



mangrove

ISSUE 3
2011



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VESTUARIO LABORAL

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**Issue 3
2011**

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Esteemed Reader,

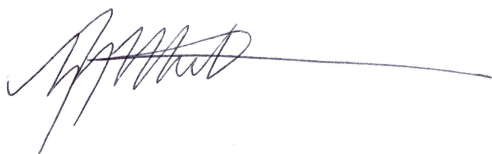
This year we have enjoyed the privilege to read, review, and publish works from the undergraduate and recently graduated community at the University of Miami. We are proud to publish the work of students from a variety of backgrounds, years, and majors. It has been an excellent opportunity to bring together this conglomerate of literary and artistic talent from such a diverse authorship, and we are very proud to present the body of work you see before you.

This has been an exciting year for the *Mangrove* staff as we have worked to make the reading, reviewing, and editing processes more efficient and to continue improving the journal by selecting quality work and presenting it in the professional manner that the work deserves. We would like to thank M. Evelina Galang and Patrick McCarthy as well as the rest of the English Department staff for their continued support of the journal, and we would also like to thank the judges of our contests: Andrew Pham (nonfiction), Harriet Levin (poetry), and Tom Williams (fiction) for their thoughtful selections.

If you are interested in joining our undergraduate staff and helping us produce more quality issues, you can find more information on our website:

www.as.miami.edu/mangrove

Best,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Zach Miller', followed by a long horizontal line.

Zach Miller
Editor-in-Chief

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Elfanbaum', followed by a long horizontal line.

Daniel Elfanbaum
Associate Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ISAAC BASHEVIS PRIZE IN FICTION

John Micich *American Memory* 6

LAURENCE DONOVAN PRIZE IN POETRY

William Neukum *What Kills* 12

LESTER GORAN PRIZE IN NONFICTION

John Mauldin *The Louvre* 14

WRITE NOW POETRY CONTEST

Vincent Pascale *Abrasive* 22

Erin Robson *Tree* 23

ART

Lila Albizu *Writing Desk* 35

Daniel Arrojo *This Is Your Life* 38

Maggie Fragel *Egg n' Eggo* 36

Maggie Fragel *Sea Above* 37

FICTION

Francis Carl Cruz <i>Delay</i>	24
Falyn Freeman <i>Lotioning, Lotioning</i>	67
Bella Martinich <i>Siosi</i>	52
Max Schloner <i>I Was a Parade</i>	39

NONFICTION

Christina M. Caymares <i>Pipo</i>	45
Justin Engles <i>An Accomplice</i>	61
Erin Nutsugah <i>You Win Some</i>	33

POETRY

Ashley Brozic <i>Mima's Poem</i>	49
Andrea Cebrecos <i>Life on High Definition</i>	60
Stephanie Guedj <i>Buttons</i>	64
Stephanie Guedj <i>Only These Are Kosher</i>	58
Elena Kasparis <i>Reichstag Heart</i>	31
Justin Limoli <i>Boom</i>	43
Nicholas Moran <i>The Rabbit</i>	48
Yale Jesse Soll <i>Apricot</i>	42
Aleia Walker <i>Georgia Peaches</i>	65

American Memory

ISAAC BASHEVIS PRIZE IN FICTION

John Micich

The boy found the body in the silo. Those silos had stood half full since spring. Spring withered to summer and the heat boiled the grain inside, fermenting in damp piles. The thick earth smell a haze. A weight all its own. The boy found the body but he had no mother and so told the farm hand named Otis or some such. The boy was confused. He had not been crying or running, but was dazed as if he had woken up in a different house. He said my father is hanging in the silo.

Police came to the farm to retrieve the body. This was in 1937. The boy was seven. Waxy and still, his eyes bulging like some bloated frog. He dangled lifeless from the center of the silo and we thought that it must've been a chore to go to the top like that, tie the noose off all the way at the zenith. He jumped, but miraculously, the coroner said, his neck held. He struggled with the rope. Perhaps miraculous is not the right word. He suffocated, legs kicking. When the boy found him, he had bitten his tongue nearly clean off. It sagged from his mouth.

The boy's mother had died a year earlier. The father had found her body in the kitchen, the sizzle and smell of burning grease. She had fallen and the skillet was on, a layer of bubbling black soot frying in the pan. He told us about it, there was no blood but that he knew straight off she was dead. So the coroner and the ambulance and the police had come, two paramedics in starched white coats came and used a stethoscope. One of them shook his head casually and the coroner made notes.

The farm suffered. The silos stood full but the farm hands stayed on. They liked a free meal and money to drink, so they stayed. Even with no work to be done. The father did not, would not let them go. They spent nights in the barn, around a wooden table in the center. Playing cards or just drinking. Sometimes they would sleep with mountain women in the hay. Mountain women with their thick thighs and their dark hair and their spells. The old

words to enchant any man. The boy watched all this through cracks and stolen glances. His father never knew where the boy was, out all night watching.

The boy's name was James. He liked the night. This is all in the shrouded past, you see. Dimly lit by memories like ours, searching by lantern-light.

In the night the boy took to walking the haunted fields of that place, listening for the eerie songs drifting across the plains. Hunting toads and raccoons, following the slimy glint of scales in the swirling darkness. One night, amid the rippling waves of tall grass, the boy searched the plains. A heavy shape emerged from the dark and the boy tripped. It gleamed a shining red in the moonlight; the smell of rotting meat. A horse, caked with dried blood. The flies were massing at its ribcage. It had been skinned.

After his father's suicide was discovered, the county clerks came. They said he would've been bankrupt in a month. He left no note.

The farm was his home before he went to live with his uncle in town. The uncle was an alcoholic. He never beat the boy.

We used to tell him legends, legends about the farm, about the land. Tales older than the caves. He never talked, but he listened. He never sought us out, we were there already. Our memory was long and we had many secrets to share, cryptic thoughts cloaked in whisper. The boy knew us from a young age, in his wanderings in the night, heard us in the rustle of grass. But he never knew our names or that we were even there at all, just distant rain on the wind.

This land was myth-soaked, our legends were like the dense maple forests to the north. Innumerable. Spectral. We could tell by the signs what would come to pass. We taught the boy to read the signs, to gather the omens like straw. There was a legend that told of wolves moving with travelers, following. To see a wolf in the daylight meant to expect a death. Farmers hated to find a dead crow. They would tie it by the feet and hang it in the fields. It acted as a ward against bad fortune. The crows only came after the first things died here, buried under rock and field. Never walk along the road at night without a gift from a family heirloom. That would be when you see things from the corner of your eye, shadows leaping, the dread of long centuries. The boy cried when we told him this. He had nothing to carry home from school.

The skinned horse had bothered us most. I remember the boy's confusion. He cried in his bedroom while the darkness swirled like ink. He wanted our

wisdom. Our advice. The horse, lifeless and massive, its blood matting the grass, an ill omen. Flies are a symbol of slow madness. The horse is a masculine symbol. It represents strong harvest. Its eyes had burst in the sun, the liquid sliding down its snout.

At night, the boy's uncle, his mother's brother, would bring women home. He stumbled around the room. He broke things. The women would laugh.

They fell through the doorway, his uncle and a woman. She wore a pink dress with ruffles. The boy thought it looked out of place. The apartment was dark and the boy sat at the dinner table. Ten now, and the legends already fading from his memory.

The sweet smell of whiskey on her hot breath. The uncle went to find more whiskey.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"James."

"James," she said, "I used to go with a guy named James." She laughed. The boy knew that he would have to leave now. The uncle had told him so, that he had to go out whenever a woman came in. The apartment was only two rooms, a living room attached to a small kitchen and the bedroom. The boy slept on a cot in the living room. At night he could hear the rumblings of the building. Old, but not so old as the farm. This place had its own legends, ones we could not protect the boy from. On nights like this he walked around the neighborhood. He would have to leave. But he could come back. His uncle never noticed when he came back, watching again as he had done with the farm hands.

Outside, alleys and filthy rainwater. Cats, their portents unknowable in this place. The stars were strange overhead. What could the boy do? He had nothing to carry with him. Turning his back to our lore, the boy stalks the streets. Unafraid. The brashness of youth clung to him, and he searched the town. The streets were mostly empty, save for the park. He would have to learn new ways to make a life here, an orphan in a dangerous place, a place alive with humanity. The night did not hold the same magic, and so the boy stopped hunting it. A lean night, not like the thick forest nights on the farm. Nights that smelled like dry leaves. He went home with a chill.

Inside the door creaked open but the boy knew they weren't listening. He could feel the humid air stale with sweat, and he watched through the keyhole. The dewy flesh of the woman sticking to the sheets as his uncle's glazed eyes watched the floor. His uncle was violent. He pushed the woman and she yelped. Her skirt was caught around her knees and her shirt over her head, arms bound together by its fabric. The uncle slapped her bare stomach and she cried out. He slapped her again.

The town was not large but it was large enough. Country crept up around it on all sides, and the boy could still see the mountains circled by fog if he looked farther to the west. His uncle had lent him a few dollars to go with his friends, to go with a girl he was fascinated by. He watched her at school, passing her in the hallway and sitting at his desk. They spoke a few times about weather and music. He saw her at the hardware store with another boy.

"Your name is Iris, right? We met at the picnic last month."

"That's right. You're Jimmy?"

"Yeah everybody calls me that."

He asked her if she was going to the dance. She said no, she had homework. He asked her if she wanted to go with him. He sensed the change, felt the warmth rise in her blush. She looked down the hall past him, her mouth open. She said okay.

"A dance?" his uncle asked. "What kind of a dance?"

"Just a dance."

"With girls?"

"Yes."

"You know I can't afford this kind of shit, Jimmy."

"I know."

They both stood in the living room. He couldn't remember why they had been standing. His uncle sighed.

"I took care of you when you were just my sister's orphan."

"Yes."

The guilt between them both was astounding. It pervaded the room, an entity with its own ebbs and tides. The boy guilty over the burden that he was. The uncle guilty over the boy and all the years and all the women. He had

found the boy watching once. They never spoke about it but they both knew, felt the other's presence. Trespassers.

The boy and his date sat alone in the car, parked in an abandoned lot behind the drugstore. We had told the boy, at some distant time before this, that pure milk was good to stifle the influence of love. But he had forgotten our legends long ago. He no longer needed our advice. He walked the night without us, the magic going quickly from the world. Seeping out, or being wrung from it. She was wearing a skirt in the style of the day and a tight sweater. They both stared out the windshield. The boy felt a surge of hot blood, a prickling in his face. He turned to her and kissed her, tasted her lips, pressed her teeth with his tongue. He felt her moist skin, the smell of her coming in waves. Her sticky forehead, sweat-beaded and warm. Warm flesh against his, spit and teeth and the thick of her tongue. He thought about the wet muscle of the skinned horse.

