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The Laureate, 12th Edition (2013)

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THE LA
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LEE HONORS COLLEGE

12TH EDITION



THE LA
URE
ATE

2013

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The twelfth anniversary edition of *The Laureate* is made possible by the generosity of the Lee Honors College External Advisory Board.

Mission Statement

The Laureate's mission is to provide undergraduate students at Western Michigan University a place in which to publish their works of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and other creative works. *The Laureate* strives to be a professional and engaging journal that appeals to all.

Editor's Note

This year commemorates the twelfth year of *The Laureate's* presence at Western Michigan University. *The Laureate* exclusively publishes undergraduate pieces and is the only of its kind on campus. Eclectic and innovative in nature, the journal seeks to give Western's most gifted writers and artists an opportunity to exhibit their work professionally.

In this year's *Laureate*, the collective consciousness of Western's talent shines through via the selected works. In the commencement of the editing process, it was evident that many of the written and artistic works were speaking to each other. The celestial design theme serves to compliment the dreamy, space-like flow of the students' work. The contributors to the content are composed of cosmonauts drifting through the human experience seeking to share their journeys with an audience in search of universality.

The Laureate staff acted as ground control, harvesting and organizing the creative energy of Western's ingenious cast. Myself and my three ambitious editing assistants: Tom Smith, Megan Schwark, and Allison Lee, were accountable for the gleaning, editing, and arrangement of the submitted works. Two design students, Derek Anaeme and Erika Jensen, led by Chris Fox and Paul Sizer at the Gwen Frostic School of Art, were responsible for conceiving the design. *The Laureate's* purpose is to showcase the mastery of written and visual art among undergraduate students, but this journal wouldn't be possible without the support from the extended staff. First, much thanks to faculty editor Becky Cooper for her keen eye for editing and her unceasing exhilaration for this project.

Also, I thank Dr. Andreadis, dean of The Lee Honors College for his much-appreciated insight. I would also like to extend a thanks to Western Michigan University, The Lee Honors College, The Design Center at the Frostic School of Art, and the LHC External Advisory Board, for without them, *The Laureate* would be no more than a yawning void.

Finally, I dedicate this year's *Laureate* to its authors, its staff, to the creative instructors of Western, to Kalamazoo, and to Muse herself. Without further hesitation, I eagerly present to you the 2013 edition of *The Laureate*. I hope that it finds a home in your heart as it has in mine.

Andrea Walker
Editor-in-Chief



Welcome to the Zoo

Jessie Fales



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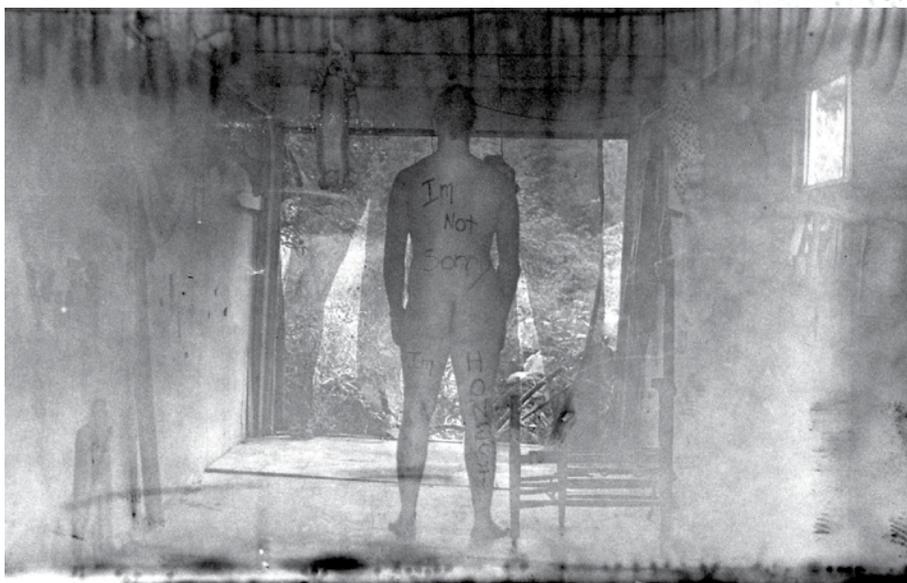
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I'm Not Sorry; I'm Honest #4

Casey L. Grooten

P

O

E

T

R

Y

A Mischief

I don't trust anybody who can't leave a fingerprint
in the place where lenses should be in this empty
frame. I don't trust my own feelings. They often
leave me stranded at the bus stop with my hands
in my pockets and humiliation in my gut. They are
always bossing me about and getting me in trouble.
Alone in my room with my coffee cup, I wonder what
I should've been working on in my night workshop
upstairs, what mischief I should have been carving,
what it might've looked like. Now, it travels along
in the flat land with all the things that should have
happened but never did—where there is only one
kind of tree to rest under and its branches are too
frail to climb. And this mischief I should have carved
is having a conversation with a pleasant rain that
never fell and a phone number I never got and the
World Peace that never came—and they are devising
a plot to get back to the real world in my head. They
read books about the fifth dimension and try to find
a wormhole out of that place and into the stone veracity
of time where I am leaving barbeques too early and
sleeping till five and obeying the law. It is one of those
days. I want to take all those things that should have
happened out of that terrible place of non-existence,
I want to spread them like peanut butter over my
sandwich world and give it to the President to eat,
I want to discuss in detail with him what exactly made
this peanut butter better than all the other peanut
butters. Then I want to have dandelion wine and a
fire in the country and an orgy. I, too, am trying to
get that mischief back here, preparing a doorway in
the future where it can walk into its own real shape
and size and I can shake hands with it, admire its
true form. My desire, my apathy, the Northern winds,
the Southern winds, all swirling like a tornado around my
body, understanding what they can about each other.



Past Lives

One window bursting with light hangs in the town's wartime blackout.
One orange cigarette dot during the new moon accompanies the rhythm
of feet and leaves. One shiny corner of a lottery ticket hits the streetlight.
One lonely wandering Titan spots it in the primordial refuse next to the
curb. One drain almost washes it down, one hand takes it up. House and
sky make one shade of murk. An upward look sees one homeless myth.
One word bends itself into shape like a smile forming, a finger beckoning,
a door mysteriously pushed ajar.

2

A pair of lovers wake inside each other. They can't remember the night
before. One makes coffee for the other. They sit on the edge of the bed
giving each other names and comparing genitals. They touch each other's
cool hair the way rivers polish Petoskey stones. They read each other's
minds and each thought gives the other a gift of raspberries. After two
years, they open the window and climb onto the breezy ledge to see what
else there is to do.

3

A trinity of sailors push past the beach of stones, almost immediately
regretting it. Sea monsters twist their limbs clockwise, unscrewing the
ship's cap, as the moon plummets like an orange into their mouths.
The three wash up, dry off, and march across the horizon finding others.
They trade songs for legends. They leap from one lover-crested
mountaintop to another, dropping seeds into valleys below, which grow
into cities. On a tundra further North than North, they sit around a fire
passing whiskey between themselves and saying goodbye.

4

Four buildings yawn and a rooster crows. Four buildings think of themselves as important; they can't imagine anything bigger. They hold their children close to their breasts. They birth their children exponentially and secure themselves to this land and each other. There's more to worry about than nature now. They're shifty-eyed. There's a collection of valuables and cows in a field. Straight lines shoot across the Earth like a map, and a tool is looked at as a weapon. Just in case.

5

Whenever autumn comes, someone else harvests the crops. Five crows unstring nation-flags from their churches. A crow wraps itself in France. We string up flags of our own: flannel shirts with one black spot or nothing at all. *I'm telling my President on you*, she whispers, *he's gonna send you back to Ethiopia*. The pale marigold of warm autumn wind, the swaying top of the fraying pine. Single deaths frolic or pile into each other. Two hibernating aubades hover around the woodstove with winter supplies. That old man over there? He's never missed a day in his life. Some things tend to themselves just fine. But they must be revisited, to remind us.

6

In this life, bones hum for flesh and flesh for blood. Six men on horseback ride across the country remorseful of nothing and full of bricks. A face sets itself into stone and that stone sets itself in a library. Nicknames are given. Gates open and mounds of sugar are poured out of dump trucks. There is something going on about a fire and some girls huddling together against my cold in blankets made of injuries. I'm sorry, it's difficult, there are reasons we don't remember those times or choose not to conjure them.

Seven artists paint nudes in a circle in Paris. Sharks the size of sharks swim down New Jersey streets, thickening against the sides of cars, fanning muscles through the city. The artists like marble slabs trace curving thighs down to kneecaps and back up again. The market collapses. Hair of beard. Canvas toned as muscles, loud, tall as Parthenon. Hair of armpit, hair of pubic region. Someone gives an order and someone fires a projectile. Outside the artistry, a rumbling is felt, three hundred miles away is their best guess. Antigone drips from her pages and pools on the floor. She slithers under the door. A spider drops on its string a quarter of an inch, a penis takes an unexpected leap against the breeze, an artist sheds a tear and she doesn't know why.

A narrative weaves its way into the ears of the creek. There's a small spot there where the boy buried his treasure, under the tree with the knot like a face. He knows nothing of romance but claims to have had eight girlfriends by the time he got to high school, he swears it. His friends shoot squirrels with bb guns, bury their bodies in a little graveyard in the forest, each grave marked with a stone, each stone marked with a day that will outlast the future. He reverently visits it sometimes because it is sacred, the most sacred place on earth, and he hopes to find a girl who adores what he adores.

Nine Theravada monks set themselves on fire and one doesn't. It's his job to tell the story. Everyone's talking about peace. His journey takes him across the Himalayans to the city, where he discovers everyone's already heard about it. Everyone's talking about consciousness. They're setting fires in the streets. Everyone's talking about the end of the world. It's an exciting age to die. The ghost of Mother Earth is rising from her body and giving birth all at once. Everyone's holding their breath. Everyone's trying to peek around the corner.

Ten children stand at the bus stop. It is the first day of kindergarten. Their parents wait anxiously in the cold with them. In each backpack is a single red folder. In each hand is the future struggling like a trout. In each fear is a parent or a dream of parents. Exhaust the thickness of autumn pulls up. Teachers begin the process of undoing everything that's being done. In each child is a book. In each book is a chance. In each chance is a hope. In each hope a violence is being committed. Around each act of violence, each child begs forgiveness, or presses her ear to the door of her parents' bedroom, driven mad with the need to be known and be wild.

John Withee

Rational Blues

When you drape your coat over your shoulders
as you step outside into the snow, rain, or sleet
all in one rather swift motion,
I'm reminded why I'm drawn to you
and how I want you to stick around
like ink-stains on my fingers—
something near impossible to wash off.
Kind of like the way mechanics get used to
oil on their hands and pants,
I want to get used to you.

Neil Shah

Hypernatremia

Ebb and flow,
her body arching
and her hair—the white
caps that spray you in whips
again. Taste her salt. Her feet
entwine yours and
the blankets, the sand.
The gulls, an echo of her cries,
sprawled and swerving. They
are an audience to these
tides that sweep as she has. And
her air, pungent, dynamic, leaving
you like menthol now, numbed
and shivering.

