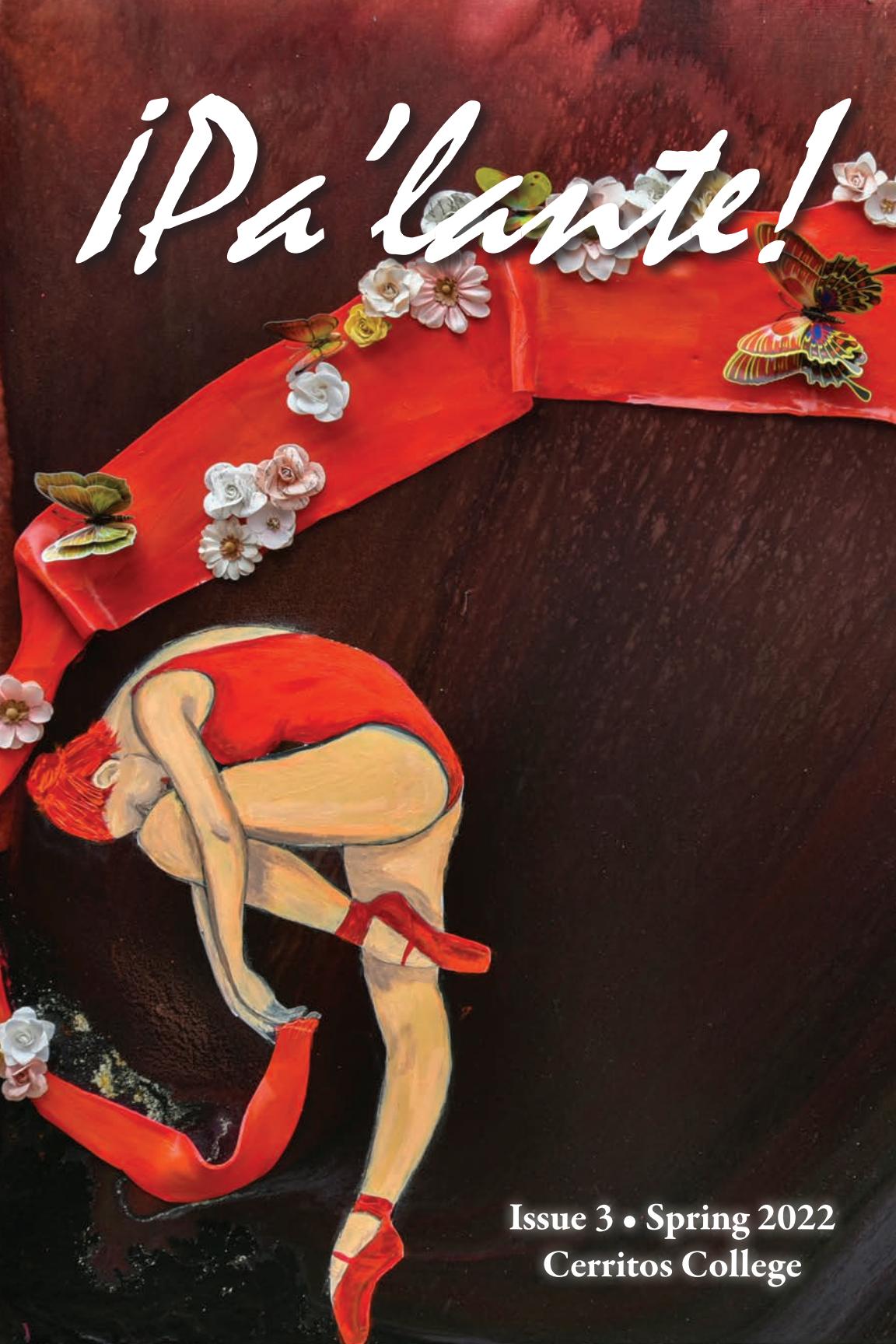


¡Pa'lante!



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Lauren Lee

THIRTY PERCENT GONE

Mouthwash doesn't make me cry anymore.
Put more hot sauce on it, maybe crack some red pepper too.
I don't take the olives out of the sandwich
Like I usually would with my clammy fingers
Shaped like broken cranes, the ones you make when you pick up laundry.
The grapes aren't sour at all, rather,
Are like bubbles of whip cream without the
Sugar, milk, butter,
Oh and salt too.
The steak tastes like the cow has been shipped from a paperback fairytale
Where its home is a cardboard box, except it's not even real.
I can't taste anything. My taste buds aren't bathing in fat.
Funny how when you are in a airplane
You eat things you normally wouldn't
And do not eat things you normally would
And you wonder if birds feel the same.

Wendy M. Thompson

OAKLANDISH

for every single black Oakland baby, '76-'89

This city—
with its Black Lives Matter signs
blooming in gentrifier gardens
surrounded by yellow kangaroo paws
leaning over the sideways wood slat fence
& contrasting perfectly
with pewter and ash paintjobs while
a silver Subaru w/ Audubon stickers
sits in the driveway
—done failed us.

Our whole generation—
70s and 80s babies who got
McGruff the Crime Dog coloring books
during DARE sessions with
holstered cops in classrooms run by
well-meaning white teachers while a
whole ass crack war raged outside
—was failed.

From the time we rode our bikes down
city streets we didn't know would
lead us to our wakes,
to the time our yearbook picture was
memorialized on a hundred
fresh white tee-shirts worn outside a
funeral home on East 14th,
this city looked away.

Fed us moldy bread during free breakfast
then told us our rotted teeth &
absent fathers were a product
of our environment.

Gave us summertimes & fire hydrants
instead of pools
but didn't do anything
to stop the bullets.

When a black child is born in Oakland,
he goes home with an inhaler and a gun.
Either way,
he can't breathe.

Our coffins were our shoe size.

We buried our dreams in our Jordans
then jumped into our futures like
escaped Mylar balloons
tangled on the telephone wires.

Our aunties once turned to us and said,
And for the rest of our lives,
all we'd have to do to visit our fathers was
look in the mirror which doubled
as a prison visiting room.

She look just like her daddy.

Stars seemed to come out later in
the flatlands compared to the hills where
white people could close their curtains
when the sideshows &
gunshots into the night sky
became too much.

What about the gunshots into a soft body,
still breathing and warm?
The skin, tissue, and muscle coming
unraveled at the blunt force of a bullet
pushing through.
Red blooms like your grandmama's roses
hang from the chest of a boy.
Were those petals we found on
the concrete the next day?

*This was no biology class,
this was real life street shit,
every time it came out, fearful that we
no longer feared what was waiting for us
outside those doors.*

our daddy's belt seemed to say

This city,
its magnificent but jealous skyline,
its hills of redwoods & rich white people
taunting fires and landslides,
its eye always turning
to the bigger city across the bay,
its flatlands marred by industrial overwork,
scars of railroad lines & concrete
freeway mazes named after white men
who would never live to see their progeny,
heavy and sagging with a thousand cars
paying the \$15 toll in the FastTrak lane,
its cemeteries full of my peers,
its houses full of new white people,
its memories full of old black people,
don't know us,
don't love us,
no more.

(You tell me, between sips of your
IPA beer, that it never really fucking did.)

But we loved it,
even as our people who could leave, did.
Moved out to further and further removed
suburbs behind the last tail of the
last white person to leave out of Antioch.
Our people moved into nice two-story,
single-family homes with a yard that
no one would come messing in until
ten years later, when our mothers would
close their curtains
when the sideshows &

gunshots into the night sky
became too much.

Still,
we would look back always.
Told anybody who asked and those
who didn't, we were from Oakland.
From the chest.

We are the survivors.

And I swear,
even though it raised us on
liquor store rations & asphalt guarantees,
this city now acts like it never knew us,
that it'd be better off without us,
and that without it, we might as well
be dead.

Edward Michael Supranowicz

DEMOCRACY FOR SALE

Prices slashed. Buy it now. 5 days only, maybe 10. New and improved. Economy-sized. Going out of business. Chapter 13, chapter and verse All major credit cards approved. While supplies last. Low fat. Non-sugar. Not genetically modified, more or less. No warranties, implied or otherwise. May cause cancer or economic downturns. Comes with military-industrial complex and lifetime judges, pork barrels and water pollution. May not be suitable for children and other living things. Can be seen by “the dawn’s early light.” Contact your local real estate agent.

Martin Toman

CHRISTIAN/CHRISTINE

When I was a child, I was given a doll by my parents to play with. As an only child I was often lonely, and they were always indulgent. I was told the doll's name was Christian. I was deeply disappointed by this gift. For a start, I am male, and none of the other boys I knew had dolls. Their sisters had dolls and other things, and the boys had any number of different toys, but not dolls. I had other toys: cars, guns, Lego, and so on. I even had action figures, which by definition are actually dolls, but I didn't see them that way.

My disappointment with Christian wasn't restricted to him being a doll. Christian wasn't like any doll or action figure I had ever seen. Christian was shaped like a baby. He could fit into my cupped hands. He was huddled together, his knees drawn up to his chest, his hands clenched to his face, hiding his eyes. Even though he was named Christian, due to his modest pose, it wasn't possible to definitively discern his sex. All the same, he was bald, and white, his surface smooth and unpitted. His limbs were immovable, so he couldn't act out scenes or be anything other than what he was, a stone baby.

I couldn't do anything with Christian, he was useless for play. My frustration with Christian actually led me to find a function for him. While sitting on the floor in my room, I threw him onto the floor in a fit of rage. Christian bounced back from the floor and struck my head. I can still hear the bonk sound he made when he struck my forehead and knocked me backwards. I had an egg on my head for a week. When I was sufficiently recovered from my surprise and pain, I picked Christian up and realised how hard he was. His density and solidity gave rise to a game. I would kill Christian.

This turned out to be far more difficult than I imagined.

I started simply. I put Christian under the rear wheel of my father's car and watched him back over Christian when he drove off to work. Christian was slightly marked by the tires, but was otherwise unblemished. The black marks disappeared when I rubbed him with my thumbs. I doused Christian with petrol from the lawnmower and set him alight, but apart from being temporarily blackened, he was unharmed. I hit Christian with a hammer. The recoil shot through my arm to the shoulder, but Christian continued to

regard the world from his protective stance, impassive and indifferent. I tried to drown him but he would just get wet. I smeared him with dog food in the hope that the dog would swallow him, but the dog just licked him clean and then urinated on him. I couldn't poison him or strangle him, and I didn't have the courage to try electricity. In the end I gave up. I formed what I thought at the time was a profound understanding: you can't kill what has never lived.