The night of the dance. The girl's friends born and raised in town, they laughed at the boy when he spoke the last of our secrets, the last of the magic. He laughed with them. They were not the right sort, and around midnight he lead them to his uncle's home. They waited in the rain damp street while he ascended, entered with an unheard creak. He took the whiskey from his uncle's cabinet. They sat in the park and shared the half bottle until it was empty. In the morning, the veil of pain and of memory. The boy tried and tried to remember what happened. Hadn't there been something he learned, something to smother pain? He couldn't remember.

The night no longer held its sway and so instead the boy took to pouring out some whiskey each time he left his uncle with a woman. Poured into a flask he bought at the hardware store and carried with him to the park. There he sat, drinking, the liquid twisting rattlesnake in his stomach. Some nights he didn't come home. They argued then. The boy tried to stop with whiskey. An itch anytime he was at home, knowing that his uncle's bottle was in its cabinet.

"Buy your own goddamn liquor," his uncle said.

The boy was already drunk. He had a stench of urine about him. The whiskey had failed him earlier in the night and he stumbled in half-drunk and had finished whatever was in the cabinet. His boots mud-caked, clomping on the wood floor. His uncle came in from the bedroom wearing only starched trousers.

“What the hell are you doing, boy?”

Drunken laughter from the bedroom.

“Shut up, bitch.” Saliva clung to the uncle’s chin.

The boy vomited. The uncle removed his belt and the boy rounded on him. With a heavy fist the belt came down and smacked with a snap like raw meat. The boy blinked, dazed, and the belt came down again. Falling to the floor, pulling his knees to his chest, the boy surrendered. His uncle lashed again and again. Blue purple welts began to rise and the belt flew from the uncle’s hands. He kneeled over the boy for better position and began to slam his fists into the boy. A popping sound and the boy rolled onto his back, a grotesque sucking in his throat. His uncle continued to punch, pounding the doughy pile of his nephew’s face. At his hanging, the uncle had a smile on his face. We were all but forgotten then.

What Kills

LAURENCE DONOVAN PRIZE IN POETRY

William Neukum

I walk into the yard to talk with the dark
alone. The others find escape in the pool
cool dark water with pale blue lights shimmering

beneath. I remember the past, barefoot
jeans dragging wet from freshly watered grass
blades intersecting toes. Crickets and toads creaking

from the nearby woods a deer emerges
undisturbed it eats white roses with thorns
rhododendrons live another night.

A beer in my left hand at my side
my right arm flexes involuntarily
skin breath eyes laughter flashing

I close my eyes, feel her lying across my chest
hearts beating, the rise and fall of breathing

sweat beading in the small of my back
against the leather of my backseat.

Her arms around my waist with hands
tucked just inside my jeans. I lean back

the gas pump digs in, the skin on her neck tastes
sweetly of a paradise perfume, sweat, and shampoo

her hand in mine running beneath streetlamps
to kiss at the corner away from her father.

When he wasn't looking we tightened our hold
on eyes with smiles finding teeth in an isolated hallway

hands breaking free and hushed nervous breathing at his entrance
hiding gazes craving more of this adrenaline filled infidelity.

I hear a friend shout diving into the water
splashing. A beer bottle knocked aside shatters
on the patio. The back door slams sealed shut

deer bolting downing the bottle
casting it into the woods and stumbling to the door
the pattering of feet on the deck stairs

rushing toweled and smiling. Grabbing the handle
I remember only her greedy frantic eyes
asking if I would always love her abandoning

my best friend crying just outside the door
tempting me with hands searching
over my skin stirring sanity, still searching

The Louvre

LESTER GORAN PRIZE IN NONFICTION

John Mauldin

First things first: I'd hardly ever taken a picture before I came to France. Staring at life through a lens felt pointless and counterproductive back home on my little Florida beach. I had always subscribed to the cynicism, "You're missing out on what's right in front of you because you're too busy trying to snap a shot of somewhere you won't even remember without the picture." But being in Paris was the first time I felt frantic, almost ravenous. I snapped photos like I was trying to snap a cage down on a wild animal. Every flash sucked life out of my double As and fed it straight into the endorphin center of my brain. I needed to catch these places, these buildings, these moments, as if their splendor ascribed to me a relative kind of rarity. I was an annoyance, a tourist, a poacher, but I didn't care.

Before, travel meant driving up north to visit relatives, and the "journey" of said "vacation" always felt more like drudgery. My parents groaned as if the process of visiting relatives was an obligation, so how was I supposed to feel when these new places sounded sadder than home before I had a chance to see for myself? The end result was a lot of travel to places I'd felt like I'd been to before, a new street with the same blue sky and the same kind of green grass, all expressed in the pained travel mannerisms of my parents: arguing over directions, where to stop, and what would be done to entertain the kids (they felt aware of our boring vacations, but maybe the problem was assuming from the get go that it would be boring). I slept somewhere around 18 hours a day during those road trips, and it was only that little because my parents insisted on waking me to eat food I wasn't hungry for at rest stops.

Because of all this, I'd say that I've never really traveled before, and, really, I might call my trip to Paris my first real journey anywhere.

Paris felt different, like an adventure, the real kind of journey I had dreamed of since I found out there was a bridge off our island and a town on the other side. Paris was a trip to a place that felt foreign, mysterious, and had

a reputation with picturesque postcards to live up to. I was sheltered most of my life, and this felt like being thrown into a jungle. The people were a new breed that I couldn't communicate with, many of them exotic and beautiful. It was the first time I had ever really needed to use a map. I was in a whole different world, and my giddy excitement felt a lot like survival.

The feeling made even the smallest of differences precious, like exchanging the pale green currency I'd grown accustomed to for the flashy and colorful foreign cash. Walking down roads that twisted and turned, street layouts that weren't a grid, hills for God's sake, hills! I was basking in a quiet sense of excitement the whole first week after I had arrived. Maybe it was this new, necessary kind of independence that I had never had before. Maybe it was the buildings, the everyday ones, whose trims were ornate and seductively curved, or the tiny cars, or the cafés. Hell, maybe it was being of legal drinking age! I couldn't be sure, but I didn't care. I was breathing in fresh air enriched by bakeries and bistros.

There was something tiny—I might be swooned enough to say magical, for God's sake—but unmistakably intoxicating about every inch of Paris. I had been to parks before, but seeing statues and tulips culminate around the perfectly manicured trees and luscious green grass of the Luxembourg gardens was breathtaking. I had actually been sworn off running for six weeks by my doctor before I left (stress fracture), but an early morning wake up by the garbage truck and a clear blue sky were all it took to set my heart aflame. The park was calling out to me in my early morning reverie. I tried to fall back asleep, but the shade, the morning air, and the ornate palace walls were screaming my name. Needless to say, I ran a very solid four miles on a partially broken foot and loved every minute of it.

I found within myself an invigorating desire to explore, to search and find, for even the smallest step from my apartment was unfamiliar territory. What difference did it make if I ventured a foot or a mile? My spare time became split between finding places and venturing to places. The metro map became glued to my back pocket. I had picked up a sense of direction when before I always had to stare at the ocean to know which way was east! In my home town, and I don't exaggerate, I didn't know street names. Since I grew up in the same place for 20 years, I knew my way around, but if someone asked me where US-1 intersects with Virginia, I'd be lost.

But here I was, becoming familiar with street signs that I couldn't even pronounce! A language that still felt garbled was holding in my head in ways it never had before in the States, because maybe, for the first time, it felt fun. My daily routine started quite naturally with class at the academy where I was studying for the summer, but as soon as three o'clock struck, I was out the door with my map and metro card in hand, ready to see the sights that, for the first time, felt like sights, and to explore the first city that I felt had some breath in it.

I have a twin brother who (in no accordance with me) loves what are called "Art Toys" or "Designer Toys." Basically, they are action figures or sculptures made of vinyl, wood, metal, resin, etc., that started showing up in the 1990s. Individual artists or designers make limited edition pieces that are produced and collected like pieces of art. It's an artistic movement that's sprung up in major cities all over the world in a kind of underground fashion. So, since I'm in Paris (and I love my brother), one of my first side trips was to a designer toy store.

Using the phrase "toy store" actually feels like a bit of an injustice after my visit. The "toys" were painstakingly painted with flashy colors. I saw a giant blue bear wearing a golden crown and an elegant ruby robe with fluffy white trim (an American designer); squat robots with colorful swords, their bodies painted in vibrant shades of orange, white, blue, and black (Japanese); smiling monkeys with purple hooded sweatshirts, white teeth, and no pants (French); and a curiously rusted robot who looked like a green stick sitting on top of a hockey puck, complete with red triangles for feet.

The toys were displayed under rich white light, exposing every curve and color in vibrant detail. The little cards next to them explained their origin and their price. Tags and stickers labeling production numbers were stuck on boxes. Even several brands of edgy, underground clothing manufacturers were on the shelves. It was like walking into the country of a counter culture. I, being the video game nerd that I am, felt a tear welling as I gawked at the amassed, brazenly displayed collection of toys that had the nerve to call themselves art. Designers who worked in graffiti, sculptors whose medium was the dunny, or the Qee (popular "styles" of designer toys, often sold as blanks, so individuals can create their own version) were placed on high and thrown under the same lamps as the Mona Lisa.

I felt an odd sense of satisfaction. It was as if my generation had shed its shell and emerged in line next to the rest of humanity, standing up onto its tiptoes and arching its head back to measure up with the likes of history's benchmarks. This work was different; this art was still young, but it was beautiful. Like before, I found myself ravenously taking pictures, ready to display them to the world as openly as my snapshots from D'Orsay or L'Orangerie.

I left the store feeling an awakened sense of artistic beauty. I wanted more and, being the naïve tourist that I was, decided that the next day I would head to the one museum I had heard of before coming to Paris: the Louvre.

My first impression upon stepping out of the dark metro and into the sunlight, my first and foremost view of the impressive outer walls of the museum, was, and I quote, "Holy shit." The words were spoken in my head, my face turned up, silently impressed by the enormity of the structure. The street vendors, rollerbladers jumping over bike racks, and even the Arab man making giant bubbles, in all their "oh, how neat," kind of touristy glamour, couldn't shake my eyes from the massive structure looming before me. I thought to take a picture of it, but it stretched so far down the street I felt it pointless to snap a shot of 1/100th of the building. My hand wavered in my pocket, my fingers wrapped around my camera, but I left it there, my neck stuck in its anchored position of awe.