Still, the taste in your mouth.

And here is the danger, for the waves recede and the pools
are drying, this bed rough and granulated like so
many others. Only the salty foam that
you came here to taste lingers—her
last utterance to you. That final
flavor mingles with
your own. And though
the waves will return,
she is not with them.

You can see her in full technicolor,
flickering on a screen as you slow the film to singular
frames. Suspend the moment,
but how useful? A trigger for memory—
Nothing more.

So you drink the salty waves. You
will find her this way or another.

Brad Tanguay

Time As—

Everybody kept telling me the time
would come and the future mattered
and practical work plus practical minds speak louder
than the words I keep finding on sidewalks
between the alleys. In-between
the city and my childhood:
there is a place where people
compete with the life expectancy of trees,
catching up every day with each other's
other madness as another way of communicating with
the already dead. Slight mistakes in a story
are the stories. This can become a going-nowhere-fast
conversation
in which you become the exclusive member
of the century-long human
body: the trunk of a skeleton
shaping the way discs slice up
subconscious cravings and feed,
the spine reaching like a backward root.
Praise to the time-honored
establishments we end up in,
whether in metaphor for the mind
or in the naked reality
of it.

Nobody said anything enlightening or anything at all
about distance. I thought about time
the entirety of my life
without progress. I'm too young
to be saying that, but it rings true like
my apathetic internal alarm:
first a reminding and then
a screaming.

The incognito quickness
of technology crept over me like the absence of color.
I would have thought my time was right around the corner.
It was miles around hundreds of corners, and the walk
around dumpsters with another man's treasure in them
was where I learned.

Finding an alley you've never been down
in the city you know
was the same place we grew up in.

I kept walking until the distance between me and us
was seconds less than the assumption
would ever be. And the world got worse
when I left the place where my
name started disintegrating.

And of the news being thrown in the trash
and the recycling center I started in high school
out of pity for all that paper.
A stalled peace talk, the placement
of public information in the wrong place.
The tears of that time had no
time to well up. And
I could see how my best friend would turn his head
after his first tour in the box. It was his first time
back home, as if looking directly behind himself
without moving his feet or his arms.
It was highly uncharacteristic, but so were the shadows
on his arms and the ink making them darker
and I thought I knew why.
When he routinely told me
without flinching and over too many beers,
that he could keep a secret
and tell me at the same time.

Kenny Jakubas

The Solstice (on self-mutilation)

Your shame was still warm
when I found you,
steam still rising from between
your flayed breasts proudly,
like a decoration of war:
A badge of lace and bone
and from behind it you stared
that same membrane stare
radiating from your China-cup eyes
spackled with tea leaves—
decoding no futures,
spider-legging only.
The present, the tragedy,
this mid-winter filth
of the mildew lining the shoulders
of roads.
From your crumpled wings,
your river teeth begged me
to understand your muted truth—
collected and shivering,
to understand that
this is the sound that snow makes.

Garret Wenger

WHITE ASTERS

Impossible to know the way
beyond way—

that which comes as a freak
of light,

or darkness,
whichever comes naturally,

at cost, and at ease
like volcanic ash
with everywhere to go; or

the way of a first frost—

heads of tiny white asters
bow and break.

Allison M. Lee

Board Meeting

Jovially, Man, clad in a suit and tie, stepped off the top of his office building, briefcase in hand, negotiating civilly with Gravity on the way down.

Rebekah Wheeler

Totally Motionless

Mom told me I couldn't do it all.

Doctors told me to slow down.

I've slowed down—
for now.

I'm out of my head.
I'm in a new reality.

How did you see yourself when you were young?
How did you see the world?

My world was vast and blue and green.
a marble that makes miniature miracles.
I didn't know of all the different ways to die.

I wasn't afraid of the things I could see.
I was told monsters lived in the dark under the bed.

But that wasn't true, was it?

Monsters live inside of us,
in the cover creases where it's warm.
Under the blankets is no longer safe.

With the lights out, shapes blur and soften.
A shadow shrugs into corners
while a dream drifts down the hall

I feel safe with the lights out.

I can say that I've lived here,
that my feet touched this pavement.

But I've left no trace,
or purpose, or point.

What was the point?
There was something I wanted to say.

There was supposed to be a point to this.

Monica Vanstone

Simplicity

Don't look over your shoulder
plowing down the straight and narrow;
didn't your mom ever tell you
not to walk on the railroad tracks?

They say seeing is believing,
but I don't see the destination.
Bang pots and pans and politics,
stuff the walls with dollar bills—
Insulation for a noisy comfort.

Make it loud enough to keep
singing trees, hungry children
harp-playing rain, faith herself

safe in the gutter.

Ella Freudenberg

Wake Up

There are crying babies in pediatric wards with no mothers
and people don't have answers to basic questions
because they have all these great ideas in the middle of the night,
but forget to write them down.

People don't stop at crosswalks for pedestrians,
because they are in such a hurry to get somewhere—
somewhere that seems really important but really isn't.
No one realizes this.

No one goes anywhere important;
everyone fears something.
It's usually easier to fear something
than do something.

Little girls squeal with excitement
because everything that is bright and higher than they
is the moon.
But then their mothers say,
"No, that's just a street light."
And so little girls stop seeing magic everywhere they look.

Students fall asleep in class during lectures.
They want to change the world,

but don't think they can
so they don't even try.

No one holds the door open for little old ladies in polar bear
sweaters
at gas stations
because someone has his hands full of Bud Lite Cans
and it's 10:41 in the morning
on a Tuesday
in October.

A 40-something-year-old
mother of four wants to learn how to skateboard
not because she wants to skateboard,
but because she wants to be cool.
And so she falls on her face and embarrasses her kids.

The Kardashians are more famous than Vonnegut.
Someone needs to get a grip on society—
shake it fervently
and shout, "wake up!"

But sometimes,
like for the baby in the pediatric ward,
there is no answer.

Jessie Fales

No Signal

The police weren't courteous enough to shut off the TV,
leaving the girl on the bed, a stiff, foamy screen,
hued blue and with shadows adding weight
to the blood ponds below her half-moon eyes.

A relative adjusts her place,
illuminating, darkening, and illuminating again
the girl's face. For the younger sister
at the corner of the bed, it is a chthonic
drive-in movie projected on familiar flesh.

The mother wraps and unwraps her warm fingers
through the girl's hair as if she were Penelope,
but nothing can be undone and the girl has become
too far lost from home. For the Gods and the Winds
abandoned their blessing
as the arrow missed Achilles' heel
and lodged in the girl's arm.

She keeps weaving.

Brushing a wrist against the
hardened arm of the girl

incites the sister to keel back
from the realities of mortality.

Sister leaving sister. Sister leaving sister.
The still animated daughter slams the door
causing a quake.

Though the war has ended, the trip commences
leaving the lifeless—less of a hero
and more of a handmaid.

Andrea Walker

XIII Ways of Laughing

I.

She woke up laughing.
It must have been a funny
dream.

II.

Why didn't Alice
laugh
as she fell down
the rabbit hole?
Surely the
sensation
was more than
curious.

III.

Dogs laugh.
Yeah.

Common knowledge,
right?

Dogs are mammals.
Cows are mammals.

Who would eat
a laughing cow?

IV.

A baby is blowing
spit-bubbles
onto his mother's blouse.

He gurgles
happily,
pleased by the gentle
rocking of his cradle and
soft lullabies.

They slowly rotate

their way into the baby's
pruney ears, and
he giggles an
existential
laugh.

V.
The TV is shoving
unwarranted and unwanted
canned laughter into
bitter faces
unfazed by
Family Guy or Will and Grace.

VI.
Sometimes people
laugh
so as not to
cry.
The tone is tough
and brittle;
their voices weave an
angry welcome mat.

VII.
And sometimes they don't.

VIII.
If Mother laughs
hard enough,
she cries.
If Dad laughs

long enough,
his whole face turns
redredred
just like a
maladaptive chameleon.

IX.
The Swedish boy's
smile
is mischievously complex,
and his laugh is
subtle.
Still, it is laughter
nonetheless and must be
acknowledged as such.

X.
Fictional characters
make the
best
sounds. Take, for
example, Rumpelstiltskin.
He may or may not laugh
in his story, but is there
a soul alive who cannot
hear his malicious voice?
It rings
in every child's head,
along with this fair
warning:
hold your newborns close.

XI.

These markers are
making
a squeaky sound as they
trace their colors
across the whiteness.
The ink
sinks
into crisp paper
deeper
and deeper,
until, finally,
a discreet "LOL" rises
up from the background
and emerges front and center.

XII.

The hardest noise
to contain
is a girlish giggle
at a slumber party.
The more the reprimands,
the louder it gets.
"If I hear one more
peep out of you..."
"Peep."
Insanity ensues.

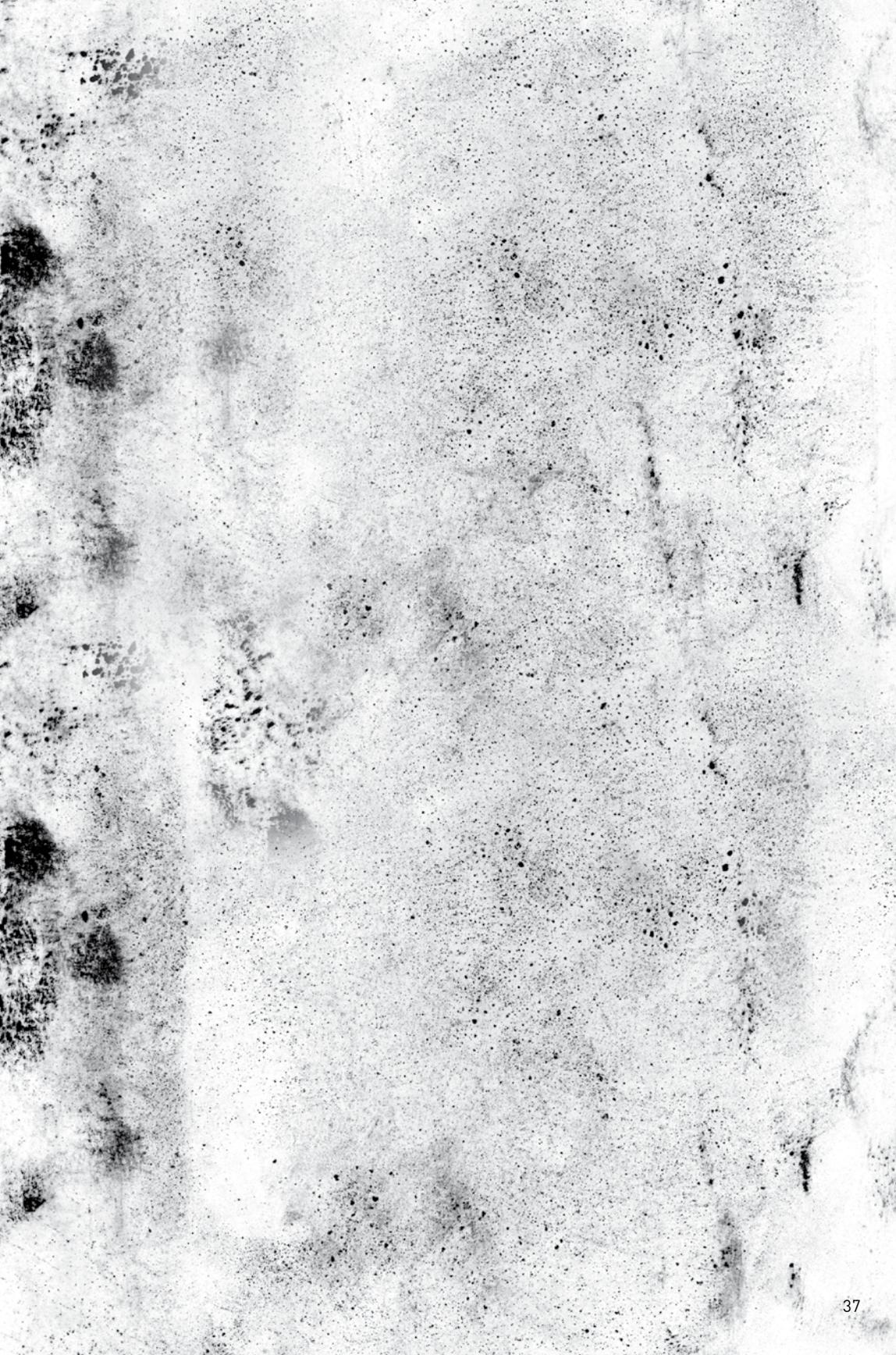
XIII.

