



# CORVUS REVIEW

ISSUE 1W

**Corvus Review****Issue 1***Editor's Note*

**W**elcome to the inaugural issue of Corvus. It is with great excitement that I present this fine content to you in hopes that familiar and little known artists can gain footing in the writing world.

I hope you enjoy the first completed issue, but more importantly I hope it encourages you to share your experience, your life, with the world as these talented people have done. It is through hardship and trial, success and failing, that we become the veritable novels of complication that we are. Each human animal possesses a cornucopia of experience and delight, laced with pain and disappointment, and all of this tribulation makes for great therapy and great writing.

Happy Scribbling.

Janine "Typing Tyrant" Mercer

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Want to submit your work to Corvus? Check out our submission guidelines at [www.corev.ink](http://www.corev.ink) to see if your work is a fit.

## First Date - What Kind of Dog?

### Jodi Sykes

My nerves are jumbled. I've peed so many times, I lost count. Checked myself in the mirror at least twenty times. Gave myself a pep talk, "You are a beautiful woman. You deserve love. You need to take back your sexuality. You ARE worthy!" Despite my anxiety, I am ready.

The last time I went on a date was 1983. Duran Duran was at the top of the charts. I was twenty one. Three years later, I was a newlywed. So much has changed since then. Married for twenty four years. Divorced for two and a half years. I never thought I'd be dating again.

On New Year's Day, I told my friends that I joined several on-line dating sites. This was the year that I was going to find a man. John was the first one to respond and we communicated through emails and by phone. Although he was ten years older than I, he looked much younger in his profile picture. We had a lot in common. He was divorced after twenty four years of marriage. He loved to cook. Loved dogs. He was a high school teacher. My background was in early childhood education, so we both loved children.

Last week, he asked if I wanted to get together on Saturday. "No. Can't do Saturday. I'm having furniture delivered." Not a lie.

"Oh, what did you buy?" he asked.

"A new mattress set," I replied.

He chuckled and said that maybe he'd get a chance to check it out. I urged him to take it slow. *Note to self - next time, lie.* We made arrangements to meet.

I called my friend, Kathleen to tell her I had a hot date planned. She was excited and gave me plenty of pointers, which included, "Make sure you go and buy yourself a sexy new pair of lace

panties." *As if!* She also told me to make sure I charged my cell phone so I could call her with all the details after the date.

My friend Judith called, and when she heard Kathleen's advice, she gasped. "Geez, Louise! Does she actually think you are going to jump in the sack with this guy? With all those diseases out there nowadays?"

We laughed and then Judith hatched a plan. "I know what you need to do. As soon as the date ends, call her and whisper into your phone, "Kathleen, I can't talk right now. John is making us a reservation at the Renaissance - gotta go, bye." We chuckled at the plan and she wished me good luck.

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It was March 25<sup>th</sup>. The place, Donovan's Irish Pub. 12:30. I arrived about ten minutes early and got us a booth in the back of the restaurant so we could have some privacy. About five minutes later, the door opened and in walked John. Twenty years older than his profile picture. He was hunched over and I rose to greet him. I could tell that he had aches and pains by the way he sat down. We ordered beers and lunch and he excused himself to go to the bathroom, *snap, crackle, and popping* as he left the table.

The food arrived and I found that there was little or no conversation unless I initiated it. I asked him about his work, his children and his dog. He bent over his plate, wolfing down his fish and chips like a prisoner eating his last supper and answered only with quick replies. He kept glancing across the table to check out the *girls* - once in a while he'd smirk.

I found myself thinking between bites of my grilled cheese sandwich and gulps of beer, *this is awkward.* I've noticed other couples in restaurants who sit and eat their meals in silence, and that's how I felt. Wanted to reach across the table and stab him with my fork

to see if any blood flowed through his veins. UGH!

I couldn't wait to get out of there. I went from moments of recalling how juiced up I'd gotten over my first date, to now wondering how I'd plan my escape.

All of a sudden, he, while checking out the boobage again, says in a sexy voice, "Well, what do you have planned for the rest of the afternoon? Wanna come back to my place to meet my dog?"

*The freakin' dog?*

Thank God for my ability to get out of sticky situations. I smiled and said, "Oh, thanks for the invitation but I'm going shopping with my girlfriend after this."

"What time?" he asked.

With no clock in sight, I blurted out, "2:15. What time is it now?"

"It's 1:15."

"Oh, Lord, better get going then!"

The waiter approached our table and asked if it was all going on one bill and John nodded.

"No, that'll be separate checks, please." I told the waiter. John looked puzzled and tried to talk me out of it. "Whenever I take women out they always expect me to pay. Are you sure?"

"I appreciate it, John, but I'm not like every woman. Besides, this is the new millennium. Thanks anyway."

*Damn. I got all glammed up, schlepped to the ATM in record time and still managed to arrive ten minutes early for this?*

We paid our bills and headed outside.

"This is me. The silver Toyota." I said as I told him goodbye.

Keys in hand, I quickly unlocked the door and got inside. Before I could close the door, he had his hand on it, smiling like the Cheshire Cat. I thanked him again, closed the door and started the car. He stepped back and I put it in reverse. I peeled out of the

parking lot quicker than you could say e-Harmony.com.

I grabbed my cell phone and called Kathleen.

"OMG, I can't wait! Tell me all the juicy details! Wait a minute...it's only 1:15. What's wrong?"

"We need to talk." I blurted out.

We agreed to go to a diner to dish.

As soon as we met in the parking lot, she hugged me. We went inside, picked a table in the back and ordered iced teas. Kathleen reached into her purse and plopped a bag of my favorite bulls-eye caramel candies onto the table and said, "Spill!"

Then, as only two best friends can do, we talked about stupid men and laughed so hard until I thought I'd pee my lace panties.

"But oh my God, Kathleen. He was so charming on the phone and through emails and then he can't carry on a decent conversation in person? What the hell? Give me a break. And besides, he walked like Tim Conway playing the old man routine. That's it. My profile is coming down as soon as I get home."

"No, ya gotta get back in the saddle again, Girl. You have to plan at least two dates per day like my daughter's friend does. You're bound to meet someone." Her daughter's friend is twenty five.

"Nope. I am D-O-N-E. Mr. Right can find me whenever the planets align."

\*\*\*

When I returned home, there was an email waiting for me.

"So how do you feel now about that new mattress and you and I?" Really?

Suddenly I was thankful to be single.

I sent him a reply, "Hey, John, it was great to finally meet you. But, I'm not going to do anymore dating for the time being. Just not ready. You're a sweetheart and I wish you the best in finding your Ms. Right."



Three more emails in succession came through..."Oh???" followed by, "Too old? Too ugly? Tell me I can take it!!!" *Whoa!* Now I felt guilty. Until this one popped up on my screen - "Just curious - was that the standard dump line that you girls use? No worries Jodi, I'm a big guy I can take it."

Now my Irish came out. "John that may be a standard line for other women, but not for me. I just didn't feel a spark. You were a great conversationalist on the phone and in emails, but not in person. Thanks again."

My online dating profiles are now in hiding. I tried. I conquered my fear of dating and I'm going to take some more time to fall even more in love with *me*.

I AM worthy.

## A Divine Visitation

I grew up in a sleepy mountain town that's nestled in the Hudson Valley. Everyone knows your name in town. Well, almost everyone.

When my grandfather passed away in 1993, I returned home for the funeral. The service was at the Catholic Church we went to growing up. The only time Grandpa went to church was for a baptism, wedding or funeral and he used to joke every time, "Well, you know the church is either gonna catch fire or get struck by lightning, so don't sit by me!" I smiled when I thought about these sentiments.

Sitting there with my cousins brought me back to my childhood in an instant. I was cursed at birth with a quirky way of dealing with emotions at times when people expected me to be a lady. Instead of crying at funerals or getting misty-eyed at weddings, laughter plagued me. Even at Grandpa's funeral.

The priest came up to us to give his condolences. "Andy was such a wonderful, God-loving man. I'm so sorry for your loss."

I let out a chuckle and my cousin, joined in. My aunt shot us a sideways glance and whispered, "Girls!" We'd suddenly morphed into five year olds.

My uncle replied, "Thank you, Father, but his name was John." Apologies were given and the priest returned to his throne up on the altar. *And, he really was an atheist.* A slight grin appeared on my face. *Stop it, Jodi. Don't go there.*

We sat and waited several minutes, when, as if watching a movie, the church doors swung open. There bathed in bright sunlight was a scruffy-looking man. Just like the opening from an old-timey western, the man sauntered up the aisle with a swagger like John Wayne. His face was covered with a full beard. I was sure his jeans never saw a washing machine. Ever. He wore a white leather jacket with

stars and stripes all over and fringe that hung from underneath the sleeves. He removed his sunglasses and took a seat in the front row. The church was abuzz with whispers. *Who was this Easy Rider?*

Halfway through the mass, the priest announced that someone wanted to give the eulogy. Even as the family, we knew nothing of this. Imagine our surprise when the straggly stranger stepped up to the podium. He brushed his bushy mustache away from his lips before he spoke.

"When I heard of John's passing, I knew I wanted to be here so I drove from California on my Harley. John was one helluva man. Growing up on the mountain was a far different life from those who lived downtown. Back in the fifties when I was a kid, there were many families who were dirt poor." He took a deep breath and then exhaled slowly through his mouth.

"As you know, John and his wife had a corner store at the foot of the mountain. When I was seven years old, I stopped in for some penny candy after school one day. The store was empty except for me and John and old Mrs. Green whose husband had died decades before. She placed her items on the counter and John bagged them up for her as I stood at the candy counter and waited my turn.

"That will be eight dollars, Mrs. Green," he said. John didn't know it, but I watched as she counted out eight wooden match sticks and then slid them across the counter to him. He placed the matches in a tin beside the crank cash register and winked at her. "Have a wonderful day, Clara and be sure to come back soon," he said with a wave and a smile."