I passed through mobs of people, all tourists like me, most clutching the expensive cameras around their necks, snapping photos as they walked and posing in front of the pyramids. I, almost out of timid reflex, took a few pictures, but the enormity of the Louvre overpowered me. Not so much because of its immense size but because of the minute details inscribed in almost every inch of the stone: the high curved ceilings and hallways, the etched stone and marble, the glass pyramid and its quiet fountains. I felt like a child lost in the supermarket and this, mind you, was when I was still outside the museum. Things got better and infinitely worse once I entered.

I had arrived to meet a tour group run by the academy I was staying at and guided by one of the professors of Fine Arts. But I've never liked tour groups. I've always thought I'd rather look at what's in front of me than try to encapsulate the work within a few tidbits of historical context. Then again, I'm no historian, so maybe that's not the tour guide's fault. So naturally, me

being me, I didn't last 50 feet within the walls of the museum before I split from the group, map in hand, excited to see the works I had heard more about than seen pictures of. I was ready to get lost with my camera securely hanging from my wrist. I remember thinking, "I will certainly be able to get some good pictures here."

I wandered somewhere within the "Pharaonic, Egypt, Thematic Circuit" and the "Antique Iran" sections. Most of what I saw felt like it was unearthed from some far desert: the fragmented walls and stone sculptures like artifacts lost in time, zoo animals forever frozen in a world they no longer belonged in. The clue that I was completely lost was the "Seated Statue of Ramses II," whom I thought looked a little like Michaelangelo's David except he had no nose and insect eyes with no pupils. I snapped a few pictures of him, then, after rediscovering my location on the map, made a beeline to the Venus D'Milo.

It was on this particular journey that my path began to fragment, grow fuzzy. I remember trying to make my way to the Venus, but the trail was so littered with statues – white, vibrant and meticulously carved – that I had to pause every few feet to stare and take pictures. I never knew their real names, but I can remember each of them when I look at my pictures. Alex: the old man hanging naked by his wrists. Timmy: the tiny boy wrestling a goose by the neck. Alpastony (my attempt at a Greek name): the centaur with an annoying little cherub on his back. The three lovely ladies standing together. Their names are simply Beauty Facing Left, Beauty Facing Backwards, and Beauty Facing Right. Whoever sculpted them must have been an ass man. No one else but he who loved what he looked at could make something so perfect.

Pretty soon, I realized I wasn't taking any pictures. I was talking in my head to the people immortalized in plaster surrounding me. I asked them how they got here, wondered if they were cold, and started to grow curious as to who had crafted them. When I reached the Venus, I hadn't even noticed she was standing right in front of me. Before I saw her, I was annoyed by the horde of people who surrounded me. Their stagnant feet annoyed me, their chatter made me feel ill, and the clicks from their cameras hurt my ears. But as I pushed through the mob, I looked up, and there I saw the Venus, staring back at me amidst the massive crowd.

I froze, her eyes locked onto mine. I centered my camera, and took a photo. As I lowered my lens, the sound of shutters swallowed me again. I looked around, then back up at the Venus. I put my camera in my pocket and pushed my way through the crowd and out of the room. I had to stop for a moment as I felt this strange sense of shame, like I had ignored a friend at a party. I couldn't even bring myself to look back at her as strings of words formed embarrassed apologies in my head. I looked up and found another statue staring me in the face. This statue, however, wasn't surrounded by the crowds like the Venus. It was then that I hardly felt like taking any more pictures.

The rest of my trip through the Louvre felt like a blur. What had started as a whirl of wonderment and photos slowly turned into a disheartened sense of overwhelming awe, a kind which I find myself hardly able to recreate adequately on paper; in short, I felt small. As I walked among the statues and the paintings, staring briefly at a few and lingering at more works than I anticipated, I looked down at the metal cards and remembered I couldn't read French. Pretty soon I put on my headphones and listened to music. I wasn't paying attention to it, but the sound did a fair job of drowning out the noise from all the crowds and camera clicks.

It seemed like the more lost I became, the more I felt swallowed by the museum around me. It felt almost like I was stuck in a maze, aimlessly drifting further and further into the center. At one point, I found myself unable to continue without sitting down and writing. With a sincere amount of regret, I am saddened that only a haze of memory remains from my visit to the Louvre, but what I do have to leave with you is what I wrote down as I sat in some quiet corner of "Oriental Antiquities."

The Louvre is large, and its collection is as intimidating as its fame suggests. In every corner you can find priceless pieces both perplexing and inspiring. In my short visit, I traveled through fawn-filled fields, almost aching as I stared at its oceans of green. I saw mighty wooden ships, some sinking, some caught in violent allegory amongst the blackened waves, battling storms the like I've only seen in my nightmares. I saw the armor of kings, their crowns and their scepters, and the battered swords and shields of the poorer many. I saw many great men, immortalized in the

stone built on the backs of their ego, remembered by the subtle brush of some lowlier genius.

There were many mighty and grand spectacles. I saw the faces on that hallowed Day of Judgment: the damned writhing in agony, and the saved basking in the sunshine atop their clouds. There were a lucky few to be left forever smiling, laughing, and singing in vibrant strokes of color upon the canvas. Then there were those carved with their flaws intact: their sneers, their fears, their misery frozen and left to echo for eternity. I even saw Jesus. In one wing he was on the cross, and in another, he was floating in midair. I saw Mona staring at the feast of Cana, its crowd flowing out of the painting and into the hoard surrounding her. As I walked, I found paintings that looked alive, as if their characters would jump off the canvas. There were some pieces strange, funny, and curious, like a mighty king with a smiling dog at his feet. Cast through ages of history, I was truly in awe, but it was a feeling I started to feel hard-pressed to trust.

The words I felt and breathed in with each sculpted bust were strange, wonderful, and magnificent. But I'm no historian; I didn't even know what, of all the beautiful things I saw before me, I was looking at. Maybe I was merely lost, a hopeless cause adrift in the ocean of art swallowing me, to drown with my mouth agape with all the other tourists flocking to the names they've heard of. I saw the Venus and the Virgin, Magdalene and De'Milo. But would I have stopped and gazed if it weren't for the stories?

I grew to feel irreverent, staring and taking snapshots at one piece and bidding another only the most cursory of glances, my gate fast and my eyes wandering aimlessly. It was a forest of form, a sea of marble, with figures so lifelike they looked like living shapes smeared over with a shiny plaster of Paris, and let bake in the flash of 1,000 ceaseless cameras. "If I could live here," I thought, "I wonder if I'd ever get lonely, staring at the endless beauties, marveling at the likes of gods and champions, chatting with the silent epitaphs of eloquence for all eternity."

I feel saddened, almost ashamed. Not so much because I couldn't read the tiny metal squares underneath each painting, but because I would hardly care to do so, even if I could. Is this cruel to the oceans of faces caught in an eternal still frame? The layers of ages carved into every stone slab, passed by

and forgotten as if it were just a mere rock? I can see shape and form, and, to me, such things are intensely beautiful. But I wish I could be left alone for a week in the Louvre to speak in privacy with all the quiet masterpieces. Maybe they'd understand if I said I was sorry.

Abrasive

WRITE NOW POETRY CONTEST

Vincent Pascale

Slip a foot under a grounded loop—
single strand of medusa hair—
and gaze upon the craggy shell of
a mighty reaching spire, ant-fortress,
timpani of the woodpecker,
wrapped in barbed wire wrapped in rust.

Inside, mandala: endless concentric
wonder. To allow the eyes any focus
surpasses the event horizon, traps
the mind in the singularity;
the hundred-year wooden circle.

Why not sit and read?
Why not grip with hand and swing a leg
over, swallow the sting of sharp
knobs and cracks on the skin of your calf?

Revel in the tiny chips of oak
which descend slowly as one gets
in your eye.

As knuckles make rough ellipses
against eye-corners, the scent of
the solemn distant colossus engulfs.

It is fresh, sharp, on your hands.

Tree

WRITE NOW POETRY CONTEST

Erin Robson

I know of an Irish convict whose hair is a dark rust color, arrested and shipped to an unknown land for stealing bread to feed his sickly baby sister.

I know a quick-witted unemployed lawyer with a cocaine addiction. He has a smile that wilts the hearts and inhibitions of unsuspecting, beautiful women.

I know a large, grey-haired woman who is the youngest of 13 siblings, the mother of five, and the grandmother of 23. With a weekly routine and a weakness for sparkling wine, she embodies the ultimate matriarch.

I know a flame-haired marriage celebrant with the prettiest white house and a stillborn son she still mourns 30 years after his death.

I know of an unspoken affair between a 16-year-old girl and a married man that rocks the foundations of a family—a family held together by secrets, smiles, and silence.

Soot, sand, earth, cloud. Multicolored hair and eyes, sharing the same DNA. This is a family tree. It is old, twisted, knotted and unwavering. It reaches into the soil of the lives of those that created it, fusing them together.

We are all the product of the same seed.

Delay

Francis Carl Cruz

She scurries past me on the Tokyo Station platform and I turn my head to watch her leave. I only see a flash of her face as she passes. The platform is crowded with people in suits shuffling to their transfers. What attracts my attention is the pink messenger bag slung over her right shoulder. My only sister has a bag with the exact same photo on the flap, a woman in a wedding dress holding a gun to her temple and smiling, as if the weight of the world is lifting off of her shoulders.

Yoko and I stopped talking six months ago, when I took a job in the business district of Tokyo. I bought her the pink messenger bag before I moved out. It was a limited edition only available for a couple days. A month later, Mother and Father had a divorce. I never had the chance to talk to her about it. Yoko probably blames me for everything, but I've always wanted to sort things out with her. Whenever I pick up the phone to dial, my mind goes blank.

I follow the woman to the small restaurant in the station and crane my neck to find her, fidgeting with the lapels of my suit. The air is bitter with the cigarette smoke hovering under the ceiling and the dry, metal smell from the trains. Then I see her back as she sits at the counter, the bride grinning at me from her place on the bag. The woman's black hair stretches down the back of her green sweater, neatly cut at the center of her spine.

"Yoko, Yoko!" I say, rushing over to sit next to her. I set my briefcase on the counter and face her.

It is not Yoko. Yoko has large eyes the color of chocolate. This woman has smaller eyes like drops of wood varnish. The forehead is all wrong, and the nose, too. This woman looks a year or two younger than I am, maybe twenty-three or twenty-four. She looks up at me, surprised, and my back stiffens.

"I—I'm very sorry for disturbing you. I had you mistaken for someone else, I apologize."

After a second, she smiles and shrugs. "It's no problem at all."

