



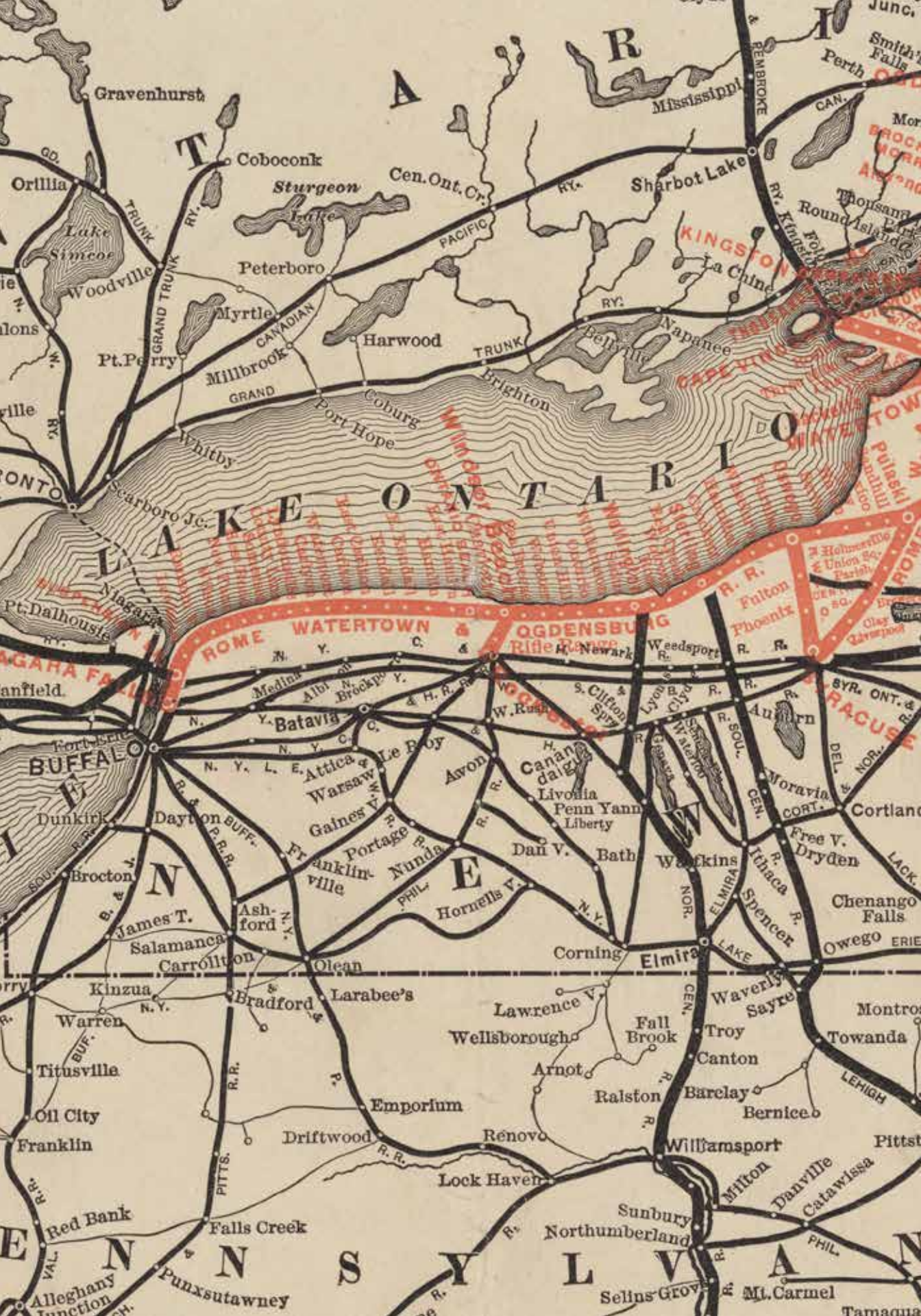
Gandy Dancer

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

Issue 9.1 | Fall 2020

gandy dancer /ˈɡɑːndi ˈdɑːnsər/ *noun*

1. a laborer in a railroad section gang that lays and maintains track. Origin: early 20th century; of unknown origin.





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We've titled our journal *Gandy Dancer* after the slang term for the railroad workers who laid and maintained the railroad tracks before the advent of machines to do this work. Most theories suggest that this term arose from the dance-like movements of the workers, as they pounded and lifted to keep tracks aligned. This was grueling work, which required the gandy dancers to endure heat and cold, rain and snow. Like the gandy dancers, writers and artists arrange and rearrange, adjust and polish to create something that allows others passage. We invite submissions that forge connections between people and places and, like the railroad, bring news of the world.

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

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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.

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.

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



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Dear Readers,

Since 2012, *Gandy Dancer's* mission has been to forge connections between writers and artists, and in times of isolation and disrupted daily life, reading these submissions certainly made us feel entertained and less alone. We have continued the production of our literary journal online due to COVID-19. We introduced new staff members to the journal, met in our editorial groups via Zoom and Google Suites, and crafted the layout on WordPress. Despite technical challenges, such as lagging Internets and learning how to use new programs, we were able to put together an exceptional journal.

This year, the first of a new decade, has featured a number of unfortunate and some eye-opening events, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to the Black Lives Matter movement, to the 2020 Presidential Election. Kailey Maher's sculpture of toilet paper, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall," speaks to the hardships of this fiercely divided time. As much as the events of this year have divided us, they have also led us to seek connection through art and literature. For some, creativity has been the most promising way to cope with such uncertainty, while others have found it harder than ever to find inspiration. We are grateful to those who submitted their art and allowed us glimpses of how they have coped.

In many of the pieces collected here you will note a desire to return to the past. In some work, this may include the past before COVID-19, the past before the current political climate; in other pieces, one sees a longing for childhood. Mick McMahon's essay "Petrichor" explores how such longing lives in our senses and oftentimes demands a resurfacing. For McMahon, petrichor is "the memory of standing next to my grandmother on her porch, watching the rain fall as we sipped cups of tea. That is my home—that is my petrichor." This essay made us think of our own petrichors that remind us of home. In Julia Grunes' story "Sunny Days," the protagonist Edgar longs for a time before his family has put him in a nursing home. We sympathized with Edgar and his longing to relive old memories, especially since we've been put into isolations of our own.

There is also, running through these pages, a current of anger and frustration, a desire for change. In Isabella Higgin's "June," the speaker expresses her frustration with America's lack of change to her deceased father. She says, "I am in lock step with people / who have had more than enough, who have had 400 years / of lies to know to call this country's bluff." Reading "June," we feel this anger and sadness. Winosha Steele, too, highlights the importance of the Black Lives Matter movement throughout her art, including "Ms. Bojangles"

on our cover and “Tether,” a portrait of a Black woman wearing a noose as an earring and a chain around her neck. These paintings remind us of a history the country tries to make us forget, though the pain is ongoing for many. As much as “Tether” is in conversation with the Black Lives Matter movement, it also speaks to the idea of gender and autonomy—or a lack thereof.

In her essay about place and memory, Kathryn Waring explores the use of video mapping. In “Searching for 360, she writes, “I am searching for a 360 that doesn’t exist, a medium that lets me tell a story that’s not in fragments. What I don’t understand is that a photo, even in 360, is just a stage. Behind every door there is a loaded gun; a crashed spaceship; a person casting a shadow. The most interesting part of a story is always just out of frame.” Each piece within this journal tells its own story. You will find stories here which explore identity, loss, the past, and change. We are grateful to the artists and writers who have shared their stories and hope they will help you to feel less isolated in this new and alien world.

Cheers!

Sara Devoe and Rebecca Williamson
December 2020

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Cover art: Ms. Bojangles by Winosha Steele

Gandy Dancer

Petrichor

Calm quiet streets, dark clouded skies, and the cold smell of water hanging in the air; this is petrichor: the scent of distant rain. A terribly romantic word, and one of my personal favorites. The Oxford English Dictionary defines petrichor as, “a pleasant, distinct smell frequently accompanying the first rain after a long period of warm, dry weather in certain regions.” I define it as home. Petrichor: the smell wafting through my window on October afternoons after school. Petrichor: the word my best friend loves so dearly that we wrote a poem about it together. Petrichor: the memory of standing next to my grandmother on her porch, watching the rain fall as we sipped cups of tea. That is my home—that is my petrichor. And I must clarify, I don’t simply mean “the smell of rain”; no, I mean *petrichor*. I *mean* the distant smell of rain; the kind that falls in the early mornings or late afternoons; the kind that hangs like a mist over northwestern pine forests; the kind you stand by an open window and sip a warm drink with. Petrichor has an entirely unique collection of connotations, separating it from being the smell of rain alone. It would be the same point as the instance of sirens versus mermaids; sure, they’re both most commonly denoted as half-fish people who sing to sailors, but most would much rather have a run-in with a mermaid than with a siren. Not myself, but most.

I have always been, in the immortal words of my aforementioned best friend, a sentimental little SOB, supported only by my mindset that home is not always a place. Home can be a person; it can be a memory. It can be the sound of a guitar with one loose string, the smell of apple cider and chowder, or even be sitting on the couch next to your best friend, playing Super Smash Bros. And why is that? Shouldn’t home be a place, somewhere you live? After all, we do say, “I’m going home,” or “actually, I’m staying at home today.” Are these phrases really nothing more than reflex? Well no, not for everyone at

least. Home is where the heart is, after all, and for some people their hearts lay inside a physical structure in which they live. For others, however, their hearts lay with other people in other places. Their hearts lay in a dreamy past, in what was a better time, or in a place other than the structure they live in.

Home is an idea, not a place, though the idea can, and often is, associated with a place. Home is a feeling of belonging, of being where you're meant to be, and that can be found in anyone, anything, or anywhere. For myself, petrichor is my home. It's a scent that wraps itself around my mind, mingling with the memory of tea or coffee, decaying leaves, and the smell of my grandmother's hand cream which I can only describe as warm. The same hand cream my own mother now uses. Petrichor is the link I share with my best friend, the word they love enough to share with me, and the word I now hold onto as a gift from them. If you ask my synesthesia, it's a word that is blue, gray, and black, swirling together like a stormy sea—gray waves crashing against rocky shores on a cloudy day, mist spraying all the way up the face of the cliff toward the pine forest overlooking the water. An absolutely beautiful word to speak and see.

That's something about words people never seem to consider; how they look. Is the word beautiful and pleasing to see? Do the images and sensations that latch onto it create a masterpiece? Is it the kind of word that only looks pretty in Times New Roman, or will Comic Sans do? Is it a pink, green, or blue word, or more of a gamboge? Now this adds an entirely new aspect of whether or not words work well when placed together; a green word and a blue word may *look* rather dashing together, but that green word belongs with a bright pink word. The words on the page become an amalgamation of complementary colors that are paragraphs apart, and gentle ombrés forming a sentence. And regardless of the words' arrangement, every page holds a rainbow of colors and memories. Perhaps it's a bit of an English major thing to do, to romanticize a word and give it an appearance, but if I'm meant to be staring at hundreds of pages of words every week...well, I might at least make it pretty.

Petrichor is my home. It is my grandmother, my best friend, my favorite smells, and all my favorite sights and feelings. It's a word that incites a mixture of immense joy and great calm within me. It feels pleasing when rolling off the tongue. I never need to feel like I am lost or far from home, because petrichor follows me wherever my feet may land; all I need to do is wait for a bit of rain. And when a dark cloud holds promise and comfort, I find I have no need to hold my breath and plead for sunny days. When you can find home in the storm, riding it out doesn't seem so bad. When you can find home in a feeling, there will always be a place where you belong.

Dreams Under the Red Eye of a Hotel Television

Avocado Toast

You've made a bold move. It's scary and everyone is asking you why.
Trust yourself. Worst comes to worst, you can always cover it up.

Yellow Light

Gun it, baby. Life's too short.

Elephant Ears

You wish for something soft and colorful in your life—consider buying a
parakeet.
But don't teach it swear words.

Gold Eagle

You will finally be published by an up-and-coming publishing house.
If sitting, you should skip town. Things aren't going to end well.

Flat Tire

Double check before leaving: passport, wallet, toothbrush, underwear, date.

Lightning

You dream of power. The thoughts in your head ram into one another, creating static, bubbling energy—unharnessed capacity for greatness.

Raindrops

The scent of a man fresh from the shower is intoxicating.

Moose

A man's head may look pretty on the wall, but if his heart is still in shedding season leave him in the wild. There's no reason to pay the hauling fee.

Needle

You seek a form of correction in your appearance. Quit eating so many cookies.

Railroad

You will leave in the dark without saying goodbye. The early morning moon will guide you down the mountain pass and onto the plains before he even wakes.

Firetruck

Your love life isn't meant to be explosive, but rather a steady burning log in a stone hearth. Children will snuggle down by your side to warm themselves. Embrace them gently.

Starbucks

Your next job will start at 7:00 a.m. You've been warned.

VW Bug

Your goals need a mechanic, not a junkyard. Pick up a quart of oil, a new toolbox, spare tire, and a few flares. The Redwoods are waiting.

In a World Gone Shallow

I see him across the parking lot,
a rutted expanse flattened by a dodgy paving company,
his wide eyes darting

above an orange bandana
as he scurries toward the main entrance.
A family of four explodes

onto the sidewalk, laughing. Grabbing hands.
He jumps, diverting paths
like schools of sardines rippling

away from the shark's open jaws.
Shiny black hands pull on steel handles,
ducking inside.

Soon he sits across from me,
body like a board.
His gray eyes sinking.

Ten feet apart, maybe twelve.
I wave and point to the slender paper bag
next to my chair.

He holds his up too, dropping the bandana inside
as the nurse's violet hands fit a light blue mask
over his face. It's only the two of us for now

with our eyes closed and our plastic bags
that should be clear and filled with fish,
not neon yellow that drips poison into our chests.

But more people trickle in
and paper bags are creased,
sagging closer to the floor each hour.

