Gandy Dancer

A student-led literary magazine of the State University of New York

Issue 4.1 | Fall 2015

Gandy Dancer is published biannually in the spring and fall by the State University of New York College at Geneseo. Issues of Gandy Dancer are freely available for view or download from gandydancer.org, and print copies are available for purchase. Special thanks to the College at Geneseo's Department of English and Milne Library for their support of this publication.

ISSN: 2326-439X

ISBN *(THIS ISSUE)*: 978-1519670922

We publish writing and visual art by current students and alumni of the State University of New York (SUNY) campuses only.

Our Post Script section features work by SUNY alumni. We welcome nominations from faculty and students as well as direct submissions from alumni themselves. Faculty can email Rachel Hall, faculty advisor, at hall@geneseo.edu with the name and email address for the alum they wish to nominate, and alums can submit through our website. Both nominations and direct submissions should indicate which SUNY the writer attended, provide a graduation date, and the name and email of a faculty member we can contact for confirmation.

We use Submittable to manage submissions and the editorial process. Prospective authors can submit at gandydancer.submittable.com/submit. Please use your SUNY email address for your user account and all correspondence.

Gandy Dancer will accept up to three submissions from an author at a time.

Fiction: We accept submissions up to 25 pages. Stories must be double-spaced. We are unlikely to accept genre or fan-fiction, though stranger things have happened…

Creative Nonfiction: We accept submissions up to 25 pages. CNF must be double-spaced.

Poetry: Three to five poems equal one submission. Poems must be submitted as a single document. Format as you would like to see them in print. Our text columns are generally 4.5 inches wide, at 11pt font.

Visual Art: We accept submissions of art—especially photos, drawings, and paintings—in file formats such as jpeg, tiff, and png. Submitted images should have a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and be at least 5 inches wide. Please include work titles in your submissions.

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Questions or comments? Send us an email at gandydancer@geneseo.edu

GENESEO

MILNE Library

Dearest Readers—

Here in Geneseo, the start of November brings about a few changes. First, the leaves that once mesmerized us with their stunning bursts of oranges, yellows, and reds, begin falling into crunchy piles strewn across campus. Secondly, as the workload picks up, so does the wind. In spite of the falling temperatures and messy hair days, we trudge on, knowing that what we have in store for us is worth any uphill climb.

It's sentiments like those—trudging up a seemingly never-ending hill—that we try to remember as we put together Issue 4.1 of *Gandy Dancer*. The process starts at the beginning of the semester, similar to most undergraduate journals. For us though, it's a little different. *Gandy Dancer* is created in a class by students with an interest in good literature and the editing process. We begin the semester by reviewing past *Gandy Dancer* issues and offering ideas for what we think we can change or incorporate in the coming weeks. Herein lies the beauty and difficulty—with every semester, classes change, which means the *Gandy Dancer* team gets a whole new set of editors and a new pair of managing editors. This has a wonderful effect, because it means *Gandy Dancer* never goes stale. Every semester we have around thirty fresh, excited, and curious minds to gather, discuss, and edit works. It's always interesting to see, with each new cast, the ways *Gandy Dancer* shifts according to current tastes and personalities. However, this also presents some difficulties in terms of aesthetic consistency—both in the look and content of the journal. As the semester goes on and we begin devouring work, the hard labor begins, but this labor—soliciting work, corresponding with authors, and discussing pieces—is part of the great pleasure of creating *Gandy Dancer.*

After attending the Forum for Undergraduate Editors conference (FUSE) at Widener University this past month and meeting with some of the best undergraduate journals nationwide, we realized that while *Gandy Dancer* shares many of the same concerns as the other journals, our journey to publication is unique. At FUSE we were introduced to many student publications whose budgets for distributions, advertising, and compensation for writers are impressive. In particular, all of these publications were able to distribute widely and give contributors copies for free, something we would love to be able to do. This inability, though, to provide people with free copies of *Gandy Dancer* pushes us even harder to provide a beautifully crafted home for the amazing talent from across the SUNY system. Although there have been recent cuts to a number of art departments, including Geneseo's, *Gandy Dancer* will still continue to seek out and showcase visual art. This proved to be a challenge

for us this semester, though, as we no longer have art studio majors on our campus. *Gandy Dancer* 4.1, like the issues before, proves that the arts are important to SUNY students, and luckily for us many have a desire to create beautiful and thought provoking work. We feel fortunate to gather this work between our covers.

As always, we received hundreds of amazing submissions from students across New York State, and deciding which ones to publish was a difficult task. Many of the pieces in this issue deal with important and pressing topics, such as conspicuous consumption and human wastefulness, transgender issues, mental illness, alienation and loss. The connection we felt to each of these pieces, and the curiosity to explore that connection is what ultimately compelled our choices for *Gandy Dancer*'s seventh issue. FUSE Keynote speaker Lise Funderburg discussed the importance of curiosity for the writer—an aspect of writing that clearly emerged while reading this year's submissions. The work examines a variety of topics in fresh ways and reveals the writers' own curiosity. The creativity, originality, and thoughtfulness of the work left us thinking about these pieces long after we finished reading. We hope the work collected here evokes the same response from you, and that the ideas and images float in your mind even after you've closed this issue of *Gandy Dancer*.

Happy reading,
Keara & Leanora
Managing Editors, Fall 2015

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FEATURED ARTIST

ART

Cover photo: Untitled by Thomas John Magnus

Gandy Dancer

DIEGO BARCACEL PEÑA

bicycling across the grand canyon

do you remember what you told me? i say.

we were riding across the grand canyon on a tandem
bike on a tightrope
        and you tried to scare me by rocking the bike.

but do you remember what you told me? i say.

sweat flew from my body to yours as we kept
moving forward
        and then we stopped—

look down, you said, rock and grass and water, look forward
and all you see is the horizon.

close your eyes looking down, you said, the
sunneverrises the sunneversets, there are no eclipses.

there is certainty in looking down.

To Rise/To Sink

As I swim I
fumble over words.

She once told me a shadow
is a shadow to a shadow.

Stare/look/glare into sun remove sweat
from your forehead so that you will sweat.

Sound out the words give
no (new) meaning,

I remember drowning, standing
straight a general unregretful.

She held my hand I held her
hand we held each other's hands.

She rose like a rose petal
rises in water.

I didn't (our) hands (linked)(together)
she dropped.

She rose again she dropped, she rose, she
dropped, she rose, I let go, she rose, she rose, she—

SARAH STEIL

Sinkhole

Picture a large open pond, man-made and frozen in February. The pond my mother's husband carved into the earth of my backyard, after tearing down our childhood swing set with a chainsaw. Criminal to have such an open body of water, exposed, waiting for things like this.

Picture Bandit, our old Boston terrier, on his twelfth birthday, shuffling through the snow, peering through the ice of the pond, searching for the fish at the bottom.

Picture my little brother, Ollie, at the screen door leading to the backyard, calling the dogs in from the yard. Picture him hearing splashes in the back pond, thinking of the fish, and growing angrier when the dogs don't come. *What's taking them so long?*

Picture Bandit, focused, placing his paws, his weight, on the frozen section of the pond, leaning forward, falling through. His black legs churn against white snow, his nostrils flare, searching for air. He kicks one last time, and this last splash will replay in Ollie's mind for years: *Why didn't I go out there?*

Picture Ollie, frustrated, stuffing his feet into cold boots, trudging through the snow, calling the dog's name, "Bandit! Bandit, come!" Looking for him, confused, and then finding him on his stomach, wet, cold, eyes still.

Picture me, miserable and enraged, searching for a fight, fists swinging but missing contact, accusing my mother: "We never should've had that fucking pond."

Picture my mother, tired, shaking her solemn head: "It's not the pond. It's the dogs who go near the pond."

At six years old, I spent a great deal of time on my living room couch watching *Emergency Vets* on television. My mother ran after my younger siblings and my father was never home, and the man in glasses on screen filled entire months. The show featured an old veterinarian with white hair and a mustache greeting sick and disgruntled dogs, cats, lizards, and birds. I marveled at this man's healing, how at the beginning of the half hour episode a wounded dog would stagger in with a bleeding leg, and by the end he would be healed, saved, running, and happy. Even then, when I was too young to understand my own desire to be saved, the concept of saving someone else overwhelmed me. My mother, tending to six frenetic children by herself, refused to get a dog, and thus I never asked throughout my hours spent inside watching the show.

One day, my mother sat me down in the kitchen with all five of my siblings. We didn't have enough chairs for all of us, so the younger, more fidgety children got seats, while my older sisters had to stand. My mother, a beauty, possessed physical traits I craved, attributes that defined her in a crowd. While most of my siblings were brown-haired and brown-eyed, my mother was redheaded and hazel-eyed, but always tired. While I wiggled on a creaking wooden chair, she folded her arms and addressed the six of us. "Listen," she sighed, "We're not getting a dog. We can't afford one and we don't have time for one. I'm sorry." My older sisters, twelve and fifteen, threw up their arms in exasperation, denied the one item on each of their Christmas lists for another year.

I, however, had never considered owning a dog. I watched them on television, spellbound, but the idea of living with one seemed completely foreign, impossible.

But a few months after I turned seven, and after a few bouts of particularly nasty fights between my parents, my mother caved. My mother, possibly trying to compensate for my father's absence, or finally being convinced by my older sisters, walked into the kitchen one morning with a small black puppy in a blanket. While my siblings screamed, I stood back, confused, insisting he was a stuffed animal. My mother told us to sit in a circle with our legs out and feet touching, forming a misshapen star, and placed the puppy between us. Our arms reached and grappled and inevitably one of us would cry out, "Mom, it's my turn!" when another had been holding him too long. We watched him like he was made of ice, fragile, as though if we turned around he would melt, disappear from our lives.

Even my father, who actively avoided my siblings and me on the rare occasions he was home and not fighting with my mother, seemed taken by our new friend. My mother and father had struck a deal: the dog stays but my

father got to pick the name. He named him after a cartoon he watched when he was a kid, *The Adventures of Jonny Quest*, and I began to view Bandit as a gift from both my mother and father.

A month or so later when I'm home from college, Ollie and I sit around the kitchen table together, and he stands to get food from the fridge. At fifteen, he is three and a half years my junior, and I see myself mirrored in the roundness of his cheeks, his freckles, his timidness. Standing across the room in baggy clothes, he scans the contents of the fridge, slouching forward. When I ask questions I don't look up at him, instead I stare down at my hands. "How was Bandit when you found him?"

Ollie stands in the light of the fridge and stops when he hears me. "What?"

"How was Bandit when you found him? That day."

One hand rests on the door of the fridge, the other remains at his side. I take furtive glances at his pensive face, as he focuses and pictures himself in the snow again. "On his stomach. With his head sticking out of the water."

"Were his eyes open?"

"Yeah. But when I came back out with Jesse his head was under the water."

I am entering this information into the database of my memory, editing the image I had of him floating on his side. Now, when I spend hours picturing him in the water, he will be on his stomach.

He tells me about trying to get our brother Jesse to come outside with him, not being able to find the words. How Jesse, on his bed in his underwear, had refused. "It made me so mad," he tells me. "I kept calling, 'Jesse, come here, Jesse, come here, Jesse, come here,' and he kept asking what I wanted."

He tells me how finally they had walked out silently together in a blanket of snow, how he had led Jesse to the pond, to Bandit, unspeaking, crying silently.

"What did you do when you found him together?"

"We called you."

This is where my memory cuts in, when a phone call from Jesse at 11:18 on a Tuesday morning had confused me so greatly that I stared at my phone for a few seconds before answering. *Why would he be calling me?*

There was a beat of silence before I answered, standing outside a college biology classroom, and my heart knew before his mouth could form the words: *Someone's dead.*

And then Jesse's voice, slow, choppy, wet, over the phone: "Bandit's in the pond."

And my own confusion: "Can you get him out? What's he doing?"

In the summer when I was little, my mother drove us to Massachusetts to visit my older sisters' aunt on their father's side. She wasn't my aunt, technically, but we grew up calling her by the name. Aunt Mary Barbara lived on a farm with a huge pond in her backyard. She would give my siblings and me nets to catch the frogs in the pond. We would wade out into mucky water and she would warn us of the snapping turtles.

One day, I went too far out into the slime water and had tipped over, mud filling my pants and shoes, my feet sucked into sludge. My siblings laughed on the grass, and my mother hosed me down in Aunt Mary Barbara's large driveway as I cried.

On the way home, my mother and my siblings sang in unison: "The day Sarah fell into the pond. No, she wasn't fond, of falling in the pond, the day Sarah fell into the pond."

When Ollie tells me about finding Bandit, he's eating chips at the table and I have that song running through my head. *The day Bandit fell into the pond.*

My questions form slowly as I approach issues I have obsessed over, as I pretend I am not putting Ollie on trial.

"And you heard something outside when he fell?"

"Splashing."

"And you thought it was the fish?"

"Yeah."

I am sitting in the chair, eyes on my feet. "It was quick?"

He thinks for a moment, chewing, shakes his head. "No. I didn't want to tell anyone. But it was a long time. I heard it and went inside and went back outside and still heard it. Like, over five minutes."

Bile runs up my throat and I feel a seed planting, a resentment growing, questions I can't ask brewing. *How did you not know? Didn't you know the fish aren't even out when it's that cold? Why didn't you walk out and check? How did you not know?*

Ollie changes the subject and I answer absentmindedly as my head swirls, imagining Bandit clawing on the side of the pond for so long, his legs churning with adrenaline, ice shocking his nose and throat. I picture Ollie sitting inside, hearing loud splashing and struggling, in the warmth of the house as the dog choked outside.

My head cuts in. *It wasn't his fault.* But my heart, wounded, beats faster and I'm afraid if I look up at him he will see the disappointment on my face.

"Well, it wasn't your fault," I sigh, feigning calmness, assuredness.

"We never should've had the fucking pond," he says. "It's just a death trap waiting there."

I nod.

My memory relies upon his information, descriptions. He tells me how our mother's husband had come outside, stood before the pond, pulled the dog from the water, and stuffed him into a garbage bag. How he tossed the garbage bag on the curb, how the molecules of water that had killed Bandit had leaked out of the plastic. "I told you to keep the dogs away from the fucking pond," her husband yelled. My mother conceded: "I know, I know. I'm sorry."

Bandit was the first of many dogs, as my mother realized that her pain over her fighting with my father could be soothed somewhat by being needed by someone else. A month after Bandit entered the kitchen doorway, my mother returned with Cricket, a small, frantic Boston terrier.

"They'll be friends," my mother told us, holding Cricket up like an offering to Bandit, who nosed her intently. My mother flushed, scared, had locked my father out of the house the night before, and was now actively ignoring our ringing phone. She invested herself in our new dog, babied her, carried her around the house, and brought her to the grocery store.

When my father finally left us a few years later, I told the dogs first. "He's not coming back, guys," I mumbled, staring at the two of them on the kitchen floor, searching for understanding. My father's leaving was otherwise secret information, and I shut out any friends I used to have when the idea of explaining everything got too hard. I mentioned it casually, years later when I was sixteen, to my friends in high school when they asked about my five dogs. One of them asked if I'd always had a lot of pets, and I answered distractedly, "No, I only got the first two a few years before my parents got divorced. So, what? Maybe nine years ago?" They looked uncomfortably back at me, and I realized I had shared private information. I tried to change the subject when my friends insisted I'd never told them that my parents were divorced before.

When I was young, I didn't want to be known as the girl whose father left, whose mother couldn't support her children alone. So I didn't make friends. I didn't talk about myself and didn't invite people over, and instead, I spent my time inside, confiding in Bandit.

Sometimes I dream of him, walking near that pond, his nose to the ground, ears erect. I see him looking for fish, placing his toes on the ice before realizing the mistake he has made. I picture him hearing Ollie's calling, his lungs filling with ice water, hoping someone will come for him. Sinking to the bottom.

But in my dream, I'm the one standing by the door, and when I hear his body hit water I know. I'll run barefooted into the snow and jump into the

pond, and my lungs will fill and my feet will mash into cold sludge, but I'll pull him from the water. Bandit will be cold, but I'll pound on his chest, and his heart will beat for me again.

When I wake again, I remember I didn't come for him. He was not pulled from the water. He sank to the bottom, heart cold, when his legs became exhausted with the weight of keeping him afloat. He sinks, and I sink with him.