I feel like I'm interrupting something. I'm about to grab my suitcase and walk away, but an announcement starts blaring on the loudspeakers. The voice is sterile and a sea of heads tilts up, as if everyone is reading a message printed on the ceiling.

"We are sorry for the inconvenience, but there has been a human incident on the Chuo Rapid Line to Takao Station. The delay will be one hour. Please pick up a delay certificate as you enter the train. Thank you for waiting."

The crowd goes back to its business, like somebody hit 'Play' again on a brand new DVD player.

The woman doesn't. Her smile fades and her shoulders droop. She crosses her arms around herself. It's awkward because the Chuo Rapid Line is my way home and I now have no reason to leave. I look at her again, glancing down to her red plaid skirt and black Mary Jane shoes. Her perfume is really strong. It's flowery and sweet, almost like she poured it over herself before she left home. White socks reach halfway up her smooth ankles and I think maybe I can buy her a lunch to make up for startling her.

"Was that your train, too?" I say. "An hour isn't too long. We should be fine with the certificates."

"Oh, yes. Yes it was," she says. Her voice is thick, almost sad.

I settle back into my seat and decide to try my luck. "Maybe I can buy you something to eat...?" Meeting women is so difficult nowadays. It is inappropriate to talk to them in many places, so most of them ignore you if you approach them in a store or on the street. The only places inviting any sort of conversation are the bars. Those women just stare at me with their eyes like slits and blow smoke in my face. Then they ask me for the most expensive sake available after they see my business suit.

"No, thank you. I just needed to sit somewhere for a second," she says, rubbing her forehead like she has a headache.

"Are you feeling okay?"

She doesn't answer.

I flag down a waiter and order a box of sushi for myself. I order two green teas for the both of us, anyway.

"Thank you very much, sir," she says as the waiter sets the tea down in front of us. She wraps her delicate fingers around the cup and blows on the tea before she sips. When she sets the cup down, a small smile blooms its way

onto her face and it is the cutest thing I have ever seen. I take a deep breath of the tea and the earthy smell clears my head.

“My name is Mori Tanaka,” I say.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Tanaka. My name is Nanako Suzuki.”

I have to consciously slow down my breathing because she is talking to me and looking straight into my eyes. It’s unnerving, but exciting at the same time. A girl has never done this to me before. I think I like it.

“Mori is fine, too,” I say. I eat a piece of sushi. She nods and doesn’t say anything for quite a while. I offer her some of my food but she politely refuses.

It’s a Thursday afternoon, so crowds and crowds of people surround us, walking or eating or texting on cell phones. Every other man in the station seems to be wearing the same suit I am. Sometimes, a man looks like a reflection of me until I notice that he is also wearing glasses, or his suit is an American cut instead of a European cut. Girls walk together in tight packs, all wearing a school uniform. A few have outrageous hair colors like purple or blue, but nobody has a bag like Nanako.

“Hey, where did you get your ba—”

“Mori,” Nanako says, as if she’s letting out something that she bottled up.

“Yes?”

“Isn’t it a little sad?”

I blink. “The wait is only one hour, Nanako. I hope I’m not bad company...”

“No, no, I mean.” Nanako draws circles with her finger on the counter. In my peripheral vision, I see men in black suits lined up all across the station, like they are all attending the same funeral. “No, it’s, ‘Human Incident.’ What is it, exactly?”

“Well, uh—”

“I commute here every day from Tachikawa, and I just, oh.”

Cautiously, I pat her shoulder. She leans into my touch and I feel something stir up in my chest. Living alone has its consequences. Her hair smells like lilacs. I can feel the warmth of her skin under her sweater.

“I’m sorry. I need to get out of this station. I think I will take a different train. Please, take this for the tea. Thank you for talking to me, Mori.” She digs out a wad of crumpled yen from her pocket. Nanako starts to walk away but I gently grab her wrist.

"Wait, wait," I say. "C-can I get your cell phone number? We can do something tomorrow."

"I'm busy tomorrow," Nanako blurts out. "I'm busy all week. I can't, I can't be going out on dates, not this week, I can't."

"All week, huh?" I grab my suitcase from the counter and look down at the floor respectfully. Getting rejected by a woman looking you in the eye... it's the worst. I tense up my face so I don't frown and make her uncomfortable. I let go of her wrist. "Okay, I mean, I can tell. I can take a hint."

"I didn't mean it like that."

"No, it's fine, Nanako." I should be used to it, but my voice cracks. I stand to take my leave. "I'm sorry for taking up your time, you have very important things to do, I mean—"

"...Ginza," she says, stepping in front of me.

"What?"

"Where I bought this bag. Ginza. If we rush, we can make it before the smaller shops close." She takes my hand and we start walking.

While we are waiting for the train to Ginza, my palm feels slick and clammy against hers. I have never held somebody else's hand for so long. It feels almost indecent. Anyone would think that we are romantically involved if they saw us doing such a thing, and I don't want her to feel embarrassed. I let go.

"So, who's Yoko?" Nanako says.

"What?"

"The person you mistook me for. Am I suddenly the 'Other Woman,' now?"

What a thing to say!

"Your face!" Nanako laughs and pokes a finger up at my cheek.

I flinch away from her instinctively. "H-hey! Yoko is, is my, Yoko is my sister!"

"You sounded so excited to see her. You forget her birthday? Oooh, if I was Yoko, I'd give you such a hard time!" Her mood has lightened, at least.

"No, nothing like that, I just moved away from home a while ago."

"Why?"

"It just became inconvenient." I scratch at the side of my head. "Anyway, you look a lot like her, and I bought her the same bag you have."

“What a nice brother!” she says. “I don’t have anyone.”

“Hm?”

“I’m an only child, silly.”

“Your parents must be proud. Are you a University student? You seem like the smart type.” I hope I’m not being too obvious. My fingers flex around the handle of my suitcase.

“I’m graduating this fall from the University of Tokyo. I’ve got a job already lined up.”

“The University of Tokyo! It’s not surprising that you’re already set,” I say, chuckling.

“I’m just moving so fast, y’know? Sometimes it feels like I’m watching my life instead of living it.”

“Don’t worry ‘bout it, Nanako. Tell you what, you should take a few days off and drink with me sometime.”

Nanako looks as if she is rolling a thought around in her head. She points ahead of us to a blue light. Blue bathes the people waiting at the very edge of the track, less than three feet away from where a train will be arriving.

“Does that make you happy, Mori?”

“What?”

“The light.”

“Not really. Is it supposed to make me happy?”

Nanako nods. “They installed those lights so that there would be less ‘human incidents.’”

“Ahh, that’s good. The train makes me late to work so often, my boss might cut my pay!” I chuckle and smile.

“... That’s why they’re good?” Nanako’s brow furrows. “Mori, how the hell can a person get into an ‘accident’ with a train, unless it’s not an accident?”

I bite the inside of my cheek. I’m pretty knowledgeable about arguments between couples from watching dramas in my apartment, but I can’t assume anything. I just met her a few minutes ago. Nanako looks at me with eyes darker than coffee. I open my mouth but then our train screeches into the station. She shakes her head and leads me through the open doors again. She presses up against me the whole ride with her hand clinging to my own. We are both sweating.

Hours later, we stand next to each other on the train ride home. My feet are sore in my polished work shoes from all the walking we did in Ginza. She doesn't usually come to this part of Tokyo, but today was a special day for some reason.

Right before the doors open, Nanako kisses my cheek and I say "See ya later!" She has a faraway expression with her eyes unfocused, like she is looking at something past me. Other passengers are either sleeping or closing their eyes or staring at the space in front of them, so they can't see my face flush. I want to touch her and find out when we should meet again. She slips through the train doors.

The bride on her messenger bag smiles at me as it swings behind Nanako. The next instant, she's disappearing into the crowd and more people flood in to replace her.

The day I told Yoko I was moving out, she cried. She whispered to me, but I couldn't hear. A train whistle sounded or there was an announcement or there were loud schoolgirls scrambling by. She said something like, "I guess it's just me and mom and pop." The last thing I saw of her was the bride with a revolver bigger than her hand pointed at her head. Why had I bought that?

I remember when Yoko and I would skip our afternoon classes and take trains to whatever station she wanted. When I imagine my sister in my mind, I always see her with a ticket in her hand. I hear her ask me where we should go next.

The next day, my train is delayed again and I'm an hour late for work. My boss accepts my delay certificate and during my break, I flip through the newspaper in my cubicle. It's a small space that echoes every sound I make. When the newspaper crinkles between my fingers, I feel like it's coming from everywhere at once. Today is my neighbor's birthday and her family had a small bouquet delivered to her cubicle. I catch a whiff as the delivery person walks by.

Lilacs. I remember Nanako's hair spilling over her shoulders and I turn the page. There is an article called: "Chuo Rapid Line delayed for second day in a row."

Nanako's senior class photo stares at me with the end of her lips curled in a smile. It's a tiny picture less than an inch in every direction, but the curves

of her face are still vivid in my head. I keep remembering that face she made when sipping the tea. I keep remembering when we were walking through the streets, laughing. I can barely hold the newspaper in my trembling hands.

I am frozen. A pressure builds up between my temples, like something is going to explode.

I think back. How the hell was I supposed to know? She was smiling the whole time. She looked a little lonely. Not my fault. Lots of people are lonely. The bag was supposed to be funny. Her friends thought it was funny. I thought it was funny.

My eyes dart to my desk. I wrench the phone off the hook and dial home, tears already in my eyes. I hear Yoko's voice on the other end.

Reichstag Heart

Elena Kasparis

A Reichstag fire
burned down my heart.

I pulled up a chair to watch
as democracy went up in flames.

To watch
as the Fascists flooded
The Chambers
with their black blood
and sinister semantics,

clogged my ashen ventricles
with their barbed barriers,
branded the stain of a Swastika
in the walls of my scorched atria,
deemed my parched, conquered heart:
their deserved Fatherland.

All rights I surrendered
with a barren salute.

Crumbled heart rebuilt into
an edifice of iron and inexorable ideology.
Me: prime slave in a red and black labor,
an Eternal, soul-tattering labor
under a striped guise:
“ARBEIT MACHT FREI.”

Heartbeat now follows
the off beat of a German march.

Now, in the heart,
only propaganda for sanguine goals.

And in the asphalt dust lays what remains
of the scaffolding.

