

*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 across the nation, *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 Reader,

Out of all the issues of *Glass Mountain* I've seen and grown to love, this one has become the most special to me because of its experimental nature. As we spent time working on this volume, it gradually became our poster child for what it means to evolve as a publication. In this edition, you will notice that we have taken a dramatic step away from what you are probably used to seeing in previous issues. Our format has changed, allowing us room to feature more of our emerging authors and artists. In addition, the simplicity of our cover takes a breath, pausing between the past and what's to come. It represents the heightened apprehension we all have when we look to the future, right when we are in mid-air – after the bold leap.

When you read through this issue, you will get a sense of what has once been: maybe memories of your first time ice-skating on the old frozen pond in the backyard, a loved one lost to a merciless illness or war, your favorite childhood pet that grew up with you, an old flame that gave you your first heartbreak. As you well know, with memory comes both the good and the bad – and we write to understand those experiences, consequently re-living them once more. We thrive in learning from our memories, though sometimes – when we are too overwhelmed – we drown. Some memories give us those small wrinkles around our eyes when we laugh, and others bring tears; on

rare occasions, both. The big question is: what will you do with those memories?

As for me, I'm going to keep remembering. I'm going to remember spending three long hours in a musty old room for our sequencing meeting: two and a half hours of that time talking about art, and the other 30 minutes scrambling to actually put things in order. I'm going to remember sleepily driving at O'dark thirty, dodging and cursing traffic in the cold rain so I could get to Write-a-Thon in enough time to help set up. I'm going to remember staying up late with the other editors, covered in paper, coffee stains, and pizza grease as we squint our eyes at small font and channel our inner grammar demons. I'm going to remember the blood, sweat, and tears – and coffee and sleep – we spent in producing this issue. And I don't mind those memories – both good and bad – sticking around, not one bit. So a sincere thank you to my fellow editors, for giving and sharing with me those memories that will remain with me forever; and thank you, dear reader, for continuously giving us – and writers everywhere – a reason to keep remembering.

As the band, Fall Out Boy, said: "Thanks for the memories."

Aries Jones  
Editor, *Glass Mountain*

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

— Donald Barthelme, 1931–1989

For our Mothers and Fathers, both near and far,

Thank you for helping us grow.

— The Editors

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## Poetry

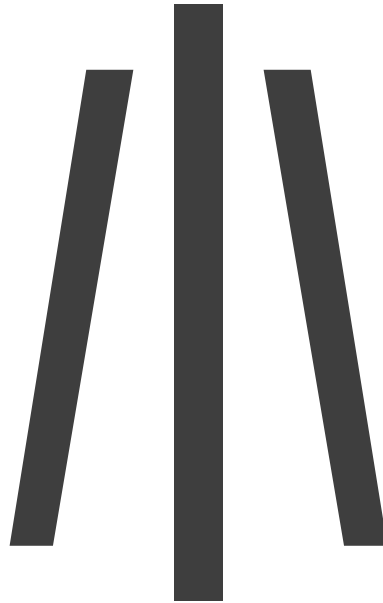
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Poetry & Prose  
Contest Winners/  
Runners-up

## Emily Van Vleet

Poetry Winner

Emily Van Vleet has worked as the assistant editor for Pacific University's Silk Road literary magazine. As a double major in Creative Writing and Political Science, she enjoys exploring the political nature of creative writing. She lives in Forest Grove, Oregon with her roommate, also named Emily, and a badly behaved, adolescent cat.

## Giant Atlas Moth

For one cycle of the moon  
I lay caught in a web  
of my own making,  
hanging from the extended  
limb of an aging oak tree,  
tenuous as a dewdrop just before  
it falls in the morning.

Leaving the cocoon at last,  
spread newfound wings,  
massive compared to a slim body,  
sticky with residue reminiscent  
of nature's confinement.  
The breeze catches beneath

their extension. Eyes feast  
on foliage this body blends into.  
Born without a mouth,  
yet surrounded by sustenance,  
hunger grows; the weight

of mammoth wings, unrelenting.  
Days pass in fleeting abundance,  
but I long for the teasing tongue  
of the butterfly.

Still, raise each wing, take  
flight, like an autumn leaf coasting,  
the same mottled color of decay.

On the seventh day  
my body crumples midair,  
  
joining the fallen leaves.

## Mason Boyles

Fiction Winner

Mason Boyles is a senior at UNC. His work has appeared in publications such as Cutthroat, Prick of the Spindle and Kansas City Voices. He is the recipient of The Southamptton Review's fiction prize and the Whispering Prairie Press flash fiction prize.

## Full Stop

At last I danced with Tess.

For the longest time she'd been talking to me and I'd been listening. I got very good at it, this listening. I didn't even reach or rub up to her. Lots of nights the two of us together out by the tire swing just rocking. Just sitting. Her telling me about it—trying to figure it out.

“What's worse?” she'd say. “Guilt or grief?”

She hated the flowers most. Once she'd thrown up on them; that was around the time we'd stopped talking.

But now the end of things. Nearly August, the last of the campers trickling home. Leaving us. Me and Tess hosting one more dance for the kids.

Well here we were. She was too tall for me so her feet kept ending up on top of mine and my sweaty hands slipped down her sides. Slipped slipped slipped all the way to infinity, until we were back out at the tire swing again watching sequins tilt down from the gazebo rafters. Tomorrow she'd drive to the warm place she always talked about for school and I would stay here for nothing. For a wage, I mean, but nothing otherwise; a hermit by process if not pay.

“I bet you're ready to get out of here,” I said.

She looked up at the moon, then she looked back down at me. Looked for something. “I don't know how,” she said. Around her wrist the hair tie she still hadn't taken off.

Tess came in May. Counselors are supposed to get here early for training, but half of them show up late with excuses. Hers was *The Chariot*.

“It was their farewell tour,” she told me. “I mean, you should have seen them.”

This—her earnest selfishness—must have been the first thing that got ideas of her in my head at night.

Otherwise this year was a good batch. A quiet batch. Everybody else had arrived mid-April, they'd brought their waivers and proof of ID in neat file folders that they stacked on my desk. They called me Mr. Barton, as if I were much older than them. I'd grown a beard in the winter so I shaved it. Still they called me Mr. Barton to my fresh, hairless face.

Tess, though, she didn't call me anything at first. Didn't remember my name, so she just started saying “excuse me?”

That first Saturday I gave her a primer course. Breezed through s'more distribution and campfire safety—breezed through all the safety, really, because I couldn't take standing in front of the whiteboard while she watched me.

Finally I wrote my name up there, all capitals.

She uncrossed her arms. “Right!” she said.

So much leg tumbling out of her shorts. Already my ideas of her were growing. I put her on the ropes course because that’s what was open. I put her with twelve year olds because they were most rowdy and she would be so sincere in her bossiness that they’d have to listen. They’d love her, too. Anyone would.

I walked her out to the ropes in the woods. Wires for safety at all the stations. “Just make sure to check the carabiners twice,” I told her.

Thing about Tess was she could be all vectors. Forward, forward, existing in distance covered rather than points. Her girls swarmed her. The other counselors’ girls, too, and the boys—the tens, the twelves, the fourteens—dropped their forks and lost food from their mouths if she walked by.

Once I saw three of the older guys going at it. Each hitting both of the others, one of the good batch counselors trying to use the handbook tactics to break them apart. He actually had the handbook out, holding it out like a shield between him and the boys. I was just going up the hill to stop it when Tess whistled out of the woods. Four girls fluttering around her like birds. She could have been Snow White, Echo, any nymph or Disney princess. Down the slope, passing by the fighting boys only because they were already in her trajectory. She put a hand on one of their shoulders and leaned in to say something I couldn’t catch and I swear to you that was it. All three of them stepped

back from each other and shook swollen hands. Tess, though, she just kept walking.

Her separateness from the other counselors was never in doubt. None of them hated her for it. All seemed to recognize that she moved on a different plane—I wasn’t ignorant to it, but still I had my ideas. I sat alone in the corner of the dining hall and hoped that our planes might intersect.

She was nearly twenty-two, but it took until June for her to ask me the right question. There was barbeque for lunch that day but she’d only ever touch the coleslaw and macaroni. Kid selfish, kid picky, but all goddess in her composure. Both bowls quivered in the hum of the air conditioning as she spilled her legs out toward my table, folded them in to sit wonderfully across from me. I wiped the pork grease from my beard, which I’d begun to let grow back.

“What’s there to do around here, anyway?” she asked me.

I slid her the canteen I kept stocked with whiskey. She sniffed it, then she sipped it. No wince to her lips, either.

“Right!” she said.

That was the beginning of our nights on the tire swing together.

Thing about my ideas is once I get some of one I’ve got to keep going with it. Drag it through the dark, through the clam and the goo at the back of my brain all the way out past my hands

and into the mud. For two weeks Tess and I went out to that tire swing. Nightly, rocking, the canteen jettisoned on the rubber between us. Just to talk.

“I remember Halloween,” she would say, or something similar. And she would tell me everything about it, never naming anyone, even the sloppy boys who lurched through each story trying to plant it in her. She had spent a lot of time in Miami and spoke staccato Spanish. Five years removed from my GED and any woman, this to me seemed the most worldly thing a person could do. Whole time sitting there, hands under my thighs to keep from reaching for her. Hands twitching. Warm with aching.

On the night that we saw the buck she had been explaining Giza to me. Her professor said it was this old, but really the rain weathering on the pyramids suggested it was older. And the alignment of the complex—the way each pyramid pointed up at the Zodiac—was set to match the astrology from a sky even older than the weathering. When she’d brought this up to the professor he’d said, “I don’t know what to tell you,” and given her a B- on the final.

While she sat there waiting for me to explain this to her, the unfairness of it, I caught a hole in the sky moving across the hill. Silhouette against the trickling moon. Ten point, from what I counted.

“Look,” I said, and at first she didn’t, thinking I guess that I was about to solve something for her. As if I could have solved anything. When she checked over her shoulder the antlers were dipping below the skyline. Down down down the hill, no more noise than the grass in the wind. I squinted until it slid

out of the darkness, a purple blob in front of a darker purple blob, and I pointed for her to see.

What did she do? Selfish Tess, kiddish Tess. She hopped right off of the tire swing. I didn’t say anything—girl like her you can’t tell to stay still. She was walking. Full, regular steps like she was crossing the tile in a bank. The buck was concrete, both eyes now stapled silver in the glare from the stars. In its rump the kind of tension you’d see right before they bounded away, only this one didn’t bound. Didn’t quiver, even. Tess put her hand out and it put its nose out. She didn’t coo or whisper. Instead she said, “howdy.” Same thing she’d said to me when she got here in May.

That buck?

I swear to you, it bowed.

Who knows how time moves in a painting. We might have been there days if it weren’t for the stillness of the moon, waiting for all this magic to dry. She stood with that deer and then she just walked away. Shrugging, smiling. When she climbed back into the tire swing the deer walked away, too. Finally I had something to say to her.

“Remember the boys fighting on the hill?” I asked.

Her nodding so graceful, legs smooth as the sky. “Right.”

“What did you tell them?”

She frowned at me through perfect lips and that was when I saw it; how she was just as confused by herself as the rest of us.

“All I said was howdy.”

Of course I kissed her.

Such warmth emptying out from the great sleek depth of me. Gentle as I was it still spilled like a sob, this kiss, our mouths making alloy for two impossible seconds. Then her hand on my chest pushing back. So soft the way she defeated me, pulling herself just far enough away for me to know the pitch and tumble of it. My five years of lonely momentum collapsed.

First thing I told her was sorry. I ached all over with sorry, it sloshed through my skull same as the whiskey, I was sorry enough for the planets and the moon and all the sadness in the history books, too. But Tess—she was all forward.

“Anyway,” she said, “what do you think about that Egypt professor?”

In the balance of that night I finished the canteen and filled it back up. We worked through the whole jug again, too, me by necessity and her by some new kind of empathy. Or maybe she just wanted to drink. If I’d asked her I’m sure she wouldn’t have known.

When the blue began seeping through the trees we moved by trips and stumbles back to our cabins. I stood at the mirror and tried shaving myself for a good half hour. I wanted to shave through the skin, too, and see if I couldn’t start over, but all I got were cuts and whiskers. Every idea of mine ground down to halting.

All morning I holed up in the counselor’s office. Sulking a little, mostly though sucked into the thoughtless rut between waning drunk and hangover. It was like slipping backwards off a horse and being bashed by its hind legs. Like folding papers on my desk in semi-trance, all the momentum I’d built out on that tire swing fallen stagnant. A guy like me. For nine months I was mayor of a ghost town, and for three I drank my way through to the nine again. I’d taken this job—a favor called in by my forest ranger uncle—thinking Davey Crocket, Paul Bunyan. Quiet man, gentle way with the kids, maybe sometime the woods would smile on me and I’d meet my own Pocahontas. So many ideas of mine when I moved up here. Turned out I was more Elijah in his cave, the older of the Johns in the woods. Recluse without God, and nothing to prophesize. How could I have known what came next?

When the good batch counselor tilted into my office he nearly startled me backwards. All eyes and sweat and stride, this one, red heat sizzling up his face. Him looking as shocked as me.

“They already called the ambulance,” he said.

I followed him out of the office. Past the cabins, the tire swing, into the woods. Only one station this far back from the rest. Only one girl working that station with her kids. All I could think of was breezing through the primer course in May, working through the canteen last night.

We came into the clearing and you’d have been certain it was a still life. Campers gone, ropes drooping in the air between windless pines. Wires for safety all around. All around except in one place. I tried looking at the sky as long as I could. Then I looked where you ended up when you fell out of it.



Real small, these girls. You think twelve sounds old when they're screaming in the dining hall, but then you see them quiet. Crumpled. There wasn't any blood; somehow that made it worse than anything I'd been picturing.

I folded over and let my stomach tumble out of my mouth. When it was empty I finally saw Tess down there in the pine cones. Kneeling a few feet away, her back to the girl.

The good batch counselor had his handbook out—he was trying the AEDs, pressing and pressing but I could tell by the bend in that girl's spine there was no air left to come out of her. The electronic protocol bleated out from the unit like a prayer: analyzing...shock required. Clear—delivering shock. Analyzing...resume CPR.

Screams from the ambulance bounced up the mountain, siren warping through trees and altitude. Screams and prayers and silence for them to echo through. Even now, Tess still the nexus of things. I was already walking her way before I caught myself. I was all out of ideas, I didn't have anything I could say to her. Selfish Tess. Distracted Tess. Always moving forward, never double checking. Bent to the ground. She, at least, was breathing.

I went back to the cabin to meet the ambulance.

My uncle came up from the woods with his guns. Plucked me out of the circus for two days and took me hunting. Turkey season went way late this year due to an oversight in the state commissioner's office—coffee spilled at a critical time, or some other minor fiasco—so I planted my boots out in Cataloochee

Valley and spent two days putting off forgetting.

Plenty had happened already. There were all species of news people, of course, and the camp owners had come in from the city in a big Escalade full of lawyers. The parents came, too, so gushed up and shocked that they had no vengeance behind them. They talked only to the owners or lawyers, they looked over the appropriate waivers, and they went home. Never shook anyone's hand that I saw.

I'd spent all of that week answering questions in my office. How often were carabiners renewed? What is the manufacturer's recommendation for renewal time? Were wires checked daily? They never did ask me what was in my canteen.

At night when the circus took a breather I'd look out my window and see Tess in the tire swing. Not rocking. Not moving. Halted for now, still in mid air. I stood still at my window, too. Both of us shirked of momentum. Me, at least, terrified of what to say to her.

In the woods with my uncle I crouched still and terrified. Neither of us talked except through the turkey calls. But the season had been running long already, the turkeys left were mostly the ones who'd gotten smart to it. We sat and sat and never shot until the end of the second day.

Here we were in the blind when all at once this big bastard was rolling along in front of us. Real strut and waddle to him. Real speed, too. Well I did what I should have—did it easy, no thought—and all of that bird's speed went right past its feet. Moving, then still. One instant and nothing was left to it.

“Good one,” my uncle told me.

I ate off that turkey for another week, plus my whiskey and the jam that my uncle had left me. Took down my mirror, too, and let the beard take back over. I was holed up, hid out. Sulking. Camp was swinging again, the kids who’d been upset by it all had been shipped home and the place was better for it—empty now, with the owners gone too and the news crews chased away by lawyers.

I didn’t look out my window for Tess. Two weeks since the accident and we hadn’t talked once. Nights I didn’t bother lying down, just sat on the couch and tried not to think of all the things for us to tell each other: the second canteen full of whiskey that night on the tire swing, staying out with it until dawn, the safety primer back in May. I’d learned how not to say things from my uncle.

When I ran out of food I stopped eating. My inbox was full of messages from the owners, titles in bold where I hadn’t opened them. Finally I got one with the title WEEDS ON MEMORIAL?

What memorial? I wrote back.

The one for the girl, they said. The one by the ropes course.

That was too much.

Same night I went out late with all of the whiskey nearly through me. The tire swing was empty but I walked behind the cabins anyway, just in case. What a wretch I was up here on

my mountain. Hermit without romance. Sasquatch without enthusiasts.