The stranger paused for a moment, and stared out at the congregation.

"John and his wife were the first people on the mountain to buy a television. Every Friday in the summer, they carried it out to the

front porch, hooked it up to an extension cord and all of the mountain kids and their parents came to watch TV and get free ice cream. A few times a year, they rolled back the carpet in the basement and hosted sock hops complete with hot dogs and root beer floats."

"I learned years later that John realized how poor these mountain families were and he used matchsticks as tender just so they could have something to eat. That's why I had to be here. Thank you for letting me share my story. Thank you, John."

He stepped down off of the altar, kissed his fingertips and touched grandpa's coffin. He put his sunglasses back on and walked down the church aisle and out the door like an angel.

My grandfather's funeral was a day that taught me not to judge someone by their appearance. This Easy Rider was on a mission and it was a lesson in humility and respect.

BIO:

Jodi Sykes is a freelance writer, author of *Rhyming Activities for Beginning Readers* (T.S. Denison & Co.), *I am Special - The Power is in ME!* and *The House on Pancake Hill* (Amazon.com). She is also a website content editor, proofreader, and daily blogger of, *Living La Vida (Lymphoma)*.

**Sanctuary**  
**Melissa Franco**

Breath bleeds through  
 the chilled air  
 as chafed hands grope  
 for warmth.

The soft glow of hope  
 beckons him forward  
 down a path of virgin snow.

The trees surrounding him wave him  
 forward. Birds send encouraging  
 words. He pauses, his flesh half  
 frozen,  
 unsure of his welcome.

Frozen air combs his matted hair.  
 A sharp gust pushes him forward,  
 he still hesitates.

He wonders if it has been too long.  
 Perhaps he's lost his  
 portion of their hearts.

He must have, he  
 can no longer feel it.  
 His bones crack as they search his  
 pocket to make sure.

Uncertainly he moves  
 his tattered,  
 soaked shoes forward.  
 Hoping he is not foolish.

His dry, cracked hands meekly  
 emerge from his damp coat.  
 His only possession that  
 gives him some warmth.

Shaking fingers bend just enough  
 to grasp the doorknob. It  
 was always open.

Twist, slide, click.  
 It opens. She turns.

Warmth encompasses her face  
 and melts into  
 her rose stained cheeks.

Hot tears flow down  
 her smooth skin.  
 She is still smiling.

They attempt to melt

this frozen man.

She opens her arms,  
 he steps forward.  
 He contains his emotions  
 for one last moment.

He holds her tightly,  
 basking in her heat.  
 It overwhelms him, he is free.

Hoping is not foolish.  
 He is home.

### Noxious Remedy

Who would have known  
Love was a deep puncture;  
Placed above the heart,  
While you sleep.

Then stitched up with  
Barbed wire;  
As if nothing  
Had ever  
Been there.

We only said goodbye with words.  
So let's not pretend this  
Disfigured love  
Doesn't hurt.

The tragic lies you spun  
Still hang from the ceiling  
The sloppy remedies you  
Concocted still stain the carpet.

You replaced the medication  
With sweet spheres.  
You tried to use lace  
As a bandage.

Nothing heals this way,  
Not with those:  
White passion  
Pills kill.

Release the flask. Don't worry,  
Just sleep. I think of  
My greatest fear:  
My love is too thick.

You'll come back to me: *bleached*.

#### BIO:

Melissa Franco is an undergrad student living in her hometown of Milwaukee, WI. She is currently pursuing two degrees in Writing and Graphic Design at Cardinal Stritch University. She has had her poetry published in two Fall editions of Creative Communication's *Celebration of Young Poets*. Her poem *Noxious Remedy* won the 2014 Delta Epsilon Sigma Annual Writing Competition. Her main genres of writing include fiction and poetry.

### Fucking For Family

Matthew Dexter

It had been three hours since my uncle pierced my clit, so this was the least I could do for him. He rubbed it with ice cubes. I slid through puddles as we hot-knifed hash in the oven.

\*\*\*

I strummed my suprasternal notch and peeled my cuticles like Polly-O String Cheese after my uncle collapsed in the gutter of the bowling alley. He was so close to his Turkey he could taste it. They dragged his body across the lanes by his bowling shoes. Fathers camouflaged eyeballs with furry knuckles. Fraternity bros chugged Keystone Light and penciled hieroglyphs into the frame boxes of their score sheets beneath bulbs of perpetual dust. I peddled to my uncle's two-bedroom shit-hole till my thighs burned. My slimy palms marinated the rubber handlebars as sidewalk fronds brushed my forehead.

I exhumed the key from the Pacifico bottle. Mexicans were dipping tortillas into a *malcajete* bowl in the courtyard. The apartment reeked of an old man and the walls were amber from decades of cigarette smoke—not to mention Siamese joints and tin-foiled meth. The Gin rummy table was caked with teal boogers; its underside collaged turquoise. His water bed was covered with rubber dolls with crimson mouths and vintage *Playboy* special editions.

I pried the suitcase from the closet next to the bowling bag and deflated the sex toys with an orange box cutter. The magazines would be worth a fortune on eBay. I swaggered



into the second bedroom. This was jammed with boxes and empty raspberry crates, cluttered with broken electronics, old crap, cobwebs coagulated with boogers.

I forged a path through a thousand empty boxes of baking soda.

The walls were white and the blinds were fresh though caked in dust. It took an hour to reach the closet. I stood atop a television set—rusty rabbit ears bent beneath bowling shoes. I rubbed my box. The pipes as we left them: blackened and stuffed with charred Brillo. Sold under the guise of containing a flower—only crack heads bought them so the Circle K parking lot was littered with dead roses. There were two charred spoons and numerous empty fluorescent lighters. Enough empty baggies to choke a million seagulls. We would sit on the edge of his shower and puff for hours.

Viscous pus oozing from indigo cuticles, blood between grimy fingernails, clumps of hash in the medicine cabinet. I emptied the suitcase in the Dumpster. I washed the sheets and clothes in the laundry room next to the mailboxes where a crack head was drying her socks.

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There was a helium balloon brushing against the ceiling, borne by mildew from the air conditioning vents. Woody from *Toy Story* watched. I was spread-eagle, endangered—as he liked it. The mirror on the ceiling was cracked. He promised chunks would never fall. His forehead and cheeks had strange scars and fresh wounds, constellations of liver marks.

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There were jars, hundreds of them stacked in a pyramid. I opened a lid. Jars full

of farts. It was obvious. Beelzebub knows how long he kept them there. People in Europe used it during the bubonic plague. When it swept through their villages, neighbors stored it, thinking they could snort away the horrors.

The jars reeked of Keystone Light and brick oven pizzas and Camels. I dug my toes into the rug. It had been months since I trimmed my bush because he wanted me to keep it natural. Atavistic, seven hundred jars. I clung to that magic carpet which fluttered above the gutters where The Black Death victims hovelled in clusters.

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My fingers were coagulated with blood and the pigs were at the door—not the Police—my family coming to collect my uncle's things. His four brothers, my father among them. People propelled by the stench of a dying continent. It clung to my nostrils and lungs and uterus.

"Why you here Lori?" my father asked.

"It's okay," I said. "His clothes will be dry in fifteen minutes."

Imagine their fingers on me, all thirty at the same time. Daddy watching from the bedroom, intoxicated. We sat Indian style, naked, hirsute, fifty fingers on the jars of expurgation, vapors in the wind. We unfurled the champion score sheets from decades earlier. The pages were yellowed, stained by turkey grease and cracked at the corners. We sunk our eyeballs and orifices into the jars. We waited for the balls to fly, that thunderous inertial vacuum to hurl us down the alley.

## BIO

Like nomadic Pericu natives before him, Matthew Dexter survives on a hunter-gatherer subsistence diet of shrimp tacos, smoked

marlin, cold beer, and warm sunshine. He lives in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

**The Magic of Closets**  
**Katarina Boudreaux**

"Might be something going on," Judee mumbles.

Alton has a fistful of her hair, and she doesn't particularly like anyone having a fistful of her hair, but it is exciting to make out in the janitor's closet in the middle of the Santa party.

Except she hears a commotion happening and, as the responsible librarian on duty, Santa and the commotion could be trouble.

Alton either doesn't hear her, or doesn't want to, and Judee pushes him abruptly away. He starts to say something, but Judee shushes him.

"Go on home to your wife, Alton," she says brusquely and pats her hair then straightens her collar.

"I don't have a wife," Alton says and tugs at Judee's ponytail.

"Alton, I just fixed that," Judee says and slaps at Alton's hand. "I know -- just felt like something to say, us being in the janitor's closet and all."

"Could be getting one," Alton says and chuckles and Judee stills her body for a moment. It's that chuckle that got her into Alton's truck, into Chickie's Chick Stand, and now into the janitor's closet. Alton's chuckle is low, teasing and something akin to a mating call.

Judee finds it is truly the only irresistible thing about Alton, but at least that's something anyway.

"You should patent that," Judee says and shakes herself out of her stupor.

Alton pats her on the butt and Judee ignores him. She is trying

to find her right shoe and Alton is not helping.

"You could help, you know," Judee says and fumbles with the light switch.

"Ah," she says as the closet light flicks on. Judee finds her shoe, slips it on her foot, and then retrieves her jacket from the bucket of brooms stored in the corner. She slips it on and hears a definite new batch of commotion.

"What in hell," she says and reaches her right hand out for the doorknob, but Alton catches her wrist.

"*Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*," he sings, and Judee watches him lift her hand to his lips and kiss her open palm. "*It's what you mean to me now, baby*" Alton croons and then executes a hip swivel.

Judee stares at him. Definitely resistible. "LSD reminds you of me? How nice," she says, and shakes her hand free of his grip.