Christian's resilience was at odds with how he was introduced to me. When my mother gave him to me she said he was delicate and precious. Staring at him, the survivor of my destructive intent, he seemed as fragile as granite.

After a while I lost interest in Christian. He disappeared into my toy box and then faded from memory. Toys were eventually replaced by other objects and concerns and he never again crossed my mind. Until recently.

My mother died last week. She lies in the family plot, her coffin next to my father's. Above her is a slab of marble as thick as a strong man's arm. I am an only child, and now also an orphan. I have no children of my own, and no partner. I am utterly alone.

When I was packing up my mother's house I found Christian. He was in a polished timber box, wrapped in tissue paper. Christian was unchanged by the quarter century since I'd seen him last, still a stone baby: smooth, cold, and white. Under the paper wrapping was a single piece of tightly typed paper. It answered many questions.

Christian now sits watching me from my desk, a paperweight for the typed script that accompanied him.

It turns out that Christian is what is called a lithopedion. My grandmother died before I was born. She was sleepwalking and somersaulted down the stairs in the dark, breaking her neck and dying instantly. My grandfather, who was the town doctor, performed the autopsy. As it turns out Christian was a baby who died in utero, but was not miscarried. He slowly calcified inside my grandmother, turning to stone. The world's longest pregnancy.

I remember as I read the sheet of paper I could feel the hairs of every follicle on my body standing on end. Christian is so rare that a university or museum would pay a fortune to obtain him. But in other ways he is priceless.

I sit here staring out the window. I can see the seasons turning. The leaves of my oak trees have turned yellow gold and are starting to fall. A blanket of them covers the ground, shrouding the grass. I watch the clouds scud by, thin white atmospheric sheets that herald winter. The sky is turning a deeper blue.

We are getting reacquainted, Christian and I. Given his coy pose, it is entirely possible that Christian is actually Christine. He could be my patient and forgiving uncle, or my taciturn and forbearing aunt. He or she has much to forgive me for, but I feel the sins of a bored child are easily pardoned, even by those who have a heart of stone. Winter will arrive soon, and after that spring and summer, but Christian/Christine will remain unchanged by time; stony and eternal.

Daniel Garcia

HOW TO FIND YOUR VOICE AFTER YEARS OF NEGLECTING WHO YOU ARE: A SELF-HELP GUIDE TO REHABILITATE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF MIND-NUMBING DISTRACTIONS

Information not found.

Michelle Park

FAMILY PORTRAIT, 1950, YANGSAN

I close the door of my room, the metronome
of mother's voice blurring out. She tells me
to take care of my younger brother, but I've
just cleaned his mess on the dinner table.

It's almost time for her second shift
at the local factory where she molds
kimchi fried rice into squares for soldiers
to feast on. Outside the rain pelts down

onto asphalt roads and thunder cries like
a baby missing a mother. I still hear
mother yelling my name but her voice blends
into Rhee Syngman's blabber about the

southerner's progress on the radio. Mother says
we should thank god that we are southerners,
because if not she and I would have been
wearing green uniforms now along with father.

But on top of my frameless bed, I lay
as my breath twists and my head stretches
time as I wander through the view of my room.
I notice a rusted black cassette strewn

on the ground and beside it, a small bag
to take in case we flee our house—given by dad in
July before enlisting to the military. I imagine
he's been to Seoul, and maybe even further;

perhaps he's closer to Baekdusan than us. And
mother—she's had sleepless nights earning
money without father. I've seen her back arch
like the strands of my hair and the blisters

on her sleek fingers from sculpting cloth. She hopes
we don't starve during the upcoming winter. When I
hear the pound of the door, I walk towards it,
the thread of silence no longer buzzing.

Cierra Burnett

INTERSECTIONALITY

We can't be black **AND**
LGBTQ+

We can't be LGBTQ+ **AND**
Disabled

We can't be disabled **AND**
Poor

They judge us **AND**
We judge us

We say,
“Why add another struggle for **us**?”

We say,
“This can't be **us**”

We say,
“**AND** does not equal **us**”

We
Are a black smear on a blank page

We
Are a wine stain on a white carpet

We
Are a marker among colored pencils

That's how they see
Us

No matter how many
ANDs

They will judge
Us

One of **us**
Is all of **us**

We cannot
Judge
Us

Like they
Judge

Us

Elle Lane

I HEARD GOD'S VOICE IN A CINCINNATI ROW HOUSE

The last time I wore this jacket my car broke down. It broke down again today. I'm beginning to suspect a pattern. Now I'm scared to wear it again, even though it's maroon and cost more than I'd ever spend (it was a gift). It's flimsy and when I put a pear in it for lunch it went through what I thought was a pocket. It landed on a vent and now has a perfect rectangle carved into its flesh. It's in the car I have to fix tomorrow. I'll wear a different jacket then, because this one is expensive and flimsy and probably cursed.

I'm not superstitious, but I'm also not an idiot. If my Uber driver assaults me on my way home, I'll know it's cursed (my pepper spray was on hand just in case). He didn't, but he seemed the type. He saw me getting into my house, so he knows where I live--but I don't care. If anyone goes that far out of their way to murder me, they respect my life more than I do.

Before I enter, I retrieve the new starter from behind the moth-hole riddled, green lounge chair the cats cuddled on before most of them died. Now there's only two and they don't get along together.

The snow is coming down hard and I hear it on the tin roof above my head. It will be 2-4 inches and it will have to be scraped from the hood of my car before I can start fixing it.

I quit smoking a year ago when I started my new medication, since it makes the cancer worse I guess. I'd smoked three times since then because I don't really care, but saying I quit was the responsible thing to do--so I did.

I don't own any cigarettes because I'm too scared to buy them with my current ID, but I have an empty pack on my wall. I filled it with fake flowers for *the aesthetic*. I didn't throw away the last of them, so periodically I'll remove the flowers and search for loosies.

It was empty, I was sure of it--but I searched anyway. Flowers in hand, I dug around the soft foil for any trace. I felt something, but I was sure it was illusory. Yet as I searched harder it became apparent there was something in it. Using two fingers I pried from the little cardboard box, a single cigarette. It was half smoked--but these were longs, Marlboro Reds. *For that Classic Taste...*

We've shared some memories, Marlboro and I. He knew me from when I was a man, which I guess is still a little true. He's always been there for me. As has this pack, it never seems to be empty. I wonder if there are little

gremlins fueling my habit while I sleep.

My window doesn't want to open. It knows what I'm about to do, damn traitor. I force him open, though, and the blast of cold air meets my face as I attempt to strike a match. I'm using a lighter I found in my old dorm room, back when I started smoking. It's white, those are bad luck. I don't believe in that nonsense, so I use it anyway.

I stare out into the same street I've contemplated so many times, from a view I only perceive when doing these exact motions. But with that first inhale, everything feels manageable. That's why they're so addicting, because when you're smoking--everything is within your grasp. You are primordial, exhaling smoke like car exhaust. A machine, a creature, a god--that is the power I wield.

For a moment I share that silence with the snow, the wind, the cars driving by--but it is disrupted. Who is this? This interloper, who speaks in a raised tone in the middle of a snowstorm. Some disembodied voice from a Cincinnati row house. Is it God? No--Cincinnati is as far from God as a body can be. Yet it cannot be human, as I mentioned before--such action is beyond mortal. To take a phone call outside in the middle of a snowstorm.

The world stops and I hear her louder. She must be God. There is no doubt in my mind, indiscernible now--but still she speaks. My friend Kyra was right, God is a black woman--that much is obvious from her tone. Voice fluttering between syllables of stress--but her power is already clear. Yes, I am quite certain--it is she, God, who intervenes now. In rapt silence I hear her speak:

"You know what I'm saying, I'm a married woman. I don't sleep around no more. I'm too old for that shit. He needs to respect this--I'm a grown ass woman."

I wish I could relate.

I considered yelling something out to her. Telling her she's beautiful or that she should find a man who respects her as much as she deserves, but I didn't. I feel bad. I could have been the voice of God for her the same way she was for me. I failed her, but I also failed myself. Maybe the jacket really is cursed.

Gale Acuff

I HATE EVERYBODY, WHICH IS GOOD LIKE

loving them all is just as bad, I hate
that, when two opposites attract and there's
some kind of baby being born, take me
(please), I'm ten years old and don't want to live
to be so old and/or frail I fall a
-part or someone has to tend to me un
-til I'm dead and maybe even after
--I go to the cemetery to place
roses on family members' graves as if
they're still alive, the family that is, not
the flowers, which are dead but just look fresh
and when I return, say a week later,
they need replacing and I don't mean just
the flowers and I don't mean just me, too.

Mathew Lily Vogel

SELF-PORTRAIT OF A GENTLEMAN

He sits in his parlor laughing with his friends
as he refills his glass with sparkling wine.

Well versed and handsome, smiling,
the boy who was a girl. The girl
who wants to be a boy, a gentleman,
well-respected scholar and artist,
narrow-waisted and broad-chested.

He talks about paintings and politics,
how much he wants that new waistcoat,
the one with the tails for that white tie
event he dreams about. The one he wants
to attend yet knows he might never
get the chance to. He longs to learn to dance,
and not dance in some electric fashion,
but ballroom dance, waltzing
as he leads his partner along the
polished wooden floors.

That night, he turns in early
after he sees his friends out,
making sure nobody forgets
a hat or a coat or a penis,
silicone, which he can't have
when he bleeds like a
woman – he's still a woman sometimes,
some days. He dances with himself,
even though
he does not know
the steps.

Clara Burghhelea

ARCHIVED GRIEF

You trip on my tongue like expired medication, the promise of betterment melting like corn candy. I walk into a bookstore, pick up books, skim first sentences, put them down. Pang in the stomach. Outside in the cold, invisible hands probing my ribs. Night flowing its skins as I wander off avenues, tongues of stars sharpening all wounds. When I sleep, I leaf through your dreams, nowhere to find myself. Fentanyl drips down the spine, I pray six times a day, candles lit to powerful gods that watch my words stride and shrug. A fistful of wisps. I burn incense all day, still fail to come out as holly, rather succumb to all terrors, crave the trunk of a cab to flap like a yawn, that pull inside its comfy entrails. At least, owning the dust in the lungs, less of a fraud.

THE PIANO

My mother was a woman of class. She didn't have much to work with, poor in money but rich in love. Everyone knows she wore faded jeans and stained blouses, but she floated as though she was wearing golden heels and evening gowns. A modern royal in farmers' clothes. She was the very definition of regal, my mother was.