One young woman coughs quietly. Ten pairs of shifty eyes
and hidden faces jerk to glare. And suddenly, I realize
we've all turned into bank robbers.

wyd

selling a beach house in idaho / lighting the sage and summoning spirits as I await
 your three character text / swimming in the east river / ruminating texting first /
 eating bacon after watching babe / looking up public campaign finance records
 to see where you donated to / craving mcdonald's after watching super size me /
 looking up the names of your extended family on facebook / starting a cult in waco /
 hyphenating our last names / going to times square and getting dinner at tgi friday's
 / starting a jets fan club in buffalo / writing smut with you as my edward cullen /
 starting a beef plant in india / doing the twist in a 1950s soda shop / following you
 until you love me / blocking and unblocking you on social media / passing up on
 taco bell after getting stoned / throwing a euro in the trevi fountain / sticking to the
 status quo after watching high school musical / getting a tramp stamp angel heart
 tattoo with property of [Y/N] written on it / fracking after watching erin brockovich
 / since you've been gone I've been lost without a trace / picturing my belly swollen,
 pregnant with your child / selling cheeseburgers at the synagogue / wanting a stable
 relationship after listening to lana del rey / presenting holofernes' head on a silver
 platter / taking my date to a classy dinner at olive garden / plucking the petals off a
 flower, whispering "he loves me, he loves me not" / witnessing the construction of
 the egyptian pyramids / maybe you think that you can hide, I can smell your scent
 for miles / flushing my phone down the toilet / taking my grandma to a post malone
 concert / stealing pictures from an instagram influencer to catfish you with / getting
 completely blacked out / composing a sonnet based on how little and useless your
 replies are / drinking the kool aid in jonestown / finding amelia earhart's bones /
 cosplaying as junie b. jones / auditioning with "defying gravity" for the talent show /
 carving your ass out of marble / someday I'll pay the bills with this guitar, we'll have
 it good / writing a poem about a three character message

✓ Read 1:32 AM



Passenger (digital photograph), Jade Nguyen

Looking for Home

The carpet is gone.

The realtor's heels click against the cherry-finished hardwood. "And this is the master bedroom."

"Beautiful floor." My toes budge at the tips of my sneakers. Once Ben and I buy the house, I'll slip across this room as if ice skating, gliding in sock feet with a wicker laundry basket on my hip. He'll kiss me, folding work pants in thirds and adding them to a pile towering at the foot of the bed.

"It's just hardwood, Nelly." Ben crosses his arms.

My parents had an orange carpet in the bedroom. I vomited on it once when I was four. Paper towels soaked up the raunchy mess. A stringy washcloth placed on the stain became a bridge to my mother. My feet squished against the damp spot, and I awaited her invitation. She lifted her arm and the covers rose. Once nestled beside her in the big bed, she pressed me into her chest. The sheets always smelled like a woman.

The bedroom is bigger than I remember. Maybe it's because of the missing carpet. There's space to walk around now that the dresser and vanity are no longer squished against the wall. It's enough space for Ben and me to share comfortably—something malleable to recreate and make our own.

At age eleven, I opened every jewelry box on my mother's vanity. While I sat on the ottoman, her studs blinked in my ears in the mirror's reflection. Lines of pearls bridged between my fingers. Her bra cups draped to my ribs. A stick of cherry-red lipstick sometimes found its way into my backpack in the morning, marking my face in the girl's bathroom before class.

I open Dad's closet, the biggest one in the house. It always served as the perfect hiding place.

My father would count down from thirty in the kitchen. I lost myself in his dress shirts and buried myself in a mountain of neckties.

His cologne still stings the space. I want to step inside, to sit in the corner again, and hide.

I pull the light string. Empty.

“Ben, look at all this closet space.”

“Might be big enough for your shoe collection.”

“We’ll have to tear down this wallpaper though.” The rose petal wallpaper is coarse under my fingertips. “I hate wallpaper.”

The realtor leads us back into the hallway. The previous owners hung new drywall and painted it red. My mother hated red. It made the house feel dark. This red was clean. There was no red on the molding—no red on the floor.

When I was seven, my mother brought home long rolls of striped wallpaper marked with a yellow clearance sticker. She sprawled out on the living room floor with a straightedge and a pair of scissors. The paper hissed as the blade dragged across. She bent around windows and outlets, cutting the perfect fit. There wasn’t enough to cover the whole room. It looked stupid, having one side of the room with the old paper and the rest new, but I didn’t want to paste over all the work I had done. I scraped bubbles out of the walls. My fingers got oily. It looked terrible.

“Down here we have a second bedroom.” The realtor opens the door and I’m taken back.

My childhood bedroom wallpaper is still there. Light green. I can still smell the vanilla bean candles on the walls.

I tug on Ben’s arm. “This room is gorgeous.”

“You hate wallpaper.”

“This is subtle. It’s nice.”

Ben shrugs.

There are still swirls in the plaster ceiling. I used to imagine they were galaxies. The tan carpet hadn’t aged in ten years.

I hid on the far side of my bed when he told me, clawing at carpet fibers. My father’s heavy feet hit each step. A steady hand on the comforter, he eased himself onto the floor beside me and told me we were moving. By we, he meant him and me. My room had to be clean so the buyers wouldn’t see my clothes scattered across the floor. The books had to be shelved. Anything I couldn’t find a spot for could be tucked into a dresser drawer. The house had to sell.

My father spent that afternoon in the garage painting slabs of white wooden molding. He carried the long beams up the stairs, the wood smacking the steps behind him. A cup of nails clattered against my homework desk. I held the molding against the wall, and he hammered it into place.

My bedroom was the first room in the house my mother renovated. She wanted me to have a nice space for myself to grow up in. While pregnant, she and my father patched the ceiling with plaster, wallpapered the walls, and

stapled down new carpet. I was born before the molding went up. No room in the house was ever finished.

Kneeling against the wall, my father threw down the hammer. It crashed against the carpet. The section of molding was too long for the wall. He'd have to pry it off, re-measure, and cut again.

"Your mother ruined this house."

I sat beside him, tracing his calloused knuckles under my fingertip. It was the first time I saw my father cry. When I hugged him, his shoulders drooped, like my mother had destroyed him. By then, he had already asked her to leave.

"Why don't we head back downstairs now?" The realtor gestures back to the door.

The brass knob lingers in my hand. I remember Mom lying in bed with me, playing the alphabet game. Apple. Blueberry. Cotton candy. Doritos. She'd ask if I wanted to play another round, this time coming up with different animals. I smelled lavender body soap on her skin. It was almost as if she didn't want to sleep in her own bed. Sometimes I woke up next to her.

I pull the door shut behind us.

"Only one bathroom?" Ben traces the porcelain tile under his fingers.

Brown water stains speckle the ceiling as if there had been a leak. I wonder if that was here before. Inside the medicine cabinet, I see faint dust marks from where pill bottles had sat for years.

Before the move, I tossed old prescription syrups from childhood ear infections in the trash. I packed my father's blood pressure medication in my shower bag. My mother left things behind—things my father and I would have to clean out of the house. Lipstick tubes. Allergy pills. Makeup remover wipes. I swiped her things into the trash. They were dirty. The new family shouldn't have to dispose of them.

"Yes, this is the only bathroom, but it has a shower and a bathtub, as well as plenty of storage and fans." The realtor gestures to the vents on the ceiling.

A single hair dangles from the fan.

My mother's hair marked its territory. Hair ties with her brown curls tangled in them. Hair snaked out of the bathroom drains. Hair tucked in the heat vents. I vacuumed what I could.

Maybe her hair is still here.

"One bathroom will be an issue if we ever have a family." Ben peeks in a towel cupboard.

"Let's see the kitchen next." I take his hand. The realtor is quick to take the lead.

The previous owners tore all the shelf paper out of the kitchen cabinets, but the border my mother stenciled around the room is still here.

"We'll have to paint over that." I point at the border. I want all traces of her erased. Paint over everything. Tear it all down.

"Small kitchen." Ben's hand skims my hip.

Mom elbowed the coffee maker when she rolled pie dough. Flour trailed behind the microwave. The clunky, wooden cutting board stuck off the edge of the counter. I sliced apples at the dining room table. Mom pulled out a folded apron from the buffet drawer. She looped the strings around my neck like threading a needle and knotted it at my waist like she was tying a corset. Mirroring the same motions, she secured an apron to her body.

"What made you choose this house?" the realtor asks.

"We haven't chosen this house." Ben squeezes my hip.

"Just looking for home." I place my hand over his, finding the gaps between his fingers.

"It's a great option. There's a small grocery store just down the road. Great schools, friendly neighborhood."

A real-estate sign pierced our front lawn where my mother and I used to have picnic lunches on a checkered blanket. Tuna sandwiches on white bread. Potato chips. Watermelon squares. I mowed the grass for Dad. The smell of gasoline and spring suffocated the air. The grass grew so long it masked the name of the realtor tasked with selling the property.

Stepping off the mower, I tugged at the sign.

I have to mow here.

"I hear her mom kisses *girls*." Two girls stood on the sidewalk.

Teachers pulled kids aside at school and told them to take it easy on me. That I was from a broken home. Dad told me to ignore it. We'd be moving soon. I knew he heard the same whispers at work. It made me feel like I finally had something in common with him.

I ask the realtor, "Mind if we take a few minutes to talk?"

I pull Ben into the living room. We stand under the ceiling fan like it's mis-tletoe. I remember my mother standing on the back of the couch to change the lightbulbs. My father scooped her off her feet and kissed her cheeks until she blushed. My mother had the prettiest smile.

I wonder who will change the lightbulbs—me or Ben? Unless we pull down the ceiling tiles and scrap the fan.

"What do you think?" I bounce on the tips of my toes.

"Serious?"

"It needs a little work, but I can see us making this a home."

"A little work? Nelly, this house is ancient. The kitchen needs a whole remodel, there's wallpaper everywhere, and the master bedroom is tiny."

I wonder how we can arrange the bedroom to make it different from my parents. We can put the dresser next to the door, and the bed on the opposite wall. I can't imagine having an orgasm in the same space my mother did.

"What about the house in Hannibal? That one was beautiful—modern and well-kept." Ben leans into me, kissing my hairline. "I don't think we're going to be happy in this house."

I wasn't happy. I pushed everything off the kitchen counter. The floor was littered with bruised apples and dusty flour. I took a bite out of an apple and spit it at her.

"Nasty dyke." I pulled my apron strings and tossed that at her, too.

My mother wiped the chewed piece of apple off the front of her apron. "Nelly..."

I rub Ben's forearms, pinching the sleeves of his shirt. "It just needs some extra love. We have that. We can fix this."

"It's going to skew our budget. I'm sorry."

Tears prickle my eyes. My parents and I sprawled across the living room floor, a Monopoly board between us. Bills of all colors tucked under the cardboard. My mother and father went back and forth; Dad pleading for Park Place, Mom eyeing Marvin Gardens. I bought the railroads and charged them every lap around the board.

"Sweetie?" Ben closes me in a hug. I look out the back door, where her garden used to be. She had watchful gnomes scattered in the dirt. They're gone now.

"It reminds me of home." I sniffle.

"You hated home."

"I hated my mother. I never hated home."

Ben traces my arms, rubbing my shoulders. "Ever since your mom passed, you've been obsessed with finding the perfect house, and you settle on this?"

"It's cozy."

"It's falling apart." Ben holds my hand. "We need a fresh start. Leave our pasts behind. We can create something new that's all ours."

"I'm not good with change."

"We can be ourselves, but in a new place. We're looking for a forever home. We'll never have to move again."

"Yeah." I nod. "You're right."

Ben wipes a tear from my eye. He studies the black smudge on his fingertip. "You wearing mascara today?"

I nod.

"It's pretty." Ben cups my cheek and kisses me. "I'll let the realtor know."

I sigh. "Okay."

Ben walks into the kitchen. I go the other way, into the dining room. I sit on the floor against the wall staring at the empty paneling.

My mother always left a tin tray lined with a paper towel and a tower of Oreos on the table when I got home from school. Some classes I only had

every other day, and rather than watching a kid toss paper wads at a proctor for forty minutes in study hall, I came home early some days.

That day there were no Oreos on the table. With no sign of my mother, I took the whole package of cookies upstairs to watch TV while I finished my biology homework. The plastic crinkled. A cookie crunched between my teeth. Noises bubbled from my parents' bedroom.

Poking the bedroom door, I found Mom pinned to the sheets by a woman. The woman's hair masked my mother's hips. Mom's mouth opened and released little cries.

As a child, I watched my mother lather creamy lotion across her olive skin, careful attention to the creases: her armpits, the space between her toes, the folds of her neck. She'd pump more into the palm of her hand and share with me. I wanted her figure to mold the shape I would grow into.

But I didn't want to become her—to become this.

Mom latched onto my eyes. She squirmed under the woman, masking their bodies behind the sheets.

I ran down the steps and sat on the dining room floor, under the table. This was another one of my common hiding spots. I'd hug the center support with my legs wrapped around it so my mother and father wouldn't notice me at a walk-by glance. I wonder what happened to our dining room table after the move.

"Ready to go?" Ben caresses my arm, pulling me from the memory.

"No."

"Sweetie..."

"We have to fix this house."

On that old paneling, Mom pounded nails into the board and displayed our family portraits. A photographer followed our family around a field behind Mendon Ponds in muck boots and a hoodie. My mother burned curls into my hair. She twisted her own hair into rings too. The photos were perfect. We were the perfect family.

"I'm sure another family will buy this house. It'll be a terrific home, but it's not for us."

Ben holds out his hand, towering over me.

I push myself off the floor, disappearing through the house. Up the stairs. They still creak. Into my mother's bedroom. The master bedroom. It's not theirs anymore. None of this is hers.

I open the closet door and crawl inside. The carpet burns my knees again. Mom used to crawl in here, too. I haven't outgrown it.

Maybe I didn't hate Mom. Maybe Dad taught me to hate Mom.

I didn't pray beside my mother's open casket. Old men shook my hand and squeezed too tight. *Sorry for your loss*. They were a few years too late.

It was my mother's girlfriend, Suzanne, who told me the house was on the market again. She wore black, plucking cubes of cheese off the end of a toothpick, red lips staining the wood. I wondered if she called herself a widow now, but I didn't ask. She and my mother wanted to buy it back, she said, before Mom got sick. I wanted to know what mom left behind in this house.

"Nelly? What are you doing in here?"