"Aw now, that's just some old urban legend. Means you're a diamond, baby. In the sky. Could be on your finger."

Judee watches Alton's mouth move. She wonders briefly if a purely sexual relationship would be possible with Alton, or if he would insist on the finger, the diamond, the whole white cake thing.

Something hits the door, or at least Judee thinks something hits the door, and they both jump. Judee hears the sound of retreating feet and she stops thinking about Alton and starts thinking about Santa.

"Maybe they pulled his beard," Alton says.

Judee ignores him and imagines Santa tied up and on fire in the

library. She pictures Santa hogtied and on fire in the middle of the fiction section with his hat over his head like a hangman's noose.

Then she envisions Santa doing something inappropriate to the children.

Alton slides his hand down her back and is starting to turn her so he can maneuver some sliding on the front, but Judee puts up her hand.

"Enough" she says, reaches for the door handle, turns it, and cracks the door open. She peeks her head out and, although she doesn't see anything, she is still cautious when she opens it a little more.

She is holding her breath, and when she exits the closet, she lets it out slowly. She knows there aren't any security cameras in the hallway because she can see all the monitors from the front circulation desk.

"Getaway clear," she says and walks briskly toward the main reading area. She feels good in her nice heels and she doesn't worry about Alton.

The janitor is supposed to be in the janitor's closet anyway.

Right before Judee gets to the turn by the water fountain and restrooms, she hears another loud wave of mad screams like the eruption when the opposing team makes a touchdown at a home game.

"What the hell is Santa doing?" she hisses. She can't remember who knew Santa or where his recommendation came from. She has new visions of Santa stripping for the children, Santa spouting Hitler at the children, Santa doing un-Santa like things to the children - on her watch.

"Damn it all" Judee says, pausing by the water fountain. She feels a little sick and takes a few deep breaths.

Judee hadn't planned on organizing the *Santa's Here Book Party*, but when Jenny Rae didn't show up to work four days in a row, and her house had new locks a few days later, the friends of the Library decided Judee was the perfect candidate for running the annual party for the town children.

Everyone knew it was just a cover so the parents could go and do holiday shopping at the town Christmas Bazaar over at St. Luke's anyway so really not much had to be done except make sure Santa had some books to give out and that the children didn't spontaneously combust.

Judee didn't want to miss the opportunity for promotion, so she had smiled and accepted and said she didn't mind the double shift. She may have said something about loving children, but she lied; she really loved books. She didn't much care for children, but she did like them when they were reading books.

"NOOOOOOOOOO!" rips across Judee's consciousness and she forces her feet forward from the water fountain and turns the corner into the main reading room.

The children are scattered, and Santa is holding his chair in front of him like a lion tamer. One kid has commandeered Santa's sack of books and is throwing them rapid fire in random directions.

"I don't want a book. Don't want a book. Don't want a book," he yells, chucking a book toward Santa.

Some of the other kids cheer and Judee starts to walk forward, but her nice heel catches on a wrapped

book and she grabs for the nearest book shelf to stop her plunge to the floor.

She catches herself. She knows Santa sees her because he starts walking sideways toward her, chair in front of him.

"What is happening?" Judee yells and straightens herself.

Santa doesn't reply, but the book thrower looks at Judee.

"Christmas is supposed to be about the Jesus and he didn't read no books. Don't want no books!" he yells and throws two books in random directions in a powerful machine gun style.

Judee doesn't exactly know what she is doing until she reaches the boy. She doesn't know how she even gets there, as everything is going in slow motion, but his arm is cocked back for another round of rapid fire book throwing when she grabs the book from his hand.

"SIT DOWN," she says and points to the floor.

Surprisingly, the boy obeys and she looks around the general reading room. Books are everywhere and bits of ribbon are strewn about like bloodied up rice thrown at weddings.

She feels something on her ankle and she looks down. The boy has wrapped his left hand around her ankle like a prison clamp.

Judee ignores him. "Everyone, each one of you pick up a book now and come back here and sit in front of Santa."

Judee looks around, but Santa is not where he was three seconds ago and the chair he was using is resting conspicuously against the bookshelf.

"Well then, me," Judee says and watches as the children follow her direction. The throwing boy is clamped to her ankle and though she doesn't know what is wrong with him, something is.

"I'm still seeing books and I'm still seeing your legs walking instead of sitting in a chair," Judee says and sweeps her gaze across the room.

The children make a wide circle around them, but ,in general, they all heed Judee and sit at the tables around her.

Judee clears her throat. She thinks about the promotion and how she really wants a new car and clears her throat again.

"Now, Santa has had to depart rather quickly. Time schedule and all that - has to get to making those toys to bring to you in a week or so," she says and tries to move forward then sideways.

Throwing boy won't budge, but Judee just drags him behind her. She makes it to the center of the reading room and thanks the Lord that it isn't a big room and that the boy is not old or heavy.

"So, you all have a book, yes?"

The children nod their heads and one snickers and says something about grown-ups stating the obvious, but Judee plows through.

"So that's your gift. Merry Christmas from Santa and read, read, read!" Judee says as joyfully as possible.

The children look at her and Judee looks at the clock.

Forty more minutes.

The boy kicks his feet in and out and Judee feels like maybe she will need to call the authorities

or something, but then he starts chanting.

"Story, story, story."

Judee doesn't know if throwing boy is the ringleader or just the clown, or just touched, but the other children chime in.

Forty minutes, Judee thinks, wondering if Alton is sleeping in the janitor's closet, or masturbating in the janitor's closet, or just standing in the janitor's closet dreaming of LSD.

"Well now, what a nice idea," she says. The children quiet down and Judee tries to think up an opening line.

"Once upon a time, there was a magic closet...where Santa would make new toys from old Janitorial supplies."

BIO:

Katarina is a musician, tango dancer, teacher, and writer based in New Orleans after a long, fulfilling journey back to where she began. She has been published in Pank, Lines + Stars, and most recently in The Bacon Review.

**Grease Poet**  
**Richard King Perkins II**

Carl the mechanic  
 was the first poet  
 I ever met—  
 livin' at home  
 takin' a few classes  
 at the local CC  
 I think us younger guys  
 in the neighborhood  
 kinda looked up to him  
 because he was sort  
 of a regular guy  
 but when he  
 came out cryin' one day  
 and showed us his  
 first publication  
 he sniffed that he'd  
 tried to show  
 his old man  
 what he'd done  
 and all the old drunk  
 could do was laugh  
 and drip snot  
 all over the pages  
 Carl said this was typical  
 of how people  
 treated poets  
 which was why I knew  
 I'd never be one  
 so I asked Carl  
 to pop the hood  
 of the Charger  
 and show me  
 the spark plugs  
 or something.

**BIO:**

Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He lives in Crystal Lake, IL with his wife Vickie and daughter Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee.

**The Art of Bargaining**  
**Thomas Cannon**

Colleen watched her father,  
 already driving under twenty, press  
 on the brakes. As if he was going  
 to park in the intersection, but  
 then he turned down the side-street  
 not anywhere they needed to go. He  
 still needed to drive to maintain  
 some sort of independence. She  
 conceded that. But it frazzled her  
 to be ever vigilant to grab the  
 steering wheel, and now he was  
 joyriding. Grocery shopping would  
 take long enough without his  
 distractions.

"Dad," she said as he stopped  
 in front of bungalow with a yard of  
 lawn ornaments and scattered toys.

"Just a minute," he answered  
 as his gnarled hands unlatched his  
 seatbelt.

She used the rear view mirror  
 to see him walk behind the car. He  
 had been quiet all morning, so she  
 hadn't been able to figure out if  
 he was having one of his good days,  
 or his typical bad day. *It's*  
*obviously a bad day*, she told  
 herself, grabbing for the door  
 handle.

Her dad, tottering up the  
 driveway, stopped to pick up a  
 ceramic frog. Then he glanced to  
 see her coming for him and shuffled  
 faster. *I'm no speed demon*  
*nowadays either*, she thought. She  
 saw him stand on the front step in  
 his flannel shirt and gray  
 suspenders. Then he pushed the  
 doorbell.

Colleen got to him before the  
 door opened. "Put the frog down,  
 Dad."

"Back away from the frog," he  
 answered out of the corner of his  
 mouth.

Before Colleen could figure  
 out if he was being sardonic or  
 serious or loony, a woman with a  
 fat baby on her hip opened the  
 door. She looked at Colleen and  
 her father through the screen door.  
 "That's my frog," she said.

"Yeah." Her father squinted  
 at the lady's face. "How much?"



"All of it. Who are you people?"

Colleen had been concentrating on her father, tugging on his arm, but now she noticed the woman. She was probably twenty years younger and thinner than Colleen's 54 and had a coldness to her bony face. The situation required an explanation, but this woman wouldn't care and Colleen would not be able to conceal that she had already taken a dislike to her. "We're sorry-"

"Maybe you are lady, but I'm not." Colleen was used to her dad calling her a myriad of names in the evening. But during the day he was better and she needed him to say her name then. "I'm Colleen," she told him, but he talked over her. "That's no way to talk to a customer."

"Customer?" The owner of the house shifted the baby higher on her hip.

"As I was saying," Colleen said. "Please forgive us, but sometimes my dad gets confused."

"I'm not confused." Her dad usually spoke in a hoarse, mumbling voice, but now it held the forceful authority of her youth. "There is a rummage sale sign with your address down there on the corner. I want to buy this frog and look around."

"My sale was last week."

"The sign doesn't say that." He nodded behind her. "What would you have to have for that lamp?"

"Is that some sort of joke? Get out of here."

"I used to live in this house."

"No, dad. You didn't." The level of Colleen's voice made three other little kids she hadn't noticed before pop their heads up from where they were lying on the floor watching TV.