She walked like clouds were guiding her every step. She smiled like she had diamonds, not teeth. She laughed like a faerie's twinkle, light and airy. She was one of a kind, and it seemed the world knew that as well. The world gave her everything, but took her away. It seemed they loved and wanted her as much as I did.

Despite my unending love for her, my mother and I never really saw each other in the ways we wanted to be seen. She was selfless, and I'm not above mentioning my selfishness. She took the time to laugh, and I'm so busy I'll laugh tomorrow. She hurts herself to help anything or anyone, and I won't risk my stability to help some stranger.

In short, we didn't get along.

That doesn't mean I didn't love my mother. It just means I'm not my mother, and I will never be my mother, no matter how hard I try. Some things are never meant to connect, like our attitudes and occasional hostility. But our love was, and always will be, there, floating in the wind like harp music.

There was one place me and my mother connected, where we rarely disagreed. Music. My mother loved classical music, to mirror her own class, and she passed that love down to me. We would sit at her old piano, the radio playing Beethoven, and just let go of all the pent-up anger and frustration. Sometimes we could be silent, sometimes we wouldn't.

My favorite times are when she would place her long fingers on the worn-down keys and play "Hot Cross Buns". In our later years, I would join in on the violin, and we would play, play, play, letting the music drift around like lavender mist. Our heads would grow dizzy, but our laughs would flow like silk from our throats. Sometimes my mother would sing, but that was rarer than a solar eclipse.

After I got competent enough on the violin, we would freestyle our way through the notes. Create our own songs. We never wrote them down, but now, more than ever, I wish we did. For some way to remember the sounds

my mother made.

Which brings us here. To the now. My fingers drift over old keys, memories resurfacing like stale perfume. I wish I had learned piano. Not the violin. Because if I had learned how to play keys and not strings, my mother would hang over my shoulder every time I played, a guardian angel.

I lay a single rose upon the dusty top. Yellow, the color of my mother's soul. I watch it roll off the propped top, onto the keys. A sad sound wafts from the keys, as if the rose reminded them of my mother's soft touch.

Perhaps they miss her as much as I do.

Do pianos retain memories? Memories of loving hands, beautiful noises, and hearty laughs. Do they recall each touch? Each note they emit? Does the piano grieve for the death of its owner? Do they wonder about their futures? Piano is just o'pain, which is what I've felt every day since my mother left. Since it is so similar, are pianos human? Can they feel emotion like we do?

I walk away, footsteps echoing around the empty room, empty as my heart. I leave the little rose on the keys. It will rot, it will mold, and I will have to clean it up with regret in my heart. But my mother might see it. It might make her pause on the stairway to Heaven. It might make her come back, see me, love me, play for me.

I hope my mother's ghost haunts this house. I hope I will hear her, down in the living room, keys moving to "Hot Cross Buns." I hope I will be able to hear it, to pick up my violin, and play with her. One last time.

Emily Melgar

ASHES TO ASHES

I am a match,
my family, a box of matches
made to burn.
Four wooden bodies lying close together
with heads violently crimson.
Ready to combust.

I'll never know why
but he strikes first.
Our protector,
his storm of fire almost scorches us all.

I am singed to the touch,
but I am here.

One by one,
they light themselves on fire.
Engulfed in their hellish nightmare
they are content in their chaos.

I start to confuse the searing pain with warmth.
No, I want to stay.

But they squeeze my dry body between their fingertips ablaze.
Ready to ignite me
and drag me across the coarse course
to watch me burst into flames.

Until we are all smoke and embers.
Wasting away,
so there is nothing left.

Not even a spark.
Only ashes.

EL MAR MÁS TRISTE

Where *lágrimas* of broken hearts
meet with the sweat of courage in its last dying
moments and are washed away
like a footprint in the sand that never fully formed.

Hearts once filled with endless *sueños*,
beaten but still beating,
they crave the golden skies
beyond the bounded horizon

that light up as dead eyes
on the other side,
stare and watch, waiting
for unwelcome *soñadores*.

All they find is a sun that refuses to shine
on this side, *una pesadilla*,
an apologetic sun hidden in haze.

Corazones that will never feel warmth,
or comfort not meant for them
in their home of shadows...

but their *esperanza*
pours into the saddest ocean you'll ever see.
Un mar sin límite.

HOME SWEET HOME

Amelia Grace was a creature of habit, but not routine. She rarely did things at the same time, but she also rarely did anything different. She went to her classes when she had the energy to do so, dragged herself to most of her shifts at the campus hotel, and spent the time in between on her couch, trying to push herself through another book she knew she wouldn't finish. She didn't date, or see her friends outside of those she worked with; she just worried. Amelia's life was consumed by stress, some self-imposed and some just a cruel joke from the universe, and she couldn't remember the last time she'd felt otherwise. There were short breaks, reprieves, but she always inevitably returned to the feeling that her head was going to explode. Sometimes, she hoped it would.

The night found Amelia sitting behind the desk of the hotel where she worked nights, freezing despite the sweater and coat she'd put on over her uniform. She and her coworker, a gangly first year named Kyle, had long finished their shift duties for the night. They sat together in silence, both having run out of energy to exchange pleasantries hours ago. Amelia didn't get along with all of her coworkers, but she didn't particularly dislike Kyle. He usually picked up her shifts on nights when she couldn't drag herself out of bed. For this reason, she'd bought him the same Fruit Punch Gatorade and Salt and Vinegar Kettle Chips he had every shift when she'd gone out to the nearby 7/11 to stretch her legs. Beyond that, there just wasn't much to say this late in the shift. It was 6:00 AM, and Amelia could feel her eyes getting fuzzy as she stared deep into the movie playing silently on her computer screen and counted down the fifteen minutes until she could clock out.

Kyle stood, water bottle in hand, and headed through the door behind them to the employee break room, presumably for a refill. Amelia yawned as the door shut behind him, free of the threat of his observation that yawning is contagious. She felt her eyes drift shut and didn't rush to open them again, despite knowing that she could be fired if caught sleeping on the job. *What the camera can't see won't hurt me*, she reasoned as she straightened up in her seat to offset suspicion.

Suddenly, the phone screeched to her right and she was snapped out of her frozen stupor, albeit momentarily. She took a moment to collect herself and clear her throat before picking up the phone.

"Thank you for calling the Club & Guest House at UC Santa Barbara, my name is Amelia. How can I help you?" The phone script left her mouth instinctively as she prayed there wasn't some complaint she needed to handle. She didn't have the patience for IT issues at this hour, and she *really* hoped no one was calling that early to make a reservation, but stranger things had happened during her graveyard shifts.

She waited, but there was nothing at the other end of the line, not even the sound of the caller breathing. A quick glance at the switchboard showed it wasn't coming from inside one of the rooms, so Amelia hung up without a care. Her eyes drifted over to the clock and saw with a bitter smile that two whole minutes had passed since she had last checked.

The door behind her opened and she jumped, having forgotten about Kyle.

"Sorry, did I scare you?" Kyle asked apologetically, taking his seat behind her at the desk.

"Yeah, I kind of forgot there was anyone here," Amelia admitted, rubbing her eyes to try and survive the next half an hour before she would find herself in bed.

"At least you're almost out of here." Kyle shrugged.

"I think I'd actually die if I had to stay here as long as you do," Amelia admitted with a dry laugh, devoid of any real humor. Kyle's reply was interrupted by the phone ringing again, and Amelia reasoned that the day was starting and the hotel would be bustling with activity soon enough.

"Thank you for calling the Club & Guest House, this is Kyle. How can I help you?" he answered, waited for whoever was calling to state their business. Soon after, Amelia saw a puzzled look on his face as he set the phone back into its cradle slowly. "Weird, no answer."

"Really? That just happened to me too." Amelia muttered suspiciously.

"Prank call?"

"I think that would've been more likely when we first came in than now." she said, brows furrowed. She shivered lightly, though she was unsure if that was due to the freezing temperature in the lobby, or the off-putting sensation that stayed with her following both phone calls. She glanced at the computer's clock and saw there was ten minutes left in her shift, so she took the opportunity to head to the bathroom. *Anything to kill time*, she thought.

She stood and headed through the swinging door separating them from the rest of the lobby, turning down a hallway to the closest bathroom.

There was no denying that the hotel was creepy at night. With its modern architecture, windows covered large swaths of the hotel's exterior,

leaving Amelia with the persistent feeling that she was being watched no matter where she was. With the sun rising slowly, she could clearly see that there was no one standing outside the hotel watching her, so she headed into the bathroom fearlessly.

Amelia looked herself over in the mirror and noted the exhaustion in her eyes. She considered throwing some water in her face to liven her up, but ultimately decided it would just make it harder to fall asleep when the time finally came. After wasting a little more time under the fluorescent lights, Amelia washed her hands and headed back to the lobby.

As she rounded the corner, she saw another coworker had joined them: Amelia's roommate, Emma.

"Good morning," Amelia said in a faux singsong voice, laughing at Emma's exhausted glare in response.

"At what cost?" she snapped. Kyle snorted as Amelia smiled knowingly. Emma looked as tired as she felt, but at least Amelia was going home as they spoke.

Emma and Amelia said very little to each other as they logged the contents of the cash register. The girls were great friends, but it was simply too early to do anything to pretend they weren't different shades of miserable.

They returned to the front of the hotel, with Emma taking Amelia's place at the desk as she signed out of all of the necessary software and pulled up her timecard to clock out. The clock struck 6:15, and Amelia wasted no time in gathering up her belongings and slipping on her headphones.

"Have a good shift!" she said with as much energy as she could possibly muster, genuinely hoping nothing too stressful came Emma's way in the next few hours. Kyle and Emma both said their goodbyes as Amelia threw her weight against the heavy front door and ventured out to the sound of her favorite album: PVRIS' *Use Me*.

Despite her heavy layers, the cold made a home in the very core of her bones. Amelia felt it crack at her resolve with every step, and was suddenly very grateful her apartment was just a few blocks up the road. Just a few more freezing minutes, and she'd be safe and warm in bed.

Amelia crossed the empty street and tried to match her steps to the drums pulsing through her head, willing herself to move faster in spite of how cold she was. She yearned for the point where her body would get used to the temperature and become immune to shivering and chattering teeth and aching bones, as it had on so many nights before. She found herself three blocks away from her street before it came, and she welcomed the

serenity that accompanied it. She could enjoy her walk from there.