"Hiding." I hug my legs to my chest, the sharp scent of cologne stabbing my nose. "Come in."

"You can't be serious."

I pat the space beside me.

"But what about the realtor?"

I rub the carpet, as the heat sparks from the friction. She can't stop us. This is my house.

Ben rolls his eyes and climbs into the closet beside me. His hip pokes against mine. His legs can just barely lay straight, toes tapping against the opposite wall. His arm crams beside mine, and as if by instinct, he places his arm over my shoulders scrunching us more into one another, as if the closet was closing in on us. I swing the door shut.

"Nelly, why are we—"

"Shh!" My finger presses against my lips.

His voice shifts to a whisper. "Why are we in here?"

"Can't you imagine it? Playing hide and seek with our kids someday. Scrunching together into this closet..."

"Most houses have closets."

"But not like this one."

"It's not even that big, Nel. We barely fit." He scooches back against the wall of the closet, his hip crashing into mine. "And it smells like old man."

"It's cologne, Ben. Try it sometime."

"Why are you being so stubborn?"

"I'm not stubborn." I bite my lip, inhaling Dad's scent. "My parents and I used to play hide and seek all the time when I was growing up. I want to have those kinds of memories with our kids someday."

"We barely fit in here as it is." Ben squeezes my shoulder. "I would hide beside the washing machine instead. More leg room."

"Maybe they'd find me first and pull me around the house to look for you."

"You better not tell them my best hiding spot."

I pinch my fingers together, and drag them across my lips like a zipper.

"We can play hide and seek in a newer house," Ben says. "One where the floorboards don't creak. Creaky floorboards give away hiding spots."

"So do peeking children."

"What?"

“I’m ready to look at other houses.”

Ben smiles, squeezing my thigh. He grips the molding along the door and propels himself out of the closet. He’s too much of an adult to crawl out like I do. He offers me a hand, and I stand.

“Why the sudden change of heart?” he asks.

“Don’t you know me at all?” I kiss his cheek. “I hate wallpaper.”

Yellow Light

Alone, you can hear sounds you never looked for. The ghost of the party next door, muffled pop songs and conversations about thin air keep slipping under the door, uninvited. I can hear this room wheeze. Bed springs whine and creak under my heavy stomach weight, forcing the white cotton pillows to rub against each other. I can hear the ocean in this bed. The stained wine glasses on my desk rattle like wind chimes singing their sad, empty song. Wishing only to be full, to be held. But the real criminals are the appliances; the fridge makes ice cubes, and it is an avalanche. The heater hums, with a bang every now and again, shuffling into place. The streetlamp outside glows silently. Pale yellow hangs still in the night, only to remind me that there is nothing there. I take in a lot of air. Cough, even, just to see who would hear.



Eye of the Beholder (photographic print), Lauren Berkey

Feast

I always dread the night before Eid. It is always a disaster.

Picture this: A girl is digging through her closet that is packed with too many clothes she does not claim but must always choose from. There are dresses, blouses, mountains of cardigans, and undershirts littered on the floor. Sometimes the girl is in the closet with her fingers gripping the clothes so tightly she creases the fabric. Sometimes she'll be standing in front of the mirror, willing herself not to cry in front of her mother. And sometimes you'll find her sitting on the floor amidst the clothes that don't ever seem to fit her right, always feeling smaller than they make her look.

Eid is an Islamic holiday that occurs twice a year. In English it means feast, festival, holiday. We celebrate Eid Al-Fitr, the Festival to Break the Fast, and Eid Al-Adha, Festival of Sacrifice. After a month of fasting, Eid Al-Fitr is always an exciting day where we come together and stuff our faces.

At its best, it is the most peaceful, joyful day of the year. We wake up at dawn when it's still dark outside, but we feel energized at the prospect of seeing all of our cousins. Text messages of "Did you leave yet?" and "When are you coming?" are already being exchanged. At the mosque, I sit on the carpeted rug between my female family members and try to find a peace I haven't felt in a long time. Afterward, the women and I go to find the men, and we all shake hands and kiss each other's cheeks. This is a big deal for a family where bickering and insults are our only displays of affection.

Finally, we meet at my aunt's house and *feast*. On the small dining room table, there are colorful plates of every Middle-Eastern breakfast dish you can think of. I have a big family, and we all huddle around the table; there are hands everywhere trying to make grabs for the food. The adults get to sit at the table, and the cousins are usually on the floor of the living room, putting on a Marvel movie that no one actually watches. The house is loud with

conversation and laughter. We eventually stand to receive our gifts—twenty dollars from each family. Before we head off to see a bunch of distant family members whom we don't really know, my cousins and I walk two blocks to the 7-Eleven to load up on snacks and slushies.

This is both my favorite and least favorite day of the year.

At its worst, it is the most stressful, demoralizing day of the year. We wake up at dawn; my brothers throw on their suits and gel their hair, ready for the day in minutes. I wake up an hour before them all, agonizing over my outfit. In the dim lighting of my room, I'm pulling my undershirt down to ensure it won't add an extra layer to my body. I pull out two kinds of footwear: boots or heels? *Heels make my legs look elongated and slimmer, but boots will cover the length of my leg more so I can get away with the tight leggings under my dress—but they make me look stumpy. Heeled boots are definitely on the checklist for next year.* I pick up the boots. I can never decide on whether I should wear belts: do they over-emphasize my curves? Or will they make me look thinner in this loose dress? Which crime will they forgive me for? I leave the belt on the floor, and move on to the next decision.

My thoughts spiral in this way because, when you're a woman, you need to anticipate every critique, and choose the battles that will be the least damaging to your family's reputation. There will be scrutinizing eyes, pictures, and judgements. In this culture, women are their bodies and nothing else. An ill-fitting top brings shame upon you and your mother until you can correct this wrong the next Eid—and in most cases, not even then.

At its worst, I'm sitting on the carpeted floor of the mosque, barely able to breathe in the packed women's section. The men have the bigger room—all able to freely walk around and take up space. I wasn't built to take up space. I make myself as small as can be, which is a lot harder to do when you're not small. The women never fail to remind me of this.

At its worst, I eat less food than my male cousins, because I'm afraid of getting bloated in my outfit. Before me lies a long day of posing as my best self, and I did not plan for my outfit to accommodate extra weight. At the 7-Eleven, I buy a water bottle and a Reese's. I try not to worry about the breakfast or the candy, because there is always a quick fix.

"That's all you're getting?" my cousin asks.

"We have to see a lot of people after this," I say.

A look of understanding dawns on her face. "Right." She's carrying pretzels and a small package of chocolate donuts in her arms. She puts the donuts back on the shelf. "I'll just get this."

The guilt sits heavier in my stomach than the candy.

Outfit shopping for these big events is a Middle-Eastern girl's nightmare. I attempt to try shopping at the mall first, even though it usually ends with a wistful sigh about what can never be. We fantasize about wearing the cute, short dresses in the store despite the hard truth that we wouldn't look like the mannequins anyway. My cousins and I like to joke about this.

"Sometimes I think Allah didn't make us skinny because he knew we'd feel confident enough to wear things like *that*," my cousin laughs, longingly looking at a revealing black dress on a tall, impossibly skinny plastic woman. Sometimes we forget mannequins aren't real and that we are.

I wonder what my cousin really believes. Is it that we don't wear what we want because we don't feel confident in our bodies, or that we don't feel confident in our bodies because we've been conditioned to hide them?

In our culture, we must dress "modestly." There is not a clothing store in America with decent dresses that fully cover the following areas: full chest coverage (heightened to at least mid-collar bone), anywhere between half and full arms, and full leg. This article of clothing should not be tightly fitted or accentuate your body. The ideal piece of clothing is one indicating you have no body, but if you *did* have one, you'd be a petite girl.

After the inevitable failure of shopping for clothes, we go back to our closets to sift through years' worth of hidden gems that either provide ample coverage or are easy to adjust (For example, if the material is light enough, it can be worn with undershirts, cardigans, jackets, or long leggings.) I try on outfits for hours, and don't have a say in what I wear. The party usually consists of me, my body, my mother, occasionally my aunt, and my objectification.

This routine sucks the life out of me in ways unimaginable. I try on outfits that do not work for one reason or another. My body is presented to my family to be judged. I am screaming internally. My mother pulls and tugs at the fabric.

"If only this were bigger," she says through gritted teeth.

"Why can't you just lose weight?" She pulls the fabric up to my neck with all her might.

"This would be a lot easier if you cared about your looks more." She drops the fabric with a heavy sigh to reveal cleavage that won't disappear.

"Try the next one."

Last year, my fifty-year-old aunt was ridiculed and attacked by my uncle because the pants she wore were "too tight." Essentially, you could see that she had legs. My uncle spoke to my mom first. "Can you talk to your idiot sister about her clothes? She's such a moron."

To this, my mom responded, "Your sister is a *hebiela*; even Malack knows to wear a long *thob* over her outfits."

I'll never forget the accusations that came with "your sister," as if she was too shameful to claim. I'll also never forget the fleeting pride I felt when my mother mentioned me, and the quiet shame in the wake of that pride.

Age does not allow us to escape from this. I learned that day that my body will always be monitored by the men in my life. I wonder if I'll ever have a choice in how I present myself. If I'll ever be strong enough to walk away. If I'll ever have the autonomy I have so desperately wished for my entire life.

This lack of autonomy, this obsession to comply with the rules and look the best, has led to a ten-year struggle with disordered eating.

When you are taught your whole life that your body should be hidden away, you start to believe that your body isn't worth being seen. When you agonize over your body being seen, you resent it for existing. And when you resent your body for existing, you might will it to disappear entirely.

This became my ultimate goal: shrinking enough to disappear entirely.

There's a fine line we have to walk, an impossible balancing act. We have to layer our clothing without looking "too plump." We have to wear outfits that are fitted enough so that we appear slim, without being fitted to the point where we look promiscuous. Clothing should be loose enough to be modest, but not so loose that it looks like a curtain.

Here's the thing: it's a lot easier to accomplish this if you're already thin. If you have a slightly protruding stomach, bigger thighs, or a heavier chest, this fine line is not attainable. More precisely, if you have an average growing girl's body, this is not attainable. I did not understand this as a young girl. My mother made sure of this.

At twelve years old, I was hyper-aware that men and women were going to scrutinize my body, and it was my responsibility to make them approve of what they saw. The first person to do this to me was my favorite person in the world.

It confused me when my mother lectured me on having a full dinner, and then criticized me for eating too much. Often, I desperately wanted to ask her, "where do you think the food goes?" I wanted to ask other questions, too. Ones that seemed to have no answers.

How can I fill myself and empty myself all at once?

How can my body be mine when it is for everyone else's scrutiny?

Mama, how can I exist here and disappear at the same time?

Eid Al-Adha: Festival of Sacrifice

An image of me at 20:

My cousin's house is glowing; golden hues of the lamps are illuminating a family. The conversation is full of light bickering and passive jabs. The air is

euphoric in a way that only a holiday can be. Our voices are loud, loud, loud in the night. I leave to go downstairs, where my cousins are waiting with a movie, and as I do, I pass my uncle. He is staring at my black top, which is designed similar to a corset. It has thin straps, lacing that runs all the way to the top of the fabric, and the shape rounded at the chest. This isn't noticeable; I wore a black, long-sleeve undershirt and jacket to quieten it. After taking off my jacket, I hoped the volume of that night would overshadow the volume of my clothes.

My uncle's face morphs into one of disgust and disapproval. In this moment, I don't care. I am ready to tell him so. Before I can, my mother throws my jacket at me. She effectively silences me, and quickly appeases my uncle in a way I'll never understand. My mother chose the outfit. She was proud. I am the one who is shamed over a shirt, a body, an existence I have no control over. In this moment, the beauty of the night dies.

It is said that Allah replaced the Prophet's son with a ram at the last moment before the sacrifice. I am waiting for that moment in between, the space of time where the son exists and doesn't. Where he is embraced in safety as he goes to die at the hand of a parent who does not deem him enough.

Mama, am I the ram, too?

Eid Al-Fitr

Fasting for Ramadan is one of the most important pillars of my religion. We are not to drink or eat anything (no, not even water) from sunrise to sunset, every day for a month. But in the hours between dusk and dawn, we feast to our hearts' desire.

Ramadan extinguishes any suspicions of my habits. Everyone is fasting, it's not just me. It lessens the guilt of it all. *I didn't eat all day, so I can have this.* And it sends me into a relapse after it's all over. *I could lose more weight if I keep doing this.*

Ramadan is supposed to make us grateful for what we have. We are to see our privilege compared to those with less. Don't get me wrong; it does. But it also makes my family more fixated on weight than ever.

My father walks into the door after ten hours at work. The first thing my mother does is cry out, "Musa, I only lost two pounds. It's been two weeks!"

My father, still covered in black oil and dirt that comes with manual labor, brags, "Yesterday, I checked and I'd lost six!"

"I hate you," my mother whimpers. "I'm not eating anything at night. I won't even have dinner—just a bagel."

At twelve, I took notes. I gathered that by week two, I should start seeing results.

This is the mindset that I get stuck in. When Ramadan is over, it's so easy to fall into a pattern. Do not eat; when you do, binge enough to throw it all up again.

We are supposed to break our fast on Eid. It signifies the end of Ramadan. It signifies the end of making yourself hungry. But the end of one fast always brings another. It is hard to break a fast that I crave. It is hard to break a habit I was able to justify.

Eid

There is a group of girls standing together, all dressed up in dresses, pantsuits, and jumpers. They're laughing loudly, some of them hunched over themselves, red faced, holding their stomachs. They're glowing. They haven't seen each other in months, cousins close enough to be sisters who don't live nearby. Their excited voices echo loudly, and they don't care. They are in a bubble. Outside the bubble, men and women circle like vultures. They pick apart the girls, from their hairstyles to their shoe choices. They compare them—place them in a competition they did not consent to. So many girls, so many things to say. *I didn't realize she was so short. Why didn't she tame that hair today? That one's definitely the prettiest. Did she not even attempt to cover that butt? Wear looser pants. Disgusting. She has definitely gained weight. That dress is not flattering at all. Yeah, but the other one's dress is way too tight. She's too skinny--does the girl eat? Sick looking. She's better off than the other one, you couldn't cover that stomach if you tried.* They feast, and feast, and feast.