"Yes, I did. My name is Jeffrey Dunham."

"Dad. We live on Cypress."

"You think I don't know where I live? I had this house with my

first wife. Bet you didn't know that, Donna?"

She wanted to tell him Donna was his other daughter. The one that always asked about his finances, but never came over to help take care of him. There had only been talk of his first wife in her parent's infrequent fights- something that her mother would bring up and make Dad not say another word. But the physical evidence- the house, even if it was a house on a different street or in a different city- made her realize it had been a whole separate life for her father. One that he was time-traveling to with his Alzheimer's.

"Still," the mother with the brood of kids said. "I just didn't take the sign down and I'm really busy right now."

"We were married for five years. Then she took up with another man, so I moved out. I thought I could see my old home."

Colleen watched the baby stare contently at the bugger on the end of his finger. It made her stomach churn, yet she couldn't look anyplace else. "I know we're bothering you. But I don't know what to do with my dad. Eventually he'll have to go in a home, but neither of us is ready for that. I can get him to go."

The lady scratched behind her ear and opened the screen door.

"No, that's okay. He can come in."

"Dad, did you hear that? You can go in."

"I'm right here."

"But you can't try to buy any more of her things."

Her father went into the house and Colleen followed, twitching her fingers. She mentally tsked at the red and yellow plastic toys scattered in the living room like Toys R Us after a tornado. But then the woman they were intruding on threw out, "With four young kids, it's hard to keep house." Then she could see how toys all over were better than no toys and just a TV

set. Her mom had kept their house spotless; it was still spotless with just dad there. Her parents had been quick to throw out anything that the kids had outgrown. Even if they still played with it and loved it.

"Dad, don't go to the backrooms." She wanted the woman to go and shut the doors to any of the bedrooms, but her dad ignored her and left Colleen standing sentry in the living room.

"I know-" the lady began as she put the baby down. But then she folded her arms.

Colleen bit the inside of her cheek. "No, what were you going to say? Because I'd like an objective view of how crazy my life has become."

"Is she here?" Jeffrey asked coming up the hallway.

"Is who here, Dad?"

"My Goddamn wife."

"Dad, you're confused."

The lady took a step to block the living room. "You're upsetting my kids." The three other kids, all under school-age, slid backwards on the carpet. "Can you two please leave now?"

"You're the one that has the stupid sign up, Candace."

"Dad," Colleen yelled. A forgotten memory told her that Candace was his first wife.

Jeffrey went on. "You can't have a sign up for a rummage sale and then be angry with the people that show up." He looked the owner of the house up and down. "What are you trying to pull? Where is these kids' father, young lady?"

"At work," Coleen said as if coaxing a child off thin ice and to shore. "Most likely at work."

"He took off on us." The lady didn't care who fell through what ice.

But Jeffrey's face softened. "Oh." He reached out and stroked her arm the way only an elderly man is allowed to do. "You keep your frog, then. Because that's not right. You're a sweet girl."

He shuffled towards the front door where he picked up a small pair of pink shoes and put them on over the shoes already on his feet.

"Dad," Colleen breathed out. "What are you doing now?"

He looked at the girl's shoe he was trying to put on and tossed it down. "I'm leaving, Colleen. Leave that nice girl alone. Can we just get home so you can make my sandwich? We don't need other people's junk anyway."

#### BIO:

Thomas Cannon's story about his son is the lead story in the anthology *Cup of Comfort for Parents of Children with Autism*. He also has his humorous novel *The Tao of Apathy* available on Amazon. His poems and short stories have been published in many print and electronic journals.

### The Upstairs Room Grove Koger

When I was young I spent a summer in Tennessee.

It was a birthday gift, Mother explained, and as Aunt Bonnie and Uncle Arnold had no children of their own, they would be overjoyed to have me live with them for a time. Later I realized that the former statement was a subterfuge and the latter untrue. My parents were going through one of their rough patches, as Mother admitted toward the end of her short life, and whatever reasons lay behind my relatives' lack of offspring, the pair did not seem to take any particular pleasure in my company.

I flew east a week after I turned ten, entrusted to the care of a distracted stewardess. The motion of the plane was worrying, and while the airline food tasted exotic, it nevertheless settled in a lump in my stomach.

At the Nashville airport a vaguely familiar, heavily perfumed woman hugged me and her balding companion shook my hand in a very formal way—and that, as far as I remember, was the last time that Arnold paid any attention to me. I sat in the back seat of their blue Buick while he drove away with great care and Bonnie, sitting beside him, talked on and on in a sharp voice.

Bonnie and Arnold's brick house was built on a low rise set back from the street. After easing the car into a garage in back, Arnold vanished and Bonnie led me in and up two flights of stairs.

We don't use this floor often, she said as she opened a door, but Maid has dusted your room thoroughly. I'm sure you miss your parents, but you're going to have a wonderful time here. Now if you'd like to rest—here she glanced at a clock that ticked away on a chest of drawers—we'll have dinner in an hour.

Then she set my suitcase down inside the door and I was alone.

But not quite. Never before had a room welcomed me, but as I looked around me a kind of tingling joy rose up my spine and down my arms to my finger tips.

The room was shaped like an L in reverse, and had a window at each end. One looked out through the limbs of a luxuriant tree and down the street, the other into the crowns of two other trees shading the garage. A twin bed sat near the corner of the L, and besides it and the chest of drawers the room contained a straight back chair and a standing closet. I sat down on the bed, bathed in green light from the windows, and as I breathed in and out, the room seemed to breathe with me.

\*\*\*

I had brought several books with me that summer, but for once, words on the page seemed less real to me than my surroundings. Although I spent much of my time outdoors, afternoons after lunch and evenings after dinner were reserved for the room. During the day, muffled footfalls and murmured conversations reached me from below, but upstairs there were the never-ending songs of birds and the smells of summer flowers on the warm breeze. As evening came on, the frogs in a nearby pond joined the chorus. Moths batted gently against the screens until I turned out the lights.

\*\*\*

When I got home late that summer I was torn between wanting to explain and being afraid to, but under Mother's questioning I made an effort to tell her about Aunt and Uncle and the house and, especially, my room. I wasn't a bit lonely there, I finally blurted out, and tried to find words to describe how welcome the room had made me feel.

My goodness, Mother said with a smile, you make it sound like your room was haunted! Then she went on to talk of other things.

\*\*\*

As it turned out, I didn't see Tennessee again for another three decades, and as time went by I visited the upstairs room less and less often in my memory.

Mother died a few years after that summer, a war came and went, and Father remarried. I was moderately successful in business, a little less so in life. Then one afternoon a certified letter reached me from Tennessee. Arnold must have grown careless in his old age, for one evening he had driven Bonnie and himself off the road into a river. And I must have made a better impression than I realized, because the house was now mine.

At this point you can probably anticipate the end of my story. When I pulled up in front of the house a few weeks later, it seemed to have shrunk. Its bricks were stained and the trees around it had grown ragged and weedy. Staring up from the street, I realized that my room must once have been an attic.

The attorney waiting for me at the door suggested that I would want to take a careful look around the house before making any decisions. Perhaps I would, I thought, but I told him that I might not be long. Then with trepidation I made my way up the creaking stairs—to a door that stuck and a room that was low-ceilinged and dusty. There was no furniture, and the window screens were choked with years of debris.

Aside from the room's appearance, I was overwhelmed by a negative quality as I stood in the doorway—the utter *absence* of something. Despite Mother's offhand comment so many years before, I had never thought that there had been some unnatural presence in the room. But now I realized quite clearly that there *had* been *something* here, once, and that it was no more. Whatever—no, *whoever*—had once dwelt here had long since departed.

I closed the door softly and headed back down the stairs to tell the attorney my decision.

BIO:

Grove Koger is the author of a guide to travel literature, *When the Going Was Good*. He writes for *Laguna Beach Art Magazine* and has published fiction in *Bewildering Stories*, *Phantasmagore*, *Lacuna*, *Two Words For*, and *Eternal Haunted Summer*. *Danse Macabre* and *Mulberry Fork Review* will be carrying two more of his stories later this year.

**Rowena's Poetry**  
**John Grey**

She reads new poetry in old  
 settings,  
 antique store turned coffee house,  
 dressed in black sweater, skirt and  
 stockings,  
 perched on the edge of a table,  
 a lotus sipping coffee between  
 words,  
 priming an internal state  
 with Kona roast or a dark brew  
 from the highlands of New Guinea.

So little flesh clings to her  
 bones,  
 she declares war on what remains of  
 it  
 with tattoos, with piercings,  
 and with her art school black,  
 in honor of Leroi Jones  
 or the starless night.

She is not some cocoon, she  
 insists,  
 that our listening can make  
 butterfly.  
 She will give us no trinkets,  
 no sweet things.  
 If we applaud,  
 that's our business,  
 or our relief  
 that we're not writing  
 what she's reading.

**BIO:**

John Grey is an Australian born poet.  
 Recently published in New Plains Review,  
 Rockhurst Review and Spindrift with work  
 upcoming in South Carolina Review, Big Muddy  
 Review, Willow Review and Louisiana  
 Literature.

**Up and Down the Stairs**  
**James Croal Jackson**

Watched watched time  
 slip in every missed wooden swing  
 and pixilated glove's plop

I ran up and down the stairs on  
 measured pink-speckled carpet,  
 to the basement, to the kitchen, to  
 the basement,  
 to the kitchen -- a treadmill's  
 dream, the incline  
 an inclination against elderly  
 lethargy,  
 the seventh inning, an extra  
 inning,  
 watery left eye saying, *how do you*  
*move*  
*so swiftly*, turning to the TV to  
 make a call for

the bullpen, the bullpen,  
 call in the bullpen,

call the hospital:  
 the only time I said I love you and  
 I croaked it

in my chest. The mumbled sine wave.  
 I clicked the phone off,  
 game ending, closer to the closer,  
 the

closed door,  
 the casket we closed to forget.

