Gandy Dancer

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

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

Our Postscript 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 the file formats 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 and mediums in your submissions.

Please visit us at www.gandydancer.org, or scan the qr code below.

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GENESEO

MILNE Library

In loving memory of Alexandra Ciarcia

Dearest Readers—

Welcome to the eleventh issue of *Gandy Dancer*. We are happy to have you with us and, despite the din of construction trucks that greets us as we pass Sturges Quad on our way to class, are pleased to announce that—as of this moment—Emmeline the bear is in one piece atop her perch in the Main Street fountain. Throughout the past three years, Geneseo has been more or less in a constant state of tearing down and building back up again, but, as we have come to learn as student editors, this process can be one of the most essential for growth. Our editorial staff has been thoroughly moved by the depth and daring of this semester's submissions, and narrowing these to fit the journal's space constraints has been an arduous task, to say the least. Huddled over our laptops in circles of unwieldy swivel-seat desk chairs, we've been deeply humbled throughout this process. Though we were both part of the *Gandy* team last spring, we found ourselves entirely unprepared for the emotional intensity the managing editor role would bring. As assembly of this volume nears completion, we are reminded of the reason we come together to create in the first place. Perhaps the gifted Latino poet and professor Martín Espada articulated this best: "We write to make the invisible, visible."

Whether the "invisible" Espada refers to is a personal experience buried deep within gray matter, a new avenue of thought that effectively disrupts ordinary life, or a bygone detail lost to the past, it is the writer's craft to trans-form the blank page into a lasting vessel. A successful artist boldly places the unexamined at center stage. Jennifer Galvão's "Liturgy of Hours" for instance, tears off the cloak of invisibility (if you will), using subtlety of detail and delicate observation to challenge readers to reconsider what it might be like to live with burdens of silence, secrecy, and shame. Through his poem, "the trickle," Noah Mazer visits the seemingly inexplicable tie between place and self, offering a visceral sensory exploration of an almost chaotic unease aroused by separation from the grounding elements of spaces associated with home. Arnold Barretto similarly disrupts the comfortable with his provocative visual art collage titled, "I'm not being racist. It's just my preference, you're not my type." In her essay, "Where a Boundary," Elizabeth Pellegrino also challenges the status quo, employing white space, sound, and creative connections to create a solid bridge—not only between genres and passions—but also be-tween societal expectation and the richness of expansion brought about by the subversion of set expectations. This piece is as ambitious as it is compel-ling, successfully stretching the limits of language and giving us goosebumps along the way.

The relative transience of our little town's façade functions symbolically for us in two significant ways: on a microcosmic scale, each work of art may require countless drafts, and even failed attempts, before the artist feels satisfied, thereby requiring many instances of "tearing down" and "building up" again. Panning out, we see that *Gandy Dancer* is also in a constant state of flux, its vision perpetually evolving, as team members are cycled through each semester and managing editors are replaced yearly. This, we feel, is a necessary part of what keeps our journal's identity fresh—not a necessary evil, but a necessary good—each new incarnation allowing space for further growth.

As you thumb through the pages that follow, we sincerely hope you are as moved as we were by the contributions of the many talented SUNY scholars who made this issue possible. Thank you for joining us on our journey; we both feel so privileged to be part of this.

Yours,
Meghan Fellows & Lily Codera
November 2017

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Cover photo:
Stacked by Shauna Ricketts

Gandy Dancer

JENNIFER GALVÃO

A Liturgy of Hours

The bell above the chapel does not ring anymore. Midnight comes and goes with no herald. Sister Mary Monica is used to silence, but she misses the bell.

She doesn't need it to wake her. After fifty-seven years, her body knows its schedule—Matins, then back to bed until five. Morning Prayer and meditation before mass. Breakfast, work, midmorning prayer. Midday prayer before lunch, then work until Vespers. Supper at half-five, free time until Compline, then bed at nine. For fifty-seven years, she has prayed seven times a day, every day, beginning with the Matins at twelve-thirty every morning.

She eases out of bed with a grimace onto sore, swollen feet. They puff grotesquely over the sides of her practical black shoes as she limps her way down the hall, footsteps echoing in an irregular rhythm. For fifty-seven years, she has prayed Matins at exactly half-past twelve, but tonight Sister Mary Monica waits an extra five minutes in the cool, dark chapel. She doesn't know why. No one else joins her anymore, not since they stopped making Matins mandatory.

No one comes. Of course they don't, she thinks a little bitterly. Most of the sisters are of a newer theology, where structure and rules and restrictions do not matter as much. It never used to be this way. God used to be something you feared. Finally, she makes the sign of the cross and begins the first antiphon.

"O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!"

She has sung these verses for years, but it never used to be alone. Her own voice is unfamiliar, uncomforting in the empty chapel. She finishes quickly, returning to bed and to silence.

The bell still rings in the morning at five. The sisters join Sister Mary Monica in the chapel for Lauds. They are a young group, almost all under

fifty, and the familiar way they talk about God baffles Sister Mary Monica sometimes. Sister Cecilia, young and indecently freckled, shoots Sister Mary Monica a smile over folded hands.

"Good morning, Sister. Sleep well?"

Sister Mary Monica says nothing, of course. Sister Cecilia smiles, but she is already turning away like she never expected an answer. Sister privately thinks they find her unsettling, a remnant of a past era where God was something you feared and venerated, not someone you mentioned in everyday conversation like a mutual friend.

Sister Mary Monica leads the sisters in the sign of the cross, then lowers herself painfully to her knees as Sister Gabriel Jesu begins the first hymn.

Sister Gabriel Jesu is their youngest sister, barely more than a postulant. She's got a sweet, broad face and a lilting Filipino accent. Her voice is not strong, but when she sings, a soft light comes to her face. Watching her, it is easy to remember how it felt to be so young, so filled to the brim. Sister Mary Monica used to wait in eager anticipation for those seven canonical hours of prayer, those seven times a day when she could sing and speak aloud. She thought her voice was something that could die from neglect.

She is older now, of course. She has grown to love the silence, the simplicity of a life locked away from the world, framed between hours of prayer. She barely has to think as she sings back each response. She knows all the words by heart. After Lauds, mass is said. They end with the blessing and the final hymn—"Thanks be to God." Sister Mary Monica gets painfully to her feet, faltering briefly as her knees groan and threaten to give way.

Sister Cecilia gives her a look of concern, a steady hand at her elbow. Sister Mary Monica shakes off the hand, but smiles a little to apologize for her brusqueness.

"You know, Sister," says Sister Cecilia quietly, "if you wanted to sit during prayer, rather than kneel, no one would object. These kneelers—"

Sister Mary Monica shakes her head. She has knelt every day, seven times a day, for fifty-seven years. To stop now would be to devalue that. Her knees ache, but they will not fail. Sister Cecilia, as always, is perturbed by her silence. She smiles, nods limply, and departs for breakfast.

The other Sisters chatter as they work. A few sing hymns, taking turns singing harmony. It never used to be this way. Most of the Sisters who joined the Order with Sister Mary Monica, back when being cloistered meant taking a vow of silence, have passed on—to the Lord or to the nursing home. Sister Mary Monica is grateful for the young Sisters, especially with postulant numbers dwindling every year, but she misses the quiet. Back then, silence meant

devoting every waking moment to prayer, to constant communion with God. The air of the convent used to practically hum, crackle with that silent prayer.

During free time, the Sisters knit hats and blankets for the premature babies born at the nearby hospital. As a cloistered order, they cannot leave the monastery, but once a month volunteers come and collect the little woolen hats, knitted to fit impossibly small skulls, half-formed, still sickly-squishy in the middle. Sister Mary Monica, silent, thinks of those tiny baby skulls, soft in the middle, as she knits. She makes her stitches tight and even, perfectly rounded, so that not a touch of cold can creep through to press against that soft spot.

Sister Mary Monica was a mother once, at sixteen, and then for twenty years she was a Mother Superior. Now, relieved of that charge, she is aged and outdated and unimportant. Her feet ache and the skin falls in loose folds over her knuckles when she prays, but she still makes the tiniest stitches and the best hats. She still has that.

Sister Augusta bursts into laughter, startlingly loud. "Gabriel," she says, "what kind of head are you shaping that hat for?"

Sister Gabriel Jesu looks up, laughs back good-naturedly. "It's not a hat," she says. "I am trying something new. Booties."

Sister Mary Monica finds herself looking up from her rows of perfect stitches. Sister Gabriel Jesu is sitting on the floor across the room, holding up a tiny knitted mass of blue yarn. It doesn't look like anything at all, really, but Sister thinks of tiny baby feet, waxy-smooth on the bottom.

Sister Gabriel catches her looking, laughs again. "Sister Mary Monica is laughing at me," she says teasingly. "I know they are not very good, Sister. I am only practicing. My mother has promised to bring the pattern when she comes to visit today."

Sister Mary Monica frowns, unsure what to do with Sister Gabriel's teasing. She goes back to her hat. She has made hats for fifty-seven years. They are much more practical than booties.

Usually after midmorning prayer and lunch is another period of work. Today is a visiting day, however, and so work is put aside for the afternoon. According to the rules of a cloistered convent, family may only visit four days a year. Many of the rules have relaxed in recent years – such as mandatory midnight prayer—but this one remains. The sisters take turns in the visiting room all afternoon, talking to loved ones through the grate that cuts the room in half.

Sister Mary Monica takes the opportunity to escape outside into the enclosed property of the convent with her knitting and a letter from her sister. She walks down the grass towards the lake, past the little white cottage where they hold retreats in the summer. The grass never grows properly so close to

the lake, where the soil turns sandy. It rises in little yellow patches, to the eternal chagrin of their aged groundskeeper. She sits down on the little stone bench by the grotto of the Virgin Mary. The lawn was recently mowed, and there are grass clippings sprayed across the Virgin Mary's marble cloak. Sister brushes them off respectfully, and then takes up her rosary beads.

The first time Sister Mary Monica's family came to visit after she joined the Order as a postulant, she was still allowed to speak. She would not take the vow of silence until next year when she became a novitiate, but even then the words came slower, the sound of her voice losing its familiarity. That voice had sung and laughed too loud and challenged the boys to races. That voice had cracked irreparably with her screams in the hospital. She did not want it anymore.

Her parents were uncomfortable with these new silences, shifting in their chairs as she considered her words for full minutes before she spoke. Sometimes she wondered if they had understood the permanency of their actions when they'd put her here. If they'd come that day half-expecting her to sob and beg for forgiveness and come home chastened and penitent. They left quickly. She wanted to ask about the baby, but she couldn't find the words.

Her parents came dutifully, four times a year, until they died. They did not enjoy it, but they came, and so Sister Mary Monica prays for them every night. The last time she left the convent was for her mother's funeral, twelve years ago. Her sister lives in a retirement community in Florida now. She sends letters sometimes in her spidery script. Sister Mary Monica likes to save them up for visiting days. Then she reads them all at once and says an extra rosary for her family—a decade for her father, a decade for her mother, for her sister, and for the baby—before going back to her knitting.

The chunky wooden rosary beads that hang from her hip are worn silky-smooth from the oil of her fingers, from years of prayer. She crosses herself, then starts in on the first decade.

"Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee—"

She's halfway through her third decade when she is disrupted by Sister Augusta tripping down the grass. She is a clumsy sight in a habit that is just slightly too short, exposing skinny ankles encased in black, but she sings beautifully and prays with sincerity. Sister Mary Monica can't find it in her to be exasperated.

"Sorry to interrupt, Sister," she says as she draws near, squinting in the sun behind silver wire glasses, "but you've got a visitor!"

Sister Mary Monica stares, fingers poised on the second bead of her third decade.

"A visitor for you!" Sister Augusta says again. "Well, she asked for an Annie McDaid, actually. We had to look you up in the book."

Sister Mary Monica frowns, but she lets the rosary beads fall to her side, and follows Sister Augusta's awkward ankles back up the patchy grass into the convent.

The visiting room is a sunny, dated room with yellow wallpaper and squashy couches. It would be perfectly comfortable, except for the criss-cross wire grate that cuts the room in half. On one side of the grate there is a middle-aged woman in a crisp, white sweater. She has a pretty, crafted face and short, stylish hair, a little gray at the roots. She sits with her purse on her lap, poised, but stands when Sister Mary Monica enters.

"Hello," she says. "Sister Mary Monica? That's what the other Sister said you were called now."

Sister Mary Monica smiles politely, unsure, and inclines her head.

Sister Augusta hesitates in the doorway. "She doesn't talk," she says. "It used to be that you took a vow of silence when you joined a cloistered convent. They changed the rules now, but Sister Mary Monica is old-fashioned."

"So she *can* talk?" the visitor asks sharply, eyebrows going up.

"Technically, yes," says Sister Augusta, smiling like an apology, "if she chose to. But that is between Sister and God." She bows out of the room with another smile. The woman exhales, sucks in her cheeks, and then sinks back down onto the couch. There is an air of grace about her. When she takes in a breath, Sister Mary Monica can see a flash of green gum under her teeth. It should be garish, but instead it seems elegant. The room smells sharply of mint.

"Alright, I guess we can skip the small-talk, then, can't we? I don't know if you—" She pauses, then starts up again with more confidence, slightly rehearsed. "My name is Eleanor. Eleanor Kenney. My birth mother was Annie McDaid. She gave me up for adoption in 1960, and then her parents sent her to a convent." She shifts in her chair, produces a laugh. "I did one of those genealogy searches. Contacted the hospital."

Sister Mary Monica stares. She imagines there is a pulse beating, suddenly, at the top of her head, just beneath her habit. Her skull has gone soft there.

Eleanor keeps talking. "My adoptive mother passed away a couple months ago, and I'd never really thought of you before that." She stops, starts again. "Well, no, that's not true. I thought of you. I just never thought I'd actually—" She swallows.

Her eyes are brown. Sister Mary Monica held her daughter for three, maybe four minutes before the nurses took her away, but she never saw her eyes. They were screwed shut under wrinkly, red-mottled skin. She was so loud when she cried. She hadn't expected that.

"You *are* Annie McDaid, right?" Eleanor asks, slightly louder. "Or—you *were*, I mean. I know nuns change names when they— I did some reading. Are you really not going to say anything?"

Sister Mary Monica flinches at her accusatory eyebrows. She thinks if she opens her mouth, she would rattle like a dying thing. Perhaps her postulant fears were not unfounded; her voice has withered down to a husk at the back of her throat. She cannot speak, but she manages a nod. She was Annie McDaid, once. She had red hair and she laughed too loud for a nice girl.

"Okay," says Eleanor finally. She hugs her purse a little tighter. She straightens her shoulders. "So you're not going to talk. That's okay, I can talk. I'm Jewish. Isn't that funny? My husband's Jewish. I converted when we got married. I have two boys, both in college. They don't know I'm here."

Sister Mary Monica nods. It is all she has, but Eleanor looks frustrated. She tries again.

"This is delicate, I guess, but the hospital didn't have any record of my father. I'd love to meet him. I was hoping maybe you had a name or—" Eleanor purses her lips. "I don't want to make assumptions."

Sister Mary Monica stares. She can recognize, then, another face in the curve of Eleanor's chin, in the arch of her upper lip. She resents it, selfishly. He did not come to the hospital. Her parents would not allow it, and she was glad of it. For those four minutes before they took the baby away, she was entirely and completely *hers*. He started college that fall. He didn't give away his voice. The baby was never really his.

Three years back, her sister wrote that he'd died. Sister Mary Monica prayed for him, but she didn't grieve like she did for the baby. He never mattered the way the baby did.

"I guess that's a no. Okay. I—I don't even know why I'm here. I guess I hoped—" Eleanor stops. When she speaks again, it's strained. "I guess I don't know God like you do, but I don't see how you being silent helps Him. I'm sorry. I don't mean to question your religion, but I'm fifty-seven years old, do you know that? I waited fifty-seven years to meet you, and I thought maybe you'd want to meet me, too."

Sister Mary Monica wants to give her fifty-seven years' worth of little woolen hats. She wants to hand over her rosary beads, let Eleanor feel the way they've worn smooth. She doesn't know a better way to explain that this silence is the best she can do. She gave up her voice long ago, promised it to God if only He'd let the baby be okay. She had done a terrible, sinful thing and she would pay penance for that. Just let the baby be okay.

"I had a good life. I had a dog and a swing-set, growing up. I wasn't—I've always been really happy and I've been very successful in life. So in case you ever wondered about that, there you go," says Eleanor.

"I'm not mad at you for giving me up, but I thought you'd at least want to apologize," says Eleanor.

"Maybe it was unfair of me to put all these expectations on you. I'm fifty-seven years old. I don't know what I thought was going to happen here," says Eleanor.

"I don't mean to bother you," she says finally, smaller. "I just thought—"

She doesn't finish. She waits a little longer. Sister Mary Monica thinks of sitting in the chapel at night, waiting for someone to come. She wants so badly to speak, but Sister Mary Monica's body knows silence like it knows the bell above the chapel, like it knows the hard wooden kneelers against her kneecaps. There is a solid knot of guilt that has swollen, gestated in her stomach for fifty-seven years. If she speaks now, what has this all been for?

"Oh," says Eleanor, less stiffly. "Oh, no, don't cry. I didn't mean to—I'm sorry." She fumbles in her purse. "I don't have Kleenex, I'm so sorry. I—want a piece of gum? Is that—are you allowed?"

Sister Mary Monica holds out her hand obediently. She feels bewildered and young. Eleanor hands her the stick through the grate. She's got a wedding ring and beautiful fingernails and her skin wrinkles a little around her knuckles. Sister holds the stick of gum in her hand, wrapped in shiny green foil, but makes no move to unwrap it.

"Look," Eleanor sighs, "I don't know why I thought we'd have anything to say to each other. I'm sorry. I'm a middle-aged woman, not a child." She tenses like she's going to stand, and panic slaps up against Sister Mary Monica's esophagus. She is back in the hospital bed and they are taking her little red-mottled baby away.

She remembers her sister's letter in her pocket, folded tight to keep the spidery script from crawling off the page, and tugs it from beneath the layers of her habit. Eleanor's eyebrows come together. She takes it in her elegant hands, reads silently. Finally she looks up.

"Is this your sister?"

Sister Mary Monica nods. Eleanor nods, then reads the letter again, lips moving silently.

"If I wrote to her, do you think she would be able to help me?"

Sister Mary Monica nods again. She gestures to Eleanor that she can keep the letter, smiling when Eleanor tucks the letter into her purse, relieved to be understood.

"Thank you," says Eleanor. "Really, thank you." She starts to stand again, and then she stops. "Would it—would it be okay if I came back some time? You can say no. Or, shake your head or something, I guess."

Sister Mary Monica can only stare for a moment, incredulous, unbelieving. Then she nods until she has to stop, for fear of knocking her habit off, for fear of rattling her brain right out of her skull. Eleanor smiles a little and Sister soaks it in greedily. The arch of her upper lip is his, but everything else is gloriously hers.

In the hour before nightly prayer, the Sisters go back to their knitting. The room is more subdued than usual with most of the Sisters content to work quietly, basking in the comings and goings of the day. Even without the vow of silence, there is something foreign and draining about visiting days. The outside world creeps in and presses against all the soft spots.

Sister Mary Monica's hands are particularly arthritic tonight. She works slowly, but her stitches are not as small and tight as she'd like them. She begins to tug at the yarn, unpicking the oversized stitches. The work is simple and repetitive, so she lets her eyes wander.

Sister Gabriel Jesu's mother has brought the bootie pattern, as promised. There is already a blue woolen bootie lying complete in her lap. The second is taking shape under her needles, impossibly small. Sister Gabriel looks up, catches Sister Mary Monica staring again, and smiles kindly.

"My mother brought the pattern. I am getting better. Would you like me to teach you how, Sister Mary Monica?"

Sister Mary Monica finds herself nodding for the second time today. Sister Gabriel smiles and crosses the room to sit beside her, rosary beads clicking at her waist. "I will show you. It's simpler than you'd think."

It is simple. After the first few rows, Sister Mary Monica's hands find the rhythm and Sister Gabriel Jesu goes back to her own knitting. Every time she laughs at something one of the Sisters says, her shoulder brushes Sister Mary Monica's comfortably. The little wool sock comes together faster than a hat, but Sister's hands are tired today. She is seventy-three years old, and she feels it. She finishes the single bootie, but then she lets her hands fall still.

