riprap journal 36

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EDWIN'S FRIDAY NIGHT

HOLLY PAINTER

1.

It's nearly 5 o'clock.

Charles and Toby will be here soon with the sandwiches and beer.
They always show up together.
30 years ago, we would have teased them
and wondered if their constant bickering
was just a cover-up for something else.
But Toby doesn't see so well these days.
Charles picks him up.

I've got the American Idol tape,
Tuesday and Wednesday both.
We always watch them back-to-back, marathon-style,
sometimes arguing or shushing each other when our favorites come on,
sometimes laughing at the ones with wretched voices or bizarre choreography,
sometimes sitting quietly.

We don't bother to fast-forward through
commercials or the recap segments.

No one wants Friday night to end early.

2.

It's hard all week not to find out what's happened.
I have to avoid certain sections of the paper
and try not to look at the billboard on Pico
where they cross out the hopeful faces as they go.

They're so young,
all of them under thirty,
just kids, really.

There's one who looks like Robert from certain angles
with his loose curls, long lashes, and faint moustache.
He wears tight jeans and shadowy pressed shirts.
When he dances, I feel shy and helpless and ashamed.
He's so young.

But so was Robert.

3.

Robert, Robert.

He had eyelashes so long
that even when he squeezed his eyes completely shut
the tips of the lashes still poked out.
And I'd twist his hair up in my fingers, gasping
while he laughed at the undignified spasms
I never learned to control.

Robert would have laughed at this, too:
the three of us sitting here Friday nights with
this teenybopper television rubbish
and the boy with the long eyelashes
though not quite as long as his own.

He'll be crossed out soon too, just like all the rest
and Friday night will be just Toby, Charles, and me again.

4.

Robert would laugh, but Robert never had to get old.
It was the only prospect he hated more than dying.
"We're too beautiful for age spots and cardigans," he said.
And we were. We were all beautiful then.
But I don't miss my young body.
I only miss him.

And it's selfish, I know, but I'd rather have him here,
old and dying slowly, just a year at a time
watching young men shimmy and shake on these shows
and dropping off, one this week, and one the next.

K-TOWN

CONOR MCNAMARA

Pink lights sprinkle the walls of the club below the Hanmi Bank.
Asian businessmen gamble and talk in groups by the ATM.
The strippers look young and timid, small; one peels her top off while the other trails behind with a dishrag and bottle of disinfectant.
I move closer—she's got a tattoo of a boat and anchor on her ass—and wonder if her father used to fish like mine, if she's ever had a pen pal, or kissed a boy on a school bus.
A man cuts himself on a bottle.
My cell phone starts to blink.
An argument breaks out in Korean.
I imagine that she sees only the tops of our heads—thin hair slicked back with expensive oils—but when the lights come on, she can see straight through us, see the cufflinks and billfolds, the wedding bands and blood smeared across oak tabletops.

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER

MEGAN GRANT

When dust was flavored
like fruit snacks and my eyes
clung to the sand under

my feet as they waved off the end
of the tractor moving an acre
an hour, my whole family

fermenting in the stoic heat
like our neighbor's wine. (We stuck
to raisin peddling) I pretended to be

Ruth as I gleaned, leaning out over
the dirt flicking through the green limbs
to pluck the dime-sized grapes,

forgotten. Hearing the *pit fshhh pit*
of the plump wax paper thrown by
my cousins and brothers over

the vines into the wooden bins
as my parents sifted through
the purpled produce, I feared

the red of the ash rising from the last
burn pile, flitting through the cloud
the wheels had flung up. Popping

a grape salted with earth,
I raised myself off the trailer
when we rounded the row

deadlifting the bushels
by my seat to take to Gran,
the sound of Papa's whistled

aubade lost in the growl
of the engine as it yanked
their braced bodies away.

LANDSCAPE WITH DEAD FISH

BRIAN CLIFTON

The snake's coiling onyx sheen wrapped
the snapped fishing line of its own flick

around sunfish, carp, baby bass bodies.
They bobbed— mouths approximating
that hollow before syllables. They wore

the throats my fishing hook had shred.

Above the water, the mating caddisflies
gauzed the boat's hull with a brittle, oily
iridescence. It was a type of symmetry:

a cast line pulled taut then a floating fish,
a snake's tail then the lake deep with sunset.

FROM

BRIEF EULOGIES FOR LOST SPECIES

DANIEL HUDON

THE SHRUB FROGS OF SRI LANKA

The sun touched you
once in that forest. You glowed,
then you were gone.
—Zilka Joseph, The Kenyon Review, *2012*

The ubiquitous tinkling calls of the shrub frogs of the genus
Philautus help to characterize the forests of tropical Asia.
—Meegaskumbura et al., Zootaxa, *2007*

Around Sri Lanka's central mountains and in the "wet zone", before the tea and rubber plantations, before the cinchona and coffee plantations, trees populated the slopes of the mountains and gathered in rain forests. In these forests were twenty-one species of frogs who are only known today from specimens collected in the last century, often more than one hundred years ago. Once they sang in the forests, by day and night, touched by the sun and rain, now they are mute in jars in museums. Among them,

one *(Adenomus kandianus)* was named after Kandy, the ancient city in the highlands,

one *(Nannophrys guentheri)* was named after zoologist Albert Gunther, whose descriptions of thousands of species influenced the work of Darwin and Wallace,

one *(Philautus dimbullae)* was named for the tea growing region,

one *(P. eximius)* for its strikingly unusual pale-yellow coloring,

one *(P. extirpo)* for being already extinct,

one *(P. malcolmsmithi)* for herpetologist Malcolm Smith, both a field naturalist and museum man,

one *(P. nanus)* for being small,

two *(P. nasutus and P. oxyrhynchus)* for their sharp or pointed snouts,

one *(P. pardus)* for its leopard-like spots,

one *(P. maia)* from the Greek word for 'good mother', as she was found protecting a clutch of eggs under her stomach,

one *(P. rugatus)* for its wrinkled skin,

and one *(P. zal)*, according to its discoverers, named as a way "to express our sadness and frustration at the loss of so many Sri Lankan amphibians", from the Polish word, *zal*, for a sadness or regret, a burning hurt, like a howling inside you that
is so unbearable that it breaks your heart.

THE CHILE DARWIN FROG

-Rhinoderma rufum

He blends into the forest floor like a dead leaf. He is immobile, as big as a thumbnail. When prey crawl too close, he strikes quickly with his sticky tongue. When threatened, he rolls over and plays dead. His world contains a slow-moving stream in the forest, perhaps a bog. He likes to bask in the sun. After she lays eggs, he swallows them and incubates them in his vocal sac. Six weeks later, he convulsively produces offspring from his mouth and they hop away. His call rings out like a tiny bell.

THE COQUIS OF PUERTO RICO

At night, the male coqui sings for his mate. He sings from the trees, from mountain streams and waterfalls, from lowland mud-banks and from inside bromeliads. Sometimes, in his singing, he duels another male in a territorial sing-off. All over Puerto Rico, from dusk till dawn, you can hear the two-note song of this tiny tree frog. It is a lullaby for the locals, who fall asleep to the chorus, the subject of songs and poems, paintings and petroglyphs, a symbol for the island and a badge of honor: *I'm as Puerto Rican as a coqui,* they say. The quickest way to make a Puerto Rican homesick is to imitate the high-pitched call: "ko-kee, ko-kee".

But the Web-footed coqui *(Eleutherodactylus karlschmidti)*, one of the largest coquis on the island, hasn't been heard since 1974. The golden coqui *(E. jasperi)*, one of the smallest coquis, no bigger than a dime, lived hidden in the base of bromeliads and hasn't been heard since 1981. The little-known mottled coqui *(E. eneida)* hasn't been heard since 1990.

RABB'S FRINGE-LIMBED TREE FROG

-Ecnomiohyla rabborum

In the mountains of Panama, one could hear males calling for females throughout the year. If a call drew the wrong kind of attention, the frog could leap from the tree and use its large webbed hands and feet to glide safely to the ground.

Discovered in 2005, only a single male was heard, but not seen, calling in 2007, and none have been heard since.

Said Joe Mendelson, the discoverer, "This one we caught just before it went off the planet."

A captive breeding program at the Atlanta Zoo has failed.

interview:
CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

INTERVIEWED BY SHANE EAVES

Photo: *Matt Valentine*

Christopher Buckley was a Guggenheim Fellow in Poetry for 2007-2008, has received two NEA grants and a Fulbright Award in Creative Writing, four Pushcart Prizes, and was awarded the James Dickey Prize for 2008 from *FIVE POINTS* Magazine, the William Stafford Prize in Poetry for 2012 from *Rosebud,* and he is the 2013 winner of the Campbell Corner Poetry Contest. His nineteenth book of poetry, *Varieties of Religious Experience,* is published by Stephen F. Austin State Univ. Press, 2013. *Back Room at the Philosophers' Club* is due in 2014.

Riprap: To start off broadly, what is it that attracts you to poetry?

Christopher Buckley: My father and mother were both singers; he was a DJ and later ran a radio station, so music and words were almost hard-wired into my synapses early on. Growing up in the '50s I heard ballads on the car radio, at home on the Hi-Fi all the time, and even if I was not consciously listening, my brain was imprinted. I still know most all the lyrics to the popular music of the '40s and '50s. English was my favorite subject in grammar and high school, and I knew the lyrics to all the rock n roll 45s that I collected as well as everything Dylan wrote in the '60s. Back in the day, writing poems was a regular assignment in grammar school. At some point, I saw it was a way to try to make sense of my life as well. And I was a surfer, beginning at about age 12. There were only two surf magazines at the time and one day opening the new issue of *Surf Guide* in the liquor store, I found a center fold-out of a perfect wave and inscribed inside the wall of the wave was a stanza from "The Garden of Proserpine" by Swinburne. I think I was 14 then and his grand music and dramatic diction swept me away. It's one of the few pieces of poetry I still have committed completely to memory. And hearing William Stafford read at my college when I was 19 had a big effect. Up to that time I was writing encoded and inco-

herent poems, that I thought were marvelous in their private and obscure imagery. Hearing Stafford's poems showed me that you could write clearly and directly about your life.

Riprap: How, if at all, has your attraction and relationship to poetry changed over the years?

Buckley: I don't know that it has really. Certainly it deepens and intensifies. The more you read and acquire, in a sense, the more you know and don't know—you bring more history and possibility to bear on your writing and reading, and at the same time you become increasingly aware of how much more there is to understand, how many more ways of saying there are. Certainly every time I see another theory-driven disjointed language-poem, I turn back centuries to Po Chu I or the Aztec poems Peter Everwine has so wonderfully translated, or to Szymborska or Milosz, or to Stanley Kunitz. I guess I realize the essential value of clear and human speech more than I did as a young poet.

Riprap: Who were your favorite poets growing up, and who do you find yourself reading and enjoying at the moment?

Buckley: The best and most important over the last thirty years is Philip Levine, along with Peter Everwine. Everwine's new book, *Listening Long and Late,* just out from the Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, is beautiful, incredible. I think Levine's *New Selected Poems* is a book every beginning poet should own. Charles Wright has been an inspiration from my early days onward. James Wright, Stanley Kunitz, Stafford, Wm. Matthews, Gerald Stern, Wislawa Szymborska, Milosz, Vallejo, Neruda, Machado, Lorca, Hernandez, Amichai, Mary Oliver, and especially Larry Levis... More recently, Jack Gilbert's *Refusing Heaven,* Adam Zagajewski's selected, Robert Wrigley's *Earthly Meditations* and Mark Jarman's *Bone Fires*. Fleda Brown's last two or three books are amazing, and

Diane Wakoski has a new book, Bay of Angels which I am reading with great pleasure. I continue to enjoy my late friend, Luis Omar Salinas' *ELEGY FOR DESIRE,* and next fall Tebot Bach will bring out a New Selected Poems & Reader of his work that Jon Veinberg and I have edited. And there is one of my favorite poets, Veinberg—a poet who avoided academia and po-biz networking and yet has produced great work more should know about. His *The Speed Limit of Clouds* from C&R press is an amazing book, and he has a new book coming from Lynx House Press in 2014, *Angels at Bus Stops.*

Riprap: What do you feel are some of the key differences between writing prose poems and free verse poems? Are your strategies different when composing a prose poem than a free verse poem? Are your goals different?

Buckley: Another of my favorite poets is Gary Young, one the most eminent prose poets in the U.S. We co-edited a big text on prose poems, *Bear Flag Republic: Prose Poems and Poetics from California.* Gary has written many essays on the prose poem and one thing I have always found interesting that he says is that he finds it harder to lie in a prose poem than in a lined poem. I suspect that is largely true, though my inclination for exaggeration and invention goes far beyond Gary's.

My strategies initially are not different. I mean, I do not sit down at my desk one morning and say, Today, I will write a prose poem, though I have my students do that. And when I do, I am trying to have them become aware of the advantages of that form, for it is just one more possibility open to someone writing poetry. I ask them to look for and listen to the longer rhythms, usually the rhythm of the sentence as opposed to a shorter rhythm of a phrase, or say a three-beat line. I have them see that a more associative way of moving in the poem is possible—events, images, observations can be more paratactic. The prose poem is capacious, more inclusive.

And yet it has to embody all of the other elements of poetry. Written in prose paragraphs, it is subversive, and exudes an aura of "truth" simply by its form. Also, I think the prose poem form allows a poet to deal with more sensational or emotional subject matter that if placed in a lined poem might seem too self-conscious, mannered.

I like that, for me at least, the prose poem accommodates more rant, more political salvos fired into the world. Finally, it is a matter of Voice for me. When I hear that voice that is freighted with more irony, anger, humor, I realize it is usually leading me in the direction of a prose poem.

Riprap: How does a poem typically begin for you? Do you start with an image, word, or something different altogether?

Buckley: These days, poems usually begin from notes, lines scribbled on pieces of paper I keep in a book I am reading, or it starts in notebooks when I have had more time to jot down some images or lines. There was a time in my 30s I can remember keeping a notebook in which ideas/strategies/structures for poems would come to me almost whole—what in sports is called "being in the zone." I was fortunate for a spell there, having a consistent block of time to think about poems and write them. The overall metaphorical connection would strike me and I would come up with a title, opening lines and the conclusion, and just draw an arrow or line down the middle of the page instructing myself to fill that in when I got back to my typewriter—yes that far back, no computers. But that did not last of course, and like most I think, I work from notes and lines, assembling them on the legal pad or computer when I have longer stretches of time and then working out the subject and meaning. Often just discovering the overarching title puts me on the right track.

Riprap: How much time do you set aside for writing? Do you have a schedule that you adhere to?

Buckley: Well, I am retired from full-time teaching now, though I will be teaching a workshop for the College of Creative Studies at UCSB in the winter. So I have more time than I used to. I remember the *AWP Writers Chronicle* publishing part of a speech Jane Kenyon gave at the conference, advice to writers really. And I think the most important thing she said in her list was "Work regular hours."

This is especially important for the first five to ten years you are writing. But always it seems, I tried to start to work first thing in the morning, when the energy is there, when the brain is fresh and something might come to you. I still do that. Though over the last couple years I find myself also working in the late afternoon, after other jobs or chores are done, after the treadmill at the gym.

At this point, it is easier to catch as catch can with writing time for me—I have a fairly well developed voice and strategies. But certainly I try to write every day, which is mostly revising really, and I try to get going in the morning, first thing.

Riprap: How do you decide when a poem is ready to be sent out for publication?

Buckley: This is a good question. In short, I rely on others. You would think I would have this down by now.

My 20th book is due in the spring. But unless you are a genius, you cannot just trust yourself. Writing is schizophrenic, especially for poetry that has so few real rewards. So you have to believe you *are* a genius, that your rough or first few drafts are brilliant, or you would not keep coming back to the table. Then, you have to switch hats and be a rigorous editor. If you do this faithfully, it could take six months to a year and half to get a poem finished. This is why you have workshops, established poets teaching them. When they tell you it is ready to send out, it usually is. But once you are out of grad school, you need a couple friends upon whom you can rely to be rigorous and tell you when something is no good. One of the biggest assets to be had in an MFA program is making a

friend or two whom you can trust over the years not to lie to you. Later in his career, Philip Levine used to trade poems with Larry Levis; Larry was a former student but he was the singular talent of his generation, perhaps of many generations. Phil knew Larry would not pull punches even though Phil had been his teacher and was a celebrated poet. In the MFA program at Irvine I met Gary Young and Jon Veinberg and the two of them see everything I write—bless their selflessness and endurance—and I send nothing out that has not had editorial scrutiny by one or the other or both. I write ten to fifteen drafts of a poem, ship it off for comment, then write fifteen to twenty more drafts, usually.

Every few years, a poem will go through them, receive six months or a year of work from me and I still have a nagging feeling that something is not right. I then send it to Phil who I know will shoot absolutely straight and put it on the right track, if one can be found. I do not send him poems very often as he has been such an important teacher for so many for so many years he is always flooded with requests for help. Every three or four years I will send a poem. Favorite story. Lead off poem in *Rolling The Bones* which won the Tampa Review Prize, is a poem called "Poverty." Gary and Jon had slashed and burned, I had written draft after draft, but still I found about forty lines suspect. Sent it to Phil and he agreed and cut them, and also revised the ending, giving me a new line. I re-worked it sent it back to Phil and he said it was fine, except for the ending which he rewrote, adding an even better line that made the poem. So even with many, many revisions you need fellow poets upon whom you can rely to honestly, ruthlessly, and rigorously give you feedback on your poems.

Riprap: If you could travel back in time and give your younger self any advice on poetry, what would it be?

Buckley: Write better. Seriously though, I guess it would be to read even more. I think I worked very hard, I had to. In my first writing workshops, I looked around and recognized that there were plenty of folks in there with more talent than I. So I had to work very hard, reading and rewriting, to come up to any kind of acceptable level. I think I was patient, that is usually what older poets recommend to the young, i.e. not pushing to publish too early. I did two graduate degrees and during the MFA I published in some little magazines that everyone soon forgot about, but just that little bit of acknowledgment helped me keep my psyche above the water line. Still ... I remember sending my first book off to the Yale Contest for first books. The only first book contest in those days, a thousand mss. flooding in. I didn't think I would win, truly, but thought I might get close and get a recommendation to some other press. That is exactly what happened. Stanley Kunitz, bless his soul, wrote me a note saying nice things about my ms. and recommended it to a university press in Texas along with a few others. I lost out narrowly there also. Then Jon Veinberg looked at the ms. and at my new work and convinced me to throw away the ms. I had sent to Yale, that almost got published.

He was right about it and I did. My second book became my first, and looking back now, it is no great shakes either. So Patience. I could have saved myself lots of anxiety and disappointment had I had a more reasonable view of the work, had I had more patience.

Riprap: What, if anything, do you feel is missing from contemporary poetry? What, if anything, would you like to see changed?

Buckley: What is missing in my view is what is missing in most human endeavors—honesty, selflessness, justice. People are people whether in politics, the garment business, or poetry. Far too much insider trading, good talent overlooked, celebrity rewarded for being a celebrity. I have worked as

a screener and book judge and have seen it go on and when I did, I quit. As for style or elements of poetry, we have many wonderful poets with many different voices in the US and internationally—there is plenty to choose from.

PENURY, POLITICS, & THE UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLE

CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

"I started off with nothing and still have most of it."

"I lost five years in the war and when I got out, I started listening to people: Do something sensible — sell real estate, lawn mowers, or mouse traps; cut a few throats and end up Vice President."
—Robert Mitchum, Holiday Affair, 1949

"There was uncertainty about the location of Heisenberg."
—John Woods

I was scraping by on Tuna Helper, box wine,
teaching part-time ... my father was shaking
his left wrist, winding his $6,000 Rolex,
encouraging me to quit, learn real estate,
sit houses on weekends, cash in and lease
a flash Mitsubishi like him.
I barely had
the proverbial two sticks to rub together,
a Ford Fiesta worth one-fifth as much as
his watch, but it took little to turn down a life
of business associates who'd steal your leads,
shave your commissions, and vote Republican—
those free thinkers at the Junior Chamber of Commerce
salad bar, comparing sport coats and haciendas.