More about why I wasn’t sleeping: I’d been having these dreams at night. Tess was in them. The girl was in them, too—that girl from the ropes course. Neither one would talk to me. Well I walked through the trees and under the ropes course and right into that dream again. Tess on her knees in the pine straw. In front of her a granite slab, a white cross behind it. She was doing something to the flowers.

I could’ve left. I could’ve gone back to my cabin and holed up again until August, starved my way down to lonesomeness for the fall. But my feet had gotten moving and there was some momentum behind them for the first time in a while and the greyest cave-dwelling part of me knew that if I stopped now I’d be stopped for good and no better than an ugly ornament from here to the undertaker.

“Howdy,” I said.

She must not have been sleeping, either. Her whole face hung off her cheekbones. I bet I looked pretty sorry, but never as sorry as I felt.

The flowers were piled on either side of the granite. She’d been pushing them off. The slab was slick with something, and the reek of empty stomach simmered up from it. I was still but now she was still, too. The buck all over again, only wrong this time.

She showed me the hair tie on her wrist. “Gave that to me right before she went up.” Popped it twice, such a thick smack

against the bones there. “She said she wanted to keep her hair down like I did.”

I shook my head at her. The moon spilled between clouds onto the words in the granite, but I didn’t want to read them. “What else?” I said to Tess.

“I can’t stand these flowers.” There was nothing behind her anymore. No forward to hold her up. “I feel like I’m the only one who was part of this.”

Then she said, “Now you tell me something.”

Well that was it; I knew what she needed to get moving again. Me to tell her how it was—how we both knew it was—and how I was no good, either. We wouldn’t be twice the bad; each of us would be half the original. She’d showed up late and I’d breezed through training. I’d had the whiskey and she’d swallowed it. But when it came down to it, hadn’t I told her to double check the carabiners?

I was head counselor, that was all. I wasn’t a shrink and I wasn’t a criminal.

She had me by the sweaty collar. Had her face closer to mine than it had been since my true great failure on the tire swing.

“Just say it.” Old bile on her breath.

When I stepped back she didn’t hold on. All I could say was, “I’m only here to pull weeds.”

So this dance.

Tess and I balanced the summer on opposite edges; me at one side of the dining hall, her at the other. Me at the window, her at the tire swing, the throb of my second great failure spread out between us. Nights I’d stir around in my blankets and try to think of ways of not thinking. I was sober for a week, then drunk for two. I took hikes and sipped mineral water. I tried and I tried but I was still working in hypotheticals. Tess slinking through every crevice of my rotten skull, only more beautiful for the change that had raptured her. That frozenness, its quiet. The intensity of it all; it was something to be evoked rather than lived. She was ghost and martyr and guilty party all at once. What did that make me?

In July we put up the sequins. We draped banners over the rafters and brought out two static-heavy amps. It was leaving season, and the whole place sank under the weight of ending.

The kids trickled in at nine. They dragged the reek of damp deodorant and borrowed aftershave with them. I sat in the corner—my only obligation—and watched; Tess, I mean. Her sundress a congealed kind of night. Straps on the shoulders, sky on the neck, that hair tie still wrapped around her wrist. The whole of her tugging at all the man of me. Here’s what she did:

She waved.

That was enough to get me working over some of my old ideas again. It was enough that I took out my canteen and started working on that, too, until the whiskey had pushed the ideas right down to my feet and I was walking on momentum for the

second time since I'd found her moving flowers off the granite. "Howdy," we both said together, and right then that was plenty. Have you ever held a cloud? Have you brushed its sides, guided its course with gentle hands? That's how I was with her, moving slow when the songs were fast and even when she stepped on my feet. Whole time building momentum. Momentum—that's what carried me out to the tire swing. I had enough for the both of us, it ached up through me like a seizure and pooled, building, at the top of my throat. New ideas now: Tess out in the world, Tess moving again. No more of these great failures for either one of us.

The sky so purple, plunging down from the horizon to hook the tops of her dress. Like she was being strapped in.

"Pretty dark tonight," she said.

All I had to tell her was what we both knew already. The safety primer, the whiskey, the night without sleep. The whole of it revolving through my head like a prayer, momentum welling in my tonsils, only I couldn't get any out of my throat. Everything garbled into one grunt of mammal grief.

Tess, then, so kind. So selfless. Her hand over my own. "It's still beautiful out here," she said.

We sat for a long time and neither one of us moved.



## Irene Vasquez

Poetry Runner-up

Irene Vasquez is a Pushcart Prize nominated writer from Houston, Texas. Irene received a regional Silver Key for her poetry in the Scholastic Writing Awards, and she received an honorable mention in the 2015 Princeton High School Poetry Contest. Her journalistic writing received a first place Gold Circle award from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association.

## Continuum

As a girl, I was dazzled by numbers.

Singing digits of pi like nursery rhymes,  
I sprouted figures from my fingertips,  
strung decimals like daisy chains.  
Days wove in and out  
chasing butterflies  
up and down the number line;

numbers never lied.

My parents tucked me into bed  
rocked me back and forth in simple  
harmonic motion.  
Nightmares never dared trespass,  
for perfect squares danced in my head  
like sugar plums.

As I grew, I put away childish things.

Trading numbers for letters,  
times tables for dream journals,  
I took up French  
parce que ma langue maternelle ne suffisait pas.

I cursed the stars  
for the distances I could not bridge:  
numbers didn't lie,  
but they couldn't hold my hand either;

the rejection  
of what I had once loved  
was sweet.

On the precipice of adolescence, I rediscovered  
gravity.

I longed for a theory of everything,  
launched myself into pools of dark energy,  
racing asymptotes into infinity,  
long last reconciling  
my dimensions.

I fell in love with the numbers which bound me  
spent night after night after night  
searching for ultimate density  
watching the cosmos  
finally reflect itself in me.

## Eric Twardzik

Fiction Runner-up

Eric Twardzik is a journalist and fiction writer based in Boston. He is a 2013 graduate of Emerson College. His fiction has previously appeared in *The Emerson Review* and his nonfiction has appeared in *The Boston Phoenix*, *Dig Boston* and *Vice.com*.



## The Shave

After living close to half my life with no distinguishing qualities, my unique gift was discovered on the 23rd of October 1995, by my brother Dan, in his garage. I had just endured a vocal cord rattling, laundry-basket-breaking fight with Mary after I offered a less than courteous assessment of our careers. It's a hazy memory, as the conflict was completely obscured by the epiphany that followed in the shadow of Dan's Trans Am. After the half-forgotten fight, and the holocaust of two K-mart laundry baskets, I stormed to the bathroom and shaved the beard I'd had since Cindy was born. The Daddy Beard. The domesticated, inviting face rug that Cindy loved to pull at, giggling as I feigned torture. The comforting chin hedge that Mary liked to run her fingers through in the darkness of our bedroom. The woolly mug that still allowed a smile to show from every family portrait in the house, Father Abraham with his wife and daughter.

Those may all be reasons why I reached for my electric razor and set it loose on my beard. With each hair that fell to the welcoming ceramic bowl I felt my inner knot of tension loosen, my heart resume normal pace.

I'd never held any resentment against my whiskers before. I used to take pride in them, bore the shifting, beard-centric office nicknames with pride until I was laid off. But when I reached up and felt the smooth, naked skin on my face I knew that I wasn't the same person that had just been screaming in the kitchen, and whatever that meant, it felt good.

I walked out of the bathroom without so much as glancing at the mirror, and left the sink looking like a taxidermy shop. Mary, who had been standing in the hallway bleary eyed and chomping at her nails, took one look at me and screamed. I didn't break my stride. I power walked through the kitchen, swung a six pack out of the fridge, retrieved the keys to the Volkswagen, and piloted the car to Dan's house.

It was there, as I passed the threshold of his garage and Dan emerged from under a cherry-red '89 Trans Am, that fate threw its curveball. The skateboard supporting his back wheeled forward from under the car and my mustached brother was confronted by the face of his sibling, sans-beard.

"Oh my God," he said, his eyes widened with shock. I imagined that my face had to be filled with lacerations, running with blood to draw the look on his face.

"You look just like George Clooney," said Dan, "Jesus Christ."

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"He plays this pretty boy doctor on that TV show ER." Dan said, splayed across his living room sofa. It was cream suede, but his wife had it covered with plastic guards so it felt like sitting on a deflated kiddie pool. A trail of lucky charms disappeared under the sidearm.

Dan stroked his trusty handlebar mustache while he spoke, as if to confirm its presence. “Lotty won’t admit it,” he said, “but Clooney is the only reason her and her girlfriends watch it.”

“Then why do you?” I asked.

Dan thought for a moment, and shrugged. “Must be the blood.”

A sound of crying came from the twins’ room above our heads, signaling that Lotty would be arriving to ER in medias res, if at all.

Dan cracked open one of the orange soda cans that I had mistook for a six-pack of Miller when I flew my house. He took a long sip and pointed the can at the screen, to signal the entrance of my supposed doppelgänger.

Just as the name of ER’s supporting producer vanished from the bottom of the screen, a doctor in cool blue scrubs materialized on the TV monitor, rushing into an emergency room to shout at people.

Dan caught sight of my reaction and gave me a winking nod, as if to say you handsome devil. I craned my neck around to catch sight of my reflection in a mirror Lotty hung behind the sofa, then swung it back to the TV to witness Clooney resuscitate a teenaged girl. The girl sprang to life on the operating table, and the camera switched to Clooney’s astonished, handsome face.

It was my face. It was his face.

“Brother,” Dan said, clearing his throat, “some words off the record. If Mary’s fool enough not to take you back, there are a lot of women that watch ER.”

Dan winked and raised his orange soda to me. I toasted with mine and drank the dyed corn syrup down, trying to wash the lump that had just formed in my throat.

I spent the night on Dan’s laminated sofa. Breakfast was shared with the twins and Lotty, who said that my resemblance to the TV doctor was uncanny. She made me the same breakfast as her kids, chocolate chip pancakes in the shape of Mickey Mouse.

I took the bug home. Halfway through the drive I imagined Mary waiting for me in the doorway, and almost lost my nerve. My confidence did not return until I idled the car in front of a manicured lawn and appropriated a clutch of roses.

I parked the bug and found the porch empty. I approached the door, holding the roses in front of me like a shield, only to find it locked. My watch read 10:14 AM. Cindy was at kindergarten, but I hadn’t counted on Mary being out. I’d committed her teaching schedule to memory, but she had also begun tutoring at the high school for extra income. Although a house key was attached to my car keys, I didn’t like the idea of waiting at the kitchen table for Mary to come home and find. It seemed too vulnerable.

I could make out my reflection in the glass of the French door, and indulged myself for a few minutes. The man staring back at me was different, new. This was not the bushy-faced grad student that first met the birkenstocked, patchou-

li-scented Mary at a poetry seminar in 1984 while eking out his master's in literature. It wasn't the unkempt adjunct in Salvation Army tweed that left the university for a sales job so his wife could still teach when a baby and check books came crashing through the gates. Not the sad, bearded man who had to sit across from Mr. Lee in an office trailer last June and be told that five years of selling frozen potstickers to Lehigh Valley groceries ended with his termination.

No, this was George Clooney.

I scratched my nose and Clooney scratched his, confirming the hypothesis. I tried to think of what George Clooney would do in this situation. He was handsome and confident. I couldn't imagine that he had chosen to study literature for seven years so that he could sell frozen dumplings manufactured by a fat-headed Lilliputian with a clip-on tie. Clooney would not wait patiently at the front door so that his wife could come home and berate him. He would do what handsome men do.

I asked myself what handsome men do, and realized that until this point I had never been considered handsome. The beard, which drifted further into history as each moment passed, first sprouted to cover the acne-pocked face of an eighteen-year-old and had never left. If Mary were to come home and find me at the door, it was possible she wouldn't recognize me.

Handsome men buy suits, I decided. I fetched my wallet from the pocket of my crinkled jeans. There was no cash, but I had the MasterCard Mary and I shared.

A voice in my head, the same voice I had been hearing since the summer, reminded me that every credit card we owned had been overdrawn since my departure from Delightful Dumplings, Inc. Mary's poetry workshops at local community colleges and adult education centers were good for the soul, but did little financially for a household of three. But this was not my credit card. George Clooney must have a robust bank account. He can probably buy a new suit every day of the week.

I walked back into the bug. The used Volkswagen was an odd choice for Clooney, but it could serve to conceal his identity. On the way out of town I stopped at the liquor store for a pick me up. I'd walked halfway to the counter with a flask of Canadian Club when I caught myself in the CCTV monitor above the register. I appreciated the angle, then walked back to the shelf and selected a flask of Hennessy, paid with by the perpetually abused MasterCard.

I took my first swig in the driver's seat and tossed the flask into the glove compartment. It went down smooth. Clooney shined a satisfied grin to the rear view mirror.

The last time I'd been to the mall was May, when I begged a pair of Vietnamese proprietors to serve Delightful Dumplings at their food court buffet. Shoddy pan-Asian eateries aside, it was a nice, upscale shopping plaza that reflected the blandly bourgeoisie tastes of the McMansion developments that had sprung up around it. I took another sip in the parking lot and tossed the flask into the back of my jeans.

The parking lot was half filled. I'd always wondered who the people that visited malls in the middle of the afternoon were.

Retirees, the independently wealthy, insomniacs. An extra dimension that existed beyond the cycle of employment and parenthood. As I passed the revolving doors into a Brooks Brothers franchise, I felt a lost childhood emotion: playing hooky.

There was a rack of tweed blazers next to a mannequin styled in the old Ivy League aesthetic, leather elbow pads and corduroy trousers. I once imagined that I would dress like that while grading dissertations in a wood paneled office, preferably with a fireplace. A floor length mirror brought me back to the present: fading jeans, stretched-out sweat shirt and scuffed Keds. My newfound face needed something more sophisticated to work with. I checked my peripherals for a sip of Hennessy when a voice sounded behind me.

“I see you’ve noticed our heritage collection tweed. It’s a classic look that can be worn in any season.”

The tweed pusher was an attractive, miniature blonde, five foot three in heels. She beamed at me, exposing a bit of pink lipstick on her upper incisor. She was a saleswoman, but her smile looked earnest. I wondered if she had noticed my flask in the back pocket of the jeans.

I grinned at the girl, and only after my gums were exposed was I struck by the gesture’s flirtatious feel. Even casual conversation with a younger woman felt like a transgression. For years I had been walled-off by the beard that made me look like everyone’s father. She was wearing a navy blazer with brass buttons that pulled at the single button enclosure over her waist. The fate of the pretty short girl: extra baby-fat that would have been stretched taut and firm in a more vertical

female. This did not spoil her attractiveness, and her bust was properly endowed to distract from the strain below.

“I don’t know about tweed,” I said after several beats. I felt that George Clooney was too exciting for the dusty dressings of academia: Clooney had never wanted to be a professor.

“That’s ok,” the girl replied, “what are you looking for today?”

I could feel her eyes on my face. I took my time to answer, allowing her to drink in my new looks. “A tuxedo,” I decided.

The girl looked away from me: the mutual stare had gone on long enough. “Those are upstairs, with our more formal attire,” she said, “and I’m Allison. I’ll be helping you today”

Allison gestured at the staircase to let me know that we’d be scouting formal wear at the second level of the store. I climbed the staircase behind her. She wore a herringbone skirt that pulled tight around her hips as she walked ahead. I thought about the long peasant skirts that Mary was fond of in college before I stopped in my tracks and gripped the wood of the bannister. I felt I might vomit, and cursed the combination of chocolate chip pancakes and cognac orbiting in my stomach.

“Are you alright?” Allison said.

I reached up and touched my face, felt the naked skin. I said something about dropping a quarter and finished the staircase. She led me to a corner of the shop with tuxedos, decorated with fake china and polo sticks in baskets. To the eyes of the undiscerning tuxedo renter, they all looked the same.

After several moments of inactivity, Allison asked me what my price range was. I thought of Mary sitting in the kitchen late at night, forming two piles of paper: bills that had to be paid now, bills we could still afford to hold off. I looked into the three-way mirror behind the girl, at Clooney grinning back to me.

“Money is no object.” I replied.

Now Allison had locked eyes with me, refusing to blink away. “You look really familiar, mister. Where have I seen you?”

I cracked a smirk as a stalling tactic, biding time for my next move. I would have been happy to give Allison the next quote, but she only stared back at me, tapping a heel anxiously.

“Have you ever seen ER?” I asked, breaking the silence.

Allison’s hands flew to her face. “Oh my god, you’re…”

Her response had tripped me up. I was prepared to spend the day basking in my resemblance to George Clooney, not playing the man. I panicked.

“I get that all the time. People say I look just like him.”

She blushed. “Well, it’s amazing. You could be twins.”

The nervous laughter subsided, and Allison selected a pile of garments for me to try on: a black wool dinner jacket with matching trousers, a white tuxedo shirt with French cuffs, and a black silk bowtie. I took them into the dressing room

and slowly peeled off the stale sweater and jeans, half-expecting to see a new body underneath. I was still as pale and undefined as the day before, but the tuxedo looked magnificent. The last tuxedo I had worn was at my wedding. It was rented and stank of moth balls.