I'm at college hours away and still I feel the blame nesting around my shoulders. *Why didn't I know?* I placed miles between my family and me, and thought about how it would feel good to leave my life behind. I realized, soon after, that miles are a technicality, and no matter how far away I get, I'm still sitting in my childhood living room. I will be hours away from home in a classroom and I'm still in the bedroom I share with my older sister, fighting with my mother. I'm nineteen years old, and somehow still twelve years old, and I'm asking myself, *Why didn't I know? Why wasn't I there?*

Bandit was the fourth dog we lost in only a couple years, and it was beginning to feel as though we couldn't be trusted with anyone or anything. The losses kept coming. We lost Leo, our bumbling bullmastiff, when he fell down the stairs to the backyard and broke his spine. We lost Todd, our young Chihuahua, when he ran out into the street the night before my senior prom. We lost Fatty, our chubby French bulldog, when my mother got drunk and accused us of loving the dogs more than her, and dropped her off at a shelter while we were at school. I felt as though bringing dogs into my house was sounding a death toll, that my hands were stained with blood, that I could no longer be trusted with anything. That when I wanted kids one day my body would smell the loss on me, gasp at my maroon hands, and stop me. "Are you sure you can handle this? You've already lost so much." I ask myself, *what can I be trusted with?* I see my dogs now and feel the fear rising in my gut whenever I leave the room, knowing the loss is coming, one day. Knowing the feeling of failing someone who had so much faith in you. Wanting to apologize for a loss we haven't even suffered yet. I feel it—a backbeat, a humming, a pulsing—knowing that the losses and sadness and failing are part of me now and will return soon enough.

I am sitting on the living room couch next to my sister Sam, watching the news halfheartedly, as my dachshund, Bruno, stretches across my lap in sleep. On the television before us a newscaster smiles, and a picture of a small black lab in uniformed arms appears in the left hand corner of the screen. I am kneading Bruno's ear in my distracted palm as the woman tells us about the "lucky Labrador" who fell through the ice in the pond in the backyard

of a four-year-old girl. The girl told her parents, who called the police, who went in after the drowning dog and pulled him out from under the ice. He must have been swimming four or five minutes before anyone found him, the woman tells us. Must have been at least another ten minutes before he was saved from the water.

Beside me, Sam mumbles, "A four-year-old has enough brain power to go out when she hears splashing."

I wonder how long Bandit had held on before succumbing to frozen water, and when I feel the anger rise, my mind runs on repeat: *it's not his fault.*

While my father worked, my mother stayed at home, frazzled trying to keep up with the six of us. When I was eleven, my father left, and the new men came, then the money stopped, and the drinking started. My mother continued to bring dogs into the house, as she replaced my father with another bitter man, as she struggled in her new relationship, and with her drinking. The dogs came and went at such a rapid pace that when my mother told her friends that we lost another, they gasped, "You really wouldn't be good with grandkids, huh?"

Cricket, Leo, and Fatty have all come and gone. When my mother found the small, broken body of our Chihuahua, Todd, in the street, I felt extinguished. I'd let him out in the backyard and he slipped under the fence. When I saw his tiny, unmoving body lying on our porch, I asked my sister, Sam, if he was okay. She cried heavily and shook her head. "His neck feels like sand."

When I reentered my house, Bandit charged up to me, and I wanted to push him away, tell him what I'd done. "I'm so sorry, Buddy." I sat against the cabinets in my kitchen crying, but Bandit didn't leave my side. He sniffed at my face. I wanted to ask him to forgive me, but I knew I couldn't.

My mother bought a young, similar looking Chihuahua before Todd's blood had been cleared from the street, and while a new puppy tumbled around our house, I stared at the small stain in the street and saw it as a warning.

At twelve, I hadn't yet forged the bonds with my siblings that saved me from drowning. It was a few years before my siblings and I confided in one another in that way, and I'd cut out any friends I might have had. So when the depression came and it felt as though I had to fight with my lungs to keep them expanding, I spent my time outside with Bandit in the sun. I didn't need to tell him the ways in which I hurt, or missed my parents, but I thought he understood, and we sat outside for hours on the old porch swing.

Caring for Bandit kept me afloat—I needed to feed him, take him out. He whined anxiously when I'd laid in my bed so long that I wondered if my skin had developed sores.

I rocked us back and forth on the porch swing, one hand resting on his side, on the reassuring constant of his breathing. When the heat burned our skin, we moved to the shade, and when the wind began to chill our bones we searched for the sun again. We seemed to spend years on that stained swing, and only when the sky blackened did I enter the house again, Bandit following close behind.

I was sixteen, and my mother had gotten drunk and passed out on the couch on my birthday. I went to bed that night without waking her to remind her. I laid in bed, eyes opened to darkness, my sister, Sam, sleeping in the bed across from me. I wanted to cry, reverse the day, to stop getting older without my own permission and without anyone else noticing.

I heard a scraping at the door, and I quietly slipped from under the sheets to open it and found Bandit looking up at me. He had a slight underbite and in the light from the open door I saw he was biting his tongue, cocking his head as I stared down at him.

"Hey, Buddy." I sighed and leaned down to scratch him behind the ear.

He walked in, sniffing around the floor, searching for a soft spot to lie. I knelt next to him.

"I think she forgot this year," I said, stroking his side.

He pressed his head into my hand, and I rested my forehead against his.

"I know you didn't, though." I pulled a blanket off my bed and laid it on the floor next to me. "This is pretty soft," I whispered, patting the fabric.

Bandit smelled the blanket, pawed at it, circled and circled until he'sd-made it into his own bed, and slept in a tight spiral.

I laid in bed, watching his rising and falling silhouette in the shadows on the wall.

Bandit's tenth birthday felt historic, like a victory we didn't deserve. My siblings and I baked a cake, as Bandit and the new additions barked at our feet. I knelt beside him as he sat by the kitchen heater. It was February, and the dogs crowded around the heating vent in the kitchen, and we struggled not to trip over them. I hugged Bandit tightly and his sticky, slimy tongue rolled along my cheek. "Ugh, Bandit!" I sighed, rubbing the spit from my cheek. But he stood in excitement, his entire body wriggling, waiting for food or to play.

We had four other dogs by then, and though Bandit was not very old, we imagined he'd speak with a shaky drawl if he were human. We imagined

who he would be, how he would walk and sound. And though we made jokes about his age, he seemed like a pillar, immortal. I was only seventeen, but I told my siblings Bandit was walking me down the aisle, that he would meet my children and grandchildren.

"The one we got right, huh?" Ollie mused from across the table, eating icing off a spoon.

I stand in the backyard over the pond, listening to how quiet it is, seeing flashes of orange fish hidden in the muck in the bottom. It must be at least eight feet across and four feet deep, but it feels bottomless, like quicksand pulling us under. My mother has blocked off the wrought iron gate to the pond with a dog crate, a burning reminder of what was lost along the way. Perhaps she intends the crate as a warning to the other dogs, as a marker to remind us what we've done and lost.

The dogs still get past the dog crate and the broken fence, however. Now, while I stand over still water and try to see Bandit clawing his way out, Bruno stands next to me, waiting.

Bruno, my dachshund, is prone to severe separation anxiety and back problems. He led Ollie to the pond when Bandit fell, barking in the grass on the side. I like to think Bruno was calling out to Bandit, that he was encouraging him, telling him one of us would find him. But I don't know how much of this a dog can convey or understand.

Bruno follows me throughout the house, sleeps in my bed, howls and whines and paces when I leave him.

Standing next to him, I realize how hard it is to love someone, how much it hurts to care for someone and worry endlessly. How sometimes I wish I had never met any of them, because then I wouldn't hurt so badly. How difficult it is to grow up with someone only for him to leave you behind. How loving someone is trusting him not to hurt you. And how, by design, we can never fulfill that promise.

I have nightmares of the ways in which I will fail Bruno, realizing that the being I shared my life with, whom I thought of as unchanging and undying, left me just as the others did. Realizing that I failed him just as I did the others.

I carry Bruno down stairs, watch him when he enters the backyard, take him for walks, and clutch him against my body when a car passes. When I wake in the morning to his body curled against mine, I rest my hand on his chest to check that he's still breathing, that he didn't leave me in the night. I wonder who needs whom more.

I want to say that while I stood over that pond and imagined myself falling in beside Bandit, that I was freed from my anger, my disappointment.

That while my head knew my brother and I were innocent all along, my heart had finally caught up to speed and forgiven the two of us. That no one could've known, that I couldn't have been there. But my self-reassurances are newborn deer—they rise, stumble, and fall. My sadness is a hardened kernel in the gut, and I will not stop dreaming of saving him.

Bruno looks up to me, and I'm once again filled with both sadness and appreciation. My love for Bruno sits upon my chest like a weight, a clock ticking, a premonition whispering: you will fail.

Look Up, Brandon Mark

Scoops, Savannah Skinner

ROBERT HELD

Hometown Night—Breeze

A woman with your voice
on tape drove me to town,
and stopping at the overlook rest stop
she heaved over the sink and told me
the gravesites behind the hotel are illuminated
in a way that might remind me of my hometown
—it was true, there were pistons in every surface
uncovered by flash photos taken too close to the faces of friends,
classmates, and parents as they ascended to heaven.

ROBERT HELD

Sanctuary

A woman with your hairstyle
drove me to the hospital in exchange for the diorama
of a housed moon made of the skin
I collected from our sheets. The mauve fog stacking
itself above the city is the only
circumstantial red as we approach
the guardrail like calculus.
She said, "I'm here.
Do you love me?" and coughed.
Meanwhile I'm in the trunk with dreams of your thighs
contoured with scars and the one time I remember
speaking in a dream,
with corrugated walls. We can't tell
if the newspaper photos were taken after
the impact. I promise we're dead in them and you
continue pasting them to your bed frame.

ADREYO SEN

The Boy Who Loved to Dance

I was five when my mother signed me up for lessons at the Maharashtra Lawn Tennis Association.

But I was scared of my coach, who was critical of my sissy handling of the racket.

One day, I was in tears and his fellow instructor bought me a bottle of Pepsi.

My mother drove me home in silence. When we were in the living room, she began to beat me with my tennis racket.

"We paid so much for these lessons and this is how you repay me?" she yelled as I sobbed.

Later, my maidservant held me and made me a cup of tea when I was finally cried out. She let me play with her brightly-colored bangles.

When I was eight, I scored above 90% on my final exams.

My mother took me to buy a book.

When we got home, she took the book from me.

"I feel you didn't put in your best effort," she said. "What do you think?"

I went to the bathroom to cry and she stood behind me.

"I have no sympathy for you," she said, "crying over spilt milk. Dry your eyes and come and do your lessons."

I often cried those days. When I was five, I was brave and bold and bright. But by the time I was eight, I was scared of everything.

My father was unable to protect me from my mother's slaps. He was a quiet man.

But he often took me out for a drive and something stirred in me as I saw maidservants returning home from shopping, clad in yellow or red or pink tunics.

I told myself I was attracted to them. But I knew I, too, wanted to be a bright bosom, to be crushed in some man's strong arms.

I began crossdressing that year.

My father was often on tour for his engineering firm and my mother would join him.

While they were away, I would sleep by my maidservant's side.

She would let me wear her blouse and petticoat and sing to me until I fell asleep.

This took me a while because I loved the feeling of her soft, worn garments against my skin.

Sometimes, in the morning, before I went to school, still in her blouse and petticoat, I would don her bangles and her silver anklets and dance for her in the style of the heroines of the old Bollywood movies we watched together. She was loud in her appreciation and would kiss me when I finished.

My maidservant and I were allies. My mother was angry with her all the time because she used to invite her lover, a security guard, into the house while the rest of us slept. I was only four when my mother caught her letting him in.

Even now, I like to imagine my maidservant's slenderness in the ardent embrace of her lover, melting into the rough body that smelt of tobacco and sweat and oil.

When I was twelve, I was sent away to boarding school. My mother worried about my dreamy and soft ways and the tendency of my early friends to dismiss me as a *hijra*.

My friends were really teasing me for my clumsiness, for my inability to catch the ball during our interminable cricket games. They despised me and thus threw the word at me to criticize my useless girlishness. After all, to be a girl in India is to be a burden and the sum total of the dowry with which one is transferred into another family.

But the word *hijra* really referred to India's transvestite community, a group of men who eked out a living by begging and by dancing in *sarees* and *salwar* suits at weddings and other occasions. Even then, I felt these "degenerate" men were women because they saw themselves thus.

I confided to my maidservant, who cooked me all my favorite dishes before my departure, that I longed to be a *hijra* myself, to break free, as these once-men had, from the constraints of their unsympathetic families, and lose myself, in dance and song.

At boarding school, I was a failure. I could not play sports. In class, I dreamt of being transformed into a woman by some act of courage and winning the adoration of a tall and muscular man. When my seniors scolded me, I dreamt of kissing their rugged faces.

I was often beaten up for my untidiness, for my poor marks and horrible sports performance, for my tendency to dream, for my effeminate ways.

When I was eighteen and just finished with boarding school, my mother threw my maidservant out. She said that she was too inefficient and lazy.

I cried for days until my mother slapped me.

I slapped her back and for the first time in my life, yelled back at her.

But my father took her side and threatened to put me in a mental hospital if I didn't calm down.

I went to the only engineering college I could get into with my poor marks. I felt guilty about my behavior with my mother and I studied hard.

I was lonely, but my effort paid off, and I made it into a reasonably good engineering firm after my graduation.

The three years that followed were hard.

At home, my parents and I rarely spoke. I was still a coward, but I made it clear I would no longer tolerate my mother's constant criticism. To taunt me, she complained about my ingratitude to the neighbors when I was within earshot.

At work, I was taunted for my quietness, my excessive neatness, for the way my eyes would fill up with tears whenever I was criticized.

When I was twenty-four, I'd had enough. I locked myself in the bathroom and slit my wrists.

At the hospital, my parents didn't visit me. I was placed in a psychiatric ward and among the other unhappy souls who'd found their way there, I made many friends. They saw me as a woman because that's how I saw myself and one of them told me I was so beautiful he'd like to take me out on a date.

My mother took me home when I was discharged and mocked me in front of our neighbors. But her words had ceased to have an effect on me and I laughed at the ridiculous woman.

The next morning, I left my house for the last time and went to a shopping mall. I bought myself a *salwar kameez* and changed into it.

People stared and called after me as I walked down the street. But I didn't care.

I felt beautiful. I felt finally myself.

At the intersection near Victoria Memorial, I found the two *hijras* who normally begged on that route.

I knelt before one of them, a tall and wise woman, who must have been kind and beautiful even when she was an unhappy man.

"Guide me," I begged. "Teach me to be beautiful."

She kissed me and I felt myself blessed.

I won't say that the last year has been easy. My parents still live in the same city as I do and often try to drag me home, or to have me committed.

One day, I was in a train on the way to a shrine beloved to the *hijra* community in a new floral *salwar kameez* when some of the passengers took offense at my presence.

A man caught hold of me and took me to the carriage door.

He was about to throw me out when the ticket collector saved me. He sat me down next to me and put his arm around me. He told me how he, too, had always felt trapped by his own body. That was why he took so little care of it.

I think he did see me as a woman. Bless him, dear man.

The police frequently raid the house in which ten other *hijras* and I live. If we don't have enough money to give them, they beat us with their canes.

Once upon a time, all of this would have made me miserable. But even if there are hard days, I am always myself. And thus, I know happiness.

My maidservant, now married, has been to see me and has gifted me with some new *salwar kameezes*, as well as those bangles and anklets I always loved.

I wear her bangles and anklets and sing and dance to earn money.

I was always creative, but my parents saw my creativity as another example of my sissyness.

In the evenings, I tell my sisters, I mean my fellow *hijras*, the stories I used to tell my maidservant. Sometimes, the children from the neighborhood join us. And sometimes, their mothers and their aunts join us too.

When I was a terrified and captive boy, I was scared of the world. But now I have been set free by my flowing *sarees* and lovely *salwar* suits and know there is much to love everywhere.

I carry my anklets and bangles wherever I go, so I can dance to the beauty of the world.

Sound, Jessica Rigby

KATRYNA PIERCE

The Meal

i will chew the faces
of Mount Rushmore
whose grit cuts
my soft, lofty throat.

as i swallow rocks
sharp eyes bruise
my red insides.
intestines curve
at bitter angles.
fossil bones
liquefy beneath

earth's hot spin skin
while i fish kiss
important men
in statue form,
before i begin
my meal on them.

JEREMY A. JACKSON

How Much *Is* a Teacupful?

I.

The fateful afternoon of December 13th, 1848 finds Phineas Gage, foreman of the Rutland and Burlington Railroad construction crew, proceeding as normal with the day's blasting. He stands among his men, his long steel tamping rod by his side, surveying the work. His mind wanders elsewhere, to his home, to his family, to his future. Another worker fills the hole carved into the rock with explosive powder and stands back, ready for detonation. Phineas is momentarily distracted, and without thinking, drops his tamping rod down onto the black powder, striking a spark on the rock and igniting the explosive. The pressure of the explosion rockets the rod upward, directly into Phineas's skull. The rod arcs away through the air, embedding itself into the ground some yards away as its owner crumples to the ground.

From here on out, Phineas Gage's story becomes rather…strange. For, rather than perishing on impact—as would be expected from having a three-foot, seven-inch rod of steel fly at high speed through his head—Gage remained conscious and was able to walk, with assistance from his fellow workers, to the road where he caught a passing oxcart that took him to a nearby hotel. There he sat, upright and lucid on the front porch, until Dr. Edward Higginson Williams arrived. According to Dr. Williams's personal statement, Gage was lucid enough to crack a joke, gesturing to his injury and saying, "Here is business enough for you." The doctor heard his story in full, but could not believe such an event had occurred, thinking that Gage must

have been somehow mistaken. Gage then got up to vomit, and the force of the expulsion caused "half a teacupful of the brain" to be expunged from the wound on his head, as recorded by Dr. Williams. Ordinarily, one would expect such a story to end with a coma or string of seizures, a very nicely worded obituary a few days later, and a weeping widow dressed in black. The tale of Phineas Gage, however, proves to be far from ordinary.