She might have, but up ahead she saw something shift behind a tree on the side of the road. She couldn't make out what it was that was hiding from her, but the fact that it tried to conceal itself made the hair on the back of her neck stand at attention. Amelia's blood ran cold, which she hadn't thought possible until it happened. She turned the volume all the way down and turned left just one block before she would have passed the tree, speeding up in hopes that she could turn another corner before it could decide to follow her. Something deep in her soul felt that, whatever it was, it wanted to hurt her.

She looked behind her and saw nothing, but refused to slow down regardless. Maybe she was just seeing things in her exhausted state, but she wasn't taking any chances. Riled up or not, she wanted to be home. She wanted to turn her music back up and forget her paranoia, but feared it might mask any footsteps behind her. Keeping a steady but frantic pace, she decided it might be time to stop watching so much true crime if she could just make it home in one piece.

She turned right and continued up the street, taking small comfort in the knowledge that her apartment building was closer to this side of the block than the other. *Almost there.*

Amelia kept glancing behind her as she walked. Every now and then she would see something just on the edge of her peripheral vision, but it would vanish as soon as she turned to see what it was. Despite seeing nothing, she couldn't shake the feeling that she might have been followed. It shook her so deeply to her core that she broke out into a run when she was just one block away from her place. She no longer cared how she might look running down the street at the crack of dawn. She barreled down the sidewalk until she reached the suddenly beautiful green building she called home, and hurried up the stairs without a second thought.

At the top, she fumbled for her keys but found them unnecessary, as the door swung open the second she grasped the doorknob. Amelia quickly scrambled inside and locked the door before collapsing behind it. She was hyperventilating at this point, but the fear that had overtaken her was steadily leaving her system. She waited for the relief that should have followed, but instead found that her mind was called back to the fact that the door had been unlocked.

She pulled out her phone with a frown, shooting a text to Emma that read "Heads up, you left the door unlocked."

Once her breathing had steadied, Amelia got to her feet and began

pulling off her coat, throwing it on the couch. She slipped off her headphones and made her way to the kitchen for a glass of water before bed. The blinds were down throughout the apartment, but the brightening day peeked around them and cast a low light over the floor that made it easy enough to navigate. Right as she opened the fridge, her phone chimed with a text from Emma.

“No I didn’t.” Amelia processed the reply and her blood ran cold for the second time that morning. *If Emma locked it, then who left it open?*

She let the fridge door slide shut as she looked around her dark apartment, suddenly even more afraid than she had been on the way home. Her phone buzzed and she glanced at it momentarily before deciding to ignore the unknown number calling her. Flicking on the flashlight on her phone, she illuminated every inch of the kitchen and living room before her gaze traveled to her bedroom door, left ajar.

Amelia’s footsteps were quiet and timid, drowned out by the sound of her heart pounding in her chest. She told herself there would be nothing and no one in the room with her, that the unlocked door had to be some sort of simple mistake, but nothing would silence the roaring in her ears.

She pushed open the door slowly and threw on the lights, eyes racing back and forth over every inch of the room. She threw open her closet doors and pushed the clothes to either side to be sure nothing could hide from her. Satisfied, and feeling just a bit silly, Amelia closed the doors and let out the breath she’d been holding. Her phone began to vibrate in her hand once more, and she once again glanced down to see an unknown number.

Her eyes fell to the bedroom door swinging closed, and the man holding a phone in one hand and a knife in the other, standing between her and her only exit.

“Welcome home,” he said, voice thick with anticipation.

Margaret Marcum

WE WATCH TV AT THE END OF THE NIGHT

you always wanted it louder and i always wanted it
brighter, turning up the system, holding down
buttons that bend into what we think
we want, like how i make myself smaller
to fit into the crescent shape of you—
as we take in shimmery images in a frame,
comforting with other worlds not our own
as how the moon sees us always
anew, as i waited for you
to grow full too

Malakai Amani

MAINE

Some fires are set to see memories in the flames,
others, to stimulate nerves.
You engage in both all while being the fire in itself.

You never believed in my beauty, or did you?
Could it be that's why you burned me?
You wanted me charred,
yet desired my excess,
you relished in the parts that were
the lightest. The moist and sapid bits,
easiest to swallow.
But what of the crusted edges you've concocted?
Aren't the blackened bits
to be manducated as well?

You smelled of cotton sheets
blowing in the wind and
felt of grandfather's slippers in fall.
You cooked ambrosial meals and
poured powerful elixirs
down my throat as you swayed
to the drums of your childhood.
Heavy. Suffocating. Moody. Bloody.

Are you not a rogue wave? Am I not a dinghy?
Do we not need each other in some sort?
Are you not the circus and I not your patron?
Are you not the bee and I your black-eyed Susan?

At the core I am art,
an appeasing eye sore,
a debossed charm you've
prided yourself in crafting
by way of the hands of all that did
and did not touch you.

Christine Stoddard

FOR THE UNBEGOTTEN

Beaming, my husband flushed my birth control pills down the toilet.

“Now we can finally get pregnant!” he gasped, as if he had finally realized what was stopping us. Chemically, at least. But I knew this was no sudden realization. The action, however joyously spontaneous it appeared, was premeditated. It came after three years of planning. If only I had been a part of the plan.

“We should get Chinese for dinner,” I said as I leaned in the bathroom doorway of our Sheepshead Bay apartment. “I want that Singapore—“

Aaron cut me off with a single desperate look. “You made the appointment with that specialist, right?”

“I was talking about tonight.” I tried not to sound irritated.

“I’m talking about tomorrow.”

“Could we decide on dinner first?”

“You made the appointment?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m not ready to have a baby.” I swallowed hard, tasting the faintest bit of blood from biting the inside of my cheek earlier that day. I had said those same words before.

He bowed his head much closer to the toilet than I would’ve for anything but relieving myself after a drunken escapade. The lemon spray air freshener could only mask so much. When Aaron lifted his chin, I was not ready to meet the intensity of his gaze.

“You’re 32 years old.”

“I know exactly how old I am.”

“Aren’t you a little old to be playing an artist?”

“I’m not playing anything. I work.” Images of commissions from the past year flashed through my mind. The blue buffalo canvas for the dentist’s office. The mural series of forest scenery for the senior citizen home. The cottage greeting card set carried by a local museum gift shop. All pictorial, not the real paintings that inhabited my soul.

“Yeah, but it’s not like you’re the next Andy Warhol or something. It’s not too late for you to get a real job. My father—”

“I do have a real job and I don’t care about any office job your father has to wave in front of my nose.”

Aaron stood up and met my eyes. It felt like the first time he had really looked at me in ages. He had stopped looking at me during sex. I was a uterus, not a woman. As he approached me, I half-hoped he would kiss me on the forehead the way he did when we first met, but I knew better than to let that hope grow.

“We have to try for a baby now. That way if there are any medical issues, like problems with conception, we can try and get them resolved early. If we wait too long, it will get harder for you to get pregnant and more dangerous for you to give birth.”

“I’m not ready.”

“We can’t put this off any longer. We’ve been married seven years, Adele.”

The vintage yellow lace wedding dress I loathed, the mound of stale cake bearing our names in icing, and the bridesmaids’ collective bout of food poisoning could have been memories from yesterday or the distant past. Frozen in my marriage, I had lost all sense of time. Frostbite disorients you.

“Is seven the magic number?” I snap.

He turned around and ran his fingers through his hair. Once, I had adored those flowing locks. “What’s the holdup?” he asked, facing the glistening shower. He bleached the bathroom nearly floor to ceiling every Sunday.

“You’re not the one who has to get pregnant, Aaron.”

He didn’t acknowledge my reply. Instead, he turned on the faucet and spat in the tub. He kept the water running as steam began to rise.

“Aaron, did you hear me?”

He spat again. “Yeah, I heard you.” He wiped his mouth with the monogrammed washcloth on the rack. It was another wedding present, just like so many items in our Brooklyn abode.

“Then why didn’t you say anything?”

He shut the water off and spun around. “Why don’t you just say you don’t want children?” he growled.

“I didn’t say that.”

“That’s my point. Say it.”

“I do. One day. Just not now.”

He snatched the washcloth and threw it to the floor. It landed right in between us. Neither of us touched it. “Say it.”

“I’m not sure.”

“You’re not sure of what?”

“If I want to have kids.”

“You’re 32 years old.”

“You keep saying that.”

“It’s true.”

“I could still have a child in five or seven years.”

“It won’t be as safe. There will be more complications.”

“We can afford a good doctor, a good hospital. We have the money and the education. I’ll take my prenatal vitamins, go to whatever classes, read all the books they recommend. When I’m ready, I’ll be *so ready*.”

Aaron bent over to pick up the washcloth and tossed it onto the rack in silence. Then he marched out of the bathroom, brushing just past me. The heat emanating from his body burned my shoulder. I had never wanted less of his touch.

I stepped into the bathroom and closed the door behind me. I jiggled the doorknob to lock the door and turned on the sink. Falling gently to my knees, I reached past the cobwebs behind the sink and fished out a small brown paper bag containing my secret stash of birth control pills. I handled them as if they were eggs. Not a rattle or crunch would give me away. I rolled up the bag as tightly as I could and stuffed it into my underwear. When a sharp corner poked my abdomen, I shifted the bag and patted it flat. It wasn't comfortable, but my black skinny jeans, tight as they were, completely hid the bulge in my panties.

I turned off the sink, opened the door, and headed to the kitchen to order Chinese food.

Virginia Laurie

THE SOUND MY PARING KNIFE MAKES

Their name was not even syllables
anymore,
just three split cherries
in my mouth,
stems hooked
around the gap in my
front teeth
like tire swing,
like noose

It was obscene, and it was not
for polite company,
rinds of raw
mango, still
green, orange
meat slugs
slipping
towards the
gullet for
choking

I don't mean to say sex
is violent,
but the wanting was,
and the body was,
loosely hidden,
wanting
to be seen,
considered,
scraped skinless
righteous

We wanted the water to
rub our bodies raw
like canyons,

carve out
the longing
inside, fill it
with faith

All that's left,
though
is sugar-lubed
thumb pads
and
lack

Alan Keith

AIRBAGS

I'm only saying.

Just so you know.

We tacked them on to
everything
like a nun with amen;
a Muslim's inshallah.

We're outta Backwoods – just so you know.

The milk expires tomorrow; I'm only saying.

Every phrase needed its own airbag;
our ears working fine
but the hearts worn thin,
Cupid's arrows rusting,

Anything that can be personal,
is,
and is so damn strongly.
Criticisms need instant apologies,
else a chaos of the mind ensues.

I tripped over your jacket – I'm only saying.

Just so you know, we're out of clean plates.