We leave. There is nothing left but chewed up bones.

I didn't want people to pay attention to my body. I still don't. At twenty-two years old, I feel the same way I did at twelve: I am incredibly small in the eyes of others, but somehow still too big.

The years are a blur of relapse, recovery, relapse, recovery. I have had to define my own sense of worth. I try not to associate the way I look with who I am. I'm trying to keep myself tethered here. I've always hungered for freedom to make my own decisions and freedom from the shame I've always felt about my body. The more I shed myself of these cultural constraints, the more I feel at home in this body. On my very worst days, I repeat a mantra that helps me breathe a little easier each time:

You are here.

You exist.

Let yourself be whole.

Levonorgestrel

Hesitantly
out the door
at the end
she unfolds a trap
destined for her belly
a place
still and quiet

no floor
just pink insulation
curling around
to support her
like the dream
she will never realize

A dream determined
to be faint and distant
abandoned here
over the years
missing
dreamt many times over
and yet hardly recognizable



Reminiscence (digital photograph), Jade Nguyen

In Night

We slink,
we speak with shut mouths
beneath shrouded clouds.
We scheme
in the night, talking about how we will
steal Sam's bike that lays on grass in the front yard,
dying of too much sun
and not enough sugar.
We stand beneath the moon's gentle gaze,
touching hands and dreading sunrise-
when we will go home and pretend
we are asleep.

To Bleed or To Cause Bleeding

Lady Macbeth,
wash your hands.
The water will turn red,
but the shame is in your fingerprints.
Sure, you can shower,
but the river down your
legs will return within the hour,
it's only day three.

You're empty, aren't you?
Unable to carry life in you.
You failed this cycle, didn't you?

Lucia di Lammermoor
had what we have,
lunacy,
hysteria,
she went mad!
Blood on her dress,
blood on your hands,
blood on our thighs.

Let's sing a
Coloratura aria,

pass
the time while
the idiots scramble.

Smile,
we denied entrance this month,
we killed them.

Don't worry,
it's not our fault.
The moon is too full
for us to brute the blame.



Self Portrait (photographic print), Lauren Berkey

A Ripening

It was night, and summer was slow, unrisen: still bloating with heat, still turgid from early June downpours. The insect-loud dark pulsed around us

and the moon swallowed itself over and over again, the world hungry & raw from growth. Everything tightened into the salt-damp shock of a licked

battery, the flesh swaddling our bones heavy with primordial aches as we pressed against each other. In the humid blackness, no one could name us

humans. We could be tawny-gold pumas or the shudder of field mice, hearts fluttering with euphoria in straw burrows, never knowing a world where

things are unnatural and coarse. *We* could be natural, here. Of course. Of course. Silky and sure and thorough, we beckon glistening dawn,

calling out into the morning-soaked sky like song thrushes in the breeze.

March 2018

I stand in the garden, my hands buried to the soil.
The earth cracks open around the cradles of my fists, still frozen.
Last frost deemed the world glacial, inhospitable,
but the radishes and rampions are indifferent; still demand nurturing
from me. I uproot my stiff palms to greet you, invite you inside
for a cup of coffee. Your hair curls, soft against your jaw now—
an unwelcome reminder that you change and I do not see it.
Months slip between us these days, fall into the cracks
where I am a guest in my house.
The cardboard carton of milk in the kitchen is curdled.
I try not to think of my mother as she vacantly poured it in her oatmeal earlier,
just the way she would scrape the mold off loaves
of homemade bread for my bagged lunches: quiet and clinical
in the blue-water light of dawn. I pour the sour milk into the sink,
watch the curds congeal by the drain. A pulpy mess stares back at me,
spoiled in my absence. I am a poltergeist in my mother's house,
writhing on my childhood mattress and splattering things in her sink.
You push yourself off the counter and wrap your arms around me,
coalescing the frigid clouds of our breath.
You whisper against the pale skin of my shoulder with each kiss;
cushion each press of your lips with a lie about the way you miss me.
I lie back. I feel you wash over me, our bodies the hushing of waves on the shore.
When it is over, we share a cigarette in the seafoam oasis of my childhood bedroom.
I pull on my woolen sweater & you lean into the scratch of my warmth for a slow
moment, then stand up to leave. I stand in the kitchen, my hands submerged in soap
and water. I pour the remnants of our morning into a basin, set the mugs to dry.
In frosty quiet, the radishes and rampions wait; entombed in the arctic earth,
purgatoric through spring.

The Fairway Market Hostage Crisis

After Richard Siken's "I Had A Dream About You"

In swollen-hot air, garbage simmered & crisped / and I stretched my arm under the passenger seat in desperation; / Aeryn told me to *hurry up* but I couldn't find my cigarettes / & I didn't want to leave them, in case there was a holdup & we got stuck / in a hostage situation—it was prophetic foresight, / I informed her: we'd be hiding between those organic on-the-vine / tomatoes & the tiny burlap bags of shallots for hours with nothing to smoke. / *Don't be silly*, she said, so I followed her / into the store's air-conditioned belly, abandoning my half-full / pack of American Spirits to wilt & wither in the fever-stale Subaru; / off to scoop coffee beans from bulk bins & thump honeydew melons. / We were debating citrus (Star Ruby or Oro Blanco) when someone yelled *nobody move!* / and fired three shots, tearing through the artificially chilled air like bitter greens. / Shocked, Aeryn dropped the grapefruits & I leaned over to whisper / *I told you so*, because I had, really, and she whispered back, / indignant, *I hope they shoot you in the leg* & then we dissolved / into soundless hysterics, cowering in the produce section / where we handed our wallets to the balaclavas / & the people inside of them, meaning no grapefruits would be bought; / the whole afternoon wasted. Aeryn and I sat on the vinyl tiles, old sweat / congealing on our bodies as we waited for the red-blue schmear of police officers / to concede that yes, in fact, there had been a robbery & they were pretty sorry / about that, but there was nothing they could do for us just yet / or probably ever, and we very pointedly did not smoke any cigarettes there, / between the three packs of pomelos and

the four-dollar starfruits, / in that fluorescent labyrinth which had once been
called our grocery store. / When we left, the roads were / summer golden-
dark & heavy, the two grapefruits we had smuggled out / plump and ripe in
the crime-stained early evening. I set them on my lap like twin suns / while
Aeryn grabbed the cigarettes from the back seat & lit them / in the glossy wet-
hot silence that stretched between us, and when we got / home, we halved the
grapefruits and drizzled honey on them, scooping out / each segment with
Goodwill spoons. The whole day tumbled off us, the / impossible tartness
bursting on our tongues / like gunpowder exploding into flame.



United We Stand, Divided We Fall (mixed medium sculpture), Kailey Maher

Whimper

(this is the way the world ends.
this is the way the world ends.
this is the way the world ends.)

stiff. rigid, unyielding,
pen to paper,
like humid air
like legs tangling in a duvet
a yearning possesses me

smoke stretches through
a whimper, cracked from negligence
room's corners grow smiles
for two weeks i yielded
showers,
cried tears of spring
sacrificial soils
reach for love i could never receive

tuning fork strikes A4
settled air sings
beams come in through open blinds,
this, is the way the world ends

Bulgarian Soldiers Distributing Cigarettes to Turkish Prisoners

Underneath the false acacia,
black lotus,
my grandmother tells me a tale
of slaughtered Bulgarians
in a war I can't remember
the name of.
Childrens' necks sheared on
wood stumps so raw
they bled out
from splinters before their heads
rolled onto Mavrud mud.
Baba holds me captive in her wool
sweater that chafes my cheek.
I was never taught
my history in America,
so she fills the gaps
with cruel wars

as punishment to my father
for taking us away from her.

Мушкато

Even as a child, I'd bite my nails, but
that never stopped the dirt
in my grandmother's garden
from scratching them underneath
until I'd pick them clean with the thinnest
stick I could reach off her fig tree.

Young branches don't break
easily, so I'd twist them until
they frayed like the bottom hem
of my jeans. I never wore shoes.
My grandfather built this house
for her, and she built a home
and a garden to feed her children
and their children—three generations
living in one house.

Никога не съм помагал с градината,
но щях да гледам как баба разкопава градината
със същата свирепост, която използва,
за да скъса възлите от косата ми, винаги мрънкайки,
малки момичета не бива да бягат наоколо така.

Quenepas

After Christina Rossetti

“Come buy, come buy!”
Eased before the red steady light,
the man chants between rusted engines
Swinging a wooden pole with pounds of
heavy fruit, weighing him down,
he bounces with each step.

The fruits wrapped in plastic bags
glisten beneath the summer sun.
Sweat trickles down his face, darkening the line where
skin meets strands meets more strands that interlock,
fester at the nape of his neck,
the nape of my neck.

“Come buy, come buy--
Mangos and coconuts,
rich quenepas,
Good for the soul!”

Inside against the slackening leather,
my thighs are exposed,
I feel the need to protect them.
The window rolls down with a certain
seduction. The man bends over, licking his heavy lips.

“Fresh from Puerto Rico,
Come buy, come buy.”

I am hesitant when my father
slips me the five dollar bill,
old and crusted, bent and torn,
It rests in my hands like a paper doll.
I am reaching over,
my hand through the window,
sinking into the hot summer sun.
The fruits jiggle in their bags
Looming over us,
casting shadows,
perspiring with sweat,
dripping with their juices.

Come buy, come buy.

The quenepas are firm in my hands,
dozens and dozens of inch sized fruits,
hidden beneath thick green skin,
darkening around the edges.

I smell the island from here.
From the littered floors,
highway exits off the Jackie Robinson.
Where trees are scarce and
coconut trees are a thousand miles away,
a plane ride that shakes,
an island that isn't a home for me.

An instant, green.
Our metal skeletons are readying to slip away into the mid-day.
The man is moving on to the next,
his words sift between the vents.
“Come buy, come buy.”

We bite, cracking the shell
the juices pour out,
dampening my lips.
I am sucking,
chewing,

biting,
devouring all
the yellow skin down to the beige
seed.

This is what men do to girls like me.

Featured Artist



Tether (colored pencil on strathmore paper), Winosha Steele



Transfiguration (acrylic on canvas), Winosha Steele



Strength (acrylic on canvas), Winosha Steele

June

Dear Dad,
Let me tell you about the world that you have left,
about the fires we have started, about
my constant fear of death. When I walk
outside the house, turn around and lock the door
I adorn myself in targets, for I am a body—
nothing more. The sky is white with acid rainfall
as I tread uneven ground. I am skin before
I am human—I can feel my wrists are bound.
It's this egregious state of being where I'm screaming
at a wall and although the wall quivers, those old pictures
never fall. So, I've taken to the hammer,
ripping nails with fingers bleeding, all while the wall tries to say
it's my words that start the healing. But it has siphoned
words from you, your father, and his father too, and since I do not see it breaking,
I fear my words will not get through. I am in lock step with people
who have had more than enough, who have had 400 years
of lies to know to call this country's bluff. I have seen white faces gleaming,
throwing gas into our crowds—they put the stones inside our pockets
and dare ask us why we drown.

Sunny Days

Edgar had become accustomed to the idea that he would be miserable here. In fact, he had assured himself of his own misery as soon as he walked (or more appropriately shuffled) through the glass doors of the blue-walled building. It was too bright in here, and the nurses always smiled for a little bit too long, and the halls had an overpowering smell of ammonia. One of the overly chipper nurses had checked him in; he didn't remember which one. They all had the same cooing voices, the same style of colored scrubs, and the same highlighted hair that was cut right above the shoulder.

Part of him understood why he was here. He had to admit that he wasn't walking as well as he used to. But another part of him thought that even if he had to lean on every object and person that he walked past, he was still walking, right? And fine, maybe his driving skills weren't as good as they had been, but the accidents weren't so bad. He wouldn't even really categorize them as accidents. No one was dead; everything had worked out fine in the end. No problem.

His family, however, disagreed. First, they came for his keys, and the process of wrestling them out of his grip had taken over a year. It had involved the smiling eyes of his grandchildren, the desperate mouths of his children, the flaring nose of his wife, and some help from the growing confusion of his mind. Then, a doctor had mandated the use of a wheelchair. Edgar had refused, but whenever they went anywhere after that, the wheelchair was brought, and he ended up in it halfway through the excursion. He told himself that it was just to placate them, but he knew somewhere inside him (likely in his shaking knees) that he needed it.

Then, his car accidents had turned into just plain accidents; his legs were the consistency of unkneaded dough from lack of use, and his diet consisted solely of chocolate milkshakes and spaghetti. His wife was forced to turn

into his caretaker, a job that she endured gracelessly. It certainly wasn't what she signed up for, and Edgar didn't make it any easier due to his unassailable hatred of being looked after. Edgar had noticed his family having countless hushed conversations while he watched TV, but he didn't think much of it. Everything had seemed hushed to him lately because he had been refusing to put in his hearing aids. When they finally told Edgar what they had been talking about, Edgar felt that he had been sent away to die.

This is a thought that was quite frequent in his mind during the first few weeks: *I have been sent here to die*. As he watched people being wheeled around, he couldn't comprehend the idea that he was one of them. The other residents talked or they didn't talk; they sang or they didn't sing; they sat and they watched the TV in the Big Room after dinner until they fell asleep or yelled for one of the nurses to take them out.

It was in the Big Room that he had met Helen for the first time. Their wheelchairs had been set up next to each other after dinner while the TV was playing, and Helen had noticed him looking at one of the nurses in confusion. He had forgotten her name again. He still couldn't figure out how to distinguish any one of them from the other.

"Her name is Blue Scrubs," Helen had said with a knowing grin. "But only for today. Tomorrow she'll be named something new." Then, she had nodded wisely and turned away, seemingly entranced with the program on TV, a soapy kind of drama that Edgar could sometimes bring himself to enjoy. He had merely given a grunt in response, but from then on, he always thought of them as Green Scrubs or Flower Scrubs or Pink Scrubs, and it was somehow easier. The days began to pass in a sort of haze after that, punctuated only by calls from his family and the occasional Fun Activity. Edgar felt certain that the person who had created that name had never been forced to experience one of them.