Even with a university job, I worked
weekends as a gardener in, I kid you not,
Hope Ranch—$5.75 an hour for a lady
of scrupulously independent means;

it was quiet, unsupervised work, noblesse
oblige from her point of view on the terrace,
and though it put groceries on the table,
I still had to sell my old-school long board
to cover the gas and electric one month,
a board, had I been able to keep it,
worth a small fortune today.
Nevertheless,
I was young enough to burn the cliché
at both ends and in the middle; I published books,
essays on my betters, and survived not thinking
too deeply about whether things would add up
in the long run, assuming that the run would,
in fact, be long, and there'd be something to add up.
My wife, a painter, took office temp jobs
so, at the end of the week, we would have a little
left for a bottle of, as dear Rumpole
had it, "Chateau Thames Embankment."
Now, courtesy of City Parks & Recreation,
I have this bench overlooking the sea
to complement my old investiture with clouds—
I am rich in all the residual benefits due me
from the air, where from time to time I try
to connect some dots off into the blue...
I kept
my hand raised, my place in line, my mouth closed
enough to get to where they let you go
with just a hair more than you need for soup
and taxes, with more time to complain, for all
the bellies that's filled.
When things change,
if they ever do, I'll know whether or not
the uncertainty principle obtains, the one maintaining
you can't know both where something is
and the speed at which it is moving—
assuming we are anywhere then at all
and that there is anything remaining to move?
Which is all, really, metaphysical speculation
adds up to.
For now, I fall back on the occupation
I had as a boy—before all the paper work
and God Particle push-back—filling my arms
with the inferences of the wind, cupping a little
sea water, opening my fingers as any evidence

disperses ... just a trace of salt dried on my brow,
a vague translation of the sky.
I round off
the clouds to the nearest zero, and find
that's pretty much what I have left.
Clouds or stars, no one can do the math.
Even Einstein left without showing all
his work—the slight of hand, the unattested
floorshow of quantum mechanics escaping
noticeable results—the grand scheme,
the unified field, something close to wishes
and beggars...
The white caps blow out beyond
the cypress boughs ... the horizon carried along
by clouds, the leaves crumbling into winter.
The friends of my youth have become Libertarians
and moved to Idaho.
Dusk, then the pale voices
of the stars ... I don't hear much argument any more,
I just hope it's not all over but the shouting.

SUGAR CANE

HANNAH HUFF

I savor unconsummated love under my tongue like a hard
candy worn down into a smaller smaller lump,
its butterscotch flavor never ebbing. Summery
yellow sweet clacking against my molars
until at an abrupt stop I accidentally
swallow the last iota of potential
us like a petrified sap drop
tumbling along my
esophagus,
thought
lost,
until that lucky
moment when I'm
a drowsy old woman
alone in a cold spot of sun
on the long lawn of some retirement
home, gumming a Werther's Original, and the caramel
warmth thaws amber hidden in my womb, our preserved DNA
finally melded into a glow more golden than anything I've known.

INSURANCE TRILOGY

CURTIS HARRELL

I. Appraiser

Late afternoon I visit the body
Shop, east L.A. and hard sun
Shattered in the cluttered yard.

Mechanics gape from bays as I fiddle
With forms, loss
Sheets, ask which car it is.

The garage owner threads me back
To the total, looks sideways, through his teeth
Says this one ain't so bad.

He's shown me the Polaroids he has
Tacked up in the welding shed.
One shows a boy's face laying in a bucket seat.

He stares at this one first thing
Each morning, wonders
How it got there.

This wreck is just a head-
On. I detail
What steel has done

To steel, the rending and wild stress,
Like what a mean question can do
To a person.

I take down numbers, evaluate
The paint, the windshield cracked like a web
From a bulge on the driver's side.

In the center hangs a blonde hair-hank.
I yank the door and breathe
Hot vinyl and perfume.

Even this far in-
Land the wind is raw with salt.
I lay down my clipboard and think fast

Cars and bare beaches. I slide my hands
Out of my pockets and comb my hair.
I envision girls asleep

At the wheel.

I get back
To business. I write
Down the license tag. I hunt

For salvage.
I stand back and reckon the damage.
I take out my camera, take pictures.

II. Adjustor

The way the sun leans down on Watts
Is how a man can lean for years
Against an orange crate in a vacant lot.

I'm bickering over twenty stitches a bottle
Ripped in the Korean grocer's ear.
He complains the way the sun leans down on Watts

Out the screen door on the dude who's shot
Around the eyes, like me, from wanting a woman and a beer.
We slip out needy hands, draw vacant lots.

Everyone here dreams the same dream and its rotten.
If you cored the family Bible and the high school years
You'd find the pit bitten by the sun that leans on Watts.

My dreams drag me like harried cops
To take statements from old black women sheared
Of their purses, squalling hard in vacant lots.

After supper I'll miss the deliberate way she
    washed the dishes. I'll clear
The rickety table under the kitchen bulb. The light is near
The way the sun leans down on Watts
Against an orange crate in a vacant lot.

III. Restitution

I know what a leg is worth.

I know what is and isn't the full use of a hand.

I can calculate pain and suffering,
Which man hurts and which man's bluffing.

I'll pay a pretty girl extra for a scar.

I drive like Jesus in a company car
All over L.A. restoring the broken with company money.

I have sheets where I can figure
The years of wages a man has lost
Because some Monday morning he misunderstood

The foreman, thought he said, let it go
Instead of, take it slow, and his hard-hat squirted
From under the concrete wall.

I'll hand the widow the check for the wrong-
Ful death, money that will run
Out too fast in Bakersfield or Fresno.

She holds the thousands of dollars the way she might
Have held his calloused hand on a June night after supper
When the sun set late in savings time
And everything was right.

APOPTOSIS

JULIET JOHNSON

1.

Juliana agreed to meet
at the Olive Motel.

All their conversations
had been quick and
appropriate.
Now nine-past-ten
she stood
before dirty walls,
fragility set aside.
Here, you drive to your
door on the asphalt hallway.

Black slacks and sweater.
When it was important to look mature.

2.

Within my second
year of college
I leveled myself.
Came out pale
blue
and quiet.

3·

First,
there is a stress.
Then an overall
shrinking
while nodules
grow on your skin.
You begin
to break down
all the time.

The center
destroyed; the pieces
ebb off
or are otherwise shed.

GRANDMOTHER'S FLYING TORTILLAS

JESSICA TYSON

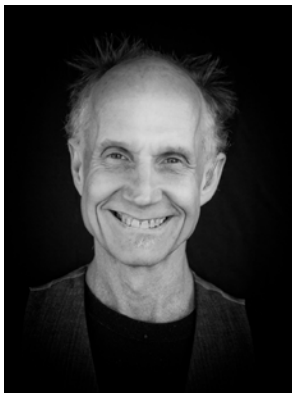
No hay mal que por bien no venga
—Mexican proverb

Four more flour tortillas
singe on the flame range,
bubble to blacken & pop
as Grandmother flips them
with fingers from fire
to the table of mouths.
Meanwhile she brands
her hands, makes wafts
of carbon-char & Spanglish
(Pinche shit-stove!),
lapses into mutters.
Between our heads & the spackle
tortillas take flight, crash landing
left near Uncle's memorial
candles or slap center-table
into the steeping chorizo:
scent of orange, scent of sweat.
Grandmother says, *es bueno.*
It's the real stuff.
What lies within Grandmother's
boundaries *(bueno)* seems
boundless—palm readings
after Mass; the overnight bus
to Vegas; hookworms
in the murky waters of Chametla
that shied into the tide.

Another tortilla skids to the edge
of the table, slows just below
the hollow ribcage of Jesus
dangling from the cross
& into the pillar candles.
There is Mary in a blue robe,
Mary with a halo, Mary
with her son draped gray
across her lap, Mary—thorns
& roses, empty hands. *Madre*
de Dios! Grandmother wails.

interview:
TONY HOAGLAND

INTERVIEWED BY RAMSEY MATHEWS



Tony Hoagland is a southerner by birth who currently teaches in the Warren Wilson MFA program at The University of Houston. His many honors include a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Jackson Poetry Prize, and the Mark Twain Award from the Poetry Foundation. Hoagland is renowned for his casual style of writing that skillfully and unabashedly analyzes marriage, consumerism, sex, race, and friendship. In 2006, Hoagland published his collected poetics titled *Real Sofistikashun: Essays on Poetry and Craft*. His latest collection of poems is *Unincorporated Persons in the Late Honda Dynasty (2010)*.

Riprap: What resource do you use for laying down a first draft: paper or computer?

Tony Hoagland: I often use an old manual Olympia typewriter. That or writing in a journal that I keep irregularly. The physical act of writing sentences is different than on a computer for me; in poetry, at least the way I do it, speed is not an issue—surprise, discovery, sometimes careful thought, accident—are the stuff of poems. My preference is just some kind of generational Neanderthal thing though. Also very much how I work is carrying around printed out messy pages with passages on them, and marking them up teasing them out with pen, until the page is a mess; some little area will have come together and that becomes the center of the next print out. It's a slow thing and ridiculously inefficient from a capitalism point of view. But the usefulness of poetry is after all far different what we call useful in this time and culture.

Riprap: How do you come by the impulse for a poem? Do you reminiscence or do you respond to a recent event or thought?

Hoagland: A poem doesn't pre-exist its crafting—sometimes the origin is in a phrase, sometimes in something that one sees. The pursuit of one's

own discomfort is probably the most reliable principle for pursuing poems. You ask yourself "what is making me unhappy right now?" what is tugging and pushing on my heart, or what is nagging away at me in what I've read or seen or remembered. Sometimes it will be very particularly circumstantial, like a conversation with someone, that stays and troubles you. But it requires silence to hear that conversation going on past its event.

Riprap: How would you describe the link between your poetry and your private life versus your poetry and American culture?

Hoagland: I would say that the private life is a tunnel that leads into and out of the public life and the culture at large. They both can be places for escapism, where one is hiding from the other. And also they cascade together like two streams always mixing and ironically commenting on each other.

Riprap: Do you feel a kinship with Allen Ginsberg?

Hoagland: Of course. His great ten poems will live forever and always be inspiring and heartbreaking or arousing.

Riprap: In one poem, you are reading *Moby-Dick* while you are on a flight. What are your three favorite books of fiction? Why?

Hoagland: My three favorite playwrights, or three of my favorite playwrights, anyway, are GB Shaw, Sarah Ruhl, and Wallace Shawn. Some favorite books are *To the Lighthouse; Light Years,* and, okay, *Moby-Dick.* But I read lots of noir detective fiction, like Martin Cruz Smith.

Riprap: Your poem "The Change" has garnered praise and controversy. You were born in the South. When you published the poem, did you feel an insight that someone born in California might not have into race relations? Has your view of the poem changed over the years?

Hoagland: My view of the poem hasn't changed much. For me it doesn't have to do with the South. It has to do with the lurking ever-presence of race and racism in the psyche of America, and the way our denial of it has arrested progress and history. "The Change" is an interesting poem because it illustrates, or narrates the discomfort, the mixture of anxiety, resentment, and admiration that white Americans feel towards brown Americans. A psychiatrist would say that because we've never dealt with our past of slavery and segregation, we are doomed to live in it forever. "The Change" puts on display the mildly racist thoughts of the speaker while watching Venus Williams kick the ass of some little white woman tennis player on the court.

The fact that so much hysteria gathered around this poem a few years ago demonstrates how much in denial many people, black and white, are about the racial under-emotions of most Americans. Political correctness—wielded in a prosecutorial way—actually shuts down open conversation—between white and black citizens, and between whites too. If people are terrorized, constantly wary of speaking rashly and making mistakes, of being accused of racism, the conversations we need to have simply won't happen. The controversy around my poem was really started by the actions of one African American bully who was not even aware of, or honest about, her own unconscious motives. But years before, Garrison Keillor had read "The Change" on National Public Radio, with no name-calling.

Riprap: If you could have a dinner discussion with three other people (dead, alive, or fictitious) who would they be? Why?

Hoagland: My best friends.

Riprap: Do you play a musical instrument or dabble at art in your spare time?

Hoagland: I play the radio professionally and I paint with the leg of a duck.

Riprap: Many of your poems mix humor with sex and violence in the same manner as a stand-up comedian like Louis C.K. Is stand-up comedy a rhetorical device for your writing?

Hoagland: Stand up, or comedy in general, and poetry have a lot in common: story-telling, timing variations in pace, pitch and diction changes. The parallels are quite striking.

Riprap: Do you feel a connection to a past life of your own or to a conversation with the dead?

Hoagland: Every poet is in conversation, apprenticeship, and love with poets before us. Frank O'Hara, Auden, DH Lawrence; the list for me is endless. I feel such gratitude for and get so much pleasure from reading all kinds of stuff that sometimes I can't believe that poetry is not a controlled substance.

FIXED ON ZOMBIES

BILL BUEGE

Immortality attracts us all.
The schoolboy thinks: If I knew I lived forever,
I would refuse to fold my hands in church.
I'd say mean things about our priest,

crawl from my grave, stuff my face with Skittles,
and head down to our skateboard park.

His father thinks: If I were a zombie,
I would suck my neighbor's blood instead of watching
football on TV.

His mother thinks: I'd frighten little kids,
watch my girlfriends rise from graves
refreshed by night, the moon, the time of year,
frost on their hair.
I'd greet them with a zombie kiss,
and off we'd go.

The timid poet thinks: If I came from the underworld,
I'd lick my scars,
hobble to the toughest neighborhood in town,
kill everyone,
and hunt for virgins in their bedroom.

The zombie thinks: If I were human,
I'd be a gentle man.
I would treat my wife and children with respect,
would never speak an angry word to anyone.

MARIGOLD–YELLOW

CAROLYN KEOGH

In 1963, John R. Hickman bought two yellow, faux-wicker lamps.
Fashioned from marigold-yellow molded plastic–
Weakly woven to resemble a basket.
They finished at a thin, unsteady base,
Tied with a rope at the bottom–made to look maritime.

Hickman placed them proudly on two small formica nightstands,
On either side of his then-new king-sized mattress.
Here, they stayed for nearly 60 years.

By 1979, both shades were replaced twice.
In 1984, one had its electrical insides rewired.
Both were pock-marked with little holes by '98.
Carpenter ants, he assumed–
Pin-sized markings of age; endurance.

By 2010, only one lamp was ever lit.
Hickman, newly alone, saw no need for the other–
He stayed faithful to his side of the mattress.
Rarely reaching across, ignoring the empty expanse of his king-sized bed.

Now, when he falls asleep with the light on–
A book of crosswords resting on his knee,
The solitary lit lamp emanates a marigold-yellow glare,
Shining across the room like a lonely, static lighthouse.

THRESHOLD

CHARLES F THIELMAN

He stokes the fire at the foot of a dune,
embers and ash
garnishing sun slants.

Waking within reach
of dream's fading braille,

memory searching for wing bones

in the undertow,
he walks his six foot of solo

alongside bobcat tracks.

Unseen eyes, deep in forest now, passed by
his dreaming face, his long slow breaths

inside immense starlight. Dream eyes

like yellow buoys above sand

marking a threshold.

Smoke dry-brushes the shapes of wind.

THE INTROVERT MANIFESTO

MARCUS CLAYTON

All the best conversations are with myself. I'm no spaz,
zealously soaking laughter and applause from an audience in absentia,
but I do not hesitate to take a bow for empty seats—only
yielding necessary praise from the truly clever, who can take a barb,
can understand that the echoes in my isolated box
Xerox statements of the great Shakespeare, Socrates, Scorsese, any maniac
daring enough to spout genius to paper before it spills into a furrow,
weakened by opinions of outsiders. I cannot be analyzed
even if I decided to speak. But do not assume I carry a shiv,
violently plotting against conversationalists, like a Valkyrie
facilitating the death of a soldier of choice. There is no plateau
urging to be climbed. I'm already looking down the highest cliff.

Gangrene infests your social circles, while my thoughts are still amethyst
talismans: enlightening, coated in allure, and mine. If fog
hadn't muddled streets outside my head, if patrons
swore to lift, to evaporate, to flash
incandescent light for all to strip without need to suffer
reprisal from disgusted grimaces, to bask in the glowing graffiti
juxtaposed to dispersing gray clouds—more class than any cover of GQ,
quality unrelenting like an internal DJ
kinetically playing your favorite tunes with no intention to stop—
probably, only "probably," would I begin to talk.

Let's not forget, there are lions outside—lurking, lined up domino
obelisks—too primitive to comprehend my astute howl.
Maybe they're kittens, but claws are still drawn.
No. I will not go outside with all the warmth in my room,
nostalgia painting walls with art that ratifies Theism,
my favorite novels blank, lining bookshelves, dying to be written.

Omniscient eyes can't cut through any wall
leaving me to my own baritone, my own falsetto,
paradigms I've perfected in this space, bounded by brick
knitted together with cement—a mixture of hardship,
quarrels, embarrassment over a failed Hajj,
jealousy of anyone who can sing a mean rendition of "Susie Q."
Relegation isn't so bad when the only plants outside are cacti.

It's dangerous out there with all those lions—maybe even a tiger—
so I stay inside with my mirrors to detach
hubris and speak as most humble scholars,
thankful for the humor pouring out of us in a reticent throng,
grateful we resuscitated sophistication back to might,
unencumbered by the rust in my throat—a vocal handcuff
facetiously locked by my anxieties. So thank you,
villains! I needed that push into this bastion of solitude
erected to eclipse even Ozymandias, and rev
watchdogs to maul faces that are unlike mine. I am not paranoid.
Do not damn me for not making my wisdom a show.
Xanax doesn't belong near my taste buds—such toxic
concoctions aren't good enough for my tongue. Do not put me on a crucifix
yearning for my forgiveness: it is no punishment. It is no Goddamn blowjob.

By all means, feel absolved from pity, from thoughts of "he's lonely"—
zoo animals don't get the stares I do—feel deprived of the academia
airborne in my brain. Feel the phlegmatic "I'm fine," "I'm ok," and all that jazz.

FROM THE SQUALL

CASSADY OZIMEC

the rain was not cold
when it fell to our shoulders
soaked our hair, yours long and brown
mine shorter, and made heavy
our clothes and our towels
the backs of our legs stuck with sand
hard to wipe away
and wet, on the beach
eating oysters from the sea
a squall draws near
sending pipers to the dunes
naked masts in the cove
and a salt mist to hold
hesitation in knots
for the crest and the fall
breakers foam closer all the time
ebb tide and our lunch is wet
still there is wine

THE NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

HOLLY PAINTER

Chain link shadow cats, night cawing roosters
pale mournful babies of quiet Latino ladies
wild dogs dragging piñatas down sidewalks
ghettobirds dip diving, bellies full of cops

Roadside fire sale: Happy Meal plastic gadgets
Catholic school polo three cousins worn
Bedsheets wreathed together by rain and dust
shopping cart, my own shopping cart, mine

Mechanics' shoes scuff pews unstuffed on the
front lawn at Friendship Primitive Baptist Church
An ice cream truck squeaks La Cucaracha and
it's Tamale! Tamale! Tamale! every morning

Musica norteña wake up, mulitas on the breeze
The blurry-dull sun leaks and you find
your Spanish dubbed out of sync like
everything else you think you remember

I15

HANNAH HUFF

Along the way to Vegas are towns that exist
only to be along the way to Vegas, towns
that you don't need to hurry through for them
to quickly be gone. A few homes with rock
driveways strewn awry, Peggy Sue's Diner,
and a barn, though the yuccas have always been
too tall for cattle to nibble upon. Then high desert
and towns that are gone, that died along the way
when along the way to Vegas came along.
Like Calico, where miners flopped to sleep
in long-johns after chipping the hills for silver,
until they were bones, and homes
sprung up later, just below the restored
mining ghost town. But the tourists hurried along
the way to Vegas, until the locals moved
along and left all the houses to fend off the Mojave
alone, just concrete bones, the windows gone.
And the mansions that sprung up later,
just across the highway from the ghost
town ghost town filled with people who will
move along, along the way to Vegas.