Midnight comes and goes with no herald, but Sister Mary Monica wakes anyway. She makes her way to the chapel on swollen feet, knees creaking as she genuflects before the altar. She waits an extra five minutes, listening for another set of practical shoes on the hallway floor, but no one comes. She begins the first antiphon.

"O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death."

She finds herself listening, tonight, to the sound of her own voice. The hitch of her consonants, the rounds of her vowels. It feels so intrusive, so unfamiliar that she stumbles over the words of the familiar hymn. She stops singing. It goes quiet.

She wonders what she is supposed to pray for now. She can't think of a single thing, and eventually she makes a decision. She gets to her achy feet, puffing out of her shoes, and leaves the chapel. She closes the heavy convent door carefully behind her. It's a warm night, and if you listen you can hear the hum of traffic and air conditioners and television sets from the world outside

the convent walls. Inside there is just the click of Sister's wooden rosary beads, the scrape of heavy cloth as her skirt swishes.

She unwraps the piece of gum Eleanor gave her, carefully tucking the creased foil back into the deep pocket of her habit, placing the gum on her tongue like the Holy Eucharist itself. It tastes sharp and sweet, so minty her breath seems to burn when she exhales.

At the edge of the lake, where the grass goes patchy and yellow, Sister Mary Monica stoops to ease her swollen feet from their sensible leather confines. Next come the heavy black socks. She tucks a sock into each shoe, leaves them lined up neatly by the Virgin Mary's marble feet, and walks barefoot down the sand.

The lake water is shockingly cold, even after the heat of the day. Sister Mary Monica's feet give a final agonized throb, and then the pain lessens considerably. She stands there in the dark, ankle-deep with her hem held just above the water's reach, chewing. She snaps the gum loudly, then tries for a bubble. It takes a couple tries, but then it swells like a balloon. When it pops, Sister Mary Monica is startled into laughing aloud.

girl (linoleum relief print), Azure Arnot

rape (linoleum relief print), Azure Arnot

LAUREN SARRANTONIO

Garden of Eden

What magic there was in eating your green beans
that made you grow through the night as you slept
sweet and curled into dark like cocoons

I am in love with that trickery. Love is not
love but trickery, whomever is willing
to be coaxed toward light
with their pomegranate hearts,

jewels sparkling in the sun,
scar tissue walls all juice in tact ::
only tasted when broken.

The fact of the matter is fruit bruises,
and I am not looking for anything more
but to stop feeling bored and to find
ways to let a sweet thing inside me.

FINOLA MCDONALD

When I'm Talking About Reality and the Bees Keep Buzzing

we take our shirts off,
feel inside
for the weight of somebody's
breath, notice

  how empty full hands are.

electricity scatters the mauve veins
of ancestors, and people wonder why

they only come at night,

why they haven't told us
the secrets of the deer,

why we haven't stopped lying
to our reflections about
the things we want.

i want the light the moth craves
above a violet ocean,

        the cooing innocence of matter.

EMMA GEARS

256 Hillary Lane

I

I have a castle in my mind. My tower, a room with two side by side windows, where sunlight turns the carpet into Rumpelstiltskin's spun golden thread. My garden, half an acre of dandelions and cotton woods, and, in the summer puffs of white settle over the grass like a fairy's blanket. My cat pokes her paws underneath my door, begging to be let inside, but at night she roams the house as sentinel, taking stock of all three floors. My steed, an ancient blue scooter, and when I speed down the decline of the driveway, I fly for a single second.

I saw my home for the last time five years ago. A family of strangers besieges it now, but they are wrong to do so, because they don't remember it like I do, and they don't live in it like I did.

II

My mother says someone stole her wedding ring. She took it off at the gym and never saw it again. I see it again and again, because every time I look at my mother's fingers I expect to find it. But neither my mother nor my dad have worn their wedding rings in months.

My dad will say to me, years after this, that although his children are the most precious things in his life, he should have never married my mother, and I can't begrudge him for that, because I could never love someone like my mother. All throughout my childhood, divorce whispers through my dad sleeping in my brother's room when he's at college, my mother's friends who I never meet, the unplanned trips, and silences over dinner. But there is so much that I do not understand.

III

I don't think of my mother as someone who lives in my house. She works, she teaches at the gym, and she goes to bed at nine o'clock. She is in the remnants scattered around the house: a coffee pot half empty, salt-crusted boots on the welcome mat, the last ring of the front door slamming into place. I won't find her sitting on the couch, remote on her knee, groaning and swearing along with me when the Sabres let another goal slip by—like my dad does.

But I do find her Friday after work, slinking for the front door, as though I won't see her clearly from the living room. "Where are you going?" I ask her, pausing my video game.

She freezes. There's a brown backpack on her shoulders. She just dyed her hair its original color, the grays hidden among black. Veins pop out blue on her hands.

"I'm going to my friend's cottage for the weekend," she says, and she expects me to accept that.

There's nothing else I can say. Even the most banal question—"Whose cottage?"—can stir a thunderstorm.

So I don't say anything. My mother tears off in her car faster than anyone should go in a quiet neighborhood, as though she can't stand being here a moment longer.

IV

My mother's mother was one hell of a mother. She forced my mother to do the cooking and cleaning and screamed at her if it wasn't done right. She threw my grandfather's clothes through the window onto the front lawn. She took her kids to meet her various boyfriends at their houses.

My mother cried to my dad, asking him, "What if I turn out to be just like her? What if I'm not a good mother to our kids?"

My mother is beautiful. She always had veiny hands that I poked when I was little, but smooth skin and curly, shiny hair down to her back, an indeterminable shade between black and brown. "It's the coconut oil," she would say. I know she has a perfectly symmetrical face, pronounced cheekbones, and straight, white teeth when she smiles, but I don't remember her like that. I remember her cutting her hair off because Dad always said he liked women with longer hair. I remember her shoving floss at my siblings and me so that we could have shiny teeth like hers. I remember her veiny hands in fists, her collar bones protruding, feet planted apart, the skin from her cheeks stretching taut as she shrieked, "I'm your mother!"

V

When my mother leaves, the four of us kids emerge like vines creeping over the side of an abandoned house. “Dad,” I ask him at the dining table. Quizzes from his students lay partially graded with red pen in front of him. “Where did Mom go?”

“She went to a cottage with her friends,” he says without looking at me. Somehow, he feels he has to cover for her, though she barely bothers to pretend for us.

“Dad, I don’t mean to be rude, but Mom doesn’t really have any friends.”

“Yes, she does,” he says, marking a student’s grade. They didn’t pass. “You just haven’t met them.”

Later, my younger sister Claire finds the note hidden in the bag my mother packed for her cottage trip: a stick figure drawing of my mother in bed and a man with a large, smiling head next to her. “Counting the days until I see you again.” It’s not my dad’s handwriting.

VI

My dad teaches calculus to high school kids. He’s been in the same classroom for the past twenty-something years. The same Albert Einstein poster has hung there since I was in kindergarten. He leaves for work around 7:15 a.m., because he loses track of time in the morning, and he commits himself to every Friday afternoon happy hour; even if the rest of the crowd changes, he’ll be there.

I’ve seen pictures of my dad when he was around my age. Twenty-two and married, smiling at the camera with all his teeth, my teeny tiny older sister tucked between his arm. Back then, he had bright red hair and thick-framed, nerdy glasses. His hair is more transparent than red now, and he’s gone for more understated glasses. I can’t picture myself like that. Twenty-two and married. How can you tell what anything will be like thirty years later? My dad doesn’t lift my older sister between his arms now, but he still places her head on his shoulder, rubs her back when she’s sobbing.

My dad used to work for an insurance company, but he left after a few years. All the complications needed to keep a business going weren’t for him. “I like math because there’s only one answer,” he’s told me.

VII

My mother, surprisingly, returns to my home at the end of the weekend as she said she would. She yanks the Xbox controller from my hands before she even takes her shoes off. “Don’t you kids ever do anything?” she says. “Don’t you ever go outside?”

I don’t say anything. Lightning can’t be stopped with talk.

My mother pulls Claire from her room and drags her downstairs. One earphone dangles forlornly at my sister's stomach. "Let's go on a walk," my mother says. "Come on, girls. Do something active for once. What do you do all day? Play video games?"

"I'll get Adam and Rachel," I say.

"No, no. Just us. Your siblings are *athletes*."

On our trek around the neighborhood, my mother says to me, "Emma, you're lucky to have the figure that you do, even though I only see you sitting on the couch. Claire, darling, however—you're getting a, a *pouch*. We need to do something about that. Your teenage metabolism won't last forever, you know."

My sister stares at her feet as she walks. "Why would you say something like that?" I ask, a ball of rage bubbling in my stomach.

My mother faces me with the narrowed eyes and upturned nose. It's the look that makes me want to punch her. "Emma, sometimes some things need to be said," she says. "You would understand that if you were an adult."

VIII

My younger sister and I always shared a room. Sometimes it was annoying as hell. Claire snored at night, and her side of the room was disastrously messy. Sometimes it was the only place we could whisper to each other without our mother overhearing.

We were together nearly every single day after our parents announced the divorce, traveling from one impermanent apartment to the next, together in changing spaces. I don't know how we survived. Sometimes, I think we're so much the same it's no wonder that strangers couldn't tell us apart when we were little. We both wanted to sink into the screens of our laptops, clicking video after video, so we didn't have to look up and remember where we were.

IX

My parents met while working at the same diner. Perkins. My dad was the bus boy, while my mother served coffee. My dad had a little crush on my mother and always hung around, hoping for a chance to talk to her. He saw his chance one day, went to take it, accidentally colliding with my mother, and spilling coffee all over her. They went on a couple dates afterwards.

I asked my mother in the car one day, "Didn't you and Dad meet when he spilled coffee all over you?"

She pulled her attention off the road to frown heavily at me, eyebrows drawn low and pinched. "That never happened, Emma," she said.

This did: My mother had a crush on my father and followed him to the same college. She'd scream if I told anyone that. In college, they were re-

acquainted and started dating. Something must have gone right then, because the August after they graduated, they were married. My older sister and brother followed shortly after. My mother said to my dad that what she wanted more than anything was to be the best mother she could possibly be for her kids.

"I thought that was so noble, so honorable," my dad told me. "To me, back then, there was nothing more noble than raising children."

X

In the five years after my parents divorced, I don't think I could tally the number of times my sister and I returned to my dad's house sobbing after an evening with her. Each instance is distinct and yet the same. She says we'll burn in hell for the way we've treated her. She says I'm a high and mighty bitch who needs to learn a lesson. She tells my brother she'll never be whole again after he failed a course. I've quit talking to my mother entirely.

When my older siblings were born, she stopped working so she could take care of them. She went to every single boring choir concert and losing baseball game. She'd take us to any movie or get any snack the moment we asked.

I want to ask her what happened. I want to know what changed between my oldest sister's graduation as valedictorian of her class, my brother's Little League championship game, my youngest sister's Beatles-themed third grade play, my acceptance of the largest grant at senior awards night, all of our awkward first boyfriends and girlfriends, knee scrapes, kiddie pools, Halloween, watching fireworks from the driveway, Granddad's yacht club, high chairs, babies in white baptism dresses—and the moment when my mother threw her wedding ring in the trash. But, now, all I could ever tell her is, "You're not my mother."

XI

Neither of my parents can afford to continue living in our house on a singular income. I'd ask anyone, if they ever stopped in the neighborhood, to check if it's changed. It has muted blue double doors, a pine tree in the front yard, meticulously trimmed hedges all around, relentless and resilient dandelions poking through the grass, and a newly paved driveway. There are other people living there now, but they don't see my home as I see it—through my dad's car window, a stark white emptiness glowing in the sun.

ISABELLA HIGGINS

As She Was

She was planted in Germany, rooted in Italy, pollinated in France and Spain, bloomed in Michigan, and watered in Albany. You would see her among tireless streets. Chasing colorless tongues and frozen teeth. She came quietly into the night—as if her tactile deftness was detrimental to her form. Ripping words from the mouths of the people she breathed in, twisting them to satiate her own roots and blossom her flowers. She ensnared dialects and lilting words in the freckles on her arms, lapped up the words she tasted in the rain and let them bathe in her mouth—frothing to her unsung beat. Rolling her *R*s and whisking her crimson midnight hair, she floated past streetlights and oceans and crosswalks, delighting herself in the dipping of her toes into the flowing asphalt. Her eyes would dance with untold memories, languages she once enchanted, and the passport stamps reeling under her skin—confidently modest of the callouses she'd obtained. Her hips had born a life of sun and storms, of monsters and magnificence, of futility and fascination. Seldom fearing time, but rather letting the painted laugh lines seep into her softened skin. Rapturous in the way she presented her pain. Mesmerizing in the way she stood. She had words for blood, dripping letters where she lay. She drank songs from the moonlight, welcoming the night to strengthen her fingertips, rather than chip bone from her back. As her leaves turned blood orange, you'd see her pressing her petals into the curls of her daughters' hair. She leeched the words that sustained her to plant on the teeth of her babies, watching their new stems sprout—watering them as the world watered her. Her life had become a blazing autumn, while her children flourished in spring. Tending to her ardent garden, between chewed cigarettes and crackling arthritic leaves, you'd hear her rasp a laugh. "You girls won't really know me."

MARLEY DEROSIA

Something Borrowed

I learned something new

at your funeral:
you were a slut
and you liked to fish in Canada.
All you used were your fingers and eyes but the air
rang with silent laughter and the twang of so many cast lines.

I learned that your daughter needed me more than I thought.
My chest felt like cement.
Then lead when my own met hers.

And that her sister had a good boyfriend.
His arm was planted around her waist so she wouldn't float away during delivery
of the eulogy.

I learned that life is funny
when I found a cicada outside the parlor. I hoped
it was just the husk—the exoskeleton—
But I picked it up and one of the wings tore off.

I learned that you were scattered in Ottawa.

I picked up the cicada from the concrete and I figured

the bush's roots would suffice a tombstone.

Sam on his Phone (illustration), Arnold Barretto

JOSEPH SIGURDSON

Savior

"Sorry we didn't catch anything," said Frank. "Usually I catch at least something in that spot."

"I saw a huge one jump out of the water," said Anthony.

"Yeah they're always jumping."

They were out fishing that afternoon and headed back in the rural dusk, down long, long roads. Frank had just started letting his little cousin sit in the front seat. It went unsaid that Anthony wouldn't tell his mom. His feet hardly touched the floor when he sat up straight. They were atop a hill and could see road and land for a far stretch. Maybe a half-mile ahead, in the middle of the road, lay what looked like a rock.

"What is that?" said Anthony.

Frank focused on it for the whole stretch, and it wasn't until he was just a few yards from it that he realized that rock was a snapping turtle. Slowly driving past, the thing pathetically lunged at his car. Frank caught a glimpse of its cracked and bloody shell.

"What was that?" said Anthony.

"I think it was a snapping turtle," said Frank.

"What is a snapping turtle doing in the road?" he asked gigglingly.

"I don't know."

Frank pulled over.

"What is it?" said Anthony.

Frank looked out the rear window. The turtle was still lying there in the road. "I think it got hit by a car."

"Is it dead?"

"No, it jumped at us when we got close."

"Oh."

"I think we gotta kill it."

Anthony unbuckled, got on his knees, and looked out the rear window. "Why should we kill it?"

"'Cause it's humane. It's the right thing to do."

"Oh."

Frank backed the car all the way down again. There was no one else on the road. No homes. The turtle didn't move when he got out and stared at it. He could tell it was alive. Had that indescribable gaze and make of the living. When he approached, it shifted its head and opened its beak-like maw. Its shell had a four-way break and leaked black blood down toward its belly and the pavement, drying, working like glue. Anthony came and stood behind Frank. "How are you gonna kill it?"

"I don't know yet." He had an idea though. Just wasn't sure how well it'd work. He went to the back seat and took the pocket knife from the fishing gear.

Anthony watched him. "You're gonna stab it?"

"It's all I got."

Anthony walked up to the turtle. It opened its mouth again and hissed.

"Get away from it," said Frank.

"I think it's okay."

"No, it's not. It can't even move."

"I think it's all right."

"Get away from it."

"You're gonna kill it?"

"It's suffering, Anthony."

"It's still alive."

"Get away from it."

Frank circled around then slowly approached it from behind, knife in hand. The thing hissed and viciously whipped its head back and forth trying to face him. It peeled itself from its blood soaked bed and managed to rotate a little. Frank just stepped behind it again. He lowered his knife hand toward its neck and the turtle struck at him like a snake. Anthony watched from behind the car. There was no way he could grab hold of it and slit its throat, he figured. He positioned himself, made ready and took a quick jab at the thing. It only nicked its head and now, more desperate than ever, the turtle flopped backward and jumped right at him. Frank stepped away. He was shaking.

"Did you get it?" Anthony called.

Frank breathed. "I can't," he called back. "I can't get it." Maybe he could find a rock and bash the thing. Maybe he could run it over. That might break his bumper, though. He didn't know.

Far down the road a car approached. Frank stepped onto the grass. "Watch out Anthony, a car's coming." A pickup-truck, barreling from afar. He cherished the truck, a solid excuse to do nothing but wait. It grew closer

and closer, no change in pace. None at all. “He’s not stopping,” Frank said to himself. Closer, closer. The turtle lay there, panting, oblivious, or perhaps just ready. The truck was upon them, blasting the thing into a fleshy, shell-scattered muddle. The truck slammed on the brakes and left a short streak of gutted innards. Anthony’s blank and youthful face stared at the gorey ruin from across the road.

From the truck came an old man. He approached slowly, squinting at the crushed turtle. “You all right?” he asked as he neared Frank. “What’d I hit?”

“It was a turtle.”

“Mm.” He scratched his head. “Must’ve crawled up from that crick there.” He stood, contemplating. “What are you doing? Wasn’t yours was it?” he asked Frank.

“No, I was trying to kill it. Somebody’d already hit it.”

“Mm. I figure it was for the best then.”

Anthony was behind the car. The old man looked from the crushed corpse to Frank. “You all right?”

“Yeah.”

“All right then.” He scratched his head. “Take care.” He went back to his truck, drove off.

In the car Anthony was silent. Frank drove no more than the speed limit. “I’m sorry you saw that.”

“He ran it right over. It exploded.”

“Yeah. That man shouldn’t be driving.”

“Why not?”

“He didn’t even see it. We saw that thing from like half a mile away. Could’ve been a person. I don’t know. I don’t think he even noticed you were there.”

“Why would a person be laying in the road?”

“I mean, they probably wouldn’t. That’s not the point.”

“He did the right thing?”

“What?”

“He killed it, you said that was the right thing.”

“Oh. I suppose. He shouldn’t be driving though if he truly didn’t see that.”

“You couldn’t do it.”

“What?”

“Kill it.”