Today's Fun Activity came in the form of a tiny, smiling woman with an uncontrollable mane of faded brown hair and skin so grotesquely tanned that it looked as if her freckles were tiny scars running up and down her arms. Edgar didn't pay much attention as one of the nurses explained what she was there to do. Instead, he thought of the newspaper in his room wistfully, squinting his eyes as he attempted to remember how it had said the Mets were doing. But he supposed that it didn't really matter. For a long time now, no matter the season, the one constant was their abysmal performance. He sighed and turned his head towards the tiny woman who was now gesticulating wildly in the front of the room, her hair bouncing up and down as she spoke.

"This is some bullshit, isn't it?"

Edgar started and turned toward the low, nasally voice that had just spoken right next to him. “Are you talking to me?” he asked, his eyes resting on the overly rouged woman sitting next to him. Helen.

“Well, I’m not talking to Paul,” she said with a quiet laugh, giving a nod at the man sitting across from them who was staring blankly through Edgar as though he wasn’t even there. “He’s not really...here anymore. And, I would know. I can get *anyone* to talk, and he won’t even say one word to me. But yeah, I’m talking to you.”

“Oh, I—”

“And I was saying that this is some bullshit, isn’t it? The amount of money I saved for this place, and this is what they bring in? I mean, look at what she’s doing now!” Edgar focused his attention back on the tiny woman who was now slowly moving her hands close to another resident’s head, her brow furrowed in concentration.

“What—”

“It’s some hippie crap about channeling energy. Ree-kee? I don’t know. Just bullshit.”

“Yeah,” Edgar echoed, “Bullshit.”

“I bet Maureen isn’t going to be standing for it much longer though,” Helen said with a wry grin, pointing surreptitiously at the resident who had the tiny woman’s hands an inch away from her face. And she was right. A second later, Maureen began to shudder so violently that she seemed about to jump out of her own skin. She began to move her mouth, saying something that Edgar couldn’t hear from across the room. Green Scrubs cheerfully guided the Reiki practitioner to another table while she apologized profusely, and two other nurses began the process of removing Maureen from the room.

This proved to be a difficult task as Maureen had begun to wail, and her hands were now flailing wildly in all directions. Some of the other residents looked up briefly at the commotion, but seeing that it was Maureen, they returned to what they were doing before with little more than a second glance. Pink Scrubs, the nurse who was standing next to them, ran over to help, and then Helen turned her body back to Edgar, her wheelchair rattling with the rapidity of her movement.

“So, this seems as good a time to talk as any, doesn’t it?”

“Sure,” Edgar said. He attempted to shift himself farther away from her.

“You’ve been here for a few weeks now, haven’t you? And, to be honest, it really doesn’t get much better than this,” she said, gesturing at the three nurses who were still trying to subdue Maureen without much success. “But I’ve got something that’s a helluva lot more interesting, if you’re...interested.” She batted her eyes, and Edgar again attempted to shift himself as far away from her as possible.

“Wha—I’m not interested in—”

"What? Honey, no!" Helen gave a cackling laugh that pierced through Maureen's sobs. "You haven't heard about me from anyone else yet? Huh, that's surprising. I thought I told them to—well, nevermind."

"What do you mean, then?" Edgar said gruffly, feeling his ears turn a bright red. He looked down at the table, feigning interest in the napkin that had been left there. A small smiling sun was printed in the corner of it, along with the words SUNNY DAYS SENIOR LIVING, which were half covered in some brown substance that Edgar was not eager to find out the source of.

"Well, I supply this—this pill to people here. I call it," and here she paused for dramatic effect, "Reminall. It really gives you something to look forward to. This place gets bland real quickly. Don't you think?" Edgar agreed, but he didn't want to give Helen the idea that she knew anything about him, so he merely gave a shrug in response. Helen, however, took that as a sign that he was still interested and powered on, her mouth gaping wide open with each word she spoke. "Ask anyone! They'll all vouch for me! Well, not Paul. But, ya know, he can't vouch for anyone."

"I've even got a couple of different choices," she said, opening her mouth even wider as she continued her pitch. Edgar noticed that half her red lipstick was on her teeth. He wondered absently if she put it on herself every morning or if one of the Scrubs had to do it for her. "Package Number One *is* cheaper, and you get the same sort of, well, the same *incredible* experience! However," she paused here, her eyes wide, "when those Scrubs are looking at you, they're gonna be just seeing a pure vegetative state, you know? And some of them do get concerned about that, especially for you since you've been so talkative here."

"I don't talk that much," muttered Edgar, still distracted by the lipstick mixing with the yellow of her teeth. He could imagine his wife and her friends laughing about it over their sewing needles and unread books. Edgar suddenly felt a rush of pity for Helen, but not enough to fully listen to what she was saying.

"You talk enough. So, that's why I got Package Number Two. More expensive, but they see you talkin' and there's even a bit of singing thrown in, huh? So they have no idea that anything's different and they don't go getting anybody worried, you know? And I got the delivery service down pat so you wouldn't have to worry about a thing. You know what? I'll even give you the first one for free, just so you can try it out."

"I don't want—"

"But you think about it all and let me know. We can't be talking about this when *she* gets back." She gestured at Pink Scrubs, who was coming towards them with an enormous smile on her face and a broken fingernail. Helen smiled back, her eyes still on Edgar. "So, Edgar, what's your necklace about?"

“Huh?” Helen pointed at the golden π on his chest, widening her eyes and tilting her head towards Pink Scrubs. “Oh! Oh, it means—well, it means ‘life’ in Hebrew. It was my father’s.”

“Well, the more you know.” She laughed quietly, and then turned to Pink Scrubs, holding her stomach. “You think you can take me back to my room, hun? I’m not feeling so great.”

“Of course! Nothing too horrible, I hope? And, oh, isn’t it nice that you’re making friends, Edgar!” Pink Scrubs trilled, her eyebrows disappearing into her uneven bangs. Edgar gave a small nod and turned his head to face Paul, still watching Helen out of the corner of his eye. She gave him a painful blink that he assumed was some sort of attempt at a wink, and then began jabbering to the nurse about nothing as she was wheeled out of sight. Edgar wondered how she was able to get out of a Fun Activity so easily; if he had said that he wasn’t feeling well, they would probably give him a cheery suggestion about doing some arm stretches and tell him that it would be his turn with the Reiki woman soon. Well, at least Paul wouldn’t bother him.

He hummed quietly to himself, thinking again of the newspaper sitting in his room. He had barely had the chance to read it before he had been dragged out of bed. Maybe next time he could bring it, and then he wouldn’t have to be bothered by Helen or whatever horrible idea of an activity that this place came up with. What had she even been talking about? Some sort of pill. And he couldn’t seem to remember what she said it did. Whatever it was, he reasoned with himself, it didn’t matter. He was fundamentally opposed to the idea of it, both because of his sixty-year avoidance of drugs based on one unfortunate instance with a brownie in college, and his immense dislike of Helen and her lipstick-stained teeth.

When he finally returned to his room, he certainly did not feel as if he had been imbued with any sort of healing energy. In fact, the activity had only reminded him that he was miserable, and he would continue to be miserable until the day that he died. Pink Scrubs had helped him out of his wheelchair and into his bed, and he reached for the newspaper that he had left on his nightstand. But it wasn’t there. He scanned the small room with confusion, looking for any other place where he could’ve left it.

Then he spotted the newspaper on the chair that was sitting next to his TV, a mere five feet away. But Edgar was already in bed, and the sheer impossibility of getting out of it suddenly dawned on him. He could have called one of the Scrubs to help him, but the idea of talking to one of their too-bright faces right then filled him with a dread that he couldn’t quite explain. He would just be watching TV tonight. Maybe the game was on.

He grabbed the remote from his nightstand and pressed the on button, sighing as he stared at the newspaper that seemed to be mocking him with its closeness. He looked back up at the TV and realized that it hadn’t turned on.

He was sure that he had pressed the on button...he pressed it again, and again, and again, shaking the remote as if it would signal to some electronic god the aching need he felt for it to work. For something to work. But it didn't. And then, Edgar realized that the remote was making a sort of clacking sound. Was it broken? His remote had never broken at home, but, of course, this place would ruin it.

He held it up to his ear and shook it once more; again, he heard that same noise. He opened up the part of the remote where the batteries were and immediately realized the problem. In place of any batteries, there was one small, nondescript white pill. Edgar picked it up and stared at it for a moment, struggling to understand how this atrocity had occurred. And then it clicked: Helen. Of course. Because of her, he now had one pill and no TV. He was sure that she was somehow the reason why his newspaper was now sitting in a chair. He looked at the nurse call button and sighed, his frustration building. This button, unlike the ones on the remote, worked almost too well. Only a few minutes after he pressed it, Purple Scrubs appeared in the doorway with a smile as big as Edgar had feared it would be.

"Is everything alright?"

Edgar grimaced at the cheery voice. "The TV won't turn on, and the remote it's...ah...well, Helen..." He couldn't find the right words to describe his current situation, and Purple Scrubs' widening grin certainly wasn't helping. It was moments like these that made him think it would be easier if he was just dead. He smiled wryly as he thought of how his daughter would react if she knew that he was thinking that. She would probably yell at him. Edgar wondered if she would visit soon.

"Yes, you were talking to Helen today, weren't you? I'm so glad that you made a new friend here! Oh, why did you put your batteries here?" Purple Scrubs asked kindly, gesturing towards the nightstand and carefully pulling the remote out of his hand. Edgar turned his head. The two batteries were sitting next to his watch on the nightstand between his necklace and a cup of water. Had they been there the whole time?

"No, I—" But maybe they had been. He couldn't seem to remember. Purple Scrubs just smiled again and placed the batteries back into the remote.

"There, it should work now!" She turned on the TV with a flourish. An infomercial for Wearable Towels began to blast throughout the tiny room. "Perfect!"

"Thanks." Edgar knew he could've done that if he had seen the batteries, so he didn't feel the need to say anything else.

"And what do you have there?" Purple Scrubs asked as she continued to smile. Edgar looked down and unfurled his fingers. He had almost forgotten; resting in his palm was the white pill that had been in the remote.

"Oh, you. You know you have to take everything we give you to make you feel strong! That's your Donepezil from dinner, isn't it? You really are a tricky one!" She laughed and then narrowed her eyes at Edgar as if he was a child who was trying to get out of eating his vegetables.

"No, I'm not. I—"

"Don't worry about it, honey. I'm just *teasing* you. Here's some water." She picked up the cup that was sitting on the nightstand. Edgar bristled, but he still took the cup from her. He was pretty sure that he had taken all of his pills with dinner. But Purple Scrubs was still standing there watching. Waiting. She raised her eyebrows at him, and he gave her an unhappy smile as he placed the pill in his mouth, taking a sip of water to swallow it. She took the cup out of his hand, and Edgar closed his eyes. He could still hear the woman on TV raving about the Wearable Towel, but it sounded fainter. Maybe Purple Scrubs had turned down the volume.

But when he opened his eyes again, he was blinded by light and had to shield his face with his hand. He could feel sweat on his forehead, and all over him. But his muscles weren't aching, and he could feel the balls of his feet and all the way up his leg. And he was standing! Edgar was standing without any sort of support or struggle, as casually as he had when he was young. He looked down at his arms and almost screamed. The arms he saw were tan and muscled and strong. They were young arms, ones that had deteriorated a long time ago into the pale ribbony ones he now possessed. Could this be a dream? He'd never had a dream like this.

His mind felt awake, pulsing with thoughts and half-washed away feelings that were becoming clearer the longer he stood there in the baking sun. He had just asked Penny to prom. She had said yes. He'd never thought that she would say yes to him. Everyone had said that she was still in love with Jack, but maybe she wasn't really because she had said yes. Jack was an asshole anyways, and he didn't deserve her. But some of Edgar's friends had said that she had only said yes to make Jack jealous. He tried to ignore the idea. It couldn't be. She wouldn't have said yes if she wasn't into him, right?

He looked down at his watch and realized that he had just been standing in the middle of the sidewalk for five minutes. Damn it, why did he stop? He was supposed to be practicing every day, and he couldn't afford to lose a second of time if he wanted to beat Jack in the next meet. He began to run again, his feet hitting the pavement hard, each step bringing him closer to Penny, to the irrational hope that she would love him if only he could get three seconds faster for the 800. That's all he needed. Three measly seconds. He couldn't get distracted, couldn't just stop in the middle of his workout.

He kept thinking of *her*. Of Penny. How he had smudged her red lipstick and how she had rubbed it off his face, laughing. How her eyes had lingered and how she had smiled at him before she walked back to her friends. Maybe

at prom they could get somewhere far away from everyone else and they could—No. He couldn't get distracted now. He had already wasted too much time. Stay focused stay focused stay focused stay focused...he could feel the sweat pouring down his face, and he blinked it out of his eyes. As he did, the light began to change and refract around him, becoming somehow artificial, cooler. The heat felt like it was sliding off his body, melting into nothing.

When Edgar opened his eyes again, he felt the weight of his body sag back into his bones, his mind slowing from the breakneck speed that it had been going a second before. He blinked again and found himself sitting in the Big Room with the other residents, facing the TV. He looked down at his arms, at his hands, and they were almost translucent again, the blue veins looking almost as if they were above the skin rather than beneath it.

"You tried it, didn't you?" Helen was next to him again, and her wide eyes and stretched out smile made her face look like that of a bullfrog. "I knew you would. You said you didn't want it, but I knew you would in the end. And you enjoyed it, didn't you? Huh?"

"Yes," Edgar whispered, his hands shaking. "Yes." He didn't care anymore about her lipstick and odd comments, how she pretended to know everything. He had been young again. If only for a short while, he had been young again. And the aching of his body and the slowness of his mind had never felt more prominent to him than in that very instant.

"We can talk about prices for more soon," Helen whispered. Edgar had to strain to hear her. "I think Maureen's gonna lose it in a few, and then we can talk." Edgar nodded, trying to stop himself from shaking. He hadn't thought about Penny in years. And he kept going over in his head--the sure beating of his heart, and the way his legs had worked like machines, pumping in succession with his arms as he ran. He laughed under his breath and felt tears coming to his eyes. He had been young again. He looked back at Helen, but her smile was gone, replaced with a somewhat glazed look.