### Seatless Unicycle

She is a seatless unicycle who dangles on a string attached to a wire on a telephone pole. Her pedals spin with the wind. The payphones wonder if still she can ride. They worry she will roll off into the parking lot and strike the black ramshackle Lincoln to gift another dent. Cars in motion on the street will snort and shriek. In saturnalia a brown Boerboel yelps and hurtles and snatches her tire with ferocity in his jaw. He tugs and pulls as her wheel snarls and squeaks. He drags with his fur the weight of concrete. Her rubber hairs become roots she cannot untangle from white oak trees sequestered to forests she cannot reach. The parking lot is gravelly and minuscule. Caterpillars need more space to bloom. Butterfly-eyed people who look like dead poets recite words with aluminum in their tracheas.

#### BIO:

James Croal Jackson dips his feet in many artistic waters. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Bitter Oleander*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, and *The Birds We Piled Loosely*. He was born in northeast Ohio but currently lives in Los Angeles. Find more of his writing at [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com).

### Decisions Across the Water Christina Murphy

Jetties garbed in a wintery sunset of drizzling rain and mist. Blue and bronze waves parade as miniature seas, and all hearts regard the sea and the earth as home, even if the idea of asylum has no meaning in cosmic realms.

Deeply in moonlight, stars uncoil in silent patterns against a silver sky, knowing that illuminations are required by all seaward beings. The calls of the sea gulls over silent shores are the flow of agency and transience. No one wanders alone, even if loneliness has the feel of another sea and midnight is but one more mark of time's indifference.

Within the blues of sea and sky, fantasy and dreams are locked as dual energies in progressions timed by the moon and the lost fealty of the sun. Decisions across the water invite transformations originating in starlight that becomes a labyrinth of golden flowers.

#### BIO:

Christina Murphy's poems appear in a wide range of journals and anthologies, including, *PANK*, *Dali's Lovechild*, and *Hermeneutic Chaos* and the anthologies *Let the Sea Find its Edges* and *Remaking Moby-Dick*. Her work has been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and for the *Best of the Net Anthology*.



**Dancing with the Detective**  
**William Doreski**

Adorned with only a towel  
 you escape the women's prison  
 because I left the door unlocked.  
 A bicyclist, pumping hard,

passes you and flings something  
 onto a railroad track. A train  
 runs over that object, which pops  
 with a nervous shudder. Laughing

among friends, you're fully dressed  
 in fashions that drape like the  
 white  
 cliffs of Dover. Ice clatters  
 in elaborate cocktails. No one

invited me, but the party flops  
 anyway, couples quarreling  
 over vague flirtations, bartenders  
 sneaking away for outdoor sex.

My favorite detective sniffs  
 the rubble on the railroad track.  
 He knows what that object was  
 and why the cyclist discarded it,

but won't tell me. I object  
 that as author of this scenario  
 I'm entitled to sift every clue.  
 You're dancing with the detective.

Your head on his shoulder suggests  
 a mop of lichen on a ledge.  
 He knows why you escaped and what  
 you hope to accomplish. Meanwhile

he'll follow me from the dance hall  
 to the library and note which books  
 I fondle, which I reject. Your love  
 for your detective conquers all,

no matter how deeply you're hurt  
 by returning to prison as warden,  
 earning the hatred of inmates  
 who told you all their secrets.

The climax requires more dancing  
 than I can describe. The railroad  
 crosses the dance floor. Staring  
 into the oncoming headlight

I hope you'll forgive and forgive  
 and be happy with your detective  
 who wears my only decent suit

and laughs at me in the mirror.

**BIO:**

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and teaches at Keene State College. His most recent book of poetry is *The Suburbs of Atlantis* (2013). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

**Fighting Habit**  
**Valentina Cano**

My battle  
is with air and involuntary  
muscles.  
It is the struggle to make my body  
a column as hollow  
as a bird's bone,  
and my jaw,  
in its reptilian glint,  
to distend and swallow days whole.

**Lone Man Faces Extinction**

A man who imagines he is iron  
with a pressure cuff like a manacle  
around his arm.  
Tightening as breath loses its  
anchor,  
as blood strums like guitar cords  
in his ears.  
The floor is serpentine at its  
edges,  
weaving itself in rhythm  
to his metal drum head.

**BIO:**

Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time either writing or reading. Her works have appeared in *Exercise Bowler*, *Blinking Cursor*, *Theory Train*, *Cartier Street Press*, and many others. Her poetry has been nominated for Best of the Web and the Pushcart Prize. You can find her here: <http://carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com>.

**Train Commuter Waiting**  
**Stanley B. Trice**

For the last twenty minutes, overhead announcements kept up the rendition that "the commuter train would be here soon" as if the mechanical voices refused to admit the train was ever late. The static noise prayed on the Commuter's worry as he got tired and grayer and just wanted to go home. Like a hot, smelly blanket, he felt the stagnant air come off the empty rails in front of him and pull his sweat and senses out of his short, pudgy self. Surrounding him, the anxious crowd of commuters grew denser as the next group of commuters showed up to wait.

The train was coming, so the Announcements announced. A few minutes later, the Announcements discussed the arrival of the next commuter train as if the one that should be coming never existed at all. The Commuter watched the crowd around him shift as some people left to ride a different track home. He watched this other diesel engine pull happy people away leaving him to feel he existed only as an extension of a commuter train that may never have existed.

Except, he wanted to go home. He did not know why, but the Commuter just wanted to get through one more commute. Suffer through one more daily rite of passage to places he barely remembered because he was always commuting. If he could just get through this commute one more time, he could do it all again tomorrow.

Each morning the Commuter woke to the radio screaming at him. When he walked out of the house in the predawn darkness, he pictured his family in bed not hearing his pain. They lived a life he could afford only if he commuted.

On time, still another commuter train came and went to places the Commuter had never been to before. He could have left on these other trains and lived a different life. Yet, his life would

have been no different the next day. Just another commute from a different direction. He thought of what his family would think of him if he accepted a better way to commute.

"I don't want to dance with you at my wedding," the Commuter's daughter told him last night.

He had just walked into the kitchen late where his cold supper sat waiting. Before he sat down, his wife said, "I told her you were a poor dancer."

"I want to dance with my daughter at her wedding," said the Commuter.

"Your daughter will dance with whoever she wants to dance with. It's her wedding you're paying for and you should be thankful we're giving you a reason to commute," said the Wife. The Daughter nodded agreeably. The cold beer tasted better than the food.

Loud, taunting announcements jolted the Commuter back into his current commuter hell. The announcements claimed "other train movement" as responsible for his late train. These "other trains" continued to move past him on their given schedule and he wondered why his train was chosen as the one to be delayed.

He considered that maybe his late train happened past a parallel universe and found a better way to commute, got sucked into a black hole and ceased to exist, or just run out of gas. He did not remember seeing a gas train before. Would the faceless Announcements say such things as black holes? Or, admit that there was a parallel universe with a better way to commute? He felt the emptiness of being late stretch out into the heat rising from the empty steel rails.

The Commuter sweated more. He wondered if he could melt down to nothing in this heat and be remade into a different life where his train kept to a schedule. He wondered how he would get home if the train never came. The Commuter thought about how he danced a lot

when he was ten. A twelve-year-old girl made him that confident.

She always sat with her friends on the afternoon school bus. He pretended to read Jules Verne books. At the last stop, they were the only ones to get off and they walked together the block and half to her great aunt's house. He wished their commuting parents would never commute home to pick them up.

On the walk, she talked about adventure and romance and he showed her his Jules Verne books because that was all the adventure he knew. It was early spring as the snow melted and flowers bloomed when their parents made this arrangement. At first, her great aunt met them with hot chocolate and warm cinnamon toast until the weather warmed more and she gave them ginger snaps and lemonade.

Those warmer days grew into hot afternoons where the three of them sat on the front porch listening to music from an FM radio. One afternoon, the twelve-year-old girl reached out her hand to him and they danced on the wooden porch to honking commuters on their way home. She told him what a great dancer he was and they made a date for the upcoming school dance. That Saturday, she went with her older friends from the school bus to the nearby train tracks.

He wished he could have been a hero and saved her from a quiet, fast moving passenger train. Instead, he visited her in a wood paneled room with bleached curtains at tall, thin windows. She looked like someone had melted wax over a mannequin's face. He took a laminated explanation of her life that did not mention his name.

The Commuter came back to his now when sweat tears cut into his eyes.

"I'm living three lives," he told the soot covered steel tracks before him.

Other commuters ignored him as if he already did not exist.

Just like his commuter train that refused to come and take him home.

"One life for home, one for work, and one for this commute. Three lives with the commute winning. Do any of you hear me? This commute has become my only existence."

The commuter crowd crowded onto the next commuter train with nothing said. What was there to say? They were going home while he continued to wait.

The Commuter began to realize he had become nothing more than a journey to and from places where other people existed. One, a stressful job he tried to forget and the other a home that was more like a house he lived in with two other people. The Commuter stepped away from the edge of the concrete platform.

He kept moving until he came to the back of the commuting crowd and under the blue metal awnings. Amid his sweat and frustration, tired legs and hurt back, he heard children giggling.

Another train came and went. Other passengers came and went. The Commuter edged further under the metal awnings toward the children's laughter. The dusty, barren steel tracks and hot concrete platform grew further away with the touch of fresh cool air running across the frame of a wooden porch. His headache and frustration faded as he opened his eyes.

It was a wreck of a commute, anyway. At home, some other commuter whose train did come would simply replace him.

The forgotten Commuter fell deeper into the memory of a lost childhood as the short toot of a late commuter train came and went empty of the Commuter. Instead, a twelve-year-old girl waited on the dance floor.