I scrutinized the mirror. I winked at myself, curious as to how Clooney would have made the gesture. I cracked a shit-eating, sideways grin, to see how it would play on Clooney’s mug, and then decided to put words in Clooney’s mouth.

“When was the last time you got what you wanted?”

Clooney stared into me. I didn’t have an answer. I crouched over the pile of jeans on the floor and fished the flask out of the back pocket. I took a long swill and stuffed it into the inside breast pocket of the dinner jacket.

A knock sounded on the door. I jumped as I imagined Mary on the other end, tipped off by MasterCard in advance. Allison’s voice called, asking if she could get any more sizes. I swung the door open and told her that the clothes were perfect, and that if she didn’t mind I would like to wear them out of the store. She blushed and said an exception could be made, so long as they scanned the tags, and asked if I would like a bag for the clothing I had wore in. I told her that they could be thrown away.

I was rung up at the register. The outfit, along with a pair of black monk straps, was certainly more than I had in savings. Allison hovered close by, in front of the women’s accessories. After signing the receipt I walked to her, confident in my new attire. She stood erect with her hands coupled below her,

cycling through stock goodbyes.

“Thank you,” she said, “I hope that you’ll be joining us again soon.”

“Allison,” I said, seeing an opening, “I hope that I can join you now. Have you eaten lunch?”

I pulled on my shirt collar playfully, the way I imagined a bashful actor might. She blushed. Her face began to form a look of apology, but its build up was reversed by her flushed cheeks. When she spoke, her voice shed any trace of sales-girl formality.

“I can take thirty minutes for lunch. I haven’t gone on my break yet.”

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We had lunch at half-past noon at a French bistro in the mall that was set to open that evening. While not officially serving lunch, I sat Allison and myself at the unattended bar and made it apparent that I wasn’t going to be leaving. After a brief misunderstanding I charmed the chef into serving us steak frites, and a busboy made us unintentionally potent vodka tonics.

There I received a synopsis of Allison. She had studied history at Villanova and graduated two years earlier. She hoped to get a job as a restorationist in Philadelphia; until then she was still living with her parents. She chomped on frites anxiously and leaned in closer to me as the vodka tonics were refilled. I excused myself to use the men’s room.

I took a sip of the flask and pissed. As I washed my hands I got another look at Clooney, red-faced and beaming in his black dinner jacket and bowtie. The decision was made. I left the restroom and returned to my lunch date. When I sat at the bar I leaned in close to Allison before speaking.

“Allison, there’s something you have to know. I haven’t been completely honest with you this afternoon.”

She looked at me with serious eyes. To heighten the drama, I paused to look for spies on either side of me before cupping my mouth with my hands and delivering a stage whisper.

“I’m George Clooney.”

The girl’s face lit up with triumph. “I knew it,” she said too loudly, and lowered an octave, “from the moment you walked in. You’re really him.”

“Of course. You saw it immediately. Are you a fan?”

She nodded back enthusiastically. “Mr. Clooney, what are you doing here?”

“Please, Allison, call me George,” I said. “I like to visit these local malls. Escape all those exclusive, hoity-toity types and their luxury stores.” I paused, completely unsure of the character I was trying to play. “It’s the real America.”

I told Allison how suddenly fame had come to me, and what a shock it still was. I had tactics, I told her, employed to conceal my public profile. When traveling I would try to rent the cheapest, oldest car I could find, in this case an ’83

Volkswagen beetle. My wardrobe switched to ketchup-spat-tled sweatshirts and grass-stained keds.

She asked me if I did this often, disguise myself as one of the regular people and wander in their midst. I said that once a month I would have a private plane fly me from Los Angeles and drop me off somewhere in the American heartland, where I could rent a junk car and wander mall food courts. It's the only time I feel at peace with myself, I said.

Allison reacted to my fantasy with the same earnestness she used to sell wool blazers. At one point she stared at me intently and placed her hand on my knee. "Mr. Clooney, I mean George," she said, "I don't think that there's anything separating you and the real people."

She reached across the barstools and collected my hands in hers. "You are the real people," she said.

I nodded my head slowly, allowing Clooney to take in Allison's profound statement. The effect on Clooney would be powerful and immediate. Emotional.

"I saw the same in you the moment I walked into that store," I said. "I don't want this to end here."

Allison held onto my hands and nodded slowly.

The words came out of my mouth, but I'd like to think they were Clooney's. Not me standing next to Allison, but that mysterious, handsome man I had seen in the mirror.

"I want you to take the rest of the afternoon off. Tell your

manager you're sick. There's a Marriott across the highway. Meet me there at three o'clock."

She nodded slowly. She tried to keep her face stoic, but an excitable grin cracked on her right side, exposing the lipstick stained tooth. I waived the bus boy over to pay for the meal, and left a forty percent tip. I slowly drew my hands out of Allison's grasp and told her that I would see her soon, leaving her with my best Clooney smile.

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"So what is the most luxurious room you have?"

Judging by the expression on the pimple-pocked concierge's face, he had never answered that question.

"Well sir," he said, "our King Guest Room is available. It features two King-sized beds, a breakfast nook and living room with state-of-the-art home entertainment system."

I slapped my MasterCard onto the counter with a force that surprised me as much as the concierge. He flinched and recovered.

"We'll just be needing a card until check-out, sir."

I nodded enthusiastically, flashing the Clooney smile.

"Just one more thing," the concierge said as he took the credit card, "has anyone ever told you that you look like -"

I raised my eyebrows in anticipation, but the concierge

blushed and looked down at the desk. “Forget it,” he said.

The King Guest Room was both luxurious and uniquely depressing, as its description promised. The clock on the VCR told me that it was 2:51. I walked to the minibar and selected a shooter of Jack Daniel’s, which I poured into a coffee mug. I sat on the edge of the bed and sipped from the mug, waiting for the green number to spell out three o’clock. I touched my face as the time passed.

Three short raps sounded on the door. I placed the empty mug behind the TV cabinet and answered the knocks. Allison stood on the other side. It was the closest we had been to each other: her head was no higher than my chest.

“They told me what room I could find you in,” she said, “but you had given them a different name. Is that part of being incognito?”

I nodded and drew her into the room. I noticed that she was holding a black paper bag in her right hand, spilling with pink tissue paper.

“Something for you,” she said, and reached up to kiss my cheek. Her lips met my smooth, naked face. Another man’s skin. “Do you want me to change now?”

I nodded. Allison crossed the suite and walked towards the bathroom, twisting to give me a backwards glance before she turned the door handle. She smiled and closed the door.

I returned to the foot of the bed. I thought of the coffee mug behind the TV and felt nauseous. A small, young, slightly

plump but pretty woman was undressing in a room yards away from me. I thought of her parent’s house, where she was still living two years after college. Did she still sleep in the same bedroom she had as a child? I wondered if she ate breakfast with her family before driving to the mall, if her mother made pancakes with Mickey Mouse ears. Her father would sit across from her at the breakfast table, ruminating over the paper. Maybe he had a beard.

The beard - Mary used to run her hands through it when we kissed. I thought of her as she was, in her old hemp skirt and my oversized sweater instead of a pant-suit from TJ Maxx. Her bob cut would revert to those long, unbrushed curls I first saw swinging on campus, and her checkbook bewitched to the Norton Anthology of British Poetry. Years of missed sleep would vanish from her eyes as Mary kissed me and called me “her professor,” like she used to.

At that moment the bathroom door opened, and Allison emerged in red lingerie. She looked at me sheepishly, and the bad mixology that had been building in my stomach all morning popped its cork. I vomited with surprising force, coating the inactive TV monitor. Allison gasped. I shouted sorry and bound for the hallway door.

I ran as fast as my legs would take me in the hallway, and vomited again after punching for the elevator. I used my bare hands to wipe the spittle from the lapels of the tuxedo jacket. As I waited for the elevator I heard footsteps approach from the corner, and acting on a general principle of panic I abandoned the elevator and made for the stairwell next to the corner ice machine.



I took the white plaster steps two at a time until I found the red glow of the exit sign. I didn't end my sprint until the parking lot was crossed and I sat in the driver's seat of the bug. Much to my relief, my stomach had settled.

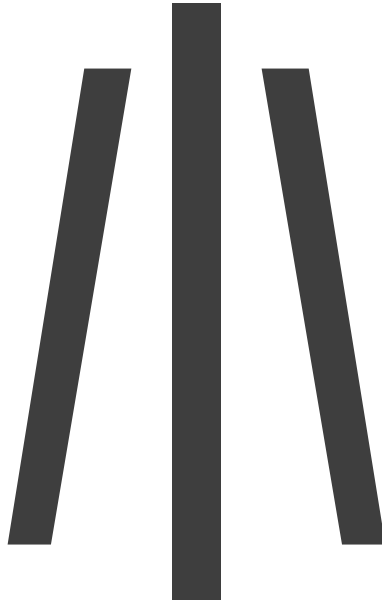
I slowly drove back to town. By this time in the afternoon, Cindy would have been back from school for an hour. Mary, fresh from trying to stuff Keats and Coleridge into 19 year olds, would be serving her sliced apples in a bowl with powdered cinnamon, trying to put some fruit in the kid's diet. Mary was still there, and I could still come home to her.

Then I thought of my wife - back in her sensible bob and pant suit - sorting through the mail next week. There would be bills from MasterCard. She would find the charges to be suspicious, even alarming. Four figures at a Brooks Brothers Franchise, a luxury suite at a Marriott thirty minutes from her own home. The pimply-faced concierge would say that a clean-shaven man using her husband's name had signed for the card, before leaving it and a young woman behind at the Marriott.

I could tell everyone that it was a fraud. This ridiculous, tuxedoed character they describe looks nothing like me. I've had a thick beard since before I was married.

I parked the Volkswagen several blocks from home and watched the sun dip below the trees. I ran my fingers up and down my face, waiting for the stubble to come back in.





Fiction, Nonfiction,  
Poetry, Art

## Big Left Turn Into Goldfield, Nevada, with Storm Clouds Linger

*by: William Crawford*

Digital photography



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## Directions for Finding Home

*by: Kasy Long*

To disappear, light a match. From the flames  
disperse ashes out to the campfire grounds, then play

the guitar until the strings break and bleed into your skin.  
But if music still sounds, drain the wax from your ears—

You're delusional; melt into water and distinguish the flames.  
Form castles in the ashes and cover them with glitter. To flee

the watching eyes, hide inside the logs  
and fold your hands along the curves, quiet

and unstrung in a bed of dirt and dried lilacs. Be sure to fall  
asleep to the owls; their hoots are unforgiving

and unmoving. As a way to call this home, line  
your body in pastels and lace, love the ashes beneath

your feet that call to you. Go unstrung  
into the night. Silence the cries that follow.

## Frogs

*by: Urias Merino*

Chine-colle origami paper on monoprints



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## Seen

*by: Rachel Lee*

The neighbor's girl refused to come out of her room after her mama died. At first, her daddy's family tried to coax her out, humming melody-less tunes while strategically placing pot pies and fresh bacon on the floorboards by the crack beneath her bedroom door. Then my mama helped the girl's aunt Tia to hang half burnt garlic and a green-speckled pork shoulder on the doorknob, hoping the smell would drive her out. They placed sweet sage and holy water on the door facing. "The preacher couldn't come," my older sister said to someone, "so I thought this would do instead." But still, the girl did not emerge.

That same afternoon, a faceless voice recommended a call to Dr. Barnes, who could not come either as he was helping the Holmes family. Afterwards, during a lunch hiatus, everyone complained over their share of the casserole dishes about Mary Margret Holmes having her baby so early, when everyone knew the baby was overdue by three whole weeks. But they made the conversation circle back to girl like a snake eating its own tail.

She hadn't said a word. Last night, they'd heard her banging on the floor, as though she were beating her skull against the baseboards. The women had heard her crying every night the first week, but not at all these last two nights. Why didn't she cry anymore? Was she comatose? Was she dead? Had she hanged herself with her own belt the way that boy down the road did five years ago? They whispered amongst themselves, building unrealities worse than the one before them. People

got frantic. They said she hadn't eaten in nearly a week and so with a leadership born only of southern conviction her aunt Gertie asked my uncle Marvin to break the door down.

At first he tried to talk to her, talking softly, the way he had once when I'd brought him a litter of kittens I'd found in the back of the barn, but there was no response from behind the girl's door, just silence. My uncle Marvin was rather lean until his later years and so he struggled to make much progress driving his shoulder against the door. This went on until he cursed himself and everyone else and went off to elicit the help of my eldest brother, Buddy. Together they had, by means of donations and petty thievery, hat pins, safety pins, bobby pins, sewing needles, sewing pins, letter openers, a thin, tin steak knife, and a nickel Emory board placed under their kneecaps as they sat, cross-legged by the girl's door, attempting to pick her lock. The women looked on from the stairs as the other men offered quiet suggestions to my uncle and brother.

Tired of it all, I sat at the warped bottom of the stairs leading up to the back door of the house, chipping the cracked white paint off with my fingernail. I hoped she was dead. Maybe then there would be something to look at. My sister came out of the house with her friend Louise, a tall, red haired, young woman who was a cousin of the girl's mother. She whispered to my sister about the girl behind the door. "She just moved here from her grandmother's house out in Bees. She done come out here for family matters," Louise

said.

“What family matters?” my sister asked.

“Just matters,” Louise said. “So sad that a child lost her mother like this. Never did know she couldn’t swim.” Together the women shook their heads in mutual sadness and leaned back to touch the hot paint of the house. The dry summer had been harsh to everything it seemed.

“Do you really think she’s dead, Louie?” my sister asked. Louise squinted and pressed her thin lips together, her freckles shimmering in the hot sun.

“I suppose she may be,” Louise said, her back rigid. “She hasn’t had any water in a week. Child done locked herself up in there. It’s like a plant; if there’s no water, there’s no life.” My sister seemed sad about this, but accepted it and sat on a three legged chair under the tiny awning over the back door.

“They need to get her body out,” my sister whispered. “It’ll be rotting soon.”

“That’s true,” Louise said just above her breath, her dress flapping in the breeze that was picking up, blowing dust into the folds of our faces and into the creases of our clothes. “I bet her face is already unrecognizable. I’m sure the rats have eaten it off by now. Her mama said they had a problem with them in the attic.”

“Maybe,” my sister said.

This was the end of their talk for a while, the heat making

it difficult to gossip outside for fear the sun would bake the saliva from the mouth before the ending ever came to the story. But the story was not gone from my mind. Slowly, as though it were a budding Easter lily, the image of the girl’s half gnawed face festered in my brain. Would rats still be on her nose when Uncle Marvin and Buddy busted through the door? Would they cover the body right away or would everyone stand back, rigid, in shock? Would I even get to see the body or would mama cover my eyes like she did when we came across a couple in an uncleared hay field? I was overcome with the need to see the gruesomeness myself, the desire to shoo the rats away on my own. I would cover the girl with her bed quilt, but first I would see her. Maybe I would pick up her eyeball and put it back in her head, so her daddy’s family wouldn’t scream. Maybe I would keep it in a pickle jar.

My desire to see these unnatural horrors made my hands and feet restless. I stood up, stretching my limbs and walked to the back side of the house to clear the agitated edge from my body. While I kicked my brown shoe through brown dust, I ran my fingers along a rather deep gauged out section of chipped paint that ran along the house. My fingers gently pushed along the gauge, feeling the wood run grittily against my skin until I came to the painted metal drainpipe that had forgotten it’s function. Casually I stared up the pipe and located three windows at the top, one round window and one rectangular window on the second story and a third, small square window located where the attic might be. I had not seen any round windows in all of my ventures in the girl’s house and so it was to my reckoning that this window must lead to the girl’s room.

I had not heard either screaming or crying, so the girl’s body



had yet to be claimed. Metal fastenings held the pipe in place and white paint kept the metal from burning too savagely. I had decided to keep the eyeball for myself.

I began the climb. My mind wandered. Where would I keep her eye? I had only recently been back to school and my teacher had been emphasizing a show and tell day. Perhaps this drainpipe would be the path towards my scholarly debut. My hands burned as I pulled myself up the pipe, my shoes barely gripping the metal fasteners. The metal ticked and groaned. The sun scowled down on me, making me pant. I wiped my forehead sweat off onto my shoulder just before my fingers latched onto the window sill. I steeled myself for horror.

A girl approximately my age and height stood in front of the bedroom door, a hammer in her hands. I threw my leg over the sill and sat there, one leg in and one leg out, shocked. This was not how I imagined this meeting to go and I was disappointed at no longer having an eyeball to take to my classroom. Her mousey brown hair was tucked neatly behind her ear, her red rimmed eyes wide in bewilderment, and her tiny fists clutching the hammer like a weapon. My uncle was still ramming against it. The girl's aunt Tia was shouting something obscene and the muffled, fractured voices drifted in from the crack near the doorframe, where approximately 20 nails were buried unevenly in the wood. She had nailed it completely shut.

"Why did you nail yourself in here?" I asked her, swinging my other leg over the sill. "That just don't make no sense." She didn't move from her spot in front of the door, her feet slightly spread apart as though waiting for a fight. I sat down

on her bed. I reached out for her doll on the bedside table and nearly knocked over a large glass of water. I realized that many such glasses remained around her room, many of them empty. "Where did you get all these? I thought you never leave your room."

