assault, I thought of the Catholic mystics. Is this what they felt? A transitory god, barely grasped but for a few burning seconds? A blood hot and bitter, tunneling toward imminent sleep? And what waited on the other end of this sanctified nap time? Perhaps a plot in the promised land, purchased with a lump sum of bubbling, magmatic pain. Purchased with the gold in one's blood.

**FOUR.** The first time I realized I could date a boy, potentially even love a boy, was watching porn. One of those low-budget twink productions. Something about the actors' tenderness in the foreplay: the gestural quality of an embrace, or a toothy smile chasing a kiss. Yes, a vision. On par with a bleeding crown, a half-dead savior. An alternative to the sanguine sewage. Smooches and touches and moments of puncturing bliss. Blood is not the only vital fluid. So is cum. *É uma bebida da vida.*

The libido can refresh a body that bleeds itself dry. To the

chaos, I offer my already pouring blood, doped with steroids and chimeric proteins. *Meu corpo, meu pau, minha bunda*: sacramental matter. *Meu sangue é uma libação*. Imbibe me, lover. This is not Christ's blood but sick queer blood, *sangue do viado doente*: equally holy, perhaps holier, and tainted with gold.

Yes, my body will fail, but I will make it suffer with euphoria. Waterboard it with jouissance. Recently I've learned that I love to go out dancing. As I rediscover the nightclub, I find the same radiances, blips, eruptions I indulge in private. Here's the pounding rhythm that can challenge my attention-seeking in-nards, so wear something fun: tights, a wig, angel wings, something leathery, something shiny, something mesh. Short-shorts, a skimpy football jersey, high tops or high heels, and the most garishly-colored, plasticky jewelry you can find. Superficialities will overpower the interior carnage. In the bedroom, the club or merely in my daily clothing, dress offers a measure of control that the untamable body rarely relinquishes. The sartorial bewitches. From my fledgling days of queerness, I've had a thing for sexy underwear. I delight in those articles by which cuteness or sexiness might be multiplied.

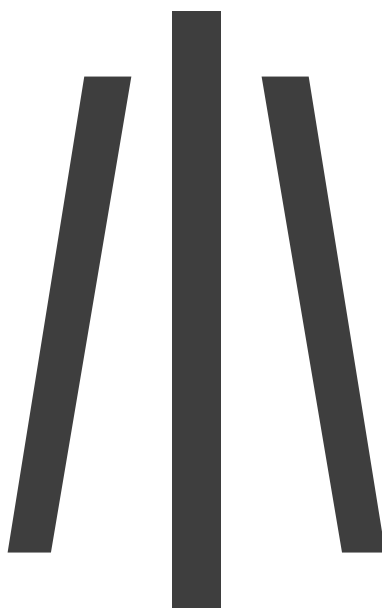
Again, I'm a Magical Boy. *Um Rapaz Mágico, um viado doente*. Costuming is a prerequisite for transformation. Now, with the proper enchantments in place: demons, I banish you from my stomach. Though you have blessed my torso with impeccable flatness, I sometimes lament my weightlessness. Thankfully, at night, this bony frame might be empowered; the strawweights shall inherit the earth. Cupid, baby, turn up that motherfuck-ing beat. Give me that impalpable-palpable love only a sick queer can know.

In her cloistered room, Julian of Norwich breathes halting-

ly, her skeletal fingers limp on the bedlinen. She's mute and paralyzed from the waist down. The room has dropped into darkness, a cruciform light the sole illumination.

And then, to her unflinching eyes: blood here, there, everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. A splendid and shameful mess. Evidence of the most divine love. One that encircles all things. Substance unified, bound like a hard pair of pecs in a leather harness.





Art, Fiction,  
Nonfiction, Poetry

## Search

by: *Sam DeLeo*

He hoped today's search wasn't disappointing. Again.

The search he made last week—of the third day of March in his 14th year—turned up the memory of a kiss he tried to give Katie Saldo in ninth grade during which a line of saliva dripped out of the corner of his mouth and onto her left hand.

He got it. He was no precocious ladies' man, and maybe not much more of one now. But he and Karen had been married nine years. He was a successful software engineer; she was an in-demand interior designer. He had to have had something going on for himself, he thought, even if he could no longer remember what it was.

He strained against the temptation to begin searching the recent past again, as he had resorted to every day now since the Saldo search. Something was happening in these searches that left him feeling both utterly confused and strangely better about himself, and this combination had been too much to resist.

Today, he was determined, would be different. He'd deny the urge to let his recent history beguile him again. He would confirm the familiar, less unpalatable version of himself and, in words he'd heard younger people at work use, "own it."

He powered on his computer and grabbed his helmet, cringing as he slid the cloth-and-Velcro sensory gear on his head

and fumbled for the electrodes. Recently, Karen had been bugging him again to wash the helmet.

"It smells like hell, Randy."

She would say this from where she stood in the doorway to the sparse, white-walled study, or else immediately upon entering the room. He always nodded purposefully, a nod of agreement and shared disgust that tried to truncate any path leading to an argument. He went to great lengths to avoid arguing with Karen. It was a strategy that worked in the early years of their marriage, less so recently.

Karen washed her helmet every week, though she used hers much less than Randy did. She had berated Randy on several occasions in the last week about how much time he was spending searching, coming home from work, searching through dinner and stopping only for an occasional late snack until it was time for him to go to bed.

When she was agitated, her appearance changed for him. Her eyes narrowed and her skin stretched tight. The tone of her voice, to his ears, shaped her words into a single, continuous sound. He was sure there were many things about him that she did not like, also.

It was true the helmet collected oil and dirt from his head, and yes, after several months of use it did begin to smell like an unwashed jockstrap. But he had explained to Karen before



that he did not want to risk getting water into the electrode tips or wire connects. Also, there seemed no logical way anyone could smell something from 15 feet away. She was pointing out the obvious, he thought, but it was less obvious and odorous than she made it out to be.

He secured the electrodes and typed “July 13, 1998,” his 21st birthday. He had no recollection of the date, but assumed reaching the legal drinking age must have made for an adventurous night.

Search results always appeared in three blocks of bulleted points. The headings above the blocks read Morning, Afternoon and Evening, or Early, Later, Much Later. Occasionally, there were no headings at all. He had first thought to search his trip to Europe after college, but he couldn’t remember exactly when he traveled and, without a specific date, the searches would not return results. He would save Europe for later. He hit “return” on his keyboard:

**Early:**

- Your mother surprises you with a birthday brunch of French Toast, bacon, eggs and Tropicana orange juice—the “not from concentrate, pulpless style,” she says, “your favorite.”
- When he returns from an errand, your father hands you a golf driver with a red ribbon around its neck. He has mentioned the club as a possible gift twice in the week leading up to your birthday. On each occasion you replied that the sport was not enjoyable to you. Shortly after your brunch, he takes you to the driving range and you swat through three buckets of range balls. Your session ends when you

hit an errant drive that scatters golfers about to tee off at a neighboring hole.

**Later:**

- Having made plans to meet friends at a bar in the evening, you arrange to get a haircut at a chain salon where you have a \$5 coupon. You request a trim but the stylist cuts it very short. You tell her it looks military. She smiles. On the sides and in the back, the whiteness of your scalp is visible.
- At 3 p.m. you meet childhood neighbor and friend, Susan Keller, for iced coffees. She buys you a scone and the coffee for your birthday while you catch up on your experiences of college life. Before you leave, she hugs you and kisses you on the cheek, but on the cheek very close to where your mouth is. When you get home and your mother comments on the haircut, you tell her that you like it this way.

**Much Later:**

- Ben Novak and Andy McConnell, the two friends from high school you have maintained contact with, take you to Spinners, a sprawling dance club with multiple bars. They buy you a 22-ounce beer and line up five whiskey shots in front of you. You drink the shots one after another and throw up for the first time in the night deep in a darkened hall way leading to the restrooms.
- While in line at the main bar, you offer to buy a girl with blond hair and large blue eyes a drink. She politely declines and says she needs to get back to her friends. Before walking away, she thanks you for what you do for the country.

Randy stripped off the helmet. He could feel the sweat turning cool on his forehead. It was true he had been a mostly awkward youth. But this felt a little too much. He made class vice president his senior year in high school, he dated a girl from Cincinnati his freshman year of college, he got good grades, he and Karen still loved each other, he earned a decent salary. What else had he repressed or buried in his memory? Or, had the easy access of his searches caused him to loosen his grip on the details of his memories?

He pulled up online calendars of the two years following his college graduation and tried to narrow down dates that would enable him to search Europe next, even though a few strands of unpleasant details he harbored unmoored themselves and floated to the surface. He worried the thrills of Germany, Italy and France over his three weeks there might not translate in the searches, that he would come off as fatigued from all the train travel instead of satiated by his sightseeing discoveries, or his visit to the Eiffel Tower dampened by the cabbie who made concentric circles around the monument and charged him over 100 francs. There was any number of mistakes one could make traveling internationally, he thought, especially when it was your first time.

But more than that, the recent past began to haunt him again like an addiction.

He couldn't deny his searches in this timeline had more relevance to his life, to his field of work and current standing in the world. If they made him feel better than wading through what he'd had to confess seemed a largely uneventful youth, so be it. One more search of current times couldn't hurt. And even if he knew his probe of the recent past never ended in

one search, he needed the jolt of positivity it provided.

Randy used to spend three or four days a month searching. It was fun to jog his memory once in a while with the daily details of his past. While clearing the gutters of the house one afternoon last fall, he fell off a ladder and injured his hip. He was laid up for three weeks. He applied for short-term disability at Caisson, the data firm where he worked. With all his extra free time, he began searching every day.

As a way to review the daily life his injury absented him from, he probed his recent past for the first time. What he discovered was dramatically different than his searches of the blurrier years of long ago, where the general narrative rang true and his objections were with a few elements that felt missing, gratuitous, or unfair to his general recall of events.

The injury for certain had him depressed, but this was an uneasiness that, in the beginning, at least, made Randy ill: Why didn't *any* of the details in these recent searches match his memories? Even more disconcerting, the searches revealed him performing the tasks of a person he could only assume was Stephen Frate, a vice president at Caisson, when for the last 10 years, Randy had been the company's senior software engineer.