#### BIO:

Over a dozen magazines have published Stanley B. Trice's short stories. He is a member of the North Carolina Writers' Network and a local critique group.

**We're Lucky to be Alive, I suppose**  
**Daniel Townsend**

I wish  
     to see you  
 and not say a word.

And shamble down the boulevards  
     beside you  
     refusing to touch your hand

An unfinished gesture  
     like the song of a bird

suddenly silenced by the bb gun of  
 a spoiled child. (Silenced by the  
 coldest of winds- that will leave  
 one shuddering ineluctably for a  
 lifetime.)

He winks at us  
 as  
 lightning  
     cracks the  
 skies of our hearts.

I wish  
     to see you  
 and not say a word.

Stand  
     outside time and space  
  
 and light 2 candles in memory  
 of once smiling.

    And place them both at  
 our bare feet.

I wish  
     to see you  
 and not say a word.

And be approached  
     by a child.

That points towards you

and I.

We know what they are  
 communicating

*"I know you cannot bear to  
 think of what you do."*

*"I know you cannot bear to  
 think of what you've done."*

*"And I know you  
 cannot bear to think of what you're  
 going to be."*

We're manuscripts pulled from  
 the fire.

    Severely  
 singed,

    But still  
 whole and surprisingly legible.  
     We do not  
 run the risk

    of burning  
     down our  
 entire world.

    Quietly our past selves  
 stop breathing in their sleep.

    Sheets still as stone  
     and  
     bygone bodies just  
 as cold.

I wish to see you  
 But this time allow me a few words,

And I promise to never punctuate  
 our unpunctuated silence again.

**Pupils, Two Fingerprints of Dried  
Blood**

It's true  
I'm still  
reaching  
    for  
the latch  
that's  
perpetually  
    out of focus.

A Gate  
    that leads  
to a spiritual  
    state of  
nudity.

Nothing but  
blank, wood-grain,  
    flesh  
completely nude except  
    for this  
    single dead leaf of sky  
    covering  
my shame, and  
    even that metaphorical.

Exposing an idiot heart  
that only  
has space  
    for one love,  
for that;  
I humbly ask for forgiveness.

A heart that was coaxed out  
    of hiding  
then abruptly bludgeoned to mush  
on the spot.

My dear,  
You open your  
    mouth to  
speak- but it  
    overflows  
with charred soil.

And I know now that when  
you are without eloquence

I am without eloquence.

And  
we've truly  
done it.  
A sky the color  
    of a neckline  
2 months dead.

A period  
left by a  
needle, now  
an exclamation  
mark,

Thanking  
    the world  
for it's  
continents of light, it's stillness  
during cruelty, inconsolable in its  
beauty,  
    and my throne which happens  
to be  
    a wheelchair in a rusted  
sepia toned park.

Or maybe the sweetest  
    little girl in  
    a floral dress,  
That the hospital misguidedly  
called a burn *victim*  
being spun in and spun out  
    by her father,  
as she dances lovingly on his toes,

Truly understanding  
how beautiful she really is  
    an accepting it.  
Like a gift from an unknown source.

*I can no longer  
write,  
I just  
wish to split an apple into  
two pieces.  
And eat them both with  
you,  
surely*



*that must count for something?*

**BIO:**

Daniel Townsend was born in 1988 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to two working class parents. He was ranked as one of the best undergraduate writers in the Milwaukee Area in 2012. He graduated from Cardinal Stritch University in 2012 with a degree in Creative Writing and Sociology. He is also writer for the small independent film company San Voir Films.

**The Monster**  
**William Quincy Belle**

"There's a monster under my bed!"

Julie pulled the blanket up to her chin. Her eyes darted around in the semidarkness. She held her breath, listening. Did something move? Was there a scratching noise on the floor? She took a breath, then leaned over to the side table and picked up her flashlight. She flipped it on and pointed it at the floor, moving the beam of light around to inspect the entire left side of her bed.

Julie scooted over to the other side of the bed, and then twisted so she had her head and arm over the edge. Once again she moved the flashlight around, trying to see if there was anything there.

"Mommy!"

Julie moved into the middle of the bed and lay back on her pillow. She held the flashlight straight up and stared at the circle of light on the ceiling. What was she going to do? There was no doubt she was going to be eaten alive tonight.

"Mom!"

She turned off the light and lay still. Maybe if she didn't move, the monster wouldn't know she was here and wouldn't eat her. That seemed like a good idea. It was at least worth trying.

The intercom on the side table made clicking noises, then there was static. Her mother's voice came out somewhat distorted. "Julie, you have to go to sleep."

"There's a monster in here. I can hear him."

Julie waited in the darkness. Would her mother believe her? Did her story make any sense and would Mom come down to see for herself?

"Julie?" Her mother's voice trailed off in an obvious question.

"Yes?"

"I want you to go to sleep."

"Aw, Mom," said Julie. "I'm not tired. Do I have to?"

The intercom made a few clicks. "I'm going to let your father talk to you."

Julie rolled her eyes in the dark. Oh boy, so much for that idea. Mom was definitely not going to come down to look for her monster. She was going to leave her only daughter to fend for herself.

The intercom made a distinct noise, then her father's voice boomed out in a deep baritone. "I thought we had a deal, young lady."

Julie lay there, not saying anything. She stared at the ceiling, looking at the lights from the street coming in through the window.

"Young lady?"

Oh, boy, was Dad angry? Julie sighed. "Yes, Dad."

"Didn't we have a deal?"

"Yes, Dad." There was resignation in her voice.

"And what was that deal?"

"Two stories then lights out."

The intercom clicked and Julie heard her Dad clear his throat. "And how many stories did I read to you tonight?"

"Two." Julie shook her head. Why was Dad so logical? With a little protesting, Julie could usually get Mom to come to her room. Instead of talking about a monster, she should

have talked about an upset stomach. An upset stomach or a headache was a guarantee of getting Mom to look in on her.

"And what did we agree on?"

Julie rolled her eyes. This wasn't working. Well, it wasn't working with Dad. "You read me two stories and I go to sleep."

"Didn't you agree?"

Julie sighed again. "Yes, Dad."

"Did I read you two stories?"

"Yes, Dad." Now Julie was sorry she had ever brought this up.

"Have you gone to sleep?"

"No, Dad."

"I read you two stories; you go to sleep. Half of the deal is done. My half is done. Now all we need is for you to do your half."

"Yes, Dad." Julie wondered why she bothered. As soon as Mom called Dad into the conversation, she knew it was over.

"Now princess, how about you put your flashlight away and go to sleep?" A couple of clicks came from the intercom. "What day is tomorrow?"

"Saturday?"

"Daddy has to go pick up the car from the garage. Everything is all fixed now, and I thought the two of us could out for breakfast."

Julie's eyes lit up. "Pancakes!"

"Right you are. Now the sooner you get to sleep, the sooner you will wake up. And the sooner you wake up, the sooner we'll get the car. And the sooner we get the car...."

Julie stood her flashlight up on its end on the side table. "Okay, Dad. I'll go to sleep now."

"That's my girl." The intercom clicked one time, then was silent.

Julie put her head down on her pillow and shut her eyes.

\*\*\*

Freddy had been doing B&Es for almost a year now. He wasn't getting rich, but he did make a few good bucks now and again. The biggest problem was fencing stuff afterwards, but thank God for old man Spencer. He ran the pawn shop downtown and Freddy had discovered, purely by chance, that Spencer also did shady deals on the side. Whatever Freddy came up with, old man Spencer was willing to take off his hands. This made things a heck of a lot easier for Freddy and lately, Spencer had been giving Freddy some tips.

Most of the time Freddy had been driving around scouting out likely places to hit, trying to guess if dark houses meant the owners were out for the evening or gone on vacation. Once he found out the hard way that a dark house could mean the people merely went to bed early. The owner had woken up with a yelp and scared the hell out of Freddy. Fortunately in the darkness and in the confusion, the guy never got a good look at Freddy, but Freddy made sure from then on to double check the garage for cars. And even then, if he had the slightest suspicion, he would ring the doorbell several times to see if he woke somebody up.

Tonight, Spencer had put him onto a house on 42nd Avenue, number thirty-five. Freddy had no idea how Spencer knew this, but Spencer claimed the owners were away for a week's vacation. It was a Caribbean cruise so the car would be gone and there was no way they would

unexpectedly come back home. Seemed like the perfect scenario.

Freddy pulled up to the corner and looked for the street sign. There was a willow tree on the corner lot and the branches were sweeping partway over the sidewalk and hanging in front of the street sign. Freddy twisted his head and saw the number forty-two. This was it.

For the briefest of moments, Freddy tried to remember the layout of the roads. Streets went east and west while avenues went north and south. Spencer had warned him to pay attention and make sure he was on 42nd Avenue and not 42nd Street. No matter. Freddy turned left and slowly drove down the street, looking at the number on the front of each house. He saw number thirty-five and pulled over to the curb. He put the car in park, then turned off the engine. The house didn't look as he'd expected. Spencer had said it was a split-level, but this looked like a bungalow. That seemed odd but, oh well, it was time to get to work.

Freddy reached in the glove compartment and retrieved a screwdriver. Sometimes he needed to pry something open, so he went prepared. He got out of the car and gently pushed the door shut. Freddy scanned the area but didn't see anybody. He crossed the street, then walked up the driveway and went around back. He stood looking through a window into the garage. The light was dim, so he took a small pocket flashlight out and shone it through the glass. The beam fell on an empty floor. No cars. Just as Spencer described it. Things were looking up.

The old man had said the best way to get in the house was through a bedroom window, so when Freddy crossed the back patio, he picked up a plastic lawn chair and carried it around to the side of the house.

He put the chair in front of a window, then glanced around between the two houses. The neighbours didn't have any windows on the end wall of their house, so Freddy knew nobody over there would look out and discover him breaking into the house. This one was going to be free and clear.