"I go out at night when everyone's sleeping. They don't hear me." Her voice was soft, but unwavering, a type of wind uncatchable by mason jars and well used by Sunday kites.

"But you nailed your door closed."

"I know."

"What if you got to pee?"

She seemed wary, but a gap-toothed grin appeared on her face. She was missing the incisor on the left side. She smiled like she had a secret.

"I go down the pipe to pee."

"I bet my mama'd get you some pie if you ask. Open the door for her and you can pee whenever you want."

"I don't want to talk to nobody." She shook her head vigorously and I squinted, annoyed at her. But it was too hot to be mad for long. Her dress was clean with small blue daisies on it. It seemed to fit her well and I was jealous.

"That's a nice dress," said I and she put the hammer down. The squabbling was an obtrusive murmur behind the door, something unreal and undesirable.

"Yours is nice too," she said.  
"It was my sister's."

"I don't have any sisters or brothers," she said and her head dipped down making a double chin. Her eyes welled up and tears would have formed if she'd had the water in her for such things. She sat on the bed next to me, her fingers playing with the daisies on her own dress, drawing patterns like constellations.

"My mama says that your mama's in heaven, but I don't know. I never seen anyone go to heaven before. I think it might be a hoax."

She sniffled away a trail of snot and reached a tentative finger out to trace the big dipper along my blackberry stains. "I think it must be true," she said. "Otherwise there's too many people believing something that ain't true."

"I guess so," I said.

"My mother read to me that heroes become stars," she said.

"My brother says they're made from dogs that were especially good," I said.

"I think they must be heroes," she whispered, looking up at the small stack of books by her bedside table.

"Whoever said dogs can't be heroes?" I asked.

A pile of unkempt things leered out of the corner by her wardrobe. Several unwashed dresses, a hairbrush, a nice cross

stitch pillow, a sewing box, and a cheap bracelet poked out from behind the wardrobe door.

"I get them when I go out at night," she said, following my unspoken inquiry. "I keep her locket under my pillow." She waited for me to say something.

"What do you think they're doing out there?" The noises from behind the door had ceased to be prominent and instead bordered the suspicious. Quieter pattering had begun furiously beneath our feet, creating cause for worry.

"Maybe they're trying to break my door down a new way," she said quietly. "Maybe they're going to get a saw."

"Maybe they'll get my Uncle Marvin's horse to kick it down. He bucked my brother Buddy off once. Broke his arm, too."

"Maybe they'll put a swarm of bees in here to drive us out."

"Or get a witch to curse us."

"They'd never get a witch," she said. "That's against Jesus."

"Maybe we should go out and see." I stood up and walked to the window, gingerly placing my leg over the jamb and onto the metal fastener beneath the window frame.

"Are you really going out there?" she asked. I crossed through the window and put my other foot onto the other fastener.

"I want to see if it's bees or a witch." I began my difficult journey downward, my feet finding familiar holds in the

metal. The sun had slipped behind a dark cloud and the heat was hidden from my already sunburnt face. Tilting my face up, towards the window, I saw a pair of legs inching their way down the metal pole. My feet finally touched solid ground. Then, did the girl's.

"I think its bees," she said.

Together we crept around the side of the house, peering into the windows as we walked by them. The kitchen window was open and the smell of casseroles and pies wafted through the warm air. Neither of us saw any bees and no witch ever appeared. The girl's aunt Tia was sobbing at the table, my mama patting her back- the only way my mama knew how to console grown women: tea and verbal agreement.

"She's dead," cried the aunt. "I never should have let her go to her room!" This private yet rather public display went on for several minutes until my brother Buddy came crashing down the stairs, winded and excited.

"She nailed it shut!" he cried triumphantly. "We just have to get those nails out. It's not the Devil putting a curse on it." He got a handful of nails and a hammer and went back to work.

"That's so stupid," I said. "The Devil don't curse doors." I stepped inside of the house, guiding the screen door silently closed behind me. I half-listened to the hopeful chatters of family and friends as to who should be the first to go in and see her. If she were alive, she'd need clothes that were clean and a decent shower, and a glass of water. Perhaps she had defecated in the corners and eaten rats.

I collected a sandwich and part of a ham. The girl was still sitting under the window. She took them gingerly and although she was hungry, she retained her manners.

"What were they talking about?" she asked.

"A whole lot of nothing," I said. I reached for a bit of the sandwich, water droplets splattering on my nose.

## Swollen with disgust, Festering under my skin, We are parasites

*by: Suzanne Alward*

Stoneware Clay, Salt Fired  
76" x 26" x 22"  
2015



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## On Being Thrust into Legal Adulthood

by: *Sheila Dong*

1. “9-1-1, what’s your emergency?” “Yes, my head is stuck in a birdhouse hole.”
2. The EMT who visits my backyard shakes her head sadly and says the only way I can save myself is to snap my neck. I’ll say I’ll think about it.
3. I rest my head on the bristly nest. Blue-specked eggs lie in front of my nose, and I watch them unhinge slowly. Mama and papa birds swoop in and peck at my cheeks like aging relatives. When they bring worms, I know it is time.
4. “Okay. Ready.” It feels forbidden to grip your own neck like this, fingers wrapping around your windpipe like constructing the pinched joint of a balloon animal. “Little help here, please.”
5. The EMT’s palms are sweaty as she closes her hands on mine. Even with her brawn, it takes eighteen tries. The break, when it comes, is not like a revelation. And even with the combined architectural prowess of eighteen surgeries, my neck stays snapped.
6. “What’s with your head, anyway? Why’s it so floppy all of a sudden?” “Hmm? Oh, this? I’m just tilting my head in a pensive way.” Or, “I’m just looking at that bird up there, see?” But of course, they don’t.
7. When I sit at a table or desk, my hand is a kickstand, a crutch, for my loose skull. When both my arms sprout pins and needles from the weight, I lay down my head and pretend fatigue. Only I’m not pretending.
8. Winter means wrapping thick scarves around my neck to keep my head upright. The tightly wound yarn nearly asphyxiates me. *C’est la vie*, I guess.
9. One day, something new appears in my mailbox. The invitation reads, “You are cordially invited to our 18th Annual Snapped Neck Convention.”
10. I did not foresee that everyone would be in costume. Their outfits drip with feathers and capes and fake intestines. Their heads hang at titillating angles that can’t possibly be comfortable.
11. At first, I think it’s some kind of special effect – but no, some have had their heads removed. Never mind about the severed connection between their medullas and their vital organs. Never mind about the massive blood loss.

12. They laugh more and more at the clumsiness of the break in my neck, the fact that my head doesn't flop at a grotesque enough tilt.

13. "Whaddya mean you're not getting seizures and forgetting where you live? And how many times a day did you say you black out? Oh, that's right – you don't."

14. When I get home, I look in the mirror. Yes, there's my head, and my neck, and all the rest of me, yes.

15. In my brashiest soprano, I belt a birthday song.

16. I pretty my room with burst after burst of confetti. I riot the air with noise-making. There is cake everywhere, and streamers, and I gorge myself on frosting like I haven't since I was 5.

17. A clock shows up as a magician, and I am amazed, because every time I look, the time is perfect. The clock's brother, a map, awestrikes me with the epiphany that my house is the exact midpoint between the bird nest and the broken neck convention.

18. There are so many sparklers in the cabinets. Who knew? I light them and stare, unblinking, into their fierce centers until they conclude. There are so many balloons on the ceiling. I knew. It's all in the way my neck stretches.

## Plucked

by: Meredith Herndon

*After Philomela*

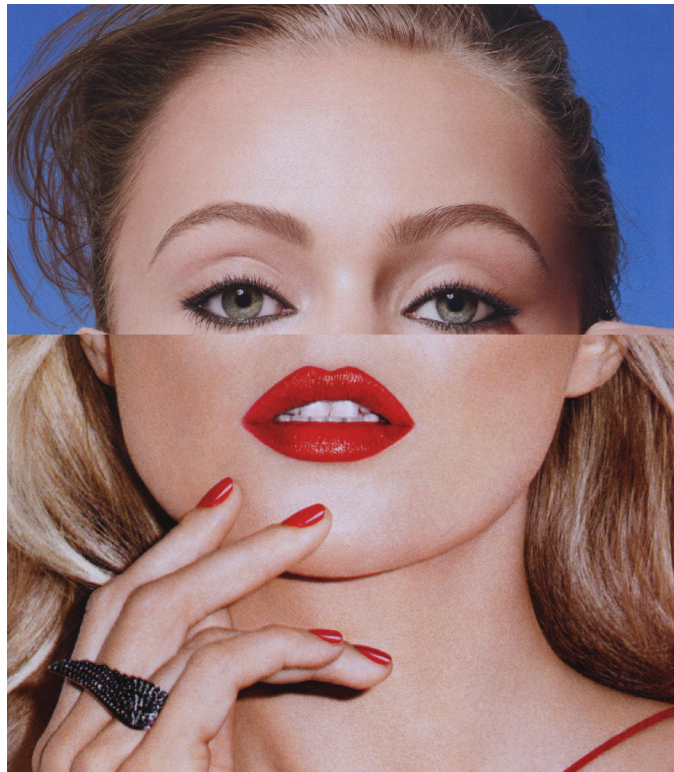
When she swallows tongueless it sounds like a gun.  
Safety clicking off, the stub chambers a round in her throat.  
Her mouth is empty.  
What echoes in the space that once housed her tongue?  
The guilty know their names.

In the backyard, the persimmons hang bloodorange  
stars: wishes.

## Specimen No. 9.2

*by: Taylor Cox*

Magazine image scans/ink jet print  
33" x 37"





## Specimen No. 14.6

*by: Taylor Cox*

Magazine image scans/ink jet print  
34" x 44"



## The Gravediggers

*by: Mark Tabakman*

When Ted Watson's mother, Gerty, died, his first reaction was not grief, but, rather, relief.

Ted sat in his den, drinking a gin and tonic, watching CNN news, his favorite mind-numbing activity. His brother, Jordie, was handling the arrangements, which was fine with Ted and even if it wasn't, it would not have mattered. Jordie had cared for their mother through the declining years of her life, doting on her in a momma's boy way that had been his, no, their, trademark for decades. Ted and his brother had not spoken for years and only began talking, if constantly screaming at each other could pass for talking, when mom's mental decline compelled them to place her in an assisted living facility and then a nursing home.

His wife came in and told him that his Uncle Heshey was on the phone.

Ted tinkled the ice against the glass. How could a son not feel something at the loss of a mother, even a miserable mother like that? When a hysterical Jordie called him on the night she died, Ted was watching a football game and was angrier at the stupid interception the quarterback had thrown than he was saddened over his mother's passing. If asked to put a label to the feeling he had at that moment, he would have said it was as if a surgeon removed a pole-sized thorn from his shoulder. In the brief conversations they had about the arrangements, his brother steadily cried as he talked, while Ted watched television and doodled on a legal pad.

Ted took a long swig off the drink and sighed. His brother was probably crying right that minute. Well, he guessed that was to be expected; Jordie had never left his mother's side from the time he was a baby. Christ, she even took him to the bus when he began high school and waited for him at the bus stop in the afternoon.

Ted stared at his wife.

"What does he want? I'm not up for talking to him now. It's probably about how much food to order when we come back from the service. That's Heshey's specialty."

"To use his words, it's of vital importance."

Ted begrudgingly took the phone. Uncle Harold explained that the cemetery workers were on strike and he would have to dig his mother's grave with his brother.

Ted could not believe what he heard. This was the real meaning of adding insult to injury.

"A goddam' gravediggers strike! No, I'm not doing it! I'm not digging any goddamn grave with him!"

His uncle commiserated.

"I understand what you're saying, Ted, but the grave has to be

dug. Your mother has to be buried tomorrow under Jewish law. You know that. What choice do we have? Just shut up and do it!"

"Can't we hire people to do that? Why do I have to do it, number one, and, number two, why with him? It'll end up being a nightmare, for both of us."

Ted could hear his uncle munching on something. As usual, the fat bastard.

"No, we can't do that," said his uncle. "The cemetery management says there'll even be more trouble with the Union if we bring in scabs to do the digging. The Union won't object to family members doing it, though. Think of it this way. This is the last act of devotion, the last act of kindness that you boys can show to your mother. "

"No."

Ted listened to his uncle's heavy breathing. Uncle Heshey was always the peacemaker in the family. Maybe that came from being totally emasculated by mean-mouthed Aunt Paula for thirty years. He was used to placating people.

"Crazy as this sounds, she would have done it for you."

"Well, that's a great relief to hear, uncle. The fact is I won't do it with him. After all that's gone on. After all these years.

How many times did I try to resolve my differences with him? Because I was older, I always had to be the mature one and give in. I apologized for things I never did. I did that for family peace and had it thrown back in my face every time. Let him do it himself. He'd prefer it that way, I'm sure."

"I know your brother is difficult. That's true. So what's the difference? It still has to be done and you and Jordie are the only ones who can do, who should do it. Look at it this way. It's an hour. Maybe two, at the most. And you don't even have to speak to him. Dig. Finish. Be done."

"It'll be too much for me, uncle. Too hard, emotionally. Understand?"

Uncle Heshey ignored the sarcasm. Ted wondered if he even understood it. His uncle continued.

"Who knows, maybe, afterwards, the two of you will go out to the diner, maybe for a drink and talk things out."

"Cut the crap, Uncle. For just once. Please."

"Please, Teddy. Please. For me, huh?"

Ted, who had read many books about Lincoln, remembered the President talking about the last full measure of devotion given by Civil War soldiers, meaning the giving of their lives for the Northern cause. Would this act be his last measure

of devotion for the woman he had fought with and rebelled against all of his life? Maybe staring at her coffin, filling the hole with dirt, covering her up, maybe that would bring some meaning, some closure.

Maybe not.

Ted was well built and stocky, with an attempt at a beard spreading across his jaw. He scratched his long, curly hair, gazed down at the Grateful Dead tattoo on his arm and muttered to himself. His thirty-second silence, an eternity for the phone, prompted his uncle to ask if he was still on the line.

“OK. I’ll do it. But I’m doing this for my father, out of respect for his memory. Nothing else.”

Ted could picture his uncle smiling, as if he had just brought the Arabs and Israelis together. “God bless you, Teddy. God bless you!”

“Will you be there, Uncle?”

“If you want me to be there, I will.”

Ted noted the insincerity in his voice but let it go for the moment.

“I might.”

Ted waited an hour before calling his younger brother. He had only spoken to him a few times in the ten years since their father had died. They had exchanged some nasty e-mails; in one, Jordie dared him to meet him somewhere “to have it out, once and for all.” Ted had declined that invi-

tation, knowing that his younger brother, whose life was a mess on many levels, could easily provoke him into a physical altercation, no matter whether they were in a restaurant or other public place. His brother was a Godfather fanatic and could literally recite the entire movie line-by-line. Ted flashed on the scene where Michael Corleone kills Sollozzo and the police captain; his crazy brother was sick enough to pull something like that and plead insanity. Maybe he should take Uncle Heshey up on his offer. Maybe that way he wouldn’t get whacked.

Ted called his brother. No answer. Ted figured he was screening his calls and decided not to answer. Ted decided he would be the bigger person at this difficult time and was businesslike in his message. “Jordie, it’s Ted. We have to talk. Call me.”

Several moments passed. Ted could imagine his brother sitting by the phone, staring at it, determining the precise moment it was “right” for him to call back. Ten minutes later, the phone rang.

Instead of a curt “hello,” there was silence.

More silence. Ted hesitatingly said “hello, anyone there?”

Then, Jordie spoke. “I wasn’t even gonna’ tell you that she died. You were never a son to her!”

“No, you were always the good one.”

“How’s that lovely bitch wife of yours?”

“How’s your life been?”

Ted knew that his brother had been unsuccessful in pursuit of a career and was a bored civil servant lifer who had recently been fired from that job. Ted smiled. How difficult was it to get canned from a civil service job? Ted knew he should not have mentioned that and tried to soldier on.

“OK, forget it. Can’t we be civil to each other for one hour just to get this done?”

“No, we can’t. I’m only doing this out of respect for dad.”  
Ted was going to tell him that was his exact reason, but held back.

“OK. Fine. When and where?”

There was another long moment of silence. Ted sensed that his brother was savoring that he could force him to wait on his every word.

“Eight o’clock. Administration Building at Woodmere Cemetery.”

“It doesn’t have to be this way, Jordie. It really doesn’t.”

“You made it this way.”

“We have to get through this, that’s all.”

Jordie slammed the phone down.

Ted immediately called Uncle Heshey.

“I need you at the cemetery, uncle. Eight o’clock. No arguing. Just be there.”

He cut the call off before his uncle could object.

He was pleasantly surprised when his car started right up; he headed towards the Whitestone Bridge, where he would drive through Queens to the maze of Jewish cemeteries where his father and grandparents were buried. He rolled the window down to let the cold air smack against his face. He hated the cold, but he wanted the stinging sensation against his face, as if to steel him to the unpleasant task at hand.