It is a common
misconception
that the throat
exists for
breathing, swallowing, etc.
The truth is,
the throat is a

channel.

The throat—
your throat, my throat,
every throat—
is a channel for
laughter's reverberation
and for the feeling of tickles.
And more than that,
it is a tunnel through which
the oppressed
can speak.

Emily W. Recchia



What Happens to a Grandmother

A solitary naked
window drew in the sun. The late
morning heat stretched to the center
of the room, to the armchair where
she slouched in sunken suede
corners. Late Morning nudged
her kindly. She did need
a few things, and moreover, could not
afford to ignore
something so familiar—
the fresh, clean
smell of spring, or leaving
as she pleased. Panting past
her iron walker, she left
with only her
swollen feet to push on.

Whenever she moved, or lived, her mind
and body argued between some perception
of abilities and the obvious
feeling of pain—children
shouting, and she's a mother
of four with that instinct,
once-admired, to endure.

She was
halfway through
the road, too far,
visibly close,
when her legs
collapsed, closing
any argument—proof
against what
she thought she could...
Her nose broke
the fall. The concrete
knocked on her
stubborn head. Her
brain and body
cried blood
and she waited.

Ariel Gostovich

A Woman at the Store,

young but only just,
lingers in the home
décor section. She
studies the empty
space in front of the bath rugs,
her soft skin crinkled
in thought. Revealing
one expression, or stuck
idea, she wanders back
and forth across a short
section of the aisle, cramped
between invisible blocks.
She stays
possibly to compare
prices, or to choose
the best color to complement
the walls of her
bathroom meant to crack
and peel and be
shared with someone.
And her hand bends against
her cheek like a mother's
would. And just a child, she turns
her head, rests
those thin lips, bitten
and chapped, on
a warm palm. And
she lingers there.

Ariel Gostovich

Prosecute One; Kill the Other

I fold the last bit of daylight into the paper, porous, three men injecting Southern Comfort into their toes; they'll get their kicks when I undress like a shade. This is not who I want to be. Switch off the light, the television, and the computer screen. The young three professionals and me, the last time I was here, their friend raped me. An artists' studio, parquet floor, a high closet to grow weed in, walls of mahogany bookshelves left empty. Why do I only drink alcohol around strangers?

This destructive situation.

This diluted situation.

A one bedroom apartment, bare walls, cat piss stench, air conditioning buzz, fallen red hair in the shower drain, the broken mirror in the bedroom, midnights spent alone with a pack of cigarettes, inhaling the smoke, exhaling the grief, jacking off of the balcony, distancing myself in my mind, from my partner in the next room by piling up an altar of men to hide my reflected infidelity in his eyes. He's watching me now, through the window shades. He doesn't know I've had a scare from the gap-toothed painter on his back on his bed, legs in the air and he doesn't know my life might be all horse pills and thin blood from now on.

He would understand though.

Every night for the last nine months, I fried an egg so the medication wouldn't upset my red man's stomach. And we were both there when the doctor kept him for five minutes too long, and honestly, I never could learn to deal with it. My circumstances roared like a tidal wave over my head, shattering all my bones, obliterating all my philosophies.

It is too easy to grieve for the living.

Casey L. Grooten

The Love Letter as a Method of Academic Discourse

My favorite time of day during winter is when everything turns blue, and the light fumbles around like a wounded animal.

It is somewhere around 5 p.m. and it's when the mail trucks are spinning their wheels on the slick streets, laden with dead bouquets and small pieces of trees and the man with the suit handing out gifts hour to hour, and I don't find it strange that it gets me down when I can't stop looking out the window. The only thing that really keeps me happy is walking to someplace because that takes me to the next place that I'll be. When we were moving together, we were also moving laterally towards the future. When we sat still we were merely stumbling from the past, our wheels locked in motion.

August Smith

Arbitrary Names for Complex Emotions

I am under an umbrella of awesome doubt most of the time.
I avoid interacting with strangers because it makes me feel like
a forbidden word scribbled with gel-pen in a grade-school dictionary.
And these days we all feel like novel characters—not actual characters
but just the literal words printed in ink on a yellowing page.
Or perhaps we feel like the digital ghosts, haunting our friends and
shedding electronic tears as some vague approximation of emotion.
The Wikipedia page for “emotion” is almost as long as the page for
“Star Wars” and that might be because it’s much easier to write about
Darth Vader than about sadness. If we follow this logic then every
poem should be about Darth Vader. We have all felt an emotion that can
only be described as “Darth Vader”. It is something like a bittersweet
sadness that makes you breathe heavily.

August Smith

Goodbye Horses

Palomino loins, pallid naked genderfuck Jesus torso twists inferno-like to Q Lazzarus croons. The kimono eats and teases, a half-baked Gypsy Rose Lee. Such cheap vermilion Wet n' Wild lips. Such a waspy flyaway Victorian coiffure that speaks of fourth horsemen wielding handguns to repay you for the skin you borrowed. You wear it now, carelessly as those blue fishnets and that lopsided Sweet Transvestite grin. Would you fuck me? I'd fuck me. I'd fuck me so hard. Tim Curry couldn't do it better, but he sure as hell stayed away from the skin trade. You slither and shimmy, your own lazy shutter shade tipsy with too much Zima in its veins. The more you slither and shimmy, the more you lose to that chasm of a bleeding cut tattooed across your breast. A necklace, a makeup brush, a chicken bone. Like what the dirty now-waif you haven't crossed off your To-Do list uses to lure your bitchy poodle down that well she's trapped in. Precious! Precious! Come on, you little...You're a deaf Narcissus, all sleek and tucked away, skinny androgyny. Turn and curl and catch and burn like your case study set aflame. You, Icarus, your kimono sleeves spread out like wax wings, don't care. You're flying, flying with those horses with your rippling flanks. Catch them. Those horses...those pretty, pretty horses. You're lying, lying, lying over them...passing into the night, as the sky begins to fall. Their skin will never be your own, you bitch of Buchenwald, you sick pretty thing. They're lying over you.

Gloria Tannis-Coward





Of Terezín, of Spleen

This bird has two stones to kill:
This fortress wall and a hard heel smile.
Oh Terezín.
The crunch of gravel and this bird's clamor
Are one in the same
In the No Man's Land of Arbeit Macht Frei archways,
A cuff you'd equate to a kiss.

In this stark little hamlet of barbed-wire eyes
Refusing to lie prostrate for panzers after sixty-odd years,
How can you evade
The dementia of God, the fugue of David?
Its evidence reflecting back in rusted mirrors and porcelain sinks,
My quagmire mouth. It tattles on itself.
A million flickering yellow stars,
How I wonder where you are...
They say there was only one toilet here;
The smell's gone. The typhoid—the winner!—took (almost) all.
The name you signed ending in "-berg" fades on yellowed paper.
Your ribs are showing. Your teeth are jewelry. Your limbs are kindling
For Saxon jawlines with ague eyes.

Herr Doktor, your leather-gloved hands choke a nation's safe words.

I would've worn this Juden guilt like a stamp on my breast,
As my Baba almost did. But she evaded their Luftwaffe, crouching in
Yellow-red Macedonian fields, salvaging little pearls of onions
Under St. Nicholas' censer, both pit and pendulum.

The tarnished horseshoe hangs downturned in our garage back home.
We are a family of Salomes, forever dancing too close to the edge
But kept alive, thanks to the silver spoons we've yet to gag on.
(Thank God. There isn't Lebenstraum enough for quick-footed
Eastern Orthodox Salomes in the Master Race)—
Only room enough to cry at rivers later.

The cemetery smiles Auf Weidersehen,
Shattered stone teeth and red-rose gums.
The gravel mutes itself.
The bird has nothing left to say.

Gloria Tannis-Coward

Apologia Nadiae

Many things come from nothing,
and nothing comes of many things.
Fruitless deeds and deedless fruits
abound, unreasoned in their roots.
How can why and Why can how,
yet neither of them speak to Now.
Still, men before them bend their knees
and dig the roots of question-trees.
The wise men rant in silly games,
and question whether things have names,
while silly men on one foot stand
and wonder how it all began:
how the sun first came to be,
and how the stars, and, "What made me?"
and, "What makes Silver shine so bright?
And why do wolves howl at its sight?"
and, "What is bound by wedding rings
when idols soar on waxen wings?"

How can how and Why can why,
and men can guess with ear or eye.
But what use are means that yield no end?
And what is wisdom told by men?
The baker makes the bread, and the bread makes the baker;
yet he's no more real, nor any faker.
Gods mold men and men make gods,
and all their gods set men at odds,
then men at odds forget their gods,
while Poor feeds Rich and Rich breeds Poor,
who hungers for him evermore,
and anarchs breed monarchs,
and monarchs split the world in two,
and when it's all over it comes to nothing—
nothing but a bit of sham-rock goo.
Ask how it comes and ask how it goes;
the answer will be always: "As far as anyone knows."

Ian Hollenbaugh



Just a Pawn

Kathleen Kanan

F

I

C

T

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N

People Who Listen to Beirut

Grace Patt

Nell

The clock's wrought iron hands read 10:52 pm in the downtown square, its black and white face is lit by beams of light placed at its feet. The State Theater has just let out its 9 o'clock show, locals and tourists alike flood the sidewalk under the marquee. You can always spot a tourist from the brochure: "10 Things to Do in Downtown Traverse City" tucked in their back pocket—or if the family is wearing matching t-shirts. Their voices carry effortlessly, and we can just make out the darkened shapes from where we stand on the other side of the river. Tonight the canal running through Traverse City is still, except for the diminishing ripples from the spot where Riley canon-balled in ten minutes ago. My shorts are spattered with river water, but since it was Riley who did it, I don't really care. He has a change of clothes in his car. While we wait for him, Ian and Gina pull out a pack of cigarettes. I stand with them on the bridge hanging over the canal, even though I don't smoke.