To be accurate, Randy wasn't certain it was Frate, as he'd only met Steve in person on two occasions. And it was true that Karen had voluptuously styled brown hair just like the wife described in the searches, and he *did* work at Caisson and was also fairly successful—by most people's standards—he reasoned. But no, he increasingly needed to remind himself, the main worry, a worry that only seemed to lessen when

he was actually searching, was that the search results didn't match what he knew, whether they involved his life at work or at home.

His convalescence produced two habits. He had continued the first, the practice of searching every day. He promised himself secondly he would not plumb the recent past, a pledge he betrayed many times but only in isolated instances until the Saldo search last week. Something about that teen-aged failure triggered a larger commentary on his married life with Karen that he had been unable to solve but which left him grasping for answers. He hoped the issues in the recent searches would resolve themselves and at least leave him with clues. Because, if searches of his recent past offered no trace of any arc that might recur and pull him out of the disconnect his injury had begun, then his day-to-day life seemed like it was following the stage directions of a play over and over, with no closing night on the horizon.

For the last decade or so, he realized near the end of his convalescence, each day had felt about the same as the next one or the one before it. There were his and Karen's Tuesday taco nights, sure, and projects that came and went at work, summer vacations and their monthly date night. But most everything else felt enormously routine.

He knew that Karen must be feeling it, too, may even have been feeling it for some time now. She was always the intuitive one between them. It would explain their new distance and the sometimes hostile outbursts she aimed at him.

The necessary spark, he decided, waited in the past that lay somewhere beyond his recent rut and its dichotomous

searches, no matter how many thrills those searches provided. There had to be splinters of the glory of youth in his past, grade school exam triumphs, college party thrills, the start of his career—which he was certain he remembered filled with optimism—some clue as to why his reservoir for similar emotions felt empty now. He knew about mid-life crises. This was different—mid-life crises required a fall from grace, or at least the loss of some preceding popularity or magic. Once he found the sweet spots in his past, he could research mid-life crises to see whether he was a candidate and if short-term memory errors as foundational as his were just part of the deal.

He steeled himself for the deep dive and hesitated. He leaned back in his chair and took off the helmet. He listened for Karen's footfalls in the house, unsure why, as he had nothing to hide. He wondered if there might be a clue he was overlooking, a tremor that shook loose this tidal shift in his past. It wasn't just a rationalization to retreat to the comfort of the recent past, he told himself. There might actually be an axis on which his past and current existence hinged. Why not focus on his return to work after the injury and target each day from that point on, until he caught up with the present?

He might in this way uncover what shift occurred, he thought, if there had been a shift at all in who he was. As he hit "return" on his keyboard, he reassured himself with the knowledge that the searches could only challenge what he remembered, not who he was...

...He was a high-level executive with a wife and a girlfriend. He had other women, too, but they did not seem to be girlfriends. He had thousands of friends who actually comment-

ed on his exploits, at least the exploits he felt discreet enough to share.

On weekends, he often went sailing. Sometimes he had sex in the hull of the sailboat with his girlfriend. He and his wife with the brown hair like Karen's did not seem to do a lot together, at least not in the days he was probing. He got a lot of massages, especially when traveling. He also drank too much and ate poorly when traveling. He did not spend much time in his office at Caisson.

Moving to the more immediate past, he went golfing in a business foursome on a Wednesday last month and had the second-lowest score.

Forgetting what his real memory preserved, the searches charged him with the tiniest of remote thrills.

Just two weeks ago, he saw himself soaring around the continents, speaking at technology conferences, attending board meetings about profit margins and investment budgets for start-ups, seemingly liked, maybe even respected, by all he met with, reading more reports than he ever had in his life, reading and reading and then telling people who listened to him about what he read, having his hip examined by a back specialist for pain, dining at fine restaurants, picking up a prescription for his high blood pressure, walking in the morning sometimes, just after dawn, and, perhaps best of all, taking his grandkids to the playground in the park and for ice cream afterward, dutifully attending their soccer games, driving with them in the car and listening to their conversations, soaking in the light of their little lives, so that, he realized, he was happier than he'd ever remembered. And, he had no idea

why.

“Bad search again?”

“Oh hi.” He took off the helmet. Karen was standing to his side. “I'm not sure anymore. The recent past is still incredible, the distant still shitty. But, it's going to straighten itself out, Karen, it has to. It just makes for, I don't know, a bit of a strange existence in the meantime.”

“That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Will you come downstairs?”

“Alright,” he whispered. “I'll be down in five minutes.”

Karen shook her head while moving her lips as if speaking. She walked out of the room hurriedly and nearly ran down the staircase.

Randy slowly spun the tiny swivel chair back in the direction of his desk. Having dropped so quickly from the high he had been riding, he felt like the room was turning. He heard Karen yell something to him from the bottom of the stairwell, but her voice sounded like it was under an upturned glass. He couldn't understand what she was saying.

The room still seemed as if it was traveling a bit to him, but when he stared at a single point it stopped. To try and reset his bearings, he focused on a patch of white wall. He stared at it without blinking, for how many minutes he didn't know, until it was as if he could actually see his thoughts—but they were like a line of ants, crawling up the wall and back down it. He lost track of how long he watched them crawl.

Finally, the room slowed to still, the house silent. He put on his helmet again. Five minutes.



## Schrodinger Somnolence

by: *Julianza Shavin*

Enhanced Photography

8" x 10"

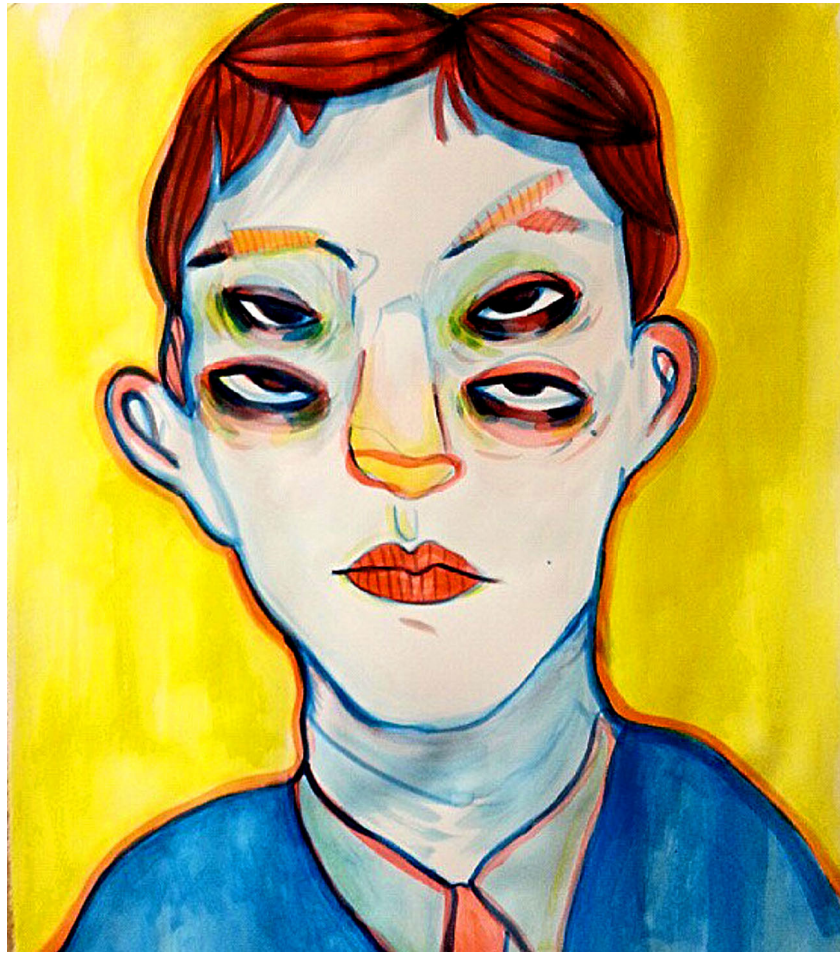




## Mind Warp

*by: Anastasia Bodagovskaya*

Acrylic on Canvas  
36" x 48"



## Manny

*by: Estefania Garcia*

Ink and Acrylic Paint on Stonehenge Paper  
16" x 24"





## Human Landscape

*by: Matthew Barrett*

Digital Photography  
9.44" x 6.56"

## Eating Alone

by: Evelyn Elgie

Under the clammy light of the bus shelter  
yellowed hands with green shadows shake in the cold.  
My chopsticks shudder from violently violet takeout box to purple lips;  
long hours leave me ravenous, footsore on a metal bench.

I glance left.  
No bus.

My hunger is congealing; a heavy lump of worry in my gut.  
Will the driver see my shadow, black against the garish light  
of shivering shelter ads?  
Or will he in a rush of wind fly by?  
And leave me stranded in the curling dark  
so many streets and steps from home.

Soon another shadow joins my wait:

with rumpled suit and crow's-feet,  
he could be anyone's uncle  
or the owner of the local bookstore  
or the teller smiling behind glass  
for all I know.

I glance left.  
No bus.

But I stay looking left, I stay  
not looking at him  
like if I can't see him he won't  
see me

Because another worry's joined the first, unwelcome fingers creeping down my spine  
the kind you only feel, alone, this late at night.

We have power in the dark when we face it as a pack:  
long legs and lashes, drinking down the night  
in hours and minutes and bites of twenty-four-hour pizza.

But alone  
I grip my chopsticks in white knuckles  
I am only scooping curdled fear into my mouth

I glance left.  
No bus.



## Land of Enchantment

*by: McKenzie Brunet*

Photograph  
12" x 9"

## The Motet

by: Kayla Probeyahn

*“Every person is more than just themselves; they also represent the unique, the very special and always significant and remarkable point at which the world’s phenomena intersect, only once in this way, and never again.”—Herman Hesse*

It is something that happens more than two hundred and fifty times in a minute—to old and young women, heavy and thin, to women of all races. Sometimes it includes being wrapped in a colorful *rebozo*, squatting over hot stones, receiving an epidural—or not. Sometimes it happens in huts, homes, or hospitals; sometimes lying on one’s back or submerged in water. The time I observed it, it was in a hospital room; a spacious, open place with a large window taking up one wall, a sink and bathroom in the right corner, and posters of medications, sanitation recommendations, ways to describe your pain to corresponding smiling/frowning icons and numbers. My oldest sister, a few years shy of thirty, lay supine in layers of sterile white sheets. She had shaved her legs for the occasion, I had noted, as I stood by her left ankle. Yes, to the epidural, no to Pitocin.