It had not always been like that. When they were growing up, there could not have been two brothers that were closer. Their closeness ended abruptly when Ted went away to college. After promising his parents that he would not drink, do drugs or drive in cars, he had proceeded to do all of those. When his mother saw that, she determined that Jordie would never go out of town to college, or to a “bastard school,” as she referred to Dartmouth. So, Jordie had gone to college in the Bronx, commuting to school, going to classes, and coming right home.

Maybe that’s where his brother’s resentment of him began. Ted crossed the Whitestone and headed east on the Cross Island Parkway. He reached down and took a small flask of Jack Daniels from the sideboard. Just one slurp, he told himself.

Against the cold.

Several men were walking a picket line in front of the Administration Building, chanting “no contract, no peace!” They yelled at Ted not to cross the line.

“I’m burying my mother,” he said. Why was he explaining anything to these men?

A burly Mexican shook his picket sign at him menacingly. “No justice! No peace!”

Ted walked over to the man. “You wanna’ know about justice and peace, well, I can fill you in. I never got any from her. Spent a lifetime getting out from under and still it wasn’t any good. She wouldn’t stop. Tried to be nice, to make peace with her a hundred fuckin’ times. Still no good.”

He suddenly felt a tear roll in his eye. He told himself it must be a cinder.

The man ignored him and went back to his chanting comrades. Ted could see him gesturing towards him, as he spoke to his friends. He went inside and was immediately impressed with the conscientious effort that had evidently been made to warm up the ambiance of the Administration Building. It was, surprisingly, not sterile. Soft music piped in, flooding the entire building, giving the impression of a large elevator. Adorning the walls were several paintings of old men in very long beards, whom Ted all likened to different incarnations of Moses. The overall effect was a cross between a wedding factory and a summer meadow of wildflowers, strangely comforting, as if the ancients were walking with the bereaved, helping them deal with the ordeal of sending the dead onward.

Ted sat down on a bench. After a few moments, he walked up to the main desk.

“I’m here to dig the hole for my mother. To return the favor, so to speak.”

He gave the name. The heavily bearded Hassidic man, his black suit reflecting a rainbow of food stains, nodded absent-mindedly. Ted wished the man had understood the meaningful sarcasm and dry funniness of the remark. As the man thumbed through and signed some papers, Ted recalled when his mother went to open school night in the fourth grade. His miserable screaming witch of a teacher, in exasperated fashion, told her that Ted “would be the death of me.” Four days later, she dropped dead. He remembered the night his mother got off the phone and ran into his room screaming at him.

“You killed your teacher! You killed her! You’re no good! Ted screamed that it wasn’t his fault and he was sorry but she kept screaming it until it was time for him to go to bed. He still remembered that day. It came back to him often when he passed the elementary school. He shrugged his shoulders. That’s what having PTSD must be like.

“You’re the sixth family that has had to do their own work.” The Hassidim pointed to a stack of spades and shovels. “I don’t understand why the men are doing this. We tried to be fair at the bargaining table.”

“I’d like to know why I am,” Ted answered. Maybe he should, after all, have let his brother have all the fun. Another demonstration of Jordie’s never-ending devotion to Mom.

Ted had never been devoted to her. He had good reason. And on an intellectual level, he knew that. He had reached a point where whether he saw her or not ceased mattering. The same for even speaking to her, as it always ended up in a screaming frenzy. Then, he hardly, if ever, even thought about her. But, now, he'd be the one to throw dirt on her. He had assumed it would just be a mechanical, distant thing to do and then, like Uncle Heshey said, he'd be done.

Maybe not. What a bitch she truly was. Why couldn't she have just met him half-way? Even ten percent. Things would have been so different.

The man reached back towards a table on which lanterns were stacked. "I'm giving you two. Make sure to return them. I'll need a drivers' license."

Ted dutifully took out his license and repressed a smile. That's what they're concerned about? Getting back the fuckin' lanterns.

He walked back to the bench and sat down. At that moment, Jordie walked in. Ted suddenly felt sad. The years had not been kind to him. Jordie's hair was prematurely gray, with white streaks cutting through it, like the Bride of Frankenstein. His beer belly seemed big enough to catch his jet black glasses, too big for his face, if they slipped off. When they were kids, Jordie, who was a thin twig of speed, always outran him, even though Ted was five years older. Jordie used to always follow him around, eager to please his brother, to emulate him. Although they were estranged now for many years, Ted still worried about his little brother's physical condition. Maybe's he's an asshole, but he doesn't look good.

Jordie walked over to the spades and shovels and took one of each. Ted rose and followed suit. Jordie glared at him, but said nothing. Ted could sense the emotion welling up in his brother. This would really be hard for him, he reflected. Every shovel would be a wound for Jordie. Silently, they walked up to the desk. The Hassidim looked up from his paper shuffling, gave them a map, with the path to the grave highlighted. Jordie was shaking. Ted wanted to reach out to him but refused to allow himself to do it.

If only his brother had met him half way. Or even ten percent. He was just like his mother.

"I know this is a difficult time," the Hassidim said. "Be careful. Respect the dead."

The brothers walked in silence, not looking at each other. Ted thought of making a peace offering, but assumed his brother would spit on it and kept silent. He settled for swinging his shovel from side to side, just to give him something to do. Jordie carried his as if it were a rifle that he was holding at attention, endowing the moment with the proper respect. Then, they heard their names called in rapid succession; both stopped to turn and see Uncle Heshey half walking, half-skipping, towards them, carrying a brown paper bag. Ted smiled. Maybe the old man brought deli with him. As if a good pastrami sandwich could wipe away thirty years of bitterness.

The beginning of the end for Gerty had come rather suddenly and had started maybe two years before he and his brother were on burial detail. For the almost sixteen years since his

father died, she had been living alone in the Bronx apartment where Ted grew up, a neighborhood now steadily deteriorating waiting for its (likely) ultimate gentrification. Then, she had called Ted at 3AM, screaming that his father had not come back from playing cards. She was going to look for him and needed his help. His father was dead for fifteen years, so his first reaction was she was playing some kind of crazy game with him. Not out of character for her. He did not think Alzheimer's. No. He always believed that Gerty's high blood pressure would one day stroke her out, clean and quick. After telling her several times that Dad was dead and she should go back to sleep, he told her he was hanging up and himself going back to bed.

"I need you to come here now!"

"Not happening, Gert. Good-night."

In a minute, the phone rang again. Gerty wouldn't take "no" for an answer.

He hung up again, took the phone off the hook and shut off his cell phone. He thought of calling his brother and sharing this development, but did not. His brother would demand that Ted go into the Bronx. Ted would tell him it was too far and then his brother would scream at him for never giving a damn about mom. Ted did not need that grief. Not at 3AM. A week later, his brother called him. Gerty had, naturally, also called him with the same story. And he did go into the Bronx. What a good son.

He met his brother at a diner to discuss what should be done. Ted sipped his water and asked for lemon; his brother

scowled. Ted wondered why he was even there. Why should he care what happened to her? Stick her somewhere and be done. After all, she drove him out of the house. Drove him away from her. That his brother was too weak or too scared or too lazy to go out on his own wasn't his fault.

Jordie was being unusually civil, for him. He explained that he had researched some places, visited a few of them and wanted Ted to look at the one he thought was the best. Ted agreed. They drove up to the place, which looked like a hotel, with a beautiful atrium and even a café in the lobby for residents and guests.

Ted mused that he could see himself ending up in this place. He paid but passing attention to the discussion his brother was having with the Executive Director, regarding activities and care of the residents, but was impressed, despite himself, with the level of detail with which his brother plied the man with his questions. When they were in the parking lot, afterwards, leaning against their cars, Ted acknowledged that. "You have done a great job, Jord, looking after her and getting the right place for her to be. Really good work. Very impressive."

His brother said nothing but reached his hand out, and when Ted took it, Jordie pumped it hard. Ted marveled that he had called him "Jord." That was his pet name for his brother when they were kids.

"I appreciate what you said, Teddy. I tried to do my best." His brother passed his hand across his face, furtively wiping away the single tear forming in his right eye. Ted shook his hand again and walked towards his car. Could he have done



more to help his brother with her after Dad died? The sad answer was probably “yes.”

Ted determined to be a dutiful son and visited his mother once a week, for an hour. As her dementia worsened, she was moved to the nursing home wing of the facility. His visits became shorter, more truncated.

If he went during the day, he would never see his brother, who he knew came in the evening and sat for hours with her. On that particular day, however, his brother showed up in the afternoon, when Ted was there.

“Nice of you to show up,” said Jordie.

“Can’t we just sit with her for a while and pretend we’re family?”

His brother sneered at him. “Sure we can, bro.”

Jordie took out a New York Mets magazine and rapidly turned the pages without reading. Jordie had been obsessed with the baseball team since he was a child and refused or, more likely, was unable to outgrow that. Jordie always, regardless of occasion, wore a full array of Mets clothing, hat, shirt, and sweatshirt. To Ted, this was a defense mechanism, his brother’s effort to keep from growing up and facing the world. What bothered Ted even more was that, as someone who lived and died with his football team, he understood it. They sat in silence for a while, while their mother made humming noises. She had but little, if any, recognition of them by now and responded to their touches, involuntarily, or so it seemed to Ted. His brother caressed her forehead, kissing it

gently. Although he seemed to want to hold them back, tears started raining down his cheeks and onto her forehead. He took some tissues from the box on the nightstand and gently dabbed away the wetness from her head.

In response, Ted immediately checked his work email. The sight of his brother’s continuing unabashed grief washed over him, putting him to shame. Still nothing? Still no hint of sadness for his mother’s condition? He knew why not, on an intellectual level, but the raw grief thrown in his face unnerved him. He bit his lip, hard.

Jordie wiped his eyes again. “Even now, big shot partner can’t take five minutes just to concentrate on his mother!” It struck Ted that there was something different in this accusation; his brother’s tone was less angry, more resigned. Ted threw his hands up.

“What’s the difference? She doesn’t even know we’re here. It’s just important for us to be here.”

His brother gave what evidently was his prepared response. “She does know we’re here! I’ve talked to specialists. She may not be able to speak or acknowledge us, but inside her head, she knows who’s here. And, she also knows who was never here for her.”

Ted was careful not to talk down to his brother, as he was often accused of.

“Don’t blame me. Please. I was out there looking for something. For myself. I thought you knew that, that you understood that. I actually thought you admired that in me.”

“I took care of them. Even after Dad was diagnosed, you hardly saw him. Two, maybe three times, tops.”

On that score, his brother was actually right. Ted had only seen his father a couple of times after he had been diagnosed with leukemia. He told himself that the stress of always fighting with his mother and brother were too much for him to take. Yet, he had missed not seeing his father and he bitterly resented his mother and brother for putting him in that position.

“I know,” he said, simply.

“Every doctor’s appointment. Doing the shopping for them. Then, after he died, taking Mom to all her appointments. Where were you?”

Ted nodded in agreement. He had initially agreed to help taking Mom to the doctor but that did not last long. The few times that he had driven her degenerated, almost from the outset of the trip, into screaming arguments and then he just stopped even offering. The straw breaking his back was when Mom told him that he and his brother had picked out his father’s headstone, by themselves. It figured. Picking out the stone would be one more special bond between them. He had told them both to go to hell after that and told his brother he was done dragging her to the goddamn doctors. Had he taken the easy way out? Maybe he used it as an excuse to cut himself off from both of them?

Maybe it was better just not to talk. Ted glanced at his mother. She was smiling the strangest smile he had ever seen on her, or, for that matter, on anyone. The kind of smile that

might come to someone on their deathbed as they look back on a life well-lived, ready to cross over. He thought this may have been involuntary muscle contraction or some medical reflex, but the closer he looked, he knew it was a real smile. He then noticed her right arm moving, ever so slightly, back and forth and followed it downwards. Ted gulped. The crazy old bitch was playing with herself. She was, gently, but firmly and continuously, rubbing her crotch.

He had never seen her so happy.

He got his brother’s attention and pointed.

“What’s she doing?” his brother asked, his eyes widening.

“What do you think? She’s happy. Maybe just let her be.”

Ted laughed. “She’s crazy but not that crazy, huh?”

Jordie reached down and moved the offending hand away. “No, mommy, not good.” He placed her hand by her side, but to no avail. Involuntarily, or not, the hand stole back to her sweet spot and the smile again overcame Mom’s face. Jordie got up again, but Ted caught his hand as he was about to move the hands again.

“What pleasure does she get anymore, huh? Let her be. She’s more human now than I’ve ever seen her.”

“I won’t allow her to lose her dignity!”

“Too late.”

Jordie ran into the corridor; Ted could hear squeals of “nurse, nurse, my mother needs help” and then Jordie’s footsteps, up and down the corridor, as he searched for anyone that could help him with Mom’s errant hand. Ted kept watching her; he wanted to laugh but, suddenly, against his will, started crying uncontrollably. Bitch that she was, this was no way to end up. Even for her.

Jordie, his face an embarrassed, acne-scarred red ball, ran back into the room, alone. Mom was still going at it. Then, two Black orderlies, new white uniforms and thin black ties, came in and, almost forcibly, brought Mom’s hand to her side, where it stayed, for the time being. She looked at them with a flash of the hair trigger hatred that she could summon instantaneously and then flashed it at Ted.

He stared right back at her, like he used to in his rebellious days. Even now, she was a nasty bitch. That hadn’t changed. His brother kept staring at Gerty’s face, refusing to look downward. He turned to Ted.

“Do something,” he pleaded. Jordie’s eyes were red and he had not bothered to wipe the tears from his cheeks.

“It’s over. Can’t you see she stopped? For now.”

A nurse came in and took Mom’s pulse. Then, she patted her on the forehead and kissed her. “There, there now, Gerty, it’s OK. Just rest.”

She turned to them. “Don’t stay too much longer.” Ted stayed another few minutes, watching his mother’s hand find its way back to where it had been. He turned to his

brother. “Just let her be. No point in trying to stop her.” “I’m getting a doctor this time. No fuckin’ nurse!” Jordie ran out of the room and headed towards the nurse’s station. Ted recalled the time when he was fourteen and she caught him playing with himself, when she burst into the bathroom. She slapped his hand so hard that it was red for two days. He watched her for another minute and rose from his chair.

“Goddamn you,” he said, ever so softly. “I’m better than you.”

He leaned over his mother and kissed her on the top of her head.

“Have a nice day, mom.”

Ted left, got in his car and, through sudden tears, pounded the steering wheel. He drove away, wiping his face with his hands.

The dampness in the night air cut through Ted. The weather was suited for the task at hand, although he could not help but think his mother, wherever she was, was happy that he was so cold. “You’ll get what you deserve,” she would hiss at him when he did something that she disapproved of. He looked at the unbroken plot of ground. What could make everything right? Where could he even start to have the semblance of a relationship with Jordie? Maybe if his brother could acknowledge that Gerty’s nasty, smothering control forced him to rebel. He sighed. He’d hit the lottery first.

Ted stabbed his shovel into the ground. Jordie did so as well,

on the opposite side. The ground was too hard and nothing happened. Jordie jabbed again.

“Too bad it’s not your goddamn head.”

He spit, although Ted could not tell whether from anger or the toll even this minimal exertion was taking on his brother. “You left to go find yourself and I had to deal with all of it. I couldn’t leave”

“Maybe you wouldn’t leave.”

Ted expected venom from his brother, but Jordie took his Mets cap off, shook some dirt off it and slapped his knee with it, his cleaning ritual since childhood. “I’ve thought that sometimes. I’ll never know what could have been.”

Ted did a double take. Was this an epiphany?

“Maybe you can find out now?”

Jordie not so lightly slapped himself in the head. “Not likely.”

The brothers kept jabbing their shovels into the ground and the opening took on the outline of a grave. Jordie panted with each shovelful. After thirty minutes, Ted wiped his brow and looked at his brother, who had sat down and was wiping his face with a handful of dirty napkins. He pictured the little boy who used to follow him around and who wanted to be like his big brother. The reality was that his brother was still a child, had never grown up. His reactions were those of a wounded nine-

year old. How could he reason with that?

Jordie got up and dug out some more shovelfuls of dirt. He was crying now, unashamedly, as he was digging. Snot was running out of his nose, but he refused to wipe it. Ted took out a handkerchief and handed it to him. Jordie hesitated, then took the offered cloth and looked at Ted.

“How did this happen, Teddy?”

His brother had called him that when they were growing up, but Ted had not heard that from him in decades.

“Jordie, she fucked us both. Just in different ways.”

Jordie slowly nodded his assent, then wiped his brow and looked directly into Ted’s eyes. “I wish I could have done what you did.” The rawness with which this last utterance was wrenched from his brother penetrated Ted. Jesus, look at all those wasted years. For himself, for both of them.

“I’m not the enemy. I never was.”

They were staring down at the hole in the ground, resting their heads on their shovels. Then, Jordie gave vent to another bout of passionate crying; Ted fought it but started crying too. He walked over to his brother and put his arm around his shoulder. Jordie composed himself, looked into Ted’s eyes with a pleading gaze and then, out of nowhere, snuggled against his shoulder. Instinctively, Ted drew him closer, then abruptly stopped.

Too much brotherly love. Too soon.

“The worst part is,” Jordie managed between heaving breaths, “I hated her!”