II.

I unearthed Phineas's story while digging through old YouTube videos made by the "Vlogbrothers," John and Hank Green. Researching and relaying odd tales such as Gage's are common fodder for the pair, as their weekly videos have a wide scope of subjects, ranging from science to literary analysis. I've always appreciated this duality, for I often find myself similarly split as a scientist with a love of books—or a literary scholar with a passion for scientific study. Sometimes, these short videos uncover truths about the human condition, without really appreciating the level of thought that they invoke in the viewer. They usually present the pure facts, and let the viewers draw their own conclusions and create their own mythos. Hank's video entitled "Stabbed in the Brain: Phineas Gage" begins with him saying, "Good morning, John. I'm a little worn out from philosophical musings…so today I'm going to just tell you the fascinating tale of Phineas Gage." He seems to underestimate how resonant this event was, both for the history of science and for all who share a fascination with the human mind.

Upon first viewing Hank outline the specifics of Gage's case, I was as baffled as Dr. Williams had been on that fateful day. Surely, the body cannot function after losing the majority of the left frontal lobe of the brain. The brain has always fascinated me, but less for its scientific qualities—biology was my worst subject in high school—than for the metaphorical resonances of its function. I have always pictured the brain as some sort of mysterious puppeteer of the body, electrical pulses sending signals down the strings of our nervous system and causing us to jump, run, or embrace. When the connection is cut or the brain is rendered inoperative (perhaps by a massive steel rod), the body should stop, correct?

The case of Phineas Gage proved that the brain is more than a simple powerhouse or on/off switch for the body's actions. Its role in human life is more nuanced, more dynamic. After a few months of recuperation, Gage was reported to be strolling about his Vermont hometown, seemingly no worse off than before—beyond losing his left eye as the rod passed through, of course. If one can suffer such traumatic brain damage, does that mean that the brain has less control over our functions than previously assumed? Gage

sent the newly emerging science of neurology into a tailspin. Theories on the implications of the case—both reasonable and half-baked—flowed from neurologists' heads like that teacup of brain did from Gage's.

III.

After Gage's eventual death, twelve years later, his body was exhumed and his skull examined by several separate academic institutions, trying to squeeze as much information as they could from the dead man. Recently, computer simulations have recreated the blast, and speculations have been hurled regarding the unclear parts of his story. In fact, the majority of what has been said about Gage has been deemed false, either grossly exaggerating the effects of the accident, or spinning a tale of mysterious events that simply never occurred. Neuroscientists of the time used Gage's case as a kind of catch-all, touting him and his recovery as proof for nearly every theory under the sun. Phineas Gage became a miracle. Despite his miraculous persistence in living, however, the remainder of his mortal life smacked of anticlimax.

After his recovery Gage began exhibiting symptoms that seemed rather out of character for the hardworking, quiet man. Until the time of the explosion, Phineas prided himself on being a good man, a good husband, and a good citizen. Very little is known about Phineas pre-lobotomy beyond this simple summary of his character; more focus has, of course, been placed on Gage, post accident. One can assume, though, from what little we do know about him, that he was a hardworking, polite family man. He was considered one of the finest railroad foremen in the country, and was content to be such. However, after the accident, the man became crass, rude, and generally unpleasant. Vulgarity flowed from his tongue, of the sort never before heard coming from the mouth of this upstanding gentleman. This change in personality caused him to lose the job that the former Phineas had loved so much. He also became estranged from his family, moving to New York City and exhibiting himself and his tamping rod at P.T. Barnum's American Museum (a precursor to the Barnum and Bailey Circus). Gage later settled in Chile, where he drove a stagecoach from Valparaiso to Santiago, ferrying back and forth hundreds of Chileans to whom he was little more than a vaguely churlish man with one eye.

IV.

Here is a trifurcated man. Phineas before the accident: a hardworking, uncomplicated man. Gage after the accident: a sour, crass sociopath, as one scientist dubbed him. And finally, you have the mythical Phineas Gage, spawned not only from the tremendous events that took place that cold December afternoon, but from the reverberations of the blast through history.

This bizarre case proved once and for all that brain surgery could be possible, and a human could even be lobotomized without necessarily causing death. Gage's change in personality, too, led many researchers to delve into the mysteries that surround the different control centers of the brain. Hypotheses sprung up that pinpointed where the "personality center" of the brain might be. Phineas Gage became a common case study. According to foremost expert on Phineas Gage, Professor Malcolm Macmillan, Gage is included in about 60% of college neurology textbooks.

The uniqueness of his case allowed for many different and wide-ranging theories to flourish on the grounds that his head somehow proved them correct. His skull and his tamping rod, now immortalized in Harvard's medical school, were just bizarre enough to create a new face of neurology, a man who simply made a mistake while working at the job he loved so much. However, the widespread interest in his story has muddled his true story. Macmillan analyzed the average error in the facts presented about Gage, and said that "the most inaccurate components [of the stories] are those about his work before the accident, the details of the changes in his behavior, and his subsequent history." This indicates, then, that the threefold Phineas, in the eyes of the scientists, definitively proves absolutely nothing. No one, no matter how long they've studied his case, quite knows what is and what is not true about him.

V.

For one generally unconcerned with the jumbled mess of neuroscientific facts surrounding Phineas Gage, I am, nonetheless, presented with certain questions to be considered. What do we really lose when we lose our brains? Furthermore, what defines who we are, if the brain—and subsequently our personalities—can be altered in such a gruesome manner? Neither my scientific study nor my literary knowledge alone provides an explanation. I am left with the stark realization of how fragile the human mind is, regardless of how resilient the brain may be. One moment, this twenty-five-year-old man was going through the motions of a day's work, perhaps thinking of what sort of hot meal he would have waiting for him when he arrived home, and the next second, he became neuroscience history. This newfound significance forced him to uproot and dismantle the life he knew before, forced him to build a new life with a new brain wherein he had to strive for acceptance but ultimately find none, all because he had found he had become a new person. He changed utterly, and proved how fragile and mutable a human life can be.

What do we mean when we call something or someone human? It is the question that has inspired much of my research, in both literature and the sciences: what is the essence of being human? Certainly if you ask any biologist, you will be subjected to an interminable lecture on DNA, RNA, genes, and their functions. If the case of Phineas Gage teaches us anything,

however, it is that there is more to the human spirit than a sequence of microscopic proteins and electrical impulses. We are an amazing species, capable of incredible feats of strength, intellect, and—in Phineas Gage's case—survival. It is theorized that after Gage's move to Chile, he slowly began to return to his old self. I'd like to believe that he was able to regenerate into the same pleasant, hardworking man his family had loved and lost. Therein is proved the existence of some unconquerable something, be it a soul or spirit or what have you, which carries the essence of human consciousness, that not even a three-and-a-half foot metal rod moving at hundreds of miles per hour could eradicate.

I am perfectly content traveling with the triptych Gage as he was, is, and ever shall be, just as I am content to exist as a bifurcated being myself, as I seek to understand the universe through the narrow lenses of both human science and human creativity. If we take the amalgamation of our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions, we come close to understanding our own incalculable souls. I find myself content in the knowledge that the human body, with our mysterious brain at its helm, will never cease attempting to know itself.

I've Oversimplified Their Beauty, Britina Cheng

Untitled, Catherine McWilliams

CHRISTY LEIGH AGRAWAL

last week's obituary

why now do you speak
of the man who threw himself
off the bridge near your town

hitching yourself to the cosmic tail of his rippling
deliverance into the river
like you might be a fisherman or
God, maybe

don't you know that
if you wait too long you never fall
asleep feeling full

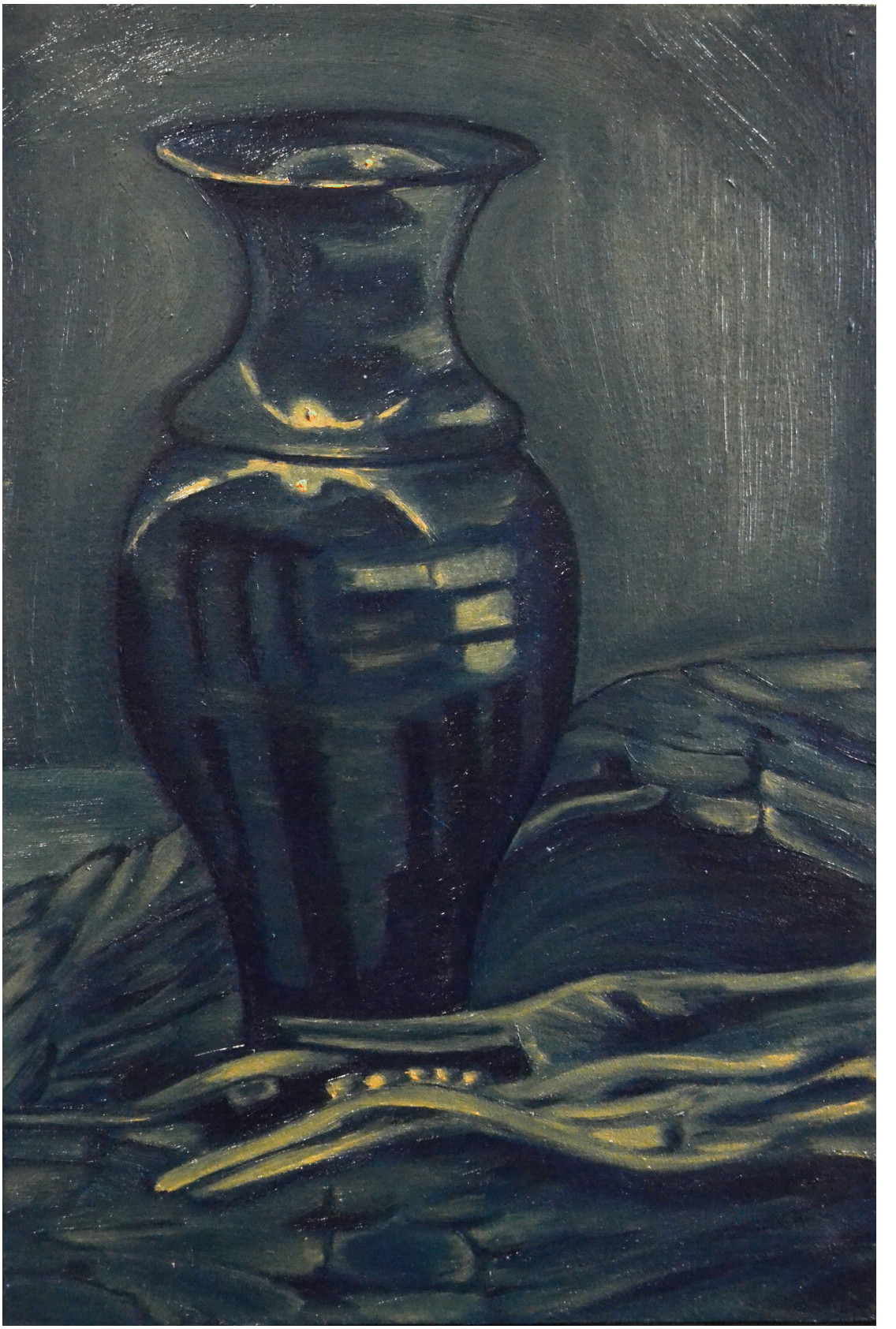
CHRISTY LEIGH AGRAWAL

Studying Genocide

the way a crack forms
is the same everywhere:
an absolute disrespect
for the body it interrupts—

invasion into hollow space
the voice falls out trailing
a weak smear: wet sound
help no one will know
where we lived, that we leaked,
that no crack is a crack, only
in two dimensions

remember: there's no reason here
no glue for this and that's
the only tired physics of fracture
left.



Complimentary Still Life, Anna Gilmore

MELISSA PARAVATI

Atelophobia

There's a common misconception about perfectionism making someone flawless. Mine doesn't do that at all. My perfectionism is the devastating disappointment I feel when I don't accomplish what I've decided I should. My perfectionism is my refusal to write in pen when completing assignments, the ulcer that developed after my first semester of college, and the dark bags that exist semi-permanently under my eyes. My perfectionism is the way I counted calories for months, but stopped when I decided that eating a nutritious diet was more important to an impeccable life than knowing how many calories are in an apple (ninety-five). My perfectionism became the pedometer strapped tightly around my wrist, constantly reminding me of how much exercise I had gotten that day and how much time was left for me to do more.

My sister expressed her perfectionism with much more impressive outlets. She had a perfect grade point average, a resumé that took up over three pages single spaced, and had enough scholarships that her PhD program was paying her to attend. If you didn't hear her anxious sobbing at night, you might be fooled into believing the idealistic image that she projected.

My mother was affected as well, but she kept it under control better than I ever could. It had taken me eighteen years of my own neuroticism to recognize that the lipstick she hastily applied before her pre-dawn coffee run was masking lips tired from smiling all the time, and that she cooked dinner every night so that she could measure out her own carefully controlled portion.

My sister wore her expectations like the tassel hanging limply from her graduation cap. My mother painted her impossibly high standards on her face in gaudy hues. I fastened mine around my wrist.

On one of the rare occasions where my sister allowed herself to relax, she and I decided to watch television. We were flicking through channels when we found a documentary on a woman living with agoraphobia. Probably in an attempt to convince ourselves that we were normal, she and I watched the entirety of the film in fascinated silence.

The woman panicked even when she was opening the door to leave her home. She talked about feeling trapped, not by the four walls enclosing her and the restrictions she had placed upon herself, but by the boundless freedom outside. There was too much space, too much room, too much uncertainty.

When it was over, my sister stood and stretched. The hollow strip of skin exposed under her shirt reminded me that I had just spent over an hour sitting sedentary and needed to work out. For a moment, anxiety pulsed in my body like a heartbeat. I checked my watch and saw that I still had plenty of time, and I released the breath I did not even realize I was holding.

"That was so stupid," my sister decided. "No one's afraid of freedom."

"You're right. She's probably just looking for attention."

A week or two later, my pedometer died.

I was in the middle of a long run, 3.63 miles in, and the screen went blank. I slowed to a stop and stared for a moment incredulously. The wind pushed into me impatiently, demanding that I keep moving. But how could I, when I didn't even know how far I could go. My life was measureless. I felt myself shrinking back inside of my body, unwilling to take a step further, because it was all too…free. How would I know if I had done enough exercise that day if I didn't even know how much exercise I had done?

I trudged back home, each step pointless without something with which I could measure it. I loosened the watch and removed it, thrust it into my pocket, and suddenly my wrist seemed very bare. There was a tan line where the watch had been, a thin stripe going from golden brown to startling white. It reminded me of the summer days spent running, or biking, or making up excuses for why I couldn't go out for ice cream with my friends.

The cool air felt good on my body. I paid more attention to the trees changing color when I walked instead of running, to the way that my footsteps struck the leaves on the sidewalk like thunder, how the clouds drifted lazily from one side of the sky to the next.

When I got back I thought about sucking down a protein shake. But I couldn't shake the memory of missed ice cream sundaes from my thoughts, so I walked into the kitchen, a rebellious thrill pumping through my body. I reminded myself that these were my rules, so I wasn't technically breaking them—just amending.

My brother was sitting at the table, eyes trained on his phone. I expected him to comment on how different and calm I seemed, but he didn't even lift his head, he was so focused intently on what was in front of him. I deflated slightly, but the thought of eating what I wanted kept me moving towards the fridge. It was full of fruit and vegetables. That was the only snack that my mother and I bought while grocery shopping. But I knew in the back there was a secret stash of chocolates, something my mother had bought during a particularly stressful month and hadn't touched. She had needed the reassurance that she was, at least, good at controlling herself.

I pushed aside cartons of sickly sweet berries and wilting lettuce. There they were: a crooked stack of three small chocolates, wrapped in shiny purple foil. They looked out of place amongst the produce, like coal wrapped in pretty paper. But I took all three and closed the refrigerator door.

My brother lifted his head, and I waited proudly and expectantly for him to comment his approval on the progress I had made.

"Hey," he said, glancing down at his phone and back at me. His eyes were distant, almost glazed. "Do you know how many calories are in an apple?"

SARA MUNJACK

In the summer of 1982, as told by dad

Monday:

Take what I say with a grain
of angel dust. James Brown on the radio
in constant conversation. These are
the days the D train filled its bodice
with graffiti & tinny boom boxes.
Underneath the Williamsburg Bridge,
you were only buying your drugs—
the pop of a gunshot and the squeal
of reality's response interrupts.
Faith cannot exist on its own
// you go home to your cream
of barley soup and Al Green. Pretend
you did not see the universe shatter—
if only for a moment. (its seams will
reconstitute itself with heat waves
off the pavement) Watch your chest,
it still rises in breath like leavened bread.