We watched her and the baby’s heartbeats on a monitor to her right. It was odd, I remember thinking, that her belly was no longer a perfectly round, swollen mound of flesh—it was sort of lumpy looking, as her infant was beginning to uncurl and stretch toward the cervix. Her husband and I waited to see the final transition of what nine months ago had been a bundle of cells the size of the dot of an ‘i’ to what was now a baby verging on nine pounds. This exit was sure

to be a grand thing—though through the eight stretched centimeters, we could still only see a lock of wet, black hair. The contractions became closer together, with ebbs and flows like muscled waves; I hold myself steady as my sister’s heels are pushing against the palm of my hand as I am helping to stabilize. She is red with exertion, and green water is gushing out and percolating at the base of the hospital bed. Soon she is stuck in a crowning moment (though not on her head), as a two-inch round patch of baby skin becomes visible. This is the transitioning moment: for minutes and minutes, for sometimes hours, there is nothing to see. Then for seconds the crown is exposed—then quickly a head. A nurse flipped on a sort of medical spotlight on the scene—a cold, white light that pressed starkly against her stretching sex organs. The obstetrician arrived at that last moment (or beginning moment?), but the beam was high enough that not even he could cast a shadow.

I would argue that that moment is the most bizarre scene ever to be common in human history—my sister’s legs, spread open like a frog’s, and a small, human head the size of a grapefruit but the color of a plum—stuck there, facing me, with unopened eyes and a tiny, frowning mouth. I suppose I expected it to be alive instantaneously, that it would be alert and crying out. I glanced up in time to watch one nurse mouth *stillborn* to the other and raise her eyebrows. I want to say that I felt some fear, or shock, or anguish—but I didn’t feel much at all. It was such an unnatural experience; I felt numbed. All of this lasted about four seconds and the

doctor breaks my thought as he pulls out the rest of the baby. I held what would have been around my 178 millionth breath while I waited for my niece's first. Soon it began to wail loudly, with the oppressive, unignorable openness of the Id. It is wrapped in pure lavender skin, with the umbilical cord twisted around the neck like a slimy white scarf. It is a she, but for several minutes we can only say "it," because it seems so alien to us—the soft protruding stomach, the cord thick as a garden hose, the bowed legs, the huge corneas that seem to edge out all the white sclera, the thin arms. All of it was so smooth, like a butter sculpture, except for the mossy hair. There was a small scrape on its head, from pushing through that ceiling of flesh and bone, and stringy spools of blood coming from my sister. I followed the nurses as they capped its head in pink, and watched it as it paused its wailing, its eyes roving about the room out of sync. There was a certain sort of magic about the baby in the miniature nose and the fairy-sized fingers—the otherworldliness of it all. A minute ago in that beige boxy room there were five people, and then there were six. Lastly the veiny, gray placenta slipped out, unnoticed, like a storm cloud.

And so it happens, hundreds of thousands of times in a day. This fascinating moment, where instinct and some raw wildness rules us, just for a few minutes. That tiny infant, dead to the watery world she grew in, newly born, washed and wrapped and ready for this warm place of arms and breathy coos—this reminds us that the human body has lived in a different world than the visible one here, in the open air. It had a purpose and a schedule there, before it was expelled from my sister's body, from her uterus, where it had grown like a parasite. Fed by a terra firma of flesh, a single organ that was the earth and sky to the tiny fetus, curled up and ignorant of

her surroundings as if my sister herself was an embodiment of the cosmos. It was Creation without a separation of night and day—but what is darkness to a closed eye? Now my niece's eyes are open, and she is growing. She does not remember the time when she was so small it was difficult to mouth the nipple that fed her, when she clung to my sister's body as if it was a firmament of freckled skin, when she was uninterested in the world and only wanted sleep. And she does not know that she will be that way again.

I moved to Arizona at nineteen to do a volunteer mission for my church. When I got off the plane, I first noticed the clouds: the unraveling, wispy white tops looked the same as any I'd seen, but the bottoms were completely flat and gray, as if pressing against a giant fishbowl, a great amniotic sac. In seconds I was in love with the desert.

The director of the mission sent me and a couple girls up north, to Sedona. And what can I say to justify the beauty of the high desert, of all the red formations? Steamboat Rock, Thunder Mountain, Cathedral Rock, Devil's Bridge, Snoopy Rock, Secret Canyon, Bell Rock, Coffee Pot Rock, Courthouse Butte, Rabbit Ears, Chimney Rock. They all lit up at sunset to a glowing salamandrine hue—it was like being encircled in a ring of fire. Because of this magnificence, it was extremely expensive to live there. The housing options were divided into three and four million dollar homes overlooking the rocks, or tin trailer homes patched up with cardboard on the edge of the creek which would flood precariously during the summer. We opted for a happy medium: a one bedroom apartment just off the heart of the tiny town. It was made both very affordable and very exclusive by its location—sitting atop a mortuary owned by a member of our local con-



gregation. I remember feeling surprised by this, but otherwise unaffected. I had never been squeamish before, and I really had no concept of death. I had attended two funerals in my life at that point; one of a neighbor's husband when I was about twelve or so, whose hand used to offer me gingersnap cookies when I would ride my bike to their house to visit. I patted it before I left the viewing. The other was a relation of a friend. I attended only for requested support, and I remember thinking to myself that that woman had looked yellow and dry and dead as a piece of furniture.

When we first unlocked the garage door and stepped our feet onto the sloping, gray concrete floor, I felt the smell. It was more than just an olfactory sensation—it was made heavier with the knowledge that that was the smell of human ashes, which undoubtedly clung to air when the crematorium was opened to cool, as it was that night. The garage was an open room with poor lighting, a walk-in freezer directly ahead of us, which created a nook on the right side where the clothes washer and dryer stood. On the left side was a small metal table, cluttered with various tools, the most obvious being the bone crusher. I have yet to find an official name for the bone crusher, so there it stands, as intriguing and disturbing as the first time I lifted the lid off out of curiosity and stared for several seconds until I could differentiate the white shapes of calcified, shrunken bones. I realized later, when I had seen several full skeletons cooling off, that the bones were too dense to be cremated, so this high-power blender would powderize them. On the other wall was the crematorium, piping hot at 1800 degrees. Desert nights are often cool, and we would frequently warm our hands on the open chamber, staring into the dusty concrete platform, that according to the tags on a hook nearby, had seen over four hundred bodies.

Dust to dust takes a different meaning when you see it—it is not glittering with human light or intelligence; it is not pressurized into perfection. It is gray, like something you could wipe off a windowsill with your fingertip. The culmination of a human life, swept off a stone slab with a broom (neither of which are cleaned between cremations)—contained in a few inches of ceramic and set above the fireplace among a smattering menagerie of trinkets and kitsch decor. It is more pathetic than Ozymandias in the desert.

Between the crematorium and the dryer/washer nook, a door led to the embalming room and a staircase to the actual funeral home. I liked that space. The walls were painted a coffee brown and the dark wooden floors hid themselves under Persian carpets in the foyer. There were a couple of soft leather armchairs and a table with a plain lamp which was kept on all through the night. The room where funerals were actually held was down a hall through some French doors. The smell wasn't up there. It was a peaceful, quiet place—at least, when the mortuary was closed. I had only been in the foyer around nine or ten at night, when I would come back from the day's labors and sit on a leather chair to relax and be apart from the other girls I worked with. Around the corner from this foyer was another set of stairs that led to our one-bedroom apartment.

As we grew accustomed to the place, we picked up on different details: the warmth of the bathroom's tile floor when someone was being cremated, the gray smoke that trickled out a pipe above the garage, the clipboard of "guests" that hung next to the washer and dryer in the basement. When we returned home we would often read about who had "checked in" that day. Some of my memories of whole days are only in

the names of the dead. *June 18th, 2013: Samuel Davis, 67, heart attack; Argus Kline, 55, kidney failure; Patrick Montse, 28, overdose.* Some days there were several names, others there were none. We always checked for the names of people we knew (we worked with a lot of old people).

It would be several days before I got curious enough to open the freezer and look at a dead body. When I did, the first thing I noticed was the packaging. Some bodies lay in cardboard caskets, others were wrapped up in cellophane like a piece of candy. Some rested on gurneys, others were stacked on top of each other in metal shelving units. Later, I would learn more about the process and science of death—and my suspicions would be confirmed: bodies are interesting machines in life, and they are equally so in death. The heart stops first, then the lungs. Blood pools wherever it was in the body, blushing the skin in flowery hues of purples and pinks. All the muscles finally relax—after decades and decades of careful control, every muscle and sphincter will release, the body will urinate and defecate freely. The brain—that small cranial planet, with its nude crevasses and snaking lobes will grapple for the remaining resources like the buzzing of a hive; working impossibly to snap a bit of electricity across a synapse. But after several hours, even the *Arbor Vitae* will drop its leaves and die. Hours later the rigor mortis will begin, and the muscles will stiffen, beginning with the delicate eyelids that once held open the clear orbs, then the soft neck that held the head proudly, then the jaw, now slack instead of clapping with opinions, confessions, professions, smiles. The eyeballs will liquefy and pool deep in the sockets. The skin lives on for several days, while the nails and hairs are exposed down to the follicles as the water dries up and the body shrinks. The skin clings tight to the bones; the body becomes

thin like a deer's leg. Everything dies, and everything stops—and yet, it is so reluctant—as oxygen and carbon dioxide and nitrogen shift and escape from the cells, a man can have an erection and ejaculate after death, a woman dead in pregnancy can give birth, bodies can groan and make soft breathing noises again, they twitch and knock the freezer walls—meanwhile, the bacteria within are feasting; a smorgasbord of tissues previously denied them in the name of mutual symbiosis.