You Win Some

Erin Nutsugah

My eyes are almost closing. I sit in the gas station bathroom sleepily, listening to the cold sound of my own urine against the ceramic, like those old Six Flags games where you shoot the irritable little jet of water at that faraway black spot. I watch the toilet fill up with dehydrated neon-yellow, just like I watched the little pink stripe race up the yellow tube as the water barreled determinedly at my black dot. My mom's green stripe was moving more slowly, her water gun less steady—probably on purpose, but I still think I won. And then I got the big teddy bear, or the snake long enough to wrap all the way around me in the hotel bed that night, or that ugly blue dog that was wonderfully softer than the one-ply toilet paper I'm holding now. My favorite was always the half-turtle, half-fish that my dad won me one time. I called the fish side Tish and the turtle side Furtle, which I still think is clever. What I never did get was the huge tiger—the beautiful, sleek tiger, frozen in his languid curve just like Sheer Khan in the *Jungle Book*, with the same mysterious (if friendlier) glint in his eye. I always wanted one; it made me infinitely jealous to see a teenage boy carrying one for his midriff-baring blonde girlfriend. I longed to wake up to that majesty curled in the corner of my bedroom. But somehow, in the countless summers of Six Flags trips, I never got my tiger. I still wonder if maybe now I would have the arm strength or the precision to win one—a little of my grown-up brain's chaos theory surfaces, wondering if having a big tiger in my old pink bedroom would have somehow left me in a totally different place than I am now: not thinking wistfully of the amusement parks of my past, not wishing for a large but unimportant stuffed animal, not knowing what the chaos theory is or caring, not sitting on a grimy gas station toilet peeing out my philosophy of life.

That sound makes me think of all this. I return to the cold grey tile with a jolt as I realize it's quiet. My body's done; I've pissed out my theoretical bent for the day with the Gatorade and iced tea and other roadtrip related liquids. I pull up my pants, glad to be leaving the filthy room, but I retain a little of

my reverie, some of my wistfulness for the tiger transferring to the memory of it. As I wash my hands in the grimy sink I marvel slightly at the memories brought on by my own bodily functions. Odd.

But, whatever. I push open the door and smile courteously at the next woman in line. Maybe she'll have a memory too. As I walk back out to the car, watching the stars in the rural black sky, I realize I still have my long, blue stuffed snake sitting on my chair at home, curled in the corner of my bedroom. When I get there, I'll wrap it all the way around myself when I go to sleep tonight, just like I used to. I still have Furtle and Tish too, and my blue dog, now that I think about it. I don't need a tiger. Or a theory. I'm comfortable in my memories.

Writing Desk

Lila Albizu



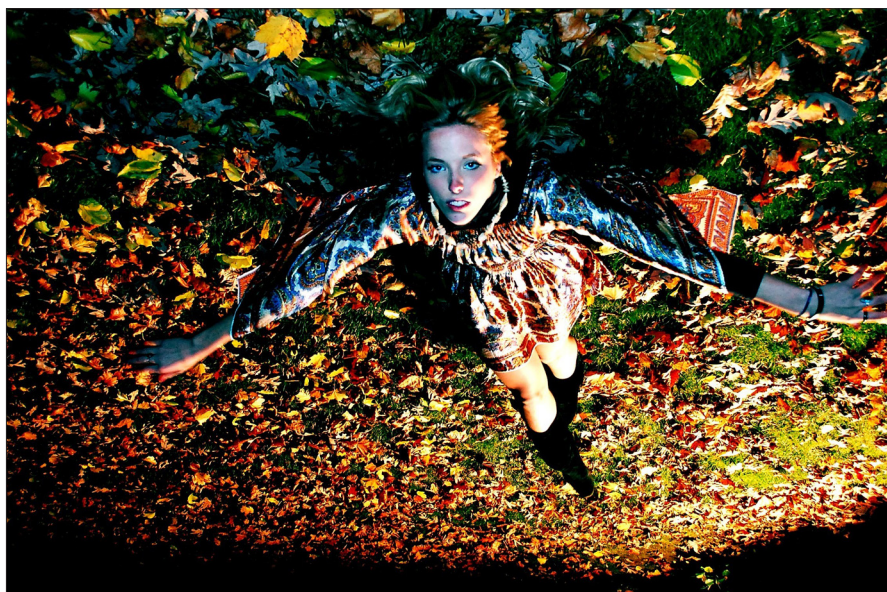
Egg n' Eggo

Maggie Fragel



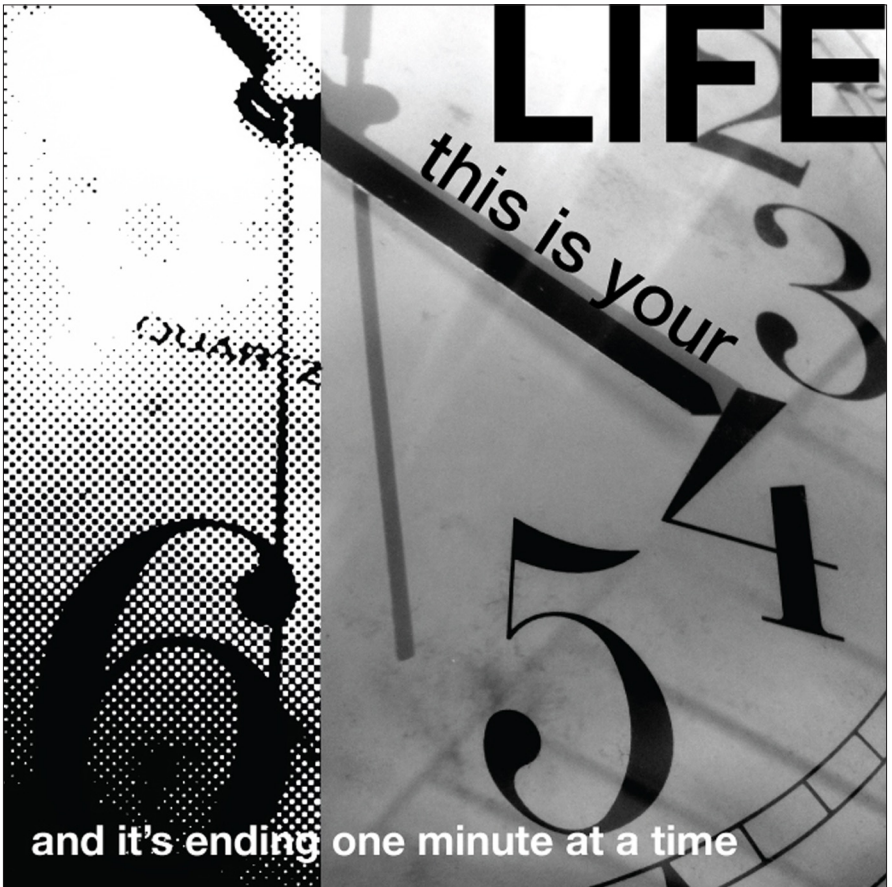
Sea Above

Maggie Fragel



This Is Your Life

Daniel Arrojo



I Was a Parade

Max Schloner

I am walking home with one hundred black and white balloons. The sidewalk quakes. The tramcar clanks as it passes overhead. It dangles in the murky slice of sky between Manhattan and Roosevelt Island, awash in the city's midnight daylight. The dangling compartment's well-weathered surface bears the wrath of two-dozen Christmases, a windswept ornament strung along high-tension tinsel. I marvel at its grace for a brief moment before my drifting mass of balloons eclipses the creeping vessel. I feel the pull of the winter wind. I fear entanglement.

The biting current rushes through the cluttered corner of 59th Street and rolls along Second Avenue. It embraces me from behind and surges along my outstretched arm to the miles of glossy ribbon that flow from my fist. One hundred trembling leashes grow tense and one hundred makeshift hounds command me along the course of the pavement. My new fear is the loosening grip of gravity. The brunt of the breeze folds my fear into its back pocket and makes a marathon track of the East River. I take one faltering leap, riding the tail end of the wind to the edge of the block. My sneakers drag and snag on the sidewalk until I catch myself at the curb. A taxicab like a rat mocks me, threatening within inches of my perch. The cab screeches to a halt and its yellow surface shifts to the hue of a carrot in the ruddiness of the stoplight.

The crosswalk signal turns white-hot. It beckons to me from across the blacktop chasm. Momentarily stricken, I hop clumsily to the street. I fancy a glance to the halted traffic—a thousand eager ships anchored in the narrow channel. Windscreens frame drivers at their dashboards. The colorful bunch resembles a misplaced United Nations assembly. As I totter across the street, a few of their eyes bob along with my skyward assemblage, but not a garish peep tonight. Not even a sigh. Not even a smile.

A bicycle, laden with the makings of a dorm-room dinner, nearly strikes me. I shake my head as if I am surprised at the occurrence. The cyclist steadies his bike with one hand and, with the other, adjusts the pile of greasy brown

bags heaped in his basket. I chuckle. He would be a fittingly inelegant addition to my one-man parade. I secretly hope he is headed in my direction. He races across the avenue and disappears under the shadows of an awning.

I had nothing against New York until tonight. When I arrived just a few months ago I thought it instantly warmer in tone and temperament than I had been assured. Tonight, though, Manhattan's dispassionate population disappoints me. I have caught my father eating Santa's cookies on Christmas Eve. I am a grown child in a cheap pea coat, doing my best to appear both remarkable and sufficiently adherent to Midtown's unspoken dress code.

Another child, still safe in her six-year-old frame, clutches her mother's hand. They approach, and she mirrors mommy's empty forward gaze until the pair walk next to me. She glances up toward my balloons and, if only for a fraction of a moment, the wide-eyed gape of awe brings life to her face. Flecks of gold shimmer in her tiny brown eyes. She turns and presses her rosy cheek into the hip of her mother's \$700 coat. I smile, but it is too late. Her mother tugs her along. They pass behind me and the breeze follows them, plowing into me now. The balloons strain against me. It is difficult for me to move against the inclination of my lofty bundle.

I glance back over my shoulder. Twelve blocks behind me smolders the remains of a party that never started. Cheap meat and empty seats populate a dimly-lit ballroom, made barer by the theft of one hundred black and white balloons. Aimed at being a semiformal affair, the party missed its mark in both class and appeal. It feigned nothing despite its catered trays with their portable flames. The disc jockey and I shared the embarrassment of appreciating the loneliness and absurdity of the almost-empty dance hall. A hall to be filled in the morning by eager over-achievers. The hung-over future of Broadway's bit-parts. Cool creative types, mostly natives.

Some of them reside here. The orange of my building's brick façade strikes an alternate horizon in the starless sky. Time and I take a short break to catch our breath. I entertain the thought that a strong breeze and a solid jump might sweep me up to the thirty-second floor. And what good might that do? I certainly cannot afford the weight of any object with enough mass to shatter a double-paned window. An endless exchange with the security desk and an awkward elevator ride will have to do.