JOSEPH CURRA

Course of Wind

We set sail for coarser seas,
crucified sheets of our old skin
to the body and arms of an oak mast
that swallows the wind, exhaling us into new directions.

O, but Wind, if you fail to show your face,
if you must opt to save your breath, leaving stillness in your wake,
we will rotate the world beneath our boat,
cradling the water in our hands
and paddle on. We will find land.

KALLIE SWYER

A.M.

00:34

She said forgiveness lasted until midnight.
I measure it now in shadows
cast on roots—above ground & twisted,

I lost a full day to penance,
then left it in water to watch it
float. A lesson in density:

whittle your guilt & you can, too.
A lesson in honesty: I live in the river
silts; they are deeper than they seem.

02:06

today I asked
the gardener why she
liked weeds, & her mouth
filled with pesticide. I see them
growing by moonlight. I resolve: tomorrow:
find a shovel.

03:41

fear changes,
she said; it stills
in the thorns, appears
when late turns early—

as if I didn't feel it
each night, curled
near my pillow,
river water pooling
by its talon feet

while memory sleeps
lost in the duvet until
it is too cold not to find it

05:22

overthinking is like grabbing at roses, the way your hands come
away red & dripping, like you can't remember if your skin was
always this unreliable & holey

07:59

an hour carving *this is not me* into a bed post in a minute i will change my mind

Featured Artist

Hook, Thomas John Magnus

Untitled, Thomas John Magnus

Fire Studies, Thomas John Magnus

KIRA GREGORY

Hermit

It's been raining. I'm deep in the woods, far from home. The sun just emerged from under a massive cloud bank, lighting up the sparkling glade. Green ferns lurk by the forest's edge, and apple trees huddle near the stronger maples. I stand in the shade, listening. Watching for danger. The field is rutted with fresh ATV tracks, and I am startled at how recently the grass has been mashed down by rugged tires. I survey the prints warily. When I hike in the woods, I am like an animal: fearful of humans.

Nine years ago I came to this place. I was twelve, my brother ten, my sister seven. The old house had been shrinking. As our father oversaw the building of the new house on Bell Hill, he sometimes drove us the four miles from Forest Street to Bell Hill Road to see the progress.

We watched the house grow in the summer of 2006. We listened to it sing in the western wind—the hollow Styrofoam blocks, before they were filled with concrete and became the solid first-floor wall, caught the evening breeze like a giant whistle. Dad brought me up one day after a summer rain, before the roof went on, and I carefully balanced atop haphazard planks, trying not to fall into the inches-deep pond that was the kitchen floor. In August, when the roof was up and my brother was still a foot shorter than me, a photo was taken of the two of us playing who can lean the farthest out the nonexistent window. In September, carpet and plastic wood began to overlay the plywood floor, muffling out visual memories of snow and rainwater in the kitchen, and open sky for a roof.

One crisp October night, the same month we made the move, I remember sitting in my new room, the aqua blue carpet stretching out before me to the opalescent sea green blinds. I was huddled in the closet, sliding door

open and fluorescent light bright above me, knitting. So comfortable. I had decided this new place was home.

Water. So soft I can barely hear it, calling to me from the shadows beyond the far edge of the field. I hesitate, unwilling to enter the open space—but I cannot resist the sound.

It's March, and my well-loved hill is a place sadly devoid of the joys of water, the places where fish and frogs and cattails grow in the sun. The delicious gurgle whispers on the wind, drawing me forward, enticing my explorer's heart. I reach the far side of the glade, pause to listen, then duck under the branches into the shade.

Beyond the wall of shade lies a world of caves, ditches dug by the water, all ups and downs and no straight path for me to cross over. I try not to muss the leaves as I slide down into the ditch, my hardy steel toed men's hiking boots grasping at the soft natural soil. I avoid the water, yet plunge into a river of chilly air that flows down the ditch, invisible.

Nine years since I came to this place. Since my father's desk, bought used in the 70s, was assembled in this corner of my aqua-carpeted room.

At the far end of this desk grows an aloe plant in a ceramic pot, decorated in lively green and pink. Its twin resides out in the laundry room where southern sunlight floods my indoor garden. Both pots are full of aloe. Both are gifts from a friend.

Anna lived by a stream, and I was jealous of that. She was like an only child; her brother was grown and had moved away. Her mother had the house decorated with all types of things that fascinated me. There were fossils everywhere, lustrous plants, hummingbird feeders that attracted winged jewels. I wanted to watch them forever. We'd go exploring in the stream, looking for fossils and salamanders, trying to sweep up the little fish in our nets and place them in the orange bucket to take back and show our mothers and my siblings. We were so proud when we caught the crayfish. Anna was shy of the waving claws and wouldn't touch it, but I was comfortable and practiced with crustaceans. I knew how to hold him around the back where his segmented legs couldn't reach. The claws waved and waved, but never found my fingers.

Opposite the desk, beside the opalescent blinds, is a white plastic folding table. Beneath the table rest three aquariums, full of bone-dry brown sand. Strong with memories of shells on the move, climbing crustacean feet, nighttime watches to observe the battles, to interfere in the raucous lives if necessary.

I'd wanted a pet, many pets, long before the move. But my mother was allergic to fur. I settled on hermit crabs after years of hopeful research, and my

parents agreed, but made sure to specify that the crabs could come only once we moved to the larger house. The months passed slowly.

One week after we moved, my patience ran out again and I went to plead my case. That weekend, we went crab shopping. I picked out three beautiful little creatures from an exotic pet store, settled them in the Dominoes sugar container with gravel on the bottom, and carried them on my lap all the way home, sometimes peeking in to see what they were up to. This same habit of enthusiastic peeking would lead to the demise of one of the precious pets, and hence one of the most tragic periods of my life.

I named them Curly, Larry, and Moe, and loved them to make up for all those years of wishing for something to love. Their first substrate was neon-painted fish gravel, before I knew that paint was harmful to the crabs. Before I knew that gravel could be harmful to the crabs. I learned over the years. But it wasn't enough.

Information on this species is limited, and misinformation common. Some sources claim the crabs are easy to care for, beginner's pets. Others go into more depth and proclaim them to be difficult exotics. I have experience now. I can tell you that they're easy to care for—until they die without reason. If a crab is sick, death is imminent. Who knows what causes the sickness? But there's nothing to be done. It's difficult to know how to keep the creature comfortable, and so it suffers in silence.

In the wild, the crabs will grow to ripe old age. Giant, gnarly old things as big as baseballs, twenty years old or more.

Mine lasted six months. Six perfect, joyous, glowing months.

There are more ditches ahead, some of them deeper. I haul myself up, holding on to a hemlock's roots, flattening myself as I slide down the near-vertical walls. And then, the land begins to flatten out. The trees are bigger here, taller. There are odd little evergreen plants clustered on the floor, like relics from the age of the dinosaurs. Later, I would learn to call them club mosses.

There's no land up ahead. I wonder why I can see trees beyond, why there's an open space in the air. As I step closer, I begin to hear a faint rushing noise.

Like wind in the treetops, but steadier. Like the call of ocean waves, far away.

I step up to the edge as the land opens wide before me. There's a stream gushing far below, roaring in the rapids from spring's snow melt. A slate black stream bed is visible where the water is quiet. I'm thirty feet up. Ancient trees grow down below and up above, towering higher into the sky than any I've seen.

There's water. There's water here, on my desert hill. I can only stare and listen.

It was simple uncontrolled excitement and enthusiasm that killed the first. When the crabs molt, shed their skin, they bury themselves for cover. The process can take over a month. I knew as much, but I couldn't stand the separation. I was only twelve. I dug up the molting crab, his process unfinished. A sick crab is a dead crab. He never recovered.

The other two were also lost in molting problems. Gravel is unfit for molting, since it doesn't hold moisture. I learned this over the years, with different crabs, but even those later creatures did not live to ripe old age.

I had various crabs over the years until recently. But life hasn't had the same feel to it, since my first pets were alive.

I can't get rid of those three aquariums, not yet, maybe not ever.

I can't help but wonder if I will ever fill those aquariums again. That's why I can't get rid of them. But I made a pact with myself, not to buy more crabs. Not to support the trade that kills them. But more than that, not to support the trade that cages a free creature that had hatched in the ancient sea.

The summer when my last crabs were dying, I tromped barefoot to a nearby field, watching and feeling carefully for rusty barbed wire, hiding in the leaf-covered soil. The evening before, I was taking photos of a striking chokecherry bush, its red fruit glowing in the sunset light. Only after scrutinizing that bush for many minutes did I notice the caterpillar.

It was huge. As large as a chokecherry leaf and as thick as my thumb, and camouflaged so exquisitely. Tiny pink and blue dots adorned its sides, which were themselves the color of a leaf in the sun. I forgot the berries and turned my camera on the leaf-worm.

It was the beginning of a luna moth.

Scrunching my face at the prick of last summer's goldenrods on the toughened soles of my feet, I approached the chokecherry bush. I searched for the caterpillar in the only way I knew how—letting my eyes unfocus and looking for a patch of sunlight in the bush. That patch of sunlight was actually the caterpillar's green, just a tad lighter than the surrounding leaves. It always took a minute or two before I found it. I'd begin to worry I'd lost it. And then, there it would be, right in front of me.

I almost reached for it. I may have poked it. I wanted to keep it and see it morph into its majestic final form, the rare pale moth. But it was a hermit crab. I'd never cared for a luna moth before, didn't know exactly what it needed from its wild world to live well. I restrained my hands, forced them to remain clasped behind me, and I explored only with my eyes.

I checked on it every other day. I watched the leaves disappear from the bush as it ate. And one day I couldn't find it.

It was gone. There were plenty more leaves to eat, so why would it leave? Had the sharp eyes of a predator caught sight of the leaf in the sun? Oh, how I wished I'd caught it when I had the chance!

And at the same time, I knew it might have died in my aquarium. In the dark, in stale air, away from the sky and living things.

I stood beside the bush with the red berries, breathing the wild air, feeling the sun and the ambient life and sounds of the field. No one should be kept from this place.

I can't remember if I went down that day, following the deer's footsteps just as they walk along my own footpaths, their dainty hooves leaving hearts in the mud. I can't remember how many times I returned to this valley.

What I do remember are flashes of light on the water, shade below the great earthen walls, joy in the dancing water and in the flickering glimmer of fish in the shallows. Giant, giant hemlocks, two hundred years old, and one great fallen trident that I'd climb up and sit on, gazing down the stream bed. Massive red-white fungi, cool and smooth to the touch, glued to the rotting flesh of standing trees. The sting on the backs of my knees from a nettle plant, its poison an indignant protest against being so rudely brushed aside. A crayfish, caught with much splashing and a hunter's concentration, waving its tiny claws dramatically. A tiny dace fish swimming frantically in my neon hunter's cap, then resting as if it had given up, only breathing. The high wild call of the woodpewee, a little bird seldom seen, that haunts the deep woods and sings with a voice that is like the silence itself.

ALEXIS HAMLIN

Without a Home

He snapped around the bend on Henry Street.
Seconds later, high beam lights infringed

in the cracked apartment window. The Ram's horn
uproars the silent, cool midnight vibe. Quickly

dodging shards of mirror glass in the carpet,
Mom unpacked twice, then packed again.

Work shoes, toothbrushes, formula,
my bookbag, and Em's diapers. She paused—

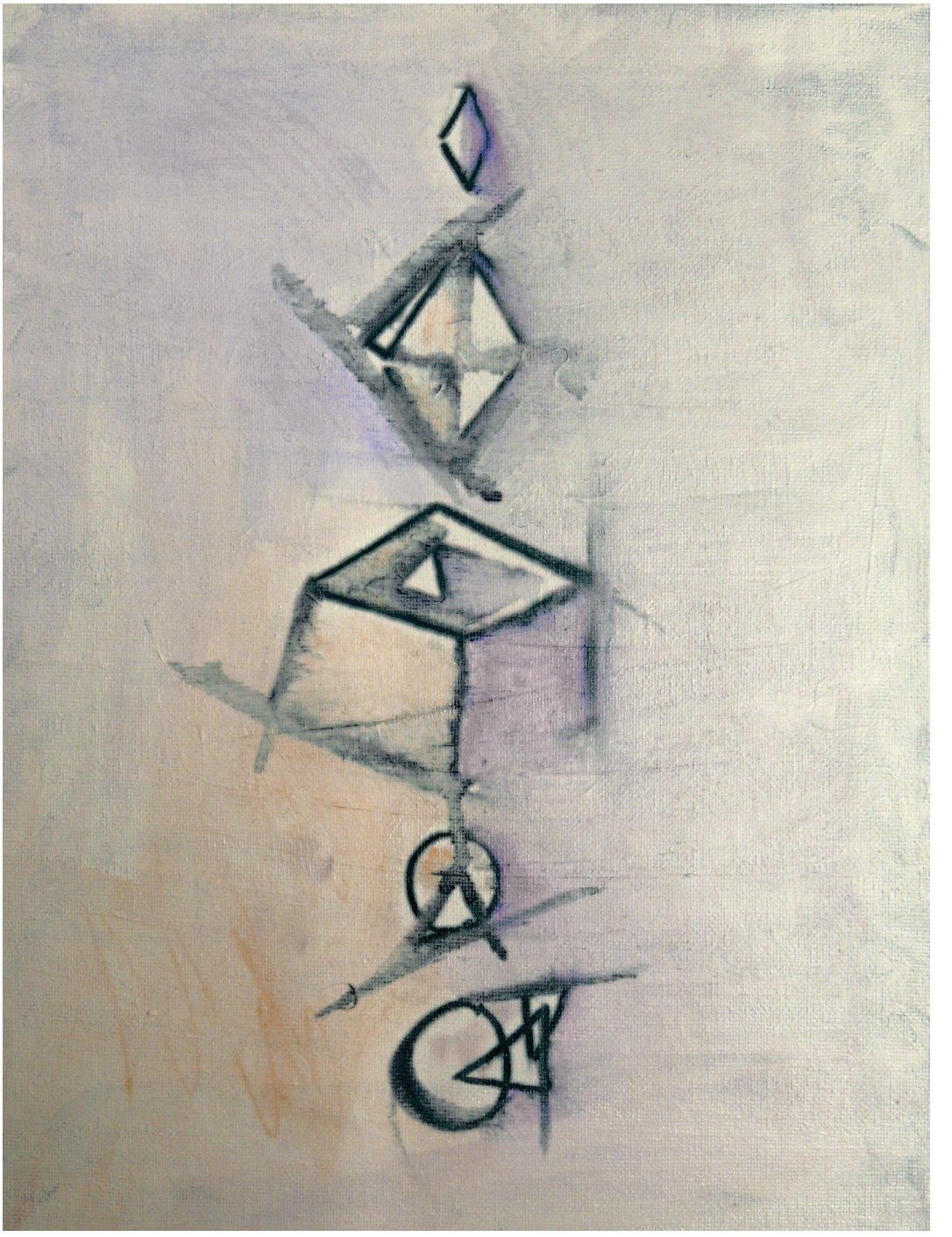
gazed over at my sister in her car seat,
drool dripping and glossing over her bunny.

My mom, stuck on Em, then me—
Her chickadees, she called us. Said we glowed.

The horn on his candy-apple red pickup
blared on, so loud, Mom covered her ears

fell into the floor and cried diamonds brighter
than his broken glass, brighter than us,

and she knew the answer right then—
we weren't ready to go back to that empty house.



Shapes, Rachel Bullock

RACHEL BENEWAY

A Reaction to the Doomsday Clock

January 22, 2015
—three minutes to midnight—
due to climate change.

In blue woods, one
tamarack tree snacks
on tattooed sun. Some
cut their throats
to implore more 4x4s,
spreadsheets, keyboards.

In limbo, frogs bite
dogs. The house
atop the falls rains
only tumbleweeds,
no seeds. Look out
your bay window.

Your flowers now
sound like hurricanes,

in this place where clouds
mud streets and rights

swing deep
in hot ruin.

Oceans are plastic, the sky
        smells like science.

Kissing to bruise says
        a watering can
    spewing gasoline.

Wavering from the soft unsaid,

what demands
        importance
is a torment.

RACHEL BENEWAY

Writing Your Obituary and Wondering if You Would Like It

This is not the place to discuss the time you chucked
a *Playboy* magazine in my middle-schooler lap just for a hoot. No,
here your love for ugly dogs and riding lawn mowers is not important.
I do not mention how often I picture the last time
I saw you. Instead, I must write the year you were born,
and the one in which you ceased to exist. Then, I must fill in the years
with where you went to college and some of your hobbies,
but only the boring ones. This is not the place to tell of my dreams
where you lick gardens clean of weeds by the light
of a setting moon. There is no place, here, to note
that I've only seen my father, your only son, cry once
before, but now he listens to messages you left him weeks ago
and falls into fountain. How do I say this in a place
that does not care about the bang of your voice,
your neck, seldom seen without the snake of a scarf, the smell
of your house, your handwriting, slow wink, onyx rings, how much
I wish I had called, I wish
I had called, I wish I had called, the weight
of your hugs
and the size of your

hands.