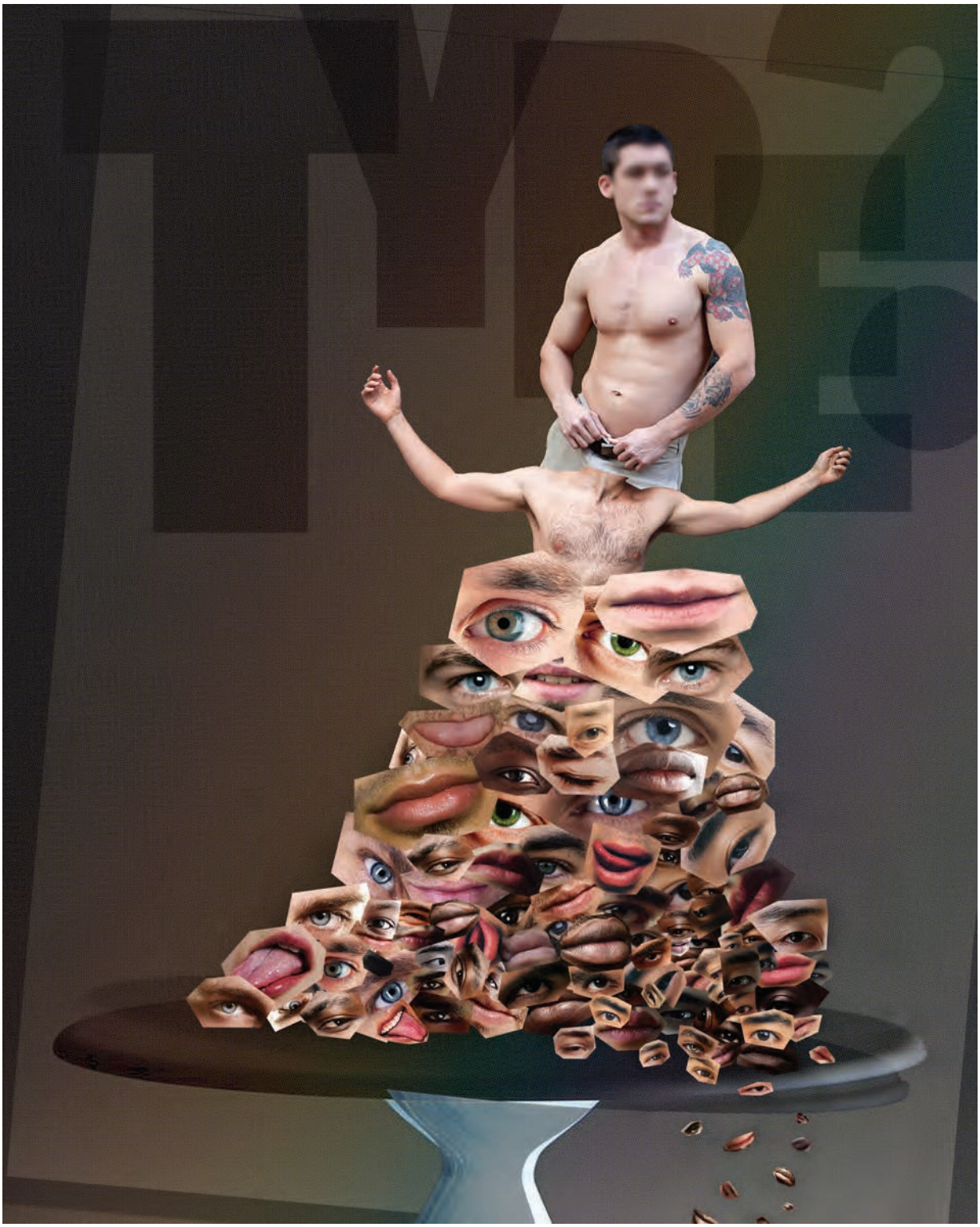
“I could have, I just didn’t want the thing to bite me. I don’t know. I couldn’t get ahold of it.”

“He did the dirty work.”

“Where’d you get that from?”

“I don’t know.”

They barely spoke the rest of the way. Frank saw that brief image of the exploding turtle over and over. He saw that old man's squint, the roaring truck, the open road. He couldn't have done it.



"I'm not being racist. It's just my preference, you're not my type" (digital collage), Arnold Barretto

JASMINE CUI

Anna May Wong Stars in a Silent Film

All I remember is the glare
of cameras. Every mouth I've met
is a flight risk, which is to say that no one will kiss me
offscreen. Instead, I am propped
up against a slick of women.
Men like me most
this way: a duplicate, voice drowned
out by the masses. They marvel
at the comma-curve of my back, the hairlessness
of my limbs. I am best when shaved
into something digestible. I never stick
in the clutch of a throat. They insert
my face into a *Time* centerfold & joke
that this is affirmative action. The truth is I am not good enough
to play myself in films because my skin
is likened to jaundice—who could love an
affliction? I am an illness
which is to say I did this
to them—I should be quarantined. The enemy
bears a striking resemblance to me. A man says
he wants to watch me unravel in a shallow pool of rain. I know better
than to call it a tragedy—this is just Thursday.
If I could speak, I'd say *when the little match girl immolates,*
be courteous & watch.

El Trabajador (watercolor), Cindy Castillo

NOAH MAZER

the trickle

two clouds, drying out, are our only shade on the interstate north.
there were rivers. between sky and matching fog before i fell asleep
there were dogwoods, and a black band of mountains held

the only thing flowing on the plain where i wake up is sour discharge
from beneath a gas station, counter manned by a crookteeth leer
who stares as he rings up food for the road. i say thanks and he grunts

wafts a warm, impotent-smelling breeze through his nose hairs.
in the car dad's still tuned to a program about the flooding, what might yet be saved
i tell him it's still too sad to listen to. he says philosophy is hard.

we pass a pair of bait shops that face each other
across the road. at home it was a rainy summer but the scanty patches of grass
in their empty parking lots are cracked and dusted

by pale dirt that the wind drags in swirls over the gravel.
i begrudge the southbound streaks in the sky and the way the gliders
fall home overhead. radio talks salvage as we drive west

past murky townships where a truck company bossman's nights leave him
nothing but to be an amateur matador,
creep through empty pastures in a secondhand traje de luces

looking for a fight. he tears a rhinestoned knee straining to pull himself over barnyard fence
dip in his mouth like always and when he spits he uncts his slippers with the black spray.
further west the smell remains. dad's drained the bottle of water i brought

from the city. my throat stays dry. where will i swim?
the rivers here are worms. turn around. i can say these things now but leave me out here
& i am afraid
eventually the barn door will creak open and the calves will low

and it will be me standing there with the lance in hand.
i've learned my lesson—we can go back now. there's no traffic coming.
pull over and turn back. i will never live so far from the sea again.

ELIZABETH PELLEGRINO

Where a Boundary

So many of us have this idea of what a space mission would look like to another planet or to an asteroid. And it's a crew of mostly men and maybe a woman, you know, because that's what Hollywood tells us these missions look like.

It's fantastic to just turn it upside-down and conceive of an all-female crew. And what would that actually be like? And if it saves money, then maybe it should be worth discussing.

Kate Greene
"For Mars Missions, Sending More Women Might Make Economical Sense"

I remember the engineers trying to decide how many tampons should fly on a one-week flight; they asked, "Is 100 the right number?"

"No. That would not be the right number."

They said, "Well, we want to be safe."

I said, "Well, you can cut that in half with no problem at all." [Laughter]

And there were probably some other, similar sorts of issues, just because they had never thought about what just kind of personal equipment a female astronaut would take. They knew that a man might want a shaving kit, but they didn't know what a woman would carry. Most of these were male engineers, so this was totally new and different to them.

Sally Ride
"NASA Johnson Space Center Oral History Project, Edited Oral History Transcript."

Mid-Atlantic Ridge, Iceland: July 5 2016

The parking lot of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge is set back from the road, filled with pastel teal tourist buses whose side mirrors stick out the front of the vehicle like bug antennae. Iceland's biggest tour destinations are geologic in nature. The blue lagoon. The glacier that Batman filmed on. The Mid-Atlantic Ridge is only visible on land in Iceland. The rest of it is buried under the sea, zipping up the planet.

Walking from the parking lot to the escarpment, I stand on the edge of the ridge that's black with basalt and spotted purple with infrequent flowers. The base of the graben is covered with sand, just as black as the rock I stand on and collect in my backpack. I imagine the Mid-Atlantic Ridge acting as the divergent boundaries I learned in geology class.

I picture lava erupted out, fissure-like, and filling the valley with liquid rock. I imagine the ridge that I'm standing on and the ridge where I see the tourists standing pushed away from each other as new rock fills the area in between. Of course we don't see lava, nor do we feel earthquakes. The only sound besides the wind is people running across the bridge that connects the two sides of the ridge. Sneakers hit the wooden planks as kids exclaim, on one side, "I'm in America!" and, on the other side, "I'm in Europe!"

That's not quite right, but it's close enough. They're recognizing the difference of the divide. How one side is the Eurasia plate and the other is the North American plate. How the world is split apart and moving together all at once.

The other geologists are less concerned about this. They're in the sand looking at the Aeolian erosion on a rock. Nick, professor of geology and Mars expert, tells them that he sees this kind of formation on the red planet. The student geologists and I are amazed, since everything we see in our portion of the world is very, very Earth-like—wet and covered in soil.

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One of the first classes that you must take when you decide to be a geologist is mineralogy, where you learn to identify minerals, and where minerals are made in the mantle, and how all of that effects the crust of Earth, among other processes.

The other lesson you must learn as a geologist is how to ask questions. This science is largely observational, and questioning whether a mineral is hematite or goethite could ultimately tell you how much water is available in the area, and even what a different planet might look like.

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Q: How does a mineral reflect light?

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Luster: *luster, even more so than color, is the best aspect of a mineral to identify first. It describes whether light bounces off the surface more like shined shoes or dirt or a brand new house key.*

Metallic: dark silver

The English classrooms in my high school were situated in a different building (House 1) than the science classrooms (House 2). With six minutes between classes, I would rush with my two best friends, Xinhui and Zoe, across the school as quickly as we could to move from Biology to English.

Inevitably, we would hit the traffic of the student body when we passed through the wide auditorium atrium and into the narrow hallways that always smelled faintly of corn chips.

My friends didn't love English. Of course, they were scientists. They tossed the subject off to me, since I was one of the few in the class that read the books in full and didn't mind the essays.

Non-metallic: reddish-brown

Carbon-dated at five and a half years old and with a speech impediment, I spent weekday evenings learning how to speak. How to form words out of the sounds that didn't quite fit in my mouth. My parents saw my frustration with my lack of communication.

They hired a speech therapist, who would come to my house. She would watch me eat bananas and make faces with me in the mirror. She'd sit, red nails taking notes, in a folding chair as I colored at a wooden table made for kids. Every time I talked it was a tongue twister.

Iceland's landscape is alien in nature. Besides the volcanoes that cradle the island, all I can see from the rental car's window are plains rubbly with lava rock. The moss, which covers more of the ground in Iceland than grass does, is scarce. Nick, who is driving, tells us that the lava is recent.

"How recent is recent?" I ask most of the questions in the car. It's because I'm in the front seat, and over the hum of the road, most of the other students either can't hear or are lulled to sleep.

"About a few hundred years."

"A few hundred years?"

"Yeah. That's pretty new in terms of geologic time."

"I guess."

"This is actually a good analog for Mars," the professor gestures to the landscape without taking his eyes off the road. "The young basalt. The relatively low amount of vegetation. The climate and surrounding geomorphology. This is not a bad place to train astronauts for missions."

"Mars missions?"

"Yeah. Moon ones, too."

"Huh." The conversation slips back into quiet thoughts, imagining the SUV as a rover, driving us across the red planet's surface. Imagining the basalts and sedimentary rocks we could collect. Imagining how we could construct the planet's history with stones and some scientific know-how.

Distorted vanilla noises. Caesarian cease sensational lips lisp lease. breathe. Epitome blasphemy amphetamine anonymous anemone ominous nimbus cologne. Breathe. Economy caramel laurel laud author arthur whorl wound round word roar worm window women worship swish silver shale. Sorbet. Illinois, ousting jasper jasmine goethite chai. Nominee none see eight; breathe.

Sulfur-yellow feather fallout.

Students bumped into each other's backpacks, and I tried not to listen too closely to the honors students, who would brag about the hours of sleep they lost over calculus, as they shrugged off another book assignment. I tried not to hear that they bullshitted another paper.

Why is your notebook on your head? Xinhui asked.

I thought maybe, if I put my book on my head, my ideas will get back into my brain via osmosis. I lied. We all knew that's not how osmosis worked.

They laughed. *I should try doing that, too.* Zoe put her binder of science and math onto her head, so that it crushed the blonde flyaway hairs.

Zoe was planning to go to MIT. Xinhui wasn't sure what she wanted to do but leaned toward a science major of some kind. They both ended up at Cornell.

I didn't tell them that the idea of English as a lesser subject was growing in my head. And I certainly didn't want to tell them that, because English was my best subject, I saw myself as lesser than them. Than all the students excelling in the subjects where I struggled. I didn't want them to know that I thought myself a failure.

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Q: What color powder does the mineral make?

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Streak: *streak is the color you get when you rub (or streak) a mineral across a piece of white ceramic. This property is both a function of hardness, (many hard minerals like quartz will have no streak,) and the color of the mineral, (sulfur looks yellow and streaks yellow).*

Reddish-Brown

"I could never do that," my
writing geology
friend says when I mention
the science lab I'm in. the poetry portfolio I have due.
"That's too much
math writing
for me. I'm not
science-y creative
enough to do that."

I used to think I'd find myself in Iceland. That flying across an ocean I had never crossed before, actually seeing the landscapes that were set as my computer background would unlock my insecurities. But then, maybe, I just wanted to hear the language I tried to learn spoken by a barista holding three lemons, who was trying to tell us not to plug our laptops into the outlets on the ceiling, because doing so would short out the entire building.

The food labels in the grocery store in Reykjavik were in Icelandic, which surprised me at first. I mean, a jar of peanut butter looked like a jar of peanut butter regardless of how the jar is labeled. It took a second though—a short time where the jar of peanut butter wasn't peanut butter anymore. It was *hnetusmjör*. In that moment, between when I read *hnetusmjör* and saw the peanut drawn on the jar, I felt like the world and my perception of the world had shifted out of alignment.

As if, you were Schrödinger, lifting up the lid of the thought-experiment box, expecting to find that the cat is either dead or alive, and instead you find that it's still both and the laws with which you observed the world through were wrong.

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An English professor visited my college to give a talk about a volcanic eruption to geologists. I met him in a poetry classroom, where students asked him "how do you write about science?"

And he said, "well, you have to translate it, right? You have to take what the scientists are saying so that the everyday person can understand it and make sense of it.

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I asked Nick what he thought of that, and he said that it's the same way getting new students to understand science. That you have to use analogies, similes, to help students understand topics. You can tell them that the Mid-Atlantic ridge is like a Snickers bar. The crust breaks, while the mantle stretches out forming a caramel rope. Then they learn how to talk about the brittle crust and ductile mantle without the use of similes.

Q: How strong is a mineral?

Hardness: *A mineral's strength is determined by the Moh's Hardness scale, where a mineral is ranked relative to other minerals and objects of known strengths. The scale is written from 1-10 and is logarithmic in nature; however, the way we usually evaluate a mineral in the classroom is by whether you can scratch it with your finger, if it can scratch a penny, and/or if it can scratch glass.*

≤6.5

A list of all the famous male scientists I could think of off the top of my head:

- Albert Einstein
- Thomas Edison
- Alexander Graham Bell
- Sir Isaac Newton
- George Mendel
- Charles Darwin
- Nikola Tesla
- Benjamin Franklin
- Steve Jobs
- Bill Gates
- Steve Irwin
- Neil Armstrong
- Buzz Aldrin
- Edward Jenner
- Harrison Schmitt
- Bill Nye
- Neil D'Grasse Tyson
- Elon Musk

4.5 – 5.5

A list of all the famous female scientists I could think of off the top of my head:

- Marie Curie
- Jane Goodall
- Marie Tharp
- Sally Ride
- Mae Jemison

Q: What shape is a mineral?

Crystal Habit: *crystal habit is the external shape of a mineral. Crystal habits are influenced by multiple factors, but one of the most prominent is the conditions (room, temperature) that the crystal grew in.*

Blocky

Zoe and I sat diagonal to each other in a grouping of 4 desks for AP Biology. Our teacher was wandering around the room with his head hunched over to read names on the tests he was handing back.

Mine was face down on the desk. I had only glanced at the grade before hiding back away. The number in red was satisfying enough.

Zoe asked me what my grade was. I shrugged. I told her it was fine and that I was happy with it.
I didn't ask Zoe what her grade was. She told me it was a 95, anyway. She told me that she was failing. She told me that a 95 wasn't good enough.

And I knew, at the time, that her sense of failure for getting a 95 on a test was just an echo on her own expectations and self-worth.

But also, at that same time, I couldn't shake the feeling that my 93 made me even more of a failure. That I would never be good enough for the sciences. That I would always be a failure.

Earthy

I don't remember when I moved to New York or when the elementary school in the suburban upstate town told me that my speech disorder required no more help.

I do remember, however, doing a reading test in 8th grade. Where all I had to do was read aloud from an essay, and the woman who was testing me looked surprised when I ended.

She didn't need to say anything. She *didn't* say anything. The timer blinked zero: zero zero in digital digits and I had only read 1/3 of an essay I knew in my gut most people had finished.
The rest of the year, my social studies teacher specifically called on me to do readings aloud in class. Each time he did it I was sure it was the test. I was sure he had been told I was a bit slow to transition the words I had read to the sounds I could make.

Skaftafell: July 20, 2016

I was wearing someone else's socks, and I felt the water wring between my river-dipped toes as the mountain trail rose.

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Q: do I double major in geology or not?

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The geology major is 65 credits large: requiring an introductory class,
The socks didn't quite fit me. They were too tight around the
Historical Geology, Mineralogy, Petrology, Structural Geology,
ankles, and the knit was coarser than my sole was used to. What if these socks weren't
Geomorphology, Paleontology Stratigraphy,
borrowed and really I was someone else walking in my own slog? I was tired of
3 electives, 2 semesters of senior seminar, Chemistry I, Chemistry II,
playing the geologist who separates her poetry and field notes
Biology I, Biology II, Calculus I, Calculus II. My creative
into different notebooks. I was tired of being the scientific voice in workshop to correct tries
writing major is only 44 credits: 4 workshops, 3 literature
at geologic metaphors. Wouldn't it just be easier to stay in someone else's socks
classes, 2 introductory classes, and 1 elective. The Geology minor
and exist as one or the other?
was 33 credits, and I just wanted some balance between the two.

Lanmannalaguar, Iceland:
is filled with banks of rocks colored by hydrothermal alteration from rivers running through the area. Some of the rocks were green, like chlorite, some were purple manganese, and I crossed a stream to pull red from the rock wall. A thin coat of red dust combined with the water on my hands. The mixture sank into the lines in my palms, looking like I was stained with blood.

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Mars:
is red because of nanophase mineral dust covering its surface. Some of it is poorly crystalline hematite and maghemite and lepidoctoite that is too small to cling to rock, and the wind plucks it off of basalt and carries it across the planet. All of it is iron oxide, blown from basaltic surfaces and deposited in piles below thin atmosphere.

Rust

oxide & stain my pants
in monthly cycle. if the allotropes
were different if more oxygen

tacked onto iron like egg to uterine
wall, crystals

would soak into my worst pair
of underwear instead of blood.

I curated the narrative about my friends.

Zoe does major in physics, but she was always the most artistic of our group. In her biology notes she'd draw eyes, obsessing over the proportion of the iris to the tear duct, the pupil to the lash line.

I can tell you that her room used to be painted orange. Maybe it still is. And whenever I visited her, the walls were chalked with yellow notes and chord progressions, because she was teaching herself how to play the bass guitar. I think she had oil paints on her desk in a glass jar, and, if she didn't, they wouldn't have looked out of place.

Xinhui is similar. She majors in environmental science, but I know she wants to be a freelance artist. Her drawings are digital or watercolor, and I sometimes wonder if she'd been happier in art school. She likes the science, though.

The same is true for my other friends. Ana is studying to be a nurse, but she photographs landscapes. Kaleb is majoring in theoretical physics, but he almost went to school for ceramics. Hanna will one day be a doctor, and she's double majoring in biology and violin.

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I often think that I am not good enough to learn science, during geology lectures.

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Growing up, my focus was on phonemes, and I think the frustration of language is what made me love it.

The Mid-Atlantic Ridge, July 5 2016

Geologists will tell you in intro classes that divergent boundaries are straight lines, dividing one side of the earth from another. Geologists will also tell you, when you've spent another year or two studying science, that they've lied.

The Mid-Atlantic Ridge isn't a neat line where a bridge can connect two continental plates. It's messy. The boundary jumps across the island, striking it through with valleys. It creates a transition zone. A place where the land is both North American and Eurasian, but also neither one by itself.

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I understand, of course, why science and English have to be separated on school grounds. It would be difficult to teach the concept of birefringence alongside a discussion about the purpose of poetry. It could be done. I know it could be done, but that takes time and planning and work.

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Rocks line the edges of the desk I write on. Icelandic basalt. Pennsylvanian sandstone. Devonian shale. And tucked away in a labeled bag, I have two small rocks from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Little baby rocks, whose vesicles are not filled with dry moss. I only take them out occasionally to remember and remind myself of the messiness.

Of the transition zone where two different things are the same, and have been the whole time.

I like to think of hematite as a dual mineral.

Hematite is a mineral that expresses itself one of two ways: 1) as a reddish-brown, earthy mineral and 2) as a dark metallic, somewhat blocky mineral. Other than luster and, occasionally, habit, the two types of hematite act the same. Hematite will streak reddish-brown. Hematite will be around 5-6 on the Moh's Hardness scale. Hematite will always have the same birefringence and chemical formula regardless of how it expresses itself.