Riley

It was a dare, and started with the idea of walking across downtown to jump off the pier. It was one of those romantic notions that everyone agrees on but never ends up doing, sort of like our idea to drop a watermelon off the roof of a building. So I jump in the river, mostly to show off to Nell. It was great. I got a running start off the wooden walkway lining the water and canon-balled in. The canal wasn't that cold, probably as warm as the bay, if not a bit warmer. Even under the water I hear Gina shriek. Upon surfacing, the 2x4's of the dock turned murky brown with my splash, and Nell had dark spots on her shorts where the water had hit. Ian stand behind her in an old band t-shirt, and Gina's bright sundress was already to the top of the stair boards that lead down to the dock.

"Guys come on! It's only a bit of water, it's not even cold! See?"
I splash a bit at Ian and tried to get Gina with my shower.

Nell just kept smiling and shaking her head.

"But seriously, come on in, it's actually a nice change from the humid air."

"No thanks, Riley. I do love swimming, but I think I'm going to have to pass on this one," Ian says in his monotone.

"Come on, stop acting silly, we got a party to get to. It's almost eleven and everyone will be wondering why we're not there!" Nell says, still trying to suppress a giggle.

"Oh fine, I guess we should, since it *is* at your house," I reply. There was no ladder, so I swim to the dock and hoist myself up. "I have a change of clothes in my car, just a second." The dry wood feels good beneath my bare feet as I climb the steps from the riverfront and towards my Subaru Outback in the parking lot.

Nell

"I'm so excited for your party. The last BPP of 2011, I'm going to miss this summer and your Back-Porch-Parties," Ian states to me before he takes another pull from his cigarette. "I wish you didn't have to leave, Nell. You're going to be so far away."

"I know," I say back, "I'll miss you guys a lot too. I promise I'll try to get back for a couple weekends other than holidays."

"You promise, right? I don't want you turning into one of those transfer snobs that talks of nothing but how great Northwestern University is!" Gina says.

"Oh come on! That's not me at all. I would never forget my friends, no matter where the four of us are in the world," I say, glancing after Riley as he disappears toward his car.

The wind off the bay is blowing inland now, and carries their smoke toward downtown Traverse City. The smell is so familiar and it makes me want to try a cigarette. Ian flicks his butt over the rail and it spirals downstream with the slow current. Riley appears on the other side of the bridge. I watch him saunter toward our trio. He's wearing khakis and a sweater vest. Instead of slouching like the rest of us, Riley stands straight as he leans over to watch the flow of the river. He doesn't smoke either.

Riley

They're smoking on the railing when I come back with my dry clothes—all except Nell, of course. I commandeer a spot next to Gina, just because it's the closest to the parking lot. I unfasten my brown satchel and my boney fingers fish out my iPod, a routine my mind is familiar with. I turn on Beirut, an indie band all of us ended up falling in love with a couple months ago. "Elephant Gun" is first in the shuffle: "*If I was young I'd flee this town.*" The artificial melody emitting from the small speakers seems to float on the air, thick with humidity.

"Are you guys ready to head to Nell's house now?"

Nell

Rounding the corner of my paint-chipped house, people are already sitting on my porch. The fluorescent light stationed above the screen door hangs and illuminates the tops of their heads. I've been hosting BPP's since our graduation from high school two years ago, so by now people just know what to do. Cheers emanate from the wooden patio when we appear around the corner. Everyone probably thinks, *Nell's here, now the party can really get started.*

Riley

Appropriately, Nell is the first to propose a toast: "To sleepless nights, my friends, and my new life. To summer!" she says. Everyone raises their shot glasses full of Captain, and in unison

everyone touches their lips to the sill of the glass and tips back their heads. The spiced rum is a familiar taste that defines the summer, and I quickly refill everyone's shot glass. "To Nell!"

"To Nell!" The BPP-goers shout back at me. Some are old high school friends, some are unfamiliar faces, and the other two are members of my foursome. Nell is the only person that doesn't answer my toast. She is blushing. When she blushes, her cheeks turn a light shade of rose, and the skin on the outer edge of her eyes smile.

Nell

It's just past two in the morning when I look at my watch. My vision is hazy with alcohol. We're playing Euchre at a table set up in the back yard. Around us, friends are playing beer pong, and a large crowd has gathered to see who will win, but I can only see Riley. We're on a team and Gina's with Ian. They're losing.

"I call hearts as trump." Riley's words seem to roll off his tongue. He winks at me from across the table, and I nod back. Our opponent's faces are unchanging, but from the corner of my eye I see Gina's eyebrow crease slightly. I lead with an ace of clubs, and we win the trick. The game continues until there's only one trick remaining. Both our scorecards say nine, both teams one hand away from a win.

"Take that!" Ian pronounces and lays down the left bower, a jack of diamonds. Gina does a thrusting motion, I smack my hand to my forehead and Riley remains motionless. The play goes clockwise around our circle. I only have a queen left. Gina lays some low, off-suit card. When it's Riley's turn the table goes silent and he wears a face of loss. *We don't have this*, I think.

"You know, you guys really have to learn strategy because," Riley's pointer finger flashes between us, "we just beat you!" He lays down the Jack of Hearts, the highest card in the game. My arms automatically fly up, he mirrors my movement, and we high-five across the small card table.

His fingers clasp around my petite hands and his skin is warm and smooth when it meets mine. The spaces between our fingers lock together. Riley's face erupts into a smile and his eyes gleam with a brightness that I've never noticed before. I go to pull away but he still firmly holds my hands, restricting me from leaning back into my lawn chair. A scent is blown my way from his swift movement. It smells like citrus and wind. I'm standing on my tiptoes in order to reach him and I almost lose my balance as I stretch over the small card table. Riley's cheeks are pink from the alcohol, or are they because he's blushing? We let go after a couple seconds, and sit back down to play another hand. He keeps looking at me with a coy smile and shrugs like he's saying *I don't know*. Next game we'll probably switch partners and Gina and I will be together, so I'll get to sit next to Riley.

Riley

Holding only two hearts, one of them being the Jack and the other a ten, I'm taking a chance on the hand when I call trump, but there's something about Nell's stare that tells me to pick it. Beirut's playing again. It's muted with the sounds of the party, and "Postcards From Italy" is playing: *And I would love to see that day, her day was mine*.

Nell leads with an ace of clubs; she knows what she's doing. Her coral nails wrap around the four cards as she lines up the edges on the table top. Her trick is sitting in a neat pile to her left. I keep the Jack hidden until Ian plays the left bower. My lips curl inward and I try to look as though we're going to lose, for the sake of suspense. Nell is panicking at this point. Her face palm says it all.

As I figured, Gina and Nell have nothing left. By this point Ian is doing a victory dance in his chair. I let out a tiny sigh and look across the table toward my partner. Slowly, without losing eye contact with Nell I say, "You know, you guys really have to learn strategy, because we just beat you!" I smack the Jack on top of the pile: priceless. Nell screams, and for a moment everyone standing in the vicinity of the card game stops to smile at her, although mine is the biggest.

We've won, and I reach towards her. High-fiving, I clutch her hands and try to stop myself from holding on too long. Nell's skin is tanner than mine. She smells of fresh water and sunscreen, a smell I have always loved, but have never told her. Her pupils have dilated to almost cover the deep chocolate of her iris. I read online once that the pupils dilate when you like someone. I wonder if it's true? I hope it's true.

"I'm going to run in the house. Does anyone want another beer?" Gina says.

"You're leaving the game? You just don't want to lose to us again," Nell yells back mockingly, a little too loud.

Gina rolls her eyes. She pushes in her chair and disappears toward the screen door into the small kitchen. Nell slowly gets up and follows her. Ian does too, and I now have no other desire than to follow Nell, wherever that may be.

Riding Parallels

Tyler Smith

In fifty-three years I have only seen one sunset. The one before it whispered quiet insurrection to me, hushing the words as it drowned over the horizon that I never needed to see a velvet and cold night again. I knew, from then on, I would never have a sleepless night. Never wake in the darkest moments of the smallest hours wondering why there was no longer anyone lying next to me to warm or comfort. Never wake with a sense of encroaching blackness or crushing silence. Never again would I cry for the sun to climb over the earth and drench me in its warm salvation.

I knew it was time to go because the world would be different in the sky. Safer. In the clouds, there were no drunk-driven cars that robbed men of their wives. No politicians willing to lie or cheat to get votes or money. In the sky, there were no war machines or war bonds or war widows.

The morning after my final night, I rose to a windy dawn and spent the day preparing with the paternal air gusting under my arms and feet, lifting and pushing me towards the blue maternal overhead. I went to work putting the finishing touches on the balloon, white patchwork with yellow stitching—an industrious combination of material that felt impenetrable. I weaved the final bits of wicker into my enormous basket, packed the stacks and stacks of dry food, the gallons of water, and my fishing rod, complete with balls of bread for bait. I brought my heaps of

empty journals, my maps, my spools of thread, my gramophone, and my Billie Holiday.

I left the earth and I headed west. It has been 7:48 in my evening ever since.

**

I have counted fifty-three New Year celebrations since my balloon began carrying me towards the horizon. I've chased the sun through silver clouds, through rain and snow, above pastures, over oceans, the sky on fire all along. I've sat atop my wicker home and watched the earth flow beneath me like a treadmill scene of houses and farms and trees and water. From miles above I've watched my round shadow thrown down on the landscapes below, a black circle worlds away but a constituent shadow of heartbeats, heartaches, and aspirations: an everything within a negative.

It used to be so beautiful and indescribably pristine—like sashaying through an oil-paint rendition of atmosphere, where the clouds would sizzle away while the children ran home to loving families, their tiny hands pointing at the color in the sky.

The balloon drifted, carrying its cargo over rooftops, past chimneys spiraling up tendrils of smoke, past the noises in the cities that grew.

The geese flew in perfect form over the water, calling at one another in some language or code that I could never understand, and I would try to imagine what they were saying, if the stories they told resembled anything we told each other. If their simple honks and squawks somehow captured the words we could never find. My bread-baited line would spool down, waiting for one of the birds to take hold, and they'd dance around the strange source of food, this new and interesting thing, before latching on. I would pull them up to me, their lost feathers spiraling down and away, falling to the sea as if to leave reminders of a world above.

I fished for the angels that would keep me alive.

**

I would sit for hours, staring into my maps and getting lost in their paper landscapes. I loved the way the world could be transcribed, taken out of three dimensions and put into two.

It was the ideal world: perfect and without turmoil. Did the first mapmakers see the world like this? A world, both tangible and impossible, existing on paper with ink lines and dotted boundaries, then opening like a canvas infinitum?

I was swimming miles deep in cartography when the wind snuck around me, pulling at the maps and threatening to send them flying away. And when I saw the woman for the first time, one almost did.

Time gets hazy in the sky, but I know I saw her before my first New Year. I remember Billie Holiday was crackling and popping about waiting until the real thing came along when the map went curling up, spinning my stomach to knots.

If that isn't love, it will have to do, until the real thing comes along...
Billie crooned.