Don't tell me hell gets worse than this.

Beverly Rose Joyce

LIKE LIFE COMES

He knew he was dying. We all are. Think about it. Nobody really likes to, though. To think about it. To imagine death as a someday happening is easier. Someday, with hands pruned and locks gray, if lucky to have any. Strands, not hands. Death. It is the transition which signals the end of a good essay. Overall. In conclusion. Afterall. It inevitably comes. After life is lived.

Not for him. *Who?* My student. One of thousands I had in room 110, down the hall from the cafeteria. Man, it got rank in there once the ovens kicked on, about two dots before noon. The hoodies and skinny jeans looked at me, in seats nailed to desks scattered around the cinderblock rectangle. Thirty sets of peepers, in fifty-minute segments, five times per day. Blinking. The bells spat them out just to usher others in. Different faces, but still blinking. Penning my words to pore over later, as if the letters put together meant something. And, they *did*. The power of it is humbling. My thoughts remain, inked in another print. Someplace.

I know where *he* is. Beneath the crust, where the soft part of a loaf hides. Since it is weak? For it is desired most? Not sure. But, he lies. Deep in a hole the same shape as the room with its chalk wall, where I taught him to read and to write. Not first, but better. How to uncover the colors under the print. To peel the skin. To smooth it down again. To be human because he did.

I always said the label etched in legible font up in the left right-angle corner of the page needed to make me *feel*. In the reach is when we understand. The gasp. The sigh. The giggle. The cry. The snicker. The moan. The click. The groan. Humanity is found inside these sounds. Only if my hangar bumps shook, or if my fist-sized rib prisoner keyed my tongue, or if my lashes bathed my cheeks to resuscitate the dead tree I snugged underneath did my red pen press Hawthorne's cover letter to the top of the lined leaf.

If art mimics life, then one first must know what it means to be alive.

And *why*. There is, indeed, a reason. Season it with dashes and pinches and smidgens. Dish it out on a flat lump of hard clay. The way to the

heart of a man is through his belly? *Hardly!* We *all* can be had that way. Food. It roots the pyramid. It also sits at its tip. So, it serves a good lesson about the difference between life and living. The calorie is the perfect paradox.

I would tell them to watch. Not what I said, but *how* what I said affected them. I would ask for a volunteer, on this day in my spiral plan book. Every year, one brave teenager would steer to the front of the room and park in the hard plastic chair opposite me, cheeked into mine. Would wait for the interrogation to begin. Not questions, statements. No desk, no table, no podium to hide behind. All open. Limbs, exposed. The one rule? Be real. Say the first thing to come to mind.

It is easy to pull the strings, like a Chatty Cathy doll. Why? Because people are similar inside. Like trees. The leaves and needles and flowers and fruit at first set them apart, but beneath the bark they are pretty much the same. Wood. Deep in the earth, they are all connected. Trees. In a root hug community underground. Despite their outside differences, the trees work together as one. They start again. Shed leaves to sprout new ones. Cry petals to bloom others. Weep sap. Then dry it up. Branch out after a hurt. There is always a new beginning with trees. From fire, from flood, from drought, they grow. So do people, I hope. In time, like the trees, we rise.

I would start with *tree*. Life. The universal symbol. Identifiable. Everyone has a tree yarn to spin. Tire swing. Bird nest. Christmas. I would move on to *dirt*. Digging in it. Eating it. Staining a cap with it. Lowering a loved one into it. Being treated like it. Soil makes a good tale. Next was *star*. Those blinks bring flashback. To a past wish, hope, dream, or to a tucked-in academic success. Nothing better than getting back a paper with a five-point intersecting line design at its top.

I did not stop there. Our leaves. *Hair*. We all grow it. *Do* we, though? Well, most do. In different colors, textures, cuts, and styles. While some want more, others pay to wax and to laser it off body parts where they rather it was not. Some 'dos are tough to miss, like an afro, a mullet, a mohawk, or dreads. Manes can be kept from gazes below veils, caps, beanies, wraps for cultural, religious, medical, even athletic reasons. Pets, brushes, stringed instruments, heck even sweaters have hair. This is where I got them. When the hot seat across from me used such a common word in an unusual manner. No matter the year, the period, the student, it never failed to happen.

The last one got *me*. His story, the final kid to sit in the midnight Virco. He was a skater. His clothes gave him away. Baggy jeans, frayed just enough to make the wear appear natural. Chain wallet. Flannel. Vans or DCs, on feet first shoved into funky socks. That was his thing, spiffy toe warmers. Balloon animal wiener dogs dancing with cacti. Porcupines in Oz heels. He even had a pair with pears. Wearing pairs of Groucho glasses. *Nice pun!*

He was the subject I hoped for that year. A little before we found ourselves in cells called home and we got to watch grown men get pavement lynched by uniforms on television. He was the baby of his family, the youngest of three to hang on my roster. His taste in music was solid, given the albums he advertised for free between his sleeves. *Is solid still a compliment, a replacement for cool? Hip? Tight? Raw?* Probably not. His favorite color? Green. His hair, it was the shade of pumpkin pulled from the oven. Until he had none. Until it fell out, in clumps between pointer and thumb, like a slip of paper pulled from the slit of a crisp bent cookie.

Fortunate, he was not. A few weeks into the first quarter, I noted his left jaw was larger than its other. Maybe he had surgery? His dimple maker looked cotton stuffed. *No.* Got into a fight? *Did you win?* Not it, either. The wind. The longer one grows accustomed to its persistent blow, the harsher its sudden absence. The whisper does not knock itself out of a frame. It more disappears, like a fluffy ended varmint from an Honest Abe costume prop. *Poof. Gone.*

It did not take long for the truth to come out about the tumor. A license? To drive, he had not yet gotten. A date? With a girl, he had not yet gone on. *Not yet's* laid pebble dropped ahead of him to follow...tomorrow. Even the orphan's song says the sun will always come out then, but maybe not for him. *The prognosis?* Slim to none would he cross the stage in a cap and gown.

His parents found alternative treatments in Maryland. Could have been Boston. . . . He was absent the next two months, which is when he let me in to his fears, joys, regrets, wants. I sent him his assignments digitally, before Zoom or Google Classroom. Only the ones I deemed necessary for him to pass my class. I had him write. Poems. Narratives. Arguments. Songs. Comics. He was especially talented at those. His sketches and quips were fit for publication, in my opinion. We were reading *The Crucible*, in room 110. While the rest of the students were tasked with taking a scantron test, I gave him only the essay. *The topic?* Guilt. *The question?* When does guilt motivate

action? Most responses were surface. That was what I called it when the ink looked the same on the whole page. See, the person who writes to give a glimpse inside prints bigger, darker, wider, longer in spots. Not many know the spirit lives in the ditch the pen tip digs.

The monitor's sleek words cut deepest. His guilt was in the bills, from hospitals and in envelopes penthouzed at the curve of the kitchen table. His family was in debt. They could not eat out. Could not go on vacation. Could not buy needed things. His siblings could not afford tuition, because of him. The action? I mean, that *was* the application part of the assignment. At first, he was a resistant Make a Wish recipient. To do so was to give in, to fold the cards. To leave the stack intact, face down. Yet, he did it for them.

He came back to class after the trial was done. Of course, the same day the sad plastic chair sat in front of the erasable wall that ran the length of the room. I debated picking a guinea pig, like a pudgy-fingered kid who plucks a puppy from its littermates wedged in a cardboard pen. I scaled this option a tick. My slight overbite decided for me. *Down*, it whistled him to his seat. The Virco, it seemed to swallow his frame. His limbs swam in ripped pants and a tee which not so long ago fit. The pants. I think they were navy. They jumped when he bummed into the L-shaped bent plastic. Which is when I saw his socks, peeking over each Chuck Taylor's thin heel counter. Coffee mugs. In different shapes and sizes and colors. A motley of mugs. All filled to the lip with joe. Like those trees, below the variety of bark texture and tone. Wood.

I understood, then. Kind of like when a comic book character comes to a profound realization. A perpendicular ellipsis sprouts from his scalp, leads to a cumulous cloud. With a dim bulb trapped inside its scalloped lines, that all-of-a-sudden daffodils itself. *Ding!* Things align. While this truth can be hard to believe a lot of the time, they do. Look at how animals move. In twos. In even groups. In flapping Vs. These are not coincidence. There is a purpose. A reason.

Alien Workshop was the brand of his board, with its neon green deck. The *tree* beneath his feet. Atop not roots, but wheels. *Dirt?* It hurts. When it blades its way into never padded well enough elbows and knees cement-loofahed pink by the end of the day. The *stars*. Blue. They blanketed his ankles. No hopes. No dreams. No talk of one day... He spoke of the points he could see. Could bend to reach. That day. The only one guaranteed. The

beanie. Burton. Striped. Dark brown, cream, and the color of apple cider. His head looked like October, right before it fades into winter. The wool was stretched at the edges to mask the naked brow ridge.

In sixteen years, the lesson had never ended with *hair*. Not this year, either. We can hear trees. Really, we can. When the wind dances with them. We can smell dirt. After a good rain or on a diamond, mitt in hand. We can see stars. And, even when they lurk behind puffs, we know they are on the schedule to pull a full shift tomorrow. Hair. We can touch it. Fine. Straight. Wavy. Coarse. Frizzy. Curly. Fingers love to get lost in it. Fondle. Fluff. Smooth. Stroke. Twirl. Pull. The longer it is, the harder to resist.

Taste. The sense leftover. The first four always seemed to feed it. Sweet. Salty. Sour. Bitter. I figured the final word had to fall into one of these categories. I used a few over the years. Peanut butter. Lemon. Chocolate. Tuna. Cinnamon. Banana. Orange. Peppermint. My selection was typically determined by the direction the stories prior went in. Plot. English teachers, we diagram it on a pyramid, but the best narratives loop back to where they started. They come full circle. Like the rings inside the rings inside the rings within the rind.

This time the choice was easy. *Coffee*. The socks picked for me. What I did not foresee was his story. Or, more prediction. *Admission?* That he knew. Plenty people hide in denial or cloud sound judgment with hope. He knew what he wanted most he would not get. To sit. Early, on a lazy Sunday snugged up to his wife and to sip from stained brown mugs which fog frames like life comes—briefly.