“I know.”

Jordie tossed his shovel aside, clearly spent, and sat down at the edge of the grave, his legs dangling into the carve-out. “Just sit still,” said Ted. “Give me a hand with him, uncle. He’s done for the night. I’ll finish up.”

Jordie protested. “I need to finish.”

“No, you don’t. You don’t owe her that.” Ted hesitated, for effect. “Or anything.”

His brother nodded and allowed Uncle Heshey to take him by the elbow.

As they walked away, his uncle held his brother’s hand, much like their mother used to do. His brother stopped walking and, turned, and waved at Ted. Ted waved back, gingerly. Christ, could they really, ever, have a relationship? Maybe Jordie was thinking the same thing? That would be a start.

By now, their effort had produced only a half-dug grave. It took Ted until the first streaks of dawn were pinching through the eastern sky to finish the job. When finally done, he set about piling the dirt in one big pile and rounded out the edges of the grave. He paused to admire the handiwork; the Mexicans couldn’t have done a better job.

Ted wiped the dirt from his hands and started to walk away,

then stopped and came back. He stared into the dullish brown floor, where the casket would go the next morning. Maybe there was a way back.

“Thanks, mom.”

## Jogging

*by: Wendy Cleaveland*

I skim the sidewalk this muggy morning,  
when I spot two legs jutting out of curbside trash,  
familiar no-mistake-about-it legs  
belonging to iconic Barbie who's now fifty-five.  
I ease her body from cardboard boxes and orange peels,  
smooth her blond hair, snarled, blunt cut by a child's hand.  
Once my hair was blond, blew long with the top down  
in a summer wind caressing my face like a kiss.  
No one has legs this long, feet permanently arched  
to slide into stilettos matching her size 1 dress draped  
over taut breasts announcing themselves, perky pink.  
Even used and abused, Barbie's arms are still smooth,  
no crepe paper skin or age spots, no saggy folds  
hanging limp like tea bags or flags flapping to and fro.  
Her red lips smile in timeless beauty and I wonder  
has she never wanted to leave Ken,  
has she always coveted the material living space  
of her Malibu Dreamhouse or Tiki Hut?  
Sweat beads my upper lip and underarms  
and soon I will smell like an old woman jogging,  
my silver streaked hair frizzed and belly jiggling.  
I bend Barbie's rubber-click knees so she's perched  
on top of the trash, and squinting through eyes well-lined  
I perceive her pouty lips pursed, Garbage Barbie.

## Ain't No Haint Going to Run Me Off!

*by: William Crawford*

The robed ghosts interrupt the desert skyline looking like misplaced clerics. The eerie silence of the winter sunset leaves Rhyolite bathed in a cool, crystal ambience. This goldmining ghost town has tangible spirits as full time residents. These Belgian sculptures created in 1982 meld with boom town artifacts in this outdoor, climate controlled museum.

My heart soars as I shoot these otherworldly visitors just before nightfall. In my part of America-The South-haints are restless spirits who inhabit their former residences amid much clamor and confusion. An unsettled haint may damn well visit while you are sipping a cold one on your pleasant sitting porch.

As my viewfinder crackles with these arresting images, a classic line from a nearly forgotten rock 'n roll tune bubbles up in my mind. "Ain't no haint goin' to run me off!" The year was 1964 and Jumping Gene Simmons was trying to break through the Beatles invasion with his novelty song, "Haunted House."

First recorded in 1958 by Johnny Fuller, this bouncy, minor hit was covered in time by the likes of John Fogerty and Sam the Sham and the Pharohs. Truth be told, down South, a haint was less like a ghost and more like a displaced, eccentric friend.

Haints and sitting porches are so important in the Southern culture that porch ceilings were often painted with a recog-

nizable pastel hue labelled "Haint Porch Ceiling Blue." An engaging and unforgettable blue-green that you will see forever in your dreams, it has a formal entry on the Sherwin-Williams paint chart.

On this winter afternoon, I am reveling at this improbable lineup of haints just 3.5 hours removed from the Vegas airport and from my flight in from North Carolina. Two good friends, also armed with cameras, share this ghost town Golden Hour. This Nevada mining district that nestles in near Death Valley offers a unique artistic experience. Here, you can savor art left from another era while you generate your own new artifacts with your handy digital box.

Modern mining technology brought some mines flickering back to faint life, while others still lie dormant in the sharp desert wind. A visit here changes your standard perspective about museums. Artists from all over the world trek to this remote enclave to create what modern convention prohibits them from churning out back at home.

You don't pay to see it and no guards carp about checking your coat and your camera. The dry heat and relentless wind are able curators offering an alternative philosophy about preservation.

These visiting geniuses have great respect for this funky, desert venue with its fabled mining history. Rusting, incongruous relics such as discarded trucks and ancient mining machinery

claim a place of honor in this outdoor art institution.

Modern art like the ghosts plops down comfortably here just like it was an old timey sitting porch in Dixie. I later find murals on dilapidated walls that rival anything I ever saw at MOMA. Here, I too break free from customary artistic convention. I shoot an endless series of glowing images focusing on the texture and tone of rust. I can happily verify that some of greatest photographic coloration can be found on rusting metal outdoors in the elements.

Time seems to stand still here at twilight in the Bull Frog Hills. My friends and I linger in silence cradling our electronic tools as night finally falls. "Ain't no haint goin' run me off," ruminates deep in my consciousness. It is almost as if we have been locked in tight after hours in some open air Smithsonian. A coyote howls far off in the desert. Some audio art offered free for the taking.







## Depew Street

*by: Meredith Herndon*

i  
From my window I can see people  
dancing on the street corner.  
Stomping their feet  
and clapping wrapped fingers  
to the beat of their impatience.  
Blowing smoky breaths  
like blessings over each other's heads.  
Their eyes are fixated  
on pumping asphalt veins.  
They will sit beside each other, get off  
at the same destination,  
and remain strangers.

ii  
I can hear my neighbor  
upstairs cooking dinner  
while the salsa music  
beats through the floorboards.  
She is alone tonight.  
Her lover's suitcase remains  
on the other side of the door.  
I don't know her name, but I know  
she only listens to salsa  
when there is no one to dance with.  
One night she threw a cactus  
out her window and told him to follow it.  
It shattered on the sidewalk,  
arrow pointing, ghost of a footprint.  
The rain drips in through her broken  
window and blooms on my ceiling:  
a woman dancing in a gown,  
a cactus blooming.

## May I Not Be Buried Alive While Playing Dead

*by: David Delgado*

Graphite and acrylic on paper  
11" x 14"



## Numbers

*by: Dorian Oberstein*

She spends a lot of time staring in the mirror. They told her it would help. She locks eyes with herself and stares until the edges of the room blur and engulf the image of her body in a colorful haze, until only her watering hazel eyes remain. And in these moments, a curious thing happens. Her eyes cease to be eyes. She can no longer perceive them as the round organs living in her face; she perceives the colors and the shape of the eyes and these things no longer connect to the word 'eye' in her mind. Dissociated from language and purpose, the image of the eyes become a distinct being. She blinks and the eyes in the mirror look at the rest of her body. The eyes perceive her body as a series of shapes, curves, edges, and colors. Some parts have different colors and textures and some parts are larger than others and this is neither good nor bad.

On this day the effect is not achieved. On this day the eyes retain knowledge of the human form, knowledge of the ethics of the body, and they judge the body accordingly. She snaps back to reality. The hours she has spent cultivating an image of her body as a neutral force is lost. She remembers that her body is bad, and she accepts the responsibility of dueling out justice.

Too big the eyes tell her. And she knows that her mother and stepfather, her little sister and her friends at school, every acquaintance and stranger she encounters must cast the same judgment. Too big.

And big is bad.

She does not eat breakfast. She drinks one cup of coffee—black. Her step-father is at work, and her mother's still in bed. If her mother was not in bed, she might eat a small bowl of cereal—dry, no milk. The only other person in the kitchen is her little sister, Megan. Megan pours herself a big bowl of Lucky Charms and shuffles to the TV to watch America's Next Top model, and she probably cannot see much through the hair tangled over her face.

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Megan does not reply.

Tyra Banks is applauding the two plus sized models. One plus sized model steps before the panel of judges. Her body is round, but it is not round like a single sphere. Her body is a collection of semi-circles flowing into one another. Her body is water and her pale skin is clear as ice. She is a plus sized model, but she does not wear plus-sized clothing—she wears size ten.

The warm coffee pools in her stomach, and when she stands, she feels the liquid shifting and squishing inside her, filling the places where food must go and where too much food has been. She washes her cup, and she thinks about numbers. She thinks about the numbers on the scale and the numbers in her jeans. These numbers take shape in her mind. The

number on the scale is three digits of boulders. Pockmarked and grey, the boulders tumble through green fields and turn vegetation to ashes. The number in her jeans is sharp and precise: angles, long thorns, and shriveled poisonous leaves.

Coffee is 5 calories. Black coffee, no sugar. 5 is a good number. 5 is a delicate buttercup flower. 5 will grow today, and mutate into something horrific.

She steps onto the school bus and sits toward the front. She is too old for the school bus, but she does not have a car. To take her place at the back of the bus would be to usurp the role of hero in a children's game of make-believe.

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She should not have consumed coffee. She walks off the bus feeling the squish squish squishing in her belly, and she craves emptiness, her throat aches for this emptiness. Trapped in between fullness and hunger, she sits against her locker waiting for homeroom to start. The first day is always hardest.

"Hey, Maggie." Jared plops down beside her. She does not like Jared because he has the same name as her step-dad. She knows this would be resolved if she would call him "Dad" just like your sister but this she will not do. Jared is Jared and this effects the merit of all other Jareds.

"So I need a girl's opinion on something," he says, and she nods impassively.

He reaches into his pocket and something crinkles. "So you know Lauren Abramson?" he pulls a family size pack of M&Ms out of his pocket and everything surrounding the candy becomes haze.

"So I was talking to her and..."

M&Ms have about 150 calories per serving which doesn't sound bad but they have next to no fiber or protein.

"It's not like I really like her or anything..."

Almost entirely composed of fat and sugar.

"I thought she had a good sense of humor..."

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"not that offensive..."

She can smell it on his breath, and her mouth floods with saliva.

"I didn't say I did it. It was more of a what if?"

His pack probably has 4 servings—approximately 600 calories—and he’s eating all of them.

“So what do you think, Maggie?”

What if she ate a pack of M&Ms throughout the day? 600 isn’t terrible for a whole day.

“Maggie?”

“What?”

“Isn’t it funny that I jizzed on my brother’s door since he dumped his freaking orange juice on my head? Like wouldn’t that be funny? Like hypothetically?”

The word “jizz” pierces through the haze. “Ew. No!” She lurches away from him and scrambles to her feet.

“Whah?” he says around a mouth stuffed with chocolate. He chews twice and the crunching sounds like bones snapping. “Why?”

She opens her locker and exchanges two textbooks for one.

“Why?” he looks positively stricken. An overgrown wide-eyed child with shiny chocolate in the corners of his mouth and a thin, struggling mustache over his lip.

The bell rings, and she walks into her homeroom.

“Maggie!” he calls after her. “Sorry, Maggie! I’m sorry!”

The smell is gone. Her stomach is numb as if from Novocain, and she thinks about how, yes, it is absurdly funny that Jared jizzed on his brother’s door. To think that someone would invoke revulsion in another person deliberately using the self, deliberately using something so intimate as the results of masturbating. He willingly displayed evidence that he had been masturbating.

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Chairs scrape.

She had once seen a comedian depict a man jacking off. Men sit hunched over themselves, furiously pumping, twisting their faces and bodies. It’s a grotesque act, pleasurable only in the absence of a spectator. She wonders if Jared knew she would watch him masturbate in her mind. She wonders if he wanted Lauren Abramson to watch him masturbate in her mind. She wonders how he would feel if she told him how revolting he looked.

The bell rings and the day begins.

The hallway floods with bodies. The school technically has a dress code but this is not observed. Girls flounce by in short skirts, crop tops, dresses with holes, and shirts of mesh. The hallway is a runway and everyone knows how to strut except for her. She is onstage without her lines or blocking and woefully out of costume. Jeans that are not skinny and shirts that do not cling are not acceptable costume pieces.

The spot lights zoom in on her and follow her as she traverses the space. She feels her shirt brushing against her stomach. She feels her feet falling unevenly on the floor. She feels her jeans straining against her flesh. She feels eyes following her with the glowing hot spotlight, pricking against every inch of her skin—exposed and unexposed. And none of this is new. And her mind can juggle other things.

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She sees protruding collarbones and cheekbones and the thinnest kinds of arms. She sees thighs the size of arms and arms the size of wrists. She sees the clean ninety degree angle between the jaw and the neck, and she sees space between idle thighs.

And these are the things she wants, and these are the things that make hunger feel like thinness and thinness feel like beauty. By fourth period she imagines her body cannibalizing itself, and she fantasizes about a stomach that goes in instead of out.

Her naturally low blood pressure is an obstacle worse than hunger. By lunch block her vision fails when she stands and she occasionally feels the hallmarks of a fainting spell—again with the vision and the dissociation and the rapid crescendo of white noise—and she sits down in the hallway or the classroom until the feeling subsides. She knows that if she falls no one will catch her besides the ground and the ground has a rather rough embrace. Sometimes she likes the feeling of a bump on her head. If she presses with her fingers the sen-

sation can be addicting. It becomes a cure for anxiety about impending tests or late homework. But other times, she does not enjoy the throbbing headache. And she never appreciates the appearance of a lump which often appears in the center of her forehead.

And of course, if she faints, they will make her eat. Today is day one of her newest relapse, and calories are not beneficent even in small quantities.

Lunch time is the hardest. The smell of food invites conflicting voices into her head. The voices which tell her she does not deserve to eat. The voices which tell her she's beyond all hope and may as well behave like the fatty she is and consume, consume, consume. And the voice which is simply hungry and tells her just a little, eat just a little and we'll feel better. Please, please, we need food.

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“So I’m like, why do I even need an SAT tutor if I’m not going to college?” Karen shovels potato salad into her mouth from a small Tupperware.

Ben rolls his eyes. “You’re going to college, Karen.” Ben is eating curly fries with his bony fingers.

“I’m going straight to New York to perform on Broadway!” The potato salad is already gone. So much mayonnaise.

“She’s kidding,” says Polly.

“No, I’m not, Polly. I’m fucking talented.”

“Karen,” says Ben. “You’re not even the lead in Footloose.”

“Everyone knows freaking Lauren Abramson is terrible. They only chose her because she’s pretty. I mean have you guys heard her?” Karen proceeds to sing a few lines of “Almost Paradise” in a pinched, nasal tone. Polly laughs. Ben shrugs.

“She’s not that bad.” Ben licks the ketchup off his fingers. Ben eats french fries almost every day, but at Karen’s pool party last summer, all his ribs were visible.

“Maggie?” Ben says, and she looks up from the curly fries. “You want one?” He slides the greasy paper bowl containing two curly fries toward her.

She shakes her head. “I’m not really that hungry.”

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She looks down at the apple in her hand. It’s almost gone. She hadn’t meant to do that. 95 calories in a medium apple, but this apple is slightly larger...

“Here.” Polly drops a handful of quarters on the table. “Go buy something.”

“Thanks but—“

110 calories, maybe. Plus 5 from this morning...

“Polly, she’s obviously on a diet.” Karen nods sympathetically. “You wouldn’t understand.”

Polly’s cheeks flush pink. Polly has a beautiful body with wide hips and large breasts, and she has been eating salad for lunch every day for the past four and a half weeks whereas she used to eat burgers and ham and cheese sandwiches. Her salads contain ranch dressing and cheese, but not all people realize that this can add an extra 200 or more calories. But Polly is beautiful and Karen is beautiful, and Ben’s bones are enviable. She is the gross one.

Polly’s Styrofoam plate is still half full of salad, but she puts her fork down.

“I need to go on a diet too.” Karen’s lunch has already been consumed. Potato salad: 350 calories. Pretzels with hummus: 150 calories... “My mom’s on Atkins. Wanna go on Atkins with me?”

“My mom’s on the Paleo diet,” Ben says. “And it sucks.” He takes a bite out off his oozing cheeseburger. “There’s nothing to eat.”

“That’s the point of a diet,” Karen says.

“Nothing for me to eat,” Ben says around a mouthful of meat and fat and carbs.

“Shit!” Polly dives into her backpack. “We were going to study for the vocab quiz!”

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“That’s because you’re in the stupid class,” Karen snaps. “And I had too much rehearsal to study!”

“Ok. I know for a fact that the school play only rehearses two hours a day,” Ben says.

“Ugh,” Karen rolls her eyes. “I’m a method actress. I have to rehearse outside of rehearsal too!”

“Maggie, did you study?” Polly fumbles with her pink and blue flashcards.

“Yeah,” she says even though she did not. She usually knows all the words anyway.

“Fatuous,” Polly reads.

“Really... bad...?” Karen bites her lower lip.

She knows this word. She remembers glancing over it. Her mind flooded with meaning and the word glowed bright and green. Check she’d thought. But now all that remains is the feeling of the word, the ghost of the meaning. Ineffable.