My friend usually has candles burning when I go over to her house at night. I think she likes the light and the petal-soft feeling candles provide. My friend tells me that she's probably psychic, but she says it in the way that makes me believe her, even if I don't necessarily believe people can be psychic.

In the candle light, under the pattering of rain on the skylights above us, she takes out a box of tarot cards, calculates my life path number, and sets to work deciphering the card.

There's a lot of "hums" and "mmms" and she covers her mouth as she thinks.

And finally she says, through all of my reincarnations I have always faced a split of passions.

A: I am metallic and grounded.

A: I am the scientist who writes poems that imagines her body as a rock, and I am the writer who experiments with similes made out of scientific fact.

A: I am the all-female crew of the people best fit for the job.

A: I am tired of my insecurities.

A: I am hematite piling on Mars body.

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The classification of minerals is only helpful in terms of human understanding of a portion of the universe. At the end of the day, hematite doesn't need to be called hematite. Peanut butter doesn't need to be called peanut butter or *hnetusmjör* or anything in particular. There is no inherent good in classifying people by their menstrual cycles.

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We exist as spectra and transition zones.

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I am insecure in science, yet take the classes anyway. I am insecure in speaking, yet decided that my passion will include placing words together on a page, knowing one day I'll have to read aloud in a room to a group of people that do not know me intimately.

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Earth is the only planet not named after a Greek God, which is another way to say that Earth is the only planet not assigned a particular gender, which is to say Earth does not exist on a binary, which is to say, I think that's how it should be.

NATALIE HAYES

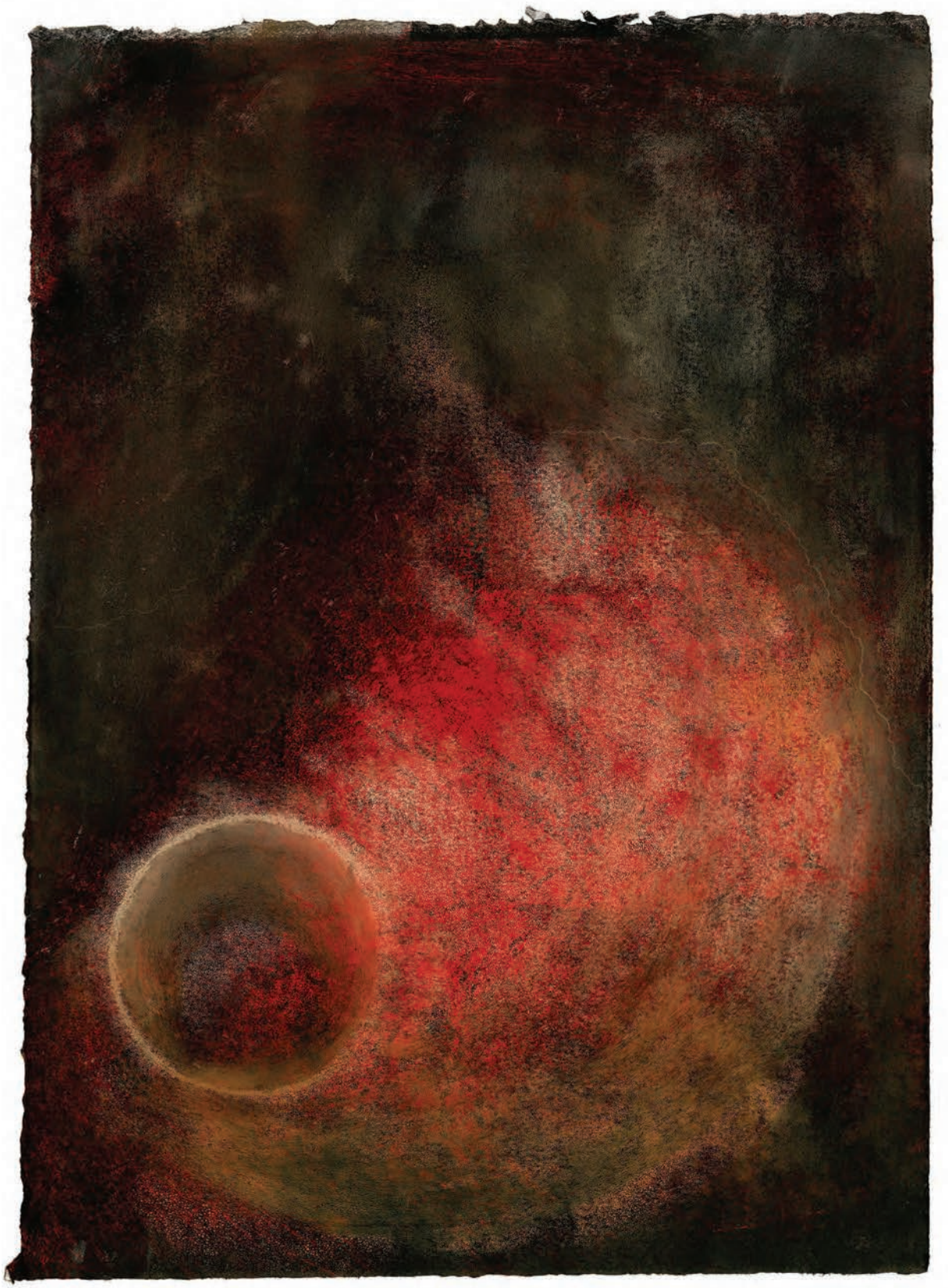
gabrg3

you are the sound of a bottle, neither prior to nor during its breaking—
only after, when it is structureless and unbound, but also the sharpest it's ever been;

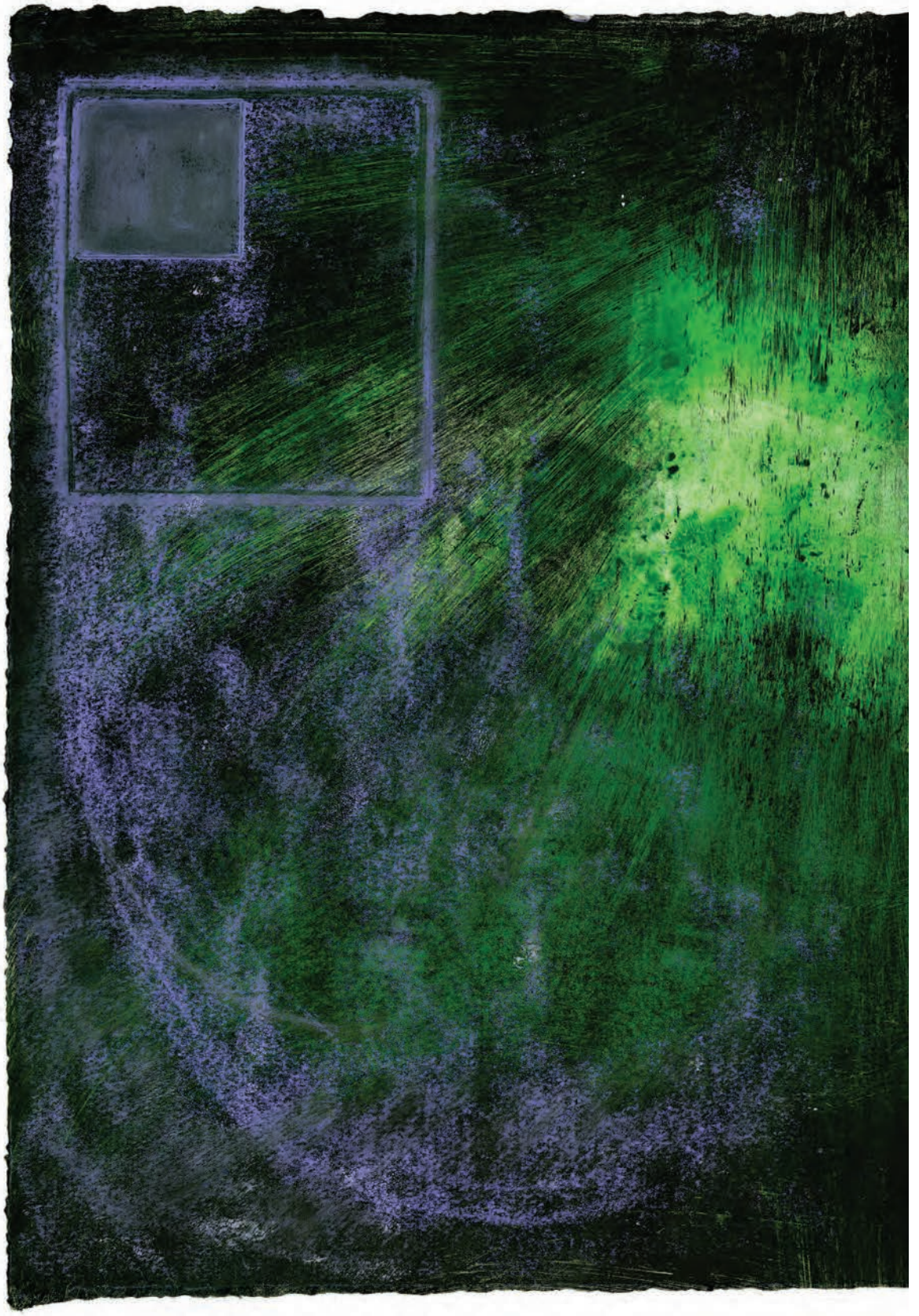
shards of glass in a puddle of sweet wine are enticing, wearing their veils of burgundy, hiding
and shaky hands become archeologists, excavating what remains.

when your teeth rot out, toss them one by one into the box where you keep the broken glass,
deep in the matter of your brain

and introduce them to one another, as if they weren't already acquainted.
as if the bottle were a stranger to your bones.



Love (monotype print), James Blanchard



Confusion (monotype print), James Blanchard

SIMONE LOUIE

Chicken Feet

The dim sum restaurant is noisy and lively in the morning, like the city it is in. The servers wear white cloth hats and white aprons, wheeling around squeaky metal carts filled with bamboo steamers, declaring the names of the dim sum in their cart to every table they pass by. The tables are filled with chatty families, relatives, and old friends; among the crowd are my parents, my two younger sisters, and I.

A pair of hands swiftly set down a bamboo steamer onto the middle of the off-white table cloth. The orangey-red chicken feet stick out of the light brown steamer, glimmering under the hot steam that brushes my cheek. One by one, the other steamers join the chicken feet dish: shrimp dumplings with thick, translucent skin and a softly-glowing pink center; yellow-skinned *siu mai* with large shrimps and tiny fish embryo placed on top of each one; rectangular, silky white *cheung fun* that easily slip through chopsticks and flop back into the soy sauce; white, fluffy *cha siu bao*s filled with red and sticky, sweet and salty *cha siu*.

I'm the first one in my family to pick up a savory claw with my chopsticks. I bite off the talons one or two at a time, sucking the skin and fat off the small, roundish bones that I roll around in my mouth, the bones getting cleaner with every roll, every suck. I push out the soft cartilage between bones using my tongue and front teeth. The action comes as naturally as the enjoyment; my parents have told me stories of my toddler years, chewing on a chicken bone in my sleep while I was still in my high chair at the dinner table. I lean forward to spit out the light, gray bones onto the restaurant's porcelain plate; they are now clean and smooth to my satisfaction, and collect on my plate like fairies' dumbbells, or souvenirs of an unknown past.

The Chinese have many different chicken feet dishes—savory, spicy, sweet and sour, sour and spicy. They're served with brown sauce, red sauce, vinegar,

and steamed or boiled, you name it. The chicken feet at dim sum places, which is where most people in Hong Kong eat their chicken feet, are usually first deep fried and then simmered in sweet soy sauce, garlic, and fermented black soybeans. The name of this type of chicken feet at dim sum places literally translates to "phoenix claws." In Thai restaurants, they are typically marinated in clear sweet and sour sauce with chili peppers, usually too spicy for me to eat more than three in a row without having to chug a glass of ice water. Chinese chicken feet are typically softer, while Thai chicken feet tend to be chewier. Like Jamaicans, Chinese people also make chicken feet soup. The chicken feet are cooked with white beans, peanuts, and sometimes other vegetables until the ingredients almost fall apart. These are the easiest chicken feet to suck on—the fat and skin practically slip off the bone onto your tongue.

I remember watching a TV program called *Blue Peter* in the living room of our apartment in Scotland when I was around eight and seeing people roast large, furry, long-legged spiders over a fire, squatting under palm trees and eating the black, hairy creatures. I can't remember if I felt more intrigued or grossed out. When my Korean best friend from Scotland told me she loved eating caterpillars and that Scottish people were ignorant for thinking it was gross, I agreed with her that caterpillars were so good even though I thought it was gross too. I had never eaten an insect in my life (at least to my knowledge) and I had no idea that anyone ate caterpillars, but I wanted to be on her team of non-ignorant people. Scottish people had no idea how to appreciate nature's gifts like we did.

I didn't know my favorite Scottish dish, haggis, was made of sheep innards wrapped in sheep stomach, until after my family and I had left Scotland for Hong Kong and I Googled it when I grew nostalgic. By that time, though, my family and I were in Hong Kong eating ox tripe and pig ears and pig blood curd (which is basically a savory, dark brown-red jello-cube made of pig's blood…its name sounds better in Chinese: 豬紅, which literally translates into *pig red*), so well-seasoned sheep innards and oatmeal wrapped in a lining of stomach was nothing atrocious.

Food historians generally agree that haggis was a popular peasant food. "Encasing hard to cook cuts like lungs and intestines along with undesirable muscle meats like liver and kidneys into a convenient stomach packaging would have been a wonderful way to feed a group—while making sure no meat went to waste," Hungry History's "Ode to Haggis" online article says.

Haggis was very much criticized and ridiculed throughout most of the 18th century, perhaps because of the sickening idea of wrapping an animal inside its own stomach. But to be honest, it doesn't seem to be much different

from the mechanically-separated meat that consists of bones and the carcass of leftover chicken which is used to make the McNuggets I also claim to love.

When I arrived in Upstate New York for college, Russhell and I bonded over our love for chicken feet. When she was little, she wouldn't eat her mother's soup unless it was chicken feet soup. I learned from her that when Jamaicans don't make chicken feet in soup, they make them in curry. I appreciated that Russhell naturally understood my dislike for chicken breast, which seemed to always be tough and dry. I also found it to be too much meat at once; I missed the joy of sucking tender meat off bones and chewing on cartilage. Having to spend time sucking and spitting your food allows your tongue to savor the flavor for a longer time before you swallow.

One evening, Russhell invited me and a few other friends to her house for dinner. She cooked curry chicken, Jamaican style. It was too spicy for most of us to eat without having to chug a glass of water every five bites, but it was deeply flavorful, and satisfied me in a way that the salads and sandwiches I'd been having on campus could never do. I sucked on each chicken bone and piece of cartilage to make up for all the dry chicken breast I had to eat in my first weeks of college.

As I was savoring the last of my chicken, I caught sight of a piece of untouched bit of chicken on a friend's plate across from me. She had stopped eating, and I was not close enough to her back then to feel comfortable asking her whether she was going to eat the chicken or not.

"Are you going to eat that?" Russhell asked her, to my relief.

She hesitated and said, "I've never eaten anything with bone in it… How do you eat it?"

"You pick it up with your fingers," Russhell said in amusement.

Our friend gingerly picked up the chicken by one end of the bone between her dainty index finger and thumb and brought it up to her mouth. She opened her mouth wide to take a tiny bite out of the chicken with her front teeth—her mouth was wide open to avoid touching the bone with her lips. I drank my glass of water in silent judgment.

In Hong Kong, people who want the freshest ingredients shop at wet markets instead of supermarkets. The smell of wet markets is usually a strong mixture of blood, flesh, and fish, a pungent, sharp, metallic smell which we have a word for in Cantonese: 腥. Slimy pieces of raw flesh, feet, snouts, intestines, livers etc. hang from metal frames at the meat stands. The floors are always wet because the butchers hose the floors down to let the blood from the chopped-up-animals flow into the sewers. Live fish, with sizes ranging from a

child's hand to half an arm and colors all shades of metallic, splash water over the glass sides of the tanks they swim in.

Apart from being damp and smelly, wet markets are also noisy. Sellers are usually middle aged or old people with rough skin and voices. Some of them are plain rude, but some seem to be the kind of guardian who gives tough love. Sellers convince buyers that their products are at the best prices : 「俾你六蚊一斤喇，好冇？好抵啊！」("I'll give you a kilo for six dollars, okay? Such a good price!") During busy times, they yell out their lowest prices from their stands to attract customers, 「一蚊雞、兩蚊雞！」The familiar sounds, melodies, and rhythms of the wet market always intrigue me: the sound of customers bargaining, the sudden thud of butchers' huge, rectangular knives against thick wooden cutting boards as their bulky arms chop through meat and bone, the splashing of water and the flapping of tails when fish are taken out of their tanks, and the squeaks of Mom's wheely-cart.

Whenever I go to the wet market with Mom, I pull along her squeaky, two-wheeled, sack-like shopping cart behind me, and follow her around the market as she uses her supermom powers to scope out the cheapest and freshest-looking vegetables and meat. Mom likes to buy vegetables from a particular stand that is owned by an old man who packs our vegetables into bags in an almost unbearably slow manner, but she goes to him anyway because she feels sorry for his mental disability. Whenever we pass by other stores, sellers call out 「靚女！」("Pretty girl!"), a phrase that is not meant to be sexual at all. I find it endearing, even though it is a tactic to earn favor with customers. After a year of college in the States, I had learned to appreciate (and sometimes criticize) the lack of political correctness in Cantonese humor.

One morning, I saw half of a pig lying on the wet tiles next to a fresh pork stand in the wet market. It had been cut open laterally with all its pink, red, and brown organs still neatly fitted within the skin of the pig, like puzzle pieces on display for a lesson of anatomy. It was so early in the morning that most of the stands had not opened yet—my dad and I had a plane to catch, and we needed to pass through the wet market to get to our bus stop. The butcher of the pork stand had not yet picked out the organs to hang on the metal frames and chopped the half-pig into meat, feet, ears, and snout. I had an upset stomach that morning, and the sight of this once-alive sack of organs made it worse.

At least the wet market is honest. The sellers are humans rather than companies; they do not hide the sacrifice that was made for my carnivorous desires.

In the past decade, the number of slaughterhouses has decreased, while the consumption of meat has increased. The meat industry has discovered ways to

produce more meat without killing more animals. One way, is gluing cheap scraps of meat together with the enzyme transglutaminase, aka "meat glue," to form a prime cut. Transglutaminase is naturally found in blood clots, skin, and hair, but most TG in meat glue is made from the cultivation of bacteria using blood plasma from cows and pigs.

James Fortner runs the Queensland Natural Beef Company, an organization dedicated to using as few additives in meat as possible. In an interview, he exposes the secret of meat glue. The interview takes place in a large kitchen of a restaurant. On the counter in front of him is a plate of diced beef, each piece about half the size of a fist, and a bag of powder TG enzyme. Fortner and his interviewer both have masks on.

"Why've we got the masks on?" the interviewer asks, who is standing right next to Fortner opening the bag of powder TG.

"This is dangerous sh—," Fortner replies, the TV bleeping him out. He points his gloved index finger into the mouth of the bag. "See that?"

The interviewer chuckles, leans forward for half a second to peer into the white, powdery contents of the bag.

"Don't breathe that in."

The interviewer steps back instantly.

Cooked glued meat, or "frankenmeat," isn't necessarily dangerous to the average consumer, but when it is not cooked all the way through, the chances of food poisoning skyrocket. Outer parts of the original small scraps of meat are likely to have come in contact with a lot of bacteria on its way from the slaughterhouse to the kitchen, leading to a high chance of bacterial contamination for the frankenmeat.

While scraps of meat are saved to be puzzle pieces for prime cuts, animal heads are often saved in Hong Kong to ensure customers that the meat on their dish was fresh. Fish are cooked and served whole: and chicken, or duck, or geese heads are placed on the dish, telling the consumer yes, I am the fish, chicken, duck, or goose you are eating. Many people in the States shudder at the sight of animal heads on their plate—anything to remind them the meat was once an animal. Bones and eyes and fins and beaks tell you what you are eating. Eating eyes is especially a taboo in many other countries; perhaps because the eyes are supposedly the windows to the soul.