The eight people I pass on the way to the elevator try their best not to notice. The three people who climb into the elevator with me cannot afford not to. For the first and probably last time in my life I wish for a soundtrack in the muted sound of Muzak. An unseen bell chimes.

I explode into the hallway. Rushed footsteps to her door.

A subdued knock.

A delayed answer in pajamas.

“What is this?!”

“I was a parade. And to no one but me.”

Apricot

Yale Jessi Soll

she will die at age 85 of a stroke
while she lies in her king sized bed
floral drapes pulled shut
though only she rests there in her king-sized bed
her husband will have died of cancer
slowly the cells spread from his leg to his brain
he sat in a wheelchair for their daughter's wedding
they never had the chance to take their grandchildren together
to the playground with the elephant and hippopotamus sprinklers
twenty two years after the last artifact from their travels finds its shelf
she will die
twenty two years after the Cambodian sun shone on their faces
she will die
the coroners will determine it occurred between 2 and 3 a.m.
she will be asleep
she bought fresh groceries just the day before
two containers of dried apricots lay on the counter
twenty two years shopping for only herself
not remembering the way she ran
when they first dated and he would call her possessively
sometime between 2 and 3 a.m.
when they were in college
and she would run with her headphones over her ears
sunglasses to hide her tears
she won't remember
if only she knew what she will know after twenty-two years
twenty-two years since the last time she saw him
she could have enjoyed the sun
the breeze barefaced while she ran and they were young

Boom

Justin Limoli

The communists are coming.
Sirens howling wolfishly,
groggy from their dormant sleep.
Hammer and Sickle bombs penetrate
Grandpa Sam's shelters.
But I have more important things to do
than to just stand idly
awaiting the coming of the atomic bomb,
who, with fiery rapture,
will convert us prisoners to pagans.

You lean on the cement wall
in your white summer dress
yearning for a fresh breeze
to run a curious hand
over your pulsating neckline.
No breeze will come though.
Mother Earth's two favorite children
are playing war,
and no hand will be left to place
that white chrysanthemum
on her empty tomb.

I can't see anything beyond these
sheltered borders.
I try to read brailed reverberations,
like a blind man with calloused fingers.
Occasionally dust would fall from the rafters,
fleeing from the inevitable end.

“Where the fuck did those commie fuckers come from?”
is our mantra.
From the bowels of Satan.

Red Talons tear through
our red, white, and blue womb
with “Bloody Vengeance,” the tragic bomb.
I grab you, and through the explosion
my starving lips lunge for yours.
Ignited, our emblazed bodies join,
outshining the fury god
raining down heated retribution.

I’m surrounded by death, but
all I can see is your eyes and bare thighs
quivering like the support beams
plunging deep into the Earth,
struggling to hold their ground.
I hear screams, but all I care about is the soft drip—
drip of our mixing fluids forming
on the splitting concrete.

Our tempo increases.
Your eyes close,
my lips tighten.
Our cheeks flush.
One last taste of you.

Boom.

Pipo

Christina M. Caymares

Everyone in our family has a different perception of who my grandfather Pipo was. My mother spoke to him everyday on the phone. Even on my busiest days, while writing my name on a notepad, singing a song in my head, or doing homework, my mother forced me to say hello. I'd give her the rolling of the eyes and the pouting of the shoulders and the big breath before grabbing the phone with a yank to say, "Hola Abuelo!"

Speaking to my grandfather from prison became a daily thing. My grandfather was skinny with very long legs. All I remember of my grandfather, with no pictures or voice attached or stories, are the mirrors in his house. The four walls that boxed the couches and coffee tables were mirrors. And I remember my mother saying in the car after leaving his house, "How tacky! I tell you, don't you guys ever put your house like that!" My mother and Margarita, his wife at the time, became very good friends. She was never a mother figure to my mother, but treated her as an equal. They were eighteen years apart.

Margarita had a big butt. She had bleached-blond hair and always had on a lot of jewelry. She mixed diamond bracelets with ceramic bracelets, and I could always hear her jingling as she came through the door. Back then there were four different chairs in our kitchen and when visiting she always sat in the one that faced the refrigerator, the window, and the sink. Her back was facing the people entering the kitchen from the hallway. My mother always sat facing the Florida Room and the two French doors that led to the backyard. I often saw Margarita before I saw my mother when I came home from school. I liked Margarita, it's just that her face was like no other face I had ever seen before. The skin at the top of her eyes was either painted blue or green, and her lips were as big as my Ken Barbie. Picturing her, the woman of my grandfather, gave me a new outlook on who he was.

My mother always said Pipo was not a bad person, he was just addicted to making money. She says he wasn't a bad father because he wasn't a father at

all. The father who adopted my mother, Lorenzo, was Pipo's brother-in-law because he was married to Pipo's sister, Pilar, my grandmother, and also tia abuela and mother to my mother by way of adoption. Before Pipo was arrested for the rest of his life, Lorenzo would take my mother, as a child, about once a month to visit him and say hello, but there was no relationship beyond that. Only after Lorenzo passed away (my mother was twenty-four) and Pipo got arrested (my mother was twenty-five), did my mother begin talking to Pipo every day from prison. He would call every day. Since my mother was forced to talk to him, my sister and I were also forced to talk to him.

Tío Pedrito, Pipo and Margarita's son, my uncle, half-brother to my mother, says, "You don't know who your grandfather was, you were too young. El era un wapo!"¹ I have no interest in clichés like that, but it's the best I could probably get from my Tío Pedrito. Those words come from a man with very few words. This is one of the reasons my sister doesn't like him; she says he is ignorant and doesn't know how to communicate. She gets angry with him all the time, but I love it because it makes me feel right at home. The exact reason why she doesn't like him, I do: he doesn't speak that much; most of the time he is stuck in his own ways, he doesn't want to change, he doesn't listen, and sometimes, I like that. Someone strong enough to hold on to who they think they are. It's exciting.

My sister dislikes most of our family members because she says they are animals, wolves. "You guys should live in the zoo," she tells them, "you live in your own little bubble." This may sound humorous, but sometimes it's not. They have sometimes laughed at her attacks (Mom included), and my sister has cried. I've tried to explain to her that we either accept the family, love them for who they are, or marry off to some Albanian and never see our family again.

My mom demands attention at our family parties, and this often scares me because we are among friends, but she gets very excited. I start to worry about her heartbeat, her breathing. "Is she going to be alright?" I think to myself. And it's not even an argument; she just wants people to do as she says. For instance, if Tío Rolly says he's going to the hospital tomorrow, but he doesn't have insurance, she'll stand up with her finger in the air and shout, "They will

¹ A badass.

not accept you!” I feel like saying, “Mom, why don’t you just tell him, he’s not going to make it.”

And then she calls my sister, my brother, and me the next day to tell us to stay positive, and she texts us inspiring sayings, as if they are going to make us better people, but they can’t help her. I don’t tell her that because I like it when Mom texts me, and I like it when she calls. But I think she motivates me more because I see she cares, forget the sayings and the staying positive.

She treats my stepdad like he’s one of her babies. Tie your shoes; do this, do that; don’t eat too much; you do that and you’re gonna regret it, trust me, I know. I don’t want him to leave her because then my life might be put on hold for a while, so I tell her, “Mom be nicer, gentler, don’t treat him like he’s one of us, please!” Then I go and have a private conversation with my stepfather, justifying why my mother is the way she is. I really have no idea, but I make up things like, she was abandoned, she had a terrible childhood, her father passed away in prison, for God’s sake. But I really have no idea what has and has not affected my mother. I asked her how it made her feel to have her father give her up like that:

“It really didn’t make me feel anything, I had Lorenzo that was my father, you know me Cristy, I try to resolve problems easy.”

That’s what she said. I have no reason to distrust her. She gets angry with me because she says I don’t listen. She says I have to open my ears and stop talking so fast. “Todos lo que haces es hablad, hablad y hablad! Abre los oídos, por favor!”

My grandfather promised me almost every time we spoke that he would take me to Disney World as soon as he got out. The last time he told me this, I was nineteen years old and Islands of Adventure was open for business.

He passed away in prison last year, and I never got to go to Disney World with him. I wish I could have but for him, not for me. I would have walked hand in hand with him, and told him that I forgive him for being bad. I would have worn a Mickey Mouse suit on the hottest day. I would have ridden the rides that would make me vomit later, and I would have buckled his shirt buttons if too much hair was showing from his hairy chest.

The Rabbit

Nicholas Moran

It begins with Sam Taylor-Wood nailing the foot of a dead rabbit to a mud wall, allowing its limp body to slouch against the table like a backwards L. The hare's beige hair clumps together, slides down the corpse in powdery flurries; the meat blackens, becomes oily, and clouds of blood splotch the wall in Rorschach expansion. For four minutes, thirty-six seconds, the rabbit turns inside out, the video plays on. Yesterday, I got drunk off bourbon and twenty people saw me vomit on myself. Yesterday, I saw that rabbit decay faster than a peach. For her next trick, Sam Taylor-Wood is going to nail a larger rabbit to a larger wall (using a larger nail), and we will see its sinew melt against a larger scourge of time. Tonight, nightmares of decaying rabbits will awaken me at seven a.m. Tonight, my sleep paralysis will prevent me from moving, I will suffocate. You need to get a load of Sam Taylor-Wood's final act, it's incredible. The rabbit is no longer a rabbit, it's incredible. The rabbit is Sam Taylor-Wood; the rabbit is a self-immolating monk; the rabbit has left the building in a drunken stupor, suffocating on a mix of its own shedding fur and vomit, wishing Sam Taylor-Wood had been a New Yorker, or at least not as exposed to rabbits. To the untrained eye, the mud wall is dripping with the blood of a rabbit, and not regurgitated bourbon and hair.

Mima's Poem

Ashley Brozic

Pretending she knows nothing
she listens.
Her eyes like cerulean pebbles
attempting to understand

a generation
half a century
behind her own.
Her wrinkles ripple lightly

like the gentle Atlantic,
each a badge of hardships surpassed;
reminders that life
goes on.

Her dyed blonde hair rings of a youth
trapped within a wooden wine barrel,
valued more
with each passing year.

Who could reject her wisdom?
Exile of an island
where the sweet smell
of Sugarcane

attempts to conceal the stench
of aged blood—
a relic of
“The Revolution.”

A Cuban Cinderella:
first betrothed to an aristocrat
who promised her more than one pair of shoes,
only for the price
of her free will.

Married later to a man
with the swagger of Ricky Ricardo,
only slurred words and clanking bottles
replaced the rhythmic beats of bongos.