When I lived in the mortuary, I felt very distant from these people, despite my physical proximity. I even once dared my roommate to lay on one of the racks next to a body, which she did. She said the plastic surface was gritty with some sort of sand. I took a photo of the moment, rolling a box labeled “John” off to the left corner so there was room for me to capture the right angle. My roommate is smiling, and though her hands are folded neatly together over her sternum and her eyes are closed, she does not make a very good dead person. Her ruby hair and stifled, low giggles echoing in the metal room were much too vivacious, as was her indignation that her bra strap was exposed in the picture, and how could I not have noticed it? With our fleshy arms contorted with goosebumps we had left the freezer with only a good memory. As I shut off the light, I had caught the words “NOT READY” written below John's name. The words meant nothing to me, like the foreignness of his body. We had no concept of who these people were; what they represented. To us they were no longer human. At least, not until we met the red-haired woman—Joan? Joanie. Jodie. For the life of me, I can't remember her name. But I do remember the look of her: the coppery cumulous and nimbus formations that seemed to hover over her scalp, rather than grow out of it; the oversized



white t-shirt she may have chosen as a mask (as many women do) for her widening torso; her forearms covering her face, the tissue-paper-skin hanging there—but mostly I remember the movement, and the sounds. She was pacing, a moderate 4/4 tempo in little circles in our backyard. She was no longer weeping, but stuttering dry, heavy sighs.

“Hello,” we called out to her. She did not stop moving.

“I can’t do it, I can’t do it anymore. My brother died, he’s younger than me, that’s not supposed to happen. Everyone says it’s supposed to happen, but this feels like a wicked, wicked, thing, how could God be in this?” We didn’t say much; we mostly listened, standing in the hot Arizona sun. I could feel the slickness of sweat rubbing between my thighs, and heavy trickles slipping sluggishly down the nape of my neck. She kept going.

“Did you know there’s a difference between a casket and a coffin? They’re different, and they cost different. How could anyone know that? I shouldn’t know that. He was younger than me.” I suppose I could have spouted off some Bible story about paradise or eternal life, but what good would it have done? I felt little for this woman. But I knew that I should feel something, which was enough to make death more present. My roommate, whose brother had passed away two years before from a brain tumor, reached out and held the woman, patting her back and saying nothing. I stood awkwardly to the side, watching with my eyes only, scrutinizing the way Joan’s crepey, wrinkled face leaned against my roommate’s breast like a collapsing wall, skewing her sunglasses at angle. I waited, looking at the smooth skin of the stiff succulents around us, the spines growing outwards around the delicate

blossoms. It seemed like hours that I stood as an outsider to this camaraderie, and saw that death linked two strangers intimately together.

It seems to me that all memories are somewhat like seeds: we experience them as encapsulated moments and they are buried in the gray matter of our minds; to ferment, strike roots, and expand. They reproduce, mutate, and change each other. These two distinct memories of mine, planted years and hundreds of miles apart have grown from my continued musings; they circle each other like black birds of prey, intersecting and skimming each other’s wings in repeated figure-eights. Their roots have become tangled and twined together, somewhat cannibalizing each other as I try to understand their connections—and all memories really are connected, in more ways than the sameness of their cerebral soil.

There is a subtle process in all of this—birth, and death—a moment where it all begins; a conception. I used to think of them as just things, things that happen sometimes to some people—and yet, now I see they are the opposite ends of the same bridge. Life and death are not opposites, birth and death are. And they are not doors that open for some and close for others—the body is the door, *you* become the door, you are the change that happens. Development occurs in marked stages, but the exact moment when it will occur is never predictable. A life begins as the rapid division of cells, springing up, differentiating; growing and conglomerating together to make a human; grown in a tiny ocean but ready to live and breathe in this airful atmosphere. A simple collection of elemental structures—carbon walls housing the tangled cords of DNA, a flagellated tail—it digs into the dense wall of an egg, which waited like a bride since the woman’s own time

in her mother's womb. The president-elect, waiting for her lame-duck sister to be expelled through menstruation. The conception; the dance; a furious fox-trot; an industrious pantomime that leads to a new life. Then—slowly—it unravels. Breath 672 million, give or take a few. The carbons will all be freed into the earth and nourish it. As one dissolves into nothingness (as it began), a widow, and orphan, an inheritance is born. But unlike births, deaths cannot be induced when we feel the time is right (except in a handful of states). Other things are quite similar though—the bowels will be difficult to control again. It is likely a person close to death will be wearing diapers or a catheter. The person will prefer soft foods, sleep for long periods of time; his or her body will be weakening, shrinking. Just as a fetus prepares to learn breathing and builds fat to keep warm in this world, a dying person experiences dullness in hearing and vision as preparation for a quieter one. The person's breathing will slow and become laborious. Soon it will stop altogether—because what need of it is there in the ground? It seems to me that death and life are based merely on the timely exchange of gases.

I've been told that if you watch an infant's first breath, you can see a swath of pink appear at its heart and blossom as it overcomes the lavender hue of its skin. I daresay you can observe the reverse effect in a newly dead person, just slower. But who could notice this? There is an obsession with presentation in both events. Whether a body has taken its first breath or its last, immediately it is washed. A newborn is cleaned of the sticky fats that cling to its skin like seafoam, and the newly dead is washed and pumped full of liquid plastics to regain an appearance of sleep. I suppose that's what the label "NOT READY" meant for John—that his body had not been entirely prepared for display. Meaning the embalmer had not flushed all the blood out of his body yet, or hadn't massaged his skin with lotion as formaldehyde pumped

through his veins, making him look fat and full again. Or maybe she hadn't yet sewn his jaw shut, or glued the round half-circle caps under his eyelids, or blushed his cheeks. Maybe she hadn't dressed him yet, or combed his hair, shaved his chin, powdered his face, or lipsticked his wrinkled lips. Maybe he was a young man with full lips and did not yet need to be shaved. I don't know, I didn't check the attendance sheet that day. I do know that the embalmer probably meant that John still looked dead, instead of sleeping; how people prefer it. I don't find that to be more restful though, and I do not want to be embalmed. Sleeping is when I had a dream that my Spanish teacher was trying to violently kill me with a knife on a cruise ship and I had nowhere to run. When I was sleeping, I dreamt that I saw through the window of my school that Attila the Hun was holding a knife to my six-year-old sister's neck on the playground and when I tried to take steps closer to her she would turn a more frightening shade of white. Once, when I was sixteen, I could not find the light switch in my bedroom, and I groped along the wall for what felt like hours, sobbing in frustration. I frequently wake up at night and am terrified when I see my husband face down in his pillow, and I scrutinize his back to check for movements, avoiding eye contact with the white scar that gleams even by moonlight on the back of his head. I lay back down and try to shut my eyes. No, when I am dead, I will be dead, not sleeping.

Sleeping limits the consciousness that we get from being in this world. It would be going backwards, to the mindless months in the womb. I hope to be going forward—and what if what we call death is only an exit from the warm hips of Mother Earth? Another type of birth.



## Pout

*by: Sara Alexandra Dixon*

Digital Photography  
2048 x 1365 pixels

## on white silence after the deforestation of black bodies

by: *Ayokunle Falomo*

How is it, that whether some  
lives matter the same as others

is still something  
we have to question?

Our lives matter too  
or do they not? No,

don't answer that...

White America,

let me axe you a question.  
No, I do not

mean ask. I mean

let me axe you a question:

if a ? or  
a black body (same thing)

falls in the forest  
that white silence often is

and no one is there  
to answer it,

is it still a question  
worth answering?

I ask you: is this question  
about the worth  
of our lives worth

answering? Maybe this  
time, offer something less  
weightier than your !



## Inspire Unity

*by: Corey Michael Scott*

Acrylic, Charcoal, Resin on Wood Panel with Wooden Frame  
48" x 96"

## Earthworms

by: Rachel Pietrewicz

When I was a child, I was terrified of earthworms. Since I wasn't exactly what one might call an "outdoor kid," I didn't encounter earthworms often, but when I did, it was a dramatic affair. Whenever it rained, I would stand on the front porch, shrieking as I looked out upon the scattering of squiggly little earthworms on the sidewalk. The thought of feeling those slimy pink worms creeping over my sandals to squish against my toes kept me rooted to the porch, frozen with fear until my mother would sigh and lift me up, carrying me over the worms and to the car.

\*

Earthworms are hermaphrodites, with both male and female sex organs. Worms mate on the surface of earth, where they press their bodies together and share sperm before separating again. The pictures online make it look like the worms are all tangled in a giant knot together, but evidently there is purpose in their posture.

\*

The first time I ever heard the word "hermaphrodite" was in an episode of *Friends*. Ross was explaining to Rachel that he had started a rumor in high school that she was a hermaphrodite. Rachel was horrified, but the live audience laughed. I had to ask my mom what the word meant, and she told me that it was for people who had both girl and boy parts.

"That really happens?" My eyes were wide in shock. I couldn't even fathom the concept. How would a person know where they belong? Which bathroom to use? Which box to check off on forms?

In college, my Women's Studies professor explained that we aren't supposed to use the term "hermaphrodite" anymore. People who are born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that isn't "normal" according to our definitions of female and male are called intersex.

\*

By the time my mother and I would return home from school or my grandparents' house or the grocery store, the rain would have stopped and the sidewalk would be clear again, save for a few dead worms, as still as the twigs beside them. I never questioned where the worms went after the rain stopped, or why they were attracted to the rain in the first place. It was like earthworms did not exist to me when they were not blocking my path on the sidewalk. I was blind to the lives they led underneath the soil.

\*

When worms mate, rings form around their bodies, which the worms then fill with eggs and sperm. The rings fall off and seal shut at the ends, becoming cocoons for the eggs to develop inside. Baby worms emerge from the eggs fully



formed; they will grow for about a year before reaching full size.

\*

At my elementary school, the gym teacher was in charge of teaching the fifth graders about human reproduction. On the first day of health class, she stood at the front of the room and told us all to scream out the words “penis” and “vagina” right there in the classroom.

“So you get all the giggling and awkwardness out of your systems,” she explained. We all looked around at each other, bouncing with nervous energy, and our faces flushed red as she counted down to the moment we could scream out the forbidden words.

\*

I was conceived during a blizzard. My parents were engaged, and they were trapped in their apartment for days, unable to escape each other’s presence to go to work or the store or their friends’ houses.

A few months later, the fabric of my mother’s wedding dress strained over her growing stomach.

\*

Once, when I was a freshman in high school, I was washing my hands at the bathroom sink. A small girl, shorter than me, entered the bathroom and stood at the other sink. She had a hard time reaching her hands to the water because her stom-

ach blocked her way. Our eyes met in the mirror. I smiled slightly, my typical I-don’t-know-you-but-I-want-to-be-nice greeting, but she quickly averted her eyes.

I saw her a few times after that, walking through the hallway. She kept her head down, and all the students stared silently at her stomach. I tried not to gape or gossip, but I couldn’t help but feel fascinated by this girl. Was she ready to become a mother? Had she read all those important books about babies that women always talk about on TV? Or was she too focused on math quizzes and English papers to worry about motherhood?