My fingers closed around the map just as it flitted over the edge of the basket, and when I looked beyond my hand holding the tattered paper, I saw her green balloon heading towards me.

I'd gladly move the Earth for you, to prove my love, dear, and its worth for you...

She was staring at me with the same bewildered fascination when she smiled. It was forever ago, but I did too. She was heading east when she passed within thirty feet of me, waving a gloved hand that cut through the clouds and looking at me with fractured blue eyes under tightly curled golden hair.

I watched her hurdle towards the darkening sky, a green teardrop getting smaller and smaller until I couldn't see her at all. She was headed for the moon, a translucent white crisp in the sky that never quite broke through my atmosphere.

I'd sigh for you, I'd cry for you, I'd tear the stars from the sky for you...

I wouldn't see the woman in the green balloon again for a long time. Over the years, I only saw her a handful of times. Sometimes close enough that I thought I might be able to smell her perfume floating toward me on some invisible lilac spiral. Other times, I only saw her gliding along the edge of the world. And I believe she saw me too.

**

Fifty-three years is a long time. A lot of time for challenges, and a lot of time for things to change. Balloons don't last forever, not without maintenance and upkeep. I hadn't taken into account that when, on the few occasions I would need to stop for supplies, I would have to worry about all of the sharp edges the world still had.

The first time I landed, in a field of billowing ghosts near a Peruvian town just south of the Columbian border, a weathervane shaped like a rooster tore a patch of white from my balloon. With panic threatening to explode in my chest, I was sure I would lose my light. I cursed the weathervane that jutted from the roof of the anonymous brick monolith.

I rushed to gather all the flapping sheets I could manage off of the nearest clothesline. I threw them into my basket, and the fact that they were all a uniform gray escaped me. I managed to patch the hole before the sky inked over.

As I drifted up to the blue, I watched the weathervane lower through my field of vision. A small tear of white dancing from the end of it, situated atop a hospital.

I flew on, restless to make up for lost time and to continue chasing the horizon.

From then on, when the balloon tore, I patched it with the dark hospital sheets. Over time, the patches worked their way in until there was as much gray as there was white.

During those fifty-three years the world changed. I imagine there was a lot of political strife and a lot of people died in a lot of wars. People likely took years to starve to death and many were probably treated as though they weren't quite human. I know the air changed. Certain places became so clouded and thick with chemicals that, for a while, the sun was just a brilliant blur, a white nexus in the fog. Now the world is just so loud. I hear sirens and watch the flashing reds and blues. This is why I float ever on. It's a world of permanent night down below: a world that exists in either chaos or controlled violence.

After fifty-three years, the birds and I don't speak as much as we once did. Their formation no longer means Vindication or Virgil or Valhala. Now it only reads Vengeance, Violence, and Vanguard—an arrowhead made of living things.

**

For all these years I've floated along in my balloon that is now almost completely gray, and I ache. I hate that ache. I feel sunburned, like my body is permanently red followed by deep tan, followed by a pale, dead-bone white.

The world is not a beautiful thing anymore. I've lived for the sun and the birds and water, and it turns out they are just more of the same. The sun will burn you, the birds will ground you, and the water will fill your lungs.

There are times when I think I can see the stars trying to struggle through—an audience hidden in the ether, just out of sight, begging just to be seen or acknowledged. Part of me really does want to embrace that infinity. I tell the wind this. I tell it that, sometimes, I dream about lowering myself down until I'm only a few feet above the glassy water. I dream that I just hover there, waiting out the last few minutes until the world turns full dark and the sky fills so completely with stars that I breathe them in like dust floating in the sunlight.

It's when I think I can see the stars that my mind drifts towards the woman in the green balloon. That woman who must be a thousand years older because she chases her days down, tearing after each sunrise, blurring day into night into day, perhaps fearing the dark, but perhaps embracing it and maybe our scar-tissue maps tell the same story.

I crank up the battered old gramophone and put my Billie on, and behind me the gunmetal sky meets the dark water.

I'd lie for you, I'd cry for you...

In front of me the sun sits half submerged in the sea, reflecting itself off the shimmering horizon, looking complete and shimmering in full circle.

Until the real thing comes along...

The record crackles and I close my eyes, letting the reddish-black, the only dark I know, creep over me. The sea breeze whispers into my ear in a language I still don't understand, and I imagine it telling me a story about a woman in a still-green balloon. One who rides the same wind as I do.



Bellum Invictum

Christopher Miller

Sunshine bathes the green hills in a blinding white. Gray clouds slightly laden with rain pass overhead providing shade, promising refreshing rain. As the wind blows gently and the autumn leaves rustle, a distant alarm mixes with the sigh of the breeze. Yesterday was much like this. People solemnly picnicked in the park, watching with desperate earnest the rippling of the water upon the shore of the pond. People walked about the bright streets, picking out the most extravagant breads and wines to eat for their meals. People breathed in the recycled air at the Metro, going to work with a dazed look on their faces and heightened senses in their minds. Yesterday was much like today. Except today the park is empty. No one enjoys the beauty of the dandelions swaying in the breeze. Why? No one watches the water lap against the mud and grass shoreline. Why? Not even the squirrels, the birds, the rabbits are present to regard the beauty of nature man has allowed to survive. Why? The city is filled with the finest bread and wine, but nobody buys it. Why? The Metro is filled with masses of huddling people trying frantically to get, or stay in, a prison-like room with thick steel doors and high vaulted ceilings. Why? Outside, a distant alarm mixes with the sigh of the breeze.

The sun beams down upon this city, this pinnacle of man's modernity, while the bombs silently fall. They strike everywhere. Killing in the green park. Why? Killing in the gray streets. Why not?

Killing in the high vaulted room in the Metro. Why not me? They came and took life like some vengeful gods of war. If I were less civilized I would worship these fragments of sudden war as my redeemers, the ones who spared me. I would cast off memories of the Before and devote my life to the service of the Weapons in the present. I would shun the ghosts of the past that I see gliding down every alley. I would be their servant, lone and destitute, but an apostle nevertheless. But I am too civilized to be swayed by the power of these gods. I defy them, spit on them lying in the park, in the streets, in the Metro. I will never bow. I will never give up my ghosts.

I awake.

The room is dark. The darkness pushes me down deeper into confusion. The room is dark. I can definitely smell something coming from over there—from the walls. Those rats again. I can't keep them out. More rats on this planet than—of course. Hunger grabs my stomach. Grabs with stony fingers balled into a tight fist. The rats. They're so weak, so small. They can see here and I cannot. They are in control. I am an outsider. I am a pillager. Something...something... like a Viking, I am here for something. Not their fields—not their women—water. Thirst is the only thing that distracts me from the pain of the strong fingers twisting my empty stomach. I need water.

**

I walk to the smog green pool of stagnant water. I regard my face in the toxic mirror. A rigid face scarred with time and visions of horror. I peer closer. Past the wrinkled skin, past the radiation burnt ears. Past the patches of hair clinging to my scalp into the center of my eyes. Around this window to my soul, the once green iris is starting to take on yellowish tint like some jaundice. The Sickness. It is beginning to set. I have averted it (rather, put it off) before. The crisis nears. I need water.

They cannot live off this. How can I? The rats—they snicker at me as I fill my canteen. Emerald green eyes of their Assembly congregate to watch this decline of man. A joy runs through the crowd. The Emperor declares that the Enemy is in ruins. All praise is to be directed to the god of war. A holiday is declared. Two hundred slaves are massacred in glee. They celebrate their continued existence with death! Barbarians. The room is dark.

I leave quickly. The chants of the masses call for my head as a final sacrifice to the bloodthirsty, benevolent god that perpetuates their existence. Their poets sing dreadful dirges. Their craftsmen shape molten metal into elegant blades. Their politicians spit inciting rhetoric at the crowd who, waiting with starving ears, crave a reason to swing a sword with hands grown too idle. The room is dark.

I emerge from Hell through a manhole.

The streets are deserted. Below, the world thrives. Above, the world dies, and a letter from the emissary says the greedy Barbarian hordes grow every day at our border. Our?

“What am I saying?”

Our. Our. Mine.

Night falls suddenly over the sky like the last curtain of the show. That’s a good simile—the last curtain—I should write that down, but They won’t understand. There I go again—They. Every new day the weary actor (singular) wakes up to find that it was indeed not the last curtain—but tonight will be. And then it won’t—but tonight will be. And then it won’t—but tonight will...what the shit?

“What the shit?”

I heard a noise

Who’s there?

“Who’s there?”

I walk across the street towards the sound.

I crawl (relating to the speed at which I am walking. I am, in fact, not actually crawling) to the shadowy canyon between decrepit buildings. Who’s there?

“Who’s there?”

The anachronistic street signs shake their stiff, aging heads at me. Their eyes were watching me. Do you know something I don’t?

Hushed voice. “Do you know some—?”

I almost asked aloud. I almost asked aloud. I need to ask *somebody* aloud.

I look down the alley.

I wonder of which I should be more frightened: the alley from Before, or the alley now? Before now, in the Before, it was only immoral. After the Before, now, it is dark. The alley was dark. The alley is dark. The alley will be dark. Perhaps after I find the

sound, I will ask the street signs which was worse... I think I should very much like to be mugged right now. Hello?

"Hello?"

A man with a blue cap and suit jacket steps quickly into the light. He speaks into a phone—no, he yells into a phone. He does not meet my gaze. Passes through me. Subsequently stealing the warmth of my soul and giving fuel to my fear. He does not notice my mouth open in amazement. He yells about a lost sale and—he yells about a lost football game and—he yells about a failure of a friend to get him the right length of putter and—he yells about the sheer magnitude of the bills the shop is charging him for repairs to his car and—he yells about his kid's poor grades in school and—he yells about his steak dinner, ordered medium, served medium well and—I yell at him about his dying grandmother and—I yell at him about his wife's love now grown weary with his work. I yell at him about his son's antidepressant prescription and I yell at him about all the human beings that were around him and how they are so familiar, even if they are so strange. But he does not meet my gaze. He storms off down the street. The warmth of my soul trailing not far behind.

After the man in the suit, a man in a military uniform resolutely steps into the light. He looks into the distance. He does not meet my gaze. He walks with steps that used to be his, now directed by a faceless politician. He thinks with a mechanical purpose that used to be guided by patriotism's zest, like a father instructing his son how to throw a baseball. And that son becoming the star left fielder on his little league team. The wet air of the Saturday morning games. Hopes of victory superseded by the guarantee of warm praises of performance by his family after the game and, more importantly, pizza for dinner! But the more times the son plays, the less he thinks about congratulations and adoration from his family. No. His mind soon dwells only on moments suspended high on the shoulders of his victorious teammates, lifting him, their star, upon dirty hands into the bright heavens of true happiness. His father emphatically exalts him too. Never forgetting nose-fulls of pride and fresh spring mornings. Never forgetting how it was Before. The soldier is tired now. Tired of arduous treks here and there carrying survival on his

back and death in his hand. Tired of faces sneering hostility. Tired of psychologists and philosophers trying to define human nature. Tired of knowing human nature. Tired of being away from home. Tired of his son asking *When's Daddy gonna? When's Daddy gonna?* Tired of being the hero, weary like Odysseus—wearing like a man whose journey home hasn't even begun, weary like a man whose Penelope must fend off thoughts of sinking more than she must fend off suitors, weaving a beautiful tapestry of stoicism that she destroys every night just before falling asleep. Tired of the dusty midnight trips guided only by the dull green pulse of the GPS. Tired of being hurt. Tired of hurting. Tired of tired. He does not meet my gaze. And I fall to my knees.