I AM AN AMERICAN

CYNTHIA SCHULTHEIS

I have elevated the mind of man
with the *Enlightenment* ~
But, I can't seem to fathom
separation of Church and State.

I represent the *free market* and
the *pursuit of happiness*~
But, I continue to force many
to find theirs in the shadows.

I spawned the man who gave us
the *Emancipation Proclamation*~
But, it took *two little ladies* to
spark the fires of our *civil wars.*

I quadrupled my land holdings
with a scheme called *Manifest Destiny*~
But, in the process displaced and decimated an
entire race of people.

I've preached democracy from
my *bully pulpits*~
But, denied the ballot
to *over half* of my citizens.

I have fought and won
the Great War to *end all wars*~
But, can't find the recipe
for *world peace.*

I have set precedents for
due process and *fair play*~
But, take advantage of the
vulnerable, poor and different.

I have invented a *weapon*
to destroy the earth~
But, I have used it to ignite The Cold
around the world for decades.

I have beaten down *my brothers*
in the alleys of the ghettos~
But, I have built courthouses
to give the *illusion* of justice.

I have fought and died in
the jungles of Vietnam~
But, I have learned nothing
about the *heart of darkness.*

I have sent my sons and fathers
to war to *"tear down that wall"*~
But, abet a begotten nation to
build a *new wall of exclusion.*

I have built a rocket that
goes faster than the *speed of sound*~
But, I sit in filthy streets
idling in traffic.

I have *fed* half of the
people on the planet~
But, I watch famine
prevail on the *Nightly News.*

I sermonize on Sundays
about God's *love* and *forgiveness*~
But, I *cannot* forgive or love
those who believe in *another* God.

I have built a thousand
million homes~
But, I evade the wanting eyes
of the *homeless.*

I have unraveled the *double*
helix of life~
But, can't seem to come to
a consensus on when life *begins.*

I have *surpassed time* with
modern telecommunications~
But, I have opened a
new Pandora's Box.

I have the technology
to put a *man on the moon~*
But, am losing the wars on
Poverty, Cancer and Drugs.

I live in the greatest country
in the greatest time in history~
But, I scorn the ground
I stand upon.

I am proud,
But, I am *ashamed~*
I am an American.

interview:

SARAH MACLAY

INTERVIEWED BY MICHELLE SLIEFF

Photo: *Mark Lipson*

Sarah Maclay is the winner of the Tampa Review Prize in Poetry. She offers her readers three poetry collections comprised of *Music for the Black Room, Whore,* and *The White Bride.* Additionally her work is featured in numerous other publications such as *APR, FIELD, Ploughshares, The Best American Erotic Poems: From 1800 to the Present,* and *Poetry International.* She now teaches at Loyola Marymount University.

Riprap: Pretend you can see into the future: what do you think the last poem you will ever write will be about?

Sarah Maclay: I have no idea, of course. And whatever it happens to be about may be less important than how it's about whatever it's about. It may not feel like it's about anything. But I hope it is many decades from now, because that will mean I'm still alive. And I hope there is snow in it, because that might mean we still have snow.

Riprap: Describe your happy place.

Maclay: A) Within the right pair of arms. B) It must be within, of course: portable. C) But let's say it's a place you could actually photograph, which has also sometimes been my sad place, but usually my very happy place: Zen garden, courtyard, bougainvillea, wisteria, bamboo, eucalyptus, fountain, Mexican sage, a small pine covered with coiling coral flowers that hummingbirds sip on, French doors to courtyard and garden, skylights, two large armoires made of Himalayan wood, one of which is covered with bronze panels of arguing dinosaurs, a bookcase that has the presence of a fireplace, windowpane mirrors, an ancient map of Paris propped sideways on the desk, weathered urn, bed draped with velvet curtains, a comfortable and minimal sectional sofa

and ottoman in pale lilac and moss, kilims; an ancient Persian rug, nearly falling apart, draped over the sofa; more rugs in diagonal patterns on the floor, paper lanterns, twig baskets full of tiny white lights, faux fur throws on a bed of white, feather earrings hanging along the edge of a champagne bucket filled with wooden spoons and fans, cards and curios from friends, a couple of wooden chests, standing iron candlesticks, baskets full of silky pillows, a grey pedestal urn filled with parasols and coiled maps and dead roses, a visiting cat.

Riprap: What inspires you more: nature or people?

Maclay: People. Specific people.

Riprap: Describe your aesthetics in three words, one sentence, or a haiku.

Maclay: This is still my guiding light, from Valery: "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." How do we do this in a naming art?

Riprap: I love your poem "Our Lady the Pomegranate." Can you tell me how it came to fruition?

Maclay: I was desperately sad. It seemed to me that a relationship had ended, once again, permanently. I didn't understand why. It would be years before I understood my own part in what had happened. Meanwhile, I was teaching Modern American Poetry and had re-entered the work of HD for the first time in many years. Her poems had spoken to me epigrammatically, mainly, when I was at Oberlin ("I go where I love, and where I am loved, into the snow... I go where I love, and where I am loved, with no thought of duty or pity" ... "I do not want to name it") and now I was also noticing other things. I dove into this scattershot writing of a bunch of poems that were in correspondence with lines from HD's trilogy, especially her poem 29 from the middle of the trilogy, and I was struck by

all these "ladies of" and I just started one thing after another without worrying about finishing any of them. It was my poultice. This happened very fast in a period of a week or two and then I lost the energy to finish the series because things were changing too much in my emotional life (for the better), but the impulse had also led me to art (as in this case, a piece by Pam Hawkes, a British painter whose work intrigues me, and to an illustration of Persephone in a book of myths I'd stained with pomegranate juice while staring at this image as a child and eating pomegranates at the same time), and to inventing more "ladies of" ("Our Lady of Wrong Lyrics") that fell outside of HD's original canon. It became a motif.

Riprap: How has your drastic change of scenery shaped who you are as a poet?

Maclay: It's strange, but I don't think of it as that drastic anymore, because, ultimately, I'm still living in a Western landscape. Here, too, we're nestled in mountains—the Rockies trail all the way down through these states, and they're not that far away. I can get to a forest, from Venice, in about an hour or two, depending on traffic, and when I drive between California and Montana, because I'm a white-knuckle freeway driver down here and can barely tolerate the traffic or the sort of herding that goes on, at fast speeds, on the freeways—it makes me feel very claustrophobic—I take as many "scenic byways" as I can. In spite of the intense population density in the cities, like LA, there's such a sense of vastness and open space all along the way, and it's easy to get into long stretches of mountains and rivers and trees and farmland, as well as ocean, so it's not that hard to get a feeling for how the whole landscape is connected and how it still feels like a frontier full of outposts that sometimes continue to grow for a long time and sometimes go bust. But it's the sense of space and the natural landscape that ultimately dominates. LA can feel like a weird mirage in the midst of this, at times, a sort of miasma, but

there are many pockets of serenity (I am lucky to live in one), some good places to walk, and I have been lucky enough to find my way to an actual sense of community here, mostly via poetry but also via things like yoga and some of our other more prominent art forms.

Community is hard-won here, I think, though there are so many insta-communities that appear and dissipate at the end of creative projects, that it can take some time to figure out how rare the more long-lasting type is. The poetry community here, though, is, to cadge Hemingway, a movable feast. Traffic makes this harder now, as weekdays often feel like what a writer friend referred to as a constant "mobility crisis," and it takes so much energy just to live, but I see poet friends all over the city and beyond, as we trek out to read or go to one another's readings. I'm not able to do this as much as I was a few years ago, but it's tremendously heartening that it happens. This is a long way into an attempt to answer this question, and I realize it may actually be an answer to something you didn't ask. But it's related in this way—I learned how to be in community as a kid, and how to make tremendous effort (due to my distance from it) in order to do that, since it was not immediately available (by walking, say) and so it's not a physical given, and I think it's something that living in the west teaches you, or at least did, before internet communities became possible. Also, just in terms of the poetry itself—my first landscape will be forever etched into me, my being, my psyche, whatever you want to call it. Let's also say, then, my first weatherscape. So it's through that lens that everything else makes an impression. I noticed long ago that, say, if I wrote about something happening in LA, there were going to be a lot more references to the world of nature than in the poems of my Bronx transplant friend here, where the cityscape was going to come first, though his poems have increasingly been given to the natural landscape. Snow is going to appear in my poems more than desert.

It just is. I rarely write just about nature, and so I am confused when readers slide over things I think are obvious references to, say, the erotic. But I am tuned into nature because it was the primary thing I was surrounded by for so many years, while I longed for people. Now, generally, I long for more solitude.

Riprap: When did you know you were a poet?

Maclay: Twice. Once when I was thirteen and overtaken by the poems that started to emerge from me at night. Is it somewhat embarrassing to say that this happened after I'd seen Zeffrelli's version of *Romeo and Juliet,* and I was initially writing a love poem in a kind of code, which I guess I still do? Not to the same guy, however. And then from that all kinds of poems continued, got pretty deep-image-y in the 70s and sprung by people like Edson, Transtromer and Lorca, and then there was a point where I was pursuing other artistic medium-loves more, and I completely lost the thread, didn't think I could write poetry any more, couldn't even quite read it. This changed in 1996, when after a series of losses and a health scare, I was casting about a bit, letting go of a lot, and poetry had rather mysteriously started to come up in one conversation after another—in particular, people were somehow interested in what I had done earlier and wanted me to leap back in. It took all my psychic energy to get myself to the workshop then ongoing at The Midnight Special, on the promenade, and then also to the workshop at Beyond Baroque. The first time, I brought nothing. Just listened. That night I dragged grocery bags full of old writing out of the closet (yes, literally) and started to work on some old pieces. I could not stop. Worked until about eleven that night and discovered how much I needed to work by hearing the words and the rhythms of the words. You can convince yourself of anything, but music is the best editor.

This second time was a kind of confirmation—and it was a thrill to feel that I was simply re-entering from where I'd left off, not having any idea whether I could write or what I would write. I truly had no idea. But people responded. I kept quotes by Martha Graham and Beckett and the Gospel of St. Thomas and Sharon Doubiago on the refrigerator, and looked at them every day—they allowed me to "keep the channel open," to "fail better," to dip back into the "well," to "bring forth what was within" me. It was as though no time had passed since I was writing poems in my early twenties—no time, just experience. And somehow everything came together.

Riprap: When do you make the decision to use prose form with your poetry?

Maclay: Is it a decision? It's my impression that the poem makes the decision. My job is to say yes. My job is just to let the thing emerge.
Sometimes, later, maybe decades later, an initial form, whatever it is, may no longer feel right. The biggest change I made in *Music for the Black Room (2011),* which contains poems begun between 1975 and 2002, was that some of the poems felt too cramped in the form I'd originally written them, mostly long stanzas with ragged lines. They needed open form. They needed to breathe, to stretch intuitively across the canvas of the page. I think it helped a lot.

Riprap: Which poem would you say is your most experimental?

Maclay: I guess it's a cliché to say that every time we write anything new, it's an experiment. Someone said that. Who? I can't recall. But I think that's true. Different kinds of experiments, different kinds of risks. "Obbligato" *(in The White Bride)* is a hyper-obsessive OuLiPo experiment. Is it as much an experiment to say that I was pleased to try a sestina ("Cut City," in *Music for the Black Room*) or some other poem in received form,

just to know that I could do it? My most experimental works may have been performance works, much like moving images on stage, with dancers and actors and regular people, in layers or in imagistic fugues. Some of the poems in the collaboration I've been doing with Holaday Mason are deliberately courting a sort of "distressed" surface, a texture full of interjection and sometimes weird bits of dark humor, rather than something that falls more elegantly in line or more spaciously into resonance. Some are even more elliptical than earlier poems, with lines that are meant to have even greater potential for ambiguity. And maybe the biggest experiment so far was a collaboration I did with five other people—Gail Wronsky, Molly Bendall, Holaday Mason, Louise Mathias, and David Dodd Lee—which we performed at the Denver AWP in 2010 and later at the LA Times Fest of Books, something I thought of as The Uberbraid, after years of doing braided readings with pals, to break up the expectation of one poet at a time. This took about fifteen minutes and it included samplings from all of our poems in different numbers of lines, from one to five, in a different order each time and with different poets having greater numbers of lines each time, and I ended up being its sort of cobbler—thrilling—and used both intuition and an Excel spreadsheet to keep track of everything.

Riprap: What would you say is your proudest moment in your career as a poet?

Maclay: Finding out that I had won the Tampa Review Prize for Poetry, which meant that I would have a full-length collection coming out (*Whore*, U of Tampa Press)—and it was a double thrill to know that it was coming out in both hardback and paper. Right up there: having "My Lavenderdom" selected for *The Best American Erotic Poems: From 1800 to the Present*. I had no idea this was in the works.

Riprap: What can readers expect to see from you in the near future?

Maclay: With any luck, the collaboration I've been doing with Holaday Mason, since late 2007, which began with the idea that we would braid together 50 poems. I live in a hut in back of her casa, so we would slip poems through cracks in the door, in envelopes. Very steampunk, I suppose, since we could have just e-mailed them to one another, but it was fun this way, sort of like when you leave a basket of flowers for someone on May Day and ring the doorbell and run away. The manuscript clocked in at 135 pages initially, and we have winnowed it down to 100 and made a few changes in orchestration. It now feels as sturdy as it has felt exciting and almost radioactive, even, along the way—like it might derange your molecules if you got too close. Working title, which feels like the one now: *The "She" Series: A Venice Correspondence.*

ABANDONED MOURNING

TOBI COGSWELL

"That was my favorite time," he said
"Before the ice of my heart chose a solitary path"
I thought we were two branches
aching to pull close and canopy our fragile selves
like two greedy hands extending
toward a
  common
    bowl of
      mussels in Honfleur.
The foggy chill, the fire, un peu de creme upon the lip
forgotten in the being of it all.
surgically precise I carved my heart in the
wide barren-moonscape
of the emptiness surrounding Mont St. Michel.
And the tide washed it away
  no sound
    no whisper
For me it was not powerful until too late
"L'omelette du jour pour moi, s'il vous plait"
"C'est tout merci, je suis seule"

DREAMS OF ELECTRIC SHEEP

ALEX RATANAPRATUM

Unplug all the wires.

Abort. Retry. Fail.

Music must play over the white noise in ears budding—
water sounds of data streams rustling pixelated lily pads.

Select>Edit>Action>Split Action

Lubricate the eyes. Self-lubricate the eyes.

 PaintingSet3
 PaintingSet7
PaintingSet1

Albums of zeroes and ones
: configured for UDMA
saved images of marker on canvas.
: error : { DRDY ERR}
looping same woman in every image.

<a style="color:#black"> painted on <body
style="background:#white"> but the eyes are slanted for recognition.

<img src="Vietnamese" alt="hazel eyes greywash" height="5'6"
width="28">

```
#include <iostream>
using namespace std;
int main()
{
cout << “San Francisco spews from your gut through your throat and
out along your tongue/n”;
cout << “You hang yourself with ribbon from ballet slippers/n”;
cout << “You are a geisha./n”;
cout << “An apple tree with one color./n”;
cout << “Cherry blossoms climb the flesh of a young woman’s hip.”;
cout << “I am there./n”;
cout << “My wings tear through my back.\n”;
cout << “My arms and your arms intertwined like an ouroborus stran-
gling our necks.\n”;
cout << “I bite at your eye as a fishhook tears your cheek and some
unnamed invertebrate wraps itself along your legs.\n”;
cout << “You give birth to a creature whose eyes become the stars that
pave your path away from me.\n”;
return 0
}
error line 15: “My wings have pushed me pass the limits of 16:10”.
```

Abort. Retry. Fail.

SISTERS

MAYLI APONTTI

One summer, we listen to Nina Simone while painting our room
yellow. This time she doesn't sing of love or forbidden fruit;

she sings of how the birds are leaving, her voice deep and
mellow, while you, in all your determination, brush back and forth

as if to preserve the four corners of our small universe. Outside
in the evening sun, the leaves begin to turn auburn and gold.

Now in our vacant room, the blinds are partially closed, curtains
pushed aside. Dried orange peels rest on the dresser.

On your pillow, I count three, long, dark strands. I remember how
you'd come home late at night, lay the change on the table, and crawl

under dark blue sheets. You would exhale deeply, the weight released,
while I watched empty cracks in the ceiling, listening to dogs howl.

You left behind some things: worn out pumps and cocktail dresses,
an old waitress's uniform; all hang idly in the closet. When we were little,

we'd go running across the grass with our shirts off,
the spray of the sprinklers chasing after us. In the sun,

we are self-conscious of our tender chests. You hid behind me
the whole time while the water fell onto our skin. In the canyon,

do you remember how our hands became bruised, how we
stuck them deep down in the cool water, and from beneath

an enormous rock we pulled out the slippery shimmering bodies
of tadpoles? I carried one for the ride home, placed him in a small

flower pot, his body wriggling furiously. But when
we pulled into the driveway, he was already dead.

JUNE BUG GUM SOLE – UNSTRUNG TIZZY

JAX NTP

i.

to drowse in a wintry blotch of sun - adagio
lounge swill in heaps of second helpings
almost pewter green almost chroma static
sostenuto - the curves of forgotten things
rehearsing presque vu - crisp fat tongues
face veiled in syncopation in tinged hoodwink
moonlit cores of opium blues such apropos
of hemp wicks - lines no longer in between
a sound repeats until it becomes a noise
andantino words blister clank teeth citronella
impinge prisms a déjà vu that won't stop vu-ing
upward from the groin to heart to brain like a fart
in a filled tub - throat globs sear flashes criss
cross you sodium orange streetlights soused,
so - pick - that coldest spot of sun, to stay

ii. ***"my boobs are heavy with missing you: rainwater-full gourds and it's still pouring"*** -hh

my intestinal tracts are tangled christmas lights
your lips are patient hands igniting nervous inertia
a place where scoliosis snowmen shrivel and scrap
nylon bristles mimeo mimeo cymbals mud meld
eyes wan yawn-grins bruised light motes heavier
than rainwater between spaces of chaos there is
another chance - finger me knotted limb nautica
flickrun them thru my hair scalpskull lopsided clementine
plumpthumbing hand voices clumsy manshaped girl
your words lush hypnagogia lawn darts pin holes
my hubbub skanvas aches in a lexicon of fluid
kaleidoscopia declare your hand boning peplum
until we split open alla avocado bleus bushels
and brimfuls scullery-trough glow glist locate boiling
earlobes adagio until only the curve remains agitato
then, rumness. our skin tangerine gunmetal topstitch
klished clashed alloy emollient now malted barley

HONEYSUCKLE

JR SOLONCHE

for Emily

By the road,
at the bottom of the driveway,
you pick honeysuckle flowers,
pluck the white, silk-smooth,
heart-shaped petals,
strew them on the ground at your feet.
You tell me to do the same,
so I pick the honeysuckle flowers,
pluck the white, silk-smooth,
heart-shaped petals,
strew them on the ground with yours.
I marvel at how much you
have grown in a year.
You are tall as a yardstick.
You can reach all of the doorknobs,
most of the light switches,
half of the faucets.
I grunt now when I pick you up.
But it is another summer
I am thinking of,
one as far off as another planet,
but one that will arrive as swift
as an arrow toward the heart,
as straight as an arrow into the heart,
when you are at the bottom of the driveway,
by the road, with a boy your age
or a little older, and you pick

honeysuckle flowers,
pluck the petals,
strew them on the ground at your feet.
You tell him to do the same,
so he picks the honeysuckle flowers,
plucks the petals,
strews them on the ground with yours,
white, silk-smooth, little hearts.

DEMOCRACY OF TWO

BRAD JOHNSON

As you click the dashboard air conditioner vent
with your big toe and scratch
stains off your bikini, you're quiet
as a college campus after fascists cart
away the communists and invite
arsonists to the library after hours.

If I'd given you copies
of my car keys you would've left me
barefoot in the parking lot
like some rust-mottled beach chair, collapsed
beside the barrel trashcan where
pamphlets from last election collect
on the pavement and purple in the sun.