The thing about eating certain parts of an animal is that some parts resemble the whole animal way too much for the consumer's liking. A steak, a chicken fillet, a pork chop, or a piece of shark fin do not remind you of cows in a meadow, chicken or pigs on a farm, or sharks swimming in an ocean. We hate to admit that there was blood spilled for us, and that we continue to let it spill, simply to satisfy our taste buds. But some of us know the heads, the

lungs, the kidneys, the feet, and the bones of every animal we slay, and we treasure every part. Some of us look our food in the eyes, bones, and blood, and eat it for what it is.

Mom filled up the dinner table with plates of steamy dishes accompanied by bowls of fluffy, white rice. Long, dark green, stringy *tong choi* in fermented bean curd sauce (*fu yu*) that never fails to find its way into gaps between teeth, pork ribs, and shiitake mushrooms steamed in soy sauce, sesame oil, and fermented black bean made my mouth water. I snuck a piece of mushroom into my mouth before our family gathered at the table. In the middle of our meal, Mom took out the salt-and-pepper salmon heads from the oven. Janine and I looked at each other—it was our night to feast on fish eyes. We poked out the eyes with our chopsticks, the gooey ball balancing easily because of the stickiness. We sucked out the savory jelly from the eye, then spit out the small white eyeball and the thin outer transparent cartilage.

Our fish-eye phase lasted for a short period of time. I think its brevity was aided by how large the baked salmon heads were—their eyes so huge I grew nauseous at how much jello was in there. For a while, Janine had all the eyes she wanted until she grew sick of them too.

Dinner is the largest meal of the day, because it is generally viewed as the most important meal in Hong Kong. This is because it is usually the only meal of the day where the whole family gathers at the table to eat. When we are too full to sit in our apartment after a glorious home-cooked dinner, we take one of our post-dinner family walks in the malls below our apartment building. "When I was in college in Canada, I made pig's heart soup every day, because it was the cheapest thing to make." Dad brags about his poor college years as we walk through the overly-air-conditioned and sparkling clean hallways of the mall. He must be proud of being able to provide his family with so much more than just pig's heart soup.

In Hong Kong, the subway stations, the malls, and the building estates are all connected to one another by escalators, elevators, and indoor bridges. To go from our apartment down to the mall, we have to take two elevators—ones with marble floors and mirrors on three sides so that you can wave hi to infinite reflections of yourself waving back at you, and later realize with embarrassment that the security guard who had greeted you and opened the door for you was probably watching through the security camera.

After exiting the first elevator that takes us from the thirty-third floor down to the first floor, we walk past fountains, pillars, and plants. We arrive at the second elevator after passing a giant sparkling chandelier. The elevator then takes us from the main floor of the private building estate to the public

mall. This journey typically lasts about three minutes or so, unless we're waiting for Mom, who often takes 15 minutes just to leave the house.

Buildings develop vertically in Hong Kong because of the lack of space, hence all the escalators and elevators and over-fifty-floor apartment buildings. Space is precious in a city that is a dot on the map but is home to over seven million people. I was annoyed at how far apart everything was in American malls when I went to the States for college. Then again, I was also mesmerized by the vastness of stores and the variety of cereal- things that I can brag about to my friends in Hong Kong who have only tasted three kinds of cereals—.

"I'm so full," Janine moaned during one of our walks. She placed her small hand over her flat stomach and looked at her nonexistent food baby in the reflections of the store windows we walked past. "I'm going to burst."

As we walked across an indoor bridge that connected one mall to the next, we approached an ice cream store called Tezukuri No Mise. Across from it was another new ice cream store named Lab Made—the store sold ice cream that was frozen with liquid nitrogen in a lab visible to customers. Puffs of nitrogen gas floated out from the store, and the menus constantly emerged with new and sometimes intriguing flavors: bubble tea, durian, cereal milk, purple sweet potato, etc. The main attraction was getting to see the workers make the ice cream with fancy lab equipment amidst clouds of gas.

"That's so weird," I said to Janine, who was holding on to our youngest sister's arm like she was about to tear it off for no reason. "Why would people pay so much more simply for ice cream that is made in a lab?" Our youngest sister agreed with me, but the clouds from the ice cream lab were too alluring for Janine, who involuntarily pulled her towards the clouds, Janine's familiar clenched fingers around her arm.

While the nitrogen clouds summoned Janine, the low prices tacked onto the glass over Tezukuri's ice cream beckoned Mom. "It's so cheap!" Mom said, looking sheepishly at Dad. "Want some ice cream?"

Mom and my sisters ended up getting ice cream. Large scoops. I was a little disgusted at my family's gluttony, but I took a bite of their rum raisin and coffee ice cream anyway. A tiny part of me thought that my dad was the only one who deserved to have ice cream after dinner to make up for his pig heart soups in college, but people get what they don't deserve, and don't get what they deserve all the time.

In the summer after my sophomore year of college, my family and I took a trip to Cambodia for five days with a tour. Every meal we ate as a tour group was virtually the same, not much different from typical Chinese food —mushy eggplants, stir-fried greens, seaweed-fish-tofu soup, chicken, and white rice. Our tour guide, Ming, explained to us on the tour bus that these

were the safest dishes in Cambodia to eat, that if we ate "too local" there would be a higher chance of food poisoning.

Ming had bought a fried spider for anyone on the tour bus who was adventurous enough to try it. I snapped a picture of myself fake-eating the spider, dangling it in front of my mouth, squeezing the tip of one of its legs carefully between my thumb and index finger so that I wouldn't accidentally drop it onto my tongue if the bus were to jerk suddenly. A minute later, I was filming Dad eating the spider.

"Mmm, protein," I said to the camera.

"Tastes just like fried carbs," Dad said nonchalantly, chewing on a hairy leg.

"Ew! You better brush your teeth tonight, or else I'm not sleeping next to you!" Mom screeched for the whole bus to hear.

Our tour bus glided past children on the dusty streets, doing various activities: sitting idly on the muddy cracked ground, playing with a piece of garbage, helping an adult lift soda cans and bananas into the back of a wagon. I put my face against the large glass window, trying to get as close I could to these children.

It's the middle of a weekday, they should be in school, I thought. Suddenly, a dry lump formed in my throat and I held back tears I hadn't anticipated. I wanted these kids to go to school so badly. I told myself I could cry for them later when I would be back in Hong Kong, where my tears might actually be of use in bringing attention to these children.

Cambodia made me realize that being able to afford to eat the meat of a cow, or any meaty animal, was a privilege. During the massacre in Cambodia, a cow's life was worth more than a person's because of the labor a cow could provide. If a servant were to lose a cow or let it die, the servant's life was likely to be taken since the servant only lived to take care of the cow. We learned all of this from Ming, who had escaped the massacre himself and fled to Vietnam with strangers when he was seven. He told us about his family who were all either killed or went missing. He spoke of how he would sleep next to strangers on the ground on their way out of Cambodia, how they sometimes became corpses in the morning, how he drank water from puddles that the corpses had touched. After that, I never looked at the tradition of eating insects in the same way.

When I was fifteen, my dad and I went to a poor village in the mountains of Taipei for a mission trip with our church from Hong Kong. I was not mature enough to understand what doing missions meant personally to me, so one of the most memorable moments of that trip was the local pastor explaining how the walls of his house used to be only cement covered in newspapers.

He explained that large rats would sometimes run rampant underneath the newspapers at night, that he once got so annoyed at the rats during a meeting in the house, that he stuck a knife into the wall, and the wall bled through the newspaper.

We slept in that same house, but it was clearly in better shape than the time of the rat-spearing incident. The tin house was wide and short with tattered quilts, and cushions inside the living room for people to sit on. There were two large bedrooms with bamboo mattresses laid on the ground covered in quilts. The bathroom had a proper toilet bowl, but we showered with buckets of cold water. If someone was using the toilet inside the house, you would have to use the toilet next to the pig sty, where there was a single pink-and-black pig to accompany you with its indifferent grunting. I had to use the pig sty toilet once, and although I almost lost balance from the mixed smell of human and pig waste that so violently attacked me, hearing my oinking companion next door was a comfort.

The local pastor had his friends slaughter the pig for our last lunch in the village. It was the only pork we consumed. There were chickens running up and down the hills everywhere (in Chinese, we call them "running chicken," 走地雞), but the only owned animal in the village was the pastor's pig. I don't know whether I felt more touched or horrified at the fresh pork soup that was served to us, but I must have already gotten used to the idea of blood being spilt for me, because I ate the soup along with everyone else from my church.

What does it mean to eat every part of an animal? Cow foot stew emerged from Jamaican slaves who only received unwanted parts of the cow from their masters. Cambodians still don't really eat cow at all, because they need the labor the cow provides.

Chinese people eat shark fin soup to show off their high social status. It is commonly served in wedding banquets and at important gatherings. Cooked usually with chicken and ham broth (and probably a significant amount of MSG), shark fin is actually tasteless, but it gives the texture of vermicelli noodles, a texture that is common in Chinese soup ingredients.

The process of shark hunting is brutal. Fishermen cast out large nets that open up and close mechanically, trapping sharks in the thick, rough ropes that scratch against their shiny skin. The sharks are hauled up and dumped on deck. The fishermen start the fin-cutting process—knives slice through shark fins; streams of blood stain the salty, wet decks of the boat. Often times, the finless shark is dumped back into the ocean. Its finless body sinks to the bottom of the ocean, eyes and mind completely aware of its own unchangeable destiny. All that spilled blood, all those sunken carcasses at the bottom of the

ocean—all for the texture of rice noodles in soup consumed by people with gold watches and Gucci purses.

"I like it," my friend from Shen Zhen, China says, when I ask her about shark fin soup. "It tastes just like rice noodles."

In the Cambodian market, there are fried spiders, fried scorpions, and fried silkworms in large bamboo baskets in front of vendors who sit cross-legged behind their products. The market is dim because of the tin roof that shelters the two rows of vendors sitting across from one another. Customers walk in the middle between the two rows of vendors, sometimes bumping into a beggar/musician who has no legs, and is playing on his self-made ukulele-like instrument, sometimes children who ask for spare change. My family and I stay close together as we pass by the baskets of fried insects and spiders, taking pictures but not buying anything. We are intrigued by the dried fermented fish—Ming had told us that the fish were dried and fermented whole, along with all their organs. This was different from the dried fermented fish in Hong Kong; we would never eat its organs.

The main attraction is the roasted turtles. The turtles are stacked up on top of one another, three to four turtles in a column, their shells facing the ground. Their heads poke slightly out of their shell and only their paws are visible from the four holes in the shell. Their eyes are closed with a strange serenity. Like the many other tourists, I take out my camera to snap photos of the stacked turtles. One photo is not enough—I take a couple more, just in case the lighting in the first photo was bad.

The lady sitting cross-legged behind the turtles is silent. I cannot see her eyes because her wide, straw hat is covering them. She takes a white piece of cloth from her lap and lays it over the turtles, hiding them from my curious and ignorant eyes, eyes that I cannot hide.

A few weeks before I leave Hong Kong for America to continue my studies, Mom asks me what food I want her to make before I spend another year away from home. "Chicken feet soup," I say. I realize I'm eating chicken feet because I love to, not because I need to. I'm thankful, but not proud. Suddenly, chicken feet do not feel that much different from chicken nuggets; the only thing I can be proud of now is that I know what I am eating.

Missed Train to Tainan (film photography), Savannah Lagmay

JOSEPH SIGURDSON

A Priest

There's a priest in town. Monsignor Something-Or-Another. He's been wandering up and down the streets with a saunter like his knees hurt. Makes it out as if he has a place to be and carries a face like he knows we're watching. Something's wrong about him, Ma'am. Young lot said he's been huffing old incense. Next-door Granny called it a stigmata. I spoke with the altar boy and he said there's a Cathar psalm in the cellar. Whatever it is, it's making him misspeak. Last sermon he said, "This life on Earth is just as it is in Heaven."

JOSEPH SIGURDSON

Kneeling

The liquor is beginning to yell at me. This morning I mistook it for thunder.
Remember when I knelt on the bathroom floor and you shaved my neck?
Dad's demon prowls deeper than hair. Now I know why they pray at AA. I
know why they drink vanilla on Sunday.

JOSEPH SIGURDSON

Chiclets

When I do sleep, I spit out my teeth. It's not always a bloody mess. Sometimes they clack out like Chiclets on the table. And I'm back in third grade, shoeless, with Mrs. Politski writing *repent repent* again and again on the board with a gluestick. When I wake there's no sweat in the sheets. My teeth fall out but I don't quiver.

America (digital photograph from scanned film), Kayla Tuttle

(right) *Lavender Carcass* (digital photograph from scanned film), Kayla Tuttle

ALLISON GIESE

Lila in the Window

Potato was eating again.

It was the third time she'd eaten all morning, which wouldn't be a problem, except for the fact that the cracked plastic mug Lila used to dole out the food had scraped the bottom of the bag several hours earlier. She guessed she could ask for another one, but Mr. Johnny had said that money was tight. He was a plumber for a small company, and business hadn't been too good lately.

Potato abandoned her dish and sashayed over to Lila on the bed. She chirped, jumped up, and nuzzled her head against Lila's bowl of noodles.

"Oh, no you don't," she said. "You big piggy. Why are you so hungry?"

Potato meowed and burrowed harder. Lila pulled out one thin ramen noodle and put it on the napkin.

"Missy, we're gonna have to put you on a diet soon," Lila said, but Potato didn't look like she'd gained weight; in fact, she looked thinner than normal. The excess skin on her belly sagged beneath her and made her waddle.

Lila turned on the TV. Cable went in and out; Mr. Johnny had borrowed some from the neighbors, but still the connection was poor at best. The TV only received one channel—a rerun channel for old sitcoms—and the channel changing button had been plastered over with tape. It was almost 2:00 p.m. *Friends* would be on soon. Until now, the TV hissed and spat an episode of *Roseanne* she'd already seen a million times before. The sound only projected from one side of the TV. She turned it down, lay back on her bed, and counted the ceiling tiles—all 171 of them—and shut her eyes. She could smell the brackish humidity that had come from making lunch, and the thin, mildewy hush that clung to the sheets on her sofa bed. She liked the way her

brain would whirr, quietly and noiselessly, when she sat very still. She liked to pretend that she was a computer.

Potato hopped up onto her stomach and lapped at the salty water left in the lunch bowl on her bedside table. "Oh, that's bad for kitties," Lila said. She grabbed the bowl and let the water wash down the large chipped sink. Smears of inky black paint remained crusted onto the porcelain, and as much as she'd tried to clean it, she could still feel the dry streaks against her nails. Potato meowed in protest. "What? It is bad for you," she said. She couldn't be sure where she'd learned that fact, or if she'd just made it up. The cat rubbed against her legs and left a fine coating of soft black and white hairs.

The waiting was always the worst. She hated these afternoons to herself, cooped up in the house. She guessed she could do laundry to have something clean to wear, but he always hated it when her dresses and sweaters dangled from the line at the edge of the room. Besides, she was almost out of detergent. Sometimes she mixed it with the dish soap, but she was almost out of that, too. She looked at Potato, who was as bored as she was, as she tried to paw at the coarse towels that covered the window. The cat's high, chirpy cry reminded her of when she'd first gotten her.

It had been maybe three weeks at that point. Items in the room were still new; the sofa bed had been fully washed and didn't yet creak, the sink was pure white, the linoleum tiles on the floor had yet to bloat up and wrinkle at the edges. She had not yet earned the TV. She would sit and, with thin, plastic bristles snapped off the long-handled broom, try to pick the lock on the door. There were boards on the windows that daylight couldn't bleed through. Her clothes were not yet stained. Her hair still had some of the red in it, sprayed in with an aerosol can for the football game at her school three weeks earlier. He'd approached her, behind the bleachers at the stadium, told her she'd dropped her phone. Lila hadn't owned a phone. Then strong hands on her arms, the chloroform, darkness.

For those frantic days she would sit, breaking bristle after bristle in the huge, stainless padlock. There was a key code, too, she knew, which she heard beeping as he came and went. Other than the faint rumble of the pickup truck pulling into the garage next door, it was her only warning he was coming.

When Lila heard the beeping, she immediately sprang away from the door and sat on the bed, nursing her pounding heart. She tried to remember the feeling of her mother's lips on her forehead that last day when she'd left for the eighth-grade pep rally. Her mother always wore a particular pinky, cool lipstick. Her lips had felt like paper on her face.

When he came in, he carried a battered cardboard box; she figured it was the food, the ration of noodles. Mr. Johnny set it onto the small card table.

"Don't you want to know what's in the box?" he asked her.

Lila never knew what to say when he asked these questions. The slightest comment could send him into a rage, or prompt an inexplicable tenderness. When she'd first asked for rags to bleed onto during her period, he'd hit her and cut the power for two days; when she timidly answered his question about her favorite candy, he brought it the next afternoon.

"Not very curious, are you?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Isn't it food?"

"No, no, not at all." He reached deep into the box with his grease-stained hands and cradled a tiny, black and white kitten, which was more fluff than anything else. "Neighbor's tabby had a litter in the barn. They were giving 'em away." He cradled it in his arms.

The kitten seemed unreal as it stirred in Mr. Johnny's grip.

"I figure you might like something to take care of—other 'n me." He offered her the kitten, and when she didn't take it, put it into her lap. It squirmed and licked her palm. "See? It likes you already."

Because Mr. Johnny's eyes were soft and expectant, Lila petted the kitten. Its fur was as soft as her grandmother's old long hair, and tears welled in her eyes. It had the same face too, the same gold eyes. "When are you taking her away?" she asked.

"Silly girl, she's not going anywhere," Mr. Johnny said. He reached into the box and took out a makeshift litter box.

In her lap, the kitten purred. It was so tiny; she felt she would hurt it if she petted it too hard.

"Come on, what do you say?"

The gold eyes stared up at her, squinty and sleepy. She wondered, if she burrowed her face into the thick fluff of fur, if she would fall back in time to those afternoons in her grandmother's barn, hiding behind boxes and looking through ancient bridal magazines. "Your time will come," her grandmother had said. "Hopefully not for quite some time. But it will."

Mr. Johnny seized her hair and pulled. "I said, *what do you say*?"

"Thank you," she said. The kitten scurried off her lap and under her bed, where she wouldn't emerge for the better part of two days.

The familiar logo of *Friends* popped up on the TV, and though the volume was poor, she sang along with it absently: "No one told you life was gonna be this way." Potato liked it when she clapped. Lila picked up the toy she'd fashioned out of a cooking spoon and a strand of yarn from an old sweater. Potato's bottom swayed as she watched the spoon dangle back and forth.

"How late do you think he'll be?" she asked the cat. "Yesterday, it was a half hour. *Only* a half hour, he said."

Potato said nothing. She pounced on the string and batted at it. Lila tugged it away and looked at the light coming through the towel over the window, tinted pink. She could almost see the daylight through the bleach spots. She wished he would just fix the window already, even if it meant the boards again. With the plastic and towel it could still get pretty cold in here, though it had been better since Mr. Johnny showed her how to heat up rocks and put them in the bed.

She watched the TV as Joey tried unsuccessfully to hit on another pretty woman. She should wash her hair. She had shampoo, but she didn't like the way it smelled like peaches. Mr. Johnny brought peaches sometimes in cans. When he ate, the thick syrup would get caught in his beard where it dried. Sometimes, it would still be there days later.

Potato rolled onto her back and then trotted over to the litter box. Lila fixated on the TV and pulled frayed threads from the bottom of her skirt. It was getting worn and tight on her. She exhaled. She'd been growing; she could feel it painfully in every joint of her body. Mr. Johnny didn't hesitate to tell her that maybe she could eat a little less. He said this as he drank down the cans of fruit, one after the other, in quick succession.

Maybe he would finally bring her that next book from the library. She'd been reading the *Little House on the Prairie* series, and while it had been dull in the beginning, it was getting interesting now that Laura was getting older. Lila tried to imagine bumping around in the back of a wagon through the West, building a home, hunting to live, with nobody around for miles. The sky a big blue bowl.

Potato kicked dirty litter all over the kitchenette. "Hey, you clean that up!" Lila said to her, but as usual the cat plopped down and started grooming herself. Lila got up, shambled to find the broom, and swept the mess onto a piece of newspaper. She heard the neighbor's dog barking—a loud *BOOF, BOOF* almost too low for her to hear. Lila had never seen these dogs; the neighbor was pretty far away, up toward the top of the hill she could barely see from the corner of her window. Sometimes, she thought they were bulldogs, other times huskies, or perhaps golden retrievers. She had a picture book of the different breeds of dogs, but the illustrations were all painted. She decided she wasn't a dog person and picked up Potato. The cat kicked at her. "Come on, you're bored, too, you big mush."