Farewell, Savannah Skinner

ALLISON GIESE

Bones

2,072 miles

When I leave White Plains, the humid air is so thick that the sky is blurry. I don't know where I'm going.

1,977

There's an accident in Yonkers. I'm stuck in traffic for an hour.

1,706

It's getting dark. I'm at one of those super rest stops with a McDonald's. I mean, I guess I've traveled through a lot of states, but at the same time all I know of them are places like these. Nobody wants to stop here, after all.

1,499

I got one of those double espressos from Starbucks, and I am practically vibrating. It's almost ten. Seventy miles an hour doesn't feel fast enough. I feel nauseous. I feel dizzy, but not in the usual way, not from the vertigo attacks. I imagine that ghosts are walking in the great blue yonder on the side of the road. He never made it to his brother's. He got as far as Tennessee before the cancer caught up with him and his lungs inflated with fluid.

I wonder if he's with them now.

1,300

Somewhere on the side of the road, I stop for the night. I have never seen night this heavy. I lay on the hood of my car—all the while the engine pinging as it cools—and look up at the stars. I don't know if I will sleep, but I know I will feel more comfortable in the car than in some dive motel.

I have never been so consumed in my life. The sky might just crush me.

987

I stop at some run-down diner for some real food. It's quiet, nothing but a few truckers, a family, and me. My waitress is chatty. She asks me where I'm from. I'm too tired to explain. I say nowhere in particular.

"Well, ya'll have to be careful out here, all alone. These hitchhikers can be crazy. One day, you might just disappear. And the people won't even wonder."

She's right, but the thought terrifies me anyway.

635

I'm getting gas at a Texaco when I see it; a family, in a blue minivan, also getting gas. The mom pumps while the dad brings the kids inside for a potty break. They emerge with snacks and slushies in hand, all of them holding hands in a line. One of the kids is crying, which makes me glad that I can't hear. Then something shifts. I can feel their panic simmering through the air. The line jerks in my hand—the tank is full. One of the kids is missing.

A teenage boy with red hair like his comes out of the station dragging the missing kid by the hand. The parents wring his arm over and over, thanking him, you saved my baby, my baby…

My heart stops and I sit on the curb, breathing hard with my head between my knees until another car honks for my spot. I'm almost there. I can feel it in my spine.

341

I stop on the side of the road to pee and suddenly he's there, almost like he was never gone in the first place. *Why are you here?* he seems to say. I wonder if I've gone crazy. Too little sleep, too much caffeine, low blood sugar. Something. *Of all the ghosts you have, why me, Aaron? Go home. Nobody said you had to live for me.*

I'm not sure if I'm really hallucinating, or if I'm just pretending for my own sake. It's desert out here, in the deep South; it could be a mirage. I rub my eyes. It's not him, it's a hitchhiker, a woman. Her hair is black, not red.

"It's okay. I see them too sometimes," she says to me, and keeps walking.

166

It's very early. I am dirty, greasy. How long has it been at this point? The map says I'm where I should be. All that's out here is sand and the occasional one pump gas station. I'm woozy thinking about it. Even with the AC on full, I'm sweating, almost feverish. In the rearview mirror, I can see him following me. I knew he wouldn't understand. I have to know what is out here that was worth throwing everything away.

120

On the state border to New Mexico I make the mistake of turning on my phone. I told them that I was going, and not to worry, but still my phone explodes with messages, especially from my dad, and from Luke, my best friend. I tell them I'm fine and shut my phone again.

"Stop lying to them," he says.

He startles me so badly that I drop my phone. I'm hard of hearing but I can hear his voice perfectly. I almost forgot.

My phone screen shatters on the hard-packed dust. I think about responding to him, but I don't.

"You went to all this trouble to dig me up again," he says. He leans against the car. "And now you won't even talk to me."

My eyes smart from the dust. I stoop to pick up the phone. The yellow dust is ground into the gaps between cracks. I open the car door.

"All right. Well, I'll see you soon. I love you."

The whole way down my eyes won't stop watering, like a bucket dragged from the well again and again.

52

Without warning my car breaks down. I have been on empty highway for hours. The only thing telling me I've gone anywhere at all is the odometer. I keep turning the key but the engine won't start. The little angry red light flashes at me—oil, oil. I passed a sign a while back telling me that the nearest town was ten miles. My phone is busted, and even if it weren't I doubt there would be reception.

I reach into the back of the car, find the mostly-full gallon jug of water, and start walking.

50

It's so hot. I have no idea what time it is, but it can't be much later than 3:00 or 4:00 p.m. I'm sweating buckets and can feel the sunburn chafing already.

I hate myself. I hate everything. I hate that I let it get this bad, hate that I let him fuck me, hate that I allowed myself to fall in love until I drowned.

48?

I keep drinking water but I still feel woozy. Heat boils off the dirt. I have come all this way without a vertigo attack, but my luck has run out. Even so, this feels bigger than that.

I trip over something in the shoulder of the road and plant face-first in the dirt. One of my hearing aids is knocked loose. Dust swarms in my lungs; my heart rate picks up, just like the car's torque had before the engine seized.

Am I going to die here?

I can't catch my breath. The thing I tripped on rips into my shinbone, and I reach for it. It's some creature's skull, crumbly and flooded with tooth marks. I sob into the dirt. My tongue is streaked with blood; I must have bitten it. I watch red droplets fall and let my head down. I am so tired.

A hand strokes my hair. I know it's him before he speaks. "Oh, Aaron," he says. "Why did you do this to yourself?"

"I can't let you go. I tried. But you won't leave me alone."

"Are you sure about that?"

I can't even look at him. "Louis, I…"

"Please don't follow me anymore, Aaron," he says. "For your sake."

My head is going to explode. I lean into the dirt. The sand floods my mouth and erodes me away.

?

Someone hoists my head up and feels for a pulse at my throat. It's getting dark. They say something, but as usual I can't hear. Sand coats my tongue and makes it hard to breathe, much less speak. All of my bones, every last one, have been wrenched out of place and pain flares through my body. A flashlight clicks on and scorches my eyes. They say something again.

"I can't hear you," I say. "I'm hard of hearing, I can't…"

The light is pulled away from my face and moves to the left so I can see. It's a cop, a trooper in a black and gray uniform.

"What are you doing out here?" the officer asks. "You're lucky I spotted you. Another hour or two and you would have blended into the side of the road."

I force myself to my knees. My vision is swirling, and I can barely read the cop's lips.

"Do you need an ambulance?" she asks me.

"I feel…" I look over my shoulder. He's gone; the skull I held is gone, too. The gallon jug of water I carried is split on its side mostly empty, evaporated into the ground. "I'm…My car broke, down, and I…I was walking to…"

"I understand," she says. "I can call triple A for you, okay? We'll get you help." She offers me her hand. "What's your name?"

I am delirious. The sun has bleached away everything. "Louis," I say. "My name is Louis."

Snow, Jessica Rigby

After the Levees Broke

Ma warned me to cool
my nerves when I saw him.
I thought *He's more hound*
than gator, more levee
than bayou. In the emergency
room, she carried me down
into the marshlands. When
our names had been made
into a list, we waited hours
to meet him at the north end
of the bog. I was dehydrated—
I took off my T-shirt, my sandals.
I thought a mosquito to be
a sparrow, a bullfrog to be
a kitten—his name was called.
We made our way upstream
on a low-power air boat,
catching glimpses of children
drowned in the silted mud,
lovers lying still at the shore
with fevers only a few degrees
warmer than the air, bodies
with crawdads pulling at their
ears. The treble of our slow

move forward was all I could
hear. Behind a homing thunder
storm, near sunset, Ma cut
the engine and carried me
off the boat, into the bed
of reeds. With those canes
and stalks around me, I looked
down past their roots. I saw
Pop there, lying with his eyes
closed, waiting for the sun
to finally bleed itself dry,
the nighttime air to turn cold.

I Am a Dog, Sarah Simon

BRENDAN MAHONEY

Trash Talk

I'm nineteen and I guess I'm already something of a veteran in the food service industry. I've worked a fistful of jobs where it was my duty to serve people fast and to serve people cheap. When I turned sixteen my parents told me I needed to get a job. Any job. Get a job. They didn't care. The only important thing was that I GET A JOB. Both of my parents were teenagers during the recession in the seventies and I think that was just the approach that their childhoods taught them to take towards minimum wage labor. My mom worked at a Burger King to help pay for college and my father worked a series of odd jobs up into his twenties, which included shoveling shit as a farmhand, hauling around trees at a lumber mill, and taking care of emotionally damaged children for a summer in a special needs foster home. They raised me in a small town in Southern New Hampshire where my job options were essentially selling people clothes or selling people food. For whatever reason, I ended up picking food and I've stuck with it ever since. I've made a lot of people a lot of food. I've also cleaned up a lot of their trash that they leave after they're done. A lot of their trash. Disposable wrappers, disposable cups, disposable bags, disposable napkins, disposable plates and forks and knives and spoons, disposable gloves, disposable people—at the end of the day, food service is a disposable industry. People are there to eat and leave, very often with little idea or little concern for what they're leaving behind. Spilled salt. Ketchup-mustard-mystery stains. Half-finished meals. Sometimes even extra trash that people dug out of their pockets and tossed onto the plates of half-eaten cheeseburgers as a tip.

My mind ends up wandering a lot, as is common in a job that takes about twenty-four hours to master. After half a dozen hours or so into a shift, I don't even have to think at all. Sometimes I don't want to. But when I do, my mind ends up wandering through the bits and pieces of trash that I find.

Every piece of trash has a story behind it. Where did this napkin come from? We don't have napkins like this here. Did it fall out of someone's pocket? Was it dropped by a child after a mother pulled it from her purse in order to wipe her child's nose? Why did he drop it after his nose was wiped? Did he decide at that moment to throw both his arms around his mother's neck and swing from her like an affectionate capuchin? What will happen next because of it? Garbage might be the absolute easiest thing to detach ourselves from. It's garbage. It has served its purpose loyally, and now the time has come for it to disappear. Bye-bye. But every piece of garbage, just like every person, has a story behind where it's been and a story behind where it's going. Sometimes I like to imagine where it is that trash originated. Sometimes I imagine where it's going. Sometimes I wonder why it was thrown away at all.

Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman's favorite strategy was what's known as attrition warfare. The word *attrition* comes from a Latin root verb that means "to rub against," so in Latin *attrition warfare* might be paraphrased roughly as "the warfare of rubbing against." In English it might be paraphrased roughly as "feeding a nation through a paper shredder." It's an all-out style of warfare that basically boils down to treating your enemy like a mistake you made on the SAT. It's the same tactic we used in Vietnam, where we napalmed jungles out of helicopters and killed about a million North Vietnamese soldiers and civilians before the war was over.

In the American Civil War though, General Tecumseh Sherman did this by conducting Sherman's March to the Sea. He and his army marched through Georgia, from Atlanta to Savannah. Sherman's troops passed the time on the three-hundred-mile march to the port city by playing cards, growing beards, and destroying anything they thought might be remotely beneficial to the Confederate economy. Roads, telegraph poles, and entire towns were rubbed into the ground. There weren't strategic geographic targets for the North and the South to fight over in the Civil War, so the only target for each nation was the other nation. The war itself was not, as many wars are, the result of an imperial conquest to expand national borders. It was an ideological war. It was a war over who was right and who was wrong. Eleven southern states declared that they were their own sovereign nation and twenty-three northern states disagreed. To battle, then. It was more a matter of endurance than it was a matter of geography. Sherman's bright idea for cutting down on Southern soldiers' endurance was apparently to cake the whole region's sky with the black, acrid smoke of its burning towns and cities so as to give every one of those soldiers asthma. Sherman knowingly began his march without enough supplies to last the whole trek and encouraged his men to "live off the land," which is to say raid and pillage the stores of food kept by the native Georgians

that they encountered. His men heated railroad tracks and then bent them out of position so that trains running along them would be derailed. Sherman didn't just want to win this war. He wanted to render the South incapable of winning. It truly was a bloody, messy conflict.

The last two summers, I worked at a family-owned amusement park making food. The scope of this place was massive compared to everywhere else I'd worked. There were something like two dozen restaurants across the park where you could buy food. They had a greasy Italian stand, a greasy seafood stand complete with greasy alcoholic beverages, a greasy fried dough stand, a greasy grilled cheese stand, a greasy café, and a few good old greasy American burger joints. All the food was overpriced and everybody in the park had already paid something like thirty dollars to get in, but they bought the food anyways because the park didn't allow you to bring in any outside food, and what else were you going to do when your eight-year-old started crying because you wouldn't buy her a hot dog? Plus, the park was essentially selling you the luxury experience of excess. Its motto was "Just for Fun!" You didn't *need* to eat two bags of cotton candy and then ride the teacups till you blew chunks over the side, but everyone should stop worrying so much and blow off steam every once in a while. It's Just for Fun!

This place was really massive. It was like a small town by itself. I think it must have employed some five or ten thousand people between everyone they needed to operate rides, to operate games, to make the food, to deliver all the stock, to maintain all the various shrubbery, to repair the electronics, to do all the office work, and to clean up after everyone else. The trash this place put out must have been formidable. I never saw all of it at once; I don't think anyone did. It would have been an attraction all by itself if they ever piled it up into one mountainous stack. *Hey kids! Come on down to the newest ride, Mystery Mountain! What's it made out of? Nobody knows! Grab a harness and start climbing! Make sure you have your tetanus shots first! And remember, it's Just for Fun!* In order to avoid that, they had each stand throw their trash in a separate dumpster and then, in the dead of night after the park had closed, the maintenance crews came and emptied them all out. I would find all sorts of things while I cleaned tables there. Your standard issue crumb-covered trays. Your toys that you won at Skee-Ball and then forgot about. Your park maps and your water bottles and occasionally your spare change. Into the trash bag they go. Into the dumpster it goes. Into the air it goes as exhaust shooting from the chimney sitting atop the Just for Fun! Factory.

I go to college in Western New York and during the school year I work at the dining hall. The work is mindless and the pay is shit but the hours are

really flexible and my commute is all of thirty seconds. I sign myself up for about five hours a week just so that I have some petty cash to spend. My shifts are usually during off hours like Saturday mornings or late at night so that I don't have to deal with too many rushes. Most days I end up tooling around the bakery looking for cookie dough to sneak or talking with the guy who only understands broken Spanglish over at the grill. I don't particularly enjoy serving college students food. It makes me wonder what all the people living in the town my university is in must think of us. We don't give a very good impression over the counter. A lot of the students I serve never look at me once and they talk to me like they're telling Siri how to make them a spinach wrap. And the trash here is almost no different. There are no trays and there are perhaps fewer people who will leave all of their trash just sitting out on their table, but how many people do you know who will sweep the crumbs off the table and wipe it down with a wet napkin (in other words, truly clean up their mess) before leaving? No one I know does.

One time I was working at the grill with the Spanglish guy and we ended up having to empty out the grease trap in the fryer. A grease trap is basically where all the various bits and pieces of food get stuck once the grease is filtered through it, along with a good couple inches of stale, murky grease. So this guy and I had to empty this out because it was getting full, which involved going out back in the middle of February in T-shirts and jeans. Neither of us wanted to be out there, so we rushed as quickly as we could. When we got out back, I learned where all the waste from this place was going. Not only was there this massive, industrial-sized baby landfill of a dumpster, there was also this enormous steel vault where all these greasy remnants got dumped and sat for a couple months until they were drained by who knows what company to who knows where. It was freezing, and we ended up pouring the grease too fast into this tiny funnel, and we spilled it all over our shoes. I stopped working at the grill after that.

The American Civil War officially ended on April 9, 1865. Four years and three weeks after it began. Over six hundred thousand American soldiers died in that period of time—the most American lives lost in any war to date. If it were an arcade game, U+C would be having one hell of a run at the top of the leader board. Right above "WWII" and "ASS." The killing streak ended when Union Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant beat Confederacy General Robert E. Lee's army to the Appomattox courthouse where Lee was planning on regrouping his forces, and General Grant surrounded him. Lee was outnumbered and outmaneuvered. He had no choice but to surrender. *Freeze, Robert. Hands where I can see 'em.* Fighting would continue until June of that year, but Lee was the South's commanding general and with him captured the

war was over that day in April. The South actually worked pretty hard for its silver medal over the four years of fighting. They were at a huge disadvantage when the war began. It was just like the story of David and Goliath except not at all. The South's only real advantage was the international leverage that their cash crop, cotton, gave them. This cotton was harvested by black slaves. Slavery was, by the time of Lee's surrender, illegal in the Union and soon to be illegal across the once-again-united United States.