We spent the day watching lines
of shade drawn by coconut palms tick
across the beachhead like minute hands. Tomorrow
will be a sunburned Sunday, full
of traffic madrigals, stoplight mediations, costs
of things but now I study
topographies in the steering wheel leather
and the sand-map of Asia the ocean licked
along the back of your calf.

Who casts deciding votes in democracies
of two? Our constitution is vague;
the courts stacked with partisan judges.
Press secretaries prepare
their propaganda as your face is vacant
as a storefront in recession.

No diplomacy or weapons inspections
convince you to expose the agent
that released your anger from prison.
We should legislate a national language
and court-martial our translators.
Instead, you hack apart every piano
that played our country's anthem and torch
them in the public square, replacing
lyrics with cinder, music with fire.

PERSPECTIVE

OLIVIER BOCHETTAZ

this morning
a crow
set foot
in the land
of the cow

amazement
among the bovines

a parade of fear
and courage

across the field
on the freeway

humans
race their cars

SHADOW CASTING

MARK BELAIR

Lit by a low
cloud cover,

each of its leaves
casting

soft darkness
on others,

the oak tree
stands

worshipfully
still

as if
praying

for an intricate,
long-held

grief
to lift.

76

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art

UNTITLED II,
2011

TYLER SPANGLER

UNTITLED 4

NINA LODICO

UNTITLED,
FROM THE SERIES *WESTERN CHINA*
YANGTZE RIVER, CHONGQING PREFECTURE,
2012

SARAH EICK

BHUBANESWAR, INDIA,
2011

BRIAN VU

UNTITLED

NOA SNIR

88

UNTITLED

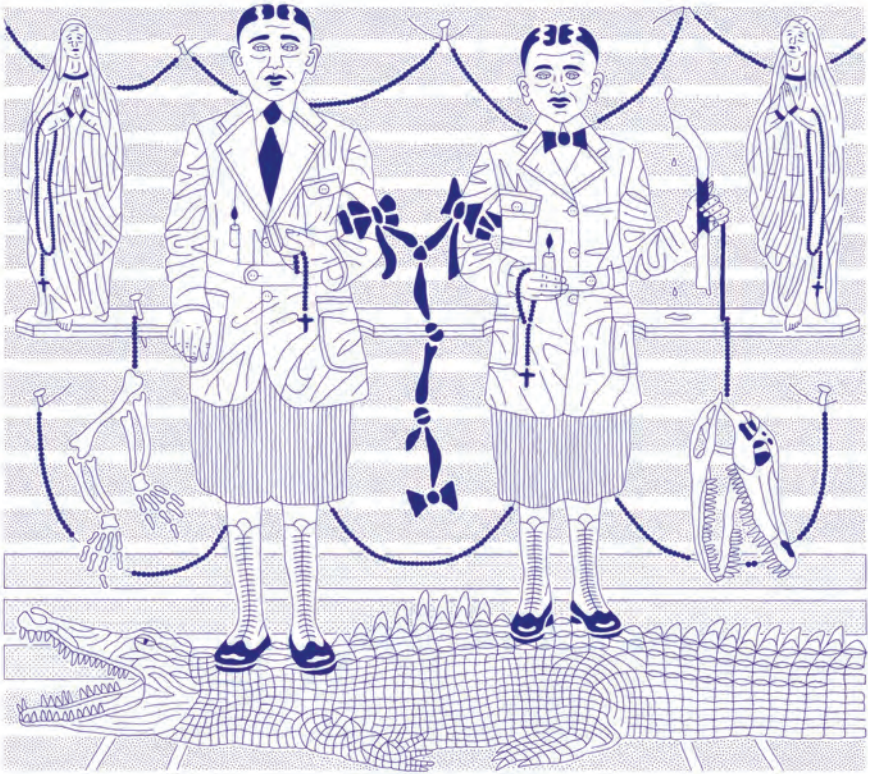
NOA SNIR

REBUILD 5,
SILKSCREEN, ETCHING, WAXED MULBERRY, TAPE, LIGHTBOX,
2013

AMELIA II

SAMANTHA WALL

THE MAKING OF BROTHERS,
FROM THE SERIES *EXILED FROM TRUTH: NINE ALLEGORIES*



DMITRY BORSHCH

UNTITLED,
FROM THE SERIES *WILL THEY SING LIKE RAINDROPS OR LEAVE ME THIRSTY, 2013*

A CURIOUS PHENOMENON FOR WHICH I KNOW NOT OF A VALID EXPLANATION,
FROM THE SERIES *THE FOURTH WALL,*
2012

BOWLIN'S RUNNING INDIAN,
LA LUZ, NM

WILLIAM RUGEN

98

99

prose

CORMORANT FISHING

ERWIN CHANG

The first thing I noticed was the heat. I felt the moisture bead on my brow as I stepped out of the plane and onto the tarmac. I tried to take a deep breath but it caught in my throat, like choking on a sip of water that went down the wrong way. The air hung stale, the gray overcast sky seemingly blocking the wind as well as the sun. I followed the crowd slowly bustling out of the plane and down a rusted stair-car. As soon as I stepped onto the ground, I felt a hand lightly tap my shoulder.

"We have to wait for Jun Hau," my father said. I stepped to the side of the crowd now piling into an even rustier shuttle bus, bound for the terminal. We weren't able to get seats close together because my father doesn't believe in leaving early for flights. He'd explain to me that back when he traveled for business, he could check in for an international flight a half hour before it departed.

The now-packed bus rumbled to life and ferried the first group of passengers away, sputtering exhaust. Standing still in the heat was even worse than walking. The cloying humidity was relentlessly suffocating.

Jun Hau finally appeared. He was one of my father's many music students, and one of the few to make it to an American conservatory for college. He was only in his late-20's and already balding, and wore a pair of fashionable black, square-rimmed glasses. He hurried down the stairs, elbows bent and thumbs under the straps of his backpack.

The sign above the terminal read *Guilin Liangjiang International Airport* in gaudy red letters. Liangjiang means two rivers, referring to the rivers for which Guilin is probably most famous for. The name's not famous, but most would recognize the sharp, impossibly steep mountains covered in lush trees that look like moss from afar. Guilin had been the subject of countless paintings, poems, and cheap Chinese informational videos, usually accompanied by wilting *erhu* music.

We got our bags and left the airport in a cab. My father dozed silently in the front seat, his head drooping down onto his chest, then quickly snapping back up when the stress on his neck woke him. It's what kept him from continuing his professional music career, he would tell me. The damage to his neck prevented him from sitting in those stiff orchestra chairs for long periods of time. I didn't pry. He didn't talk about his past often and when he did, he wasn't fond of questions.

Jun Hau and I exchanged a glance. We both knew better than to try to help. He went back to staring out the car window, camera at the ready on his lap. The view wasn't even that great, just rice paddies, tin shacks, and a long well-paved two-lane road into the city proper. Still he remained vigilant.

We set down our luggage in our hotel room, though it could more accurately be called a small villa, undoubtedly hand-tailored to cater to rich foreigners here to sight-see. I noticed Jun Hau had his instru-

ment with him, a French Horn. I became uncomfortably aware that I didn't have mine with me. I had stopped playing the previous semester, two years into college. When I told my father that I wanted to quit, he just sighed and nodded.

"Do you think they'll let me practice in here?" asked Jun Hau. "These rooms are pretty close together."

"Who cares? This place cost a fortune," my father replied. "If they call and complain, then you'll know if you can play or not." Jun Hau nodded and started to play. My father glanced over at me, and I stared at my feet to avoid his disapproval.

When I was eight, my father asked me what I wanted to do in life. I told him that I wanted to be just like him. He bought me a French Horn the next day. If I had told him I wanted to be an astronaut, I doubt he would've enrolled me in space camp.

Our first day of the tour started with a riverboat tour down the Li River. The boat seemed to be a villager's idea of luxury; the main cabin was converted into a makeshift dining room, grimy booths next to grimy windows. The only things on the menu were freshly-caught river fish and beer.

On one side of the river were lush rice paddies, with farmers in those conical hats you see in Vietnam War movies. On the other side was a huge cliff face, gray and covered in vegetation. Small alcoves were carved into the cliff face, with seemingly no way of getting in or out. The tour guide later explained that these were catacombs where locals would traditionally store their dead. The water was a sickly green, a by-product of heavy tourism. Dozens of beer bottles and plastic visors rotted on the riverbanks. My father told me it was good for the farmers, they could turn the bottles in to the city for money. Jun Hau took photos of everything.

Toothless farmers rowed up next to the riverboat in thin wooden canoes, grinning up at the passengers, hawking their wares, mostly fruit. A few westerners clamored over the railings of the riverboat, cash in hand. I don't think they realized they were paying ten dollars for a few peaches and lychees.

The riverboat eventually stopped at a visitors center, and everyone piled out onto the old stone dock. The center was built in a valley between two opposing cliff faces, maybe only a hundred feet wide. Carved into the stone were restaurants with names like "River King" or "Fish Palace," with street vendors in front of them shrilly screaming at passersby. Gift shops sold overpriced knick-knacks: fans, jade baubles, the farmer hats we saw earlier. Tourists jostled each other, shoulder to shoulder, trying to see everything before the tour group made them move on. I hardly noticed it though. All I could stare at was the towering slabs of rock looming overhead, like two giant fac-

ing headstones, blocking out the sun. My father seemed not to notice.

When it was time for the group to move on, I saw that Jun Hau was taking a picture of himself in one of those stupid farmer hats.

We were taken by bus further down the river. It was more placid, but not quite serene, like it was supposed to be, according to all the art about Guilin. The sun had begun to set when we were taken to a small wooden dock with several wooden motorboats, maybe five people to a boat. A young woman in traditional Chinese dress started to recite Chinese poetry using a megaphone as the boats putted down the river. The thought was nice, but the feedback from the cheap megaphone turned her flowery recitations into a jumble of screeching nails on a chalkboard. The tour guide tapped her on the shoulder and whispered in her ear, and she passed the megaphone around to the other passengers. She asked for volunteers to serenade the group with their favorite songs or poems.

She passed it first to Jun Hau who started crooning a Taiwanese pop ballad for a few measures before turning a bright shade of red. He passed it on to a French-Canadian photographer who sang the entirety of *Frère Jacques,* chest puffed out. When he passed the megaphone to me, my father held up his hand.

"Oh, he doesn't perform anymore," he said. The photographer shrugged and gave the megaphone back to the woman. I turned to look out onto the river, now wide enough to be a lake, acutely aware of my father staring at me.

A farmer in a narrow canoe pushed off from the riverbank and began to row towards our boat. Perched on his canoe was a cormorant, a bird that looked like a mix of a duck and a hawk. It was tethered to the boat by a rope on its leg and had another rope wrapped around its neck. On command, the bird flew up into the air, and dived into the river. When it surfaced, it perched back onto the boat, bill pointed upwards. The farmer wrapped one leathery hand around the neck of the bird, and used the other to reach down the bill to retrieve the fish it had just caught. The bird made a gagging noise as the farmer removed his hand from its throat. Everyone applauded.

interview:

MYRIAM GURBA

INTERVIEWED BY OLIVIA SOMES

Myriam Gurba is a high school teacher who lives in Long Beach, California. She graduated from UC Berkeley, and her writing has appeared in anthologies such as *The Best American Erotica* (St. Martin's Press), *Bottom's Up* (Soft Skull Press), *Secrets and Confidences* (Seal Press), and *Tough Girls* (Black Books). Myriam's first book is *Dahlia Season* (Manic D Press), a collection of short stories and a novella. Other collections include *Wish You Were Me* (Future Tense), *menudo & Herb* (self-published), and *A White Girl Named Shaquanda* (self-published). She blogs at Lesbrain and at Radarproductions.org. Her hobbies include misinforming children and art.

Riprap: I will start with the more obvious, standard questions. Why are you a writer? What motivated you to become a writer? What geared your writing towards poetry?

Myriam Gurba: I'm a writer because I'm a writer. The same reason that I'm female and am human. I can't help it. As Lady Gaga sang, I was born this way. Being an artist is a heritable form of mental illness. That said, genetics must've motivated me. DNArt. As far as poetry goes, I write poetry because it comes to in bursts not unlike the experience of eating Pop Rocks. Experiencing poetry in my mind is the closest I get to mysticism. It is mysticism.

Riprap: Who are some of your influences?

Gurba: My family and everyone I love. My pets. Things that don't fit in. Words. Joy. Extreme feelings. Beauty. The grotesque. Youth. Wisdom. Childhood. The trauma of being female. As far as specific poets go Sylvia Plath, Mike Topp, Eileen Myles, Martin Espada, Langston Hughes, tatiana de la tierra, Griselda Suarez, and vulgar graffiti.

Riprap: Your writing appears very personal. What aspects in your life do you find material from?

Gurba: Seriously, all of it. That's the only thing we have to draw from. Everything is filtered through ourselves. That's all we are, sponges absorbing and then excreting the world as we've experienced it. Every piece of art is somewhat autobiographical. Even stupid avant garde paintings of things that appear to be cubist rendering of deli meats are autobiographical, just in a pretentious, esoteric way. However, my work isn't quite so esoterically autobiographical. If I write about a girl I knew in sixth grade with epilepsy, I probably really am writing about a chick I knew in sixth grade with epilepsy. Given that I like to entertain (I don't see a point to living life unless you're entertained), I'll probably take the reality of this girl and goose it up a little.

Riprap: I love that you are willing to say anything in your poetry and prose. You do not shy away from words or subject matter audiences or readers might take offense to. How is that process like or rather do you ever write something and feel you have gone too far or written something you're unwilling to share?

Gurba: Thank you! I don't like the idea of finding anything intellectually sacred. If one considers things intellectually sacred then they can't be poked and dissected and dragged through the mud like an artist must do with ideas. Artists get ideas dirty. That being said, yeah, there are some things I haven't written about but would like to. Mostly things about people whom I love a lot. I don't want to alienate them completely.

Riprap: Do you ever think in terms of book projects, or do you let the poems and stories pile up and then say there's a book? What are some of your fantasy projects, including the ones that might never get done?

Gurba: Mostly I've let things pile up until they pile into something real. My current fantasy is to write an anti-book which is a book but also not a book at

the same time. I have no idea what that means but it is like literary masturbation to think about it.

Riprap: Last question, writer's block, does it exist or is it just an excuse?

Gurba: I think it's real but I also think the antidote is to write even when you're feeling uninspired. For example, when you're feeling blocked, give yourself a fun or silly exercise to do to get certain juices flowing. I go into creative hibernation during the winter but I still give myself stuff to do. Like I write in my blog and give myself little projects. My current little project is re-writing Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily* for the American teenager.

KINSHIP

YESENIA C AYALA

Ruben takes a final glance out of the portal before crossing the threshold into the plane, the blue logo of TACA Airlines displayed right above the passenger windows. He steps in and makes his way down the aisle, finding his seat and placing his carry-on inside the compartment above his head. He takes the furthest seat from the aisle, the one next to the window, and drops himself onto it. His father moves in to join him.

His father, whose mustache hasn't a single white strand, runs a hand through his curly graying hair. He lets out a sigh and Ruben turns away from it, catching the scent of the tamales they'd had for breakfast earlier that morning.

An old woman occupies the third seat in their row. She reaches for the seatbelt to tie herself down. Her hands are covered in age spots and her thin, spindly fingers shake as they struggle to latch the belt together.

"Permiteme," Ruben's father says, reaching over and fastening the strap.

Ruben stares out of the window, slightly embarrassed at how polite his father is being. His father introduces himself. Jose Luis. He probably uses a different name in El Salvador.

"Is that your son?"

Ruben gives the old woman a broad smile. "One of many," he tells her. He turns back to the window, satisfied at the look of admonishment his father had just thrown his way. He tunes himself out of the conversation that has now picked up next to him, and lets out a breath of frustration. His father still hasn't told him exactly why he's being dragged on this trip. There is no well-founded reason that Ruben should be sitting here when the woman, the funeral for this other woman, has nothing to do with him. Nothing. She is a complete stranger.

He recalls the events of the past few days and shakes his head. Somehow, his mother convinced him to go on this trip.

"Your father has his reasons, mi amor," she'd said to him last week.

"What reasons? What's so important to him that we've been put in the backseat?"

"We haven't been put in the backseat. Your father loves you and your sisters. That's not going to change."

"Ma, how can you be on his side?" Ruben said, anger burning in his chest. "After all he's done to you? How can you still have him live here? He's not even your husband anymore!"

His mother opened her mouth but Ruben shook his head. "No. I'm not going."

The runway is now disappearing from his view. Ruben's ears pop as the plane ascends. It all makes sense, if he thinks about it. Money use to disappear frequently. His mother would sometimes tell him that his

father had lost a few hundred dollars, or that his father's semi-truck broke down during a work trip out of state, requiring another few hundred to fix it up. But the money went somewhere else entirely. It certainly didn't go to his mother, who'd taken up two jobs in order to pay for rent. They were all lies.

"I have no choice going, Ruben," his father says, startling Ruben out of his thoughts.

Ruben doesn't answer. Perhaps a trip to the restroom would be nice. He starts to get up and realizes the seatbelt light is still on, indicating that the passengers are to remain seated for the time being. He crosses his legs, and picks up a worn out travel magazine from the seat pouch in front of him. He flips through the first few pages.

"I need to explain to you what has happened up until today. You deserve it, hijo."

"You don't need to tell me anything," he says quietly. A few more pages go by.

"Why won't you hear me out?"

"I don't need to know what you did. I already know about your other woman."

"You only know what's on the surface, Ruben. I didn't have a chance to explain that day you got the call. Let me explain."

Ruben closes the magazine, having gone through to the end of it too quickly. His father waits for his approval. Ruben was often told that he was the spitting image of his father. Same dark eyes, same smile. It would make him happy. He was proud since his aunts would always comment on how handsome his father was at his age. But now the wrinkles around his father's eyes are moist and oily, aging his face with every second that passes. How did he only just notice that the folds around his father's mouth, brilliant whenever his father smiled or laughed, had hardened and become permanent?

Ruben remembers the call that he received. He was home alone, his parents working, and his sisters at their afterschool program.

He picked up the receiver when it rang.

"Buenas tardes. ¿ Jose? Jose, tu mujer..." It was a woman's voice. Urgent. Cracked.

"No, he's not here at the moment," he responded, frowning.

"O, Rubensito. Is that you?" There was a muffled noise at the other end. She was blowing her nose.

"My Dad is at work right now."

"I'm sorry to be calling like this pero la mujer de tu papá, she just passed away. We need him here, can you tell him that? Rubensito? His woman, his wife. Tell him, please. She passed away. She's gone."

Ruben replaced the receiver back down a few minutes later. When his parents arrived they questioned him. Asked him why he was

staring at the wall. When he told them about the phone call his father didn't explain anything. He ran back out to buy an international calling card, the thirty minute one, and came back home. He was on the phone the entire evening.

Seeing as how he won't be going anywhere stuck on the plane, Ruben sits next to his father, listening as the older man tries to explain himself.

"I brought you with me so you can understand. I've done nothing wrong."

Ruben looks at him in disbelief.

His father raises his hand and says, "No, I know. You're right. You had the right to now. So do your sisters. But they're too young to understand." He scratches his mustache, his mouth twitching as he hesitates to speak.

Ruben feels his chest tighten. It might be out of anger, or out of pity. His mouth is dry and he struggles to swallow. He doesn't turn to look when his father starts to speak again.

"I was your age when I married Rosa," his father tells him. "I was seventeen and I had no idea, no conscience to know what I was doing. I just knew that this was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen—"

"Everyone will hear you."

His father pauses for a minute, as though considering the risk.

"I was your age and I had to learn how to take care of a family. There was no other option for me, Ruben. It wasn't like here in los Estados Unidos. No high school, no college. The only thing that I had to look forward to was a job working the milpa. I had to raise kids who would, in their time, take my place and have their own family. It was a cycle that I lived in. It's the way I grew up. ¿Me entiendes?"

Ruben wishes he didn't understand.