Together they watched a few more episodes. Sometimes Lila liked when they ran in order. Other times she hated it because then she knew exactly what would happen next, and then what was the point of watching? If she were lucky, an episode from late in the show's run would come on. She hadn't memorized those yet.

By five it had gotten dark, and she turned on the one lamp in the room. At least in the low light, Mr. Johnny couldn't see the mess. She tried to keep

the space clean, but it was so small, and sometimes she ended up crowding everything into the corner and throwing a sheet over it, so she didn't have to look at it. She was hungry; Mr. Johnny had said he was going to bring her dinner and groceries. She figured he must have gotten stuck in line at the store or in traffic, as he frequently complained, though she couldn't see how traffic could be terrible around here in the middle of nowhere.

He came a little after eight, startling her from the doze she'd fallen into. A plastic grocery bag flopped onto the bed.

"What happened?" she asked, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. She tried not to sound irritated.

"Boss made me stay late. I took off Christmas, so I couldn't say no." He sat at the table. "Coffee?"

"I didn't make any."

"Why not?" He rubbed at his beard, which had flecks of white paint in it. His overalls were covered in splotches, too. She tried not to pay too much attention to the muddy footprints he'd dragged in.

"Sorry, I fell asleep."

Mr. Johnny sighed. "What else do I keep you around for?" He went over to the small pot and started fixing it. Lila looked into the bag of groceries—more ramen packets, a box of cereal, one quart of milk, and a roll of paper towels.

"Is the rest in your truck?" she asked, and blushed at his expression.

"Is that not enough?"

"It's just… I'm almost out of cat food—"

"Well, Jesus. You could have told me."

"I did," she said sheepishly. "I'm sorry."

Mr. Johnny shook his head. The coffee pot gurgled. He always made it so strong, saying he liked it "like mud," and that was how it smelled. It also made her nauseous.

"I was…," she continued. She bit her lip. "I was hoping that, maybe if you'd brought some chicken, or something, I could have made us a real nice dinner—"

"Shit, Lila, do you know how much meat costs?" He poured a cup and used some of the fresh milk. He sat at the table, at the one good chair.

She crossed silently into the kitchen and put up a pot of water to boil. She looked at the flavors of ramen he'd brought: chicken, pork, shrimp. He never brought beef. Beef was her favorite. "How was your day?" she asked gently.

"You remember that prick Angelo?" he said, and then continued without a response. "Well, the asshole shows up drunk as all hell, can barely walk straight, swaggers right into the bathroom where I'm working, all up to the elbows in god-knows-what…"

She half-listened, nodding, and "uh-huh"-ing in the right places, as she made her dinner. She was hungry enough to eat the whole thing, but split it in half and brought part of it to Mr. Johnny. "This the shrimp one?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes, um…" The question died on her tongue.

"Good. I like that one." He sipped at the soup. She perched on the other broken chair and saw Potato peep her head from under the bed.

"I finished that book," she said timidly. "The one about Laura?"

He grunted and kept eating.

"I think she's getting married in the next one. I would really like to read it."

"I'll get it if I have time. But I don't know if I'll be able to get to the library before it closes." He dabbed at his beard with her napkin.

"Thank you. Thank you so much."

He shrugged. "Those damn dogs," he said, and gestured at the window.

"I like them. I think they're nice."

"I wish they would shut them up. One of these days, I'm going to complain."

"If you want to," she said. She pushed her fork through her noodles.

"I will. Why is it that a man can't sit in his house in the peace and quiet?"

She took a sip from her tepid glass of water. The smell of the coffee had made her lose her appetite. "…Are they huskies?" She asked.

He looked at the TV, which was now spitting reruns of *Family Matters.* "Hell if I know. I've never seen 'em. I love this one," he said.

"I've just wondered. I thought you might know."

Mr. Johnny said nothing and watched as Urkel activated his time machine.

"Do you think that maybe some time you could put on the game channel?" she asked. Her heart pounded. "The… this one's very nice, but sometimes I like a change. Potato and I play along, you know."

"You don't like this one? I changed it just for you." His face was starting to turn red, and she faltered.

"I… I know, and it's really nice here now with the TV. Thank you." She sighed.

He drummed his fingers on the table.

"I was thinking," she said. "You know, it's going to be New Year's soon. There'll probably be a sale. If you can get maybe… some chicken… I can make fried cutlets like my mama taught me."

He looked at her, and she flinched. "Like who taught you?"

"Nobody. Nobody taught me."

He relaxed.

"I just figure you must get tired of eating noodles every night," Lila said. She always felt the need to keep talking when he was here, to entertain him.

"It's pretty boring. I know I can do better because you gave me that cookbook."

"I figured it'd amuse you," he said. He smiled. He needed to floss.

"It *does*," she lied. She rarely had enough ingredients to try any of the recipes. "I can give you a list, maybe, and you can get some stuff and I'll make us a real nice dinner."

"I'd love to see *you* cook," he said. "All right."

She smiled.

The cat darted out from under the bed and dashed to the food bowl. "Again, kitty?" she asked her. Potato glared, wide eyed, at Mr. Johnny, before coming to rest at Lila's side. "She's hungry."

"So, feed her."

"I thought you'd be bringing me some food."

He laughed a little. "Damn list's gonna be a mile long."

She tensed. But he seemed amused rather than angry. She could see it in the easy way he leaned back in the chair. She took his empty bowl and offered the water to Potato, who hissed.

"I don't know how you stand that mangy thing," he said. "Always so nasty. She used to be so cute, but then she grew up. Shame how that happens." He looked meaningfully at her zit-stained face.

She laughed awkwardly despite a painful blush. "She fills up space."

Mr. Johnny went over to the sofa bed and sat down. She brushed a greasy strand of hair out of her face and sat down next to him. She tried not to flinch at his filthy fingers when they touched her shoulder.

For fifteen minutes she pretended to watch the new show on TV. Mr. Johnny seemed engrossed, but his hand steadily slid down her terrycloth dress to fondle her nipple. She started shaking. She'd wondered when—she'd been lucky the past few days.

It was easier not to resist; sitting there, or lying there, and in fact to smile and even seem to enjoy herself. She got more that way; he said *yes* to her questions more easily.

When it was over and he had fallen asleep, she went over to the towel draped over the window. The room smelled like sweat, and her thighs ached. She lifted the edge of the towel and peeked through the window.

The moon was full in the sky, partially obscured by clouds. She tried to think of the last time she had seen it, but couldn't. The light reflected off the snow on the ground, and she shivered in her thin dress. Above the fence there wasn't much to see, just trees. There never had been much outside this window.

In the distance, the dogs began to howl. The sound made her heart hurt, and she wished she could join in, but instead a few thin tears snaked down her face.

"What are you doing?" Mr. Johnny snapped behind her.

"I'm sorry—I just wanted to see the moon."

He grabbed her by the hair. "Someone could have *seen* you," he said. "Someone could take you from me. Do you want that?" He shook her.

Pain radiated through her body. She couldn't speak.

"Do you?" he said again.

"No," she sobbed.

"I didn't think so." He yanked his clothing back on. "The cat has worms," he said, grabbing Potato by the back of the neck. He slammed the door behind him, leaving her in silence.

Organic Composition in the Andaman Sea (digital photography), Shauna Ricketts

Merging into Chaos (digital photography), Shauna Ricketts

ARIANNA MILLER

laid out to dry

their irish accents lit a fire
in us shook our american
minds when they said they loved our fast talk,
the way we kissed & bit
their lips
& they told us we were brilliant

we let them take us
home, where they showed us cloudy views
from their flat, the insides
of their palms & made fun of us for wearing
flip flops; "a girl should never show an irishman her toes."

we watered left behind lovers as we gaped at green
mountains sprinkled in little white puffs
only pausing to remember what it felt like to kiss in sligo
rain, our faces hidden beneath soaked sweaters & the glow
of yellow lamps.

ARIANNA MILLER

the invention of mental illness

my mother always told me there was nothing wrong with me.
the bees buzzing beneath my mattress were nothing more
than grandfather's snoring reverberating through the walls.

when i was six i crawled up the ladder to my mother's loft
made of pine and something sour. she said the smell was rain-
soaked pillows digesting the water. i knew it was milk she kept

in her closet; sometimes she mistook it for the fridge. on sundays she took
me to the lake-drenched park. where the ducks & geese poked their heads
into puddles that were no longer there. momma said i was better than birds

i had to stop making up things that weren't there.

The Indestructible Man

Poppy once told me that all of his hair fell out in the shower. He'd been shampooing, with clouds of suds forming between his fingers. When he went to rinse, suddenly every strand was washed away; they floated across the shower floor and disappeared down the drain. He was left with a bald patch encircled by thinning hair. To hide the premature baldness, he bought a dark toupee that was thick as badger fur. Grammy hated that toupee. When Poppy babysat me, as he often did, he would place it on my head to make me laugh.

Another time, he told me that a great gust of wind blew his hair away. He had walked into the backyard and *whoosh!* It was gone, flapping away on a tailwind like a big, dark bird.

Once upon a time, there was a scientist. This scientist wanted to do something that had never been done before. She wanted to make a man who could never be destroyed.

Lexi's white graduation gown was bright against the muted hospital walls. Her cap—also white and decorated with purple flowers and silver jewels—bobbed as she walked in her heels, the gems occasionally catching the light. In her hand was the slim diploma case. The actual high school diploma would come in the mail in six to eight weeks, but for now the case would do. We—my mom, dad, Lexi, and I—were there to show it off to Poppy, diploma or not.

Poppy had been sent to the ER yesterday. He was pale, unresponsive. Grammy called the ambulance in the midafternoon, but I wasn't told until after I finished work. I'd even talked to my dad on the phone earlier that

day, but he hadn't mentioned it. When I asked why he hadn't told me, he explained that he didn't want to worry me, but I should have known. My dad's voice was uncharacteristically light through the phone speaker and he said that he loved me, which he only reserved for goodbyes before a long trip, or when he dropped me off to start a new semester of college.

After a stint in the ICU, the doctors could only say that Poppy had low blood pressure. Their tests had revealed nothing else. Their treatment was comfort, rest, and observation. My dad told us that Poppy was spooked more than anything. He asked the doctors to resuscitate him if need be, despite the DNR on his paperwork. He was just scared and that scared me too, but I understood.

When his vitals were stronger, Poppy was moved into a spacious single room on the third floor. Grammy was inside waiting for us, sitting in one of the square chairs by the bed. Despite her long hours in the hospital yesterday and her long hours there that morning, she was still put together: white capris, white Keds, seafoam green blouse with a green necklace to match. She had withstood many, many hospital stays in the duration of her marriage. Still, she was fighting off tears when she saw Lexi.

"Lexi, you look beautiful," she said, dabbing her nose with a crumpled tissue that had been buried in her purse. "Congratulations."

"Mom, pull yourself together," my dad interrupted. He didn't stop to greet Grammy the way the rest of us did. He went to Poppy and gently shook his knee. "Hey, Pop."

Grammy blew her nose into her tissue, the fabric so thinned from reuse that I was surprised it didn't disintegrate. "Nice to see you, too, Michael," she said and she laughed weakly. My dad ignored her and continued to do so as she said to my mom, "Michael's always so miserable. I don't know how I ended up with such a miserable son." She tried to laugh again.

We didn't laugh, but we each gave her a hug. She told me that I looked beautiful. She told Lexi that she would have been there if she could, but she couldn't go anywhere anymore because of Poppy. We had all grown a little deaf to this refrain.

My dad has always looked larger than he actually is. He is not particularly tall or wide, despite Grammy's constant comments about his weight. I suppose it's because he walks heavily. It makes him appear dense. But he only walks that way because of his bad back and his bad knee, products of a bad accident that left him unable to work. His unemployment was another of Grammy's grips, but I had never minded. Growing up, there was always someone around. And, despite her disapproval, Grammy certainly took advantage.

Buried under Grammy's greetings, Poppy's voice, weak and low, caught my attention as he greeted my dad. Poppy was still Poppy, with a big hooked

nose and ears as long and floppy as deli ham, but he seemed to have whittled away in the hospital bed. His arms and legs were thin; most of his mass centered in his stomach that rounded like a mound of snow under the blankets. It pulled him into a constant hunch. His arms shook, the right worse than the left, from the Parkinson's. The baby green hospital gown gapped around his thin shoulders, the fabric drooping to reveal the large scar from when some doctors in Boston had to cut him open to swap out his old heart for a new one. He didn't notice us at first. I prepared myself for this to be a Bad Day. To be one of the days where he saw trains and gangsters and crying babies, or any of his other now frequent hallucinations. But Lexi gently placed a hand on his shoulder and he turned.

There was a sliver of a moment where I thought he wouldn't recognize us. It was the softly-spoken possibility. Delicately worded, not believed, and always posed as a "what if" type of question. His eyes were foggy and red-rimmed, but they brightened as he said, "Girls!"

Suddenly, everyone could breathe again. Lexi filled Poppy in on the ceremony. We told him that he wouldn't have wanted to be there anyway. There were close to a thousand people. Two hundred and fifty kids had to cross the stage. There was no air conditioning and the chairs were uncomfortable, too. Moving carefully around the beeping hospital equipment and the thick plastic bedrails, Lexi leaned close to Poppy as I took their picture. His color was looking better, and he made silly faces for the camera when Lexi placed her grad cap on his head.

Only a few feet away, Grammy was crying to my mom. "Donna, I can't do this anymore. It's too hard. I can't have a life. He keeps me from sleeping. I can't keep doing this."

My dad interjected. "Then maybe it's time for a home."

This argument had been a snare for our family, ever tightening. It was a decision years in the making, but Poppy had always pulled through in one way or another. Grammy was no help; she talked out of both sides of her mouth, one moment preferring the frying pan, and the next the fire. We knew she was waiting for my dad to decide.

Grammy again whipped out the abused tissue. "I don't want to be in that house by myself." Her words smacked around the room.

"Enough," my dad said. He cut her off and walked out into the hall.

My mom often scolded my dad for talking that way to his mother, but she didn't then. His retirement, as well as our family's physical closeness to our grandparent's house, meant that my dad was the one Grammy called when the TV wouldn't turn on or Poppy needed a shave or the driveway needed to be shoveled or the will needed to be looked at or Grammy needed to complain. And he had heard all the complaints.

My phone camera put little, yellow boxes around Lexi and Poppy's faces. If he became distracted, Lexi redirected him. With prompting, he would make another goofy grin and we'd ignore the slip.

I heard Grammy again tell my mom that she didn't know how she ended up with such a miserable son. Then she began to cry about how only a few weeks ago she found Poppy crawling along the bathroom floor, naked, at half past two.

The scientist spent days in her lab preparing for her creation, sketching diagrams and running mysterious experiments. What stumped her was this: what should she make her indestructible man out of? Steel was too heavy. Iron rusted. Wood could burn or rot. One day, she came to a surprising conclusion—aluminum. Aluminum was light and malleable. Aluminum didn't rust. Aluminum wouldn't burn or rot. Thus, the scientist began to construct her indestructible man out of aluminum.

Poppy once had a koi pond. He dug out a spot in his backyard that had previously been the location of the in-ground pool that my grandparents filled in over a decade before. He picked out four koi—one for each of the grandchildren at that time—and let us name one each. I'd like to think that I named mine Merlin, he was cosmic blue and silver, but I don't remember. I really should because a decade later the pond was filled in and the four koi and their descendants moved into a tank in my living room.

The koi were never that exciting to me and Lexi. We were all about the frogs—finding them, catching them, putting them in a bucket. We tossed the bucket of frogs out into the creek behind the house, but they always came back, croaking every summer night in a chorus. There were small frogs and big frogs and forest green frogs and jade frogs. The biggest frog was the Grandpoppy Frog, said Poppy, and all the rest were his kids and grandkids.

Lexi and I had many sleepovers at Grammy and Poppy's house, spending the night on top of an extra tall mattress. On summer nights, you could hear the frogs croaking through the open bathroom window. Thinking of those nights reminds me of stories that Grammy used to tell me and Lexi, particularly one about our great-grandfather killing chickens at their farm in Plymouth; I can't remember her words or how old I was or what our great-grandfather's name was, but I do remember spinning around in circles whenever we retold the tale about the chicken that ran around the farm with its head chopped off.

The scientist made her indestructible man an aluminum mouth for talking, smiling, and laughing. Short, strong hands for drawing and crafting. When the scientist was finished, the indestructible man seemed perfect. He could talk and joke,

make her laugh and laugh at himself. He was a craftsman and built the scientist brightly colored birdhouses. But things were quickly found to be not right.

Not long after we arrived, two nurses entered Poppy's room, wheeling in a portable computer. They just needed answers to questions regarding his health history. We explained everything to the nurses because Poppy couldn't get the dates straight by himself. The heart attack was in 2000, the transplant in 2005. With abashed politeness, we tried to let Poppy answer the questions. But the words were stuck in his mouth like taffy; some didn't even get as far as his mouth. They were pinned between two brain wrinkles, unobtainable.

"Do you know what year it is, Mr. Canarelli?" one of the nurses asked. This one had big, curly, red hair. She was loud and a bit gruff, but that may have just been from her needing to shout to be heard by Poppy's failing ears.

There was a pause and my family looked at each other. It was almost a laughably easy question, and my dad and I exchanged tight lipped smiles because we both knew what the result of this simple test would be. Poppy replied that it was 2012, only five years shy.

Poppy became more distant with each question from the nurses. The second nurse, this one manning the mobile computer, didn't know how to respond to Poppy when he answered questions no one asked. She repeated herself, once, twice, and then cast my parents a pleading look.

Poppy laughed. He was looking out into space toward the brightness of the window. "What is it, Frank?" my mom asked, smiling. She followed his line of sight until they were both looking out the window.

"Those are the biggest snowballs I've ever seen," he said with a smile. He told us that there were young boys outside having a snowball fight.

I had once volunteered at the rec therapy department of a nursing home where the program director prepared me for what I was going to see. She told me that many of the residents would often see or say things. Iit was best not to contradict them. They had been through enough already. There was no point to prove.

"Frank!" Grammy cawed, "There's no snow! It's nearly July!" She said July like *Joo*-ly, an elongated coo that forty years away from her Southern roots couldn't erase.

My mom rubbed Poppy's shoulder as she said to him, "Oh really? That's nice. Are you cold, Frank?" She asked the nurse to grab him an extra blanket.

Poppy's face fell from the window as his mouth tightened. He seemed to sink into the pillow.

While the indestructible man was not too heavy and did not rust, burn, or rot, he dented. Even the slightest battering would ruin his delicate construction. Talking, smiling, and laughing crumpled his face and sagged his lips. He could no longer

craft his birdhouses, because his fingers were crushed by the slightest pressure. Despite the scientist's greatest efforts, the indestructible man became more and more dented until all he could do was sit in a chair all day. Every dent had a dent. And those dents had dents. And while the indestructible man remained indestructible, he was crushed into nothing more than a little aluminum ball, no bigger than what could fit in your pocket.

The nurses ended their questioning when Poppy said that he had to go to the bathroom. He barely had the strength to pull himself out of bed, much less make it to the toilet. They brought him a bidet and everyone exited the room as the nurses attempted to get Poppy onto the plastic seat.

Grammy was already starting to tear up again. "This is what I mean. He can't toilet himself. Clean himself. At home he always leaves a mess…"

"I think that's enough," my mom gently interrupted. She was smoothing my sister's hair with her hands. She knew that no one wanted to hear about Poppy like that.

After a minute, the two nurses exited the room. They told my parents that he hadn't gone yet, but was still trying. They told Poppy that if he needed any help, all he had to do was press a red button.

After the nurses left, my dad said, "He won't be able to go. He's embarrassed."

"They want him to press a button?" my mom asked, dumbfounded. "Is he going to even remember what the button does? Can he even press down on it hard enough?"

"He can't press the buttons on the TV remote anymore," I commented.

My mom elbowed my dad. "Mike, see if your dad needs help."

We all looked at my dad. I wanted to tell him that I loved him even though he was only going into another room and college wouldn't start up for another two months. He sighed, then knocked on the door frame and poked his head inside before disappearing into the room.