Corinna Schulenburg

SICKBED SONG

There is no outdoors there is
only the view from the window.
There is no window there is
only the wound in the wall.
There is no blood in the wound
only my sailboats of breath.
There is no ocean to get to
only rivers that run backward.
There is no backward there is
only space for a single dimension.
There are no dimensions only time.
There is no time only hours.
There are no hours only pills.
There are no pills only birds.
There are no birds only distance.
There is distance. There is
distance. There is no distance
only mouths that drink it up.
There is thirst. There is only
thirst. There is there was.
There is will be. There is
a healing that comes slowly.

SUGAR HAS AN ITCH

Sugar has an itch, they tell me,
but I have a different taste I need
to scratch, cuz we all have claws

and every day the keratin's gotta
sharpen itself on something. We all
have puritans within that shame us

for how the frosting sticks
to fingers, tongues. We all are slick
with excuses and the honey goes

down easy. What I mean to say:
that tickle in the mind, that only
one more time, that I can quit today

or tomorrow; don't get so good
at taming that demon you forgot
that every demon is an angel turned

inside out, how the sleeve of lust
is lined with revulsion, how too much
bites the tail of never ever enough.

Even balance has its own kind of crave:
the shudder of the scales finding
even, the thirst of the cup half-empty

and half-full. Sweetness, teach me
moderation even in moderation,
a scratch for every needful itch.

A SCIENCE TO LEAVING

"The nervous systems of foraging and predatory animals may prompt them to move along a special kind of random path called a Lévy walk to find food efficiently when no clues are available." -Quanta Magazine

Who can make out the pattern? A map
got stuck inside the albatross. A shark
out of luck takes the deep dive. A drum
even beats in the blood of flies. A search
hard-wired into all that wouldn't die.
Within the random, a rhythm; older
than eyes, a billion years of empty belly
as our guide. Our guide! You've felt it,
when sweet turns scarce, and fullness
is rare as any dodo. Something says go,
and we do, short, short, then a far long,
then repeat, until we eat, or we don't.
There's a song coded in our nucleotides,
and it has wings, has teeth, has goodbyes.

Melissa Feinman

SUNNY SUNDAYS

Ava opens the blinds to let the light in because that's all that makes sense to do. What her mother Rose always did. Does. She looks at her mother now, pallid skin fading into the chintz fabric of the chair, that hideous chair.

Can something so ephemeral, teetering on the edge of consciousness, be described in present tense?

A cascade of dust particles rain down as Ava pulls the blind slats slack. She watches them spin in late afternoon sunlight across the floor, attempting to fill some of the empty spaces in a house that has always been too big for the two of them. Ava can almost see Rose's large hands throwing various curtains open with one, violent jab, darting from room to room until she had attacked each one. *Sunlight*, Rose used to say to a tiny Ava once the snot on her face had dried and the sobs became whimpers, *cures any ailment. You could go mad from the darkness*. Ava used to wonder if it was as simple as that, if they had left New York because the tall buildings too often blocked the sun from hitting their Brooklyn stoop. In their oversized Connecticut house, the sun knew no bounds. On summer days it felt as though the sun never set, burning through the spotted windows, saturating the house with a sticky heat, leaving the floorboards swollen like overwatered plants. Ava would dance through the many rooms tinged yellow-white. She waited to feel happy.

"Mom," Ava says loudly as the last of the dust hits the floor. "It's Sunday." Ava wonders if she'll be caught in this lie, or if the two women are floating so far from reality that the days are starting to tumble backwards over one another.

"Get me my purse," the body that now inhabits Rose says to no one in particular. Yet the phrase rings with the smallest bud of familiarity, as if she were misremembering a line she once had to utter in a school play.

Sundays were for them, like they are for most people, steeped in rituals. Ava remembers the slow drip of the mornings; the sunlight first filtering in, followed by the smooth warble of a Sinatra album coming in distorted through the scratchy speakers of their old stereo. A lazy spiral of coffee steam would eventually drift through the air. Rose would dress in her version of "Sunday best," donning crisp pantsuits in harsh colors and unforgiving stilettos that screeched against linoleum. Ava would grumble

her way into a dress and quieter shoes. The pair would stand out among the throngs of sweatpants and starchy jerseys, pacing the hospital-white corridors bathed in a faint neon glow from the various store signs that surrounded them. They would squeeze through the narrow spaces between department store clothing racks, Ava trying to escape her mother's lectures on different fabric types. They would pause at the little glass jewelry cart because Ava loved to hold the glass beads up to the fluorescent lights, watching their shiny translucent surfaces expand with beams of color. They would lick cinnamon sugar off soft pretzels while creating backstories for the other families that, like them, passed large chunks of time away at the Bradford Mall. They would, in these moments, feel normal.

Ava wears sweatpants today, waiting for Rose to say something in protest. She doesn't. Even Rose is only dressed in a plain skirt and a pale blue sweater. They drive to the mall in silence, enjoying the emptiness of what is, in a distant reality, Wednesday afternoon streets. When they enter the overly air-conditioned mall, Ava misses the pairs of eyes that would pause over their formal attire.

It had been a false Sunday once before. Ava remembers hands digging into her shoulders and white stars cartoonishly popping in front of her eyes. Being shaken. There was an awful taste in Ava's mouth, like dried, curdled milk. She could not tell if it was the early morning, right before the sky wears its navy blue silk, or still the middle of the night. She fumbled for her lamp, the one that swelled with floating red balloons when turned on. She then saw her mother's face being worn by someone else, her blue eyes rimmed red and looking hollow, her mouth just a violet slash in the middle of her face, nostrils flared, chest flushed.

It's Sunday. Bradford's having a huge sale, and we have to beat the crowds, Rose insisted, her eyes flying in their sockets like windshield wipers.

It's Tuesday, Ava said softly, I have my presentation on Teddy Roosevelt in the morning. Go back to bed, Mom, the mall's closed.

No, Rose yelled, stamping her foot. *Car. Now.*

Ava didn't get dressed, didn't brush her teeth. She padded down to the driveway in fleece slippers and a matching set of dessert-themed pajamas, the rancid acidity still in her mouth. Her head buzzed against the incessant chirping of crickets. Rose touched the printed chocolate chip cookie on Ava's shoulder. *I'll get you a new matching set*, she smiled, and in the light of the car, Ava could see mauve lipstick stuck on her teeth.

When the kind police officer, arriving after Rose's yanks at the locked doors set off the mall's alarm, found the two of them milling in the

floodlights of the parking lot, he pulled Ava aside. He crouched down, making himself much shorter than Ava, who was tall for her age. He smiled gently. *How old are you, Ava?*

I'm ten, Ava said, straightening. Double digits.

And has this happened before? Your mom taking you places in the middle of the night? Not a lot. Just to the town's fall harvest festival before the lights had come on. And to a school holiday concert that had already happened months before.

Do you feel safe living with your mom, Ava? Ava paused, wondering whether this was a trick question, like the multiple choice questions where the answers were A, B, C, or "All of the Above." Ava's teacher told her to stop choosing only "All of the Above" as an answer, though it was the most tempting answer choice for all the questions. Her teacher, after hearing where the cops found Ava and Rose at four in the morning, would tell Ava she could do her Teddy Roosevelt presentation next week. *Of course I feel safe. She's my mom.*

Ava looks at her mom now, vacantly staring at their pretzel stand, no recognition at all. Ava wonders if it was easier for Rose to transition into fading memories when she already had a fractured mind.

The thing Ava always hated about Bradford Mall was that it lacked a large fountain, like they have in malls in the movies. She reaches into the comically large pockets of her sweatpants, feeling for loose change. She extracts a penny and a dime and tosses them into the trough of the drinking fountain. Rose says nothing of this strange activity, and instead walks ahead, walking toward something she doesn't know. The coins sit lamely in the shallow basin, un-wishable.

Bryan Kashon

BOX IT UP

compartmentalization is the ability to take
your trauma. box it up in a way that is neat
and fun. as if
a cardboard container can
hold toxicity. feel that?
it's the irradiated plate they placed
behind your dad's eye to fight the cancer
there. put your trauma somewhere safe,
right in your brain, behind your eyes. watch it
seep out, bit-by-bit (so you feel—
but don't die— from it). you're done. close your eyes,
your box, your lids. come back to it.

trauma is the content of all little boxes.
you know: the things we hold
onto; our traits written for us.
stack your trust issues next
to the heavy holiday boxes. always
seeming to coexist.
take your sexual assault, set
next to the photo album filled
with moments. walking home from orientation
on a nice spring day, feeling the sun,
and a man older than your father's
eyes resting on your neck, back,
“fine sweet ass.”
take the suicidal tendencies and hide them
deep. under the old, oversized sweaters,
past the dinosaur toys your parents
kept because maybe the family would grow.
when all you want is to shrink

i look into the box
every now and then to
remind myself that i can

always close it,
empty it,
burn it.

Haydil Henriquez

TO BE DISPENSABLE

in your early morning walk of shame,
when you are forced to make home
out of collected bones.
the winds pick up easy even in the summertime
your soles like your womb, a barren field, dried river veins in soil.
blistered open, thirsty. your hands calloused closed in prayer.
you dreamt of growing old with this one.

the train heading to Penn Station is late.
the birds gather twigs & limbs early in the morning.
and you scrimmage with the clouds.
sun wins again.

there is no place for love.

Haydil Henriquez

MADE IN BAHIA

I dream of a long term relationship here. A man I can live with.

Ty pulls the white straw to his full midnight moon lips, sipping the -tskahh steel-cut coconut water, dripping on his wet hands. He often confuses live and die in Portuguese.

Not Fabio...Fabio. He wants to live in decadence.

I want to live my life! This way!

Walk hunger towards the beach where four sunkissed men levitate. Eyes fixated on the horizon, the sun bellowing with color. The exotified feel guilt for exotifying though, the second they gulp. They feel it on the ribs of their bones.

The wall with the dancing cement sings,

A vida em movimento tem um sonho, impossível de tocar com as mãos
Life on the move has a dream, impossible to touch with your hands.

I think life is pointless. Dust for dust. Seven thousand years from now, no one cares about YOUR life. Think about it, one of the sailors who accompanied Christopher Columbus to this god forsaken 'New World,' will not be remembered. Ty breathes deep as if to create a memory of this new epiphany.

None will be remembered.

Many names ring for one deception, Cristobal Colombo, Cristobal Colon, Christopher Colombus, who were we pre-Colombia?