“Isn’t it like silly or stupid?” Ben asks.

Polly flips the card over. “Yup!” she beams. “I knew that one too.”

complacently or inanely foolish : silly She should have known this.

A tap on her shoulder, and she jumps.

“Hey, Maggie?” Jared. “I just wanted to say I’m sorry.”

Karen wrinkles her nose. Polly has returned to her salad.

“Leave Maggie alone, man.” Ben unwraps a ball of tinfoil. Crumbling brownie inside. Anywhere from 200-500 calories. Maybe more. It looks like it was once rich and goopy. Her heart starts beating wrong.

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“Lauren Abramson?” Karen’s neck muscles flex. She pulls out a pack of gum. Polly extends her hand, and Karen gives her a piece before taking one herself. It is not sugar free gum.

“Yeah.” Jared shoves his hands into his pockets, and shifts onto his other foot. He glances around the table, and she knows he’s wondering if he can sit down. The booth could fit three to a side if they squished, but Ben isn’t giving her room to move over and Polly and Karen certainly won’t make room.

“Ubiquitous,” Polly reads the next card.

She can hear Ben’s chewing in her ear mixed with the chomp chomp on sugary gum and now that she thinks about it, Jared’s breath is still laced with M&Ms isn’t it? And the lunchroom is full of fries and ketchup and chocolate and grease.

“Ubiquitous,” Polly says again.

And she can smell the fat and the calories are airborne, penetrating her skin. The air is thin in her chest. She hopes no one can see her sweat or hear her heart beat.

“Uh... Maggie?” He adjusts his backpack. “I know there’s not much lunch time left, but can I sit with you?”

“Yeah...” she says. “Ben can you-“ Ben groans and shifts over.

Jared breaks out into a smile, Karen rolls her eyes, and Polly waves her flashcards around.

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Jared feels warm against her arm. “So... uh... what’s up?”

“Leave Maggie alone, dude,” Ben says.

The bell vibrates through her seat, and she jumps.

Jared slides out of the seat, she stands up, loses her vision for a moment, and grabs her backpack.

“Hey Maggie, do you want me to walk you to class?” Jared asks.

“I’m going to fail” Polly cries, gathering her flashcards.

Karen cracks her gum.

She pushes past all of them.

“Maggie, are you ok?” Jared asks, but she’s already gone.

Squish, squish, the water balloon rolls through the halls, and the spotlight is back on, and they’re all looking at her. They can see her fat, they whisper about her fat, they taunt her fat. She fantasizes about her run to the bathroom. She knows which bathroom is least frequently used, which stall feels most like home. It’s been six days since her fingers last prodded her throat, and some part of her doesn’t want to ruin this accomplishment, but she also doesn’t care at all.

An ocean of water and a few chunks of apple. That’s all that would come up. If anything.

Is 115 calories at 12:45 pm so bad?

Yes. Yes it is.

Because yesterday she consumed 1860 calories and at the time it felt okay, but now she knows, now she remembers that it’s not, and even if purging won’t save her, at least it will relieve this pressure, this building pressure inside her...

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Dorian Oberstein

“Maggie?” It’s Polly.

She stops, Polly skips up to meet her and laughs “You can’t run from the quiz! C’mom.” Polly grabs her wrist, and she follows. She has no choice. Discretion is everything. “I think Jared likes you” she whispers as they walk into

the classroom. Polly raises her eyebrows, but she cannot respond. The room is spinning too fast, and she needs to sit before she falls.

The quiz does not go well. The definitions simmer in an unreachable place in her skull, and sentences are impossible to formulate. But the urge passes, and her stomach remembers its emptiness.

She is no longer a water balloon. She is deflated and beautiful.

The first day of a relapse is always the hardest at school, but by the time the final bell rings, the voice which demands nourishment has been silenced.

Ben waits for her at her locker and offers her a ride home, and she is very happy to skip the ride on the bus. On the way home he talks about how gross Jared is and If he's bothering you I'll... but she is not listening. She is looking out the window and imagining her body running along side the car. A fanciful form of her body—fair and fine, it floats more than it runs. Beautiful, beautiful, light as air.

At dinner, Megan talks about trying out for the track team, and Jared is thrilled for her, he says. So very thrilled, and he immediately starts talking about his days playing football. Megan looks down at her plate, and prods the broccoli with her fork. Mom misunderstands Megan's doleful expression and offers her more chicken. More chicken for our beautiful star athlete. And some brownies after dinner, she promises.

Dorian Oberstein

Dorian Oberstein

Mom looks finally over at her plate, and she freezes with fear. "Good girl," she says, nodding to the food left on her eldest daughter's plate. She turns back to her husband, who is now laughing about his "fat-ass" new secretary.

She rises from the table and no one bats an eye.

The resolution of this meal is calculated, mechanical. The first time she felt compelled to get rid of her food, her sobs had been louder than the retches. But now, she knows how much salt to mix with the correct volume of lukewarm water. She turns on the shower, pulls her old toothbrush out of the back of the cabinet, and stands before the toilet.

She chugs the salt water, and her face reflexively scrunches tight. She pulls the cup away, and looks inside. Halfway there. Her heart is already accelerating. She chugs the rest with a little more effort.

The water fills her past her breaking point, and even when it's inside her she can feel the vile salt. The intense nausea builds. She picks up the toothbrush and hobbles to the toilet.

She always begins standing up. She clutches the counter with her left hand and poises the handle of the toothbrush at her lips. The nausea's still building, building. Her breaths are accelerating, and she waits for her opening like a gulf club poised to tap the ball toward the swinging pendulum. She grips the counter tighter.

Dorian Oberstein

Dorian Oberstein

You don't have to. You can still stop. Still stop. says another.

You disgusting piece of shit, you deserve all of this, all of this, all of this.

She latches onto that last mantra as she drives the toothbrush into the back of the throat. Tears stream down her face as she softly gags. She feels a fluttering sensation around her diaphragm—the same feeling she gets when she feels attraction or arousal. The adrenaline pulses through her, and she would describe the feeling as home.

Her stomach contracts, and she feels the impulse to pull her hand away, you deserve all of this, all of this, but she maintains the pressure, and the last contraction comes. In one swift move, she removes the brush from her mouth, grabs her hair with her left hand, and bends over at the waist. Gravity takes care of the rest as the vomit flies out of her mouth and splashes in the toilet. She spits, but her saliva is thick, so the string remains. She gropes for the toilet paper and wipes it off carefully. She takes a deep breath, looks with sickening pride at the brown mass in the toilet, and repeats the process.

You disgusting piece of shit, you disgusting piece of shit

She continues until her stomach contracts hard and only bile spills out. She knows the taste of bile. She knows when she is done. Her entire body aches, but she is pleased with the volume in the toilet.

She doesn't bother to wipe the tears from her face. She flushes the toilet and wipes off any splatters. She scrubs the toothbrush with hand soap in the sink before returning it to its place in the back of the cabinet.

Dorian Oberstein

Dorian Oberstein

In control.

She steps on the scale, and the number looms, hideous. She looks in the mirror and cannot muster dissociation. She sees flesh piled high and wide, and when she steps in the shower, she turns the water on hot and imagines this fat melting off her bones.

115 consumed. 250 calories consumed and then purged, approximately 125 calories of these were absorbed.

340 calories. She knows this is a good number, an admirable number, and she feels proud even though it scares her.

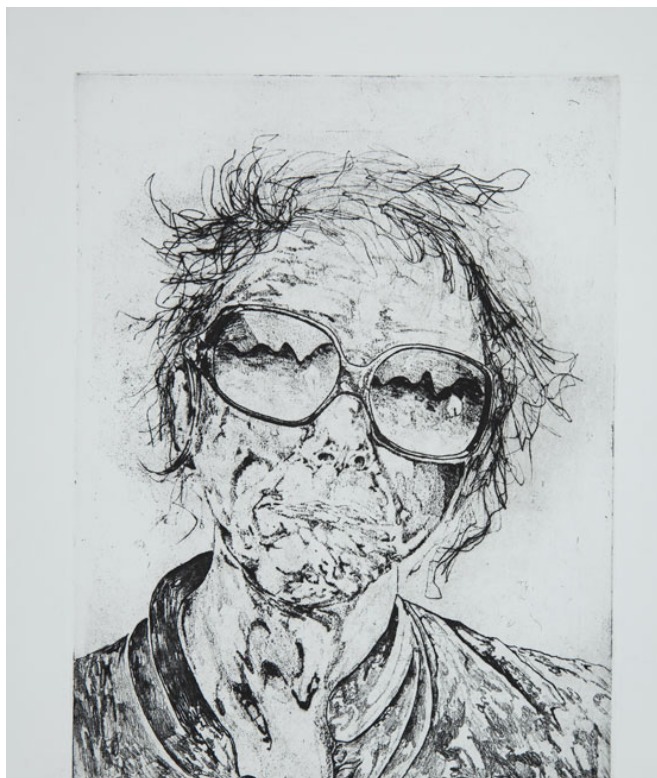
She goes to bed before doing her homework. Under the covers, she presses her hand over her chest, but the heart palpitations do not stop, and her throat aches, and she is terrified, terrified that she is sinking into these habits again. But the number on the scale remains behind her eyelids. Ten pounds higher than she was at her lightest, and if this is recovery then she doesn't want to recover.

She shivers into sleep.

In her sunglasses, Reflected a new desire,  
Lets leave this place now

*by: Suzanne Alward*

Hardground etching  
9"x12"  
2013



## say hi to dad

by: Esin Asan

when  
you breathe in her scent and your lungs tell you  
they've found home for the first time and  
they promise to quit smoking if  
they get to stay home  
it's something like that

but now  
you breathe in and that breeze  
travels from your nostrils to your eyelids  
condenses into a million different words  
that lump up in your throat  
it's something like that

I don't know how to fix my broken heart  
no, I don't have a boyfriend

I am not a grown up yet  
yes, I know how to deal with coffee stains

I can't take care of myself  
no, I've only had two cups of coffee today

I don't feel safe with anyone but you  
yeah, I guess I missed you too

when the lump untangled in the middle of the night  
traveled up my nose to my eyes and  
it started pouring

when the lump became five thousand hiccups  
it burnt holes in my diaphragm  
when my breath was hotter than five thousand suns  
it burnt holes in my nose  
when my soul had to run five thousand miles  
it burnt holes in my mind

I would wake up

get out of bed



leave my room



come to your room



get in your bed

I'd breathe in  
my lungs would tell me  
they've found home again and again

they'd promise to quit smoking if  
they got to stay home

(four thousand nine hundred and seventy two miles  
to be exact)

take me home now they don't understand me  
yeah I'll call again  
say hi to dad

## Imagine

*by: Caroline Olsen*

Oil Pastel Drawing  
18" x 18"

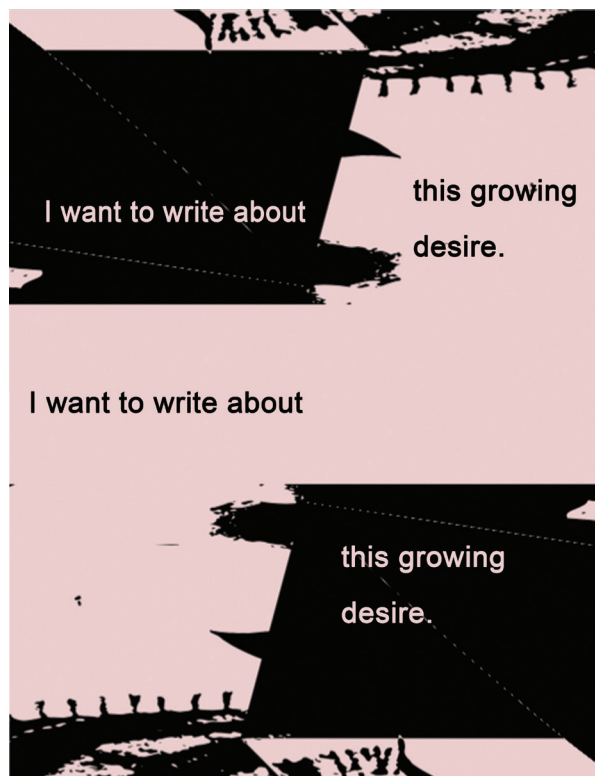




## This Growing Desire

*by: Christine Dunn*

Digital Art



## Window Watching

*by: Mary Higdon*

She watches from her window,  
down into her backyard.  
Her little sister laughs and runs and shrieks with the neighborhood kids.  
They jump and roll and chase and spin  
and their bare feet run across the soft, green grass.  
Their legs covered in Mickey Mouse Band-Aids and mosquito bites,  
they catch fireflies until they're called inside for dinner.

Sooner or later, her sister will lose the spark  
that keeps her outside, smiling and laughing, all day long.

The way she scrubs her hands after finger-painting will someday turn into  
scrubbing the black X off her hand in a grungy bar bathroom.

Her friend whispering and giggling in her ear  
to say that she kissed the new boy on the cheek  
will eventually become her best friend crying on a bathroom floor  
and showing her a pregnancy test that reads positive.

She mourns her little sister's wide-eyed innocence and happy spirit,  
because someday she'll learn to put her sole identity  
into how many boys she can hook up with during Homecoming weekend,  
and her definition of a good time will be  
based on if she can even remember it the next day.

So she watches from the window,  
and sees her old self in her sister's bright eyes  
as she laughs and runs and shrieks with the neighborhood kids.

## Mornin'

*by: Rachel Tyler*

Photogram



## My Mother Telling Me of Her Father's Death Over the Phone

*by: Alain Ginsberg*

I tell her that I  
have left my body behind in Baltimore.  
How there is a home waiting  
for me somewhere, and yet  
there is no way of me knowing  
how to get to it.

I vomit the world into the receiver,

it talks back the same way  
I speak to my mother the first time  
I become an echo of her father,  
and all echoes will fade in time,  
and all echoes will fade.

I vomit again into the receiver  
but nothing comes out,  
nothing exits me like an apology,  
how when we say hello to each other  
it is the only question we can offer  
to each other, how everything else  
must be taken, how you still sleep  
with an unlocked front door, searching  
for children to come home,  
long after they have made one  
out of the night sky.

Where do you hide a monster when you are no longer afraid of the dark?

Where do you hide when  
you know no one wants to  
find the you that vomits  
brick walls and bullet casings,  
bruised faces or bruised knees,  
(all choices cause some damage)  
begging for a language to be  
understood by anyone other than the toilet,  
and my mother tells me that  
her father has died anyways.

Where do you hide a monster  
when you are no longer afraid  
of the dark? Anywhere.

And my mouth is full  
of cigarette butts and my throat  
is coated in sawdust and splinters  
and my gut is a painting  
of my grandmother's now empty home,  
how the ghost of him exorcised,  
and I vomit the universe  
looking for my fears, hoping  
the scariest thing would always  
be the dark, and how  
I would never need a key  
to find my way back home.

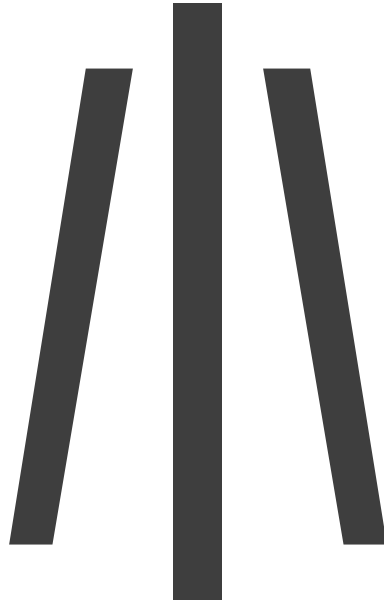
## Familial Archives

*by: Elizabeth Lent*

Digitally collaged image







Reviews

## Intimate Apparel

by: Caroline Cao

*Intimate Apparel*

*Directed by Sarah Becker*

*Theater Production-Drama*

*Ran Feb. 19-21, 24-28, 2015 at UH Quintero Theatre*

*UH School of Theater and Dance*

*Written by Lynn Nottage*

### Intimate Apparel, An Embroidery of Feminine Tribulations

Intimate Apparel is set in 1905 when women wore elaborate undergarments. The heroine of the play sews clothes, not the outside fashion dresses paraded in public, but the undergarments, sewing her own artistic touches, unseen by public, but loved by her female customers. They appeal to her clients because of its literal inner beauty, suggesting that in these times, women's expression of dignity and agency are confined to their inner selves.

The studious Ester is embodied by Shunte Lofton. Within her schedule, Esther confers with two clients, both from radically distinctive spectrum of social class. There's the snarky but passionate Mayme (Constance Swain, who starred as the feisty leading lady in UH production of *Fuente Ovejuna*), a prostitute who claims she aborted the ideals of romance until she falls into its trap. Then there's socialite Mrs. Van Buren (Meritt Weirick), unhappily married to a husband who guilt-trips her womanhood and lack of fertility. Not even an upper-class white woman has reaped much pros in the marriage.

Both Van Buren and Mayme converse with Esther about their undergarments, exhibiting the private intimacy of affectionate conversation between females. It's clear that the socialite and the prostitute are not just clients, but confidantes who give-and-receive secrets to and from Esther.