Grammy took my mom's arm and squeezed it. "I don't know what I'd do without Michael." Then she looked at all of us and tears welled up in her eyes. "I don't know what I'd do without you girls."

I thought of a silly little fable in the hospital room. Sometimes it's easier to think of things that way. It's easier than thinking of what I do know—pasta dinners, big nose, checkers, koi, and frogs—and what I do not—Grammy said you used to draw once, are you who I got that from? What swear words could you say in Italian? Tell me all of the words you remember from back when that was the only language spoken in the house.

The irony—what the doctors can't succinctly shorthand onto a chart—is that their successes, measured in every day you're still here, are tainted with loss. Every year for five years was our last holiday season with you, last Fourth of July, last birthday. And every year you shrink. And every year I get more used to the fact that I can't talk to you anymore.

At college, I study biology, so I can understand how broken things are, and how the drugs to fix things only break them more. Let's think clinically. Let's think creatively. But let's not think about the rest.

One of the local nursing homes in the area had an open room for Poppy. They fit him in right away. Hospital to the home, without a single stop at his house. Grammy filled up a suitcase with things just for the first few days. Soon we would make his room homier; we made plans to hang a birdhouse outside his window once someone went to the store to buy a Shepherd's hook.

Most days, Poppy sat in an armchair by the big wall of windows in the Magnolia House living room. Many of the other residents were ancient ladies who could barely move. One lady slept all day. Another had an eyepatch and a pit underneath. One lady would laugh randomly every few minutes. "She's a sheep," commented Poppy. "Baa, baa, baaaa."

When I had the time to visit him, I tried not to do it alone. The last time I did, I had no idea what to say. I pulled out a game of Connect Four from a pile of puzzles, but Poppy had little interest. He was occupied, telling me about the game of bocce ball that he played at the community center and about how the whole roof had caved in the other day. Plus, I think that his hands shook too much to properly hold the pieces.

Looking at Poppy, I am reminded of my fable. Poppy is now thin and saggy, with no hair and the jowls of a Grandpoppy Frog. He calls Lexi, my mom, and me "honey," and I selfishly fear that he is forgetting about us. There isn't much left.

With time, the man and his memories become something crumpled and small. They condense until they are a tiny, silver ball that you can carry around in your pocket.

CARRIE ANNE POTTER

Peripheral Instinct

Like bone,
I thought as we drifted
out to the lone point & I saw
matchstick birch limbs
lying endsoaked

along rock walls.
Through late August haze
they appeared velvet branches
shed by some stag, or
the quills of a pale-
winged tern, left
behind

when she mounted
on balmy current: all of these
relics of abandonment,
just as the two of us

paddled out
cast together in this
experiment in buoyancy,
but susceptible to parting
like the horizon cleaves
its lake & sky.

Tierra y Sol (gouache on watercolor paper), Cindy Castillo

GRACE GILBERT

At the viaduct, the Hudson in March, fourteen days since he fell under

I watch

his Mama

fling

a lone

golden

lent-lily

into
the swollen
gorge.

GRACE GILBERT

eastern meadowlark, thirty-ninth mile of morning

i tire of the pounding. the
fogged windows, incessant
static of sleeves and stations,

the hum hum   hum
the rusted engine of a thing and of me.
to the left, i notice

dappled auburn under-
bellies among dirt clods & dry
grasses, gaping:
        inserting beaks into soil,

        sweet lazy whistles
from splintering wood beams,
        gentle hymns for sunup

pull over. i rest
a moment after cracking the door,
watch the grassland

fledglings learn to nestle in
dips & hollows
of the wintered stubble

field. when engine revs
they flit & swoop, chaos
shrouded in smog

while i softly tap
pinkies against
the wheel

EMMA GEARS

Review of Anne Valente's *By Light We Knew Our Names*

In Anne Valente's *By Light We Knew Our Names*, killers are conjured from the whispers of school children on playgrounds, ghosts leave long-forgotten tokens for their granddaughter to find, and babies speak their first words to mysterious creatures hiding in flowers. With each of the thirteen stories in her collection, Valente blurs the line between what is and what isn't; she weaves together magic with reality. Whereas her characters may question the truth of what they encounter, the themes Valente explores—loss and grief—are grounded firmly in the concrete and painfully real. In addition to the magic of her stories, there's magic in Valente's prose as well. The images she creates are sharp and exact, reminiscent of the way that one may focus on a seemingly insignificant detail during times of crisis.

By Light We Knew Our Names is Valente's debut short story collection, published in 2014 by Dzanc Books. Her works have appeared in *One Story, Hayden's Ferry Review, Ninth Letter, The Kenyon Review*, and others. In addition to her short story collection, she is the author of the fiction chapbook *An Elegy for Mathematics* and the novel *Our Hearts Will Burn Us Down*. The winner of several awards, including *Copper Nickel's* 2012 Short Story Prize and *The Masters Review's* 2014 Notable Debut Author, Valente is currently a faculty member of Hamilton College's department of Literature and Creative Writing.

One of the most striking features of Valente's prose is the way she uses the first-person plural, "we," to begin several of the short stories in the collection. The "we" bridges the magical elements of her stories with real human experiences. It lends a surreal quality to her stories, complementing the surreal experiences of the characters. In addition, the "we" includes Valente's readers in the story and invites them to imagine themselves as part of the subject, part of the characters' struggles and triumphs. The plural first-person gives a universality to Valente's collection. In the story which gives the collection its name, a group of young women fight back against the oppressive misogyny of their Alaskan town under the Northern Lights:

> We waited through split lips, through whistles from car windows, through bribes brokered at the movie theater, *free tickets for a hand job*... We waited until Wren came late to the bluffs, one night in August, carrying a six-pack in one hand, the other covering her mouth where blood spilled between her fingers. She set her beer hard on our picnic table, removed her hand, slapped a wet, red handprint against the wood and said, *Enough*.

The four women central to "By Light We Knew Our Names" decide that to put a stop to the treatment they suffer because of their gender, they must teach themselves how to fight; and the light that illuminates their meetings is the light of the Aurora Borealis, burning bright above their seemingly hopeless endeavor. Valente describes the micro- and macro-aggressions women universally experience because of their gender, reaching deep into the hopelessness and rage women feel as a result. But, despite the grim situations many of her characters are in, Valente is careful not to paint her worlds as entirely painful and hopeless; out of the suffering connections are made and bonds are formed, which allow the characters to bear their grief.

Many of Valente's stories explore individual characters alongside something larger; the immediate story sits in the foreground of a global backdrop. In "By Light We Knew Our Names," we see this in the ever-present misogyny of a small town; in the haunting "Until Our Shadows Claim Us," the connections come between a kidnapper and tragedies across the world. "In late April, the day after the Chernobyl disaster, a radioactive bloom above two continents, we awoke to a world tilted even further off its axis, a world in which Rachel Vasquez had disappeared," Valente writes, through the voices of elementary school children struggling with grief. These images remain in the characters' consciousness in the same way that they will stick in the readers.' Valente's fluid, graceful prose and her introspective characters are impossible to forget. The incredible circumstances the characters find themselves in—children summoning a long dead serial killer, college-age kids stealing fake

dinosaurs from the World Fair—draw us in, but it is the depths that Valente explores and her means of writing about painful human experiences that make us stay, that remain in our minds long after we close the book.

MEGHAN FELLOWS

An Interview with Anne Valente

Anne Valente's debut novel, *Our Hearts Will Burn Us Down*, was released from William Morrow/HarperCollins in October 2016. Her second novel, Utah, is forthcoming from William Morrow in early 2019. Her first book and short story collection, *By Light We Knew Our Names*, won the Dzanc Books Short Story Prize (2014), and she is also the author of the fiction chapbook, *An Elegy for Mathematics*, which has been re-released by Bull City Press in 2017. Her fiction appears in *One Story*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Hayden's Ferry Review*, among others, and won Copper Nickel's 2012 Fiction Prize. Her work was selected as notable in *Best American Non-Required Reading 2011* and her essays appear in *The Believer*, *The Rumpus*, Prairie Schooner, and *The Washington Post*. Originally from St. Louis, she currently lives in upstate New York where she teaches creative writing and literature at Hamilton College.

***Gandy Dancer*: In your short story collection *By Light We Knew Our Names* (Dzanc Books), there are so many memorable characters, like Francie and her father in "Terrible Angels," or the young women in the title story. Can you talk about how you create and develop such a range of compelling characters?**

Anne Valente: Thank you for these kind words. For each story, setting and conflict often come to me first; I imagine a particular landscape or place, or else a particular situation, i.e. "What would happen if *x* happened?" From there, I then imagine how someone might react to that situation, and characters tend to be born out of how a particular someone might act or react. I'm

also drawn to language and lyricism and how a particular character's voice might interpret the world. In this way, characters also come for me from the rhythm, diction and syntax of the language.

***GD*: A number of the stories here make use of the first-person plural. Can you talk a bit about what this point of view offers? Why don't more writers use first-person plural?**

AV: I'm not sure why other writers don't use first-person plural more often–maybe it's considered off-putting, or even clunky as a central perspective–but I love its use and what it can do. Who's telling the story always matters, and the social implications of a collective perspective are fascinating to me. A writer can play quite a bit with where the borders between the collective and the individual might rest, depending on whether there's an individual situated within the collective or if the narration never identifies individual narrators. A writer can also explore how events, traumas, or everyday experiences affect an entire community. There is a great deal of tension in first-person plural between what everyone is experiencing and what only a few of the collective are experiencing, and for me, it's a wonderful tool to employ in fiction.

***GD*: Many of the stories in *By Light* are coming-of-age stories. Is it difficult to get into the headspace of a young child or adolescent?**

AV: The distance between adulthood and adolescence seems at times like it would be a bridge too far in trying to remember what it was like to be that young, but I feel sometimes like I've maintained a child's sense of wonder as an adult. The same fascinations occupy my attention now as they did when I was small–how spiders build their webs, what it's like to live in the ocean, whether there are any edges to the universe or if space just keeps going and going. For these reasons, getting into the headspace of a child doesn't feel insurmountable, though I want to respect each individual character and not solely make them a reflection of who I was as a child, and in some ways still am.

***GD*: As a woman writer, do you find it difficult to write from a male perspective? Are there any tricks to this? Is there anything you keep in mind while writing from a perspective not your own?**

AV: When I began writing, I actually wrote far more male characters than female characters. I feared an audience assuming that my characters were autobiographical, but more than this, I think I also internalized that readers were more receptive to male characters–in other words, that male stories were the ones that mattered. Because I'd absorbed so many masculine stories, it didn't feel particularly difficult to occupy a male perspective, though certainly not all male characters occupy masculinity in the same way. However, I've since become far more invested in what it means to write an identity that I

don't share. We are essentially required to do this as fiction writers, but this becomes tricky when we are writing from a position of power or privilege regarding another identity. While I don't have any fast and true tips for how to write outside of one's perspective, empathy is at the heart of all good writing. To understand another character is to understand that particular character and not what we assume their gender, sexuality, race, age or ability represents.

***GD*: Many stories feature the use of the fantastical or supernatural. One of our favorites was "Dear Amelia," which explored humans turning into black bears in the backwoods of Maine. Tell us the truth, were you a Sci-Fi fan growing up? How do you see the realistic and supernatural working together?**

AV: I actually never watched or read much science fiction, but I devoured ghost stories and urban legends as a kid. I've found that many of the things I was most interested in during childhood–the supernatural, the world of science, the insects and trees in my backyard–continue to make their way into my writing and what I most love. I don't really see realism and the fantastic as diametrically opposed but instead a spectrum along a border, and for me that border has always been relatively permeable. Science fiction, the supernatural, and magic realism can all be incredibly subversive, and, for me, they've become a tool of exploring alternative narratives to dominant modes of history, culture and human thought.

***GD*: Were some stories in this collection harder to write emotionally than others? We're thinking of "Minivan" and the title story, in particular. Is there a certain headspace that you must be in to write these type of stories?**

AV: Some were definitely harder than others. The title story felt especially difficult, given the world these young women must live in–and despite the extreme nature of it, how that world parallels our own. At the time of writing the story, I was noticing a lot of silence in my personal and professional life around sexism and sexual violence against women, and I wanted to create a world on the page where it could no longer be ignored.

***GD*: *By Light* came out in 2014, and then your first novel *Our Hearts Will Burn us Down* (William Morrow), was published in 2016. It started as a short story. Can you talk about the process of developing the story into a novel? What were the challenges in that?**

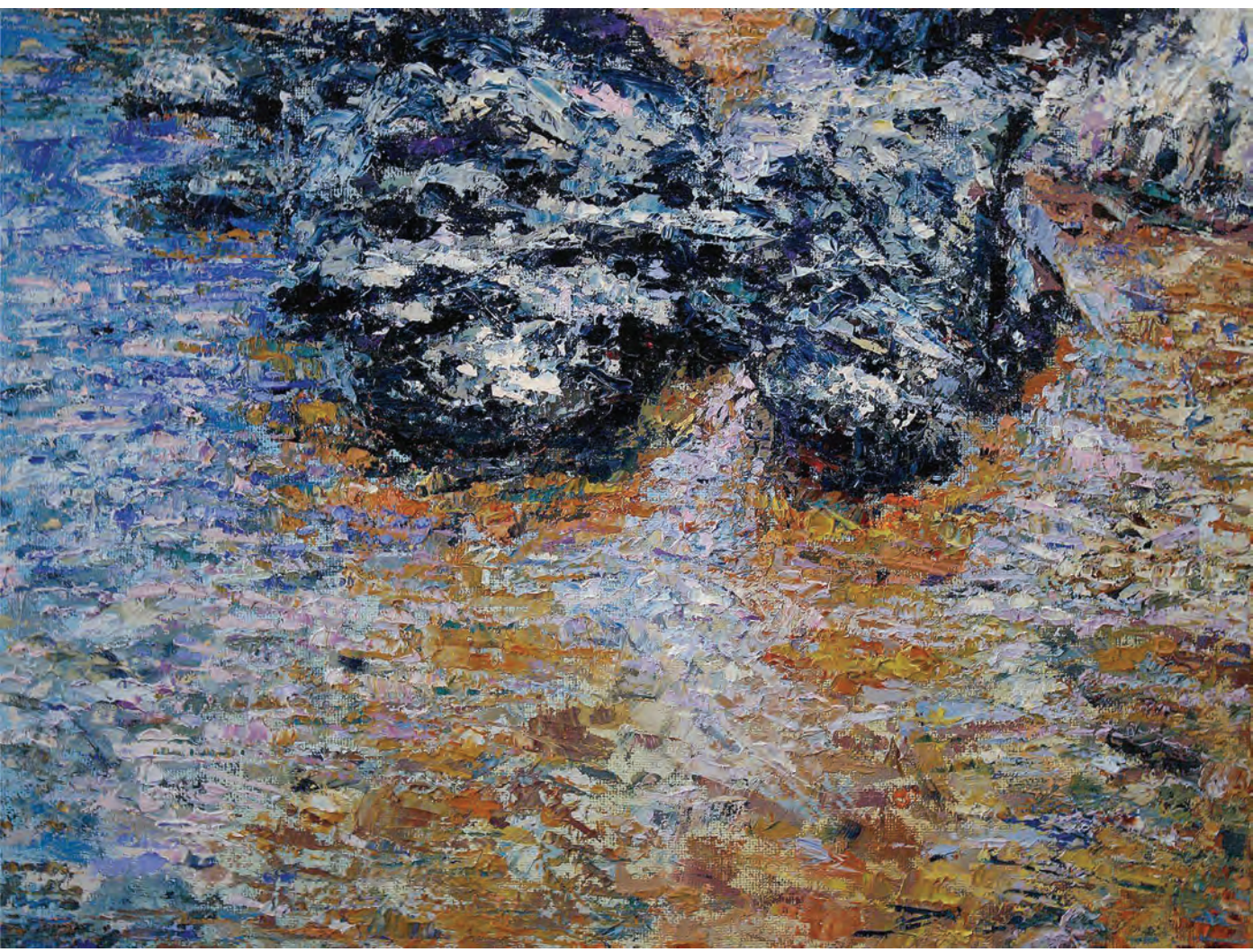
AV: I never thought I would develop a short story into a novel, as every story that I've written has always felt done to me, or else written as its own, contained world. However, I wrote the short story version of "Our Hearts Will Burn Us Down" shortly after Sandy Hook, and as I watched the news cycle quickly forget yet another mass shooting–and one of the worst mass shootings we've seen–the story felt undone to me. Since the short story was centered on elementary school children, it was a challenge to modify that world

into a community of high schoolers for the novel. I'm also pretty invested in lyricism in short stories, and I wanted to maintain that kind of prose for a novel without overburdening the reader. A greater emphasis on plot had to factor into a longer work as well.

***GD*: Can you tell us a bit about *Utah*, your forthcoming novel? We can't wait to read it! Does it also meld the real and the fantastic?**

AV: Thank you! The forthcoming novel does meld the real and the fantastic, to the extent of the kind of world the characters occupy. *Utah* takes place in a present-day world where planes are beginning to fall from the sky due to global warming and erratic weather patterns. As a result, two sisters must take a road trip to their mother's funeral. One sister is a former NASCAR driver, and the other has just been released from prison for having burned down a library. It's a strange narrative in pulling together so many strands of research that I knew nothing about before beginning to write: American racing, paleontology, falconry, geocaching, women's prisons. But it was an adventure to write.

Bright Night City Lights (oil on canvas), Jackie Phuong Ta



Róc Rách (oil on canvas), Jackie Phuong Ta

LAURIE J. JACKSON

Webbed

Every three months the Terminix guy, Eric, climbs out of his white truck, wearing his super utility belt and disposable polypropylene shoe covers, and sprays inside and out of the South Carolina house. Additionally, I'll spray Raid: Ant and Roach Killer 17 along the edge of the garage, in hopes of keeping the spiders away. I stay low to the ground with the can, so the wind doesn't pick up the insecticide and kill the plants on the side of the house. However, bug spray will only kill spiders if their bodies touch the spray. This means when Eric comes and sprays the entrances to the house and in the garage, the spiders must lay down in the area that has been sprayed. If the spider just walks over the spray, then the spider won't be harmed. I guess that's what it means when the can says, "Kills on contact."

The bug spray I bought at the store will kill insects just like the company's spray. However, there's a *but* there.

Eric says, "The spray that you buy at the store will only last two to three weeks, while our spray lasts three months."

So, in the beginning of November, Eric comes over and rings the doorbell, breaking the quiet early morning. I choose sleep over decent presence, waking up to the sound of the door, and grabbing a pair of shorts to throw on under my nightshirt. Hopefully he can't tell I haven't brushed my teeth yet. I walk around with him as he sprays between the blinds, in the cracks of the windows that are in the kitchen and sunroom, and at the base of the back door.

He asks, "How are things goin'?" in a southern drawl.

"Things are going pretty well. There have been a lot of those big-butted black spiders in the garage, but thankfully none inside the house."

"Well, I'll take a look in the garage for you and spray around the walls."

"There have also been a lot of earwigs in the bathroom," I explain. "After I kill one, another just takes his place."

"I'll be spraying in there, as well. They usually come up through the pipes."

Eric is the only one who really comes over. Company is a rarity for me because graduate school consists of friends who want me to come there, rather than them come here, which results in no one going anywhere. I watch Eric spray, switching the can from each hand, doubling his speed.

The one floor, three bedroom, two bathroom house is big for one person. The radio plays throughout the house, so there's some noise to fill up the space even when I'm not there. I don't like being the one to break the silence when I get home from class.

My mom and dad are back home in Saratoga Springs, New York, and my sister lives in Florida now for her new job, while I've moved into the South Carolina beach house. The South Carolina house is my parents' future retirement home, with no stairs and less obstacles. A place they can go when they don't want to deal with snow, which now seems to come later and stay longer in the north. My parents bought the house back in 2005, when the development was still being built. The walls are still an off-white primer color, but it makes the house brighter. My parents got to choose the layout: the open sunroom, connected to the dining room and living room; the dining room next to an open kitchen, overlooked by a bar; and a double-sink master bathroom, with a guest bathroom. Having two bathrooms is a big deal, since the house in Saratoga only has one. I moved to South Carolina after graduating from my college in Oswego, New York, to pursue a master's degree in writing at Coastal Carolina University. The house is convenient, so I can live off campus at a cheaper rate and explore on my own.