An acrobatic orange army ant walks on your striped black skirt, baby spider hovers over your nape near the rock of soil. You talk about men among two men. Patriarchy. Pleasure. You say, full of neophyte, *with a girl it always feels more wholesome. Not the maternal kind. More one.*

Fabio interrupts, nonchalantly says, *It's the same way with a guy, like if a guy sucks me and I don't like it, I move and he sucks me a different way.*

You and Ty laugh belly-full of bewilderment, at the honey lost in translation. *No, no. I've never had sex with a woman. You tell the air. Too afraid I'll never leave.*

Ty says there are tribes in the Amazon that still haven't made contact with civilization, or have avoided it for as long as they could. Places that still use the barter system. Pirate ships in the forest. What? There are some things that haven't been found. Some people are still saved.

The three of you walk to the other side of the MAM, where the lined cargo boats pass the scattered wooden fish boats, and the sun sets in the periphery. It's sad the colors we yearn. Control, instead of sail.
Sometimes I think God exists, Fabio thinks out loud.

How do you say mundo in English, Ty asks as if it weren't his first language.

World, you say knowingly.

Eghh, WORLD, it's ugly isn't it?

Most English words are, you say. Fabio interrupts as if he's had a revelation, a new understanding of where we've been.

Sometimes I think God exists. Sometimes you think we don't.

Você precisa viver sua vida para você, not to be remembered, says the air.

Today we splurge, cab it to Porto de Barra, spit jokes the entire car ride. Watch the tires take us up cliffs by the bay. Find the first bar. Order the brown bottles. Fabio says he's paying. He got an accidental deposit in his bank account. Now he wants to live a little. You look at the boardwalk; the young man balancing the blue-red beach umbrellas is hit by the passing bus. His four unsold umbrellas tumble on the cement, and he looks God in the eye. A resentful exchange to the skies, perhaps not too unfamiliar.

Edith Piaf plays from Fabio's phone, *No je ne regrette rien* dances on the

salty air. *You talk like the ocean waves*, Ty tells you as you reach for a menthol cigarette, a natural movement you added to your Portuguese. Ignore Ty. The woman sitting at the table across from you stands up to leave with two senior aged gringos.

It's terrible for us, Fabio says under his breath. *In France, you go to see the Eiffel Tower, the tourist sites, here they come to steal peace from our women, they come to see our goddesses shaking their bodies.*

We talk about the silence. Fado music plays. Ty says it sounds like a rainy day by the sea, to then find the African beat and the tones of the Indians. Not even a revolution can quiet our shame. *But here in Brazil, we started bad and we're ending bad. I'm sad to be Brazilian right now*,” bow-headed Fabio reaches for his beer, eyes pulled against gravity.

Ty tries to cheer him up. *We're a world in Bahia. We have deserts with lakes.* Where else can you find where the dead find hope?

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With desenvolvimento we find more distance. People want more space. Empty air. *Eu quero uma cerveja, gelado dolce e cigarro*, you shout at the brisk air. Menina bonita/ beautiful girl is the name of the ice cream.

This is why you learn to love Fabio, tugging at the straw barely consuming his milkshake he says, *Right now, I want to fuck*. Chegou a chuva para Fábio that night. job interviews, accidental deposits, English teaching opportunities, and men, eventually. Night continues falling, Ty plays with the sand like the days when he did so innocently. Ty nosso churrasco com farinha. Nossa black sheep. The night falls black.

Stephen Sossaman

WILLARD STORROW, ASLEEP IN HAPPY VALLEY LEISURE VILLAGE

Willard had a thing for Candy
went to the prom with Hope
had a crush on Money
a blind date with Potential
a one-night stand with Success

Willard married Compromise
had a brief affair with Contentment
and ran off with Remorse
who loved him enough to stay

THE GULMOHAR TREE

A memorable toy does not imply a memorable childhood, but a memorable childhood is seldom complete without a memorable toy.

When I was growing up, very few of us had real toys. Instead, we made toys out of everyday objects. Cylindrical tins of talcum powder became tanker trucks. We cut holes in shoeboxes to serve as windows and they became buses. We made bows and arrows fashioned from branches of trees. V-shaped branches were especially prized to make pocket-sized slingshot catapults, the bands made from bicycle inner-tubes. My favorite toy was my make-believe car; the steering wheel came from an old tricycle and was just the right size to fit in my little hands. The seat was a rectangular block of granite left over from a fencepost construction project, strategically placed next to a young Poinciana tree. The tender trunk of the tree served as the gearshift and I spent hours driving to faraway lands, crossing mountains, traversing rivers and slaying monsters. Sometimes, I would allow my sister to accompany me on these epic journeys, both of us seated on the granite block as we waved goodbye to our friends. We stopped to refuel and sometimes I let her drive, reluctantly giving her the wheel and telling her exactly when to change gears. I still have many fond memories of that car. I don't recall how long we played this game, but it came to an end when my family moved out to another house.

Toys have been around almost as long as humans have. Archeologists have found toys that are several thousand years old with themes similar to what we have today; figures of animals and human beings, carts, chariots, tiny weapons, all introducing the child to an adult world. Clearly, toys are an integral part of the human story.

I am filled with amazement when I see the variety of toys available today. There are miles of aisles of toys in a typical department store, and then there are entire stores dedicated to toys. You can buy toys of every possible color and stripe, based on age group, interest and theme. You can buy toy electric cars for eight-year old's that have more features than the first real car I bought. You can buy toys based on your favorite TV characters, available in different sizes, with different levels of animation designed to suit every budget. Some of these toys can walk or dance and sing songs, while you can have a real conversation with others. You can buy toy kitchens with ovens, stovetops and microwaves, with cutlery and imitation food. You can buy

vacuum cleaners designed to resemble their real-world counterparts for fervent six-year old's who want to vacuum the house, but their interest in household sanitation sadly dwindles when they are handed a real vacuum cleaner as teenagers. You can buy toys resembling power tools such as chainsaws and drills, plastic tool belts, hard hats and safety glasses, all for the workmen and workwomen of tomorrow. You can buy dolls that sleep and cry, some of which are sophisticated enough to require frequent feeding and diaper changes. You have construction toy sets with bulldozers, backhoes and overhead cranes for the future builders of our infrastructure. You have toys to satisfy every fantasy of every child, but I suspect many toys are designed to indulge the fantasy, cravings and childhood memories of the adult that buys them.

A few years ago, I went back to my childhood home to see what had become of the tree whose tender branches served as the steering column and gearshift of my favorite toy car. What I remembered as a small shrub was now an adult tree, over thirty feet in height and bedecked with a canopy of bright red flowers. It seemed like the tree was ablaze in the hot Indian sun. The granite block that served as the seat was nowhere in sight. As I stood under the shade of that tree, I remembered the many afternoons I spent in its proximity, going on long journeys limited only by my imagination. I remembered the hours of comfort and entertainment I derived from the tree. It was remarkable to be in the presence of this beautiful and generous Gulmohar tree which was such an integral part of my favorite childhood toy. Batteries not included.

Katrina Kaye

REMINDING

When I met you, I fell in love
with flying, with candle light,
open windows. From the safety

of your late lit bedroom,
I watched rain as it ate the earth,
leaving soft teeth marks

in the dirt of your gardens. I hear
the moths come every seven years,
but sometimes it seems

like they are always here, flittering
against door frame in praise
of porch light. We don't always

forget the way we are supposed to,
nor do we remember the way
the seasons would like us

to believe. I crawled upon your hand
on fine legs, wing brushing palm,
stabilizing myself as you peered

through the brown spots on my wings.
You did not crush me or push me
away. Details blur and the edges

of film burn through so all one sees
are big moments, not days shifted
in between. My wings against

your open hand; you let me stay
as long as I needed, did not protest
when I took again to the air.

I don't remember exact words,
but I have not forgotten your face.
I can't remember why I loved you

but I can't forget that I did.
It's been over twenty years
since you made me feel loved

just by the meeting my gaze.
It has been six years since
you died, but I swear I have seen

the moths more than once since then.
They flutter on the window beside
my late-night lingering, reminding me

of the early hours we shared
before the sun approached. We had
closure; nothing left unsaid or undone.

That was the last season of the moths,
Reminded me that you were once
a light I could not resist.

Brian Yapko

COURTROOM 600

Echoes of evil stain the walls
the jury box, the judge's bench
like nicotine stains, like old blood,
like fingerprints, scattered bits of
harvested hair and charred skin.
How return to my mother's homeland?

How pick up the yellow star and the
pink triangle? The judensau hangs
degrading above the platz, carved into the
Cathedral. A plaque explains it but cannot
explain it. A shopkeeper sees us hold
hands. He whistles one of the old marches.

A stone to mark the synagogue burnt on
Krystallnacht is lost among busy shoppers
in the hauptmarkt buying lebkuchen,
ignoring the Medieval walls as kitsch.
Too young to grasp this place, they dance
to Dschingis Khan and drink beer.

Nuremberg's Palace of Justice is pain in
stone. In Courtroom 600 we mourn amidst
a group of teenagers insolent, taking
laughing selfies in this time-capsule room
where monsters were tried. I cannot
breathe that they once lived. Were here.

A simple cross hangs on the courtroom
wall—respectful, but I shudder that
no symbols honor the victims. Icons
matter. How else document the twisted
road to justice? I wonder, as the laughter
of tourists echoes from the hallway outside.

My husband takes my hand and says
pink, yellow, flesh, blood,
we're still here and
the monsters are gone.
Ah, but ancient myths endure.
How can we ever be sure?

Sheree La Puma

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FENCES

Before Enlightenment Buddha was a man named Sid. [Siddhārtha] Born rich he sought to find an end to rage, the space between pain & death, also known as human suffering. He left his wife & son to wander.

Love is an ending with no plans to build.
I haven't found a true replacement for
departure. Abandonment begins
with god. I am wired for the journey,
those migratory moments meant
to banish rain.

Not wanting the petrichor of you, I will
never again wear the red dress in the
closet. My love parched hands both
lonely & wild unlatch the gate near
the guava tree in the yard. I flick my
cigarette. This will be our closing.

INTERVIEW WITH OBED SILVA



Photo credit: Dario Debora

Obed Silva, author of *The Death of My Father The Pope: A Memoir*, joined us in April for the English department's Visiting Writer Series. We had the chance to ask him a few questions.

Was the decision to write about your father and the fallout from his death an exorcism for you or a way to understand him, and therefore yourself, more deeply?

It was a way for me to have a better understanding of why my father was the way he was and also to explore how I could be so much like him even though we lived so far apart, he in Chihuahua and I in California.

How did you decide on the topic for your book? We all have so many stories to tell, and even experienced writers have trouble deciding what their next story will be. What advice would you give to new writers who are deciding what story to tell, especially when writing nonfiction?