His father continues, "I never planned on coming here, and there was less of a chance of me coming here when Nelson was born."

Ruben only recently found out about his half-brother, Nelson. He had always wondered what it would be like to have an older brother. He never thought that he would actually be faced with one. He doubts Nelson knows about him and sisters. At least not a whole lot. How is Ruben supposed to interact with him anyway? It was already difficult for him and his sisters to get attention, what with their father's frequent trips. He's gone for months at a time. And now there is also this other person to look after. How thoughtless of his father to have so many children.

"In the end I had to leave them. I thought maybe if I settled down here, I'd be able to bring them with me soon after. Nelson was too young to travel at the time. It was so humid that day. The seats of the small plane we were flying into Méjico stuck to you like an extra skin."

At this point Ruben has already heard the story. Countless times. About how in the summer of '88, the hottest summer on record, according to his father, he'd crossed into the United States with nothing more than a backpack, a lighter, and a small paper in which was scribbled directions to cousin Mirta's house. Ruben sits quietly in his seat, his eyebrows furrowed, wondering whether to stop his father from telling the rest of the story to him. But, as he listens to his father talk to him about how he had spent his first days in the country, he feels a welling up inside his throat. He swallows, and hates that he feels sorry for his father who had to take care of two different families.

His father is silent now, his mind probably focused somewhere deep in his memories.

Just when he thinks his father is not going to continue talking, he opens his mouth, his mustache quivering. "You know that swap meet on Alameda and 45th? I met your mother there. She served Horchata and Aguas Frescas," he says, a smile forming on his lips.

Ruben faces the window; clouds layer the great expanse of sky. It almost sounds like he still loves her. That's impossible though. They're divorced, and this—this other family is most likely the reason for it. His mother found out and wanted never to see his father again. Is that what happened? But that couldn't be true.

"Why? Why did Mom..." Ruben's voice cracks. He clears his throat. His father turns to him and waits patiently for Ruben to regain the courage to speak again. The moment is gone, though, and Ruben stays silent.

The duration of the flight is quiet, with Ruben refusing to meet his father's eyes. Eventually, they arrive just after noon, at the Cuscatlán International Airport. It is busy with flight passengers. People search for family members, friends. The old woman that sat next to them during the flight is escorted out by a younger man, presumably her son, onto the sidewalk outside.

Ruben grabs his small suitcase from the conveyor belt, his backpack secured onto his back, and waits nervously as his father fishes for his own bags. Ruben shifts his weight from one foot. He tries to imagine this other son. He will surely hate their father once he finds out. There must be anger inside of him, knowing that his father had not come back. Once Nelson finds out about the betrayal he will act cold and distant towards their father. And Ruben won't blame him.

He finds himself staring at each person that passes by him. Inspecting. Searching for the large eyebrows of his father, a dimple on the right cheek. He and his half-brother must not be far apart in age.

"What do you think?" his father asks him as they walk outside of the airport. He struggles with his suitcases, which are larger and heavier than Ruben's. Ruben reaches out to help him.

The cars roll past them on the street, and the people around rush to avoid the sweltering sun. The heat starts to press up on Ruben. He pulls at his shirt.

"¡Apá!" a voice calls out to them.

Ruben turns and is startled when a young man hurries over to his father, a head of curly black hair bouncing with each step.

"¡Hasta que te apareciste!" His father laughs as they embrace. "How are you doing, mijo?"

Ruben's stomach churns as he watches the exchange. Mijo. He was expecting a different reaction. Maybe he doesn't know yet.

They stand an arm's length apart, Nelson nearly as tall as their father, an inch difference. Ruben can see Nelson's eyes begin to water, but he keeps the smile on his face. After a moment, Ruben remembers the reason for them coming to El Salvador in the first place. The funeral. He fiddles with the hem of his shirt as his father offers comforting words to his son. A minute later, the young man turns to him.

Nelson, his face free of tears, smiles at him. "¿Eres Rubensito, va?" he asks him. He extends a hand and Ruben takes it. "Whenever Apá visits he talks about you and mis hermanitas. I can't wait for me and the twins to meet them someday."

Not having found his voice to reply anything, Ruben follows them as they walk towards a parking lot. Twins? He falls back and lets his father and Nelson's conversation drift out of earshot. They pass by a small town square. A vendor is posted under the shade of the trees, where she sells popsicles to a group of children. Another group runs to join the congregation, having collected some spare change from their mother, who sits at a nearby bench.

Ruben bites his lip, staring at the back of Nelson's head. It looks just like his father's.

Why hasn't he brought up the fact that his father left him years ago? He should be outraged!

Ruben kicks at a loose cobblestone but his foot catches in a crack on the street, causing him to trip and lose his balance. His suitcase falls to the ground.

"Oh, let me help you."

"Estoy bien," Ruben mutters.

Nelson makes to grab the suitcase from his hand.

"I said I'm fine," he snaps.

Nelson steps back, his hands raised. "Ay, perdon," he says. He turns away from him and continues their walk.

By the time they get to the parking lot, Ruben's shirt is sticking to his back and the straps of his backpack dig uncomfortably into his shoulders. They stop in front of a canary-yellow Toyota truck. Old and forming rust, it creaks as they throw their luggage at the back of the vehicle.

"Where're we going now?" Ruben asks.

"We're going to my old house," his father says, motioning for Ruben to scoot into the middle of the front seat.

It takes half an hour to reach his home; it is a long, one-story building, split into different residential units. An outdoor marketplace surrounds the area. People mingle outside of the stalls, chatting, and purchasing fruits and goods. The people stare as the three men make their way down the path with their luggage, having left the Toyota parked under the sun a few yards away.

His father's house is marked with a faded blue door, rotting towards the bottom from exposure to rain and mud. They enter into a living room and are greeted by a middle-aged woman carrying the smallest newborn child Ruben has ever seen.

A noise, somewhere between a choke and a gasp, emerges from his father. Ruben looks at him, alarmed. The older man is staring at the baby, a warm smile playing on his face.

"Hola, Jose Luis. It's been a while," the woman says. "And the circumstance on which you have come! It is a blessing and a shame. Mi hermanita, en paz descanse, will be comforted now that you have come back once again to your children." She makes the sign of the cross with one hand, touching the top of her forehead.

Ruben feels his heart sinking. After a quick search of the living room he spots another baby lying on the couch, wrapped securely within a thin white blanket.

Twins.

"They're beautiful, Lucia," his father says.

"They're yours?"

The question escapes Ruben's lips before he could stop himself. There is no reason for him to be angry. It's not as though his parents are together. He clenches his teeth but the burning in his eyes intensifies. His father turns to him, the wrinkles on his face limp with sadness. He runs a hand through his hair.

Nelson walks in, having been caught up in conversation with a neighbor, and places the heavy suitcases near the doorway. He smiles when he notices his aunt and the newborns. Ruben, unsure of where to look, drops his gaze to his feet. He can feel his father's eyes on him.

"Have you met them, Ruben?" Nelson asks, walking up and resting a finger on the baby's forehead. "This one right here is Rosita. ¡Que linda! And the soccer-ball head over there is Carlos." He picks Carlos up, being careful to hold the back of his head and neck, and brings him over to his father. His father takes the baby and brings Carlos up to his face. He kisses the baby's cheek.

Ruben steps out of the house, feeling his feet move automatically away from the scene. The heat has not died down. If anything, it feels warmer. He wanders over to the market stalls a few yards away. Two new children to look after. Two new children that will need their father. Their father's attention. Their father's love.

He picks up a small wooden man from one of the tables, gripping it hard and displacing its head by accident. He puts it back on the table and walks away. He lets out a shuddering breath.

A few days ago his sisters were sitting on the couch of their living room, their small feet unable to reach the ground. Their father told them that he needed to go away for a while to visit a friend. They were probably used to his absence by now. This trip shouldn't feel any different. Your brother and I will be gone only a few days, he told them.

Ruben, who had been sitting in the armchair at the time, fixed his gaze to the television screen. "Leave on your own. It's not like we'll miss you."

His father left the room without a response.

Ruben chews on the inside of his cheek as he passes by a fruit stand. The smells of mangos, peaches, and rambutans fill his lungs. His mouth waters and he sneaks in a grape.

"Ruben, ven," his father's voice comes from behind.

Ruben continues walking, and spits a seed onto the dirt. He wipes his sweaty palms on his jeans. God, the heat.

"Ruben, look at me." His father grabs Ruben's arm. "What do you want me to say to you, hijo?"

Ruben is silent for a moment, memorizing the pained look on his father's face.

"Whenever you left for work...sometimes you weren't even in the same country as we were."

"No," he says. "For the most part I have visited Nelson every year of his life since I left him."

Ruben furrows his brows. That explains Nelson's behavior. The guy knows everything. Everything about him and his family. Everything about his father. Ruben, on the other hand, knows nothing. He wipes at his face, his hair sticking to him with perspiration.

"Mom worried, you know. She would always worry you'd leave her whenever you were working."

"I came to see Nelson only, while I was with your mother."

"She thought I didn't know. But I would catch her in her room sometimes."

"Ruben-"

"Crying."

"I always came back to her."

"In the meantime you were here with another family."

"Rosa was a wonderful woman."

"Yeah, she must've been a real saint!"

His father opens and closes his mouth. He stares at Ruben for a moment, before turning around and walking back to the house.

With a sigh, Ruben sits himself on a bench a few feet away. A broken fountain rises behind him, the water motionless inside the large basin.

Later that afternoon, Ruben heads back to the house. The back of his neck is red and tender to the touch. He opens the front door slowly and hears a voice coming from the kitchen. He goes to investigate. Nelson is seated at the table, cradling Carlos in his arms. He looks up when he notices Ruben walking in.

"We were wondering where you disappeared to, man."

Ruben hears no other voices in the house. The living room is empty. "¿Y mi Dad?"

"He went out to visit some friends down the street," Nelson says, the corner of his lips lifting slightly. "Tia Lucy went with him. Why don't you join me?" He kicks the chair next to him aside and motions for him to sit. It's cramped. The table takes up most of the kitchen space.

"He looks like you," Ruben tells him. Carlos' eyes shift to him, before giving their attention back to Nelson. Ruben points at the baby's face. "You have the same nose."

"¿De veras? You think so?" Nelson gives him a smirk. "It's my mom's nose. The only thing I got from her apparently; everyone's always saying how I look like apá."

"You get that, too?"

They laugh quietly.

"How did your mom...?"

"She caught an infection. When the babies were born. It got really bad and she passed away in the night."

It's quiet for a moment. Nelson makes no other move to continue their conversation. He plays with Carlos, whose fist is wrapped tightly around his index finger. There is no trace of worry on the young man's face. Nothing to indicate that his life is a tangled web of lies, the way Ruben feels his to be. But then Nelson has always known everything. Known that his father had left him and made another family in the United States. Ruben wonders if it is because Nelson doesn't care, or maybe Nelson was allowed the time to get over the idea, that he's accepted his father as he is. A man he can only see on occasion. A man that doesn't belong to him. This is their truth.

The funeral is the following day. The church is small. The day's heat is enclosed inside the building, keeping the evenings chill at bay. The women wear black veils, and the men wear their best slacks. Rosa's immediate family, including Ruben and his father, are provided with roses, their silk petals moist with water blessed with the pastor's prayer. The casket, though simple in design, is cut delicately at the corners, the smooth base decorated with rings of white clovers.

Relatives and close friends walk up in turns to say their last words. Soon, nearly everyone in the room has gotten up to see her. Ruben's father is next. He makes his way through the aisle, one arm holding Rosita in a white lace blanket. His free hand trembles as he places a single rose on Rosa's chest. He stays there for minutes, looking down towards his wife, whom he once thought to be the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

Sadness creeps into Ruben's chest. The women his father has loved are both gone. All he has now are his children.

Nelson follows after their father at the front of the church. He goes to his mother, the young man's lips moving soundlessly. Ruben stays where he is, seated at the end of his cold chair, unable to stand. He turns the rose in his hands, twisting the stem.

His father rejoins Ruben in the seat beside him. He speaks to the small child in his arms as if she can understand every word he is telling her. Though mourning, his father's eyes glisten bright. Ruben, being careful not to startle the child, reaches over and places the silk stem inside the crook of his little sister's arms.

OH SO WILD A REGION

KERSIE KHAMBATTA

She was tired, famished and footsore.

She exploded with a curse in Sylheti.

She pushed the 'japi' back on her head, and adjusted the large, wicker basket slung over her bent back.

It was a rainy-sunshine day, hot and humid.

The koel sang lustily.

The peak tea-leaf growing season in Assam is June to August.

The tea leaves have to be plucked at the right time.

And, this was it.

Pluck, pluck, pluck.

Day after day of plucking.

No rest.

Back-breaking labour.

Laxmi's husband, Vijai, worked in the Withering shed.

They lived in a small cottage made of mud, with a straw roof which leaked constantly, even though they had it covered with long pieces of thick plastic. Heavy stones stopped the plastic from being blown away.

Manu and Kavita Choudhary, who owned the tea plantation, lived in a luxurious, sprawling bungalow with a swimming pool, and television sets even in the bathrooms. High, ornate, iron gates opened on to a winding driveway that led to the large, open-fronted mansion bordered with a deep veranda. They invited people regularly to poolside parties, where huge quantities of expensive food and wine were served by servants smartly dressed in red-and-white uniforms.

Manu was tall, angular, clean-shaven, with smooth, dark hair, a florid complexion, a deceptively-genial manner, and a high-pitched voice. Kavita was an unfit, fifty-something woman, fat, short, and waddled like a duck. Her hair was dyed.

The plantation was huge.

It was an industry.

The green tea leaves were brought to the factory twice a day (sometimes thrice) and thinly spread on Hessian cloth placed over wire mesh racks in the Withering shed.
Vijai started work at six in the morning, and finished at seven in the evening. He worked seven days a week. No holidays. He had to be there even when he was sick.

The workers were so busy, one day, that they scarcely noticed a solid, squarely-built man, with weathered features, a carefully-curled moustache, big ears, shaggy eyebrows, and skin as rough as the bark of a jungle-tree, loitering casually in the fields.

He boarded at the village of Jambola near Pilchar. He was a city-man from Kolkata, and his business was stirring up plantation workers. He called himself a Unionist. His name was Daya, but people called him 'Shaitan'.

He went to the fields, and spoke to the workers.

"Hey, you! ... You ...you ...you are crushed ... you are down. You need to fight!" he growled belligerently.

"Fight? ... Fight what? ... Why fight?"

"Fight those rich, filthy, arrogant, banyas living in the palace there." He pointed a thick finger. "They are killing you."

The workers were not fighters. They could not understand what he was saying. They turned their backs on him, and went on plucking.

He followed them doggedly through the fields. He came to their houses. He did not leave them.

"Why are you after us? Who are you? We have never seen you before, eh? Go away!"

He did, but returned a few days later, with bags of rice and flour.

"Here take this," he said abruptly. "You have little to eat."

They were confused.

They were simple folk.

They whispered amongst themselves.

"He's okay! See, he brought us food. Our children are hungry," some said.

Manu and Kavita never went into the fields. They travelled overseas ever so often, leaving the manager in charge.

The manager, Chandra, was careful to ensure that the money rolled in, and the profits never fell. He had a job. He was paid one hundred thousand a year. He bought a Land-Rover, and a Harley Davidson motorbike. He loved motorbikes, and roared to Kolkata once every month, leaving the assistant manager in charge. The assistant manager was a drunkard, and he depended on the assistant, assistant manager.

Shaitan befriended the assistant, assistant manager.

The assistant, assistant manager took him to the mansion of his employers, when they were not there, and Shaitan fumed at seeing the luxury and the opulence. He was a Naxalite who passionately believed that the rich must roast in hell.

He went to the poor workers, and described graphically what he had seen. His voice had hardened.

"They milk you! ... They rob you! ... They become richer and richer at your expense ... They trample on you!" he said in a hoarse, threatening growl.

He fanned discontent among the workers.

He nurtured hate.

The timid workers became bolder.

He brought them fiery, local brew.

He sat with them after work, and they drank.

"Drink" he bellowed. "Yo ho ho!"

He swayed as he lumbered to his feet, after drinking steadily for two hours, and telling them stories of Naxalite raids on remote estates which had been plundered.

"Follow me, my countrymen," he yelled, "I'll show you what is happening."

There was a lavish party going on at that time, and the noise carried far. Thousands of tiny lights were garlanded through the trees of the garden, and lavish flower arrangements had been positioned either side of a long walkway through the grounds. An oak-panelled hall had been laid out with rows of straight-backed chairs. Smartly-dressed women flicked the scarves of their salwar-kameez back round their shoulders from where they had slipped down onto brown forearms.

The workers, anger overcoming fear, followed Shaitan as he stumbled towards the mansion, a half-full bottle in his hands, from which he took a long swig from time to time.

The hosts and the guests at the party were blissfully unaware of the storm coming towards them, led by a deadly Naxalite.

Shaitan came to a lurching stop, his face drawn, his eyes red-rimmed over dark pouches.

The workers saw the flash cars; the drivers lounging nearby with plastic plates full of food.

The roar of anger startled the drivers. They rolled their eyes in terror.

They panicked when they saw this massive, fierce man, leading a densely-packed crowd.

They tumbled into the cars and raced away, with no thought for their masters left behind.

Manu and Kavita were at the long, buffet table, picking up hot pakoras delicately, when a male servant rushed to them.

"Sahib ... Memsahib ... the workers ... they come," he stammered.

They turned reluctantly.
"What? What is it?" demanded Kavita impatiently.

"The workers, madam ... they come."

"Why have they come? What do they want? They can't come here!"

"They are shouting ... angry ... chanting ... murdabad."

Manu and Kavita put down their plates and went out.

They were shocked!

Utter chaos! Shouting! Screaming!

The guests were pushing, shoving, falling over each other in a panic to get away.

"Run ... run ... to the cars."

But the cars had vanished!

The night was dark and still.

The women were sobbing, stumbling in their expensive high-heeled shoes.

The men ran in all directions in a desperate attempt to flee the mob that was advancing upon them menacingly.

The workers followed Shaitan like a tidal wave.

"Quick, Manu ... quick ... get the rifle," screamed Kavita.

Manu reacted fast, and appeared with a loaded rifle. It was a repeater that could fire a dozen rounds at a time without reloading.

But the bounce, the confidence, the arrogance had gone. His heart was beating overtime; he tried to show a calmness he did not feel.

Kavita cowered behind him, pleading with the mob to stop.

"What do you want? What is it?" croaked Manu.

He had to face the situation bravely.

All the guests had fled, and so had the servants.

Manu and Kavita faced the crowd, who were baying for their blood, like a pack of hounds on a hare hunt.

Shaitan stopped in his tracks suddenly, his face a mask of fury. He saw the long, scary rifle pointed straight at his heart. He was a coward. He realised that, as the leader, he would be the first to get shot.

He melted back into the crowd, and egged them on from behind.

The crowd hesitated.

They glared at the rifle.

"Back, Manu, back," whispered Kavita.

They inched back one step at a time, till they came to the nearest room. They darted into it, and locked the doors.

"I'll call the police," stammered Kavita.

"Nearest police-station ... half-hour away," lamented Manu.

"They will not dare ... the rifle! We will hold them until ... police arrive."

"Where are the servants?"

"Fled ... the cowards ... left us!"

The drunken workers chanted abuse and threats.

"Death! Death! Kill them!"

"Burn the house down!"

Shaitan egged them on.

They set the house on fire, and bolted the doors on the outside.

The fire caught rapidly, and the dense smoke made it very hard for Manu and Kavita to breathe. They wet towels, and put them over their faces.

Kavita was hysterical. She sobbed loudly. Manu took her into his arms, tried to comfort her as best he could.

They shouted, begged and pleaded with the crowd to let them go, but the roar of the flames drowned their voices.

The house burned to ash.

The crowd slipped away.

The horror of what they had done dawned on them.

The fierce glare of headlights, the shrill screech of brakes announced the arrival of the police. They froze in horror! They could not believe their eyes!

The fire brigade came after that, but there was no fire to put out. It had destroyed everything.