\*

If all goes well during earthworm mating, both of the worms will end up with a fertilized egg to carry. It’s an effective way to ensure the survival of the species. With earthworms, pregnancy is always a sign of success.

I wonder if they celebrate it in any way, if the worms gather together and acknowledge the pregnancy. I like to think that they do.

Humans celebrate pregnancies with baby showers, but only when the women are at a respectable age with a respectable job and a respectable partner. When women are young and single and unprepared, no one throws them parties because no one wants to celebrate failure.

\*

During my senior year of high school, a girl I’d known since

kindergarten announced her engagement on Facebook. She never came back to school, and a few months later, wedding pictures flooded her page. While I struggled to make a decision about where to attend college, she walked down the aisle and made plans to move in with her new husband.

After I arrived at college, she posted a sonogram picture to her page.

This wasn't a girl I knew well, so my interest in her life shouldn't have moved beyond curiosity. But I couldn't stop myself from pulling up the picture late that night, my phone screen providing the only light in my dorm room. I couldn't stop the attraction I felt to this picture, to the girl's wide beam and the gray photo clutched in her hand. I did not see a woman in the picture, I saw a girl. A girl with so much time left before she would have to become an adult. She should have been using that time to be silly and reckless and young, not to become a wife and a mother. I realized that I took all that time in my own life for granted; the thought of suddenly running out of time like that made me feel panicked.

\*

When I was a child, my friend Manny and I liked to play doctor in my basement playroom. Since he was a boy, he always got to be the doctor, and I played the role of the patient. Our favorite scenario to act out was one in which I gave birth to one of my dolls. The two of us would shriek in pretend pain and horror as we simulated the birthing process we'd seen on TV when our parents thought we weren't looking.

\*

When my sister told my father she was gay, he was confused and surprised, but supportive.

"At least I don't have to worry about her getting pregnant," he told me over lunch one day.

\*

Because the earthworm mating process is so efficient, earthworm populations tend to double every sixty to ninety days. This is good for composters, who use earthworms to decompose food waste, and gardeners, who need worms to mix soil and move nutrients around to help plants grow. If we have worms, we don't need to dump everything we don't want into landfills, and we can grow food.

But earthworms aren't always good for the environment. In some areas of the world, they do what they do best: eating and mixing, which can involve chomping away forest floors and their bacteria. If earthworm populations continue to grow, they'll continue to eat and mix, and they'll eliminate crucial parts of our ecosystem.

\*

The human population has been growing since the Black Death in the fourteenth century, thanks to advances in the medical and agricultural industries. Humans have gotten good at surviving, but not without destroying the environment in the process. As more people inhabit the planet, they produce more carbon dioxide and create more pollution. They also use more food, water, and fossil fuels. If the population continues to grow at its current rate, there will be



too many of us, and we will run out of resources to sustain ourselves. There simply won't be enough food or fuel for everyone, and we will kill both ourselves and the planet.

\*

My relatives love to mention my future children, as if they already exist in some parallel universe. "When you're older, you should bring your kids to visit us on weekends," they tell me. When I explain that I don't want to have kids, they laugh, waving hands in the air as if to physically brush the thoughts from my mind. "Of course you want kids," they say.

I try to argue with them, explain that having kids won't make me more valuable, that I want to have a career, that I resent the gender stereotypes they all abide by without question. But they ignore my protests, claiming I'm too young to know what I want.

\*

Humans have gotten so good at surviving that, by 2050, the human population is expected to reach at least eight billion, maybe even as much as ten billion. I will be in my fifties. The children who grow up during this time will only know a world that is overcrowded and on the brink of destruction. I do not want to bring children into a world that is too small for their dreams.

\*

When my sister was in elementary school, her dream job was to be a mom. She'd scribble the word "mom" in crayon

on construction paper below stick figures of herself and her future children. When I was in elementary school, I wanted to be an interior designer.

\*

Whenever peers or classmates talk about their ten-year plans, they usually discuss their career goals, and then they say something like: "and I hope to have a family!" This addition always makes me uncomfortable; I don't understand how they can group their future spouses or children with their careers. I have a family already—my mother and father and siblings—and I'm not looking to replace them with a husband or my own children. I know I can be happy without creating a new family.

\*

On my eighteenth birthday, my aunt announced her pregnancy over lunch. My father's side of the family had gathered at a restaurant: Dad, siblings, aunt and uncle, grandparents. After giving me a gift, she said she had something for all of us, then pulled a sonogram picture out of her purse.

Everyone at the table gasped, tears springing up. She'd been hoping and trying to be a mother for years, unsatisfied with her life as a career woman in the city. She didn't want skyscrapers and subways, she wanted backyards and carpoos. Growing up, I had always admired her for her independent, glamorous life in the city. I'd been blind to what she actually wanted.

\*

For about three decades, China had laws in place to prevent overpopulation, and certain families were only allowed to have one child. People in the United States seemed to regard these laws as barbaric and inhumane because families should be able to choose how many children they want to have. The same people who gave their friends and relatives unsolicited advice about family and reproduction were horrified at the thought of the government trying to interfere in such a private matter.

\*

I always thought my sister would be the first of the siblings to have kids, even though she's younger than me. I had visions of myself in New York City, working up the ladder to my dream career. Maybe I would have a boyfriend, but not a husband. Not for a while, at least. I would visit my sister and her husband on holidays, and their children would think of me as the Cool Aunt.

When my sister came out, I changed my vision. She won't live a simple life in the suburbs with her husband. Maybe she'll have kids, but it will be different. There will be adoption paperwork to fill out or expensive medical bills to pay. There will be time for her to think about what she really wants.

Maybe she won't want kids, the same way I don't want to be an interior designer anymore.

\*

My sister, two years younger than me, had her first kiss before I had mine. She was fifteen and brave, strutting down the

school hallway clutching her girlfriend's hand. She dared the world to disapprove of her happiness.

When I was fifteen, I didn't know what I wanted. I went to school and came home and did my homework and slept too much. Depression was thick and suffocating; I didn't have the energy to smile at boys in the hallway or sneak under the bleachers at Friday night football games. I burrowed down into my bed, avoiding the light that slipped through spaces in the blankets and reminded me of all the things people wanted me to do.

\*

The largest earthworm ever recorded was found in South Africa. From nose to tail, it was twenty-two feet long. One particular type of earthworm, the Australian Gippsland, usually grows to twelve feet long, weighing about a pound. Worms can also typically eat their weight in food every day.

\*

When I was thirteen, my mother took me shopping for new bathing suits. Every scrap of fabric I slipped on failed to conceal the rolls of my skin. I sat on the bench in the dressing room and sobbed, cheap eyeliner running down my wet face. My mother dragged me to three different stores, eyes wide with confusion and horror as my throat ached with the scratchy pain of self-loathing.

My friends were so thin you could see their ribs poking against their skin, but the fat of my thighs spread wide across the chairs I sat in, and my stomach bulged over the top of my jeans. When I'd wear my bikini to go swimming, I'd suck in my stomach until I could hardly breathe, sure that everyone

was looking at me. Everyone was looking and judging and hating; they all knew how ugly and boring and unappealing I was.

\*

When earthworms are injured or severed, they can regenerate parts of their body to become complete again. They do not split into two earthworms, but the piece of the worm that was separated from the body gradually grows back, giving the earthworm a second chance at survival.

\*

In my last year of high school, I stopped sleeping so much. I applied to colleges and dreamed about where I would live for the next four years. I had an exit strategy, and my body grew lighter as the end of high school approached. I was blind to the boys around me, potential partners or companions passing by unacknowledged in my distracted state.

My best friend kissed a boy she liked, a boy who'd be thousands of miles away once college started. She gushed about him in the mornings before class, and I forced smiles in return, the countdown to graduation flashing across my eyes. I didn't see the point in creating new relationships when they'd be severed within the coming months.

At my high school graduation, my sister sat in the audience with her girlfriend, while I still had yet to kiss a boy. I wasn't brave or passionate or confident like her; I was tired and frustrated and anxious to leave.

\*

Earthworms can live up to eight years, but they usually last for a year or two. Some humans view them as pests that must be eradicated, so they use insecticides to kill off earthworm populations in their backyards. Other worms are killed accidentally by chemicals intended for other purposes. Earthworms have the potential to grow and mature for years, yet they rarely make it past the first stages of life.

\*

Two months after my eighteenth birthday, my father called me late at night.

"Your aunt lost the baby," he said, and I cried as I handed the phone to my sister. I went to my room and sank onto my bed, where I lay for hours as I mourned the cousin I'd never have and the life my aunt was so desperate to live. I felt paralyzed, unable to move from my bed or think about anything except the loss of one child in a world on the brink of overpopulation.

\*

Earthworms don't have eyes; they can only sense light. If they are exposed to light for too long, they can be paralyzed. Darkness is essential to their survival, so they are able to move away from any traces of light they encounter. Earthworms burrow underground in the moist soil, blind to their partners, blind to their surroundings, blind to crying little girls on porches.

## singing the sunday service

by: Evelyn Elgie

serenity comes  
like incense in a sunbeam:  
narrow whorls drifting,

tongues that shift and change  
shaping ceremonials  
with each languid turn.

when i start to sing  
my lungs fill with spicy smoke  
and satisfaction,

and notes spill out: trans-  
figured. i didn't know that  
this was what i missed-

blue robes itching, knees  
on a thin embroidered cushion,  
a cure for sleepless

nights. the trinity  
in coloured glass knows that I  
don't believe in him

the way that i do  
in music. he understands.  
it has been too long.

## The Truth

(for Rebekah)

*by: Cornelius Rosewater*

I came  
all this way  
dreaming  
thinking  
believing  
I was  
a four course meal.  
But you  
showed me  
I was just  
a boiled-hotdog dinner.

Thank you.