It really just happened. I was on a flight on my way to my father's funeral, and I opened up my journal and began to set pen to paper. During the two hours that I was in the air I completed much of the first chapter of the book. When I returned to California after having buried my father, I continued to write the story. I knew right away that there was something powerful in it that I felt others could benefit from. If you believe you have a powerful story to tell with an important message, then write it. But be honest. Many writers suppress their stories because they are afraid of what readers might think. To me, what readers will think is not on my radar as I'm writing. Don't be afraid to tell the truth, even if the truth is unpleasant.

You explain in the afterward why your mother's story doesn't play a more prominent role in the book, which has to do with her unwavering feelings

about your father. Was she supportive of the book? Has she read it?

My mother has always been supportive of the book. I had to use her for research, so she was also part of the writing process in that way. She has read the book, but it took her some time to complete it because it was difficult for her to get through many of the scenes. When she finally did finish reading it, she told me she was very proud of me for being brave enough to write it and for being as honest as I am.

The scene where you find out your dad was once apprenticed to a famous artist in Mexico but abandons it because he considered his mentor, Chihuahuan artist Pina Mora, “too strict” was especially interesting. On one hand it revealed an aspect of your father you hadn’t known about and even admired—a budding artistic talent in his youth. But on the other hand, you have nothing but scorn and contempt for his not pursuing and even squandering his talent, more evidence of his recalcitrant laziness. How has this influenced or informed your own development and conception as a writer?

It taught me the value of embracing my talents for both writing and painting. Knowing that my father had given up on his talents, only makes me want to keep refining mine. This is why I write and paint as much as time allows me. I don't want to be like my father and give up on talents. I want my talents to be part of the mark I leave behind when I'm no longer on this planet.

Most of the book describes the time around your father’s death with subsequent memories of visiting him and relatives in Chihuahua. Events from your own life eventually do get woven in but seem to play a secondary role. Was this a conscious decision to focus exclusively on the memory of your father and the legacy of his alcoholism rather than your own evolution as former gang member to college graduate, professor, and eventually writer? In other words, are readers to expect a forthcoming volume two of your memoirs?

Readers should expect a forthcoming book. I am currently writing the second part of this story, but this one revolves around my mother and how she saved me from the gangs, drugs, and prison. That book is titled *In The Hands of My Mother*, and it picks up right where this one ends. I had actually started this book before *The Death of My Father the Pope*, but then my father died and *My Father the Pope* just exploded out of me.

CONTRIBUTORS

Gale Acuff has published hundreds of poems in over a dozen countries and has authored three books of poetry. He has taught university English in the US, China, and Palestine.

Malakai Amani is a former student of Cerritos College who has been previously been published in the *Wingless Dreamer* anthology series. Malakai is a self proclaimed loner, foodie, travel, and anime enthusiast. When not in deep thought near scented candlelight, you can find them curled up next to their pet cats.

Clara Burghellea is a Romanian-born poet with an MFA in Poetry from Adelphi University. Recipient of the Robert Muroff Poetry Award, her poems and translations have appeared in *Ambit*, *Waxwing*, *The Cortland Review* and elsewhere. Her second poetry collection *Praise the Unburied* was published with Chaffinch Press in 2021. She is the Review Editor of *Ezra, An Online Journal of Translation*.

Cierra Burnett is a 19-year-old student at Cerritos college. She was raised in variety of areas; Downey, Long Beach, and Lynwood shaped her the most. She loves reading, spending time with her family, and writing poetry.

Melissa Feinman is a published writer, teen advocate, and mental health professional from New York City. She currently works as a teen programmer, bringing creative spaces and creative outlets to young people so that they can express themselves in safe and healing ways. She believes that telling stories that shed light on experiences around mental illness not only illuminates such experiences for readers, but also helps writers feel in control of their own narratives.

Daniel Garcia is a Cerritos College student pursing an English major to achieve his goals of being a writer. Though not previously published, he is hoping to find ways to share his work.

Haydil Henriquez, born Ya-í-dil, is the daughter of diligent Dominican parents. Raised in the solemn concrete of NYC, she is a daydreamer, auntie, Bronx-bred poet—a purveyor of the forgotten dialects of the working class. She is an arts educator, cultural advocate, program manager and spiritual warrior. She has worked with communities across the Diaspora facilitating storytelling workshops for youth. Haydil's writing unleashes mirages of

transnational lives in its most authentic nature.

Beverly Rose Joyce lives in Brecksville, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland, with her husband, Carl, and their two daughters, Mallory and Samantha, along with their two dogs, Shadow and Reggie. She holds a BA in English from Baldwin-Wallace University and a MA in English from Cleveland State University. She was a public high school English teacher for sixteen years.

Bryan Kashon is a graduate cum laude from Humboldt State University. His short stories have appeared in *Toyon Literary Magazine* and *The Platform Review*, and his first full-length play was produced by Lime Arts Productions for their May 2021 Fringe Theatre Festival. Bryan currently resides in Sacramento with his fiancee and their three-year old daughter. When not writing he thinks of Colorado, acts, tells stand-up, and loves his family (sometimes too much).

Katrina Kaye is a writer and educator living in Albuquerque, NM. She is seeking an audience for her ever-growing surplus of poetic meanderings and hoards her published writing on her website: ironandsulfur.com. She is grateful to anyone who reads her work and in awe of those willing to share it.

Alan Keith is a substitute teacher working out of Toronto, Canada. He tries to keep his writing honest by only writing about what he sees, but if he's being (really) honest, he actually makes a lot of it up. Alan has printed two short story collections and a novel; they sit anonymously on his bookshelf. A poetry collection is his next project.

Sheree La Puma is an award-winning writer whose work has appeared in *The Penn Review*, *Redivider*, *The Maine Review*, *Rust + Moth*, and the *I-70 Review*, among others. Her poetry has been nominated for Best of The Net and the Pushcart. She has a new chapbook, *Broken: Do Not Use* (Main Street Rag Publishing). Find her at www.shereelapuma.com.

Elle Lane is an internationally published trans-woman writer and poet. She received her BFA from the University of Cincinnati, who she represented at the 2021 Reiss Colloquium. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in the literary journals *DAAP works*, *LUPERCALIA Press*, and *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. She has also been featured in the anthologies: *For a Better World* (SOS Cincinnati) and *Intermissions* (Grattan St. Press).

Virginia Laurie is an undergraduate English major whose work has been published in *Apricity Magazine*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *Phantom Kangaroo*, *Cathexis Northwest Press*, and more. Find her at <https://virginialaurie.com/>.

Lauren Lee is a senior attending Yongsan International High School in Seoul, South Korea. She is currently building her creative writing portfolio in preparation for enrollment in a university and was recently accepted into Emerson College Creative Writers Workshop and the Juniper Institute for Young Writers.

Margaret Marcum is a third-year student in the MFA program in creative writing at Florida Atlantic University. Her literary interests include ecofeminism and healing the collective through personal narrative. Her poems have appeared in *Amethyst Review*, *Scapegoat Review*, *October Hill Magazine*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, and *Children, Churches, and Daddies*. She was a finalist for the 2021 Rash Award in Poetry. She lives in Delray Beach with her two cats, Angel and Alice.

Emily Melgar is a Cerritos College alumna currently attending Cal State Fullerton where she is pursuing a bachelor's degree in communications. Her emphasis is in journalism and will also be minoring in anthropology. She is passionate about writing, travel, history, poetry, and photography and hopes to combine all of these passions and hobbies into a journalism career when she finishes her degree. While at CSUF, she writes for the school's student newspaper, the *Daily Titan* and is currently an Arts & Culture Reporting Intern at *Voice of OC*.

Danielle O'Hanlon is a self-taught visual artist specializing in 3D acrylic sculpting and mixed media paintings. Her work is abstract and dreamlike, with color-changing backgrounds and 3D elements. She also works with oil, acrylic, and charcoal. Her works have been published in multiple magazines and have been featured in galleries all over the US. Danielle currently lives and works in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. More of her work can be seen at www.danielleohanlonart.com.

Mariela Ortiz is a Cerritos College student from Compton, California. She has a B.A. in Sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and is currently pursuing a Certificate of Achievement in Creative Writing. Her favorite genre is horror and she enjoys curling up in the dark with stories that both delight and terrify her.

Chris Pais was born in India and came to the United States to pursue graduate studies in engineering. His work appears in *Poetry India*, *The International Journal of Heat and Mass Transfer*, *Wingless Dreamer*, and elsewhere. He lives in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he works on clean energy technologies and tinkers with bikes, guitars, and recipes.

Michelle Park is a 16-year-old currently studying at the International School of Manila located in the Philippines. Many of her poems are about nature and memories from her childhood. She loves to eat food, and during her free time, she enjoys playing soccer, dancing, and listening to music. Her works have been published or are forthcoming in *The Weight Journal*, *The Rising Phoenix Press*, *One Art Poetry*, and elsewhere.

Corinna Schulenburg (she/her) is a queer trans artist/activist committed to ensemble practice and social justice. She's a mother, a playwright, a poet, and a Creative Partner of Flux Theatre Ensemble. She has poems in *Arachne Press*, *Beaver Magazine*, *Capsule Stories*, *Lost Pilots*, *Long Con*, *LUPERCALIA Press*, *miniskirt magazine*, *Moist*, *Moonflake Press*, *Moss Puppy*, *Oroboro*, *Pastel Pastoral*, *Poet Lore*, *SHIFT*, *The Shore*, *The Westchester Review*, and more. Find her at <https://corinnaschulenburg.com/writer/poet/>.

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Wendy M. Thompson is an Assistant Professor of African American Studies at San José State University. Her creative work has most recently appeared in *Sheepshead Review*, *Funicular Magazine*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *The Account*, and the *Santa Fe Writers Project*. She is the coeditor of *Sparked: George Floyd, Racism, and the Progressive Illusion*.

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Mathew Lily Vogel is a transgender artist and writer attending Virginia Commonwealth University for a BFA with a minor in creative writing. He has been writing poetry and prose for over two years and has been published once before. When not writing or illustrating, he can often be found relaxing at home with his girlfriend or running his weekly Dungeons and Dragons games.

Brian Yapko is a lawyer in three states. His poems have appeared in multiple publications, including *Plentitudes Journal*, *Kithe*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, *Cagibi*, *Society of Classical Poets*, *Poetica*, *Grand Little Things*, *Chained Muse*, *Tempered Runes*, *Sparks of Calliope*, *Abstract Elephant*, and others. His debut science fiction novel *El Nuevo Mundo* will be released in the Summer of 2022 by Rebel Satori Press. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

¡Pa'lante!

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