The officers searched the remains, but found only ash.

The police commissioner thundered in to oversee the investigation. He ordered that the culprits be found and caught forthwith.

"They must be punished!" he barked angrily. "It is cold-blooded murder!"

The workers cowered in terror in their huts.

Detectives went systematically from house to house, asking searching questions.

No one admitted anything.

The police could not arrest and charge all the workers for the crime. They consulted their panel of senior lawyers, and were advised that there had to be solid evidence for the charges of arson and murder to stick.

The guests and the drivers were also questioned.

Shaitan was identified by description as the leader.

The police brought in sniffer dogs to try and track him, but the dogs couldn't find any scent to follow.
The detectives contacted the Kolkata police for help.

They, in turn, alerted the airport authorities and Customs.

Interpol was notified.

There was outrage throughout the country.

The Opposition in Parliament demanded the resignation of the Police Minister. He, however, refused to step down, saying that the police were doing their best, and though they knew that the workers were involved in the crime, there wasn't sufficient evidence to charge any particular individual. It was a mob action. The Minister disclosed that there had been a leader, and they were trying to find him. He would be charged with murder, if found. The Minister revealed that that person had had contacts in high places, and had probably skipped the country, by the time the net had been spread.

The Devil had disappeared.

interview:

JODI ANGEL

INTERVIEWED BY TAYLOR MIMS

JODI ANGEL

Jodi Angel's first collection of short stories, *The History of Vegas,* was published in 2005 and was named as a San Francisco Chronicle "Best Book of 2005" as well as a Los Angeles Times Book Review "Discovery." Her work has appeared in *Tin House, Zoetrope: All-Story,* and the *Sycamore Review,* among other publications and anthologies. Her stories have received several Pushcart Prize nominations and she was selected for Special Mention in 2007. Most recently her story, "A Good Deuce," was noted as a "Distinguished Story" in *The Best American Stories 2012*. She grew up in a small town in Northern California—in a family of girls.

Riprap: When do you write? How often and for how long?

Jodi Angel: I don't have a set schedule for writing, though I often times feel guilty about it because many writers that I admire do have schedules, do have routines, and do write regularly. I don't. I tend to write a lot in my head, so in all honesty, I am always working on something—untangling a plot, gathering images for a new story, figuring out a direction that isn't self-evident in the trajectory of what I'm working on. So, if I count the fact that I am a "head writer," I write constantly, even though it looks like I'm doing other things. I might be playing Red Dead Redemption on the Xbox 360, but I'm really working on something important... When I finally do sit down to write, it usually happens because either my head is overflowing and I am pulled tight as a guitar string, or I have a deadline. Either of those two situations are enough to motivate me to sit down and do that hard part, which is grinding out each sentence, one after the other, in hopes of getting an entire section down. When I am writing short stories, I can write an entire one in a night (I like to write at night when my inner editor is too tired to trip me up), and that's how I like to work—one draft, one shot, all or nothing. Most of the stories in my collections were written in a matter of hours. Nothing ever lingers on and on for days. I don't have the attention span.

Riprap: When did you first start writing?

Angel: I guess I first started writing when I was a young teenager, like 13 or 14 years old. In seventh grade we learned about the elements of fiction—plot, character, setting—and then we had to write a story of our own. I wrote a 30 page epic. From then on, I couldn't help myself.

Riprap: A lot of your stories in The *History of Vegas* are from the perspectives of teenagers. Do you find something unique about that age?

Angel: I love writing from the teenage narrator point of view because I really like thinking about events that move characters from innocence to experience, and teenagers have so much freedom to make mistakes, to learn and grow and experiment and experience, and the repercussions tend to be lower and the consequences tend to be less long term than they are for adults. As a writer, the teenage experience gives me a lot of material that I can use and distort and raise the stakes with, and teenagers tend to get bored and look for trouble and nobody expects them to be out having careers and paying their mortgage. I like that freedom.

Riprap: What did you read when you were younger? What do you read now?

Angel: When I was younger, I used to love to read survival stories—any book that left somebody out in the middle of nowhere with nothing was a great story to me. Maybe that's what I like about teenage characters—they are metaphorically survivalists. They have very few tools with which to navigate their worlds sometimes. I was also a huge Stephen King fan by the time I was in 5th grade, and that never died, though I would argue that King's better books are his older ones. As I have gotten older, I find that I read a lot of short stories because I love the form, so I still keep very close to short story collections that come

out every year—like George Saunders's *Tenth of December*, which was fantastic. And I love Junot Diaz, Alan Heathcock, Donald Ray Pollock, Ron Carlson, Laura van den Berg, and Lisa Glatt. One of the best books I read last year was Alissa Nutting's *Tampa*, just because it was completely off the rails and really really funny despite being really really disturbing at the same time.

Riprap: Your last collection of short stories, *You Only Get Letters from Jail*, is entirely from the perspective of young men. What compelled you to write those stories?

Angel: I like using teenage boy narrators because, as a 43 year old woman, a teenage boy is just about the complete polar opposite of me, and in order to write their stories, I have to completely inhabit those characters or the stories will not be real. Being a narrator who is so much *not* me is a good workout for my imagination.

Riprap: Many authors struggle with writing from the perspective of opposite sex. Has that ever been an issue for you?

Angel: I don't think I struggle with writing from the male perspective because I inhabit these characters so completely. I see the world through my narrator's eyes, and I think that there is no gender delineation for hard times, and most of my narrators are going through one during their stories. One of my favorite books is Wally Lamb's *She's Come Undone*, and he managed to write an entire novel from the point of view of a girl, and never once did I think, "Hey, this sounds as if it was written by an adult man." Wally Lamb changed everything about crossing gender lines with narrators, and crossing them well, and I wanted to see if I could try it, too, with this homage to him.

Riprap: What is your next project?

Angel: I am currently working on a novel, but more than anything, that novel is currently working on me.

GENEVIEVE, QUEEN OF HEARTS

MJ RAMOS

Genevieve Esparza lived at 3206 E. Lanfranco Street practically her whole entire life. She was born right there in the living room one day while her mom was yelling at her brothers to stop watching the neighbor lady take off her clothes and to hurry up and come inside or else. Genevieve lived as a little girl in that house. Even after her mom and dad died and her brothers moved away and her husband's heart stopped working, she lived there—up until that Sunday when no one was looking and her son came and took her to live with him and his family forever.

Genevieve. Queen of Hearts. Ever since the first boy laid eyes on her. Back in 1943, she caused the Great Heartbreak of East L.A. She was only seventeen.

When Genevieve was still named Genevieve Lira, all the teachers at her school knew she had the power to drive boys wild. The basketball team needed new uniforms, so the teachers went after her. Don't you want the boys to look handsome for the homecoming game? don't you want to help them win? they asked her.

How could she say no?

So Genevieve's job one Saturday was to sit in the kissing booth at the school carnival and cost five cents a pop. And just like that, all the guys found out. Those days before the carnival, there was not one penny for good luck to find on the sidewalks. All the nickels, dimes, and quarters wished on in the Hollenbeck Park fountain disappeared. You couldn't even walk into a store to ask for change for a dollar.

Why?

Because every single coin in East L.A. was waiting in the pockets of all those boys who were waiting to lock lips with Genevieve.

Then it happened. The morning of the carnival, Rudy Esparza asked Genevieve to be his girl and she said yes. Later that afternoon, he guarded that kissing booth like a soldier and cracked his knuckles whenever another guy even looked Genevieve's way. All anyone could after that was play the throw-the-pingpong-ball-into-the-fishbowl game. Guys were walking home with three, four bags of goldfish in each hand, letting their leftover change spill from their pockets with each step. For a long time, the sidewalks of East L.A. were buried in silver and copper and shined like treasure. There are still some coins on the sidewalks to this day.

By the end of the week, though, all the goldfish were dead and Roosevelt's basketball team lost its homecoming game. The Great Heartbreak, they all called it. All because of Genevieve.

She's three of a kind, that Genevieve. The Genevieve of my grandma and her friends needs prayers because she never goes to church and sways her hips too much when she walks. When is she gonna stop smoking? women our age don't wear their hair in ponytails, never once has she invited us into her house for coffee are the things they say to each other when they peek at Genevieve through our kitchen window blinds. This isn't the same Genevieve of my grandpa and all the other grandpas on Lanfranco Street. To them, she's still just as beautiful as the day she broke their hearts—just don't tell anyone. My Genevieve smells like vanilla ice cream. Hair silver as quarters. Eyes green as avocados. Peanut butter skin.

One day, during hide-and-seek, she found me lying like a statue under her porch swing and asked me if I wanted to come inside and meet her magical lovebird, Gonzalo.

Liar, I told her.

No, she said. If you ask him to grant you a wish and he hangs upside down, it'll come true. If he stays still, then he doesn't like you. Don't you want to come in and see?

I should have remembered what my grandma said about strangers. I should have run away to find another hiding place. But I didn't. I went inside. And just like that, Gonzalo did his magic and I couldn't stop going over ever since.

I went to Genevieve's the day before she was taken away. Straight to her front door I went and knocked.

From inside she asked, who is it?

It's me, Isabelle, I said.

Isabelle. Come on in. Gonzalo's waiting for you.

I took my seat at the big table like always. She walked into the room and sat across from me and put Gonzalo's cage between us the way she always did.

Gonzalo tells me you're here because you have Gilbert on your mind, she said.

Yes, I said. Then I smiled because Gonzalo knew everything.

Now close your eyes, Isabelle.

I closed my eyes.

Shut them tight, she said.

I shut them tighter.

Now make a wish, she whispered.

A wish...

Yes, a wish. Find the wish inside you.

Anything I want?

Anything you want.

I heard Gonzalo hop from one of his perches to the other. He was ready to do magic.

Ok, I'm ready, I said. I breathed in the smell of Genevieve's perfume that I liked so much.

You found your wish?

I found my wish.

Now unlock it. Tell it to me.

I wish I had a bra so that Gilbert would fall out of love with kickball and in love with me. He likes girls who wear bras. He told me.

I opened my eyes and saw Genevieve looking at me like I was someone she did not know. She started to laugh and laugh and laugh, becoming the Genevieve my grandma hated so much. Gonzalo was stretching in his water dish. Was he broken?

Aye, Isabelle, Genevieve said, leaning over and putting my hands

inside hers, turning into my Genevieve again. You're only seven years old. Don't mess it up with a bra.

But I want Gilbert to love me with all his heart.

Someday he will.

Can I know what day and time?

She stood up and put Gonzalo's cage back in its usual spot. Isabelle, she said, one day you're going to wake up and find a heart outside your door. And the next day, you'll find another one. And the next day, another. Before you know it, you'll have so many hearts, you won't know what to do—these hearts beating all around you, asking to be your only one. But don't pay them any attention. Keep on collecting those boys' hearts. Steal them from the hands of girls. From the kitchens of their mothers and the garages of their fathers. But promise me, Isabelle, that you will never love any of them back. Because one is never enough. Because if that one heart grows boring or stops working, you'll find yourself alone. Dreaming of all those hearts you threw away. What they're up to now. What could have been. It'll make your own heart grow cold.

My feet started to swing under my chair. I didn't know what to say.

You must remember this, Isabelle. You will remember?

Genevieve asked me as if she were telling me.

Yes, I finally said.

But I was a liar.

Genevieve ran her fingers through my hair. Good, she said. Good. I will help you get Gilbert.

I went back to my house and waited for my grandma and all the other grandmas in the neighborhood to get together and leave to play bingo like they always do on Saturday nights. Finally, they did. Carrying their good luck charms in their purses.

Then I ran to Mr. Gonzalez's house. He was sitting in his garage, listening to the baseball game with his eyes closed.

I walked up to him and whispered, Mr. Gonzalez are you awake? into his ear.

He opened his eyes. Isabelle, he said.

Hi, I said.

How are you?

Good. Is Cynthia here?

Cynthia? No. Her mom picked her up yesterday after work.

Mr. Gonzalez, is it true you have beautiful brown eyes?

He laughed. Say that one more time, Isabelle?

Beautiful brown eyes. Let me see—oh yeah, Mr. Gonzalez. Totally.

These old things, he said. They're practically gray now. From years of dust.

No. She was right.

Who was right? Cynthia?

No.

Well, I know if wasn't my wife.

Genevieve. She said it.

Genevieve?

Yes.

Genevieve.

Yeah, she always talks about how you were so handsome. One of Lanfranco's best.

Genevieve?

Yes. If you don't believe me, then go ask her yourself. But don't say I

told you.

I left Mr. Gonzalez sitting there and went and said the same thing to all the other grandpas in the neighborhood. Except to Mr. Gallegos. For him, I changed my words a little. His eyes were blue.

After that, I ran all the way back to Genevieve. She had made herself look pretty with her hair rolled up like a donut and a dress as red as Christmas. In the background, there was music. The old kind without words she liked so much. The kind that melts you into something silly, she'd always say.

Now, Isabelle, your next job is to stand on that top porch step and make sure that everyone who passes gives you a nickel.

So we sat and waited. We waited and nothing. And then, just like that, it happened. I saw Mr. Gonzales come outside to water his grass. He stood there for a whole song and a half. Then he threw his water hose down and walked over.

Genevieve, he said.

Rudy, she said.

Five cents, I said.

He reached into his pocket and put a nickel in my hand. Then he went to Genevieve. The music I think melted him into something silly, too, because for a while he did nothing except look at Genevieve until she asked about Carmen—Mrs. Gonzalez's first name—and how is she doing?

He told her that Mrs. Gonzalez was at bingo. Then he leaned in and kissed her. On the lips. Soft like smoke. When he was done he couldn't stop smiling and Genevieve couldn't stop smiling. But I think her reason was because she had just become the queen of a heart she had lost a long time ago.

Mr. Gonzalez tried to get another kiss, but Genevieve didn't let him. She pointed to my hand, open and waiting for another nickel. He gave me a quarter.

I started to laugh. I laughed and laughed and laughed. I laughed so hard my eyes closed and I fell to the floor and thought my sides were

gonna explode and my guts were gonna slingshot in both directions. When I caught my breath, I saw other grandpas standing over me—Jimmy's, Mireya's, the smelly twins' from up the block—all waiting to put money in my hand. And that line kept growing. And my pockets kept growing smaller because no one asked for change.

Straight down Lanfranco Street there they were, one behind the other, all those boys who walked home with cold lips in 1943. All those boys who lived through the Great Heartbreak. And dummy me, with all that counting and laughing, I went to sleep and didn't get to see it all. I curled up on Genevieve's porch like a cat. And that night, I dreamed my Grandpa picked me up in his arms and said how was he going to buy the racing form tomorrow now? and then I fell into my bed.

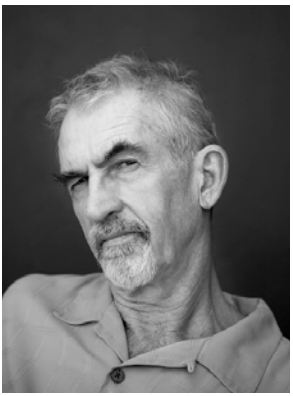
When I woke up, my pockets were empty.

Shame on you, my grandma said to my grandpa the next morning for not going to church even though everyone else's husbands suddenly did and what was his excuse? And when she saw me, Isabelle, why did you sleep in your clothes? and why did you let Isabelle sleep in her clothes? and Isabelle where are you going?

Outside, I said. And I did. To check if the line outside Genevieve's house had gone down but not even one person was there.

They had went away. Just like that.

Then I saw it. Hanging right there on my grandma's tree. Hanging all white and new and just for me. Right there on the branch that I could only reach on my tiptoes. My bra. Swinging with the wind like a flag. And I swear to you, I swear there was bird food on the floor under it. There was even the littlest green feather that got tangled in the lace.



interview:

JIM KRUSOE

INTERVIEWED BY JOSEPH HERNANDEZ

Jim Krusoe's first novel *Iceland*, was published by Dalkey Archive Press, and his others, *Girl Factory, Erased, Toward You,* and *Parsifal* (2012) by Tin House Books. He has also written five books of poems, and two books of stories, *Blood Lake,* and *Abductions*. His stories and poems have appeared several magazines including the *Santa Monica Review,* which he began in 1988. His essays and book reviews have appeared in the *New York Times Book Review, the Los Angeles Times Book Review,* the *Washington Post,* and elsewhere. Two of his essays on the craft of fiction have appeared in the *Tin House Writers' Notebooks I & II*. He's received an NEA fellowship and a Lila Wallace Award. He lives in Los Angeles, and teaches at Santa Monica College and in the Graduate Writing Program at Antioch University.

Riprap: The fiction you write, especially referring to your most recent novel *Parsifal,* often stretches reality and presents things in an unreal or "surreal" way. What drives you to write in such a way?

Jim Krusoe: People keep using "surreal" to describe what I do, and maybe I should just give up and accept it, but to me there's nothing at all surreal about my writing. I take surreal to mean work where things behave in an unnatural, random manner, as in Dali, or Andre Breton. I prefer to start with real situations, but with something off about them. The thing that's off about *Parsifal* is, of course, that large objects, mostly auto parts, are falling from the sky. Everything else after that seems pretty believable, or at least conceivable, either from the headlines or my own life.

Riprap: What are some recent works of fiction you've read that have inspired you?

Krusoe: I don't know that fiction *inspires* me (to do what exactly?), but three books I've read, or reread recently that made me feel humble before them are Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveler* (which at first I inexplicably resisted), David Markson's *Wittengenstein's Mistress,* and Javier Marias' *The Infatuations*.

Riprap: As a writer of both fiction and poetry, how has your writing in one of these genres influenced your writing in the other? What similarities, if any, become apparent to you in writing both genres?

Krusoe: I like to imagine poetry as jumping from stone to stone. Fiction connects the stones with the mortar of detail and event. I read a fair amount of poetry as well as fiction, so tacking onto the previous question, one of the books I'm really enjoying is Charles Wright's collected late poems, *Bye-and-Bye.* Poems, or at least his, allow a different kind of interface with the world than most fiction. They allow breathing space, and the longer I write fiction, the more, oddly enough, it begins to resemble what I would call poetry. I like the interest poetry has in language in and of itself, for one thing, where much of fiction is often just hurrying to get to the next stopping place. But more importantly, I've taken to writing in sections in my fiction because the spaces between them (as in *Parsifal*) allow the reader to insert his or her own reactions to the text instead of being swept along by it. Also, in the spaces between things, between the stanzas of a poem, for example, a reader can have a sense of all the layers of the world *not* spoken of, but undoubtedly present.

Riprap: What non-literary sources do you often draw inspiration from? Music? Film? The physics of the world, for instance?

Krusoe: Music. *Parsifal* was begun when I had just finished an extremely unsuccessful attempt at a novel. I was sitting on the couch, looking out my front window trying to imagine something to write, when lo, the Overture to *Parsifal* came on the radio, and it created an empty stage that I could fill. The other piece that appears in that book is Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." So there's a range in the kind of music that affects me.

Riprap: What is your take on the phrase "Write what you know"? To what extent do you believe this to be true or not?

Krusoe: Obviously it's true for some, but not for me. One of the reasons I write is to discover what I *don't* know, to see the world in a slightly different way. I would hope my writing has that effect on a reader as well. I was raised in Cleveland, and to be forced to describe what my life was actually like growing up there would be a death sentence. Eventually I was able to re-create a new and improved Cleveland, which I wrote about in *Erased*.

Riprap: Where do you find your fiction often beginning? Do you, for example, begin with the goal to write a novel about a war between the earth and the sky, or do you begin with a name, such as Parsifal?

Krusoe: More and more, my fiction begins with an image that I can't get out of my head, and then another, and then another. The trick is to see how the images relate to those around them, and then pray that a narrative of some sort will form. I struggled for six years with the book I'm working on now, trying to see how things fit, throwing out some images and adding new ones. In many ways I'm much more of a collagist these days than a person who writes conventional narratives that begin with an action or situation. My approach reminds me of when I was a child and I made what I used to call experiments with my chemistry set. I would pour stuff from one test tube into another and it would turn color, or froth, or get hot, or explode. It's too bad that those kinds of sets have been long outlawed for children.