## Teka

*by: Estefania Garcia*

Digital Illustration  
4" x 8"

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## Dinosaur Bedsheets

by: William Brown

Cigarettes'll whittle your teeth like a boy scout.  
Little puffs like the *nick, nick, nick*, of a pocketknife,  
or long drafts with the confidence of a barber  
shaving the naked neck of a man. But love is not selective.  
I learned that from a bumper sticker. You can skip  
the cigs and fill your mouth with little bricks  
of nostalgia: the kind Grandma gave me  
when I'd walk to her trailer after dinner  
and we'd suck on gritty lemon drops—  
sugar and salt fighting for the other's birth.  
They would've rubbed my tongue raw  
if Grandma hadn't cut me off to tell me  
Grandpa took her, dressed in her best silk  
dress, to a truckstop on their wedding night.  
They ate steak plated fancy with honeysuckle  
and drank sweaty beers instead of champagne.  
Truckers collected quarters in a bowl  
for the jukebox and wrote "Just Married"  
on their windshield in grease. I begged  
for another story every night, but she'd say  
it was too late; come back tomorrow. I did  
until I found a stick that bit like licorice to raw  
my tongue slower; roast my throat like a s'more.  
Let my breath be exhaust, lungs immortal  
as dinosaur bones, tucked under bedsheets of tar.

## Rat Chapels

by: William Brown

I wonder how I didn't know to write an address  
and where my sketches—The Rock floating over ropes  
that snapped back and forth in jagged lines—ended up.

I sent at least one a week—always to Skip,  
always to nowhere—and the mailman always  
picked them up. Never skipped them for actual mail

with a stamp or address like my brother's order  
for sea monkeys that never grew. I never thought  
to wonder how the mailman knew which Skip,

my Skip who moved five *Blues Clues* episodes down  
the interstate. I was too focused on my tongue sliding  
close to a cut I wanted but didn't deserve. Like the shock

from a door knob in the dark after rubbing your socks  
across the carpet, or Adam reaching out for God.  
Now when I taste that lack of response, I imagine

somewhere, deep in the catacombs of my local post office,  
there's a box full of WWE drawings; a home for a friend.  
Except the home doesn't have a trampoline for wrestling

or even a door, because the post office is a landfill.  
And The Rock drowns next to sea monkeys  
that thrive in a cesspool of Coke and eat immortal

fast-food burgers. Or he's being fought over  
by rats to build their dumpster chapel  
and cover its ceiling in art.



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## House

by: Manju Mohapatra

It is almost the end of winter, but the relentless cold shows no signs of yielding to the spring. The sun rises as usual, but instead of giving warmth, it steals heat from wherever it can. If the nights are dormant from its absence, the days in the park are just as illusory, even with the warm rays. With layers and layers of clothing from head to toe, leaving just slits over the face to breathe, and to see, one turns into a walking mummy. When night falls, one can retreat to the shelter. The whole night, a cold wind blows, knocking the tree branches against each other, calling out *whooooooooo, whooooooooo* to anybody willing to listen. Despite the noise outside, at least the body is protected from the brutal cold and wind while in the shelter.

He lies there the whole night to warm his brittle bones. Most nights, wrapped in his tattered blanket, he does some soul searching but realizes that his soul has disappeared, confined within the room. Before he remembers that it wasn't always like this, a deep slumber takes over.

Once, not long ago, it was different. He had a house along a stretch of beachfront properties that faced the shoreline on the other side of the Long Island Strait. He built the house there, intrigued by the history of the location. There are towns sprinkled along the strait with names such as Huntington and Stony Brook, as well as Massapequa and Syosset. The American Indians were long gone, but their footprints were left on these towns. After a long day's work in the city, he could just catch a train and arrive at the house in an hour. On a clear evening, he could watch the ferry leaving Port Jef-

erson until it disappeared over the horizon. As the sun went down, a garland of lights came into view on the other shore from Stamford, Fairfield and Bridgeport.

The house he built had cathedral ceilings and plenty of rooms. Each was open, airy and infused with natural light, as the house was wrapped in its own balcony, facing the water. It was surrounded by manicured lawn and gardens with a variety of flowers blooming in different seasons. There was a fountain inside the house from which cascading water fell with a gentle murmuring sound and disappeared underneath the floor to another fountain outside. The house was decorated with artifacts, big and small, from all over the world: Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Far East. On the walls hung paintings of known artists, which the interior decorator had selected with great care. Everything in the house, inside and out, top to bottom, was meant to be there. The house, with its rooms so meticulously divided by walls, stood there, waiting to be lived in.

But he had no time for anything else. The job on Wall Street did not leave room for any pleasure other than the rooms he lived in at the big house. His days, as well as nights, were spent speculating, dreaming of Dow Jones, NASDAQ and S&P 500. He watched the market trends like a hawk. The market went bullish, and all the celebrities, actors, athletes and people with millions of dollars in intermittent paychecks didn't know where to park their money. He kept buying stocks for them as his phone rang off the hook. Stock prices

went up, and he made a fortune.

Then he came home to the dark house and set it alight with the flick of a switch. He went from room to room, relishing their pastel-colored walls, glowing softly from within. He stood near the window looking out at the fountain, the spray catching the light from the nearby lanterns in the garden. He gazed at the paintings on the walls with a renewed awareness and glanced at the statues all over the house. At night, before retiring to his room, he observed the carnival of lights decorating the port and ferries pulling in and out until midnight.

One holiday, as he stood in his garden, he wanted to explore the surroundings, enticed by the fragrance blowing in the evening breeze. He went walking along the beach, his feet pulling him farther and farther away from the house. There were wild jasmine and honeysuckle vines creeping onto other shrubs, making the air intoxicating. His feet continued to take him towards the smell. He passed the lighthouse at the port and took a turn towards a narrow path along the water. The sun was about to set, and a fresh coat of vermilion seeped into the horizon. Flocks of herons flew skyward, rising from the water, signaling the end of another day. As he kept walking, he could see the string of lights on the other shore of the sound. Slowly, one by one, all the houses lit up on this side, and everything took on fathomless shapes, mingling with the dark.

But it wasn't for long. It was a bright night, the second full moon of the month of September: a blue moon. As he was about to turn, from afar, he saw the outline of a figure, a silhouette standing all alone and looking at the water. When he came closer, he saw the contour of a female body clad in a

long gown. At a distance the waves danced, drinking the yellow from the atmosphere. As he came closer out of curiosity, she turned her head and looked up at the moon. He saw her face.

He had known that face since his high school days. "Gina? Is that you?" he asked her. She didn't reply. She looked at the moon for the longest time. He turned his head and followed her gaze towards the sky. Craters covered the face of the moon like pockmarks. "Where's my brother?" he asked her. "Martin left me for a man," was all she said. Gina and Martin had been dating since high school and had recently gotten engaged.

"What're you doing here?" he asked her without a clue. "I'm just looking at the moon before I look at the water," she replied without turning towards him. Then the moon became obscured behind a floating cloud, and a soft haze blanketed everything. "What do you mean?" he asked, baffled. Gina had a distant look on her face as she asked him in return, "Do you think this body of water is large enough to contain me?" She kept looking out at the sea.

So, he salvaged what his brother left behind by bringing Gina back to the house. "The house needs people," he explained to her as they walked towards it. Now the house had one more person to take care of it. They married in a civil ceremony the next day. A couple of months after that, Gina began experiencing morning sickness.

As usual, he left for work early in the morning and came back late in the evening. Gina stayed in the house the whole day, not going out anywhere or doing anything. If he asked about

her day, she said, “The baby has sucked the life out of me.” He left it at that.

Another seven months elapsed, and one sunny morning he took Gina to the hospital, her belly as big as a watermelon on the verge of bursting. A baby girl was born the next day. “Who do you think she looks like?” he asked Gina when he visited her the next morning. “I wouldn’t know. Can you tell?”

“They’re the same genes, should it matter?” she asked him. He looked at the baby. She had his brother’s dimples. “No, it shouldn’t,” he answered as he looked out the window.

He brought Gina and the baby home to occupy one of the rooms. “Here you go. This is yours,” he told the baby as he put her in the crib. Gina stood there, watching him look at the baby. “The room looks good, don’t you think?” he asked her. She nodded her head with contentment. They named her Cora.

The next year, another room was decorated, and another the year after that: one girl and two boys. If he wasn’t mistaken, the boys, Ryan and Luca, were the spitting image of him. It wasn’t important who came from where, but what mattered was that they all belonged to the house. Finally, the house had all the people he thought it should have. Gina kept the babies neatly in their cribs out of his sight, for he had better things to do. “Take care of them, and leave me alone,” he told Gina, and she nodded her head. He had to earn money and lots of it. Wall Street had plenty of money for its stockbrokers, but one had to work day and night to get hold of it. Cash flowed into the house like water.

Then the little children left their cribs and took over the house, knocking over a statue here and breaking a prized Tiffany lamp there. Smudges from their fingerprints hung on shreds of wallpaper and the pristine walls. The house smelled of rotten milk and what seemed like cow dung, even though there were no farms within fifty miles of the house. They were always together, from morning until night, like a pack of rats. When he got back in the evening after a long, hard day’s work, they scurried to their rooms, not to be seen until morning. At daybreak, they spilled over the whole house again as he got ready to go to work. The three of them called out “Good-bye,” in unison, omitting the “See you later.” In response, he told them, “Just disappear.” Gina just stood there, saying, “These children have sucked the life out of me.”

When the weekends threw them all together, he called the children to come and sit down with him. They peeped their heads through the door, cracked open, and walked in slowly, deliberately. They sat on the floor near his chair, surrounding him, a smirk on each face. “What do you want?” Cora asked. “You’re wasting our time,” Ryan said. Luca was too little to have any opinions yet.

“Don’t talk to your father that way,” he said with as stern a voice as he could muster.

“Father? What’s that?” asked Cora. “We’ve heard such a word but don’t know what it means,” said Ryan. The children all laughed together, even the little one. He made them stand in a line and smacked their heads against each other. They laughed even more, as if performing in a circus. Gina was planting trees in the garden. “They’re going through a phase,” she told him after he went looking for her. “I’ve planted a tree

for each child... in case they are not here.”

“The trees will enhance the beauty of the house once they grow,” he thought.

The children remained at this stage for a while. They lost baby teeth, got new teeth, went to school, came back from school, brought friends home, and went to friends’ homes, not knowing the meaning of “Father.” Now, instead of laughing in front of him, they whispered behind his back. They ran all around the house, playing hide and seek, dipping into the fountain in summer and running along the water as they pleased. If they saw him, they froze like one of the statues that decorated the house. Gina looked amused. The house stood there motionless, waiting for them to grow up.