When I was little, growing up in Saratoga, I used to be able to pick up Daddy Longlegs and carry them away from the house. My older sister told me that they were actually quite poisonous, but they couldn't penetrate through human skin, and that's why they weren't dangerous. I didn't think they could be dangerous, with their thin, flat, brown bodies and long skinny legs. I was actually right too, since they lack venomous glands. I watched as a Daddy Longleg crawled along the house using its second pair of legs as feelers. I grabbed him by the back leg and he wiggled as he tried to use his other legs to push away from my two fingers.

When I watched the movie *A Bug's Life,* the spider, Rosie, didn't scare me at all. Rosie was part of a group of circus performers. The circus performers helped save the ants from the grasshoppers, who were planning on taking the ants' food as winter got closer. Rosie's character was sweet and delicate. She had two eyes, a thin body, and thin legs. My fear of spiders started to grow as

I watched my sister cower from the hairy eight-legged arachnids. It's as if I absorbed her fear. Rosie's cartoony look, even though it was supposed to remind me of a spider, didn't remind me of the fear I *have* for spiders. I've never been brave enough to get as close as you'd need to in order to see their eight gazing eyes. My fear started with the big spiders with big abdomens, and spanned all the way down to the tiny specks of a spider. It wasn't long until I couldn't even pick up the Daddy Longlegs anymore. I always called for Mom or Dad to save me. Later, I learned that Rosie was one of the most dangerous spiders. The red hourglass on her lower abdomen meant she was a Black Widow.

Eric works his way from the back door to the front door, going inside the two bedrooms and guest bathroom, while talking about his daughters. Then, he moves to the master bedroom and master bathroom, asking about how grad school has been at Coastal and how my parents are doing in New York. Of course, while Eric is in the master bathroom there are no earwigs at all.

"How are your parents doin' with you all the way down here?" he asks. "I bet they wish they could stay too, with the cold weather headin' their way."

"Apparently, it's already dropping down into the forties," I reply. "Dad is fine, but Mom is nervous as always. I think she's asked the whole neighborhood to look out for me."

Eric's can of spray has a long, skinny rubber tube at the nozzle. He hits the top button, and the spray comes out like water out of a showerhead. The air circulates enough in the house that there's no smell, but I still wouldn't want to be accidentally sprayed in the face—no matter how animal and child safe it claims to be.

It's different being in the South Carolina house without my parents. I have to go to school, which changes the house completely from its original beachy, family vacation vibe. We used to come a lot when my sister and I were in high school, then less when we both went to college. The house felt like summertime, with the smell of banana boat suntan lotion and the sound of virgin strawberry daiquiris being made by my mom. Now, I come to an empty house after school and work with the radio on in the background.

The first night my mom, sister, and I stayed in the South Carolina house, there was no furniture, so all three of us slept on the floor in the master bedroom. Mom and I were fast asleep, but Lisa apparently couldn't sleep because of the noises she heard, which she wouldn't discover until the next morning were caused by the fridge. It sounded like someone was turning on the water and banging around in the kitchen all night. This is a sound I've grown accustomed to.

When my family was in the process of moving things into the South Carolina house, my mom noticed these really big, black spiders in the corner of the garage. She figured if they didn't bother her, she wouldn't bother them.

She got tired of leaving the house for months at a time and coming back to spider webs everywhere. My sister and I would refuse to sleep until the house was bug free. So, after our sixteen-hour drive from New York, we'd vacuum and clean, killing all of the bugs. Well, my mom would kill all the bugs.

My mom hired Terminix so she didn't have to do as much work when she first arrived. Eric explained that if other houses got sprayed, and ours didn't, all the bugs would come to our house. Now, that's a pretty good salesman. He helped get rid of the spiders in the far corner, which were black widows—a painless initial bite, but extremely poisonous.

There's an old children's song that goes, "There was an old lady who swallowed a spider to catch the fly, that wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her. She swallowed the spider to catch the fly, and I don't know why she swallowed a fly. Perhaps she'll die." It's not the most comforting song.

When I was little, my sister told me that if I slept with my mouth open, spiders would crawl into my stomach, so I learned to breathe through my nose at night. We slept in the same room; I was on the bottom bunk, and she was on the top. One night before bed, we saw a black spider on the ceiling. We ran to wake up Mom, but by the time she got into our room, the spider had disappeared. We both refused to sleep in our beds until he was found. The idea of an unwanted late-night snack crept into my mind; at least the old lady in the song chose to swallow the spider. Mom helped us shake out our comforters and sheets. We were all about to give up hope and sleep in the living room, when I saw him on the wall by my pillow. Mom put the tissue aside, took a flip-flop from our closet and killed him. His body fell to the ground, under my bed. She told us we could sleep now; all the spiders were gone.

Eric sprays the entrance to the garage, behind Dad's workbench, and all along the walls and behind the beach toys. "You'll see winter here is usually just rain, with lows in the thirties."

"It's weird not seeing the leaves change," I reply. "It still feels like summer."

The smell of the spray in the garage is stronger than in the house, but it doesn't necessarily smell bad. It's not a good smell, like when there's food in the oven, but it doesn't smell strong like bleach.

He takes out the Terminix sheet and fills in the receipt. I sign at the bottom where my mom usually signs.

"I'm going to work around the outside of the house now. I'll knock down those spider webs at the front entrance," Eric says.

"Yeah, Halloween is over. Thank you," I say. "Should I leave the garage open to air out the smell?"

"You can if it smells, but I wouldn't for too long. You don't want snakes to come in."

I stutter, "Oh, oh yeah. Good point." He takes off his shoe covers and heads outside to his truck.

I kick a few chips of mulch that have strayed out of the garden back into the dirt. The garden is no longer a fresh, dark brown color with green plants bursting through the soil. The dirt has dried out, and the plants are dying. Autumn is a slow process in the south, while the temperature gets cooler, the brown inches its way down the grass and leaves. Eric pulls a hose out of the back of his truck and starts spraying the lawn. I sweep away the leaves that have blown into the garage, along with the remains of spiders.

When I'm alone in the house, I can hear the emptiness. It isn't silent. The noises are loud, but I can't always place the cause of the noise. As I'm sitting on the couch doing homework, the TV will occasionally make a cracking noise as if the flat screen were falling off the wall. The air conditioner will groan, stutter, and then start up with a small boom, as if there was something living within the vents. In the kitchen, the fridge will vibrate and refill with water, making new ice. During the day, the windows in the sunroom will make a banging noise, like a wild golf ball went off course and into the window. Since the development is located around a golf course, and hole ten is basically in our backyard, I've checked occasionally. But there's never been any evidence of a golf ball, and the windows still hold in one piece. I recently discovered the banging is from bumblebees as they fly into the window.

I ignore the sounds while I lay in bed, knowing the house will never be still. The house is alive, and there's no one but me inside. Well, not just me. I also have the Robertos, the name I give the earwigs, which seems less creepy since their real name leads me to believe they like to crawl in my ears at night. I tell each new Roberto if any of them crawl low enough from the ceiling, they will die. The Roberto that lived on the unreachable kitchen ceiling was there for weeks, until I discovered him slammed on the bottom of the door in the microwave. I found another Roberto steamed in my coffee grinds, which kind of ruined the rest of the pot of coffee for me. It would have ruined my first cup of coffee if I'd noticed it beforehand. The Robertos in the bathtub die the quickest, since they get mushed and washed down the drain in the tub.

In the book *Charlotte's Web*, I never had a problem with Charlotte, as she helped keep Wilbur alive. Charlotte took on a mothering role in the story. However, the movie was a different story. Charlotte brought herself down, from the darkness, and had eight hairy legs, and a huge abdomen that came to a point. She had millions of creepy, crawling babies, flying out on their own webs, making me realize one spider equals so many babies. I was supposed to feel sad when she died, but I didn't.

One time, as I sat in the chair on the porch, my sister stared behind me. She told me not to move, which of course made me duck out of my seat, recoiling out of her view. I could see the fear in her eyes. Hanging from the ceiling on the porch, a spider was inches away from where my head was a moment ago. We yelled, but no one was home. It was either I kill the spider, or I'd have to think about it all day. So, I grabbed a napkin, which was thicker than a tissue, and wrapped it around the spider. I made a fist so hard that I could feel my nails dig into my palm. I don't like the squish or crunch a bug makes. The feeling of the sound ran up my arm, and I became queasy.

From inside the house I see Eric in the back, scraping down the black egg sac that clings to the siding. He gets rid of the funnel orb web in the far-left corner by the patio furniture. I hate orb webs because they look like caves, and I know deep inside there's a big spider hiding. Once Eric finishes in the garden, setting up what he calls, "Bug traps," he puts his things away and leaves, never saying goodbye.

Even after Eric's visit, I find myself spraying the entrance of the garage at night after I get home from class. Once the sun sets, I don't like to go outside. The spiders crawl out from wherever they were hiding during the day, and crawl all over the tan driveway, making it way too easy to see them. Sometimes they crawl into the garage when I get home from school, and I grab the Raid from Dad's workbench. I kill them on sight, and spray along the edge of the garage. I have a rule that eases my guilt: if I see a spider in the house, which includes the garage and back patio, then it will be killed. Every morning I see dead spiders lying curled in front of the garage door. They must have rubbed their spider bodies through the spray, or their legs weren't high enough to keep them safe. There are only a few spiders that make it into the house, and if they are bigger than the size of an ant, then they get sprayed or flip-flop squished.

There are lots of lizards in South Carolina that eat insects like flies and crickets, along with snails, caterpillars, and spiders. I have a lizard named Henry that comes in and out of the garage. I appreciate the lack of spiders in the

garage since his arrival. However, as the temperature drops at night, so does his health. I pet him before I leave for school, to see if he is still alive. After school, I planned on getting a plastic container from the store, to bring him into the house to keep him warm, but it's too late. When I come back home, he has disappeared. He was a small lizard—one of those green anoles. I watched as he went from a brown to a green, back to a brown. I don't appreciate his bigger, brown lizard family members though—one of which I later discover in the kitchen.

I wake up at seven in the morning to get ready for school, and there he is just lying on the windowsill, under the blinds. At first glance, I scream, thinking his tail is a snake, and my scream never stirs him. I call my mom that morning and she tells me to capture him, or get him to run outside, which sounds easier said than done. It is up to me to get rid of him, so I take the rectangular-shaped Ziploc container that we use for leftovers and slide him from the windowsill onto the lid. It is actually quite easy. I accidentally set the container on his head, but he still isn't moving or trying to run away. Possibly I have stunned him, or maybe he is pretending to be dead. I go through the garage and set him free on the driveway. He plops to the ground in front of me, so I poke him with the tip of my shoe. He's had a traumatic morning, so I leave him alone. When I get home from school, I find him in the same spot in front of the garage. Maybe he ate a spider that had been poisoned. I sweep him into the garden, making sure he is right-side-up.

Children's books always tried to make spiders seem so friendly and so misunderstood. In *James and the Giant Peach*, James let Miss Spider be, while she sat at his window. James even considered her a friend. Miss Spider was portrayed as a dark artist who preferred to be alone, friendless. I've tried to think of spiders as living creatures, something that helps us by eating pesky insects, but there are larger spiders out there that eat millipedes, wood lice, and even small lizards, frogs, and birds. I hope I never see a spider large enough to eat a bird.

I'm scared of the idea of having spiders on me or near me. I remember when I went to open the door on the back porch in Saratoga, and I felt a tickle, a simple itch at my arm. But, when I turned my forearm over to scratch it, I found a big spider, with a huge abdomen. I squealed and flung my arm, brushing my hand down, knocking her off, across the room. I had no idea where she went, and I ran my hands over my body, shaking. I still felt her, as if she'd crawled back on me. I could still feel the tickle at the hairs on my arms and then my legs. I ran outside, asking Dad to scan me over, to make sure there were no spiders on me.

After Eric leaves, the bugs stir and come out from where they're hiding. There's just me left to kill the spiders, and the other bugs who cross the line and come too far, inside the house. I'm temporarily brave killing spiders when I know I'm the least scared in the room, or the only one left in the house. Mom and Dad bought me the Terminix Ultimate Protection Crawling Insect Killer, which is specifically for ants, roaches, and spiders. It's for indoor use, with active ingredients of geraniol, cinnamon oil, and other ingredients that make up the majority: white mineral oil, 2-propanol, vanillin, triethyl citrate, isoprophyl myristate, lactic acid, N-butyl ester, and carbon dioxide. I'm not a scientist, so I don't know what it means; I just know it does the job.

One morning, I wake up ready to leave for school, and I blindly reach in the dark to hit the garage button. The door slowly opens, letting light in, which is when I see her. The size of her butt is the size of my thumb, and that's not including her long legs. Her big abdomen is like a False Black Widow's, and her long legs are like those of a Brown Recluse. I bring my stuff to the car, and run to the workbench, pulling out the Raid, which says, "spray areas infected by these pests." I spray her area, which is right next to the garage door button, where my arm had reached over just a few seconds ago. None of the others have compared to Charlotte's size, who must have walked her way over the spray to the other side of the garage, too close to the entrance of the house. She clings to the wall as I continue to spray her, making direct contact with her giant body. When she finally falls to the cement, she lands in a puddle of Raid. She crawls her way out of the puddle towards me, twitching, as I continue to spray her. She stops and stares at me with her eight eyes. She refuses to die. I spray her again, and she falls over onto her side, as her legs finally retract and curl into her body.

I can't tell if she is suffering because I can't hear her screams. So, I set down the Raid and I take Dad's iron shovel, with the wooden handle, and whack her. Charlotte is dead. I sweep her remains into the garden, streaking her yellow blood across the garage, which still remains there. The way she crawled towards me terrifies me still. The arachnophobia in me believes her spider friends witnessed my cruel actions and will want to take revenge. If I ever find a Charlotte in the house, Eric will be sadly mistaken for giving me his cellphone number for emergencies. I'm not sure what he believes is a bug emergency, but to me, a Charlotte is a "get-your-butt-over-here-now" call.

The next morning I walk into the garage and place myself in front of the garage button; I'm not taking the risk of reaching over again. I hit the button as fast as I can, trying not to think about Charlotte. To my relief, there is nothing on the wall, but as the garage opens, over by the garden, where I swept Charlotte's body, there are baby spiders. They are everywhere. I don't want them to crawl into the garage and they are too tiny to step on, so I grab the Raid. Raid: Ant and Roach Killer 17 has the active ingredients of

imiprothrin, cypermethrin, with the majority of other ingredients that aren't specifically listed out on the bottle. This red and black spray can of death has warning labels all over it, explaining how harmful it is to pests, plants, animals, and humans, yet it is promised to be "outdoor fresh." I spray the baby spiders until the movement on the driveway stops, and then I do the entrance to the garage just in case.

It's interesting how small the word *killer* is on the can.

About the Authors

Azure Arnot is a senior at SUNY Plattsburgh studying gender, women's studies, and printmaking. She's from the most beautiful place on Earth, the Thousand Islands, which she will talk about if you give her the chance. She's an unstoppable feminist, audiobook junkie, loud vegan, and water lover.

Arnold Barretto is an international student in the BFA program at SUNY Plattsburgh, with a concentration in photography and graphic design. He is currently exploring concepts within the gay community in his work. He also enjoys theatre and will be performing as Rocky Horror in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* this Fall.

James Blanchard is an artist from upstate New York. In his art, he tries to convey his feelings in order to connect with the viewer in some way. He feels these connections are more important now than ever.

Cindy Castillo is a junior at SUNY Geneseo. She is currently majoring in English with a concentration in literature. She hopes to one day become a high school teacher or counselor, but in the meantime you can find her drinking an iced coffee or a matcha tea latte while attempting to get all her school work done. She is the youngest of three. Her mom is her muse.

Marissa Canarelli is a senior biology major and English minor at SUNY Geneseo. When not writing, she is often found procrastinating about writing.

Jasmine Cui is eighteen and only getting older. Her work has been recognized nationally by the Scholastic Art and Writing Foundation. She was named a 2017 Foyle Commended Poet by the Poetry Society of the U.K. Her favorite writer is Joan Didion because all Joan wanted was for someone to listen.

Marley DeRosia is a senior English (creative writing) major at SUNY Geneseo. A Rochester native, she loves garbage plates and talking about how everyone should love garbage plates. She recently studied abroad, and was inspired by Irish landscape and the poetry of Yeats.

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Emma Gears is a senior English (literature) major who spends a lot of her time wishing she could bring her cat to Geneseo. The rest of her time is spent crying over Bills games and coming up with new story ideas that she may or may not write down.

Allison Giese is a senior at SUNY New Paltz, where she is completing a degree in creative writing. She hopes to become a novelist and video game writer.

Grace Gilbert is currently studying creative writing and childhood education at SUNY Geneseo. Her hobbies include eating Manchego cheese, daydreaming about Sir Elton John, and whispering the word *gazebo* to herself until she dissociates from the English language.

Natalie Hayes is a first year English major and film studies minor at SUNY Geneseo. She has been writing poetry since she was about seven years old. She is sure that she has improved with time. While she is passionate about all types of artistic expression, from painting to filmmaking, poetry is her preferred medium.

Isabella Higgins is a first-year student at SUNY Geneseo. She is an English major and is tentatively on the pre-med track. Outside of school she is part of the ultimate frisbee team and *a cappella*.

Laurie J. Jackson has an MA in Writing from Coastal Carolina University. She's a graduate of SUNY Oswego, with a BA in creative writing. Currently, she's working on her first novel. She is published in *Great Lake Review* and *The Oswegonian.* She likes to combine her artwork with her writing.

Savannah Lagmay is a senior international relations major with minors in Asian studies and art history. She studied abroad in Taipei in the spring semester and traveled solo throughout the island.

Simone Louie is an English (creative writing) and music composition double major at SUNY Geneseo. She has lived in three different continents, and has become passionate about the idea of home and belonging. She sings Cantonese and Mandarin pop songs in the piano practice rooms at college when she misses Hong Kong. She doesn't know whether she misses her Scottish accent or not, but her love for haggis lives on.

Finola McDonald is a creative writing major and philosophy minor at SUNY Purchase. Her work has appeared in *Barely There* and *Italics Mine.* She invites you to get lost in her work, and find a little piece of yourself somewhere along the way.

Noah Mazer is an English (creative writing major) at SUNY Geneseo.

Arianna Miller is a senior at SUNY Geneseo; she has previously been published in *Gandy Dancer*. Ari studies creative writing and adolescent education, hoping to inspire her future students to fall in love with words as she did. In her free time, Ari enjoys writing, performing slam poetry, and playing with her pet hermit crab named Lilo.

Elizabeth Pellegrino is a senior English (creative writing) and geology double major. She believes that storytelling and asking questions are the two most important lessons every writer and scientist should learn. Additional lessons would include: poetry 101, rock hammer safety, how to survive the

eruption of a supervolcano, and a discussion on whether tea-making actually helps the writing process.

Carrie Anne Potter is a senior at SUNY Geneseo, where she majors in English (literature) and French and minors in linguistics. She is from Potsdam, NY, and consequently considers herself at least half Canadian. When she's not furiously debating the geographical boundaries of "upstate" and "downstate," Carrie can be found writing poetry, taking herself on miniature roadtrips, or rewatching "Portlandia" for the hundredth time.

Shauna Ricketts is a sociology and political science double major with a minor in urban studies at SUNY Geneseo.

Lauren Sarrantonio is a graduate student of speech language pathology at SUNY New Paltz, with a special interest in end of life care. Her essay, "The Amorphous Children" can be found in *Gandy Dancer* issue 4.2. When she's not reminding everyone in proximity of their mortality, she's internally reciting the poem, "The Gate" by Marie Howe.

Joseph Sigurdson is a prose poet from Buffalo, New York. He currently attends SUNY Oswego as a creative writing major. He has recently completed his debut collection of poetry, and has been published in *Great Lake Review.*

Jackie Phuong Ta is an international student from Vietnam. She is persuing her BFA at SUNY Plattsburgh, concentrating in graphic design and painting. Her paintings are created with energetic brushstrokes together with different palettes of arbitrary colors. She loves to paint landscapes of wherever she travels to. In the future, she wants to be a happy artist who travels everywhere and brings surprises to everyone by random acts of art.

Kayla Tuttle is currently a senior at SUNY Plattsburgh. She is a English writing arts major and photography minor. Her work is strongly influenced by her hometown, Malone, New York and her life on a dairy farm. Her most recent photography is focused on the lines and angles of her surroundings, with a focus on architecture and urban landscape.