Riprap: What are some authors that you feel have had a significant impact on your writing, or on the way you approach writing?

Krusoe: I like writers most who create a complete world, not fantasy, but one still recognizably, or remotely, mine. When I was four-years-old, the lady next door read *David Copperfield* to her children and to me, and I've never forgotten the impact it made. She was a widow whose husband blew up in an explosion in a match factory, which was a Dick-

ensian sort of accident, come to think of it. So I love Dickens, Proust, Kafka, Beckett, Thomas Bernhard, and Cormac McCarthy—*Blood Meridian* and the Border Trilogy. Henry James, too. I wish I could say I learned from them, and I certainly tried. Still, it took me a few years to figure out that as much as I may admire a writer that doesn't mean I can write like them. In the end we are left with who we are.

Riprap: When did you start writing?

Krusoe: I can't remember when I didn't write. In the third grade I wrote what I thought were funny advertisements; in junior high I wrote a play; in high school and college, poems. I began, as many people, trying to use writing to call attention to myself. Then at one point, mercifully, that became irrelevant. Instead I try to honor the piece by making it as strong as I can.

Riprap: What is some advice you'd give to an aspiring writer?

Krusoe: Persevere. Try to get better every day. Be humble. Pay attention.

Riprap: With your most recent novel *Parsifal,* what questions did you set out to answer?

Krusoe: I don't ever set out to answer any questions; if a question is a good one, it won't have an answer. So I only want to frame questions, and they are probably the same questions I always seem to be left with: Can the past be undone? What is responsibility? Are good intentions enough? What is the difference between being alive and being dead? Oddly enough, I went to a production of *The Trojan Women* just the other day, and those were the same questions it was asking.

Parenthetically, there do seem to be two kinds of writers: the answerers and the questioners. Guess which one I am.

Riprap: If you could write anything, what would it be?

Krusoe: I would write a two hundred-page book describing how a certain hill in West Virginia looked on the spring afternoon when I saw it forty years ago. There were sheep grazing near the top, a blue sky with puffy white clouds, and the grass was so green it hurt my eyes. A fresh wind was blowing. In my imaginary book, there would be no people and no plot. That hill, with everything on and around it, seemed then, and still does, as profound and beautiful a statement as I can imagine.

YARD SALE LINGERIE

JORDAN FARMER

I came upon it at Ruby Hatfield's yard sale after a long hoot-owl shift of sitting in the truck, making sure none of the pill heads from over in Bradshaw tried to steal the mine's copper wire. She had it hung over the chain link fence at the First Baptist Church, the gossamer material billowing in the breeze. It was white as a fish belly and trimmed in lace. Even without touching it I could tell it would be soft, like the velvet hair inside a pig's ear.

I had no idea what the thing was called. It wasn't the sort of thick cotton nightgown my mother had worn when I was a child. It was too short, too low-cut and thin. Nobody would hang something like that up at a yard sale in the church parking lot. A part of me decided I must be imagining it. I'd been awake since seven the previous evening. Normally, I got a little sleep in the truck, but aside from copper thieves the mine was having trouble with coyotes coming off the hill, so I'd set up with a .22 rifle and waited to see if any came nosing around for the scraps the miners tossed out of their lunch buckets. After a couple hours of waiting, I'd cracked the spine on my detective novel, too scared to go to sleep. I'd been caught sleeping on the job a month before. One more time and the boss would shit-can me for sure.

Exhaustion and the early morning light, which had taken on the purple hue of an old bruise, must have been causing me to see things. I couldn't imagine Ruby Hatfield, who had been a withered hag for all of my thirty years, wearing something like that, but I'd heard once she'd been young with dark heavy hair that fell down her back, and some man must have stood transfixed, stopped in his path and captured by the sight of her like a squirrel treed by dogs. A small sticker had been stuck just below the cupped hollow meant for the left breast. Twenty-five cents. I had the money, a whole array of crumpled bills and tarnished, bent coins in the pocket of my jeans. I wanted to touch it, but my hands were grimy, covered in a film of gun oil from the .22 carbine and the soot that hung heavy in the air around the mine. All I could do was lean forward and breathe the deep scent of some long-withered honeysuckle that wafted from the fibers, intoxicating me with ancient lust. I had my nose an inch from the sloping neckline when I heard Ruby's cane pounding the blacktop of the parking lot.

"Thinking about buying that negligee?" she asked. Her words crawled out over toothless gums and tight lips. Ruby resembled a bird. She was short and hunched, as if the weight of life had compressed her into a small ball. A man's denim work shirt hung off her crooked shoulders, its tail touching her knees.

"Naw," I said. "I was just looking at it. Sure is pretty."

"Real good deal for something like that," she said. "Young man like you ought to have a lady that would appreciate it."

No woman had paid me the time of day since Willa left two years

ago. I didn't even talk to girls. On Sunday evenings, I watched them come to town from the hollers in their church dresses, their heels carrying them past me in a quick hurry that seemed to leave no time for a second glance, much less a kind word. The other days of the week I spent in bed, sleeping away the daylight until it was time to go to work. Hoot-owl has a way of cutting you off from the ways of normal people. The everyday concerns break down. Most nights I barely bothered to brush my teeth, and my guard uniform was never laundered.

"I don't got a girlfriend," I said.

"Well, maybe you got a girl you'd like to give it to," Ruby said. "It'd make a nice present if you were sweet on anybody."

The idea seemed presumptuous to me. What sort of girl would want a man to bring her something like that? A fella might as well go knock his hard-on against her ass. Ruby just wanted to get a sale.

"I think I'll just leave it for someone who can get some use out of it," I said. "Thanks, anyhow."

I started to turn and saunter off towards the truck, but I could feel Ruby's milky eyes on me. I stopped, toed at the bits of gravel littering the paved lot, and thought about whether or not I could really leave something as exotic as a negligee hanging on the fence to spoil like fruit.

"Only a quarter?" I asked.

Ruby nodded. Her hand was open in anticipation of payment, the pooled hollow of her palm deep enough to hold water. I dug the coin out of my pocket and placed it in her hand. Her skin was thin like the film that develops on unstirred soup. I thought about how easily such skin could tear and leave the person standing totally exposed, skinned alive for the whole world to examine every tendon and bone.

"Ain't got no bags," she said. "You'll have to tote it."

I carefully picked up the negligee with the tips of my fingers, folded it long ways, and draped it over the cleanest part of my left arm. The material was cool and soothing, as if the wiry hair on my arm were being sheared off by ice.

"Thanks for the business," Ruby said. "Find a nice girl to give it to, Lester. A handsome boy like you shouldn't have any problems."

I nodded my thanks and climbed in the truck. I moved the rifle from the passenger seat, tossed my detective novel on the floorboards, and set the negligee down. I thought about what she said. It had been so long since a woman had looked at me, I'd have given it to any one of them. The only woman I ever spoke to with any regularity was Willis McGrew's wife. I turned the key and the Chevy's engine rattled hard. It gave an asthmatic cough and belched a cloud of burnt oil as I pulled out.

Willis and I had been best friends since high school. Our fathers had been miners and drinkers together since they were young, and it seemed natural Willis and I would carry on the tradition. Eventually

we did, but as children we kept our distance from each other. Whenever my dad brought me over to Mr. McGrew's house, I avoided Willis as if he were a cat with a sore tail. He was a wicked boy, prone to lighting fires and beating on things with a splintered Louisville Slugger. He whipped me several times before we teamed up to pummel Hollis Meyer in seventh grade and get back our stolen baseball cards. Willis respected me because I was afraid of him, but not afraid of fighting. I had learned that being small and weak meant you had to throw the first punch or run. I chose the first punch. It was the sort of decision Willis could get behind.

The sun was beginning to peek over the mountains. Its dull light strained through the skeletal trees left bare even in July. The radio said some sort of blight had hit the woods, stripping the leaves off the oaks. The blight, coupled with the two-month drought, had killed most of the vegetation. Our typically green mountains were full of barren, bald patches.

Willis would probably be awake. In the mornings, he liked to sit on the front porch and sip a cold beer. Willis' days didn't involve much other than beer and surveillance. He'd been on disability for five years, ever since he'd hurt his back underground. Beverly said he was healed, but Willis refused to accept it. Disability had become a golden ticket in the southern coal fields, a way out of underground labor, and no intelligent man was willing to give that up. I decided I'd go see if Willis was awake. I could show him the negligee, and if he was sleeping I could always talk to Beverly. She sat close and concentrated on what I said. She didn't just wait on her turn to speak.

The road to Willis' house went from potholed pavement to dirt within a mile. The shallow creek on the left side of the road was stagnant, its usual swift water evaporated until it was mostly muddy bottom, and the weeds leading up the path on the side of the mountain had become brittle and dry, ravaged by drought. The road used up a lot of critters who came to the creek to drink. Along the side of the road lay bloated raccoons, opossum, and one small mutt, nearly flattened. Crows big as chickens paced around the bodies picking off mouthfuls. Country crows have changed since I was a boy. They used to fly off at the sound of an approaching car, but these just looked at me.

Willis' house was a squatting one-story building surrounded by a low-hanging weeping willow and several dying oaks. The trees had been dead for years, but Willis' disability status wouldn't allow him to go outside and take the chainsaw to them. The house peeled paint, and the porch sagged from years of the untreated wood warping. No one was on the porch, so I parked next to Willis' El Camino and stood by my truck, looking into the ditch that separated Willis' yard from the road. The ditch was four feet deep by three feet wide and surrounded

the home like a moat. During the spring thunderstorms, when the water ran off the mountains, it was the only thing that kept the house dry. Willis was fanatical about maintaining the ditch, but afraid to dig it on his own. He'd become suspicious that people were spying on him to prove he wasn't truly disabled, and that if he so much as walked outside carrying a shovel they'd snap a few pictures and have him before Judge O'Bryan in a week. I'd come over every March when the soil softened and dig for hours, stopping only to sit and sip the lemonade Beverly brought me. I thought of all the times I'd been in that trench, covered in dirt until I smelled like a gravedigger and every muscle ached. I didn't mind helping out. Willis and Beverly were good people, and a man has an obligation to his friends. I spit into the ditch, opened the truck door and found a plastic grocery bag under the passenger seat to place the negligee in, and went around the house to let myself in the back door.

Beverly was cooking breakfast. I could smell the frying sausage and hear the splatter and sizzle of grease. Brody, their fat tom cat, slinked up and rubbed against my leg. I nudged him out of the way. Brody's got a bad disposition. One minute he's loving on your leg and the next he's got his claws buried. "Hello," I shouted.

Beverly turned from the stove, gave me a smile, and put a finger to her lips. "Willis is sleeping one off," she said. "Have a seat and I'll make you some eggs."

I pulled my chair away from the table, careful not to let the legs drag on the hardwood floor. Willis was the worst when it came to hangovers. Once, when he found himself locked out of the house, he took the door off the hinges and left it sitting out in the yard.

"How was work?" Beverly asked. The light from the window barely touched her. Shadows played on the lines of her back that stood out under the wrinkled mess of Willis' work shirt. It was a tad short and I could see the beginnings of her thighs. I made myself look away. My mind continued to travel up her leg until I squeezed my eyes closed and concentrated.

"I don't know how much longer I can deal with hoot-owl," I said. "People ain't supposed to live like this. I feel like a damned ghoul."

"Least it's work," she said. She flipped the sausage patties over, speckling the countertop in grease. "I wish Willis would go back to work. All this laziness and drinking is gonna kill him. Those coyotes still around?"

"Ain't seen any," I said. A week before I had shot one down the hill from the mine. I'd been coming off the hill on a run to town to pick up some late night grub for the guys and seen its luminous eyes glowing from the brush. I leaned the .22 out the window, fired twice into the thicket, and heard the sharp yelp as the animal was hit and began to thrash through the foliage. When I got out there was a solid blood trail,

but I didn't bother to follow it. I didn't want to see it die, or have to finish it off. The truth was I didn't know if it was in me to take another shot.

"How many eggs you want?" Beverly asked.

"I'm not too hungry," I said.

"Well, you're eating," she said as she filled a plate with eggs and sausage. "I've cooked thinking Willis might get up, and it's a sin to be wasteful."

The first time I met Beverly was at one of Kevin Chaffin's bonfires. In those days we used to go up the holler to the end of the old horse road, into one of the clearings near the sludge ponds left over from where the company used to wash their coal. The sludge ponds were giant bogs, muddy pits with no bottom that the old miners said were full of the skeletons of deer and other varmints that sank down and drowned in the mud. Chaffin would build a fire near the pond, burning brush and old furniture while the boys cranked the radios on their trucks and sipped beer with the girls who'd come because it was Saturday and there was nothing else to do. Willis had showed up with Beverly. She was from Kermit, just a few miles over, but they had met at a movie theater in Pikeville, Kentucky where she was visiting relatives.

"This woman," he told me, leaning close and blowing Budweiser in my face. "This woman, she ain't like other girls. She's different."

Later, when the men were daring one another to take a stroll out into the muck that had claimed so many creatures, Beverly had pulled her boots off and begun walking across, sinking up to her bare knees in the filth. She stood in the middle of the sludge, black mud clinging to her hips, and smiled. "You fellas sure are gullible," she said.

I shoveled eggs into my mouth, broke a cat-head biscuit and used it to sop up the yolk. In those hours when the sunlight was straining through the large windows, there was no better place in the world than Willis' kitchen. I listened to the sound of Beverly humming some tune, smelled the frying food, and felt the brush of Brody against my leg, trying to make friends. The last time he'd climbed my leg like a tree, nine pounds of spitting rage heading straight for my balls. I closed my eyes and thought about my dank apartment with the cramped kitchen where the sink overflowed with dishes swarmed by gnats, the small twin bed with dirty sheets. No woman had ever huddled close with me in that bed.

"I brought you something," I said. My fingers slipped into the bag and traced the lace fringe on the negligee's hem.

"What's that?" she asked. I watched her turn, rest her elbows and forearms on the countertop as she leaned back against it. "Some kinda present?" A wicked grin played across her face. It was the sort I'd always longed to see.

I held out the negligee, unraveled the wadded material until it hung

from my grasp, and watched her eyes light up with brilliance, awed by the silk and lace. Her mouth parted as if she were about to speak, then clamped shut as her brow furrowed into wrinkles that looked deep and permanent.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Something I found down at the Hatfield yard sale. It weren't too expensive, and I thought you might like it. I thought you and Willis might like it."

Her hand went out to caress the hem, but she stopped just short. She let her hand fall and there was disappointment on her face, the sort a child has when it's told a dog may bite.

"I can't accept that, Lester. Not from you."

I started to put the negligee back in my lap, but laid it out on the table instead, the short hem hanging off the side like an obscene tablecloth. I made my eyes stay steady. When I spoke my voice came out thick and dry, but didn't waver. "Throw it away then. I ain't taking it back."

I wanted her to see I'd found a measure of conviction, that after a life of slinking around and away from things I'd decided to step up toward the things I wanted, even if I wasn't going to get them, but something in her eyes made me think she'd decided I was crazy. I got the sense she liked the table between us.

I stood up, left the negligee lying on the table, and put my plate in the sink. She didn't move away as I stood running water over my plate and watching the egg yolk swirl down the drain. I could hear the shallow sound of her breathing and feel the warmth from her skin as it sweated from the heat of the kitchen.

"Tell Willis I stopped by," I said, and went out the door, left her leaning on the counter looking at my awkward gift.

I dropped into bed as soon as I got home, and it was dusk by the time I came to. My days operated in this nocturnal cycle. I'd not been outside in real daylight in over a week. The apartment was warm, and the dirty bed sheets damp from my sweat. I showered, didn't bother to shave, and ate a fried bologna sandwich while standing at my kitchen counter. I didn't have to work, and the idea occurred to me that I should just go back to bed. There was too much free time to be awake, too much opportunity to ruminate on how foolish I'd acted with Beverly. I could remember the look she'd given me, the cold way her eyes had assessed the negligee. It seemed like I'd broken things in a way that couldn't be repaired.

I thought about loading up into the truck and just leaving. I had nothing holding me to the shitty three-room apartment or the town. My job as guard and coyote killer wasn't the sort of thing I could stand much longer, and without Beverly and Willis it seemed as though there was

nothing left. I didn't know where I'd go, but I thought maybe I'd just get in the truck and drive, see how far the dying pickup could take me. I imagined the mountains tapering off into fields or the stifling heat giving way to a cool northern breeze.

The phone rang and took me out of my thoughts. I laid my sandwich down and picked up the receiver.

"Hello," I said.

"Lester." Willis' voice sputtered and choked on my name. I could hear a slur developing, each syllable slugging through the sour mash mouth he'd developed. "Lester, what you doin'?"

"Eatin' a bite." I didn't know what to say to him. "How're you?"

"I'm havin' a drink. Sitting out on the porch wondering where you at? Kenneth and the boys were coming over. Gonna bring out that twelve string Gibson of his." There was a pause and the sound of him gulping beer. "How fast can you get here?"

"Pretty soon, I suppose." I knew the boys weren't coming. Willis wasn't going to say anything to me about it on the phone. It was something we'd have to settle in person. It was a bad sign that he was already so drunk, but I figured I could defuse the situation. I'd once talked him out of searching for Randall Wiley with a sawed-off twenty gauge after Randall had made fun of Willis' days as the Wildcats' first baseman. He'd said Willis couldn't catch the clap from a holler whore.

In some strange way, I didn't care much what happened. I figured that if he wanted to fight about it that was fine by me. I'd made a big enough ass of myself to warrant a shot in the teeth.

"I'm on my way," I told him. I hung up, slipped into the cleanest pair of dirty jeans I could find, and went out to the truck.

All the lights were on at Willis' house. I parked the truck next to the ditch and sat for a moment. Willis was on the porch, reclining in an old lawn chair with a bottle resting by his feet. A cloud of mosquitos and moths circled the humming bug zapper behind him, drawn to the electrical siren song despite how many crisp corpses were already stuck to the mesh screen. I took a deep breath, found the last bent Marlboro in the pack I'd stashed between the seats and lit it up. I allowed myself a long drag before climbing out and pitching the smoke into the ditch.

Willis didn't look up as I came up the driveway. He leaned over, grasped the bottle, and took a long drink that made the whiskey bubble. I climbed up the steps, leaned against one of the porch posts.

"Where the boys?" I asked.

"Be back momentarily," he said. His voice wasn't slurred so much as mired in alcohol. Each syllable seemed dipped in rot gut until it was bloated and sodden, left to croak out wet. "Went on a little beer run."

He handed the bottle to me.

I took a small sip and handed it back. Our fingers touched and I could feel how cold his hands were even in the warm night air.

"Beverly around?" I asked.

"Nope," he said. "She ain't. Though I guessed you'd ask about her. She told me you came by earlier. Told me you left something here."

The negligee was wadded up in his lap, his fingers squeezing the material. I watched his eyes crawl over my shoes. The fingers of his other hand tapped the glass bottle. "What did she say?" I asked. "Cause if I've hurt anybody that weren't my intention. You know how much I love you two."

He flung the bottle hard and it hit me in the chest despite my attempt to throw up my arms and knock it away. I was more surprised than hurt, but he rose up and swung at my head with a drunken haymaker I hadn't seen coming. His knuckles dug deep into my ear as I grabbed him by the collar and the momentum of the punch took us both off the porch. We landed in the damp grass together. I managed to get out from underneath him, and began trying to drag myself off towards the truck. Willis wasn't coming after me. He lay on his back, his eyes rolled up toward the clear night sky, and he screamed out. I assumed it was a howl of anger, but I watched him run his dirty hands through his hair, smearing mud on his face until he looked covered in war paint.

I crawled over, gripped the splintered porch for leverage, and climbed to my feet. I sat down on the edge and looked at Willis. "What'd you hit me for?" I asked.

"I fucked my goddamned back," he said.

My left leg was throbbing in time with my heart beat, and I could feel the slightest trickle of blood running from my left eyebrow. The porch wasn't too far a drop and a part of me assumed Willis was faking, waiting on me to get close enough for him to bury the Case knife he carried in the pocket of his jeans into my neck. I watched him grip the tall grass and try to push himself up. He got halfway up before letting out another howl and dropping back down.