Esther may be a talented seamstress with a streak for independence, but she's also eager to escape spinsterhood. Then she receives a wooing letter from a wayward stranger George (Kenn Hopkins Jr), who writes lyrically about the intense working conditions of the Panama Canal. Seeing her ticket out of spinsterhood and a chance for romance, Esther replies—or technically, has Mrs. Van Buren do the romantic writing for her, since she is illiterate.

Josh Clark plays an affable Mr. Mark, the Jewish fabric storeowner, magnetized by Esther. I can count instances where love confessions are exchanged but never said explicitly. Because he and Esther interact face-to-face, we know that he should have served as the happy ending, but the reality of social and racial mores make it impossible. Through delicate cues, gestures, and small observations—a minuscule detail of a loose button underlines their bond—between Lofton and Clark, you can pinpoint every single time Mr. Marks and Esther's hearts break, but they have no idea how to transcend their social bounds to profess their feelings.

Director Sara Becker executes the action with marvelous restraint in deliberation to the source material. The play



served as an intelligent choice to perform due to the visceral wealth of Lynn Nottage's dialogue. It's notable that rarely do more than two characters appear on the same stage so that the audience may be immersed in the confidentiality of Esther's scenes.

Like in Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, when the first act that ends on a wedding, tragedy can only ensue in the next act. When a wedding happens, it's exposed as a precarious rite-of-passage for bride and groom rather than a blissful milestone.

The second act unmasks George from his romanticized letter persona. Throughout the first act, his words echo from the letter with a seductive chestnut masculinity in a so obvious "too good to be true" fashion that he functions more of a temptation rather than a fully realized human being. His letters are akin to self-indulgent flirtations on an online chatroom. Once he enters into Esther's life as her husband, he squanders her money to take shortcuts and pleasures in life. His irritations about his job drudgery are authentic in a time where an African-American man can barely scrounge for stable employment, but he can't put the grunt work into bettering himself. Lofton doesn't just inspire sympathy, but she also encourages esteem for her strength. Even in her most frantic destabilized moments, she strives to get it together as her marriage rips apart the threads of her empowerment and even her camaraderie with Van Buren and Mayme. We care so deeply for the woes of Esther that we pine so

much for the wish-filling happy ending. At the end of the play, Becker predominantly aims for a downer interpretation. We trust that Esther is resilient enough to re-weave her life, but the price is devastating and reparation is stitch-by-stitch. But the real tragedy isn't the bastard of her husband or even the separation from her soul mate Mr. Marks. The tragedy is the loss of the female companions she could open up to.

## The Other Side

by: *LeeAnne Carlson*

Roberto Minervini never expected to find himself living in Texas. If he had envisioned living in the States at all, his imagination had not taken him beyond New York City, but marriage to a Texan brought him to Houston and a love he never imagined; a love for the American South, and her people. Minervini now explores the people of the land he has grown to love through the camera lens, and his often gritty slices of life have found an appreciative audience in, of all places, his native Italy, as his fan base spreads across Europe.

Beginning with his “Texas Trilogy,” Minervini’s style has evolved from more traditionally scripted films to films that skirt the boundary between documentary and fiction. His goal is to get to know the diverse populations of Texas, and now, Louisiana, and he does so in somewhat unorthodox means. Rather than hiring trained actors and working from a script, Minervini simply moves among the people that he is filming. He becomes familiar with their lives and films these lives day in and day out for months at a time. While he may begin with a specific concept that he wishes to explore, and some scenes may be directed to achieve certain effects, the reality is that the majority of his filming is simply a process of collecting; collecting images, phrases, and experiences. This collection is then shaped to explore certain essential truths and beliefs. Minervini never outright challenges the beliefs of either his subjects or his audience, instead, he lets the human experience speak for itself on the screen and allows viewers to draw their own conclusions.

Minervini’s most recent film, *The Other Side* explores life among the truly disenfranchised, Methamphetamine addicts in rural Louisiana. As Minervini follows his subjects, Mark, and his partner Lisa, what might otherwise have been a purely depressing look into a life of addiction becomes a touching portrayal of a man seeking to care for his family through the only means that he has at his disposal, providing them with the drugs upon which they depend. By filming within the community for months, Minervini has access to the most intimate and intense experiences. We see a pregnant woman taking meth, then going to work as a topless dancer in order to earn the money to buy more meth. We see Mark alternately supplying the drug to those who are addicted, while exhorting his younger family members to study hard so that they become not trapped in the same lifestyle. The scene where Mark comforts his dying grandmother is real, not acted, as is his confession to Lisa that when his grandmother dies he intends to turn himself in, for he knows that in prison he will be forced to “go cold turkey,” and he knows that this is the only way he will break his addiction. These scenes are touching, but they are made infinitely more powerful by the realization that these are not scripted lines, but private discussions between family members that we are unexpectedly allowed to witness. By capturing such intimate moments, Minervini challenges many of the presuppositions that the audience may have regarding the drug addicted, exposing the public’s

misperceptions that those on Meth care only for the drug. When Mark discusses what he appreciates about staying out of prison, he does not reference access to his drug; instead, he says that he likes to work, shower, and bathe. During a scene filmed at the family Christmas celebration, the family members share their wish that hunger and homelessness would be ended, as well as that others could know the love of family such as they experience.

The Other Side was in competition at the Cannes Film Festival, the second of MInervini's films to premiere at the festival. After he returned from France, I was able to interview the filmmaker about "The Other Side" and how he approaches his craft.

Q: This film was shot in similar fashion to your previous film, "Stop the Pounding Heart" in that you to a large degree move within the community that you are filming. Did you have any issues becoming accepted, trusted enough that the protagonists are able to act naturally?

A: Part of the cycle of methamphetamine addiction is a period of paranoia. We actually became able to predict when these periods would be and usually did not shoot during those times. Beyond that, there is a narcissism in every person, people want their stories told, and this works in my favor. When I film, I actually give them the opportunity to be beautiful.

Q: Beyond being accepted by the people that you are filming, were you concerned that you might run into trouble, legally, by essentially living in a community of drug users?

A: We actually went to the police beforehand. We told them what we would be doing. The fact that the people of the community are using is no surprise, it is generally known, and the police do not regularly feel the need to canvass the area because, as both the protagonists and the police told me, essentially they are trapped there. As paroled felons, it is not as if they can legally leave, and they do not have the resources to leave if they desired to. Plus there is the fact that they are committed, in their way, to their family that lives there, the bedridden grandmother, the children.

Q: In "Stop the Pounding Heart," the last film of your "Texas Trilogy," you filmed a live human birth. In "The Other Side" you filmed Mark and Lisa, the protagonists actually having sex. Is this simply to shock the audience?

A: Actually part of why I do this is to challenge my own inhibitions, to get at what is important to the protagonist. In another scene, we filmed Mark crying. This was difficult for him. He felt weak by being exposed in such a way, while it turned out that getting naked for the camera was actually empowering.

Q: Your films are not scripted, but they are occasionally directed, in which you may indicate the type of conversation

that you would like to film. How much of the scene where Mark tells Lisa that he desires to return to prison was crafted by you?

A: None. It was actually the last scene that we filmed. Mark was clearly preoccupied, when we asked why, he told us that he needed to have an important conversation with Lisa. We asked if we could film it, seeing the degree of emotion that Mark was exhibiting. He allowed us to film what was the moment that he actually shared his heart with Lisa. She was unprepared, and it shows by her response. It was a powerful moment.

Q: One more question, now that you have “struck it big”, how has your artistic vision changed or been influenced by having access to outside funding?

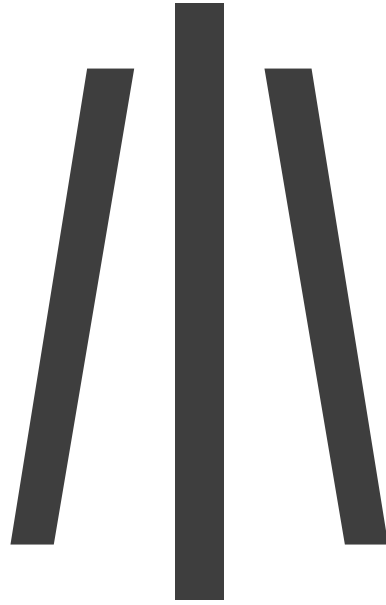
A: My artistic vision hasn't changed, for I am still focused on reality-based, socioculturally relevant issues, and on telling the stories of people and places from the part of the US that I call home (the South). However, I have to admit that, now that I am fairly “relevant” as a filmmaker in the international scene, it takes a lot of determination to keep my vision intact. More players are involved in my productions, and all of them have their own interests and goals. Hence, it is key to be surrounded by the right people. And that ties into the second part of the question: investors/funding sources. In order to preserve my artistic freedom, I have made the choice to work only with European investors. Since funds come mostly from public institutions, their intent is to promote the arts, and authorship. They finance the auteur before the film project. In America, investors and producer focus

more on the end result (return on investment) than on the artistic value and relevance of the film project. Their vision is predominantly commercial. Hence, to work with a US investor is like asking a loan shark to support you financially. I am not remotely interested in that. I am an auteur, and I consider my films to be pieces of art, not selling goods.









Contributors

### Suzanne Alward - art

Suzanne was raised without structures, borders, or curriculum; a hands on learning environment, where experience equals education. “Unschooling”. Having this unique upbringing granted her with an eagerness and curiosity that sparks her drive.

Growing up on the Central Coast of California, Suzanne’s aesthetic is informed by her natural surroundings. Themes of growth, wilderness, and decay can be found in her work. She attended her local community college, Cuesta College, and received her transfer associates. Versed in sculpture, painting, and writing Suzanne is able to illustrate her perspective in many ways. She is currently an undergrad at Rhode Island School of Design.

### Esin Asan - poetry

Esin, or Essie, is a sophomore English + Psychology major at Vassar College, originally from Istanbul, Turkey. She drinks too much coffee and is in the process of transitioning to tea instead. She writes, sometimes. She has recently found the courage to share her words with the world. She is a Politics co-editor of Boilerplate Magazine, in which her poetry has been published. Vassar Student Review has featured her work as well.

### Caroline Cao - reviews

Caroline M. Cao, though Florida-born, considers herself a full-Houstonian spiritually. In her spare time, she would conjure ideas, document them, and process them into stories or open mic performances... or relax by staring at the ceiling as a remedy for writer’s block. During her years at the University of Houston, she was a devoted staff writer of The Cougar Opinion and Cooglif Life & Arts magazine and has written movie and theater reviews. She has done additional reviews for Glass

Mountain and her Wordpress. She served the UH Sigma Tau Delta English Honor Society as a Historian officer, rousing her members into writing. She is a current TV/ Movie reviewer for OutLoudCulture.

### Wendy Cleveland - poetry

Wendy Cleveland is a retired English teacher from upstate New York who moved to the South where she attended the Sewanee Writers’ Conference and is presently a member of the Alabama Writers’ Forum. Her poems have appeared in Yankee Magazine, Persimmon Tree, Red Rock Review, and the anthology Chinaberries & Crows. Her first collection of poems, Blue Ford, will be published in the fall of 2016 by Solomon & George.

### Taylor Cox - art

Taylor Cox is a visual artist born and working in Houston, Texas. She is receiving her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Photography/Digital Media from the School of Art at the University of Houston. Mainly working with found materials, her images challenge differing identity stereotypes in American society through the use of collaged scenes. Her work explores ideas of materialism and commercialism and how that affects ones sense of self. Her work has been shown in various group shows around Houston; at the Blaffer Art Museum, The Mariago Collective, Hardy & Nance Studios. She is featured on Roologic Records Arts Walk as the Artist of the Month for March.

### William Crawford - art/nonfiction

William C. Crawford is a writer & photographer living in Winston-Salem, NC. He was a combat photojournalist in Vietnam. He later enjoyed a long career in social work. Crawdaddy also taught at UNC Chapel Hill. He photographs the trite, trivial, and the mundane. Crawford developed the forensic foraging technique of photography with his colleague,



Sydney lensman, Jim Provencher.

#### David Delgado - art

David Delgado is a UH BFA Sculpture Alumni, previously published in *Glass Mountain Spring 2015*. Other publications include *The Aletheia 2014 Cover Art* and *The Daily Cougar, Opinion Column 2011-2014*. Born into a Spanish speaking household and then introduced to English in his school years, he enjoyed the idea of languages merging to form a better comprehension of the ambient world. This is applied to the visual language in his artwork, using imagery derived from intangible dreams and mundane items of life.

#### Sheila Dong - poetry

Sheila Dong is a student at the University of Arizona in Tucson, AZ. They are double-majoring in Creative Writing and Psychology. Their work has appeared in *Words Dance*, *Scribendi*, and *Collision Literary Magazine*. Besides writing, Sheila enjoys dancing, cooking, using singular third-person gender-neutral pronouns, and collecting stories about people who have died unusual deaths.

#### Christine Dunn - art

Christine Dunn draws much of her inspiration from her experiences growing up in Houston, Texas. The exploration of the art scene in Houston led her to further pursue a career in art in Austin, where she is currently working on a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Studio Art at the University of Texas. Her interests are reflected through the simplification of forms in 3-dimensional as well as digital art. The piece submitted is created digitally.

#### Alain Ginsberg - poetry

Alain Ginsberg is an agender writer and performer from Baltimore City, MD whose work focuses on narratives of gender,

sexuality, and trauma. They've been published or are forthcoming by *Black Heart Magazine*, *Words Dance*, *The Beltway Quarterly*, and elsewhere, as well as having performed across the northeast, northwest, and parts of Canada. Outside of poetry Alain casts curses through dance and collects rocks.

#### Meredith Herndon - poetry

Meredith Herndon hails from the East Coast—land of bluegrass and home of the crabs. Her work has been published in *Copper Nickel* and *The Walrus*. She is currently pursuing a seemingly endless undergraduate degree in Creative Writing at University of Colorado in Denver.

#### Mary Higdon - poetry

Mary Higdon is a junior at the University of Houston. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri and moved to Houston at the age of fifteen. She has always had a passion for writing, and she especially loves writing poetry. In the future, she hopes to work at a publishing company and eventually publish her own novel.

#### Nickolai Lanier - art

Nickolai Lanier is a senior at the University of North Texas studying for his B.F.A. in Drawing and Painting. He seeks to create playfully intelligent work, viewing his workings as visual experiments that deal with his own identity, humanity's place in the Kosmos, and with ideas of faith colliding with ideas of the contemporary world. His art has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions across north Texas. The works have been published online by *ArtSlant.com* and in the *North Texas Review*.

#### Rachel Lee - fiction

Rachel is a creative writing major at the University of Houston, with an emphasis in fiction. Having pulled a love of

reading and storytelling from her family, it seemed a natural course to pursue writing. She won an honorable mention award for the 2015 provost writing competition. She plans to continue writing fiction, as it is one of the greatest joys in her life other than her fiancé, her chocolate Labrador, and her surrounding loved ones.

#### Elizabeth Lent - art

Elizabeth Lent is a writer, photographer and plant forager from Fairbanks, Alaska. She is currently studying writing at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work often deals with themes of nature and mythology, which explore human interactions and connections with the land. Elizabeth has been previously published in *Glass Mountain*, as well as *Polaris*, the annual undergraduate journal of arts and literature at Ohio Northern University, and *MOUTH*, the Art Institute's undergraduate writing publication. "Familial Archives" is a series of digitally collaged images that utilize family photographs.

#### Kasy Long - poetry

Kasy Long is a junior creative writing student with a minor in literature at Ohio Northern University. She is the current Production Manager for Ohio Northern's undergraduate literary magazine, "Polaris Literary Magazine." She has had fiction published in "Polaris Literature," and has a forthcoming creative nonfiction piece set to be published in "Polaris Literary Magazine." She also has a forthcoming poem set to be published in "The Sucarnochee Review." An Indiana girl with Ohio as a second home, Kasy prefers black-and-white television and film, particularly "I Love Lucy."

#### Urias Merino - art

Urias Merino, a 23 year old undergraduate art student at the University of Houston. Currently on his senior year at UH graduating in May 2016 with his Bachelors of Art with an

Art History minor. Has worked with many mediums such as, painting, ink, cut paper, digital art, mixed media, and print-making. This would be the first time submitting art work to be published. Will be submitting chine-colle origami paper on monoprints.

#### Dorian Oberstein - fiction

Dorian Oberstein is a senior English major/Education minor at Vassar College. Her work has also appeared in *Diverse Voices Quarterly*. In the future, she plans to pursue a career as a high school English teacher and continue writing fiction.

#### Caroline Olsen - art

Caroline Olsen is a senior at ROSS S. Sterling High School and has been in the art program for three years now. She loves painting and drawing in pastels. She plans on making art for the rest of her life and study abroad.

#### Rachel Tyler - art

Rachel Tyler is a sophomore studio art major at the University of Texas at Austin. Her work focuses on the human figure and identity, and has been published in the 2013 and 2014 volumes of the Martin High School literary magazine, *The Coup*. "Mornin'" is a photogram.

Need bios for Caroline, Beau, LeeAnne, and the other guy.

## My Father's Helper

*by: Nikolai Lanier*

(Cover Art)  
Acrylic and bubble wrap on panel



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