Paid her Queens mortgage
by sewing buttons onto thin,
delicate undergarments
that she could never afford.

Never once stopped to rest
until forced
by a stroke of God's will,
that debilitated her bones,
once solid as ivory tusks,

and thinned her blood,
once thick as her homemade
Arroz con Leche.

An escape artist at her finest;
she always managed to surpass those caskets
that tried to contain
her soul.

She looks at me
with awe in her eye.
A mirror image of herself
sits before her.

Eyes of cerulean pebbles,
virgin blonde hair,
skin with not a ripple of wisdom:
a difference of 60 years, only.

Her granddaughter seeks answers
desperately,
but the wise woman simply says,
“Hay Que Vivir La Vida.”

Although the sparkle in her eye portrays
that she knows more
than what she lets on.

Experience has shown her
that life's course
prefers no extra helpers.

Siosi

Bella Martinich

The rainy days had ended one night of December when Jemial arrived to dry the sky, leaving no trace of the torrential rain that, for three months, fed the parched earth. I would have to wait for the next rains, for Iwa, to see my mother again. To see her hands that look like flying birds, to hear her stories about the Wayuu spirits of the wind and the drought, Pulowi y Juyá, while she kneads the morning bread or when, in the warm afternoons, she braids my hair.

It was hard to conceal the distress of my face that sweltering day of January. I waited outside my mother's house feeling oppressed by the immensity of the sky, with the palms of my hands damp, playing with the blue ribbon of my dress. My rigid body felt like a tree that was about to be hacked, about to lose its green branches, which for centuries had reached the heavens and shaded the falcons' nests. I felt lost going to a world I did not belong in, leaving behind my friends, my mother, my home.

My mother's eyes, fixed on the road, avoided mine.

She did not oppose him. She never did. Not even the time when he demanded my presence after his long absence. He did what pleased him. He always did. He met my mother while he worked in the fields; she was only fourteen. He took her away from her tribe and gave her a small blue house where a year later I was born. He gave me my name, Alfonsina, and never asked my Wayuu mother if she liked it. She did not protest but secretly always called me Siosi. He declared I would become a school teacher for Alijuna children, for white people like him, but she instead said that I would grow up to become a fine putchipu'u, a wise woman with the gift of the word, and gain an important role among the people in her tribe. She never said it in front of him, which was all fine with me until the day he left us, one night of April, and married an Alijuna woman with a pale face and green eyes like his.

He waited for me to join him in the city for my mother did not contradict

him that time either. But that night I saw my mother cry for the first time. I was on my way to be a schoolteacher, just like he said.

I kissed my mother, got in the bus feeling insignificant and small, and sat in the only empty seat I found, second row next to a dark-skinned man who smelled like rum. The radio played a sorrowful tune and a woman sitting in the front seat, looking out at the barren ground, followed the words of the song with small movements of her lips. She had deep scars in her legs and knees and carried a heavy bag of spices which gave her the smell of cinnamon and mint.

The bus moved slowly among the narrow dusty roads. I saw a man sitting in the first row, with his hands pressed together, praying to an image of the Virgin Mary painted on the back of the driver's seat. On the image, the Virgin Mary's eyes were the color of the sea and her skin dark like the trunk of a tree. She was floating in the sky covered with a cloth of stars and with a red rose in the place of a heart.

My mind full of apprehension, I could think of nothing but my mother's hands. I tried to distract myself reminiscing of my times with Adela and Hortencia, and the green and yellow iguana they gave me for my eighth birthday. I thought of my friends' eyes, grey and large. I thought of Hortencia's voice, of Adela's smile.

Overcome by sadness, I closed my eyes and prayed to Pulowi, and prayed and prayed until she came and went inside me in the form of a light wind caressing my skin. She made me feel at peace.

In Maicao, a short distance from my town, a Kusina girl, no older than fourteen, got on the bus. She was barefoot wearing an old brown dress a little too big for her, holding something wrapped in a blanket against her breast. The dark man stood up and gave her his seat next to me. She did not look in my direction, not even once, but I did stare at her for a long time, at her tangled black hair covering most of her face, at her long feathery earrings that had the shape of small snakes, at her bare feet covered in dried mud, at her necklace of sea shells.

It took me a while to realize that she was carrying a small child in her arms, for the naked baby, sleeping under the dirty blanket, had barely moved until, perhaps stirred by hunger, it uttered a soft cry searching for its mother's

nipple. The girl uncovered her chest and carefully placed the baby even closer to her. The pale face of the child contrasted with the darkness of his mother's breasts.

The girl had the smell of a forest, a forest of cacao and kapok trees, of maracuja and water lilies. I turned around and looked outside the bus and saw an inhospitable barren land, blue seas, wind, and sand. When I looked at her again. I could tell that she wasn't from here; she came from a far away place.

After feeding her baby, she placed the child on her shoulder near me. The baby opened his large brown eyes and looked at me. He was calm and smelled like fresh milk. She put her lips to his ear and began whispering a song while caressing him. I saw the dirt under her nails. I saw her hands take the shape of birds.

An uneasy quiet prevailed in the bus. The girl was nervous. Her Kusina face was still of a child, but her sad eyes seemed to tell a different story. Her gaze was old as if she had already lived too much for her young age, as if life had shown nothing but unkindness to her.

We rode in the most absolute silence, sitting next to each other until the bus was almost empty. She stood up then and walked towards the back of the bus and sat in the last row, by herself. I wondered if my continuous gazes at her baby made her uncomfortable and that is why she stood up. I distracted myself looking at the window, but I could not stop thinking about her.

An old woman got on the bus and took the seat next to me. She was white, a true Alijuna. She smiled at me. I saw the deep wrinkles around her lips and the gap between her two front teeth. I saw the black spot inside the iris of her left eye, and her long white hair wrapped in a braid that hung down to her waist.

"What is your name girl?"

"Siosi."

"Where are you headed to?"

"To the city."

"The city? That is a long journey."

She took a dried piece of fruit from her bag and slowly brought it to her mouth and stared chewing.

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"When I was your age I already had two children... my husband was 25 years older than me... he used to come home drunk and beat me up almost every night."

I said nothing. I began thinking of that half Alijuna child and could not hear the rest of what she was saying. She noticed my distraction because she paused for a moment.

"So what did you do?" I replied focusing my attention back on her.

She opened her eyes wide, "One day I got a knife and stabbed him right in his heart."

She took another piece of dried fruit and said, still chewing, "Then I made a fire and cooked him until his bones were nothing but dark smoke. The next day, I confessed my crime, but no one believed me. My neighbors said that I was too small to kill a man that size, for he was indeed a big man. They thought he had left me and that I was insane. After that, and since no one ever missed him, no one mentioned him again." She spit a seed on the floor. "I never regretted it, for I have had a peaceful life since then."

I heard her story, and like her neighbors I did not believe she had killed a man. Perhaps she was indeed insane.

"You are smart to go away from this town. Men around here are wicked. I heard women in the city wear nice shoes and nice clothing, and they even go out and live by themselves. They need no man."

Her story almost made me forget about the young girl sitting in the last row, but then the bus stopped and I saw her walking towards the door. She got off quickly. I followed her with my eyes until she disappeared behind dunes of salt. The woman next to me was by now resting with her eyes closed. I looked at the back of the bus where the girl had been seated and saw the brown blanket with something moving in it. I got up and walked towards it.

"Stop the bus, she forgot her baby!" I pointed towards the road without being able to mutter another word.

The bus stopped, and the driver and the few people that were still on the bus gathered around the small bundle.

"Poor thing," someone said.

"We must turn around and find its mother," I said.

"That is going to be hard," said the driver scratching his white belly. "She

is an Indian. They are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Besides, she does not want it."

The old woman who was the only one who had remained seated, eating her fruit, stood up, walked towards me and grabbed the baby. It was then that I noticed that it was a baby girl.

"It is a girl. No wonder," the old woman said.

"But what does it matter if it is a girl?" I replied.

The old woman looked into my eyes and said, "It does matter, she is a girl and here no one wants girls!"

The driver emptied a wooden basket filled with tangerines and put the baby in it. "I will leave it at the next station. Perhaps someone might want it. I cannot keep it, I already have too many mouths to feed on my own."

I could not believe what was happening. What if nobody wanted her? What was going to happen to this child then?

The old woman reached in her bag for more dried fruit and said, "You don't have to go that far, take her to the next Wayuu cazerio down the road and ask for Jayariyu, the putchipu'u. He is a wise man and he will know what to do."

The bus arrived at a small cazerio of four houses of clay and thatched roofs. Half-naked children with swelling bellies ran back and forth chasing a dog, but when they saw the bus they let the dog go and looked at us with curious eyes.

"Is Jayariyu here?" the driver said to them.

One of the children pointed towards the last house, one surrounded by tall blooming cacti, wrapped in winds of sand, where an old man was sitting in his chinchorro with a small green and yellow parrot on his right shoulder.

The driver took the box with the baby and went to talk to the man while some people in the bus began looking at each other murmuring complaints. I remained seated, looking at the sky until I saw a falcon fly high and disappear behind a cloud. I looked at the house, and from afar I saw the driver engaged in an elaborate rhetoric of gestures, but Jayariyu's stern expression did not change. After ten minutes or so, the old man made a sign with his hand and a Wayuu woman, who looked like my mother, came and took the baby inside the house.

The driver came back, took his hat off and dried the sweat from his forehead, "He is going to keep her."

"What will he do with her?" I asked.

"He will probably make her a putchipu'u like him."

And as if nothing had happened, as if it had been another normal day, he drove the bus away, while I remained with my eyes fixed on that cazerio thinking of that baby girl. I knew I would never see her again. I knew I would never see my mother again, my hometown, my friends Hortencia and Adela.

Before the old lady got off the bus she said to me, "You are doing good by leaving this town behind. Go to the city; you will have a different life because there, being a woman is not so bad."

Only These Are Kosher

Stephanie Guedj

It is clean
if it has hoofs
like a split-ended hair. It should
roll a flat green
between its cheeks.

To touch the carcass
will leave you dirty
until evening.

It is clean
if its scales flake up
against a nickel knife,
and if finned

on two fleshy sides.
It should be slit
down the middle.

It is not clean
if its three toes curl
on one foot, or has knobby legs
like a shrunken root.

It is clean
if it hums and furls
like a wilted cloud—though only
if the jointed legs
leap the ground

from grain to grain. It is not clean
if it walks on all fours
pawed and panting,
or licks water from a bowl.

It is clean
if it has a fat thigh
or stringy tail,
stripped of fur and wringed of blood.

Whoever touches the carcass
is unclean.