"It's that goddamned bulging disk," he said. "I've cracked a vertebra."

I heard the screen door creak, and looked over to see Beverly silhouetted in the light. Her face was partially obscured by the mesh of the screen door, but I could see the deep purple bruise, the swelling around her left eye that made the side of her face look distorted and tight, as if the skin might begin to rip and tear at the slightest movement.

"Bastard," I said, and moved towards him. I was ready to stomp him flat, to keep hitting until he was nothing more than a liquid that would seep down into the earth. Beverly came out onto the porch, but she wouldn't come into the full light. She stayed close to the bug zapper,

her face only clear when the sparks from an insect's death allowed a moment of illumination.

"Don't hurt him anymore, Lester," she said.

Willis gave a hacking cough. "I've finally done it, Bev," he said. "I've broke my goddamned back."

I walked over and hunkered down until I was close to him. He stank of dried sweat and whiskey, and his chapped lips bled from where he'd bit them on the way down.

"Can you stand?" I asked.

"I don't think so," he said.

I turned back toward Beverly. "Call an ambulance," I said.

She didn't move inside toward the phone, just stared off into the dark. I tried to meet her eyes, to see what she wanted me to do, but she was avoiding my gaze, trying not to look at the broken men on her lawn.

"Help me up," Willis said. He reached out to me. I leaned down, got an arm around him, and rose up until he was on his feet. His legs seemed too weak to keep him standing on his own, so I let him rest his weight against me. He'd begun to cry, a soft whimper as we swayed in a drunken dance toward the porch. His mouth was dripping freely, the warm drops soaking into the denim of my jeans. I held him back and looked at his mouth. His bottom lip was already swollen and there was a large hole where his teeth had come through.

"Gonna need some stitches," I told him. He opened his mouth as if to speak, allowing me a glimpse at his bloated tongue. It looked raw and pink, and there was a film of blood in his mouth. "I'm taking him to the hospital," I said to Beverly. "I think you ought to come along."

She was sitting in the lawn chair. The visible sliver of her swollen eye was a cloud of busted blood vessels. The rest was nearly shut.

"I ain't going anywhere with you two," she said. "Just let me be."

I wanted to explain to her, to let her know how sorry I was, but I couldn't manage anything. Willis hacked blood on my shoulder. I leaned him against the porch and picked the negligee up out of the grass. I wrapped my hand around his jaw and forced his mouth open wide enough to stuff the bundled material inside, filling the ragged maw. The satin began to soak up the blood and saliva, the smell of honeysuckle replaced with the metallic twinge of violence. I got Willis under the arm and we moved off to my truck, stumbling over the ditch. I helped him get into the passenger seat, then went around to my side. I moved the gun out of the way. The car stalled, but I pumped the gas enough to get it going without flooding the engine.

Willis was trying to speak through the mouthful of fabric. I pulled it from his mouth.

"Jesus Christ, I'm sorry," he said. "I'm so sorry."

I felt like shoving the negligee down his throat, making him

strangle on it, or maybe shooting him with the .22 and leaving him to die in the ditch. I looked to the porch. I thought I could still make out the shape of Beverly standing by the bug zapper. I wiped my hands on the negligee and examined the lace fringe. It felt soft and light in my rough palms, but it stank of dirt and men's blood. I tossed the soiled rag out into the ditch, put the truck in gear, and drove out of the holler toward town, away from the night song of crickets and the occasional screeching owl.

contributors

Mayli Apontti: Mayli Apontti recently graduated with honors from CSULB with degrees in English Literature and Creative Writing. Her other passions include traveling abroad, painting, and playing guitar.

Anna Arroyo: Anna Arroyo is a photographer from Barcelona based in Berlin. She works only with film and is moved by daily life moments, people, nature and light. Recently she has kept a visual journal, paying attention to architecture, lifestyle, nature, color composition and portraits. She likes creating delicate, sensitive, but at the same time intense imagery.

Yesenia C Ayala: Yesenia Carolina Ayala received her Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing from the University of California, Riverside. She plans to further her writing career by attending an MFA program within the next year.

Mark Belair: Mark's poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Atlanta Review, Fulcrum, Harvard Review, Michigan Quarterly Review, Poetry East, The South Carolina Review,* and *The Sun*. His books include the collection *While We're Waiting* (Aldrich Press, 2013) and two chapbook collections: *Walk With Me* (Parallel Press of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2012) and *Night Watch* (Finishing Line Press, 2013). For more information, please visit markbelair.com.

Olivier Bochettaz: Born in the French Alps, Olivier Bochettaz recently migrated to Long Beach in order to join the local community of poets. He has a BA and a MA in Literatures in English from Stendhal University, France, and is currently part of the MFA in Poetry at CSU Long Beach. His poetry can be found in *Cadence Collective* and *Remedial Art Class,* and his critical works in *DUMAS*.

Dmitry Borshch: Dmitry Borshch was born in Dnepropetrovsk, studied in Moscow, and now lives in New York. His paintings have been exhibited at the National Arts Club (New York), Brecht Forum (New York),

ISE Cultural Foundation (New York), and the State Russian Museum (Saint Petersburg).

Bill Buege: Bill Buege is the author of two chapbooks: *Jill* (Tamafyhr Mountain Press, 2007) and *Imitations* (Chiron Review Press, 2008). His poems have appeared in *Callaloo, Christian Century, Collages and Bricolages, Iris, The Laurel Review, Mid American Review, Phoebe, River Styx, Sou'wester, The Madison Review,* and the anthology *Chick for a Day,* as well as in many other periodicals. One of his poems was nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Erwin Chang: Erwin Chang is a Journalism major at CSU Long Beach with a minor in Creative Writing. He was a Music major until his Sophomore year. Born and raised in LA, this is his first submission of any literary work.

Marcus Clayton: Marcus is a graduate student earning his MFA in poetry at CSU Long Beach. He strives to one day become a college professor teaching various English courses, and his lifelong dream is to lead creative writing workshops. Until then, he spends much of his time reading comic books and listening to bands no one has ever heard of.

Brian Clifton: Brian Clifton lives in Kansas City, Missouri. He has lost numerous things in his smallish apartment. A running list of missing items includes: a light bulb, keys, three sticks, a leather strap, 500 grains of sand, reams of printer paper, and a ukulele.

Tobi Cogswell: Tobi Cogswell is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Credits include or are forthcoming in various journals in the US, UK, Sweden and Australia. In 2012 and 2013 she was short-listed for the Fermoy International Poetry Festival. Her fifth and latest chapbook is *"Lit Up"*, (Kindred Spirit Press). She is the co-editor of San Pedro River Review (sprreview.com).

Sarah Eick: Sarah Johanna Eick was born in 1974 in Münster. She began photographing during her studies in Art History, Philosophy and Applied Cultural Sciences at the WMU in Münster. Her interest in photography was inspired by painting and techniques of mixing photography and painting. This interest led to photography studies under Hans Eick. She has been active as a freelance photographer in Berlin since 2001.

Jordan Farmer: Jordan Farmer was originally from West Virginia. He is currently a PhD student studying creative writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Megan Grant: Megan Grant is a senior at CSU Long Beach who grew up in the small town of Reedley, California. She is majoring in Creative Writing and Literature, emphasizing in poetry, and also has a minor in Jewish Studies.

Curtis Harrell: Curtis Harrell writes and teaches in northwest Arkansas where he also busks with the banjo and leads tours through a cave in the summer. He has been recently published in *The Healing Muse, The New River, descant, Eclectica, The Arkansas Times,* and *The Old Time News,* a journal of American old-time music.

Sam A Harris: Sam A Harris is a photographer that lives and works in London, UK. Thematically his pensive but subtle work touches on issues of life and death, and quietly asks questions of our place within the world.

Daniel Hudon: Daniel Hudon, originally from Canada, teaches writing, math, physics and astronomy in Boston. He has published a chapbook, *Evidence for Rainfall* (Pen and Anvil Press), a popular nonfiction book, *The Bluffer's Guide to the Cosmos* (Oval Books) and has a travel manuscript, *Traveling into Now,* that is looking for a home. He blogs about environmental topics at econowblog.blogspot.com and some of his writing links can be found at people.bu.edu/hudon.

***Hannah Huff*:** Hannah Huff received her MFA in Creative Writing: Poetry from CSULB. She is currently writing prose.

Brad Johnson: Winner of the 2012 Longleaf Press Chapbook Contest, Brad Johnson has published four chapbooks of poetry. His first full-length collection *The Happiness Theory* is due out from Main Street Press in the fall of 2013. Work of his has also been accepted by *Atlanta Review, Nimrod, Permafrost, Poet Lore, Salamander, The South Carolina Review, Southern Indiana Review* and others.

Juliet Johnson: Juliet Johnson is a Drawing and Painting major also working on a minor in Creative Writing at CSU Long Beach. She has self-published three chapbooks, the latest one entitled *Chromas.* She is currently learning the value of a full night's sleep, contemporary artists' views on figuration, as well as how to make acquaintances into friends.

Carolyn Keogh: Carolyn Keogh is a museum professional and writer who likes to look at paintings and watch the Real Housewives. She resides in Brooklyn, NY.

Kersie Khambatta: Kersie Khambatta, a semi-retired lawyer in New Zealand, is a part-time writer of articles and short stories. His writing is recognizable by his simple style, with short sentences and appropriate words. He has a diploma of Associateship of the British Tutorial Institute, London, in English, Modern Journalism, and Journalism in India, and a Certificate in Comprehensive writing awarded by the Writing School (Australia and New Zealand). His pieces have appeared in publications in Canada, New Zealand, USA, India, and other countries.

Tom Kondrat: Tom's first foray into photography was at an early age. But unlike most, by 12 years old he had landed (and had gotten paid for!) a photograph in a travel publication. More than 10 years later, Tom returned to his first love, abandoning his financial computing education in favor of a camera. He's since had work in numerous exhibitions in

London, Taipei and Beijing, many publications and few awards including Association of Photographers Open Award in UK.

Nina Lodico: Nina Lodico graduated from CSULB in 2013 with her Bachelors in Fine Art Photography. She hopes to create relationships with her viewers which then bring a realization, whether good or bad, of one's reality through commonalities in her art. Her biggest goal in life is to inspire people.

Conor McNamara: Conor McNamara was born and raised in Seattle, Washington. He earned a Bachelors Degree in English from the University of Montana in 2011. His work has appeared in online versions of *Intentional Walk Review* and *Squalorly.* He lives in Los Angeles.

Natalia Melikova: Russian born, American raised, Natalia has an MFA from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, CA. Natalia currently lives in Moscow to work on The Constructivist Project – a project that promotes Russian avant-garde architecture and its preservation through photography and information. More: nataliamelikova.com / theconstructivistproject.com.

Jax NTP: Jax NTP holds an MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry from CSULB; where they were the Editor-in-Chief of *RipRap Literary Journal Vol. 35* & Section Editor of *Watermark Journal Vol. 7.* They won the William T. Shadden Scholarship Graduate Award for Poetry in Spring 2013. Their work has been featured in journals such as *PEARL, 3:AM (UK), Cordite Poetry Review (AU), The Fat City Review,* and *The Mas Tequila Review.* More: jaxntp.tumblr.com.

Cassady Ozimec: Cassady Ozimec is the oldest of three brothers from Buellton, California. He is currently pursuing a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing at CSU Long Beach.

Holly Painter: Holly Painter is an MFA graduate of the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her poetry has been published in literary journals in the

US, New Zealand, and Australia. Holly lives with her partner in Michigan and Singapore, where she writes love poems on behalf of besotted people around the world at adoptapoet.wordpress.com.

John Francis Peters: John Francis Peters is a Los Angeles based photographer specializing in documentary, portrait, travel and lifestyle projects. John's diverse body of work ranges from the portraiture of influential personalities to essays on emerging culture and environments in transition. His personal and assigned projects focus on both domestic and international subjects.

Max Pinckers: Max Pinckers is a photographer. He lives in Belgium. More of his work can be seen online at maxpinckers.be.

Kristian Punturere: Kristian Punturere is an 18-year-old freelance photographer based in Los Angeles, CA with a concentration in portrait, documentary, fine art, nature and fashion work. Born and raised in Culver City CA, Kristian's interests have been nurtured by both the eclectic LA culture as well as the community-driven attitude of Culver City, thus influencing his love for the arts and the power of true human connection brought about by photography.

MJ Ramos: MJ Ramos graduated from CSULB in 2004. She loves her husband and son, weekend getaways, modern literature, ghost stories, and wine—yes, in that order. She is working on her first compilation of short stories.

Alex Ratanapratum: Alex Ratanapratum is a senior at CSULB majoring in English Literature and Creative Writing. His poetic project deals with the subjects of urban third generation Asian Americans: hip hop and internet cultures; dwindling cultural heritage. He has been accepted to UCR's MFA in Poetry as a Distinguished Chancellor's Fellow.

William Rugen: William Rugen worked for 20 years as a fisheries oceanographer before quitting to pursue photography. He currently lives in Seattle and works as a commercial and fine art photographer. The look and process for each project is driven by subject matter with the use of color and strong graphic elements being the only common thread.

Cynthia Schultheis: Cynthia Schultheis is an alumna of CSULB, earning her MA in US History in 1994. She has taught at community colleges before returning to her alma mater. Presently, she is the Assistant Director of the campus' Multicultural Center. Cynthia has written poetry since her teens, and this particular poem, "I Am An American," is one she's been revising for the last 20 years.

Noa Snir: Noa Snir is an Israeli illustrator currently living and working in Berlin, Germany. She was born and raised in Jerusalem, where she graduated *cum laude* from the Bezalel Academy of Art & Design. She works with international clients and has exhibited her work in Israel, Europe and the US.

JR Solonche: Four-time Pushcart Prize nominee as well as Best of the Net nominee JR Solonche has been publishing poetry in magazines, journals, and anthologies since the early 70s. He is coauthor of *Peach Girl: Poems for a Chinese Daughter* (Grayson Books).

Tyler Spangler: He has a BA in Psychology and is an Art Center College of Design dropout. He ran an illegal punk venue for 13 shows until it got shut down by police. Tyler currently freelances and works with clients in the music, surf and textile industry.

Marcus Thibodeau: Marcus Thibodeau is an artist with a BFA in Printmaking from CSU Long Beach. He works primarily with monoprints and silkscreens. His work focuses upon the exploration of self, specifically chaos theory and how this develops self. The incorporation of text (from books and from his own thoughts) and imagery (photo-based and hand drawn), layered together, is used to portray

his thought process and the never-ending chain of thinking.

Charles F Thielman: Born and raised in Charleston, SC, moved to Chicago, educated at red-bricked universities and on city streets, Charles F Thielman has enjoyed working as a social worker, truck driver, city bus driver and enthused bookstore clerk. Married on a Kauai beach in 2011, a loving Grandfather for five free spirits, his work as Poet and shareholder in an independent Bookstore's collective continues!

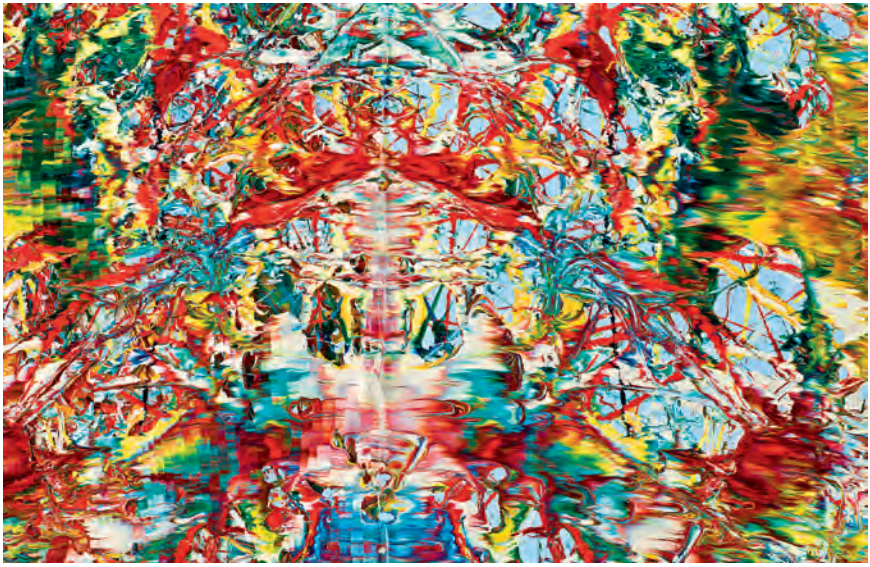
Jessica Tyson: Jessica Tyson is a poet, copywriter, and practitioner of the service arts from San Diego, CA. She is a fairly recent graduate of the MFA program at the University of Washington, as well as a proud alumna of CSULB.

Brian Vu: Brooklyn via Orange County photographer Brian Vu's images are inspired by psychedelic and religious experiences and aesthetics. Photography is an extension of what his past, present, and future look like. Not through a lens, but through a kaleidoscope.

Samantha Wall: Samantha Wall earned her MFA in Visual Studies from the Pacific Northwest College of Art in 2011. She has exhibited nationally and is the recipient of awards and honors from the Regional Arts & Culture Council, Oregon Arts Commission, Ford Family Foundation, and the Joan Mitchell Foundation.

Geordie Wood: Geordie Wood is a freelance photographer and photo editor based in Brooklyn, New York. In 2013 he was named one of PDN's 30 New and Emerging Photographers to watch. Geordie is a graduate of the SI Newhouse School and current photo editor of *The FADER*. When not making pictures, you may find him enjoying Miles in the 1960s, getting lost in the Maine woods or listening to NPR.

Mark Lovejoy: Born in west Texas back in '52, Lovejoy has had an interesting life – it reads like a beat novel or a Country and Western song – he's traveled much, worked as a printer for over 30 years and is now making art that encapsulates a fascinating journey from Texas to Greece, from Iceland to India, always observing textures, colors, forms, ideas, thoughts; all the time processing, making, doing. His work is his expression of a life as color. See more work online at: marklovejoydotcom.tumblr.com.



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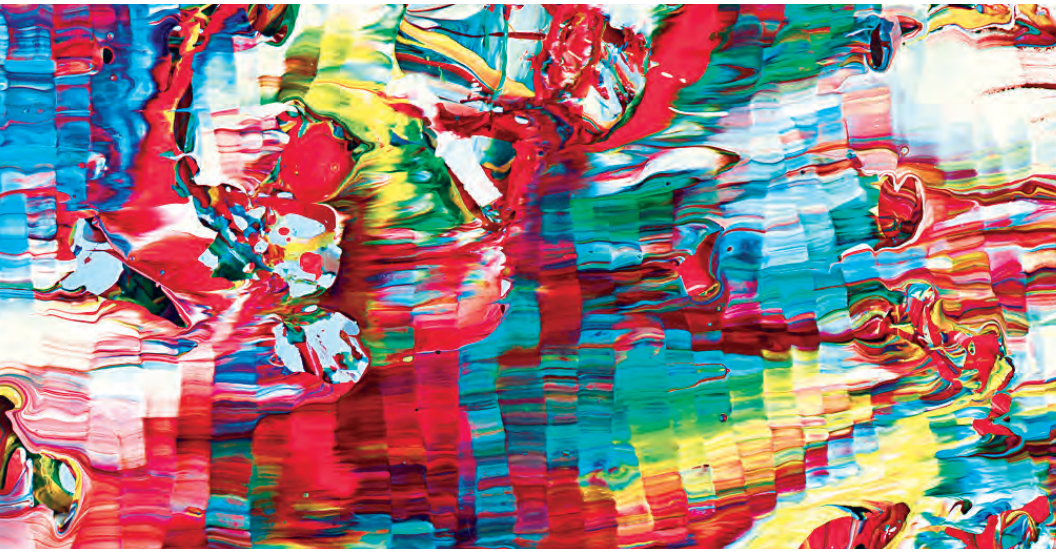

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