Before long, they had all grown up. They started calling him “Father,” although he didn’t know what it meant by then. “Father, I want this” or “Father, I want that” was all he heard day and night. The house beamed with joy when he obliged, and all hell broke loose if he didn’t. But he stayed put once he decided that there was no *need*, it was just *want*. They kicked a glass here and banged a door there. They howled like a pack of wolves looking for prey, hungry to slit a throat and suck the blood. Gina just stood there, helpless. But he didn’t give in for fear that they would turn him into a carcass. “Whose house is it, anyway?” he asked them.

Then one by one, they left the house. The last time he saw Cora, there was something under her dress, a big ball stretching from her front to the sides like a balloon stretched on both ends. “Father, I’m leaving home,” she told him while coming down the stairs. “I’ll bring the baby to show you,”

she said. She squeezed everything that had belonged to her for nineteen years into a suitcase and left in a waiting car, just like that. Gina cried her heart out, but what was to be done? The other two stood near the door, looking for an exit.

Soon after that, the stock market crashed. There was a dramatic decline in stock prices fueled by public hysteria. Over a period of a few days, the market lost more than twenty percent. All he heard was, “Sell, sell, sell,” and it sounded like a war cry. Once the selling started, there was no going back. People sold their stocks in a panic and lost their life savings. Over the span of a year and a half, the market lost fifty-four percent. People went without jobs, and banks took over their houses purchased with money that didn’t exist. A sense of hopelessness pervaded the air. That was when he left the stock market. He went and cleared out his office one day, removing his nameplate from the door. He read his name, “James Wilson,” aloud. The name once gave him a lot of pleasure. Now he had no job.

On his way home, he kept thinking about the house. It stood there with all its splendors, but the thought intimidated him. The house needed money for its upkeep and sustenance. The water for the garden and fountains, the soft lights burning until dawn, its marble floors that needed polishing, the manicured lawn—all siphoned money for his own pleasure. Now that he was without a job, he was afraid that the house would no longer be his.

At home, Gina looked at him with contempt. “The house... what’re we supposed to do with the house?” she kept asking him again and again. “At least we have these.” She glanced at the paintings and the statues with a new understanding.

Now that Cora was gone, Ryan and Luca kept to themselves. The cursing and howling were less and less. They hardly came out of their rooms, until one day Ryan came to him and said “Father, I’m going to fight in the war.” His eighteen-year-old face had grown long and thin, unrecognizable to his own father. When he was asked which war, he replied, “Either one will be fine. Does it matter?” Then he packed his eighteen years of life in a duffel bag and stood at the door until an Army jeep came and picked him up. He climbed in without turning back. Gina stood in the garden near the trees she had planted when the kids were small and asked, “Do you know which war? Where am I supposed to write to him?” He told her, “Let’s wait to hear from him. Then we’ll know.”

But they never heard from Ryan. Within a year, the war sent him back from Iraq in an aluminum casket. There were yellow ribbons tied to all the trees along the way into town, honoring Ryan. He accompanied Gina to Ryan’s funeral and came home with the flag that draped his coffin. They handed him a diary Ryan kept, which neither Gina nor he read. “What’s the point?” they said.

By this time, he was drawn to something more urgent: playing the slot machines at the casino. He found the connection he was looking for in his life. The casino felt like a stock market, and it enticed him like never before. He could hear the jingle of the money from all directions, overpowering his sense of being. But this time he was the player, the investor. The slot machine told him what he used to tell his clients: “Invest more, get more; play more, win more.” It was a mantra he repeated again and again.

At first, he was gone for an afternoon, losing the hundred

dollars he had brought. The next day, he lost eighty but won twenty. Then the day after, he played the hundred as well as the twenty he had won the day before, and won fifty for that day. Then his sixth sense kicked in: “Just stay there, and play big.” Before he knew, he was gone for the whole weekend, and the hundred turned into a thousand. He was losing big, winning some. But wasn’t that how it was supposed to be? He understood the game like no one else. He knew how to play, how to invest.

When he came home, Gina and Luca were nowhere to be seen. Or if they were there, he didn’t know. The big house, with its many rooms, had devoured them. The times he did see Gina, she mentioned money disappearing from the bank accounts. “I’ll win big. Don’t you worry,” he told her, expecting her to understand.

Then he left home for a month. When Gina asked him where he had been, he told her, “Vegas. Where else?” She stood there looking at him while Luca went out the back door, closing it with a thud. “What’s up with him?” he asked. “He’s going to Alaska to help harvest salmon,” Gina told him. There were tears in her eyes. “We have no money.” Her long brown hair had turned grey, and she had cut it short. She looked like a mannequin in one of the glass windows in the department store. He didn’t think he was going to see Luca again.

“Well, it’s easy. I have to go to Vegas to win money, big money this time. Give me your wedding ring.” Gina was stunned. She felt as if someone had touched her entire body with a hot rod. It was the wedding ring from—how long back? She tried to remember. Then she took off her diamond ring and was about to throw it on the table, but he caught it midway.

“What’s for dinner?” he asked.

Gina pulled out a pouch of white powder from her pants pocket, brought it close to her nose, and started snorting. “Do you want some?” Her eyes had become wide. “I’ve pawned the silver statue you bought in Thailand.”

On his way out the next day, he took the Andy Warhol painting he had bought at an auction while Gina looked greedily at the empty wall. “We don’t need so many decorations now,” he said as he started the car engine, while she stood there near the door and waived goodbye.

One by one, they got rid of all the artifacts. The slot machine ate up the money he made from the sales, and he didn’t ask Gina about her share. Once, she told him that she shared the stuff she snorted with Luca when he was still at home. But soon Luca was also gone for good. One day when her husband was in Vegas trying to earn money, Gina came home and found Luca lying on the floor, his hands and legs stretched in all directions and froth running from both sides of his mouth. Luca hadn’t gone to Alaska after all. When Gina went and looked for the white powder she had kept in the drawer, it was all missing. She didn’t have money for a real coffin, and Luca had to be buried in a cardboard one. Her eyes were all puffy and red from crying when he saw her next, after he returned from Vegas.

That was when he decided to take a loan against the equity of the house. There were just two of them now. “The house should be used to the fullest extent,” he informed her. The house, which had sheltered them, seen the birth of the children, the death of Luca, remained stripped to its bare bones, its heart a graveyard, cold and opaque. It wondered what else

was there to be taken.

But this new money didn’t prevent him from trying to earn more at the slot machines. It was work, after all. He sat in front of them, days at a stretch. When he won something, it went back into the machine to earn more money. The stock market had taught him how to invest. Sometimes when he got a break from the machine, he called Gina from the pay phone.

After returning home from one of his outings, Gina showed him a notice from the bank. “What’s this?” She held the paper to the light. “I’ve never seen anything like this.”

He took the paper from her hand. “The bank is going to repossess the house,” he told her as she kept looking at the paper. “We still have a few more months to spare.”

“Before the bank takes over, we can sell rest of the things.” Gina went from room to room making a list, but all of the big furniture, the paintings, the marble statues and the oriental rugs were already gone. Only a lamp here or a chair there had to be taken care of.

Then one day Gina complained about stomach pain. It got worse and worse. She just stayed there in their bedroom, day and night. By the end of two months, she was gone.

Soon after, at daybreak, two bulky men from the bank showed up at the house. One of them was a security officer. They went through the house looking for stuff, putting anything left on the curb. The men escorted him out of the house before putting a padlock on the door.

After the men left, he stood there for half an hour on the bank's property, gazing at it and deciding which direction to go. A soft drizzle covered the dry landscape, and an acrid smell wafted from the grass burnt in the August heat. The house remained standing, a witness to his shortcomings, bare and empty within, and everything wilted and scorched from the summer heat outside. It had nothing to offer him. He had snatched everything from it. The house had turned mute in its own sorrow.

He had nowhere to go. He never heard from Cora after she left the house. He had no idea if Martin lived in the same town any more. He kept walking to the nearest bus stop.

It was evening when he arrived at the city center. He had forgotten about this part of the city, even though he walked through it every day when he worked at the Stock Market. The park looked familiar. He found his way to an empty bench.

Soon the other occupants of the park, men and women in groups or alone, returned for the night. They were holding little tin cans jingling with coins. As they settled on the ground or on empty benches, they looked at him and opened crumpled bags containing remnants of sandwiches.

Hunger caught hold of him, then. He left the bench in search of food. At a distance, he saw some fast food shops, neon lights blinking from them and people going in and out. When he arrived there, he saw someone throwing a bag in the garbage bin. Before he could reach for it, someone else grabbed the bag and went off. He had to wait his turn. On his next try, he found few chicken bones with some meat sticking to them.

It was September when he first came to the park. He spent his days begging like the others and returned earlier to find a bench. Sometimes the nights were cold, and sometimes they were warm.

There was another man who came and shared the bench with him for a few days. They went begging together, but after a while, the man went back to his own corner of the park.

After the first frost, it didn't take long for the winter to come. The cold wind howled from all directions at night, and by morning, patches of ice formed everywhere. The trees stood in the ground like ghosts, icicles hanging from the dead branches. A couple of people in the park died from the cold. At first, the city provided shelter at night to whoever wanted it, but after the deaths, they were all forced to seek shelter regardless of their wishes. After all, everyone got a hot meal and a cot in the corner.

At daybreak, he sits on a bench outside in the cold morning and waits for the sun to rise. He prefers this bench in the open, where anyone who cares to cast a glance at him will remind him of a life they have no idea about. He squints his eyes, and there they are, looking at him. Every glance bores into his soul and tries to extract information, trying to punish and redeem at the same time. Silently, those eyes tell him, "You must've earned it," as their owner stretches a hand to throw a quarter or two, then disappears into the vast nothingness. That is when the memory of the lost house haunts him. He imagines seeing the paintings, the statues, the fountain, but they recede into the background as soon as they appear. He sits there on the bench, drenched with the frigid wind, and dozes off, dreaming of the house and waiting for the blue moon.