Life on High Defition

Andrea Cebrecos

Sitting on his favorite declining recliner, he pulled the start button, the curtains opened; the scene, two lovers in a park. Tears stained his cheeks as he got off his right knee, a blank look discoloring the girl. “Comedic romance,” he muttered and closed the channel, curtains closed. Minutes later, they parted once again; the scene, bewildered wife in a park. Her staring forced him to remove his glasses, setting the image out of focus. Her moving lips emitted no sound. “Delightful,” he said and closed the channel, curtains reunited. He walked to the garage and found the door open, the previous three characters gazing. “Put on your glasses and come watch a show with me,” he said. And as he turned, the door closed; the scene, old man in a tomb, their last word mumbled. “Pathetic.”

An Accomplice

Justin Engles

The pressure of the towel against my arms, the contour of the seahorse tattooed on his forearm, and the emanations of gasoline and engine grease that rose from his shirt. These were the constants I used to remember him. When he did appear in our home, he would often dry me from a bath and balance me on his knee. His arms had the weight of roped nets, heavy with salt and the sleek smoothness of dead fish.

His hands were rough and calloused, the texture of his brown leather duffel bag, the one that rested, worn-out and somehow truculent, on the staircase. The contents were vague, metallic, polished objects that hinted restively of the sea: a razor, a compass, tools and implements that somehow, when I tried to piece them together, had given me a sense of something foreign, something of the world of men, and the waves beyond my own four walls. They were tools of distance and absence, and here, on land, they were useless. With them, my father could chart a lengthy course or navigate by constellations, but he did not know how to use them to measure my height in notches against the wall, or gauge the tiredness in my mother's voice as she spoke into the black rotary telephone. He could not map the scars on our knees or cut our hair. What he could not measure in fathoms or tonnage, he could not make sense of. The bag stayed closed until it disappeared at the beginning of every month.

My childhood was voyeurism, watching the animation and silence of my family's lives from a banister or a sofa. I was eight years old the summer that I first began to feel the ugly strength of what connected us. I recall the shipswayed step of my father as he crossed the lawn, as he kicked off his boots, as he sat down at the kitchen table. While my mother chopped vegetables, she told him in the dry tone of a regimental officer's report of all our successes and shortcomings: Brian lost a tooth in gym class, Devin's got detention for talking back to his teacher, I couldn't make it to Elisa's recital, Molly will need braces. He listened with the feigned interest of a houseguest. He would ruffle my brother's hair if necessary, or glare sternly at my despondent teenage sisters.

I surveyed him from the windowsill and studied his half-hearted gestures. I had seen all of the thousand movements and scenes my mother described to him, the memory of them made up the brief patchwork of my life, but for him they only existed secondhand.

On my father's birthday, we found comfort in a television convention that we could emulate. Birthday candles, cake, gifts. The face paint that ran into my eyes as I perspired was left over from the Fourth of July and had been meticulously applied by my bored sister in the style of war paint. In the sweltering heat, camouflaged with those orange and blue bruises, I looked around at the backyard that had been adorned with paper banners and ribbons. The wooden picnic table where I'd carved names of imaginary places was covered with blue vinyl. The swing set where Brian had broken his arm, the oak tree that we'd set on fire with kitchen matches, everything had been converted and disguised. Itchy in the starched collar of my shirt, I pulled up the grass in small fistfuls and waited for dinner to begin.

We followed the script for the benefit of this unknown third party observer. We sat around the table and self-consciously fumbled with props, parcels, and plastic cutlery. Then my father opened a present wrapped in newspaper comics. It was a black karate belt. He looked up, puzzled. My mother, smiling indulgently at no one, told him to wear it as a blindfold. Indifferent and bemused, he played along. My mother held a finger up to her smiling lips. The gesture explained nothing. I did not understand the game. Certain things would always be left unsaid by her plotting mouth. Devin led my father by the hand with an awkward earnestness and lined him up, blindfolded with the karate belt, against the wooden panels of the house. The shingles were rough to the touch and released the heat of the day in small groaning exhalations. I watched from a rope swing in fascination as my brothers and sisters unveiled several colorful balloons filled with water, and threw them with the deftness and virility of a firing squad. They laughed wildly. But many of the balloons fell short and rolled in the grass by my father's feet. The balloons lay there, smooth and torpid. My father took off his blindfold, stared dumbly at his feet. Their young arms had failed them, their smiles faded. No one seemed quite sure what to do.

I watched the slow clockwork of his face, he seemed to smile. He picked up the water balloons and threw them, dexterously, precisely, at my brothers

and sisters, and they cried out in surprise and feigned despair. Yet there was a chord of guilt and anger in every small voice, even in my own. My father was grotesque. He was laughing. I began to cry. Not for any one reason, remark, or shout, but rather because somewhere in their game, in their laughter and anger, had been a betrayal. It was a betrayal I could not describe or understand, only intuit. Some of the uneasy, silent truce that bound us had unraveled and without it I had glimpsed the dissonance that indicted all of us. I cried at the way that all things had been reversed, turned around, against, and inside out. I cried at the carnival strangeness of how we had tried to kill him and at the way he had refused to die.

Buttons

Stephanie Guedj

Maybe toads will come, twenty balloons in tow,
for me and leaf-browed owl, who sits on a moss branch.
Some stars are too high. I want to skip the puddles
and unweave a button from owl's nest.

Owl sits fatly, plumps over, and folds
his fluff feathers, like clouds, on buttons
twined in a matted nest. I want a button like owl's,
yellow-dipped in star honey, because they are shiny

and splayed, and remind me of a story
about crickets and long-nosed dummies.
Owl sits on a fairy-speckled egg in his nest's hub.
Maybe he'll give me a button

in exchange for my wooly sock, which he'll like,
I think, to plump and wool-wrap his egg.
I see owl's yellow-dipped buttons
above my hand's stretch and tip-toe dance.

I should stack buckets, benches, and sage-frayed chairs
to reach the nest. And maybe soon, toads will come,
twenty balloons in toe, under the moss branch
to sing my request in gurgles and burps,

and they'll release the strands. Twenty balloons will bubble
to owl's leafy brow, and maybe he'll know the toad's
warty-mouthed song, and give me a button,
yellow-dipped in moon honey, for my wooly sock.

Georgia Peaches

Aleia Walker

i.
heritage flight

ii.
you can't just go home
when home is a bouquet
of hours away

or when indignant store clerks
make you miss Southern Charm

when the angry red BMW makes
you want an obedient town car
beside you instead

iii.
superseded by a small business
loan for TSA clearance

iv.
when Mummy's cooking is only
accompanied by holiday traditions

or when TropiChops and yucca fries
replace Chick-Fil-A number ones
with Arnold Palmers

v.

A week's travel for me
the pack rat looks like
a winter in France for
an islander. So my
carry-on screams
for a touch of magic
realism and to be an
oversized duffle to
match its contents.
But DELTA joined its
peers and charges \$45
for bathroom tissue.
So my bag packs a
city tenement.

vi.

two days at home and the
monolingual syllables marinade
my heart for the festival of
dialects my ears have missed.

vii.

two hours home my mojito toes
samba in high tide sand screaming
eu quero mais

but my soles still miss the red clay

Lotioning, Lotioning

Falyn Freyman

They're kind of like old lady hands," she says, and immediately I pull away my hands from the counter where we had just been comparing. I cradle one in the other against my chest and pout my lips dramatically.

"Do you really think so?" I'm horrified, but I try to keep this work exchange playful, or at least professional. I reach for another t-shirt from the pile and smooth it flat across the counter, examining the way my fingers wrinkle when they're spread, fleshy purple dents at the joints and a hundred hair-fine lines between each of them.

"Hm," she says. "I don't know, do you moisturize?"

I think of all of the moisturizing hand lotion I've ever seen scattered around the house growing up, all lost or abandoned by my mother. Jars of Vaseline jelly with the beeswax smears and gelatinous fingerholes. Corn Huskers' Lotion. Miracle Repair Lotion. Anti-aging serum. Greasy doorknobs and thick microwave button fingerprints. I guess my mother has always had those desert extremities.

"I do, sometimes," I say, and by now I'm wishing more than anything I could avoid looking down at my hands as I fold over one sleeve and then the other.

The truth is I've tried. I've tried to follow a routine, a schedule for softer hands. Apply before bed, apply in the morning, apply in the daytime, purchase travel-sized crèmes, exfoliate, reapply, reapply. I'm usually good at sticking with something if it's important enough, but like flossing or removing chipped nail polish, the fruits of all my extra labor were never as rewarding as I hoped they would be. My hands stayed the same, stayed the same as my mother's hands, stayed thirsty. And old-looking.

I finish with the shirt and smooth over the completed square once more before adding it to the leaning cotton stack at my side.

"Let me see yours again?"

She pauses in the middle of shaking out a new shirt and places it back down to show me her hands. They're tan and silky-looking and immediately

remind me of spider legs, the way they're tapered and delicate, but also the way they move, in one fluid waving motion. She waggles her fingers and I think of a daddy longlegs on its back, the frantic phantom flail of a slow death. "Oooh," I say with a laugh as I graze her palm, testing for softness. "Like a baby's bottom!"

She smiles at me, a relieved smile, and then an it's-so-simple smile, a you know it, girl! smile and says, "Moisturize." Maybe she even winks.

CONTEST JUDGES

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER PRIZE IN FICTION JUDGE

Tom Williams is an associate editor of the *American Book Review*. His short fiction and essays have appeared in over thirty publications. His novella, *The Mimic's Own Voice*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag Publishing Co.

LESTER GORAN PRIZE IN NONFICTION JUDGE

Andrew X. Pham is the author of *Catfish and Mandala* and *The Eaves of Heaven*, and the translator of *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*. He is an aerospace engineer, journalist, technical editor, travel writer, bicycle tour guide, and restaurant critic.

LAURENCE DONOVAN PRIZE IN POETRY JUDGE

Harriet Levin is the author of *The Christmas Show*, which was chosen for a Barnard New Women Poets Prize and the Poetry Society of America's Alice Fay di Castagnola Award, and *Girl in Cap and Gown*, a 2009 National Poetry Series Finalist. She is co-director of the Program in Writing and Publishing in the English Department at Drexel University.

"Cordoba Sunset," a photograph by Stacey Carrillo, is the winner of *Mangrove's* 2010 Art Contest.

The Write Now Poetry Contest was part of Mangrove's 2010 Alliterative event wherein submissions were composed and submitted on the spot based on a short prompt.

Wish your art was on the cover? Look for details about next year's *Mangrove* Art Contest on our website:
www.as.miami.edu/mangrove

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