Freddy got up on the chair and examined the window. It had a screen he could easily remove, and the interior window was open. Somebody had been airing the room out and forgotten to close it. All Freddy had to do was push the window up and he would have more than enough room to climb in. He wouldn't have to break any glass to get a hand in to unlatch the window.

Freddy used the end of the screwdriver to pop the metal frame of the screen out of its supporting grooves. He lowered the screen to the ground and left it leaning against the house. He put one hand on the underside of the window and pushed up, sliding it open as much as possible. Freddy put his screwdriver in a back pocket, put both hands on the inside of the window, then hoisted himself up and inside. He struggled with his balance, but got his one knee onto the ledge and twisted himself around part way. He lowered one foot to the bedroom floor, then brought in his other leg and stood up.

Freddy glanced around in the half dark, trying to get his bearings. Spencer had given him a description of the layout of the home and a list of items he should look for. The woman had jewelry, and the man had expensive watches. Freddy took a step toward the hallway when a light in the room came on. Freddy froze.

"Are you the monster from under my bed?"

Freddy heard the little girl's voice and felt his pulse jump up about twenty beats a minute. Something had gone very, very wrong, and the family was home. But Spencer hadn't said anything about kids. He'd said this was an older couple. Were they babysitting grandchildren? What was he going to do now? Jump out the window?

"You don't look like a monster."

Freddy's mind was going a mile a minute. What to do? Escape seemed like the correct course of action, but that little girl's voice seemed so odd. What was she babbling about? Freddy slowly turned. The lamp on the side table at the head of the bed cast a dull light around the room. There in the middle of the bed with her head propped up on a pillow was a young girl. She was staring right at him.

"Mommy thinks I shouldn't be afraid."

Freddy looked at the girl. He looked into her eyes. They seemed oddly large, wide open and round. They gave her a look of innocence, but they were also hypnotic. Freddy couldn't look away.

"Don't worry, little girl," said Freddy. "I've made a mistake. I think I'll run along."

The girl looked at Freddy without blinking. "I should deal with the monsters myself."

Freddy furrowed his brow. He thought this was a little weird and he should get out of there. "I'll be going now." Freddy couldn't help but smile.

Something came from the girl and splattered on Freddy's face. He was so surprised he inhaled and when he did, he became light-headed. He felt unsteady, as if all of his strength was draining out his of body. He stood there transfixed. He

could feel himself losing touch with his surroundings.

Freddy stumbled back a step, then dropped to his knees. All of his energy was gone. It was as if he had become a limp rag doll. He fell backwards and ended up half-sitting against the wall with his legs stretched out in front of him. While he could feel his body, he no longer had any control over it. He couldn't move. His mouth was hanging open, but he couldn't talk. His eyes darted back and forth, alarmed. What was going on? Was he having a stroke?

Freddy heard the covers on the bed being pulled aside. He looked toward the little girl as she rose off the bed. Freddy looked but couldn't comprehend what he saw. The torso of the girl blended into what Freddy thought was a snake's body, a large snake's body. It uncoiled from the bed as the girl's torso, attached to one end, floated over the floor until it was a few feet in front of Freddy.

"Yes, I should deal with the monsters myself."

Freddy screamed, but no sound came out of his mouth. He tried to move his hand to defend himself, but it lay there motionless. What in heaven's name was this? Had he walked into a nightmare?

The torso moved to his feet. Freddy stared at it. He was scared. He was really scared. He couldn't move a muscle and this little girl was some sort of snake creature. The elongated body shifted position so the torso was now lying chest down on the floor at Freddy's feet. The little girl looked up at him, then her mouth opened. Something shifted on either side of her head, then her mouth opened more. Freddy could see things moving under the skin on each side of the head as the mouth opened wider. It was unnaturally wide. No, it was horrifyingly wide.

Freddy screamed again, a silent scream, but his panic could only echo through his mind as he lay immobilised, defenceless.

The little girl's head was distorted out of proportion as the mouth had become a gaping hole. The entire torso moved forward as the girl's arms seized both of Freddy's legs by the ankles. They lifted his legs up and Freddy watched as his feet disappeared inside the girl's mouth. The torso continued forward in spurts as the arms and hands held up parts of the body so the mouth could swallow it. Freddy's eyes looked in utter horror as his calves, his knees, and then his thighs disappeared into the distended mouth. The two saucer-like eyes perched over the cavernous opening stared directly into Freddy's eyes. As the little girl moved forward to swallow him, she never stopped looking at him.

When the mouth got to the waist, the tiny hands grabbed a hold of Freddy and slid him toward the mouth. Freddy's body shifted until his torso was flat on the floor, with only his head propped up against the wall. The mouth moved forward and took in the hips. The little hands took Freddy's wrists and positioned his arms in against his sides as the mouth slid over his chest. The mouth covered the shoulders. Freddy could feel the lips around his neck. There was a pause, then the mouth opened and stretched and with one final lunge, Freddy's entire head was taken into the mouth.

\*\*\*

Julie returned to her bed and reached down to draw her blankets up under her chin.

The intercom clicked a couple of times and a woman's voice full of sleep spoke softly. "Are you okay, Julie?"

"I was dealing with a monster,  
Mommy."

"Oh, Julie, you were having a  
dream. Go back to sleep."

The intercom clicked, and the room  
was silent. Julie shut her eyes and  
fell asleep.

**BIO:**

William Quincy Belle is just a guy. Nobody  
famous; nobody rich; just some guy who likes  
to periodically add his two cents worth with  
the hope, accounting for inflation, that  
\$0.02 is not over-evaluating his  
contribution. You will find Mr. Belle's  
unbridled stream of consciousness here  
(<http://wqebelle.blogspot.ca>) or @here  
(<https://twitter.com/wqbelle>).

**Monocle**  
**Emily Lundgren**

The hand is red and so  
Olive's scream was a scream that  
rooted into the cornstalks and  
soaked in the autumn mud. There,  
across the yellowed grass, she  
pulls herself back and her heart  
plunges somewhere dark and  
troubled. In his palm pools red,  
and the dried running lines from  
his neck and face lead to chewed  
skin. The deep gash from neck  
through jaw takes her to his dead  
eyes that are deader than any  
picked fruit. The red hand  
stretches towards her; she imagines  
it alive, the way it would writhe,  
pleading the way only outstretched  
fingers can plead. Olive's scream  
is a scream that captures no one  
but the dry fields and the cold.  
Shock vibrates close against her  
ribcage and her deep breaths  
rattle.

Olive doesn't know how she  
came to wake next to a dead man in  
a gray watery dawn. She thinks back  
on her fling: the drinks split, the  
watery puke in the toilet, and then  
here, like a gift—the drag down the  
steps and the green tint of her  
wobbled knees. Something rumbling,  
deep, guttural, underneath her—  
movement. But then the waking dream  
tilts until she tumbles askew, back  
into the yellowed grass near the  
linden tree in a great dying field.  
She sits her back towards the dead  
man and finds composure, pressing  
her lips together to keep away her  
grief. Olive doesn't know the dead  
man's heart. She doesn't recognize  
his hairy arms or his barrel chest.  
It would seem he's just a man.

She's nearly naked. This dips  
into her slowly and then awakens  
her skin until the cold is wrapped  
so tight her pressed blue lips give  
way and her teeth chatter. Slowly,  
slowly, slowly, she looks over her  
shoulder at the dead man. His  
wrinkled flannel, his husky  
trousers. She does what she must.  
She crawls towards him, unafraid,  
only shaken now, only grief-

stricken. She imagines the prickly weeds watching: how do these things come to pass, they sway. Olive spreads her numb toes and her numb fingers, and then with knees rubbed raw, she undresses a dead man.

She begins with his shirt; each plastic red button flaked with dried blood. His chest is hairier than his arms, like a grizzly wild bear. She finds trouble with his stiff arms and must roll him on his chest, peeling the sleeves from his paled arms. She doesn't think while she works because she must keep her fear in the bay of her mind, casting anchor low and high in dark waves. The dead man's trousers are stiff and large and the color of soft clay, tucked under his swollen belly. Wearing his itchy loose flannel, she pulls and pushes her heels into the dawn dirt until the trousers belong to her. She takes his socks and his heavy boots and drowns in him. Warm, he holds her: his scent is sweat and earth.

Deep in the trouser pockets there are two treasures that weigh against her thigh: an expensive cell phone with a bloodied spider web face and a curious round lens with a gold wire trim. Olive brings the lens to her eye and the world blurs into grays and shadows. A cold creeps into her and she turns towards the dead bear man. There she spies a smudged shadow at the edge of the lens, too blurred for features, only vaguely human. This capsizes her and she shudders with heart dropping, dropping. She buries the round lens into the trouser pocket and the fleeting adrenaline leaves her skin crawling with cobwebs.

Looking towards the old linden, she sees a gray jay on a low branch. Her secret sharer. She can't bring herself to touch the man's dead flesh after what she saw through the round lens. She doesn't close his stilled eyes. Instead, she turns away on the edge of the stricken cornfield and heads across the yellow meadow. She's in no hurry. The roads here are always

waiting.

\*

She walks west towards the hills. The roads are more like a hidden paths, with potholes and deep ribbed gravel. She doesn't try to recollect. She just walks and clutches the round lens until it sores her palm. As her limbs stretch, numbness fades and leaves dull aches that go beyond just bone. The little cuts and pricks on her hands and arms begin to sting. She is acutely aware of her body. It doesn't feel like it used to feel. It bore witness to something terrible and she feels like a bruise.

Across the flat road she sees a cloud of dust in the distance billowing behind a truck, a bright red in contrast to the meadow yellows and dawn grays. Her legs wobble in the wake of relief and a small sigh escapes her. As the truck approaches, her body heats a hunger in her belly that churns and bubbles. The mist floats heavier and she feels heavier as she waits. She sways with movement just to keep herself from feeling sunken.