Then Maureen began to moan, and Helen shook her head, her eyes clearing. She straightened in her chair, becoming a businesswoman again. "I gave you Package Number Two for your first experience, and none of the Scrubs knew anything was up. You'll be wanting that again, I assume?"

Edgar nodded more vigorously than he intended to. "I don't have money in here with me. I don't know how I would pay."

"Oh, don't worry about that. I don't have anyone pay with money. It's more of a bart—"

"Get away from me!" Maureen screamed, drowning out Helen's words. "I want my babies! Helen gave me my babies and then she took them away." She began to sob, her frail body bending as she hugged herself tightly with her arms. Helen watched the spectacle as if it was nothing more than a program

on the TV, and then continued to speak when Maureen had decreased to an acceptable volume.

"As I was saying, it's more of a barter system. I get what I want, and you get what you want. Much easier than money. Money's exhausting; when I worked in sales all I got was money, and all *that* got me was this." She gestured mindlessly at their surroundings. "I'm sick of it."

"So, what do you want?"

Helen smiled again, and for the first time since Edgar had met her, she looked almost bashful. "I want your necklace," she said, pointing a wizened finger at his chest. Edgar looked down at the gold π and his stomach began to churn.

"My—"

"Yes." Her eyes were clear, calculating. Edgar dropped his gaze to his legs, to his unmoving feet. If he had one of those pills, he would be able to walk again. He would have control. But he couldn't give her his necklace. It meant—well, really, what did it even mean to him anymore? His wife would be angry if she found out that it was gone, but she hadn't visited once since he got here. She probably wouldn't even notice. And he had been planning on giving it to his son, but he seemed wholly disinterested in anything Jewish or anything related to Edgar, so there wasn't really any point in that.

He couldn't seem to find any reason in his mind for keeping it; all he could think about was breathing fresh air through his lungs and walking on his own two legs and kissing Penny in his car, fucking Penny in his car. It had been that old green Chevy that had stopped working after a year. He grinned. And why had they broken up? Maybe she had gotten back together with Jack. He couldn't remember.

"Are you gonna give me an answer? Come on. I'll make it—I'll make it two pills for the necklace. You're killing me here."

Edgar nodded. He lifted the necklace over his head and dropped it into Helen's outstretched hand. Her claws quickly retracted, and the tiny π, along with its chain, disappeared from view.

"I'll switch one of your pills at dinner with Reminall for the next two days," she whispered, and then turned her head back to the TV, smiling about her latest acquisition.

The thought of the Reminall waiting for him made the always-smiling Scrubs and their enthusiasm easier to bear, and he even managed to give a respectful nod at Maureen while she was wheeled by. He made it through the rest of the day in a sort of daze, muttering to himself about Penny and sweat and lipstick and running faster, faster, *faster*. When Blue Scrubs finally handed him his usual seven pills, Helen nodded at him from across the room, and he gave her a short nod back. Almost mechanically, he reached for the water and quickly swallowed everything that was given to him. The room began to

blur around him, and he could feel his heart beating faster and faster with every second.

He blinked his eyes rapidly and was then immediately attuned to the fact that this was quite different from last time. He was sitting alone in a classroom, his classroom from when he taught ninth-grade math at Lindham High School, his back aching slightly from the rigid chair that he was sitting in. Edgar felt a pulse of disappointment when he realized that this memory would not have Penny in it. This quickly faded, however, when he looked at his familiar cluttered desk covered with ungraded papers and the lopsided wooden π that his students had given to him the year before with all their names signed clumsily on it, and the picture of his family that rested on top of three textbooks. He, his wife, and his daughter were all grinning from ear to ear. His son's face, however, was distorted and red, and he looked as if he was attempting to squirm out of his mother's arms. Edgar smiled softly.

He didn't even mind the heat of the stifling classroom. Anything was better than the unbearable chill of SUNNY DAYS SENIOR LIVING. He looked down, and in front of him sat the lesson plan for the day and multiple unfinished seating charts. He was switching up the seating again as some of the students had grown too comfortable with each other, and it had become impossible for them to focus in his class.

"Mr. Applebaum?"

Edgar looked up and saw one of the boys from his fifth-period class standing, timid, in the doorway. "Aaron! How can I help you?"

Aaron inched into the room and looked at Mr. Applebaum while tapping his fingers anxiously against his leg. "I—umm—well, I was just—I got really confused on the homework, and I know that you said that it's really important for the Regents, but I didn't really understand it in class and then I got really confused at home and now I don't have it done and I don't want to not know how to do it for next unit because you said that we would need to know this to do well with that and I really don't want to fail the Regents and I was wondering if maybe you could help me." By the time that Aaron had reached the end of this statement, he was quite out of breath and his entire body was shaking.

Edgar gave him a reassuring smile and covered the seating charts with a textbook that was lying next to him. "I'd be happy to help. And as long as you study and keep doing what you're doing, you should do fine on the Regents. I know you're a hard worker, and this unit is really difficult. We're going to be going over it in class, but come sit here. You'll know it as well as I do by the end of this."

Aaron gave him a disbelieving look but nodded, walking up to the chair next to Edgar's desk with less trepidation than he had had originally.

Edgar smiled at him again and began to take out the worksheet that had been assigned for last night's homework. "Alright. Let's get to it." Edgar began to sketch out a parabola to explain the first problem, and Aaron's hurried questions started to become more relaxed as he understood the concept. After five minutes, he had stopped shaking, and by the time they had been working for twenty, he was almost smiling. Edgar picked up his pen to write one more note on his paper, but as soon as his pen touched something solid, he saw Aaron's body begin to melt into the desk, the blue of his shirt and the pink of his skin slowly solidifying into the wood. Edgar grabbed at him desperately and cried out, but when his arm touched Aaron it began dissolving into the wood and he closed his eyes in horror.

When he opened them again, he was seated at the table the next day for dinner, and his breath was coming out in quick, shuddering gasps. Helen grabbed his arm and whispered, "Calm down! It was just a bit of a reaction. You're fine. You're fine!" Edgar nodded and looked down at his hands. He grasped for his necklace before remembering that it wasn't his anymore. "Quick, relax! Or a Scrub will notice. What did you see?"

Edgar didn't answer for a few seconds, smiling slightly despite himself, despite the horror of the memory's final moments. His voice had been so sure, so confident, so capable. He couldn't remember the last time he had felt certain of anything. "I was—I was a teacher again."

"Alright, you're good. You're good," Helen said, relaxing, her face breaking out into a smile again.

"Where are my pills?" Edgar said in an urgent whisper. "I want to take it now. I need to—I can't be *here*." He hated the desperation in his voice, but he was too shaken to have the ability to mask it.

"Just—just wait a few minutes, okay? Catch your breath again." Edgar nodded, and started to take deeper breaths. He looked at the food on his plate and saw that it was half eaten. Strange. He took a sip of water and then reached up his hand to call someone over to get his usual—

"Edgar! Edgar, honey, you have a phone call!" Pink Scrubs came rushing over to his table, a cellphone in hand.

"Who is it?"

"It's your daughter! Isn't that nice?" she cooed.

"Yes, it's very nice," Edgar said. He took the phone. "Hello?"

"Hey, Dad!"

"Hey, kid. What's going on?"

"I—I just wanted to see how you were doing. I just—I was setting up my classroom today and I was thinking about you." In that moment, Edgar hated her. He hated his daughter more than he had ever hated anyone. He hated her for being able to live memories rather than merely reliving them and dangling that knowledge in front of him as he sat here, useless. "And—I don't know

why, but I was thinking about that time when you took me sledding the first time it snowed that winter when I was like seven because I wanted to go so badly. Remember how pissed Mom was? She was yelling at you about how you could still see the grass on the ground, so there was no way that we could go sledding. But you took me anyway.”

“Yeah, I think I remember.” And then Edgar felt so guilty for his hatred that he couldn’t stand it.

“When we got to that big hill close to the house, we really couldn’t sled because there was only the thinnest coating of snow and the grass was still poking through.” She laughed, and Edgar laughed too, a quiet laugh, but a laugh all the same. “And you said that it didn’t matter, that we could still have a good time. And we stuck out our tongues and caught the falling snow on them and—I don’t know why I was thinking of it but—” and then her voice broke, and Edgar could hear her trying to stifle a sob. “I miss you, Dad.”

“I miss you too.”

“I’m gonna come and visit you really soon, ok? And we can all go out to dinner. But—shit, look, I—I’ve gotta go. I’ve got to make dinner for the kids. But I love you so much, and—”

“I love you too, kid. Talk to you soon.” Edgar handed the phone back to Pink Scrubs and stared straight ahead, his face blank. The nurse handed him his pills with a smile. Edgar took them from her and stared at them for a moment, his hands shaking as he held them up over his half-eaten meal of dry chicken and spaghetti. He wondered vaguely when his daughter would visit. And then he placed one of his pills in his mouth, wincing slightly at the bitter taste as he let it sit for a few seconds, and then swallowed it. And he did the same with the next one and the next one and the next.

“What are you doing?” Helen whispered, her eyes wide. But Edgar didn’t answer. When he finished, Edgar closed his eyes, leaving a certain white pill to dissolve, slowly, on his tongue. When he opened his eyes, he could almost see his daughter standing next to him, her face red with cold, the two of them catching snowflakes with smiles and frozen tongues.

The Fear that Left Me

i've started picking wildflowers every time i go to the bar. three tequila sunrises at sundown while crocodile-eyed townies watch. blackout & legs crumpled to the floor, i'll dream of a sandy motel far away. gag under a splintered smile when strangers call me a walking receipt—three more green tea shots for my rosy cheeks & never ending conversation:

"tell us about yourself!"

i don't remember any september before this. i don't even remember this one. i am a rotting crab apple stuck to the bottom of a shoe. overcooked marshmallow rot. my love is stuck on concrete & in between smokers teeth—i don't want to tell you why. i want to smoke cigars & play pianos & sink into quicksand.

"tell us about yourself."

once i vowed no other love was better than the one that killed. twenty not so hard to swallow pills rushing in—the sperm of a skeleton, like the tadpoles little boys catch in nets—love was pumped out of my stomach into a plastic bag. the sensation was tender but the emotion was cruel. nurses with picket fences mutter:

"what a shame"

like some dumpster diver who finds a broken CD. comforting your family while they cry in the lobby. waiting for your breath to spin (as if dusty records were even worth a listen) the skies were drained. to jump out of the car would be both too easy and too hard, a man with a coffee rim blouse told me:

"do you want to kill yourself?"

maybe. my brother couldn't stop staring at the chemtrails (like a fucking phoebe bridgers song) constant thunder surrounded our haunted house. a reminder from some higher source that the boys on tricycles should cross the street if they want to stay boys.

"do you remember where you were a year ago?"

no. my bedside table reeks of beer. neighbors praise with tylenol-coated authenticity when I'm healthy. this college town is a trial prescription—doctor since birth thinks it will reinvent bones. i'd like to do coke in the bathroom of some crummy dive bar but instead i will read brochure about suicide prevention month.

"what of affection, then?"

new kind of love is caught in the telephone lines above. a tree grows from a stump and i am smiling. stare out my apartment window screen, watch the flies creep in. only act disgusted when my roommates scream. new kind of love does not kill & instead is placed lightly on my tongue. invites her over to do homework—actually does the homework. leaves dying and new relationships cracking autumn skies (like a brick to glass) make an instagram account for new cat: love will kiss my nose.

"and what of me?"

you are the fear that has left me. i wear lemon perfume and kiss glassy lips. become a moonflower, the most romantic of plants. i am not graffiti under a bridge. i will hang in the louvre. i will become a still-life clementine. seal my eyes shut for collarbones and shoulders and spine. laugh under pink midnight sheets and kiss best friends—you will become the shadow. i will become the wildflowers, picked from main street every time i go to the bars.

It Was Your Fault

boys with pocket knives used to carve
their initials into the bark of trees; now they cut
into your flesh. pins sticking in,
a little plush tomato no one can eat;

your grandmother fixed the stitches
after a dare ripped your tube top off & stuffed it
into a bottle, sent out to sea—looking
for the razor in your candy, you forgot
your red solo cup & suddenly

you are an empty plate:
did you put on your coconut cream?
there is no seasoning
in the cupboards of sexual greed,
an oasis of free roofie where you forget
to count your drinks.

your legs were a fabric so silky
they couldn't resist threading their bones in between.
thank your skeleton for hiding
beneath an ugly coat of paint
this weekend when the varsity swim team
decides you are not worth a \$100 fee.

the pixie dust you loved at age five
was laced with a kiss & a sniff

sold your vulva to a group of lucky men.
their guns aimed straight for your head
as the sunlight washed in, all over your face:

you questioned the taste
of their holy communion, confirmed into the religion of pinned down
ecstasy, when broken eyelashes & irresistible drool scabbed your cheeks,
I heard you had to watch their brothers baptize at the sight of your shrunken torso, bent
over a composite of hairy legs & unkempt beards & lighthearted sin.



In The Lane of Memory (digital photograph), Jade Nguyen

13 Days After, While at Work (4 October 2020)

All the sporty folk who
go the distance and
fuck thrice daily
run miles in colorful joggers,
push strollers and cappuccinos
'round the block.

Through the bar's glass—
with jigger and muddled bitters—
I think about my two little boys
and this divorce. A past echoes
with visual aids:

Outside, happy couples hold hands,
tug each other toward the next interest.
Inside, patrons speak softly
with locked, loving eyes.
Others cheer the Cowboys
with a gaze held in duress.

I pour, polish, wipe
a run-down surface,
aim for cleanliness,
and need a deep breath.

An Enquiry concerning Inessential Human Consciousness

!
I think isolation creates time
therefore in considering my life
I am in terms of irrelevance

 defined

as

not absolutely necessary

disconnected

@
which point in time did I begin to focus on
relieving pain and avoiding suffering

as opposed to obtaining knowledge
creating connection
or feeling that every day the sun rises
I am part of an infinitely beautiful swirl

demarcation
ordinal sets
individuation
or quantity

contemporaneous applications include
the assignment of indexable metadata
appended to varying complications of media,
such as tweets, memes,
or direct neural interface qualia

it would be useful to invent the machine
if only we had the time to do so
can you imagine a simulated life?