I hear a lot of debate today about whether or not the Civil War was fought over slavery—which is weird because, living in New Hampshire, I usually don't hear a lot of debate about anything. But I guess it makes sense if you know what Northern New England is like for the people living there. Once you get out of the suburbs of Boston into the upper half of NH, Vermont, and Maine, the average population density is something like five to ten people per square mile. My family drives up north pretty often to visit mountains or watch leaves change or do other activities you might see on the cover of an L.L. Bean catalog, and we always end up running across some hill-people of the Appalachian genus. When I was a kid and my knowledge of Southern states could be traced exclusively back to cartoons, I always thought it felt like as we went further and further north, the people came from further and further in the deep south. And, even now that my geographical knowledge base has moved beyond *Foghorn Leghorn* reruns, I think I see some truth to this—New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine are all about the Civil War South's principles of small government. New Hampshire has no sales tax or income tax. Vermont's gun laws are some of the most lax in America. Maine's state police are so unobtrusive that they've never caught a single serial killer, despite Maine being one of the states where I most feel like I might be murdered. At my small-town high school there was a group of kids who were into what I almost want to call "Redneck Couture." In school they all wore ripped flannel cut-offs and loose-fitting jeans with holes in them—not because they were too poor to buy clothes from stores other than Walmart and Goodwill but because they had enough money to dress however they wanted and they chose this style. In the morning they all tore into the parking lot in dumpy mud-covered trucks with Confederate flags whipping out the back—not because they could only save up enough money for a secondhand hunk of rust but because their parents had told them to pick out a car for their sixteenth birthday and they said they wanted the one with *MURICA* stenciled on the side.

So I heard a lot of debate in high school, and even now from those who I still keep in contact with, about if the Confederacy was fighting for states' rights or slavery. The kids at my high school who had the Confederate flag as belt buckles thought it was states' rights. And there's some truth to what they thought. The Democrat who ran against Abraham Lincoln in 1860, Stephen

Douglas, cited state sovereignty as his number one concern for the nation. Abraham Lincoln himself was, arguably, ambivalent about free black Americans. He was a member of the African Recolonization Society, which advocated not only freeing slaves but getting them out of America. He wanted to free Africans from slavery and free America from Africans. So yeah, the American Civil War was probably about states' rights. But what you can't ignore is the fact that all those states' righters were protesting for their right to slavery in the first place. It was written into the declarations of secession for many of the Confederate states that this decision was motivated by slavery. When people argue over whether the Civil War was a battle over small government or slavery, I think they both hold a piece of the puzzle. It didn't matter what was being fought over that day in Appomattox, though. The war could have been about which *Cooking Light* recipe made the best key lime pie. General Lee was captured and the war was won.

The first real job I ever had was at McDonald's. It was an independently owned franchise right next to a major highway exit. It had all the business that a major fast food chain would get with the resources of a family-owned diner. I worked there the summer of my junior year, which ended up being a more or less traumatic experience. The thing about McDonald's is you have to think about it at a theoretical level or else you'll never survive. As a customer or as an employee. You need to view your meal as a hamburger in the abstract, totally separate from the factory farms and the slaughterhouse floors and the flash-freezing and the tears of the teenagers doomed to drop out of high school that serve as your seasoning. And these fries, to you these fries are the idea of french fries more than they are starch sticks mashed out of a machine and then sprayed with a liquid sugar compound so that they'll look golden brown after they're fried instead of the dull grey that they normally would be. Yum. This soggy scrap of a chicken's ass that has been sitting in its watery heating tray is not being plopped down onto this bun by my own two hands for actual human consumption. No, it will simply get launched out into the ether. The first McChicken in space. Even the trash becomes conceptual. The gloves that I put on and then throw away after each order aren't made of a limited resource that I and everyone around me is consuming like we're all competitors in a petrochemical pie-eating contest. These are all just images and sounds and words drifting free of their meaning, and maybe in some ways none of this is actually happening at all. That'll get you through a day or two at McDonald's. But you can't out-think the sweet 'n' sour scent of a trash bin forever. Especially the trash bins outside in the parking lot. Those are the worst. The sun beats down all day as trash accumulates in and around them. Like the most vile smelling salts, the hot stench of the last few bites of

hamburger meat decomposing and liquidizing on top of the mustard that has begun a slow and revolting confluence with the artificially-flavored berry and banana smoothie at the bottom of a soggy apple pie tin will force you back to reality. As you jostle all of this out with the last hour's trash inside a grey plastic bin and hurl each leaky bag into the dumpster, the stench will stain your skin, your uniform, your memories.

There is an area of ocean somewhere between California and Japan known as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. The ocean currents in the Pacific swirl around and around, and I guess it's been creating this massive island of trash for decades. Conservative estimates place its area somewhere around the size of Texas. The wildest conjectures estimate that it could be twice the size of the continental United States. It's difficult to tell exactly how much of this trash has come from land pollution and how much has been hurled off shipping vessels, but scientists are generally willing to hypothesize that the trash is all from humans. No marine life has, to their knowledge, developed the technology to produce empty cans of Coca-Cola in any significant amount. If you've ever seen pictures of a turtle with its shell all warped from some little rubber band or plastic strip, it might just have been swimming through the Great Pacific Garbage Patch for a little too long. And have you ever seen those labels on packages of seaweed sold as snack foods saying that there's a chance this seaweed contains trace amounts of pelagic plastics? Could be the Great Pacific Garbage Patch yet again. And scientists have found evidence of a Great Atlantic Garbage Patch, and a Great Indian Garbage Patch as well. Trash piles the size of continents slowly swirling in widening gyres like dirty sinks swirling around clogged drains.

The American Civil War ended on April 9. President Abraham Lincoln's brains were blown free and clear of his body on April 14. At least he got to hear about the surrender of General Lee first. Maybe it was the last thing that went through his mind before the bullet did. Andrew Johnson, who had been Vice President for just a month before Lincoln was assassinated, became President. In politics, as in theater, it's often difficult to follow a great act. Lincoln was known and admired during his presidency as a moderate politician. Had he been alive for more than a week past the end of the Civil War, he might have enacted policies designed to integrate the Confederacy back into the fold of the United States and repair the damage done by the Union army during the Civil War. And that's what Johnson, as the President during the Reconstruction Era, tried to do. The difference between Lincoln and Johnson, though, was that people liked Lincoln. Johnson didn't have the charisma or wisdom to effectively rule the country the way Lincoln had. Congress actually impeached him and they almost kicked him out of office

on a technicality. They got within one vote. For a good decade after the end of the Civil War, the U.S. Congress was united in thinking two things: that Andrew Johnson was the worst and that the South had to pay. The Congress was controlled by Radical Republicans who treated the citizens of the South as war criminals rather than fellow countrymen that they had only recently finished murdering by the cannonful. They kicked all the Southern representatives out of Congress, and they didn't let anyone from the South vote in federal elections for about a decade. Congress also ratified what are known as the Reconstruction Amendments, which abolished slavery for good in the South and in theory granted black Americans equal civil and voting rights. Then one day, the North up and left. They disbanded the military gangs that had functioned as governments for the Southern states. They stopped enforcing their shiny new constitutional amendments. They left behind a fragile pile of Band-Aids that did little to heal the nuanced socioeconomic conflicts that had caused the war in the first place. They left behind a region that was still damaged and bloodied by their own hands. They left behind people who were just as racist and now even more angry, with a shattered economy and broken homes, to peacefully coexist with the men and women whom they had involuntarily freed. They left illiterate freemen in a world of hostility and Ku Klux Klans and Jim Crows. They couldn't handle—or couldn't even perceive—their duty of racial integration and economic repair for the damage they caused. They won the war but found themselves unable to deal with the consequences.

The Confederacy was the number one meal and the Union had a hankering for it. The Union pulled up to the drive-thru window and ordered one sloppy, self-inflicting victory with a side of fries, please. In the parking lot it dipped its meal in the Fancy Ketchup that the cashier had stuffed in its paper bag. Then it cruised by a trash can on the grass and tossed the greasy remnants in its general direction before peeling back onto the major highway entrance right next to the restaurant.

Today, eight out of the eleven original Confederate states are ranked thirtieth or lower out of the fifty states for education. Petitions still surface every so often in these states to re-secede from the United States. In September 2015, a city in Alabama discussed banning the wearing of short shorts at a town hall meeting. Just three months earlier, a twenty-one-year-old in South Carolina discussed igniting a race war. He decided to start with a church in Charleston, where he killed nine black churchgoers. His personal website was later unearthed, and he was found posing in picture after picture with the Confederate flag emblazoned on jackets or on the hood of his car.

As a child it was my weekly chore to take the garbage out to the curb every Thursday. I was paid five dollars a week, but if my parents hadn't had a monopoly on my allowance I probably would have asked for more money.

It was hardly worth the five dollars for me to wake up a half hour early every Thursday morning, empty out all the trashes in the kitchen and bathrooms and bedrooms and offices in my house, carry them all down to my basement, cram them into these little trash cans, and then carry those trash cans all the way down to the end of my driveway along with all the bins for all the recycling as well. The trash smelled bad and it got on my clothes right before the school bus picked me up. I wanted nothing to do with it. I remember being only vaguely interested in what happened to the trash after I brought it down to the curb. Every so often I would take a trip to the town dump to get rid of the weird stuff like computers and mattresses, and I never saw any trash there either. The town dump was really more of a very, very run-down secondhand shop. Anything the trash men considered worth saving was kept in a storage unit for anyone who also decided it was salvageable. There was a dumpster or two of recycling. But never any trash. Did we burn it? Did it fuel our street lamps at night? What do we do with our trash?

For anyone who is still curious at this point, I believe our most sophisticated solution to date is digging a hole in the ground for said trash and then burying it.

A fast food restaurant is a bit like an allegory for the rest of the world. We walk in, we pay, we eat, we leave, and we try to not think about what comes next. But the allegory is flawed. There are some key differences between a fast food restaurant and the rest of the world. No one is being paid to pick up after us in the rest of the world.

Alone, Kira Gregory

Microcosmos, Kira Gregory

SAVANNAH SKINNER

mausoleum

After thunderstorm; we parked to watch
the sunset pink. It smelled of lilacs,

clouds, factory steam from across town:
one-way streets somewhere beneath.

Smack mosquito bites with an open palm
to stop the swelling—behind his ear,

a salt lick. Sweat, two-day-old shampoo.
I named trees after his lips; my fear of them.

My shivered legs, damp with déjà vu:
kissing in this place before, the sunset

more orange, cheekbones still inside his skin.
His hands more or less the same, maybe

new scars on fingers. They spoke like bees;
with dancing. I am graceless—still digging

the same freckle out of my palm. We rubbed
our shoulder blades together to hear them

hum like glass-wings. Valley sounds; spring
peepers, sirens heading somewhere south.

SAVANNAH SKINNER

twenty-seven negatives:

the disposable camera I forgot on your kitchen counter

I. Your house from the highway, coming up in stone;
II. the underpass where I wait for you—
III. the baseball diamond where you wait for me.

IV. Your house from the couch in the barn,
V. the couch in the barn; your boots over the arm.
VI. Dusty air, slat-sided sun: stretch marks in the crook of your elbow.

VII. Us in the graveyard; mausoleum against the sunset,
VIII. me on a swing at the playground against the sunset,
IX. sunset through the walls of our abandoned house.

X. Our abandoned house: tin cans, two sets of stairs,
XI. disassembled chimney (I took some home for stove bricks).
XII. Me leaning against the industrial stove in your kitchen

XIII. with ice on my mouth; me with a fat lip, your strawberry-stain lips,
XIV. morning lips: swollen. Black & white—ice cubes half-melted
XV. in your cupped hands. Skittles, pseudoephedrine.

XVI. You wearing my shorts: the closet door
XVII. in his old bedroom—blank walls, a digital scale,
XVIII. suggestion of a ghost in his old bedroom—

XIX. orb of a ghost in the mirror at the caved-in house.
XX. Back door of your apartment taken from
XXI. the high school track; my sister's steeplechase

XXII. records; plastic-wrapped in a particle board
XXIII. cabinet, your kitchen from the perspective of
XXIV. Maddie-dog. Maddie-dog from the perspective of

XXV. the porch bench, your head on a pillow in my lap:
XXVI. wisdom teeth post-op. Vicodin, red Jell-O
XXVII. at the tip of your Novocaine-tongue: my blue-veined wrist.

Untitled, Brandon Mark

CHLOE FORSELL

In Search of Invisible Lives: A Review of John Gallaher's *In a Landscape*

Sometimes, while sitting on my bed in my dimly lit college dorm room cramming for a test, I consider the ways my life would be altered had only the smallest things worked out differently. What if my mother hadn't shielded me from seeing my cat get run over? What if I hadn't learned the hard lesson about bike riding and loose pants at eight years old? What if I had chosen to take Spanish instead of French in high school? It is this kind of prodding at one's own life that I imagine inspires John Gallaher's *In A Landscape*, a deeply reflective poem/memoir.

Gallaher has authored or co-authored five collections of poetry, the most recent two published by BOA Editions: *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts* with G.C. Waldrep in 2011, and *In a Landscape* in 2014. His 2007 collection *The Little Book of Guesses* won the Levis Poetry Prize. His poetry has been featured in a variety of magazines, literary journals, and anthologies, including the 2008 edition of *The Best American Poetry*.

To look at the cover of *In a Landscape* is to be instantly transported to the familiar. The simple sketch of a suburban neighborhood of square houses with two-car garages and front porches could be any town—almost so mun-

dane it bores us. Except for the single hand that floats above the cul-de-sac, pointing, reaching toward the houses, attempting to touch, grasp even, some bit of the lives of the people within them.

"Are you happy?" Gallaher opens the collection with this question, demanding that the reader become aware of her own mental and physical space as well as her role as reader of this poem. The address of this piece, as with most in the book, contains an *I* and a *you* which read as Gallaher himself speaking almost directly to the reader. Gallaher's poetics blur the lines of speaker and author, *you* as character versus *you* as audience, *we* as characters versus *we* as the universal or communal. This blurring allows for an intimacy that is at once uncomfortable and comforting. As the poems unfold Roman numeral after Roman numeral, we become more and more familiar with a speaker who we begin to understand is almost completely Gallaher himself.

This unfolding is another strength of the collection. Written in long-lined verse, which mimics prose, Gallaher's poems don't allow us to read them simply as narrative. Just as we feel we are being lulled into a narrative of memoir, a thought, a musing, a sudden new idea interrupts and jolts us—capturing the tendencies of human consciousness:

> I also remember gluing a Popsicle stick to my upper lip, as a mustache. It burned. And now I'm reading that we all have invisible lives that encircle us, some imagined thing that defines us in some way, and I'm thinking it's more true to think that there's nothing invisible about us. This is what we are. Look around. We stagger because we stagger. It's where we get to.

It is through this ability to capture our inclinations of thought, and the power of association and dissociation, that Gallaher is able to achieve what his poetry seems to be reaching to do: to relate. As Gallaher becomes consumed in moments of his own life, he asks the reader to try to understand and relate to them. For instance, the memory of a four a.m. car ride, recalls another car ride, and reveals the invisible life of an ordinary moment: "But then, there's this other car ride, isn't there,/where I'm knowing it's the last moment with someone,/that it's the last moment we will still be in love, or something like it."

In a Landscape asks the reader to feel a deeply intimate and philosophical connection to the lines on the page, to experience an inescapable questioning of oneself and life through vignettes of a life at once foreign and familiar, to abandon the unwritten rule of poetry that insists that we not equate speaker and author. The collection asks the reader to push through the long-lined philosophizing, extensive use of memoir, and near-constant questioning that is frequently left to the reader to answer. Do so, and you will inevitably find

something which many other collections of poetry—though perhaps more traditionally beautiful or pleasing in form—fall short of achieving: An ability to bridge the deep disconnect that exists intrinsically within a population of human beings who above all else want to relate to each other. In the final poem, Gallaher writes:

> And heaven is 7% smaller now, and has had to cut a couple whole departments. So we ask ourselves what's left there, and we don't know. But we start off anyway, because that's what we do. And then one day we just stop.

We exist as a result of infinite unknowns. Gallaher recognizes that it is these unknowns, as well as the moments unique to each life and the associations which link one life to another, that best allow us to understand each other. His ultimate vulnerability, as well as his undeniable craft, leaves the reader with a rare sense of intimacy. By the time the reader reaches the above excerpt, which ends the seventy-one section poem, she finds herself in a comfortable acceptance that she, somewhere along the course of this collection, has become a part of the "we" that doesn't know, but will "start off anyway."

ROBERT HELD

An Interview with John Gallaher

John Gallaher is the author of *The Little Book of Guesses* (2007, Four Way Books), winner of the Levis Poetry prize; *Map of the Folded World* (2009, University of Akron); co-author, with G.C. Waldrep, of *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts* (2011, BOA Editions), as well as co-editor of *Time Is a Toy: The Selected Poems of Michael Benedikt* (2014, University of Akron Press). His poetry appears widely in such places as *The Boston Review*, *Crazyhorse, Field*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, and *Pleiades*, and in anthologies including *The Best American Poetry*. Gallaher is currently associate professor of English at Northwest Missouri State University, and co-editor of *The Laurel Review* and The Akron Series in Poetics.