## Hazy Evening

*by: Sara Alexandra Dixon*

Digital Photography  
2048 x 1365 pixels





## Abandoned Moab

*by: McKenzie Brunet*

Photograph  
12" x 9"

## Empty

by: *Jim Zola*

Five bucks doesn't get  
the Jeep's needle out  
of the red. A pain  
behind your eyes pushes you  
back against the headrest.  
I drive you to work,  
then just drive. Past  
the construction workers  
balancing on top  
of the skeletal  
building, past the black  
tabby three days dead  
in the ditch, past  
the old men walking  
their wives to stay alive,  
past the shops that could be  
anywhere, until  
a dinging sound lets me  
know I won't have enough  
gas to get back. I'm stuck  
here in the shadows  
of former farms;  
icehouses, tobacco sheds,

barns. They aren't obvious,  
covered in kudzu dreads,  
broken down kneeling,  
the color of absence,  
of rust, the color  
of a bruise almost gone,  
a ghost. Last night  
I punched the wall  
so hard I thought  
I busted all twenty-seven  
bones. Afterwards,  
the phone kept ringing  
its mantra -- no way,  
nothing, never mind.  
You wrapped my fist  
in a bag of ice.  
In the morning, the kids  
drew magical beasts  
in spackle dust  
still on the floor.

## prayer meetin'

by: *Taylor Frost*

my momma told me about strawberry field salvation,  
about muddy river resurrection, said I oughta spend less  
time on my knees and more time repentin'

but she don't know what it's like when we're parked  
down at the dam and we are skin on skin and your hands  
are twisting knots in my hair and the floodgates open

and I'm cryin'

oh my god, oh my god





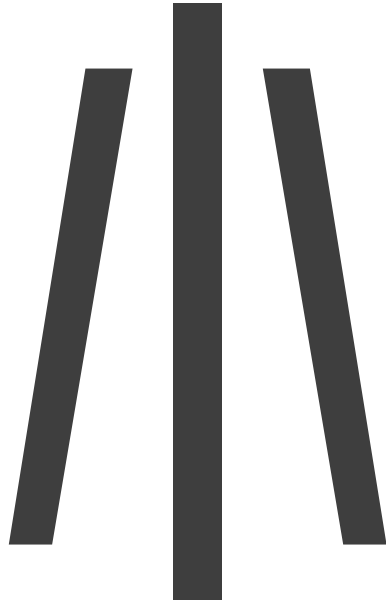
## Barefoot

*by: Sara Alexandra Dixon*

Digital Photography  
2048 x 1365 pixels

*To climb the glass mountain, one first requires a good reason.*

— Donald Barthelme, 1931-1989



Contributors

**Matthew Barrett - Human Landscape (Art)**

Matthew Barrett was born 1983 in Corpus Christi, TX and later moved to Houston, TX where he would graduate high school. After graduating from Westfield High School in 2002, Matthew would commit the next four years of his life to the United States Marine Corps where he would complete a tour of Operation Enduring Freedom. Upon finishing his contract, Matthew worked for several years before deciding to return to school at the University of Houston to pursue his artistic passions through Photography & Media Productions.

**Anastasia Bodagovskaya - Mind Warp (Art)**

Anastasia is a Visionary painter. She discovered that art was her true passion and has been painting for 5 years now. She is currently at the University of Houston getting her BFA in Painting. After completing that, she plans to further pursue theatrical makeup/ body art for films, media, shows, and art. So far, her work has been featured in performances, photoshoots, music videos, art shows, and live showcases. The medium in which she works in is acrylic painting. Anastasia believes there is a spirit in both humans and paintings, so her art is meant to visually illustrate that spirit and give a visionary experience.

**William Brown - Rat Chapels (Poetry)****- Dinosaur Bedsheets (Poetry)**

William Brown is a recent graduate of the University of West Georgia where he worked as an editor for the school's literary magazine, *Eclectic*, for two years. William has accepted admission to the English Graduate Program at Texas Tech University and will begin taking classes in the Fall of 2017. After receiving his Masters, he hopes to attend a PhD program in order to become a professor of English and Poetry.

**McKenzie Brunet - Abandoned Moab (Art)****- Land of Enchantment (Art)**

McKenzie Brunet is an artist and photographer based in Grand Junction, a small city in western Colorado. She currently attends Colorado Mesa University, where she plans to acquire a BFA in Animation, Film & Motion Design. Her photographic pieces focus heavily on the mysterious, liminal, and often forgotten world of the frontier. 'Abandoned Moab' is a photograph taken on the outskirts of Moab, Utah.

**Sam Deleo - Search (Fiction)**

Sam DeLeo has written about music for *The Denver Post* and has had his work appear in *Paste Magazine*, the London-based fiction magazine *Talking Soup* and the poetry compilation *Urania*, among others. He also has a short story forthcoming in *Grub St. Grackle*. He currently works as a special sections editor at *The Denver Post*.

**Sara Alexandra Dixon - Pout (Art)****- Barefoot (Art)****- Hazy Evening (Art)**

Sara Dixon lives in the beautiful Ozark mountains, where she finds that life is made more beautiful when seen through a camera lens. Her favorite subjects are nature, and family, and she has been known to spend endless hours photographing bugs.

**Evelyn Elgie - singing the sunday service (Poetry)****- Eating Alone (Poetry)**

Evelyn Elgie grew up in the backwoods of Norval, Ontario. She is in her fourth year of an undergraduate degree in Contemporary Philosophy and Creative Writing at University of King's College, and is an editor for Dalhousie University's literary journal, *Fathom*. Her work deals with mental illness, intersectional feminism, displacement and landscape, and has previously appeared in *Open Heart Forgery* and *Hinge: Journal of the Contemporary*.

**Ayokunle Falomo - on white silence after the deforestation of black bodies (Poetry)**

Ayokunle Falomo is: a Nigerian. a poet - who uses his pen as a shovel to unearth those things that make us human. a lover: of almonds. the color blue. hymns. grapes. & conversations. a TEDx speaker. an author (of the collection of poems - "thread, this wordweaver must!" - which serves as a reminder that your stories matter, and is also an invitation for you to share them. & of "kin.DREAD" - an upcoming collection of poems and thoughts that seeks to explore the relationship between our fears and those closest to us.) a dreamer. an American. He enjoys walking. & talking to himself (sometimes in third person actually)...a lot.

**Taylor Frost - prayer meetin' (Poetry)**

Taylor Frost lives in Central Virginia with her family. She is pursuing a Bachelor's degree with majors in English and Sociology. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Whurk Magazine*, *Artemis Journal*, *Cargoes*, *The Album*, and *Gravel*.

**Estefania Garcia - Manny (Art)**

**- Teka (Art)**

Estefania Garcia is a local illustrator and senior undergraduate art student at the University of Houston. Her art takes inspiration from subversion of identity, friendly monsters, the cosmos, kitsch and pop art. She has previously been published in Volume 17 of *Glass Mountain* and her artwork can sometimes be seen in group art shows around Houston.

**Manju Mohapatra - House (Fiction)**

Manju Mohapatra was born in India. She got her undergraduate degree from the Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland, College Park. After a few years stint as a banker, she followed her passion to write short stories. Her stories are multifaceted and reflect the multidimensional

existence of ordinary people who do not belong to any one place or time. The author lives with her husband in Maryland, and loves to read and travel.

**Rebecca Oet - Soaring Rainbows (Art)**

Rebecca Oet is a high school student from Solon, Ohio, USA. She enjoys photography, reading fiction and comic books, writing short stories and poetry, and watching anime. Rebecca is a national silver medalist in the 2015 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and has won multiple gold and silver keys for her photography in the Regional Scholastic Writing Competition & Exhibition. She has published her photography in numerous magazines, including *Ranger Rick*, *Teen Ink*, *Stone Canoe*, *Silk Road*, *JAAM*, *Forge*, *Sandy River Review*, *Whirlwind*, *Blacktop Passages*, *Riding Light*, *Constellations*, *Off the Coast*, *Bitterzoet*, *Best of Photography 2015* book, and the cover of Susan Faulkner Fine Arts Exhibition and Auction Brochure.

**Rachel Pietrewicz - Earthworms (Nonfiction)**

Rachel Pietrewicz is a sophomore at Susquehanna University with majors in Creative Writing and Publishing & Editing. She writes fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, but nonfiction is her favorite genre. When Rachel is not writing, she is usually trying to convince her friends to expose themselves in their own nonfiction pieces.

**Kayla Probeyahn - The Motet (Nonfiction)**

Kayla Probeyahn is currently a student at Brigham Young University-Idaho, where she is completing a degree in English. She pursues both creative writing and literary studies. The author has not been published before, but she has been recognized by her university for previous work in creative nonfiction and received third place in the university's annual writing contest.



**Cornelius Rosewater - The Truth (Poetry)**

Originally a(n) (un)common laborer from southern New Jersey, Cornelius Rosewater is currently masquerading as a competent employee of the National Park Service in order to travel the United States. You can find him at his website, OurLousyArt.com, where he frequently combines daily musings with awful photography.

**Corey Michael Scott - Inspire Unity (Art)**

Corey Scott is a senior art history major at the University of Houston. Although he studies history, Corey pursues a painting career full time. He currently works with interior designer, Kelly Amen. If you look at the human race, you will see filters and rules we place upon ourselves. Humans have an odd tendency to limit, categorize, and blindly follow stereotypes. However, we are also passionate, unique, enduring, and ambitious. As an artist, Corey believes it is his purpose to record our race according to his perception. As Picasso once said, “painting is just another way of keeping a diary.” If you strip away all reality until you are left with basic emotions such as happiness, anger, and jealousy, then you will find the place where Corey’s art begins. This series, *As We Are*, reflects that primitive instinct through subject and medium. Inspiration stems from the desire to capture us in the most intimate moments of being human, whether our intentions are good or bad.

**Julianza Shavin - Schrodinger Somnolence (Art)**

Raised in Georgia, Julianza (Julie) Shavin, is a composer, writer, and visual artist who adopted the Rocky Mountains as home in 1993. She works as a specialist content editor and is a licensed professional proofreader who giddily shares, “Language is my first language.” Pikes Peak Arts Council has conferred upon her Performance Poet and Page Poet awards; she also has numerous honors through The National Federation of State Poetry Societies. Her working-entitled fifth book,

“Closet Optimist’s Creed” is scheduled for summer 2017. She serves as President of Poetry West ([www.poetrywest.org](http://www.poetrywest.org)), plays cello with the Pikes Peak Philharmonic Orchestra, and collaborates with New York-based spoken-word artist Hank Beukema on a Youtube poetry/music series which has 23 pieces thus far. Her artwork has appeared as literary magazine covers.

**Jim Zola - Empty (Poetry)**

Jim Zola has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for Deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children’s librarian. Published in many journals through the years, his publications include a chapbook—*The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press)—and a full length poetry collection—*What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He currently lives in Greensboro, NC.

**Soaring Rainbows**

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