\$
the tough conversations
rent is due
furloughed
car loan, too

I am lucky to at least have a home
I cannot be alone
regarding this particular concern

%
the rate at which
is of primary concern here
and that is what we mean by
inequality

in the streets
a body's color
is a reliable predictor of future outcomes

Hume says
the future may not always resemble the past

it is time to remove our masks
and put on masks
and rally for *disproportionate* no longer

^

(similar to, but not to be confused with, the logical AND)

in proofreading, *insert here*

but in Latin
caret
means it *lacks*
or to indicate separateness

I fear for my use
in signifying
exponentiation
or as part of an
upward curve

I have been conditioned
to flatten my own height
my whole life

finally
I can find purpose
in staying at home

&
being so small

Sonya Bilocerkowycz's *On Our Way Home from the Revolution:* A Review

People have various identities. There is one's gender identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, sexual identity, and so on. But what does it mean to take pride in one's identity? What defines one's identity? Is it understanding one's own roots? Is it participation in certain cultural events? Is it going to the Ukrainian restaurant in the East Village of Manhattan, or sacrificing relationships to fight in a revolution? In her collection of essays, *On Our Way Home from the Revolution*, Sonya Bilocerkowycz tackles these questions as she explores her identity as a Ukrainian American.

On Our Way Home From the Revolution is comprised of fifteen essays in which Bilocerkowycz pieces out where exactly she fits in the timeline of the Ukrainian Revolution. In doing this, her essays look at family relationships, culturally immersive experiences, and travel to show a changing sense of what it means to be Ukrainian. We are welcomed into Bilocerkowycz's Ukrainian heritage and invited to watch memories of her family (specifically her Busia, which is Ukrainian for grandmother) play out. Busia is a central figure throughout these essays; guiding Bilocerkowycz on her journey of self-discovery from afar. On their relationship, Bilocerkowycz says, "I don't know where Busia ends and

where I begin.” Bilocerkowycz travels to the Ukraine to teach English, where she experiences revolution firsthand.

Extensive research also informs this collection. For instance, “Word Portrait” is a document taken from police files which lists the characteristics of Bilocerkowycz’s grandfather, also known as prisoner No.XXXXXX, who was arrested for betrayal. Bilocerkowycz obtained this through emailing the Ukrainian archives about her grandfather. Other instances of research mixed with speculation are the multiperspectivity that lies in “Duck and Cover.” Bilocerkowycz imagines herself in the shoes of several different people. She imagines herself as Sasha, an eight-year-old student who was present at the time of the 2013 Chelyabinsk meteor. “*Duck and cover* is what your fourth-grade teacher screamed, but what she meant is this is war,” she would say to Sasha. Bilocerkowycz also puts herself in the shoes of Anna Politkovskaya, a Ukrainian journalist who was murdered in an elevator. Bilocerkowycz says, “Ten years later, when my grandmother dies, I will admire her crown of glory and think about where I came from.”

The essays stand alone, but together the effect is one, long story with intertwined characters and once central conflict—a search for identity. The interconnectedness we see between “The Village (Fugue),” “The Village (Reprise),” and “The Village (De Capo)” is a great example of this. All three stories follow Bilocerkowycz’s grandfather, and her journey of discovering his past actions. In “The Village (Fugue),” we are told by Busia about the village elder in the small Ukrainian village, who then becomes Bilocerkowycz’s grandfather who was aiding the Germans in “The Village (Reprise).” Despite what she learns about her grandfather, Bilocerkowycz does not let the facts erase what she feels for this country and her people. In “The Village (De Capo),” she tells the reader “...I am telling my daughter she may go to the revolution. Which means I am telling my granddaughter, too: Yes, of course, leave home and go.”

Bilocerkowycz’s use of vivid imagery makes the reader feel as though they are experiencing life alongside her. With just its title, “I Saw the Sunshine Melting” offers a both innocent and eerie way to describe the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. Bilocerkowycz mentions how many of the bus drivers, one including her great-uncle’s cousin whose name they don’t know, got out as evacuation was occurring and sunbathed, blissfully unaware of radiation poisoning. Readers would also be struck by the imagery in “Encyclopedia of Earthly Things,” a story that is written entirely about Bilocerkowycz’s affiliations with certain words—like the word “poppy,” which she describes as, “Petals of red paper, easily lost. Suggests virginity. The seeds are also like fish eggs.” Each word or object she describes comes along with a resonant image affiliated with her Busia, and although some are sweet, some are brutal, like

“A Sunflower Field,” which she describes as, “...a graveyard. It is a cemetery for Boeing plane parts.”

Though *On Our Way Home from the Revolution* is rich in history, it is not just a collection for history lovers. Unlike history books, Bilocerkowycz immerses readers in another’s life. We come to understand the emotional reckoning Bilocerkowycz has undergone. As much as this is a collection of essays about revolution, it is also about the yearning to discover one’s place in the world. As Bilocerkowycz asks, “Am I just a reflection of a reflection?” It is a collection for readers who desire to open themselves to harsh realities and see how those realities pave ways for new beginnings.

An Interview with Sonya Bilocerkowycz

Sonya Bilocerkowycz is the author of *On Our Way Home from the Revolution* which was the winner of the Gournay Prize. Her nonfiction and poetry have appeared in *Colorado Review*, *Guernica*, *Ninth Letter*, *Image*, *Lit Hub*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and elsewhere. Before completing her MFA at Ohio State, she served as a Fulbright Fellow in Belarus, an educational recruiter in the Republic of Georgia, and an instructor at Ukrainian Catholic University in L'viv. In 2019, she joined the English department at SUNY Geneseo. She is the Managing Editor of *Speculative Nonfiction*.

Gandy Dancer: *On Our Way Home from the Revolution* is very much about history—personal, cultural, and political. It's clear that a lot of research was done. Can you talk about your research? Besides the texts listed at the back of the book, what other forms of research informed your collection?

Sonya Bilocerkowycz: As a nonfiction writer, I absolutely love research and talking about research, so thank you for this question! Archival research was critical for the book, as I was able to locate Soviet-era documentation about my family members, and the information in those NKVD documents altered the course of the book project. I'm really grateful to my Ukrainian friend Marianna who assisted in finding them. It wouldn't have been the same book if we hadn't discovered those few brittle and yellowing pages from the archives.

I returned to Ukraine twice while I was writing the book, in 2017 and 2018, and those trips were also a form of research. There are a series of essays in the book called "The Village," which document excursions to my family's

village in western Ukraine over the years. As a personal essayist, I tend to document everything—snippets of conversation, which flowers are in bloom, the shoes I'm wearing, what the politicians are saying on the radio—and these observations sometimes find their way into the essays. So, I knew when I visited in 2017 and 2018 that it wasn't just for pleasure, that I needed to see what had changed and how I had changed. Being in the village again was important for the manuscript.

GD: Several of the essays, such as “On Our Way Home from the Revolution” and “Duck and Cover,” feature structures separated by different acts. “Samizdat” also has several acts, and you also add side notes of important reflections. What is the significance of the side notes? How do you think this act-like structure lends itself to the themes of identity, history, and memory across the collection?

SB: I like this word “act” you're using, as it reminds me of theater, and I sometimes think of the essays that way. The act-like structure helps me to visualize what each section is accomplishing in terms of emotions and stakes, and then to arrange them in a way that creates maximum tension and revelation for the characters.

“Samizdat,”—a term for banned writing that was circulated underground—is about literature and the political implications of words. I use five books to organize the five acts of the essay, and the side notes you're referring to are actually quotes pulled directly from each of those five books. My vision for the quotes is that they serve as a kind of “underground” text that exists just below the surface of the essay's main text. A few of those five books—Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* and Miłosz's *The Captive Mind*—first appeared underground as samizdat, in fact, since they contained ideas viewed as oppositional by the Communist state. My hope is that the mysterious voices in the pull quotes will raise further questions about who is allowed to write and under what circumstances, and also remind us of the resiliency of words. As Bulgakov tells us, “manuscripts don't burn.”

GD: Can you talk about the order and sequencing of the essays? How did you decide where to begin and which should follow?

SB: *On Our Way Home from the Revolution* begins with the narrator in Ukraine during the 2013-14 Maidan revolution. The events of that year cause a kind of identity crisis for the narrator and prompt her return home, both literally and figuratively. After the revolution, she seeks to better understand what her diaspora family had experienced in Ukraine during the first half of the twentieth century, and the book proceeds in a vaguely chronological manner back to the present day. The penultimate essay in the collection is about the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, which Mikhail Gorbachev said was “perhaps the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union.” I liked the idea of ending the

book on a precipitating event for a different revolution. After all, revolution is a circular word.

GD: I also wanted to touch on the more experimental structure of “Word Portrait,” “Article 54 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR,” and “Encyclopedia of Earthly Things.” To me, these essays provide a brief break in the overall narrative structure, while still informing the reader about important cultural and historical moments. Was this your intention for these essays?

SB: I think that’s a helpful characterization. The first two listed are documents-as-essays, and while they are involved in the narrative plot, the reader doesn’t really understand that until the end of the book. I planted them earlier, however, hoping readers would revisit and view them differently once they learned about the accusations against the narrator’s great-grandfather.

“Encyclopedia of Earthly Things” explores the process of cultural mythmaking. Despite the fact that much of the book is invested in deconstructing idealized myths, the narrator still feels some urge to participate in mythmaking. Perhaps because she is an artist—she can’t help herself. It’s a really indulgent essay, full of cultural shorthand, references, superstition, and it was written with a Ukrainian reader in mind. In that sense, it is a respite from the larger narrative plot, though its themes are still very much entwined.

GD: I noticed you use a lot of repetition—certain words, phrases, and ideas. The first phrases that stood out to me are “I was a tourist in the revolution” and “we fought for two years.” Also, there is the rainbow—or *veselka*—and the way it creates a full circle in more than one essay. I believe that these images served to emphasize important ideas throughout the text. For example, *veselka*, or a rainbow, is described as a “full circle,” which I think is important because it signifies how the narrator goes through a cycle in discovering who they are. The narrator starts in one place, and while she does learn new things about herself and her history, she ends up in the same place of love for Ukraine. Was this your intention?

SB: Absolutely. As I said earlier, revolution is a circular word. The state will continue to disappoint, the people will continue to rise up, etc. I knew the collection was going to have many recurring elements, though I believe there is still growth and change, specifically for the narrator. While the circumstances in the beginning are really similar to the circumstances at the end, it’s not totally cynical because the narrator herself is not the same. In repeating words and phrases, I sought to mimic this larger truth on the level of the sentence. Ideally, the reader experiences the repeated image differently with each encounter, even if it’s just a slight variation. The word (or the world) may be the same, but you are not. The narrator still loves Ukraine, but that love is

matured and nuanced because she has had to grapple with Ukraine as both victim and perpetrator.

GD: In “Samizdat,” you mention that you “take it for granted that writing is an art and not politics.” Later in that essay, you also mention how writing is not just “safe” or “expressive.” When and how did you come to this realization about writing? Was it a gradual realization or a particular moment like your essay being republished during your time in Belarus?

SB: Experiencing political pressure in Belarus because of something I wrote was perhaps my first personal encounter—and a relatively minor one—with this phenomenon, though it continues to ring truer and truer. In the decade since I lived in Belarus, I’ve become obsessed with the work of Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist who was murdered in 2006 for her reporting. I’ve become obsessed with the work of James Baldwin, a Black American writer surveilled by the FBI in the 1960s and 70s. (The bureau’s Baldwin file was 1,884 pages total.) Writing is dangerous, though of course these are only the most dramatic examples. There are many who face quieter forms of repression for their words which challenge the status quo. I now understand that all writing is political, even if it does not explicitly address politics.

GD: The essays titled “The Village” seem to serve as turning points in the collection, especially if you look at the rest of their titles: “Fugue,” “Interlude,” “Reprise,” and “Da Copa.” There is generally a return to Ukraine—to Marina and Yarosh—and a discovery of information that affects you, such as knowledge of Marina’s death or the guilt of what your great-grandfather may have done. They seem to serve as an emotional arc, kind of like a circle, of the narrator realizing that she has discovered what the revolution means to her, especially in the end when she tells her granddaughter it is okay to go. How do these essays serve the emotional arc of the narrative?

SB: Interestingly, I’ve never had an interviewer ask about all of the “The Village” essays at once, and so I really appreciate your question. For the narrator, the rural village where her grandmother was born and raised is a touchstone for her own Ukrainian identity. It seemed appropriate then, in a book trying to sort through the complexities of that identity, to use the village as a physical stage for the tensions and questions the narrator is working through. The narrator wants so desperately to belong to this place that was her grandmother’s and yet she learns that true belonging comes with incredible trauma and guilt, things that she had been sheltered from to some extent. This is really the emotional climax of the book.

The book also has a lyrical bent and the village essays lean heavily into poetic symbolism. The river Ikva, the eggshell-blue headstones, the storks on the telephone pole, last year’s pig, this year’s poppies—the village images

are established in these essays, and they form their own emotional thread through the text.

GD: Several times through the text, you come back to the phrase, “a reflection of a reflection” in regard to the idea of memory. Memory is just one the major themes, along with identity and history, that consistently appear throughout the collection. In the titular essay, you write, “I still do not know who I am to this revolution, so I do not write my name on a brick.” Since completing this collection and having time to reflect since its publication, how would you answer this question today. Who are you within this ongoing revolution? What do you hope your collection teaches readers from around the world?

SB: I hope readers will be urged to examine their own complicity in unjust systems. I think that’s what I know now that I didn’t know before writing the book: that I am personally implicated in evil. Historian Timothy Snyder, who studies Nazism and Stalinism, instructs us to take responsibility for the face of the world because “the symbols of today enable the realities of tomorrow.” Today, I am trying to take responsibility for words and through words.

GD: It has been difficult for many writers to find inspiration for their work during these turbulent times. How has the state of the world affected your writing? What are you currently working on?