The men pass me in my lamentations.

Another man comes crawling out of the maw of the alley (relating to the speed at which he is walking. He is, in fact, not actually crawling). He dangles, with limp arm, a canteen filled with water of a smog green luster. He walks, not with direction or purpose, but with the magnetic pull of instinct, his body seemingly non-compliant with the aching feet that drag him along. He stops. Looks me in the eyes, meets my gaze. His entire history encoded on the disks of his yellowing iris. A home, small and not paid off, but cheery. People everywhere. A car with a broken speedometer and terrible fuel economy, but functional. People everywhere. A wife, beauty's remnants waning behind the nebulous cloud of age, but loving. People everywhere. A job, days crawling by (literally, crawling) and becoming filled with craning necks glancing at clocks, but it pays the bills. People everywhere. Streets, overcrowded with people – those impregnable vaults of information, experience, emotion, deviation, hope, vice, triumph, possession, perception, reality... People everywhere. But what good is history if nothing is to be learned by it?

“What good is it?”

There's no lesson. No information. No experience. No emotion. No deviation. No hope. No triumph. No possession. No perception. Just Memory's ghosts.

Just reality.
Just survival.
Just Void.

The man looks at his doppelganger. His face a leaf, sitting slick on a wet branch. In the black distance a broken bomb shelter in the depths of the Metro crumbles. As toxic air floods the station, the sky thickened with black night. Just as the stage-hands were beginning to lower the curtain on the final act of the final show, just as they had done the night before, the man spoke.

“What is there to live for now?” he asks.

“Memory, and the water in your canteen,” he answers.

In the cover of the soupy toxicity of the night, the emperor Rodentus III leads his legions into the vast expanses of the vacant bomb shelter. The crimson banner of his god, Bellum Invictum, leads the way.



What Am I?

Jessie Fales

D

R

A

M

A

Paths

Robert Alexander Santana

CHARACTERS

Lala, a fifteen year old girl.

Javi, a fourteen year old boy.

SETTING

A clearing in the woods of Hispaniola Island, just a few hours before night fall.

SCENE 1

Lala and Javi rest before trying to leave the mountain.

Lala: Every second, a door closes somewhere in the world. Something or someone is separated from another space, another person, another situation, or reality becomes inaccessible by a threshold.

Javi: Would you dare to say every second?

Lala: Do you realize how many doors are in the world?

Javi: Closing?

Lala: How many doors are closing or not closing in the world?

Javi: I only know the doors that I have entered and left.

Lala: A lot of doors close smoothly, suddenly, by accident, mechanically, without intention.

Javi: How many?

Lala: I do not know. We should keep walking.

Javi: If you could walk without being heard, if indeed you became just a little story of my life after that storm, then I could accept that I don't exist, that I came to this forest a few hours ago and I got dragged away, deep in the woods, without complaint. I'm sure the others already noticed that I am not there.

Lala: People quickly accept that someone is absent and resume their lives. Or maybe, they think you walked away for a moment to be with yourself.

Javi: Let us pause for a few minutes. I need to rest. My back hurts.

Lala: It's strange that we haven't found our way.

Javi (Pulls out his cell and raises his hand, searching for a signal): This thing is not working.

Lala: Are you sure?

Javi: Not one signal bar. I know I shouldn't have turned away from the others. You said it was supposed to be easy, that we would find the blue waterfall and I would return before dinner.

Lala: Yes, that I promised you. But we can't find the right path to reach the waterfall. Trust me, I'll get you out of here.

Javi: This phone is the only thing that can help.

Lala: Really? Right now I just see it as useful as a brick. We have to find a way to guide us.

Javi (Looking at his cell): Oh no! This is serious, very serious.

Lala: What?

Javi: I'm running out of battery.

Lala: Forget about it and help me rebuild the events that led us here. I found you. I told you about the waterfall and we walked for about fifteen minutes.

Javi: I can't believe that you can track the time in that way. I wear my headphones and there is no force that can get me out of that world. The time just flies away.

Lala (Something catches her attention on the stage. She looks to her left):
Look at these beautiful flowers.

Javi: I'll take some.

Lala: I don't think so. I believe you shouldn't touch them.

Javi: What? It's okay if I take a flower. It's just one.

Lala: I have the impression that you could alter the normal course of things.

Javi: What do you mean?

Lala: I think they're in a specific arrangement, a kind of randomness, but not the concept that we have about it. In any case, this would be the randomness of nature that is always the most accurate.

Javi: Accurate? What do you mean? It's just a flower and it will stay so even if I take it. Just as the forest remains forest with more or less trees.

Lala: You have no respect for anything.

Javi: Well, for some reason we are superior. That justifies our desire to change things, to improve.

Lala: I do not think so.

Javi: Well, I do.

Lala: We can't think that nature did her part to create us and now cast us aside and let us live without her. We need her.

Javi: I see where you're going. Believe me or don't, but there are millions out there who will continue doing whatever they want.

Lala: Listen. (Pause.) This quiet, here, around us, this silence that covers us. Isn't it wonderful?

Javi: Silence leads to boredom.

Lala: Keep listening and pay attention to what is missing.

Javi (He pauses and tries to listen with his mouth open):
I can't hear anything.

Lala: Exactly. You don't hear anything. You don't hear the alert on your phone screaming that you have a new message or email. Isn't it wonderful?

Javi: It's not.

Lala: Whether you stay here or go back and be absorbed in the screen that illuminates your face for hours, you are alone. You're like an ant trapped in a raindrop. From your little liquid cell, you can see others, but only that. You resign yourself to meet death calmly.

Javi: That's not me. How can I be an ant? What do you mean?

Lala: That's stupid.

Javi: What is stupid?

Lala: Not to understand that real life is something else.

Javi: Real life?

Lala: Yes, what happens outside. What happens when you interact with your peers.

Javi: It is, I know that. But reality comes to me and I want to avoid it. It is curious what happened to me the other day. I was listening to music on my iPod while waiting for the metro. It was seven in the morning and as usual, many people were waiting on the platform. One woman in particular stood beside me. She looked sad. She caught my attention, and since I enjoy the habit of wanting to look people in the face, we made eye contact. Then she started talking. Her lips moved incessantly and she gesticulated nervously. A train stopped in front of us and we got in. She sat next to me and kept talking. I stared at her blank lips, which trembled more and more. As she spoke, I moved my head affirmatively each time she made a pause. She was crying, but I noticed that she was trying to control larger tears and struggled to not collapse. A few minutes later the metro stopped and the doors opened. She took my hand firmly and I could read in her face an expression of thanks. She left the train and stood in the middle of the station. I kept looking at her until the doors closed again. The car pulled away slowly, leaving the scene.

Lala: Can you tell me what the woman told you?

Javi: I don't know.

Lala: Don't know?

Javi: No. I never turned down the volume, so I did not hear anything.

Lala: I can't believe you.

Javi: You have to understand. I was afraid she was contagious. Sadness is spread from person to person like a virus.

Lala: Indifference is the only dangerous contagion in dealing with others. I could say that others are more alive than you.

Javi: Are you going to stick with that? (He gives a small whimper.) Coño! It hurts! My back! (He takes off his backpack with the help of Lala.)

Lala: Rest here for a while before continuing. What's in this bag that makes it so heavy?

Javi: Nothing. (Grabs the backpack from Lala's hands.)

Lala: All I know is that if we do not hurry, the night will fall soon.

Javi: Now that I think about it, I never understood your effort to defend nature. Explain it to me.

Lala: I know it and that's enough.

Javi: You should share it with me. Explain to me why you defend something that does nothing for you other than obstruct your way. You know how I got here?

Lala: I know as much as you know.

Javi: Really?

Lala: Almost as little as you.

Javi: What is that little part that you know that I don't?

Lala: The affront against nature is costly. Like that one small town by the foot of the mountains.

Javi: I know what you mean and I don't want to talk about it.

Lala: You should remember. You know how it happened. I guess something remains, some trace, a toy, a dish sunk into the mud.

Javi: Forget it. Do not mention it anymore.

Lala: But it's about me, it's about us. At least you survived.

Javi: I also fought for the others. I threw my hands in the air, in the water, looking for another hand that would hold mine, looking for your hands, but the force of the water was stronger.

Lala: But the force of water was greater than our will. Why build a village where a river once passed? Everyone knows that rivers always recover their paths. That night, for some reason, Grandma didn't want to go to sleep. Something kept her awake: a relentless throb that only caused a predicted misfortune. She stood in the doorway watching a steady rain that had begun earlier. The wind snatched the door from her hands and slammed it. The sky rumbled every second. Who could foresee what happened that night? When all of us reconciled to sleep, we heard a terrible sound as if the earth had split.

Javi: After a few seconds we saw no glimmer of light for the thunder.

Lala: There was no thunder. The explosion we heard was because the White River was dammed with enormous rocks and the growing rainfalls overflowed it. All the energy restrained for hours was

released in a few seconds. A large water snake approached blindly toward our town. Minutes later, everything was ruined. Everything was water and we struggled to survive, to grab something and not be swept away.

Javi: Nature was cruel with us.

Lala: Would you dare judge her?

Javi: She gives us misfortunes. She gives us misfortunes. Sowing the stories of regular people, who, if they survive, are heroes or are pitied.

Lala: She only recovered what belonged to her.

Javi: A stone is inanimate. A stone thrown ferociously to another person is no longer inanimate; the anger becomes solid, anger flying, anger breaking skulls. Nature used stones and the river to show us her anger.

Lala: You're alive.

Javi: If you could walk without being heard, I wouldn't dare to say that you're here. Days later, the town was invaded by volunteers, a multitude of good souls hungry for victims. I looked for you in every rubble pile.

Lala: You breathe.

Javi: Everyone asked me if I needed anything. I repeated the same thing until my lips became numb: My sister, I miss her a lot, please find her.

Lala: Keep moving forward.

Javi: I can't explain how I survived and what strength keeps me alive. I can't stop thinking about you.

Lala: The most important thing is to get out of here now. A door is almost closed at this time.

Javi: I'm cold. We should make a little campfire.

Lala: We must keep moving.

Javi: You're my only connection to what I really am. Oh sister! I am lonely without you.

Lala: I would be ashamed to admit that I don't even know what's keeping you here. You should go toward them.

Javi: I'm tired, but I'm starting to see things more clearly.

Lala: Otherwise, you may get lost forever.

Javi: We went to the mountain. I was supposed to stay together with the others, but I walked away for a moment. A few steps later, I saw you in a clearing of the mountain. Five years have passed, but I could recognize you in a second. I said your name and you turned to smile at me.

Lala: I approached you and asked if you wanted to see the blue waterfall.