I had the good fortune of interviewing John Gallaher between two of his readings—one in Rochester, New York, where he read alongside Nickole Brown at Dine and Rhyme, a fundraising event for his publisher BOA Editions, and the other at SUNY Geneseo. During his reading of "XV" from *In A Landscape*, a poem about his cousin Lyle surviving a freak crash of the cargo plane he was co-piloting, Gallaher paused for a moment to comment that he couldn't shake the idea that the students in the first row of seats looked like they were in an airplane cockpit. Gallaher weaves comments and anecdotes like these into his readings so often and so well that they become part of the poem. Some poets might take offense at being called a great storyteller, but I doubt Gallaher would. Gallaher told me he's delighted by reviews of *In a Landscape* that call authorship into question. Wayne Coyne, lead singer of the

Flaming Lips, for instance, writes, "Gallaher is not a writer or a poet, he is a psychic using words to trick us."

ROBERT HELD: How does the conversational tone figure into your work?

JOHN GALLAHER: John Ashbery, when he wrote a blurb for one of my books, said "In some ways it seems like John Gallaher's poems write themselves." You could look at that as a negative, as if I'm not even an author at all. But that's part of the John Cage idea: the context creates the art. If we really believe this stuff we say all the time about "if this author wasn't there to write this work someone else would have because the age needed it," let's add to that "Okay, I don't exist. Okay, you talk." In *Triggering Town,* Richard Hugo talks about how poets have obsessive language, words that obviously mean more to the poet than to everyone else. In some ways, that sounds too mystical to me. I want words to be kind of conversational words, but at the same time, I think maybe for me it's conjunctions that mean more to me than they do to most people. *Maybe, perhaps, kind of, or…* I love that language, because it's not the language of finality; it's the language of continuance and that means we have hope.

RH: Could you talk about your fascination with John Cage?

JG: My fascination with Cage started back in the 80s when I was an undergraduate. Right after Cage died, there was a documentary that someone made about him, and it was showing in a classroom. I wasn't enrolled in the class or anything, but I walked by and saw this thing going on, and it looked so odd…It was these two guys playing chess with John Cage's lilting voice talking about something or other. I went in and started watching it and was fascinated. At that time, I read *Silence* and I liked it and thought it was really neat. Later, in about 2009, I had a little bit of research money from my university to buy some books, so I replaced my copy of *Silence* which was long missing, and bought another one of his books, *A Year from Monday*. I also bought a CD, titled *In a Landscape,* of some of his earlier compositions. I sat down to write one day, and I was very not interested in writing as I had been writing. I was listening to *In a Landscape,* so I put that at the top of the page and started typing, and I typed for three months.

When people think John Cage, they think of "4'33," some of his most avant garde compositions, but John Cage also made a lot of really melodic compositions. In his writing, too, some of it is very discordant, but interspersed are these anecdotes, just straightforward anecdotes—things that someone told him or that he knows from his own life, and I really like that aspect of the writing. Cage shows us that you can talk—you can just talk—and at the same time you can be having this theoretical conversation. This understanding allowed me to do the same kind of thing in my new work.

RH: You mentioned in your reading that the motive behind the new direction in *In a Landscape* was that you were tired of imagination and art.

JG: I'd been doing collaborative writing with my friend G.C. Waldrep, and when you're doing that, you're in this communal space, which is a big act of imagination. When we were finished with our collaborative work, we retreated into our own personal spaces, and for me, that meant a kind of denial of imagination. Of course, that's all B.S., but this thinking worked to trick myself out of the imagination that I was very happy with and that I'd grown accustomed to. I call it the "John Ashbery imagination," and because I loved that so much, I wanted to walk away from it, and say "I'm not going to make anything up. I'm not going to imagine something; I'm only going to recall… I'm not even going to try for music. I'm going to try for prose."

RH: Speaking of Ashbery, you're often compared to him. How would you explain your relation to his work?

JG: So many of us are so indebted to the barriers Ashbery broke down, to the territory he opened up. He inscribed that territory, so anyone who follows in that path will have Ashbery elements. At the same time, you can't wear someone else's clothes. So, how do you go into someone else's territory and build your own house? How do you have your own psychological entity, but still inhabit that world? I was thinking, what are those of us who are writing in this vein denying, or what are they walking away from, and are we walking away from things that we don't need to walk away from? In the 90s, I was reacting very strongly to a kind of 80s poetry that was pretty serious, kind of elegiac, had to do with parents and children. I walked away from that tone, but also that content. Now that we're in an Ashbery landscape, what about that content? Can we bring some of that material back into our world that we're making here?

RH: One thing I admire about both your work and Ashbery's is the use of names. How do names function in your poems?

JG: There is one person who has been named in every single book I've written—I don't think I've missed any—Margot. But I don't know any Margots; I just like that name. Naming is also a New York School thing, but in New York School poetry it was real, well-known people, but when I name someone in a poem, it's going to be someone like me that no one really gives a shit about. If you're John Ashbery and you name Frank O'Hara in your poems you say "Well, it's Frank O'Hara; this is important!" We can deal with made up names because there's a power in those names, and I like that, but then with *In a Landscape*, I said forget that, I'm going to say Brendan; I'm going to say Natalie, and they have to deal with that, and I have to deal with that.

RH: How do you navigate the nonfiction aspect of your poetry?

JG: We have to respond in some way to veracity. You have to make these constant negotiations of "oh, I can't tell that. I can tell this story but not this one little part of it." One of the things I've decided is that anything said to me is open game. When I'm talking about someone in my poetry, I'm often writing about something they've told me, and I feel like that's fair: they gave it to me. But if I pass by a window, and I see you doing something in a room, that feels like invasion. Unless it's something really public, like my wife has some brothers who have had trouble with the law and are in jail. That happened, so I can write that. It might be uncomfortable for the family or them, but it happened. I have to say, though, my father doesn't read anything I write. What if he did? He might not like some of it, but some, I'm sure he'd be okay with. I'm not mean. I'm not vindictive.

RH: How did you grow up? What is your life like now?

JG: I live in Missouri in a small town of 11,000 and have a couple kids. We ride bicycles, and I'm a youth soccer coach. As a kid, I moved around a lot. I was adopted. We don't talk much about adoption as adults, what adoption does, not in a tragic way, just the regular way anyone who has been adopted goes through a certain psychological veil that people often deny, even the adopted child who doesn't want to upset the applecart. You were brought into this space, this new family, and if you complain about it maybe you'll be sent away. I was three-and-a-half when I was adopted, and I felt a little like I was performing. They say who you become is 50% nature and 50% nurture. I'm missing context about who I am. I think, at the same time, that this applies to everyone, to every child and every family: I came from space and showed up here suddenly, and I'm bringing some of my space with me. We all think, "These people are crazy. I'm not crazy, am I? Am I one of these people? Oh my god, I belong here."

My life now is an interesting one because it's a cornfield basically. A lot of people want to sentimentalize this setting or push it into the past. Talking about someone whose house abuts a cornfield, it's either going to become a horror movie—children will walk out of the cornfield—or it's either going to be this sepia tone, Americana thing, but what if it turns out there's just a normal life there, you know? I get the same TV channels as everyone else

RH: With *In a Landscape* are you trying to open up that story?

JG: I think so. I was nearing fifty at the time I began the book, and my children were young, and other people, other men especially around the age of fifty, were dying of heart attacks around me, these middle-aged dads dying. It became this sort of "here are my stories, kids, in case I'm not here to tell them." Being conversational was important to me, and not lying was really

important to me, not making things up, but also really trying to say what I think about things, because that's part of our story—try it! There's not really a writing prompt for this. I was thinking about that today, because I was thinking about visiting a class and having a writing prompt for them, but the writing prompt I really want to give is this: tell me what you really think about asbestos, and use some object to explore this, like what was your last experience with a teacup? What happened? And then, of course, do you love your parents?

RH: Do you have any advice for undergraduate creative writers?

JG: It was easier in my age, because no one expected anything from you. I didn't expect anything from me. All the literary journals were hard to get into, and all the people getting into them were thirty and up, even for the first time. So when I was twenty-four or twenty-two or twenty, I really felt like there was time, but now it seems like there's so much pressure on everyone. Even when you're still in school, you're supposed to already have all these books and accomplishments behind you. I say, take your time, do your thing. I was thirty-six when my first book came out, and now no one asks me how old I was when it came out—I could have been twenty-six for all anyone cares now; it doesn't matter. It only matters when you're in the midst of it. Most of us don't get to be the big innovators. Most of us just get to inscribe our little part of the territory. But for the people who do make the big innovations, like Ashbery, most of the innovation is done early in their career, but the best work come later.

ANGELA WORKOFF

The Escape Artist

Ryan knew his wife would kill him for messing around like that. Kate always said that curiosity made him do dumb caveman things, akin to poking bugs with sticks or playing with lighters. Ryan saw it differently. He was an engineer by disposition, education, and trade. He assessed, took things apart, then put them back together. Since it was the first snowfall of the year, he wanted to get outside for a closer look. Kate had left for work an hour before and he had the chance to try out something new.

The bedroom window opened so quickly that he was surprised. Windows would have to go on the repair list. While they'd gotten a deal on the Webster house, Ryan had been fixing things since they bought it that summer. Every time he turned around there was something new to fix or replace. Because it was their first home, he wanted to get it just right.

Ryan stuck his head out the window and looked over the edge.

After assessing the distance to the frozen ground, he thought about the risk of injury. At worst, if he fell, maybe a broken arm and some busted ribs. Tuck and roll, though, and he could make it out with bumps and bruises. Okay. He could swing that.

The window frame wobbled as he hung on, steadying himself. He sat on the sill, and swung his legs outside, one after the other. Thick snowflakes began to land on his blond crew cut. Wearing only plaid boxers and a white T-shirt, he shivered once, then shook off the thought of cold. His old man always said cold was a state of mind.

The street was empty, everyone already at work or school. Ryan sat on his bedroom windowsill and watched the snow fall over Bridal Lane.

For a few minutes, he was able to make time slow. Cold air filled his nose, invasive and odd, no smell. Winter didn't have a smell. He closed his eyes and listened. The first snow even had a different sound. Crisp. Clean. Clear.

Every year, he was surprised at how foreign it seemed, as though he'd forgotten what snow was like. The good feeling would dissipate though, Rochester hammering everyone with its endless winter. Ryan knew that every snowfall that followed would seem less new, less special. So he took a deep breath and drew in the bare, clean air. He felt private, present. Perfect.

He was happy for those few minutes. The snow fell, Ryan sat above Bridal Lane, and he was able to understand part of his world in a quiet way.

The calm in solitude never lasted long, because there was always somewhere to be. Kate would freak if she knew he was dragging his feet into work again. His eyes snapped open. He ducked back under the window and swung his legs indoors. Shut the window as though he'd never opened it. His regular pattern of thought had become interrupted lately, as he knew the conversation was coming any day. Once things were settled with the house, they would start trying for a baby.

He showered, shaved, and dressed. Grabbed his gym bag and slung it over his shoulder. Almost out the door, a Post-it stopped him in his tracks: "LUNCH!" Kate's notes. He turned on his heel, grabbed the lunch, and left.

He took the back roads and pulled into the office parking lot at 10:15 a.m. Two cups of coffee fast forwarded the morning. A virtual server went down. He brought it back up. Then a printing issue. Ryan wrapped up before lunch with a clean slate and no pending items to fix.

As he walked to the break room with his packed lunch he passed a small group standing behind the receptionist's desk. Three guys from the networks department stood with their arms folded across their button-down shirts, staring at the ground. The receptionist stood off to the side, looking in the same direction as the men. Ryan took a closer look. Amy from accounts was crouched at the bottom file cabinet trying to pick the lock with a little screwdriver. Probably one of those eyeglass screwdrivers from the checkout counter in the supermarket. That would never work.

"I lost the key," the receptionist said, shrugging.

"Amy used to break into shit when she was a kid," one of the guys said, smirking.

"Not really," Amy said. "I wanted to see if I could figure this out." She was dialed in, concentrating on the lock. Like an engineer, except pretty. In her late twenties, she had a flash of red hair pulled back into a ponytail. She was slight, small in the shoulders, wearing an Oxford shirt. She didn't try to act cute for the guys, but they were all in love with her, secretly.

"Can I give it a try?" Ryan stepped forward and set his lunch on the desk.

She sighed, stood up from her crouch. "Go nuts."

He pulled out his multi-tool and opened the needle nose pliers. Then he fashioned a pick and a small tension wrench from two paperclips he took off the reception desk. As a teenager he used to spend hours playing with

dismantled locks. It had been a while though, and Amy stood over him as he worked. His hand fluttered to finesse the paperclips correctly. *Come on.* A minute passed as he rattled the lock, hoping the trick would work. The notch in the pick caught the cylinder. The drawer came free.

"I bet you almost had it," he said, as he turned to her before walking away.

Amy followed him into the crowded lunch room. Sound bites clipped inside his ears: men indignant after another Bills' loss, women chatting about reality TV. Their conversations floated by as he walked to the sole empty table in the back corner of the room. She was on his heels.

"You knew I couldn't pick that lock." Amy stood in front of his table with her arms folded as he took a seat.

He shrugged. "You were getting there."

"Come on. Treat me like I have a brain."

He blinked at her, unsure of what to say. Then he talked about locks, explaining how pins work inside of a cylinder. Amy sat down and listened, asking questions along the way. Smart questions. She followed him through the explanation, and asked how long he'd been picking locks.

"I used to break into shit when I was a teenager." He lied, but it was more interesting than telling her he spent a lot of time in his parents' basement, taking things apart.

"I didn't take you for an escape artist."

"More just to see if I could do it. Experiment with different locks."

"The Oak Tree is a scientist."

"Who?"

"You."

He hoped she didn't see him blush. "I just like to take things apart and put them back together."

"I was pretty good at Legos when I was a kid. That's as far as I got." She shrugged, and stood over the table tapping her fingers on the surface. She rapped the table twice with her left hand and pivoted to leave.

"Did you call me the Oak Tree?" he asked.

Amy looked down a little and smiled. "That's kind of your deal. Solitary. Solid. Like a block of wood."

He smiled, then covered his mouth with his hand. "I don't have a nickname for you." He hadn't flirted with anyone in years. Girls in college, before Kate.

"I didn't expect you to, but I'm glad you're more interesting than you look."

Wow. He chewed around the inside of his mouth. She walked away. He held his knuckle lightly in his teeth for a minute, rolling the interaction over in his mind.

As he unpacked his lunch, a Post-it fell to the floor. He picked up the little blue square: "CAR PAYMENT!" After letting bills pile into a stack, he'd almost gotten his truck repossessed the summer before. Kate was right, but lately her tone had become more urgent. He knew she was gearing up for the kid conversation. Muttering, he crumpled up the note and pitched it at the trash cans across the room. Missed.

Someone at work, who was actually interesting. And interested. Huh. That was a new thought for the day.

Months passed, spring finally arrived. By April, he and Amy began sending each other instant messages, cracking jokes about coworkers. In June, they were eating together in the break room every day. He didn't much like to speak about his private life. She knew he was married, and always asked how Kate was doing, but he drifted the conversations away from his home life as often as he could.

On Bridal Lane, he continued his home repairs. Even after replacing the windows, the downstairs toilet, and all of the kitchen cabinets, there was still work to be done. The loose bannister bothered him every trip downstairs. The chipped linoleum tiles in the kitchen would be next. Through July, the list continued to grow, but Kate sat him down and said the place would never be perfect. They had the talk and decided to start trying for a baby.

In August, Amy invited him out to meet her friends. He told Kate he was grabbing drinks with guys from work. A team-building exercise on a Thursday night. As he pulled out of the driveway, he disappeared inside of his mind, getting farther from Kate and the house. He pictured a life with Amy. It happened more often now, testing the idea out to see what they would look like together. A few weeks before, he dreamt of her. She was in a field, running. He couldn't see himself, just Amy in front of him, turning back and laughing. The light in the dream felt like the sweet light right before a summer sunset. When he was alone and didn't have anything else to think of, he would go back to the dream and the warmth of the image it cast in his mind.

The bar was set deep in a parking lot, across the street from a Wegmans. The inside smelled like a hardware store. Fresh sawdust blanketed the ground, kicked around a little, kids playing in the snow. The large wooden bar seemed to grow out of the ground, a huge, honey-brown counter with a brass rail and ornate shelving to hold the liquor. The rest of the place was a mismatch, dark with old, crappy Budweiser signs. A row of red-faced barflies claimed territory at the barstools. The young people, the kids, hunkered across booths in the back. One stood up from their ranks.

Amy waved, and walked out to greet him. She looked like a farmer chick, dressed in a plaid shirt, sleeves rolled up to her elbows. She gave him a hug. His hug was light, hands gracing her back for a second before retreating away.

Her friends all looked the same. Tattoos, beards, nothing you needed for a real job. A bearded kid started a conversation with him. They waded through small talk, finding little in common. Ryan talked about his job. The bearded kid probably had a cool job and his parents paid his rent. The kid had a habit of saying, "Hmmm," when he listened, like a professor or a shrink, which set Ryan on edge. When the kid said, "You've never been to Europe?" and tacked on a *Wow*, afterwards, Ryan looked at him, dead-eyed, then turned away, pretending to check something on his phone.