SB: It’s been a really hard year, hasn’t it? I’ve found myself reading a lot of Black feminist writers and abolitionists, and their ideas are having a huge impact on my work. For example, an essay draft I started two years ago about a prison in Ohio, and which I never really knew what to do with, is now revealing itself to be an essay about prison abolition. This fall I wrote an essay about police arresting jaywalkers in Belarus (sometimes called Europe’s last dictatorship) and about U.S. police arresting Black Americans for jaywalking. My current writing is deeply preoccupied with police power, what Walter Benjamin calls an “all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states.” This is a logical development in my work, since *On Our Way Home from the Revolution* was invested in the question of why people become agents of state violence.

Searching for 360

In Google Maps, I still live in Rochester. Zoom in on my old apartment in Street View and you'll see my silver Neon parked outside. It's November 2015, and it looks like midday—the sun is high, my neighbors have gone to work, and there are barely any cars parked on our street. The park across from our house is empty.

Click on Rochester, NY in Google Maps and a link pops up with photos to explore. Many are just regular photographs, but there's a growing number of 360 images, too. Among the first is a 360 of High Street. Here, in Google Maps, it's October 2015, and we are in the Northeast quadrant. It's a residential area of the city, not far from where I once worked. Zoom in and you'll see a woman sitting on her front porch. Five pumpkins are arranged on the porch steps in descending size order. The woman stares at her hands—holding a phone, perhaps? You can't zoom in far enough to see for sure. You wonder what she is thinking about—kids, a partner, a job—but Google doesn't say. Down the street, a child rides a bike, feet permanently frozen on the pedals.

Not long after I move to Pennsylvania for graduate school, I start making 360 videos. At first, it's for a class. A friend and I, partnered up by our professor, leave the city and drive an hour southeast through rural Pennsylvania. I've just moved to Pittsburgh; he's grown up here. We stop at a middle-of-nowhere town, where the fire station doubles as a community center and bar. We've heard rumors of a UFO that crashed here back in the 1960s, and we want to use 360 to capture this place and the story that remains. We set out to learn more, camera in hand.

In Google Maps, I exist, but only in fragments.

Here, in Google Maps, outside my apartment in Rochester, it is November 2015 and I have not yet moved for graduate school. But when I type in the address of the office where I once worked, it is 2017 and I have already left. On South Ave, it is the summer before I leave, and I am at a bar with my friends, sitting around a fire out back. You can't see it, but my roommate throws darts at a board nailed to a tree. Scroll down the street, however, and we flash forward to 2018. Here, in Google Maps, I still exist, scattered across a city I no longer call home. But each time the Google car drives by, bits and pieces of the life I used to live disappear.

When I try to explain to my family what a 360 video is, I tell them to picture themselves in Google Maps. Inserted into a string of still photos taken at street level by Google's fleet of camera-equipped cars, you can walk around, toggle yourself left or right, up or down. Stroll through the street as if you are actually there.

But Google didn't create virtual reality. The concept of VR predates the term: in the nineteenth century, artists painted 360-degree murals that filled the audience's entire field of view. Robert Baker, an Irish artist, used the term *panorama* to describe his cylindrical paintings. Derived from the Greek *pan* ("all") and *horama* ("view"), panoramic paintings allowed the viewer to feel present in the scene depicted—often, an historical event. They allowed the viewer to step into the past, even if just for a moment.

In Google Maps, I type in the address of my grandparents' old home. Out front, it is 2013 and they have not yet sold their house. The red cardinal my grandmother painted onto the mailbox is still there; their last name handwritten on the sign above it. In Google Maps, I am relegated to the street, but if I zoom in close enough I can see a shadow standing by the first-floor window. In this version of reality, my grandparents still live at home. There are no assisted living facilities, doctors offices, or long-awaited phone calls to see which, if either, will remember me on any particular day. In Google Maps, their car is still parked in the driveway, a Christmas wreath hanging from the front door.

In the small Pennsylvania town I visit with my friend, in Google Maps, it is still 2008. The fire station has not yet turned into a bar, and the parking lot

is empty. In real life, we talk to the bartender and locate the spot where the UFO supposedly crashed. As I drive past, my partner sticks the camera out the car window to record. We interview locals and add soundbites to the film. We want the viewer to explore the area alongside us; we want them to make their own decisions about what happened, and why, and how the community reacted. In 360, the audience becomes a participant. In 360, it seems like anything is possible. Nothing is out of reach.

In Google Maps, I visit the house of a friend who died of a drug overdose. I scroll down the street to my grandparents' home; my childhood home; the first apartment I ever lived in. I visit the places I used to work, and the versions of myself I used to be.

But there's more to Google Maps than just my own past. When I'm bored, at home, in the attic apartment I've recently moved into in Pittsburgh, I log onto Google Maps and explore the streets of cities I've never been and likely won't ever go. I'm not sure why. Maybe, it's the digital equivalent of being a fly on the wall of a room I don't have access to or maybe, it's a form of voyeurism. On the news, I hear the names of countries and cities I've never visited and I want to know more than what's edited into soundbites. On TV the news is always bad but here, in Google Maps, life at least appears to keep moving.

In Aleppo, Syria, it is July 2017 and a user named Mahmoud Marshaha has uploaded a 360 inside of a children's clothing store. A sign on the wall declares "no smoking!" in Turkish. The store looks brand new: the floors are shiny; ceiling lights reflect back at us. Someone has stacked dozens of shirts individually wrapped in plastic on the floor into neat piles. Tiny, brightly colored shirts hang off the racks mounted to the wall. One has an image of a smiley face emoji wearing a bowler hat, SMILE written in all caps underneath. A man in a blue button-down shirt stands behind the counter. I see outlines of people walking down the street through the store windows in front of me.

Google Street View could never produce an image like this: Google isn't allowed inside of buildings or stores. But private citizens are. In recent years, Google Maps has given users the ability to upload their own 360 images. We're no longer relegated to the street. Now, we can navigate restaurants and stores and the insides of people's bedrooms. In Google Maps, there is life, splayed out on the internet for anyone to see.

In Google Maps, there are still mistakes. I type in the address of my first apartment in Pittsburgh, click on Street View, and am teleported to a different Portland Street in a different city. This street is not my street; that house was never my home. I'm on a highway staring up at a truck; I'm looking at a field where there should be houses. In Google Maps, I try to visit an apartment I once stayed at in Germany. I don't remember the address, but I search for the mosque I remember next door. I find the mosque, click on Street View, and suddenly I'm in Istanbul. In Google Maps, the road we choose isn't always the road we take.

After I start shooting in 360, I fall in love with the form. Because of its possibilities, and because of what I think is a controlled surrender: the ability to showcase a scene in its entirety, raw and unedited. But I am searching for a 360 that doesn't exist, a medium that lets me tell a story that's not in fragments. What I don't understand is that a photo, even in 360, is just a stage. Behind every door there is a loaded gun; a crashed spaceship; a person casting a shadow. The most interesting part of a story is always just out of frame.

In Google Maps, lives are captured, but never fully. When I log into Google Maps, I see an archive of the places I've been. Every time I use the GPS on my phone to navigate somewhere new, it remembers. Coffee shops and stores and friends' houses. Cities in other states and countries. But the list isn't complete: there are homes I've navigated to without GPS; places I no longer need Google Maps to find. For now, I can go back in time and trace my life through Rochester, or visit cities I've never been to but would like to know. But these are just fragments of reality, digitized—never a whole life.

In my real life, it is 2020 and I am teaching college students from a desk in the corner of my bedroom. Outside, Pittsburgh brakes to a halt due to a pandemic that no one saw coming. But in Google Maps, time has not caught up: I scroll through the streets of Manhattan to Times Square, and a crowd of visitors line the big red steps; down the street, a double-decker tour bus stops at a traffic light. No one wears masks. In Google Maps, there is the recent past and the further past but nowhere is there the present: click here, and I am shooting darts at a board nailed to a tree in Rochester; click here, and I am walking past a mosque in Germany; here, and I am sitting around a fire with my friends.

In my real life, I press pause. I haven't left my neighborhood in over a week. Instead, I log onto Google Maps and think of all the places I'll go

once it's safe. I've never been to California but here, in Google Maps, I can pretend. I am on a beach in Santa Monica; I am on a mountain at Yosemite; I am walking through downtown LA. In Google Maps, I watch the sun rise and set and rise again. In Google Maps, I don't need a plane to travel.

Sometimes I wonder how many other people log onto Google Maps, just like I do when I'm bored at home sitting in my attic apartment. Do they explore the images others have uploaded? Do they search the maps of their lives, jumping from apartment to apartment, neighborhood to neighborhood, city to city? Do they consider all the places they will go once the pandemic is over? What do they see? What is remembered? And what—old homes, former selves, a shadow of a family member just out of frame—can never be traced?

About the Authors

MALACK AL-HARAIZEH is pursuing her last year as an English education major at SUNY Oneonta. When she isn't writing, she is dancing or awaiting One Direction's reunion. Malack is from Pine Bush, NY.

LAUREN BERKEY is a current freshman at SUNY Oneonta. She's always had an interest in photography and won her high school's award for the best work in photography. In her free time, she's either with friends or taking photos (frequently both).

ELLIE CASTERLINE is a senior at Binghamton University working towards a BA in English with a concentration in creative writing. Her early kindergarten acrostic poetry showed promise (E is for Eagle, L is for Lion, L is for Lamb, etc.), but her current work grapples with feminism and the strife of misogyny...so, maybe not too far off from before.

ABIGAIL CORNELIA is a junior at Binghamton University pursuing a bachelor's degree in English as well as philosophy, politics, and law. She is a former intern for the Binghamton Poetry Project, a literary service program located in Broome County. Abigail is native to Long Island, New York, where she spends her time scribbling in library books and cleaning trash from the beaches.

KAYLA EYLER is currently writing poetry and moping around at SUNY Geneseo. She likes vampires, women, tofu, and fresh air. When she isn't bothering her roommate, she can be found gazing longingly out her apartment window to the parking lot or making a pasta meal.

KIEL M. GREGORY lives and tends bar in Sackets Harbor, NY, and studies English literature, creative writing, and philosophy at SUNY Oswego. He has served as guest editor for the North Country Writers Festival and managing editor for Jane's Boy Press. His prose and verse appear in *Lips*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *aaduna*, *Furrow*, *Audeamus*, and elsewhere. In addition to writing, his interests include skydiving, cooking, photography, and reading classic and contemporary speculative fiction. Visit kielmgregory.com for more.

JULIA GRUNES is a sophomore at SUNY Geneseo. She is majoring in psychology and English (creative writing). When she isn't writing or doing schoolwork, she's likely doing something music-related.

SARAH HOLSBERG is a senior at the State University of New York at Geneseo, studying early childhood education and English (creative writing). As a writer, she is interested in the intersection of the personal, the

political, and the creative. She plans on traveling across the world, teaching in a New York City school, and writing professionally.

ISABELLA HIGGINS is a senior English (literature) and psychology major at SUNY Geneseo. She is an avid supporter of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the mobilization and unification of people who believe BIPOC deserve far more. She hopes to study civil rights law after graduating from college.

MIRA JAEGER is a first-year student at SUNY Geneseo. They participate in creative writing, film, and visual art.

TANYA KORICHKOVA is a senior applied math major at SUNY Geneseo. She spends her time between Geneseo and Redlands, California, where she was raised after immigrating from Bulgaria at the age of six.

KAILEY MAHER is a BFA student concentrating in ceramics and sculpture at SUNY Plattsburgh. She works primarily in stoneware, alabaster and bronze. Her pieces reflect the effects of time—shaping and reshaping—not in minutes and seconds, but a living lifetime of transformative movements of expansions and contractions.

MASON MARTINEZ is a senior majoring in creative writing and public relations at Purchase College. They mostly write science fiction and fantasy. When they're not writing or studying, they're either working at an indie bookstore, devouring unhealthy amounts of coffee, or caring for small animals.

MICK MCMAHON is a third-year English major at SUNY Oneonta hailing from Westchester, NY. He has had a passion for writing since he was young and is hoping to pursue a career in it after graduating. When not writing, he enjoys drawing, studying wicca, and watching an entire TV series in one sitting. He's an avid activist for LGBTQ+ causes, and much of his work surrounds his experiences as a transgender, queer man.

JENNA MURRAY is a junior at SUNY Geneseo studying English (creative writing) and communication (journalism & digital media). When she is not writing, she spends her time focusing on photography, music, and traveling. You can find her attempting to skateboard around Geneseo, or playing with her cat, Suki.

JADE NGUYEN is a senior BFA candidate at SUNY Plattsburgh with concentrations in photography and graphic design. She also studies web design and programming. An international student from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, her photography focuses on fabricating and presenting a reality that is different from what we see every day.

MIRANDA PHILLIPS is a junior creative writing major at SUNY Oswego. When she's not writing, she can be found hiking with her rescue dog, riding horses, or dreaming of her life as a novelist in beautiful Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Born in the Bronx but raised in the Caribbean for the majority of her life, WINOSHA STEELE was introduced to art at the age of five. Her earlier years were filled with bliss and creative adrenaline. Now, Steele's vision is to expand her

artistic horizons while embracing her Antiguan heritage. Her hope is that her art will compel people to question their notions of black history

MOLLY R. SULLIVAN has been all the way to Japan in her studies. When she is not focused on working toward her degree, Molly bakes, paints, and gets lost looking at the animals in her neighborhood. In her time at SUNY Oswego she was a teaching assistant and aspires to go to graduate school to study history. Her writing has appeared in the *Great Lake Review*.

BRITT TRACHTENBERG is a freshman at SUNY Purchase, where she hopes to graduate with a BA in creative writing. Her poems have been published in various magazines such as *Urban Galaxy*. Her favorite poet is Mary Oliver.

KATHRYN WARING is an essayist and multimedia writer based in Pittsburgh, PA. Her work has appeared in *Essay Daily*, *The Normal School*, and *American Literary Review*, among others. She is a proud SUNY Geneseo alumna ('15) and former managing editor of *Gandy Dancer*.

MISTY YARNALL is a creative writing major at Purchase College. She has an AA in creative writing and an AA in English from Monroe Community College. Her publications can be found in *The Roadrunner Review*, *KAIROS Literary Magazine*, *Litro Magazine*, *The Merrimack Review*, *The Finger*, and *Gandy Dancer*. Misty is working on a novel.