Javi: You approached me and asked me if I wanted to see the most beautiful waterfall of this mountain. So I said yes, and I followed you with enthusiasm. I was happy and I couldn't tell you how glad I was to see you again.

Lala: But we did not see the waterfall.

Javi: That was your excuse for bringing me here.

Lala: Know why you're here?

Javi: I know. I guess I'm here because I need to change.

Lala: You are here because you have to change, to start looking at your environment. Recognize that while you are in your universe, everything around you is changing. If you really have changed, you must return.

Javi: Would you come with me?

Lala: I can't leave here.

Javi: Come, I'll take you to the city. We'll be always together.

Lala: I must stay here to take care of this.

Javi: All this can take care of itself. I'd be lost without you. I'm cold now and it will come with me: the always present cold.

Lala: The image that you belong to, as a whole, should be a kind of fire in which heat finds you whenever you're cold.

Javi: How much time do I have here, really?

Lala: Three days. They have started to look for you. If you follow the path of cayenas you will get to a small town. They know that a guy is missing, so you will be immediately recognized. (Javi puts his backpack on the floor and rests his head on it. Lala, on her knees, touches his head.) But you do not need to run. Soon, it will not even be important how or where I am, and I know I'll find you again in the middle of the night. You will kiss my knees until I fall asleep and I'll take care of your dreams, as I did that night.

(Javi closes his eyes. Lala sits next to him.) And then you'll do for me everything you once did, crossing fences, visiting thousands of doors to fall again, and at times, foolishly crying. No one asked you to weep.

(Lights fade to black as Lala caresses Javi's head. Both fall asleep.)

END



Ghosts of Yokohama

Austin Brown

A

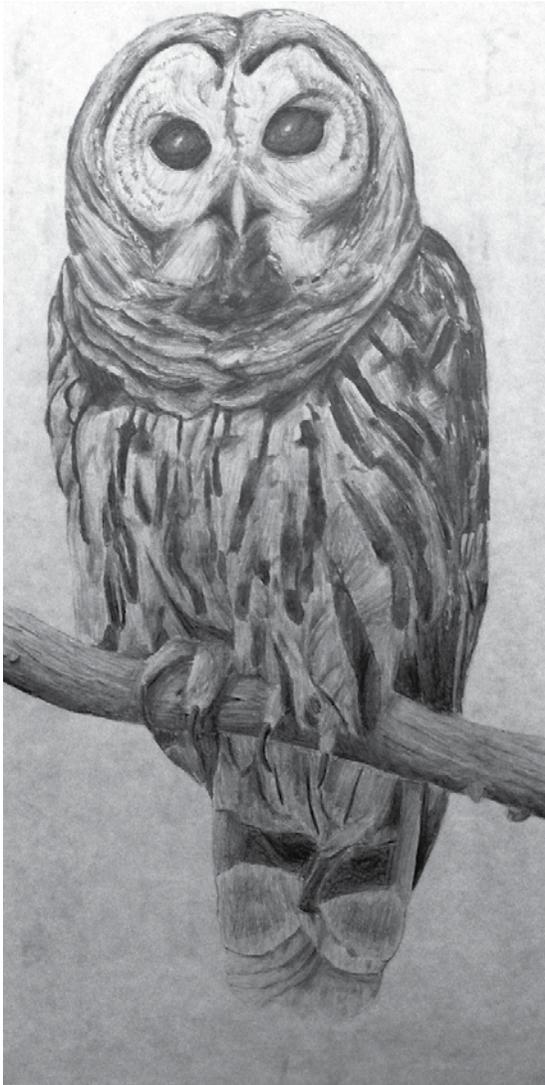
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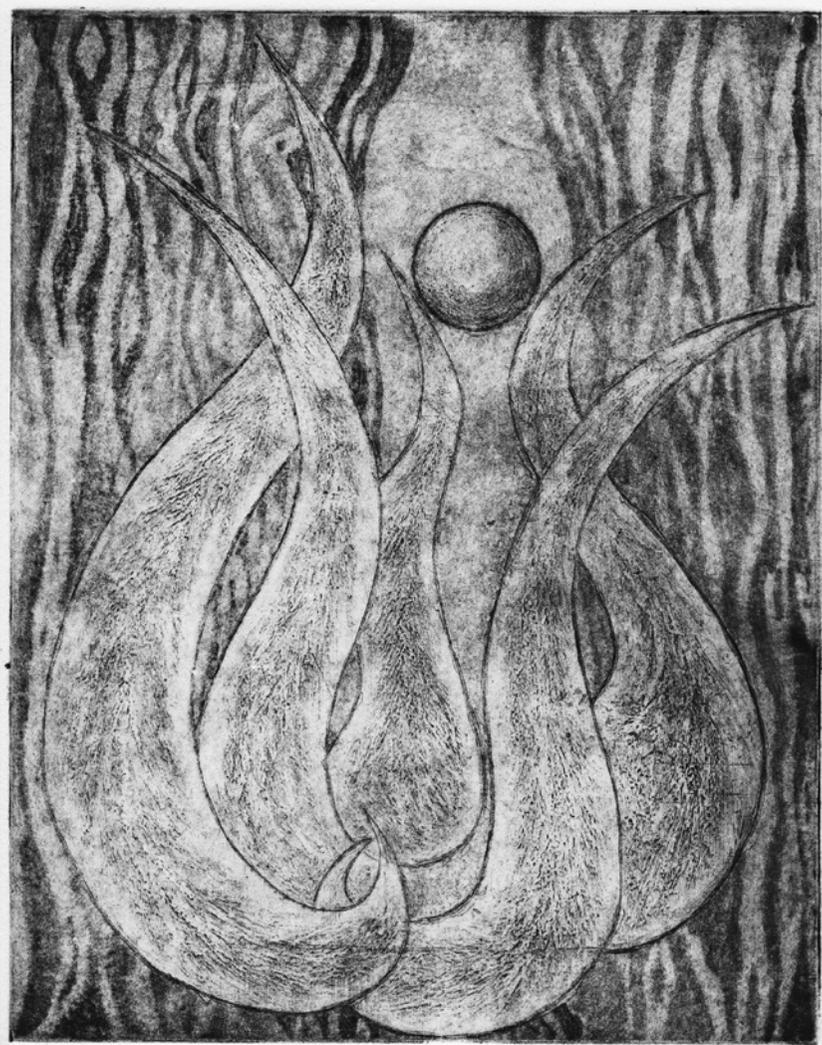
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Virginia Fives



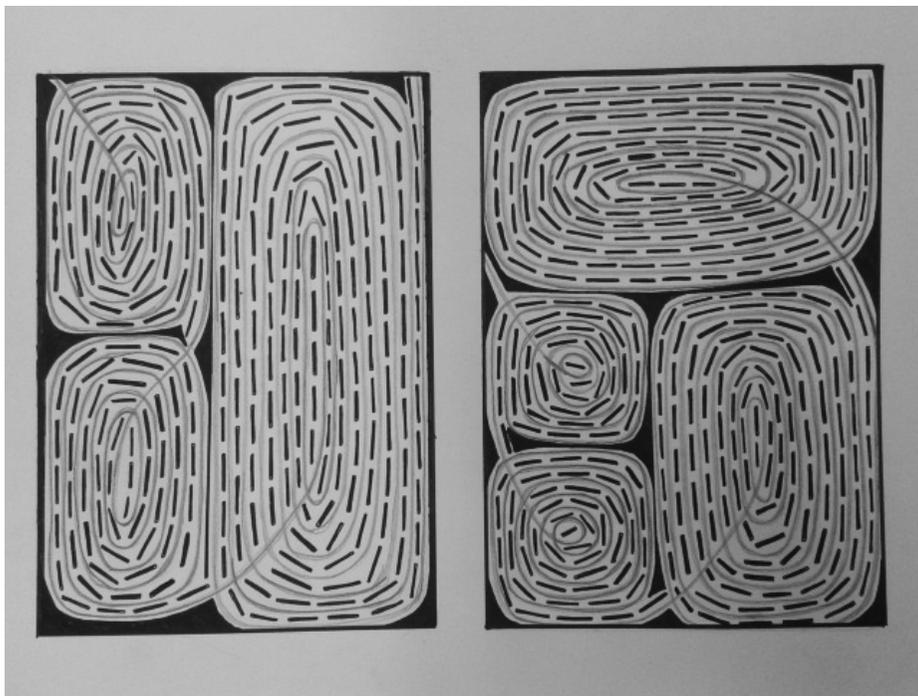
The Barred Owl

Genevieve Sertic



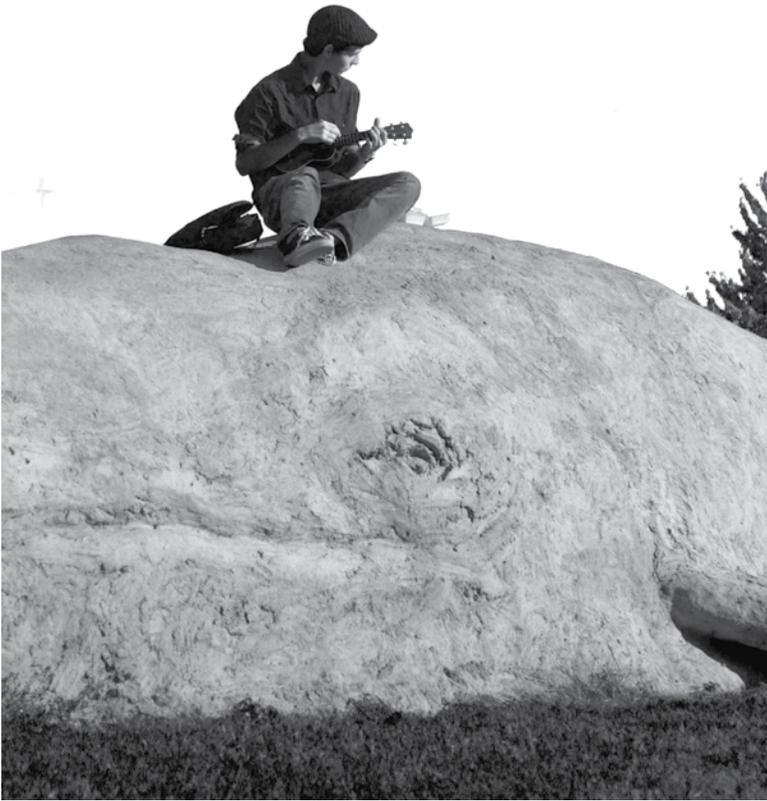
Conformity

Sara Rio



Wheels

Kelsey Wagner



Boy on Whale

Jessie Fales

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How to Make a Book & Other Preservations

Kenny Jakubas

Listen to a craftsman who defends the dexterity and passion needed for the making of a book by hand. He is one of few. There are no computers, no digital distance, just physicality and threadbare appreciation here. Listen carefully to Francesco, but fail to grasp almost all of the small practical things when he goes through them before he starts you off. When you do start, feel better. Letters are everywhere and words are your focus. Each drawer is sorted and full of type, and with a legend detailing each letter's little box, you start hand setting the first line of your piece. Your letters are dime-thin and important in their combinations. Even the blocks of space have space in your perfect happy line. As you work in silence, make a small promise to retain small things here.