The truck comes to stall on the soft gravel shoulder. In the cab leans an old thin man, his eyes gaunt and his face almost skeletal. She looks towards him, blocking the clouded sun with her hand. She must tell someone about the dead man.

A dog pants heavy in the truck bed, with a brown face and a white spotted body. It smiles. At first only noise between them is the scraping of wiper blades across the bug-splattered windshield. He reminds Olive of her grandfather who died years ago, the first dead body she'd ever seen. It was preserved, wax-like, unsmiling.

"What happened?" says the man.

"Please," she says. Her own voice surprises her; it sounds far away and warped, as if strung through a pinhole. "I have to call the police." She slips a trembling hand into the trouser pocket and reveals the cell phone. "It's

broken, see?"

The man nods as if he understands why she is there. He pauses, and then, "Get in," he says, leaning across the cab to open the passenger door for her. She accepts and hopes he doesn't ask questions because she has lost the ability to tell stories. She won't think on how she came to wake next to a dead man. She leans heavy into the wrinkled red leather and hears the radio on low. The man's dark windbreaker crinkles as he shifts the truck into gear. He smells like vanilla pine bark and the dog pokes its face into the cab, sniffing her tangled brown hair.

"Dock, get down, Dock!" says the man in dominate slur he must only use for the dog. It ducks back into the truck bed and the man apologizes and shuts the window. "He's a good dog," the man says.

Her gaze shifts down and fixes on the bone-hilt knife between them in a soft leather sheath. The man notices her gaze and he offers explanation: "I hike with Dock now and then, usually around the house—we live outside of Custer, but we were out this morning on the loop—I carry the knife in case of mountain lions."

Everything he says sinks through her and into the truck. Olive finds herself unable to listen properly. She pulls the round lens from the trouser pocket and turns it in her stiff fingers. She thinks of the smudged shadow and shivers.

"What's that?" says the man.

The truck lurches onto a pink rocked road.

She turns the lens back and forth. "I don't know," she says. "It reminds me of a magnifying glass." But when she peered through it at the dead man, the blurriness magnified nothing. Instead it only revealed.

Slowly, she brings it to her eye and looks towards the old man. She sees his blurry blue shape.

"Looks like a monocle to me,"

says the man, "a real antique."

She turns and looks out the small window at the dog. She sees a dark shape where he should be, almost human. Smudged and crude and moving. Swallowing the cold shriek of her heart, she takes the monocle from her eye and buries it away. She stares ahead at the road and keeps quiet.

"So where're you from?" says the man.

Her voice is low. "Rapid," she says.

He nods.

They weave through the wildlife preserve and cross deeper into the hills. The tall pines, once healthy and proud, are dying in so many shades of brown. She's heard the reason why, learned too late through trail plaques and park rangers. The wood beetle eats into the pine bark with obsession and fervor. The pine tries to save itself—it pushes out sap and pushes out sap, slowly, slowly, slowly, and eventually suffocates until its needles turn brown and sag. It infects every pine around it. But still, the tourists come every year; still eager to watch the wilds die.

The truck rumbles over metal park grates.

"There's a dead man," she says, "down the road where you picked me up." The words spill from her mouth and dribble down her chin. She looks towards the man and she watches him unfold their meaning. He doesn't ask for a story. He only asks if she's cold.

\*

Sometime later Olive sits on the concrete patio outside a motel room. She can't bring herself to return home; no matter how many times the police insisted she call. Their endless questions provided them with a story she never told, rehashed through yes's and no's and I don't knows until her head spun. She hid the monocle in the bathroom until she could leave, not allowing them to take it from her on the pretense of evidence.



Now she sits wrapped in the motel bedding, the cheap comforter and tan blanket keeping her warm on another rainy night. The plastic deck chairs creak in the cold wind and whistles hollow through the cracked porch sliding door. Last night was like this night. Cold and dark and wet. She watches the slow of Main Street. This is a season of slowness. And last night—well it was just a party, she tells herself, maybe the last party on earth: she was invited, she went, and so now there's nothing left to do but wait.

She holds the monocle with the gold trim in her palm and in the inked evening she brings it to her eye. Olive looks towards the nearest dying pine and she sees the familiar smudged shadow. She sees the human shape and sees it moving, its edges sharp. It sways closer and closer but never clearer. Her whole body feels as though it shrinks and shrinks under its deliberate approach, the cold wrapping around every rib bone every muscle every curve of skin. It takes up the whole monocle lens until all she sees is its darkness, peering slowly, slowly, slowly. She is only frightened by its lack.

When she looks up from the strange monocle she can feel the shadow now, a shape sketched and wanting nothing but to work into her bones.

So Olive lets the smudged shadow in.

Where it works into her core and strips her clean.

**BIO:**

Emily Lundgren is a graduate of the University of South Dakota's MA program. She has previously been published in *Beyond Imagination* and has work forthcoming in *AnotherRealm*. In her spare time she likes to go on long runs, during which she envisions brain-hungry chasing zombies to keep her motivated.

**Wear Anything but Green  
Art Heifetz**

When Mom succumbed to cancer at a tragically young age, Dad spent his evenings seated in a green recliner, wearing his green cardigan, only getting up to fetch another bowl of breakfast cereal which he dubbed the perfect food or to change the channel on the black and white TV with the missing remote.

He carpeted the living room to match the chair, shuffling his feet until it came to resemble a worn putting green, which seemed only fitting since he'd been a caddy in his youth.

He was wedded to that color more than any Moslem prince.

God knows how many times we offered to redecorate. We tried to broaden his spectrum by buying a color TV but he said they hadn't perfected it yet and returned it to the store. We attempted to replace the chair but he wouldn't stay out of it long enough for us to give it away. As for the carpeting, we joked he would be buried in it.

To this very day, my sister and I won't wear anything green, not even for St. Pat's Day, and I threw over an Irish lass for a laughing señorita who revels in red.

**The Sleeper**

As I nod off  
 the book slips from my hand  
 the wine glass drops to the floor.  
 I simply cannot keep awake.  
 My head hits the recliner  
 I'm down for the count.

As a kid I'd fall asleep  
 packed like a frozen fish  
 in a musty subway car.  
 Teachers threw erasers at my head  
 to wake me up.

Now I doze off at movies  
 and awake to find  
 the closing credits  
 scrolling down the screen.  
 My rumbling snores  
 keep pace at concerts  
 with the timpani.  
 At bedtime your shapely form  
 stuffed into a teddy  
 elicits barely a grunt.

I drown myself  
 in rivers of caffeine  
 I jog I swim  
 I work out at the gym  
 but still I close my eyes  
 before the company departs.

When I've gone to my eternal rest  
 I'll be remembered less  
 as a poet or a prof  
 than as a sleeper.  
 "He was a good man,"  
 my wife will say,  
 "the short time he was awake.  
 Good thing I had a lover  
 for the other times.

**BIO:**

Art Heifetz teaches ESL to refugees in  
 Richmond, VA, and writes poems, 175 of which  
 have been published in 13 countries.  
 See [polishedbrasspoems.com](http://polishedbrasspoems.com) for more of his  
 work.

**But Now I Don't  
 Shabreka Chapman**

Daylight dwindled  
 As time ticked and timely tocked.  
 Ceaselessly-  
 The clock mechanically moved  
 Without daring to miss a beat.

Down the hall in 34B  
 A young woman screams through her  
 phone desperately  
 Pleading to her father  
 While a small child whimpers in the  
 background.

On the other side of the hall,  
 A couple is having a lovers'  
 quarrel.  
 The lady's makeup is smeared  
 And the man has beads of sweat  
 Dotted across his forehead.

Both are a breathing apology.

As daylight dwindled,  
 As time timely ticked,  
 As the clock mechanically moved,  
 Daring not to miss a beat  
 I thought of you.  
 How you moved with much grace.  
 How you uttered my name when you  
 saw my face, and  
 That twinkle in your eye  
 When I caught you in a lie.

I am thinking of you now,  
 But I am also thinking about the  
 lovers on the other side of the  
 hall.  
 And the lady  
 In 34B  
 With the whimpering child.

**Emmet Till**

Here lies a boy-  
 Here lies a son.  
 Here lies the life of the beaten  
 colored one.  
 Because of a whistle-  
 A noise of some sort,  
 That exited the mouth of the young  
 colored boy.  
 The white woman grew mad-  
 Offended to say the least.  
 She told, Then oh!  
 Many white men,  
 Turned once beautiful face-  
 Into a beast.  
 Chains  
 Barbed wire  
 And man's very best-  
 Landed upon the body of the  
 innocent brown flesh.  
 When the job was done,  
 They tossed him into a river.  
 And left a mothers heart  
 dying  
 dispirited.

Here lies a boy-  
 Here lies a son.  
 Here lies the life of the beaten  
 colored one.

In memory of Emmet Till.  
 R. I. P.

**BIO:**

Shabreka Chapman is a fierce slam poet and a  
 transplant of Seattle, WA. In 2012 she  
 received her B.A. in Creative Writing from  
 Cardinal Stritch University where she  
 nurtured her writing abilities. She is  
 currently working on her first collection of  
 poetry, a Chapbook entitled, "Solivagant."

**About the Editor**

Janine Mercer holds a B.A. in  
 Writing and Communication from  
 Cardinal Stritch University in  
 Milwaukee, WI. Her work has  
 appeared in many forms, including a  
 recent publication in *Sinister  
 Wisdom*. Her poetry collection,  
*Collection: A Chesterfield Reader*  
 is available on Amazon.com. She is  
 an ex pat from Newfoundland,  
 Canada, who currently resides in  
 Milwaukee with her partner of 11  
 years and a plethora of pets.