Ryan felt the world stretch out around him, dead center among some laughing, happy hipsters. What was he even doing there? Playing at what? Friendship, you need a *friend*? He excused himself to step outside for a cigarette. Muttered his way out the door. Kicked himself over and over inside his head.

A set of jogging footsteps sidled up to him.

"Can I bum one?" The farmer chick. The plaid burnt-brown shirt, unbuttoned, and revealing her small figure in a tank top.

"You shouldn't smoke," he said. Half-flirting.

"Neither should you." She held her hand out.

He nudged a cigarette out of the pack and was about to light it for her when she stole the lighter away. Lit the cigarette herself.

"You okay?" she asked.

"Swell." He spoke with the cigarette in his mouth, lips a firm line.

"Ben sounds like an asshole, but he's actually pretty funny." She'd been playing with the paper wrapper from a drinking straw, folding the thin strip over and over.

"I gotta be honest with you. This isn't my thing."

The straw wrapper unraveled and she folded it up again. "You do this a lot, huh? The shy kid bail?"

He was afraid she'd make a joke about him being antisocial. Never getting out. Hanging out in his loser suburban house.

"Sometimes. I don't know."

"It's okay. I get it." This made her smile through her cigarette drag. Ryan felt as though she had a box of his secrets and she was letting each one out slowly.

She continued. "I don't know you all that well. I know you a little bit. I think you might like everyone if you gave them a chance."

Kindness. Her eyes said kindness.

"I'm going to take a couple minutes out here."

After letting the straw wrapper unravel one last time, she tore it in half, in quarters, then shred the rest into small pieces which fluttered to the ground as she began to walk away. She paused and turned to face him. "One thing, shy

dude. If you keep everything to yourself, people will leave you alone. They'll think that's what you want." She stubbed out her cigarette and disappeared into the bar. He didn't want her to leave him alone.

When he got back inside, he tried. Her friends bullshitted around, talking about movies, music. They knew a lot more about music than he did. They laughed at one of his jokes and he found himself fiercely happy in that moment. He caught Amy's eye, saw her looking at him. She looked like she was proud. Her admiration, if that's what it was, filled him up.

A few hours later, they were the only ones left. Amy inched the label off her beer bottle with a naked fingernail, no nail polish, trimmed short. They hadn't spoken for a few minutes, but he was content to dwell in the afterglow of the night, knowing it would be over soon.

Amy set the bottle down and looked up, eyes wide, as though she'd suddenly realized something.

"I have to call my roommate for a ride. I'm right at the point where I might stop making smart decisions."

"Okay. I'll wait with you outside."

She climbed out of the booth and grabbed her phone from her purse. As she walked away, he snuck his eyes to the right without moving his head so that he could watch her go. Just never let her know, never let her know that you know she has a perfect ass. Shit. He caught his reflection in the window next to him. You. Drunk. Drink water.

Amy came back and said okay. He steadied his hands on the table. They left a tip, then walked out together.

In the parking lot, the cars were scattered in the spaces. They passed underneath circles of light from the streetlamps. A small breeze cut through the humid air and Ryan got a little sad, feeling summer disappear with that almost chill. Happened every year at the end of August. The lot felt like every summer parking lot he knew, growing up in Rochester. In high school, they all hung out at the custard shacks to talk smack and pick up girls. Ryan usually watched the other guys do their thing while he leaned against a car, eating his ice cream. His buzz was dipping. He leaned against a lamp post and lit a cigarette. Amy sat on the ground.

"Why do you talk to me?" he asked.

"I think you've got some stuff going on behind that Oak Tree thing. You just keep it to yourself." Her words rolled. Not slurring, but tumbled out of her mouth sooner than the kind of calculation he was used to with her. "Why do you talk to me?"

"Because you listen," he said.

"I'm sure everyone else would listen, if you gave them a chance."

Stooping down to steady himself, he sat on the ground, just a few inches away from her. He leaned back with his palms behind him on the asphalt.

"At the very least, you found the person you love. That's most of the battle."

Her words struck him, as she sunk into herself and the usual excitement in her eyes disappeared.

He chewed his cheeks. *Not her. You. I found you*. His sense of protection got confused, and he wanted to tell her she shouldn't worry. That she would meet someone and turn out fine. Someone though, someone else. Not him. She would wind up with someone else. The thought of her with someone else made him hollow. He wanted to tell her a secret so she would care about him.

"Kate doesn't love me anymore. She married me to have kids." They sat next to each other, not saying anything. He felt the space, the silence, that time.

"I'm sure that isn't true," she said, casting her words in front of her, over the ocean of the parking lot. She looked even lonelier than he felt.

So he kissed her.

At first she received him, tensed. After a breath, she kissed him back. They separated and he saw her face lulled from its usual intensity. Peaceful, for a moment.

"I'm so glad I found you," he whispered. Only those few words, and he half hoped they got lost in his throat so that she wouldn't hear. Life was a lie. She needed to know the truth, that of all of the billions of people on earth, he found her.

She held his hand and nestled her head against his shoulder.

A small blue hatchback rolled past the patches of cars and cruised up to Amy and Ryan.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she said. After brushing herself off, she left her hand on his shoulder for a moment and he gave it a squeeze.

After she left, he sat on one of the cement parking bumpers and pulled out his phone. A text from Kate had come in about forty-five minutes ago.

"*Where are you?*" Shit.

"*Home soon.*" Ryan sat in the parking lot for another hour, chain smoking until he felt sober enough to drive.

The next morning, he woke after eight to find an empty bed. The running dream afterglow was back. As reality began to assert itself, he realized what had happened. He'd kissed her. The moment replayed in his mind, and he tried to watch it over and over again, like a movie. He could recall how the parking lot felt, how her face fit inside of his hand. What her lips felt like. The reel rolled and he held her image inside of his mind, inside of his chest. That's what one of those moments feels like. That's what life could be like.

A spurt of coughing made him sit up, and his stomach rose to his chest. He counted each beer and each cigarette, culminating in a groaning, empty-tin-can kind of hangover, with all the associated shame. It hurt, hard. Hor-

rible, that it felt private and tremendous as he replayed it inside of his head. Every day was another day on top of another day. Life usually played out like that, he'd come to realize, like a flat line. But last night had been different. For once he felt love or hurt, or a confused combination of the two. He felt sick.

As he moved through the house, his brain sloshed around inside of his head, feeling as though it had broken from its tethers. They kept a case of Gatorade in the garage, but he checked the fridge first. A Post-it note curled around the cap of the blue kind, his favorite flavor. "Three Advil! I missed you!" The hurt came back, and her penmanship sent a wave of nausea and almost-tears to his throat, his eyes.

He grabbed the Gatorade, pounded the drink, and threw the bottle in the trash.

An hour late. He kept his head down as he walked the aisle of cubicles to get to his desk. No one looked up. The tops of heads were fixed forward. All eyes at the screens. Amy didn't have anyone else she spoke to besides him, really. No one would know. They had no idea what was really happening to him. His coworkers didn't know him and he didn't know any of them, for that matter. Everyone put a half version of their life on display at work, covering up whatever was really going on.

No sign of her.

The morning dragged; he didn't have the stomach for coffee. His hangover made him aware of every beat-up part of his body. Normally he could think, or at least just glaze over and process tasks. Today, each organ declared itself at odd intervals. He couldn't focus on the mindless work sharply enough to accomplish anything. He sweat through the calls and emails, wiped his face with his gym towel, and looked behind his shoulder every once in a while to make sure no one was coming.

By lunch, when he usually met Amy, he convinced himself he didn't have the stomach for food. Better off that he stay busy and keep working.

At two in the afternoon, he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Do you feel as awful as I do?"

A deep sigh rose from the depths of his hunched over body. "Worse."

She wore a white dress with little sleeves. Large orange and pink flowers, Hawaiian ones maybe, splashed over the white. She held her hands, twisting one in the other. The image of her so beautiful and nervous broke his heart. He kept his face flat and bored.

"Did you get lunch yet?" she asked.

"Can't eat."

"Would you get a soda and step away from your desk for a few minutes?"

"I don't know, there's a lot to do."

"Five minutes," she said, and was no longer asking. She softened her face and tone. "The fresh air might do us good."

"I'll get a pop. Sure."

They walked together, down the row of half-height cubicles. They passed the reception desk and went through the front doors. The sun was bright and loud. Ryan spent such little time outdoors during the week that he almost forgot what weekday afternoons looked like. Everything about the weather and the feel of the day, how beautiful she looked in her dress, stood at odds with how his insides felt. The ten-thousand-foot view of his life, with his wife, and his house, and sometime soon his kids, stood at odds with how his insides felt.

Amy walked over to a nook beneath an overhang, some distance away from the front doors. He stood three feet away, arms folded. Neither of them spoke for a full minute. She turned to him.

"The kiss last night? That's kind of a big deal."

He didn't speak.

"It was a big deal to me. I didn't think that was on the table."

"Oh," he said. Out of his peripheral vision, he saw her chewing on a thumbnail, shaking her head, slow at first. In a quick movement, she stood in front of him. Her eyes asked. He absorbed that deep look from her eyes. As long as she didn't freak out, everything would be fine. Her worry, her agitated state, made him want to wrap her up and hold her forever.

"I thought—"

"Look, I just wanted to have sex with you," he said. The lie exploded out of him, rupturing the air between them. "Okay?" He saw her free fall as it happened. The care, the concern, disappeared. Amy's face became empty. She walked past him, back though the office doors.

Ryan looked around to see if anyone would notice him, then walked to his car. He drove home.

Kate would be home in an hour or so. After drinking a glass of water and taking three more Advil, he went up to the bedroom. Took off his pants and polo shirt. Lay on his belly in his undershirt and boxer shorts. Looked out the window from the quiet bedroom in his empty house.

He would have to figure out a way to get rid of his smallness once the kid arrived. Everything would change. He would leave behind the things that scared him, and find a way to keep them to himself. Kate wouldn't know that. It might come to be that she might not know him anymore, because he had to be strong for her.

At seven a.m. the next morning, he woke up and got out of bed. She was gone already. He went in to work.

About the Authors

Christy Leigh Agrawal is a native of New York and hails from the mid-Hudson Valley town Hyde Park. She is in her last year studying English (creative writing) at SUNY Geneseo and hopes (despite looming fears of post-graduate life) to pursue a career relating to poetry and civil rights law. She is passionate about the Islamic feminist movement and eliminating stigmas associated with mental illness and addiction.

Rachel Beneway is a senior English Education major and creative writing minor at SUNY Fredonia. She has previously been published in *Gandy Dancer* and Fredonia's literary magazine, *The Trident*. She would love to befriend Junie B. Jones.

Rachel Bullock is a senior at SUNY Oswego, with a creative writing major and a biology minor. She has taken many art classes in high school and college, and experimented with many different mediums. Her favorite fictional character is Rosemary Cooke from Karen Joy Fowler's novel *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves.*

Britina Cheng is completing her final year at Geneseo as an English major. She is working on a film featuring women of color without catering to the white cisgender male psyche. In another dimension, she and Jimmy Brooks would be buddies. Maybe they would even date.

Joseph Curra is 22 years old, currently studying at SUNY New Paltz. He has identified as a musician and a songwriter for most of his life, but is slowly learning to identify as a writer, too. He is an English major with a concentration in creative writing. He'd like to know Miss Lonelyhearts of Nathaniel West's *Miss Lonelyhearts.*

Chloe Forsell is a junior at SUNY Geneseo pursuing undergraduate degrees in English and French. She hails from a very small Lake Erie town in Chautauqua County, about an hour south of Buffalo. Chloe has developed many fleeting interests ranging from green tea to iridology. She was published in *Gandy Dancer* Issue 3.1, and is thrilled to be a current member of the *Gandy Dancer* team.

Allison Giese is a sophomore at SUNY New Paltz. She is currently studying English with a concentration in creative writing and theatre arts with a concentration in theatre studies. She has been writing the same novel for seven years and will probably continue writing it for the rest of eternity. On the side, she indulges in writing a lot of terrible fan fiction.

Anna Gilmore is a student at SUNY Fredonia, completing her BFA in animation and illustration, with a minor in art history. She enjoys writing short fiction, poetry, and creating art.

Kira Gregory is a sophomore at SUNY Polytechnic Institute studying media and communications. When she's not at school she is digging in her gardens, playing guitar, or watching the night sky. She has made a tradition of participating in NaNoWriMo. If Kira were to befriend a fictional character, it just might be Stellaluna.

Alexis Hamlin is a sophomore at Monroe Community College where she studies creative writing, particularly poetry. Her fictional best friend would be Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games*, as they both have quick tempers and even quicker wits.

Robert Held is an English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo, makes video poems, wants to be a big boy, likes videos of farming equipment and playstation, and stepped in a muddy puddle today but didn't get his socks wet! He'd be best friends with Voltron.

Jeremy A. Jackson is a senior English major/theatre minor at SUNY Geneseo. Jeremy keeps busy: a list of his hobbies would fill volumes that would make Dostoyevsky weep with joy. This is his first publication. He would befriend those time-and-space travelling rogues, the Chums of Chance from Pynchon's *Against the Day.*

Thomas John Magnus is a junior biology/geography double major at SUNY Geneseo. He got into photography at the end of this summer, taking walks outside to train his eyes in color and composition. To him, a good photograph incorporates story, subjectivity, and emotion. Andy Warhol, Christian Anderson, Alfred Steiglitz, Andre Kertesz, Keith Walters, and his cousin Dillon Buss, all inspire him.

Brendan Mahoney is a sophomore English and economics double major. He's still desperately clinging to the idea of a math minor. This is his first publication.

Brandon Mark is a senior physics major at SUNY Geneseo. He grew up in Warwick, New York, a small town in the downstate area. Brandon is looking to pursue a master's degree in mechanical engineering with a focus in design and alternative energy. In his spare time (ha ha) he enjoys taking photos, drawing, hiking, and hanging out with his dog, Stanley.

Catherine McWilliams is an aspiring artist and senior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. As a life-long nap enthusiast, Catherine commonly falls asleep while reading next to a piping hot jar of tea. When she isn't napping, Catherine spends her time taking photographs, studying art, drawing strangers and leisurely reading.

Sara Munjack is a sophomore English (literature) major at SUNY Geneseo. She grew up in Queens but also lived in Austin, Texas. She attended five different elementary schools in five years. She spends most of her time writing angsty songs on her guitar or writing poetry.

Melissa Paravati is a junior at SUNY Geneseo, from New Hartford, New York, studying early childhood education and English. This is her first publication. Melissa is the National Communication Coordinator for Inter-Residence Council, an active member of the National Residence Hall Honorary, a Resident Assistant, a tutor for Perry Literacy Center, and a Zumba instructor. She would get along swimmingly with Hermione Granger.

Diego Barcacel Peña is an English (creative writing) major who likes to write poetry and sleep through classes at SUNY Geneseo. He would like to be friends with Gregor Samsa because he likes to have friends that he can make fun of and abuse. He also likes a friend that makes him look more attractive.

Katryna Pierce is a senior English major with minors in creative writing and women and gender studies at SUNY Fredonia. She has been published in *Gandy Dancer* and Fredonia's literary magazine, *The Trident.*

Jessica Rigby is studying liberal arts at Clinton Community College and is Secretary of the Student Senate. She has several works published in CCC's *Cliffhanger*. Her passion is performance. She greatly enjoys music and theatre and performs in a music and comedy duo called Super Super Serious Please Don't Laugh Band.

Adreyo Sen is pursuing his MFA at Stony Brook, Southampton. His thesis is a novel incorporating elements of fantasy and magic realism.

Sarah Simon's interests include photography, poetry, and working with people. As a psychology major, Sarah enjoys breaking from the subjective by studying the general human mind.

Savannah Skinner is a senior at SUNY Geneseo. She has answered this question multiple times, and is accruing a lot of fictional best friends. She'd probably choose someone who doesn't seem like the jealous type. Charlie Bucket, perhaps, due to his generosity and his lifetime supply of Wonka candy.

Sarah Steil is a junior English (creative writing) and pre-vet major at SUNY Geneseo. She loves spending time with her five crazy siblings and four crazy dogs. She would love to be friends with Edgar Sawtelle of *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*, because he's also a lover of all canines and they could swap some stories.

Kallie Swyer is a junior at SUNY Geneseo, majoring in English (creative writing). Though she loves Geneseo, Kallie is currently studying abroad at Bath Spa University, being inspired by the history and beauty of the English countryside. The last time Kallie was published she was in fourth grade, and she is hopeful that her writing has since improved.

Christian Wessels is a senior at SUNY Brockport where he studies poetry with an interest in literary translation. He is the student manager of the Brockport Writers Forum and has received grants from the Brockport Foundation to fund his research on American war literature. He would like to have dinner with all of the Argonauts besides Heracles.

Angela Workoff grew up in Brooklyn, NY and graduated from SUNY Geneseo in 2006. For nearly ten years, she worked at a technology firm in Midtown Manhattan. She is currently an MFA candidate in fiction at Rutgers University-Newark. Her stories are typically set in New York City or Rochester. She is working on a short story collection exploring the two regions.