Lose some focus when the roof echoes—slowly first, then building into a sharp patter—with the rain, which drowns out Francesco's words. He stops and looks out of a window behind him. The Dolomite Mountains sit back there, misted over and dark in their imperfect line against the glass, and rain falls cold and straight. "It is," he says, pausing for a word, "depressing."

Listen to how all of his instructions—and tact for an otherwise lost process and with otherwise lost letterpresses and typesets—make the craft worth preserving, worth remembering. You are in the foothills of the mountains, tucked in the small town of Cornuda, Italy, where this gem of a museum sits.

When you first heard Tipoteca, you thought of some ancient ruinous place. In some respects, you were right. When you think such a craft is long gone and not worth the time, just when you begin judging a book by its cover and all that, think more about the particulars. Arrive at the conclusion that you are lucky, but know that that word is big. Realize this after you've been home, after you've simmered in that dose of luck and experience. Moments after you read the e-mail with the news (not a month after your return), experience an entirely different form of luck.

In the beginning—as all things in need of preservation start—underestimate the significance of being in the company of this man. Think about how important printed words can be, but recognize that for most people, they don't mean as much anymore. For those few people who make books by hand, not for the nobility of it but for the joy and finality of it, they are the connoisseurs—the practical engineers—of literature as we know it.

For Francesco, quality beats quickness every time. For you, he neglects his beard for your book. One morning, he neglected his morning coffee for the first day of printing the book that you would be in, but once he got you going, he trusted you and your group for a second and went and got a cup. Be surprised by his knowledge of the English language, and marvel at his conversations with your professor, John, who speaks flawless fast Italian with him. Laugh inside at Francesco when he is genuinely funny, even though when he is, he isn't trying to be. Like when he teaches you about the clicking noise you'll hear when you've hit the end while rolling out a proof. "When you hear the *click*," he says, "you are done." The word click is heightened, as if he were trying to mimic the sound of the small noise. Later in the day, smile the biggest smile when Francesco stands next to you during a group picture and puts his arm around you just before it was taken. Forget about that picture until you're home, and then dig it up in a frenzy.

Be optimistic about the instruction manual that you realize you must start writing, because unlike the more practical uses for the written word, you want this to be an instruction manual for people who don't like instruction manuals.

In the beginning stages of production and planning, fail miserably to recognize the significance of this book (the title: *Lost In Venezia: And How We Found Ourselves*, the individual writings, the paper and proofs, all of it). When you uncover and collect the stuff you brought back, and stumble across the book for the first time since you returned, notice how you kept it undamaged, the pages and ink flawless.

Become interested in Francesco when he begins work on printing the pages that will go into the book. The hand press is large and black: intimidating but marvelous, old but fully functional and near perfect. He lets you think about what order the pieces of writing should go in, and then starts moving blocks of text into the large doors that serve as a plate for the press.

When it nears lunchtime and you all walk to the Piccola Bar, sit next to him. Listen and laugh at the stories he tells about America, especially the one about how he went to Alabama and frowned over the accents and the bikers there. As he orders another beer during lunch, think about how great it would be to have a few more with him, to have only another hour to talk with him. He tells you about how his daughter will be studying near Michigan next semester. Astronomy, you think. Notice the subtle pride of a father as he tells you this. The lunch menu is in Italian, and Francesco willingly translates it for everyone. He tells you about his studio at home, and how this is the first time he is assisting and instructing the actual authors of the book he will facilitate and print. Again: feel lucky.

Integrate yourself into one of the groups involved with the printing of your class book, which includes writing by your peers. There are pieces about terrible beer and appreciation, a radio tower in Verona, about the loss of a loved one and the trip of a lifetime, about luck and experience. Something about the process of inserting every single letter, every single piece of punctuation and space into your individual block, it changes the perception of your poem.

Notice how small the variables are when it comes to making words appear perfectly on perfect paper. You know how much patience and knowledge must be involved with getting this aspect right, but you realize it is no distress to Francesco, who seems to enjoy the challenge. Your piece is one of the first to be printed, and you notice how it appears to be making an inconsistent impression on the page.

“You aren’t making a very good impression, Kenny,” someone in your group says. It is partially true. You’ve made it a point to distance yourself from certain people at this point in the trip. Like some *Real World* kind of stuff, there is an undercurrent of repetitive persons who distract and disrupt, and it makes you feel like stepping back and fading into your notebook. Two weeks of seeing these people and you are ready for you.

Before ink is even applied, Francesco runs blind proofs. His glasses are connected around his neck, and he only puts them on when he needs to see up close. When he studies a blind proof and impresses the invisible words on a piece of cardboard, holding them against the light coming through the glass window, notice how it looks like he is studying those words and their meaning. By using the light, he can spot small inconstancies. In the beginning proofs with ink, your capital letters are a bit faded, so Francesco has to tinker. From somewhere in his blue button up shirt—hidden beneath a modestly worn leather apron—he pulls out the key. It unlocks portions of the puzzle that is the base plate, the one holding the words together, essentially. From an old pill bottle, he puts paper-thin metal pieces underneath certain blocks, raising those letters by the fraction of a hair’s width. Other times, he puts pieces of tissue paper on the top plate, which is made of wood and serves as a sort of door that opens the press. Something like a paper and plastic flap puzzle is hidden under that top plate, which involves steps and procedures far beyond your capacity for the knowledge of such intricacies.

Become the group member who handles the task of rolling ink onto the blocks of text. Francesco carefully works a small

amount of ink onto an even block, which is all done on a piece of marble (for its smoothness and lack of porosity). There is, however, a crack in one of the marble slabs, which catches Francesco's eye. He determines this may be the cause of our inconsistent impression of ink on the page.

The rolling technique, as Francesco demonstrates, is about rhythm. The roller is roughly twice the size of a pizza dough roller, and by lifting it between passes, the thing inevitably turns, allowing for an even distribution of ink. Francesco does this with the ease and rhythm of a real Italian artisan. He comments on how this is pretty much the most physically demanding portion involved in the making of a book. You would argue against that, because earlier, you had trouble picking up your block of text and moving it. To prevent everything you've worked on (every letter and line) from dropping and disappearing, the thumbs and hands have to apply equal pressure on the block. Francesco moves blocks of text like some people move poker chips. When you get the hang of inking, you'll love the small things about it, like the sounds. The sticky *ssstick* of the roller over the square of ink on marble, the small clicking of the roller going slowly over each letter, et cetera. When applying ink on the base plate, keep the shoulders square and hold the roller almost under you, just like Francesco said to do. As the roller approaches the letters, move the wood handles forward over them, allowing for a natural rolling motion that makes for an even application of ink.

The walk back to the bed and breakfast is short enough to enjoy. Your room overlooks rows of kiwi trees, and tonight, the moon is ahead of them and bright. It lights the outline of the mountains, and that would be the last time that moon will have shown itself to you in Italy. Your roommates talk constantly about another person in your group. You participate, and it makes it hard to speak to the guy the next day. It reminds you of how people used to talk back home in high school. A class of less than a hundred: nobody can hide from their flaws, and eventually they find out through time and words. At lunch one day, your roommate types a note on his phone and passes it down the table. It says: *He is literally picking his toenails at the dinner table. WTF?*

**

When everything is set to standards, after blind proofs and proofs with ink on proof paper, let Francesco approve the impressions and start punching out the pages that will go into the book. You can feel the difference in this paper. There is something almost humane about it. In your group of three, one of you handles opening and closing the door, along with taking the page out of the press after a cycle. Another rolls ink, and the third person rolls the press inward and pulls the large handle until he feels the end. When running the pages and looking over them, pick up some large and small mistakes. There is a backwards "e" on one, and another starts darkening in certain spots. Let Francesco tinker. Watch his hands more than anything, because they flit quietly and quickly. First the key, maybe some tissue paper, the tapping, a small wood hammer on the letters to ensure they are in the plate, et cetera. After a time, switch duties within the group. Try everything. Rotate.

Get lost in the ideas for the cover of the book. Mostly, the graphic design majors in the bunch are handling this, but observe anyway. You like the idea about it looking like a map of words that have been popular throughout the trip. *Gelato* (ice cream), *schifoso* (disgusting), *Spritz* (orange flavored alcoholic beverage), et cetera. Even though there is debate about color and design, love every idea and proof. There is tension everywhere, it seems. At this point in the trip, your group has adhered and integrated themselves with certain people. Certain people bother everyone. Be civil, but keep your distance. Ignore how everyone seems to look at you when you take a break to write. You are in charge of writing the colophon, and suddenly your paragraph is not perfect enough to be in the book. Step away and let Francesco look over it. Then, find it fascinating that he knows some rules of grammar better than you do.

**

You are on the plane over the North Atlantic. When you can't fall asleep, start writing about the end of the trip. Fail miserably to realize how much more material you will have as a product of this trip, and know that everything you wrote will not be realized for some time afterward, and that some of it will never be. Never forget Francesco.

You don't, but you never really thought about the possibility of having to *remember* him, of also having to *preserve* this memory of the book he helped you make. When you see a picture of him online a few weeks later—a close-up with the words “Ciao, Francesco,” above it—think about it and dismiss it for a while. Fill your glass of Italian wine far over the halfway mark. Deny any possibility of tragedy.

As another semester in Michigan draws near, check your e-mail and read over a message from John. Something tells you this was going to happen, and here is confirmation, the news you dread to find out when you're alone and on your computer.

Francesco
Sun, Jul 29, 2012 07:37 PM

Hello everyone,

Unfortunately I have some bad news. Last week I learned that Francesco Z. has died. It came as quite a shock to everyone. I don't know all the details. He was with his wife on vacation in Crete, and they were at the beach when he had a heart attack. It is strange to think how recently we were working with him and how well he seemed. He was only fifty-seven. Sandro writes to say that he attended a memorial service in Verona, and also points out that our book with Francesco will be his last, and consequently:

“Ha un significato ancora piu profondo e umano, adesso.”
(Now has a significance even more profound and humane).

I'll be in touch again soon about the upcoming exhibit.

Best,
John

Feel how your heart hurts just seeing the words. Pay attention to the skipped beats of it and the loss. So much distance, but you tear up

as if he were closer. Stop and confront a lingering sadness for days after, a surreal compulsion that reaches but fails, and reminds you that this is sentimental, even though you hate that word. You were getting ready to mail him a thank you card, you think. You still haven't really looked through your journal or the book, but you know they contain his image in small ways. Read the ending lines of a poem you read a few days after the e-mail, and close your eyes slowly for the end of it, because you know the connection and it makes you melt: *So much lament, for see what he has sown/that only now you gather what you've lost.* Read it again.

Open the book you are in and read it again. Feel the same pages that Francesco touched. Know that his eyes were looking down on your words. Remember the way he would squint for mistakes and smile at you like he'd known you for years. Tell the members of your family, but feel unsatisfied and empty. Make the picture that has his arm around your shoulder the wallpaper on your laptop. Your family is sincere in their words, but you know they did not see him or watch his hands work on your book. Do yourself a favor: keep something inside and never lose it.



I'm Not Sorry; I'm Honest #2

Casey L. Grooten







WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY