

Door is a Jar

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Cover image by José Galant

Introduction

This time a year ago our first issue was published, and since then, so much has changed.

One thing that I value and appreciate most about being Editor-in-Chief of this great magazine is witnessing how each new issue is a marker of where we are. For editors at other publications, new issues might symbolize where they are headed, but for me, it's all about this moment—right now!

A few days ago my partner and I walked through the French Quarter here in New Orleans where we live, and as we walked, after watching people gathered in a circle, propped on buildings, listening to a jazz band in the street, I said, "We'll never have this moment again." He looked over, "Well, of course we'll be back."

I said, "No, just think of this: We'll never be the age we are now and in this same place. Time keeps changing. We keep changing. The city keeps changing." He looked at me with a smile and quick laugh, and said, "Ahh! You're so poetic!" and we kept walking.

When I think of this, I'm reminded of Whitman's "Miracles" and Herrick's "To the Virgins, to make much of Time." You know the lines: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may/ Old Time is still a-flying:/ And this same flower that smiles to-day/ To-morrow will be dying."

For me, and hopefully for you, our magazine is also something to be gathered—to cherish the miracle of. Now as you prepare to turn the page and read this issue, I encourage you to sit back, grab a cup of coffee or tea, and enjoy where you are, where we are—this unique miracle never to be had in this same way, again.

-Ahrend Torrey, Door Is A Jar Editor-in-Chief

“The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity.”

— Walt Whitman

Lower Mississippi RIVERKEEPER® Award

Each year, at the release of the Spring issue, Ahrend Torrey and Maxwell Bauman, along with the input from a local organization, introduce two contributors whom they feel best represent Door

is a Jar Magazine as recipients of the year's award. This year's winners are featured on the first few pages of this issue, showcasing their bios and unpublished work. Anyone who submits work to Door is a Jar Magazine has a chance at winning this award.

As a way for Door is a Jar Magazine to give back to the local community, we partner with local organizations to help them reach their ethical objectives. As of February 2016 we partnered with Lower Mississippi RIVERKEEPER® in an attempt to bring awareness about their organization, thus to bring awareness about the water quality concerns along the Mississippi River. We hope that by partnering

with Lower Mississippi RIVERKEEPER®, we can help them reach their objectives, which are:

- Educating the public and community leaders about water quality concerns along the Mississippi River
- Strengthen the environmental community in Louisiana and recruit new activists to insist on improved river conditions.
- Monitor and investigate reported incidents.
- Target polluters and compel compliance with the Clean Water Act to reduce pollution into the Mississippi River.

The 2016 winners of the Lower Mississippi RIVERKEEPER® award are Valerie Westmark, chosen by Ahrend Torrey, and Drew Pisarra, chosen by Maxwell Bauman. These writers were chosen for several reasons. Both writers wrote with exceptional craft, and the work they submitted exerted a kind of power that moves and intrigues our reader. Just as importantly, these writers wrote with language that is very accessible. The standard of accessibility that we look for when judging this award, goes hand in hand with one of our core values—the value of making our publication open and available to everyone.

2016 Award Winners

DREW PISARRA



Drew has been writing poems inspired by the works of Rainer Werner Fassbinder since 2011. He's also somewhat obsessed with Korean movies, Gertrude Stein, and Mad Men. His book of short stories, *Publick Spanking*, came out so long ago, he's begun to suspect that someone else wrote it.

VALERIE WESTMARK



Valerie began to explore poetry in 7th grade English and has not been able to untangle herself from it yet. When you meet her, you'll find she's quick to say thank you, always stops for the sunset and spends too much time with the people she loves. She graduated with a concentration in creative writing and her poetry has been published in numerous journals.

Pre Paradise Sorry Now

(For Ian Brady and Mira Hindley)

Drew Pisarra

A van
A bottle of
sherry. A Shovel.
A driver. A pair of hands.
A lost glove. A pile of clothes. A
naked body. Some packages. A gag.
An axe. A road. A railway station. An electrical
cord. A sprained ankle. A phone box. A kitchen knife.
A screwdriver. A couch. A hatchet. A luggage ticket. A prayer
book. A 13-minute tape recording. A scarf. An exercise book. An
arm bone. A photograph. A dog named Puppet. A stray tooth. A map.
The moors. Pauline. John. Keith. Lesley. Edward. And that's pretty much it.

World on a Wire

Drew Pisarra

This opinion is not acceptable.
Nevertheless, aliens are watching us.
Of that I'm fully aware. I've caught
them hovering below dropped ceilings,
watched them watch me without judgment,
without comment, without ears.
This is just one of life's unspeakables.

This position is not that believable,
not even to me who knows that slaves
couldn't build the Great Pyramids anymore
than Druids could build Stonehenge or
any random Paleontologist is going to
rebuild some Missing Link. Look in
an ape's eye? I'm doubtful to say the least

The facts are all quite simple. The world
went from flat to round to ellipsoid.
Jesus was murdered in year zero.
Nietzsche slayed God's father in 1882.
Physicists insist time isn't linear
yet everyone hates it when I say,
"The future happened yesterday."

An alien walks into a bar and sits next to
an alien from nearly 37 galaxies away.
What does he learn over a scotch and soda?
Science is the white chocolate
of religion. General consensus is
the dullest part of consciousness.
Acceptance will never set you free.

Ode to a Granddaddy

(Dedicated to Ken Weekley)

Valerie Westmark

I pulled out all the old
videos once, carefully
put them in and resurrected
him as he was: dark hair,
full and suave; someone I'd never met.

He gave momma and daddy a
toast, commanded the room,
all voice and class.

I got strangely emotional
watching him there: glass raised,
welcome on his face,
warm & sturdy, already
generous to me, the thought
of me, whom he had yet to know.

I think of the way that love has
multiplied, trickled down & expanded,
wrapping us all
like the way he hugs now, tight & tender, reminding
that true treasure is each other.

Vows

Dom Hewett

For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
In the full knowledge
That you'll turn this
Into yet another bloody poem.

Exit Wound

Kim Festa

They were the color of dried blood--the caked crimson of a freshly sutured exit wound. Somehow, though, they were still invitingly velvet. My open palm grazed the suede texture of its wedged heel and then cupped the rounded toe front. I'd imagined myself in them, traipsing around on my own aimless road, every brazen step cushioned by a lofty platform. Such shoes were an inaudible siren of one's arrival.

"Would you like to see them in your size?"

I wondered what the salesgirl would think if I told her they were for a wake.

"Seven-and-a-half please."

The wedge's insole surrendered to the weight of my expectations as I threaded the thin strap across my slender ankle. They were the perfect shoes to prop up the weary bones of the feet that for decades bankrolled a budless spirit.

Sold.

I forked over crinkled bills from my faded wallet in exchange for liberation in a Big Brown Bag. "Wear them in good health," the salesgirl called as I made my way to the funeral home.

I hadn't seen my father in years, up until the weeks before his final trickle of Scotchy breath. Lying in repose was not only the impeccably pinstriped suited body of my abuser, but the hidden, ripped hemlines of my stolen childhood. An American flag was decorously draped across the glossy casket. Tucked under his purple dress shirt and his Purple Heart medal was an unopened bottle of Dewar's whiskey.

The marginalia of his life edged his corpse in faded golf-outing photos, the still lifes of his boyhood in Bay Ridge, and the bell-bottomed memories of his disco days. Golden banners slung across white gladiolus arrangements tagged his visible identity: beloved father, cherished friend, and honorable veteran.

A recognized hero. Decorated and respected. An abusive, angry drunk. As I looked at the jaundiced little boy photo, the endothermic anger of my five-year-old self at once surged and cooled between the walls of my needing him and hating him. Maybe there was a scintilla of goodness, I thought as I peered directly at the smiling boy in the sandbox photo. And maybe there wasn't.

The only visible part of me was the red wedges that carried me to the first row earmarked for immediate family. I was at once a counterfeit version of a mourning daughter and a phantom of all I fought to be in this life: a mother, a wife, an anesthesiologist. Visible.

Strangers politely claimed that they were sorry for my loss as they tried to figure out my link to the dead man. Slanted eyebrows and flimsy handshakes evoked confusion: was she the "Sam" erroneously listed as a third son in his obituary? Could she be a niece? Even the parish priest--who dished out first communion on my awaiting tongue and absolved my first sin of swiping a scented eraser from a classmate's desk --forgot to mention "only daughter" in his requiem. "An oversight," he later apologized.

The scent of tired lilies and woodsy cologne intensified as a balding man stuffed in a tweed sport jacket approached me. Extending his meaty palm, he uttered, "Sorry for your loss." His polished tassel loafer grazed the side of my new shoes. "He was a friend of mine." His heavy-lidded eyes cast a glance at my feet before they met my own steel gaze. He paused before advancing in the receiving line, auditing the black outline of my familiar almond eyes. My father's eyes.

"I apologize for asking this, but who are you?" There was an urge to undo the oversight. To arrive.

"I am his daughter. His only daughter." I felt the red wedges buckle under the accumulated weight of who I was and forever longed to be.

“Funny, he never mentioned you. Ever.”

His words singed like a layer of hot tar on a gutted, pockmarked highway. The thing about brokenness is that it is almost always invisible under thick slipcovers of silence.

I felt like no one and everyone. Yet still someone. In red shoes.

white pantsuit

Alan Reade

you of the lavender Jaguar
you of the perfectly ironed white pantsuit you
with the indigo Prada bag
and high heels of clear Plexiglas
and walking by some bullish neighborhood guys all
shoulders and pores
in tank tops pulling sunglasses down noses in
greasy garages
and them going back to doing nothing with
a smile and some comment
you white and shining like fresh paint in
the oversized onyx sunglasses
you of the smiles and the driving away past
peeling tenements
more peeling tenements
still more peeling tenements and liquor stores these
of the
spilled
liquids on pavement
of rot and chicken bones and car oil congealed
with flattened black gum stains and weight of
the charmless
dr y- rot wood and piss mattress smell
and kids who talk of nothing but who
kicked whose ass
waiting for dirty buses on a weed-filled corner you of
the sunset
you of the shining car on the bridge you
toward computers and credit cards and
downtown shops
a glow like hope
and hope another product
like high-end bath gel
that smells of the sea—but not the real sea stinking of
kelp and heaving ships and longing— no, the one in the
mind
the one of salt and aquamarine and bright metallic beach pails with
cartoon crabs drawn on the side
clicking claws and playing on the cartoon beach and
you of the bleached smile from a dentist far from your
point of origin and
forgetting already
where you've been

Oranges

Alan Reade

People are like fruit,
But much more slowly,
Ripening into genteel dotage
We don't like to call it decay.

This woman in my neighborhood
Shuffles down my street
With a cough like a broken bottle —
Probably 40 but bent like 80,
As some people are.

And then there is this orange:
A few dark spots, but great rind and juice

I peel it, bite in, and think:
We wait for experience to perfect us,
Then risk that no one wants a taste.

Daily Health

Harshal Desai

An apple,
A day, can strengthen the heart's blips
Which is why, I hungrily kiss,
her cinnamon scented apple-slice lips

Lilo's Musings

Heleen Abramson, MSW

Sitting on a bench outside the Hilton situated on Connecticut Ave. in Washington, DC, I was an observer, this time. What in particular did I observe, you might ask? On this particular occasion, I observed many people: families, businessmen, foreign nationals and many others of varying cultures and faiths. A cornucopia of cultures, languages, customs, beliefs, and birthrights. And yet, in my mind at least, one thing unified and united all these diverse people. Any ideas on what visual clue was easily visible to anyone, or at least so it seemed to me, as I merely sat and observed and chose not to interact with any of these people. Think visual...think easily observable and discernible to the casual observer...

Has the light illuminated the darkness for you? Has the flash of the lightning, instinctive response struck you yet?

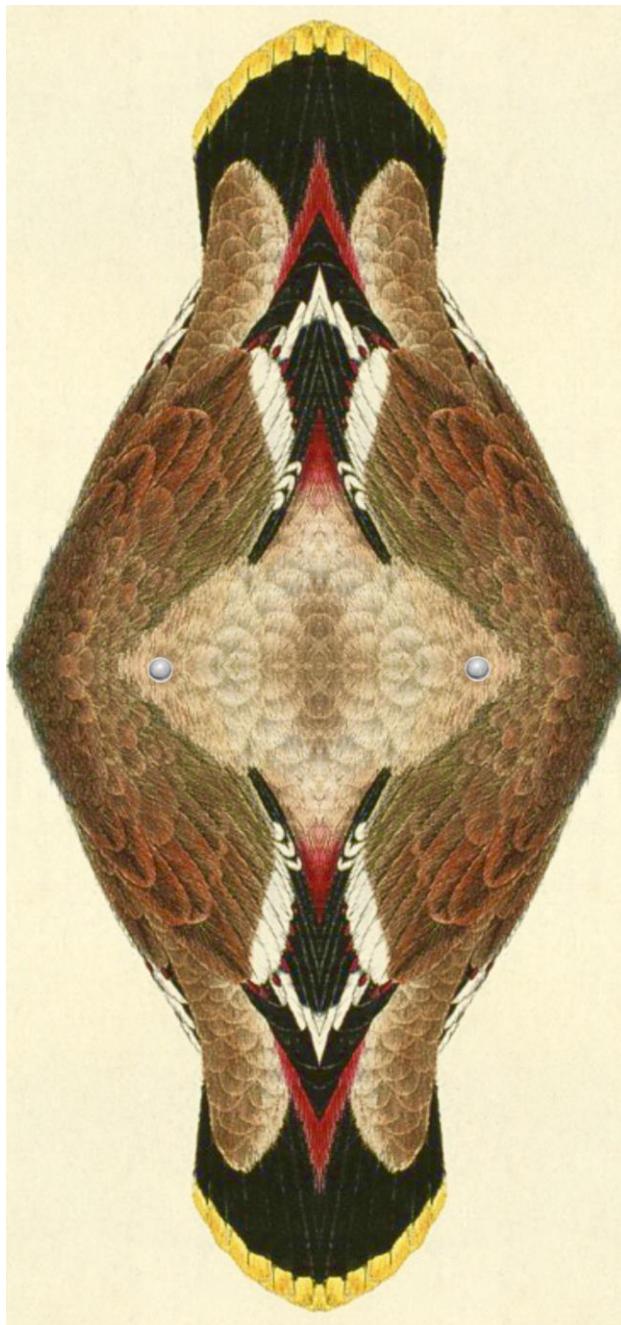
Fair enough, I will not torture those who have not yet received that particular flash of intuition. The one visual thing that I observed all these varying cultures and peoples and nationalities have in common was their mode of dress.

They were all dressed in either jeans, shirts, athletic shoes or some variations of that costume. It was almost as if the United States has exported a uniform for all US visitors. An unwritten code passed on orally that all visitors to America, The Golden Country, shall dress like an American. That way, they will pass as Americans. After all, they are wearing American uniforms, as it were. And so, despite their differing looks, coloring, features and languages, the one thing that many of them, as visitors, have in common with their host country, those United States of America, is their common mode of dress. How very sad, I thought.

Equally sad, in my mind at least, is what the corporations determine as American culture to export to other countries. Rather than export those things that would truly benefit these respective recipient countries, what do we, the US, export? This time think about satisfying a basic human need: food. Think Golden Arches? I think this one was easier to guess, yes? How many countries have you gone to and seen the familiar arches of McDonald's, or the benign face of Colonel Sanders? And, you may admit, it made you feel a tad less strange and foreign as here was something immediately recognizable.

What I find sad is that, among other things, how healthy is a diet of McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and the fast food genre? What precisely is wrong with the healthy eating habits of other peoples in their own countries? Who are we to say that each culture's native wisdom is inaccurate? Thanks for Allah, Buddha, or the myriad of names other cultures have for God. Look at, for example, the Yananamo Tribe, located deep in the rainforests of Brazil. Somehow, they are happy with their lives. They remain completely and strangely oblivious to the likes of Guess Jeans, Colonel Sanders, Sex and The City, and all those numerous parts of the American Culture that are easily recognizable and hence, exportable and profitable.

Maybe we could take a lesson from those Yananamo. Perhaps, we could spend our days, blowing ebene, a powder derived from the bark of a tree, up our nostrils. And, remain blissfully unaware of anything else save our surroundings. It's a thought.



William Wolak, **Lightning Streaking From Your Fingertips**

Eyedropper of Woman

Lara Lillibridge

A glass of water, two eye droppers. I drip blue with my left hand, red with my right. The colors swirl into violet. So many conversations in my head.

“You can’t write that, you have children, even if they don’t read it, their friends might, do you really want your teenaged sons’ friends to know you [REDACTED] at thirteen? Are you sure you want your children to know [REDACTED] about your mother? What will the mothers of your sons’ friends at school think when they read your memoir?”

“Write your shame, write your deepest secrets, don’t try and look good on the page, the narrator must be a complicated character, if you aren’t crying while you write you are writing the wrong things.”

“I feel a moral obligation to caution you about writing about sex. Once you put it out there, you can never take it back. Write in metaphor. You need to learn the value of obscurity.”

I can’t separate the red dye from the blue, no matter how much I want to fit in properly.

“Be a good mother don’t even let them know who you are you are first and foremost a mother do not shame your children it is not their fault you want to write so damn badly why do you have to write memoir can’t you write fiction so they will never know who you really are and you don’t want them to know who you really are do you what kind of mother would write a book like that anyway how can you do that to your children maybe you can wait until they are older like thirty? By then your mother will have died and wouldn’t that be better for everyone?”

In an interview at the end of *The Kiss* Kathryn Harrison said, and I’m paraphrasing here, that her children were damn proud of her and would choose her as a mother no matter what. That it was important for her children to know that sometimes we make bad decisions and get in over our heads and that she wanted her children to know that they could always turn to her, that she understood about feeling like there was no way out of the mess you had contributed to except for suicide, and that she wanted her children to know that they could tell her anything and she would always help them. I should have gone with a direct quote, she said it more succinctly and elegantly. Maybe I should paint the quote on my front door.

“But you aren’t that brave, are you? I only ask because I know how much anxiety you have and I only think that writing this memoir why does it have to be a memoir why don’t you write fiction but if you insist on writing this memoir the anxiety might kill you.”

Violet is a beautiful color. Magdalene’s red and the Virgin’s blue. Just because I am not Catholic doesn’t mean their stories don’t swirl in my glass of water. I raise the glass and drink. My tongue cannot taste the disparate colors.

“Whore mother mother whore how do you want your children to view you if you are a good mother you must never let them know who you used to be why do you insist on writing it down what will their friends think do you want their friends to know you [REDACTED] at thirteen how important is that to your story anyway? And please tell me you didn’t mention [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] or God forbid [MOST DEFINITELY REDACTED]. Maybe you need to consult a lawyer.”

I stick my fingers down my throat and spew violet at their feet. Let them try and separate the red from the blue—it is beyond my capability.

I learned it

Heather Whited

White
the aloe
on our shoulders
dried
while our
sunburns
peeled
I studied
the water
run
punk
when he cut his
finger,
the towel
I wrapped
around it.
I closed him
up again,
a tight bandage
and my own
clutched hand

Hungry Hollywood

Rollin Jewett

Open your mouth, Hungry Hollywood Fill again
your bloated belly Gorge your out-size ego, your shrink-wrap talent

Gobble your razor-sharp hipster sipping sit-com martinis
at the industry waterhole - a new flavor each month!

Savor your delicate wasp-waisted waif-in-waiting
her EVER-READY smile applied with BILLION WATT lipstick.

Swallow your aging playboy flexing by the pool,
still clinging to some glimmer of glamour.

Go on...
devour your own fat-free, guilt-free, low-carb, no-calorie
soul...

Which you never seem to choke on.

Crashing Into Woods on a Snowy Evening

Rollin Jewett

Whose woods these were, I'll never know. My Buick crashed right through them, though;
To find my body, broke and cold...
They'll have to dig deep in the snow.

Tonight I thought I'd be so bold
To drink much more than I could hold.
I promised I was fine to ride...
No greater lie was ever told.

My car lies ticking on its side.
And yet I see not Heaven's Guide.
At first, I thought it some mistake...
But in the crash...I know I died.

And now I'm lost in downy flake,
With no more promises to break...
And miles to go before I wake,
And miles to go before I wake.

Big Eyed Doll

Tami Canaday

At rise: Sitting on a rocking chair in Sammi's bedroom is a doll with big eyes. Sammi is four years old. Her mother is Marcia.

BIG EYE DOLL
(to SAMMI)

Your mother has schools of iridescent minnows swimming out of her mouth.

(SAMMI looks at her mother)

SAMMI

Mamma, I don't like Great Aunt Golda's doll.

MARCIA

Why? It's a collectible. According to E-Bay, it's worth over four hundred dollars.

SAMMI
(to BIG EYE DOLL)

You're scary.

MARCIA

Collectibles aren't scary, dear. Besides, I thought you liked dolls.

SAMMI

I like Bitty Baby. And my maid doll. (indicates BIG EYE DOLL) But not that.

MARCIA

Well, she's a family heirloom, which means *very special*. You'll give her to your daughter one day. Let's think of a name for her.

BIG EYE DOLL

That jeweled crown on your mother's head? Look.

(SAMMI looks at her mother)

BIG EYE DOLL (cont'd)

Now, it hangs on her neck like a bicycle chain.

MARCIA

So, what do you want to name your doll?

SAMMI
(crabby)

I don't want to.

MARCIA

But she needs a name, sweetie.

BIG EYE DOLL

Look.

(SAMMI looks at her mother)

BIG EYE DOLL (*cont'd*)

Sheets of sand pour into your mother's eyes. Puddle inside her feet. Into steeples for your sand bucket.

SAMMI

Mamma, she's talking to me.

MARClA

She is? (*smiles*) All dolls talk to little girls just like you.

BIG EYE DOLL

Look at your mother over and over again. Her hands are skeleton keys, and you'll dream about her forever after this day.

MARClA

What she's saying?

SAMMI

That she wants to live in the basement with Kendrick.

MARClA

No, she didn't. (*to BIG EYE DOLL*) Why did you tell her about my skeleton hands?

(reaches into a canvas bag on the floor and pulls out a sand bucket. To SAMMI) It's time to play with mother.

END

The Tigris

Danny Uebbing

Under a hazy green-yellow hue the Tigris spreads out at dusk. More temperate than the Euphrates, whose notoriety holds tales of sucking away soldiers and any poor fool unlucky enough to slip into its angry current, the Tigris rather sifts in its languor, drifting along debris and at one time, canoes, between slim islets of algae and tall dry grass.

The sun hardly dances over its ripples but falls flat and pools up into one yellow sweltering swarm of gnats above the water.

Near the shore, facing the base, a decrepit frame of a military truck sits tilted, half submerged.

These parts east of Eden, thinks the soldier, have seen much mileage from innocence.

A fisherman drifts into view on his raft. Dipping his oar in the murky black, he plods close to what he hopes will be a more fruitful spot.

About no more than 200 meters away, up a dry, heavily polluted embankment there is a tall gate crowned with a long strip of concertina wire. Beyond this, on a little hill, a Bradley Armored Fighting Vehicle sits perched for guarding the river and the surrounding jungle of palms.

Perez, one of the platoon's snipers stands on the right sight of the turret, his weapon laid next to him on the hot metal. Perez is dark-skinned and even behind dark Oakley's, one can sense his frustration at having to pull four hours of guard after dinner with the new guy.

The new guy stands up in the left side of the turret, cleaning his glasses.

Some time in, a bee flies near Perez and he swats it down on the hot metal of the Bradley. The new guy watches as Perez lights a cigarette then, and proceeds to use his lighter to burn off the wings and the legs of the bee as it writhes on the hot metal.

"Yeah, walk it off motherfucker," says Perez.

The new guy, after a while, sticks the butt of his rifle into his shoulder and leans into a good firing position. He only has iron sights at this point, which means his targets he must line up with a little iron notch at the end of the barrel. He settles that notch center mass of the shady figure of the fisherman out on the river. Perez has a scope attached to his M-4, and he looks over and is momentarily impressed.

Got him? Perez says.

What? Yeah, I just want to range him. I'd say about 200 meters. I'd say about that. Can you hit him with your iron sights?

I'm not gonna shoot him I just want to range him just in case, says the soldier.

Shoot him, says Perez.

The fisherman?

You won't shoot him.

I'm not going to shoot him.

Things get quiet.

You know you have to charge it first? Perez says. You might want to practice that.

He charges it.

Now switch your selector switch from safe to semi.

He does.

The fisherman bends in the dying daylight.

Shoot him, says Perez.

No, he's unarmed. Just a fisherman.

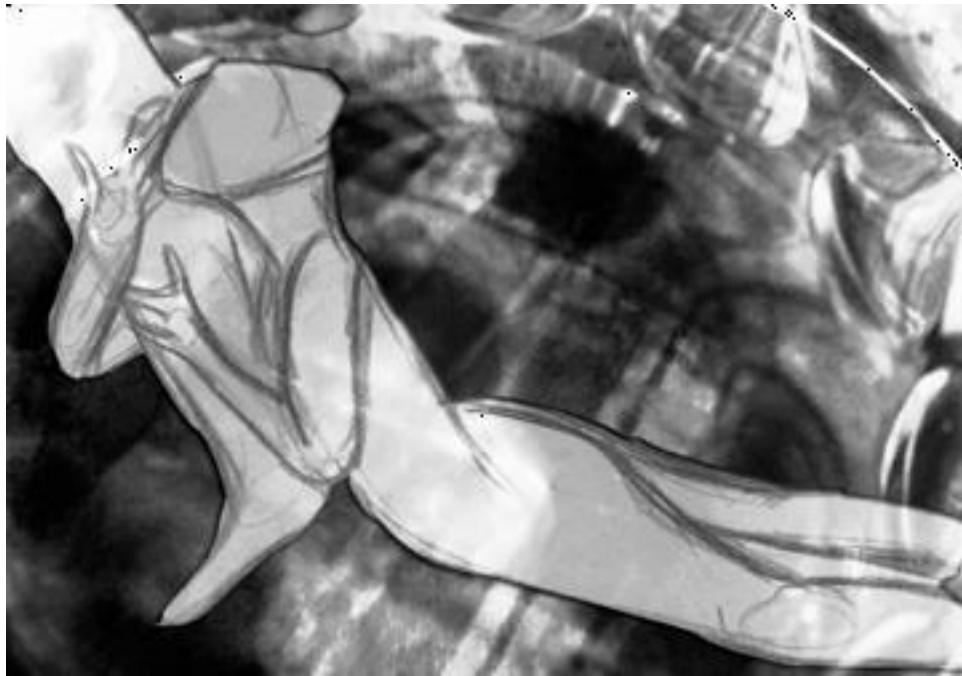
You don't know that. Besides, what are they going to do? Sweep the river for an AK? I can get an AK in 5 minutes, toss it in the river. Our word against his. And they ain't gonna believe his. Make yourself a platoon hero there, new guy.

A boy comes out of the grass beyond the gate to try to sell them some whiskey.

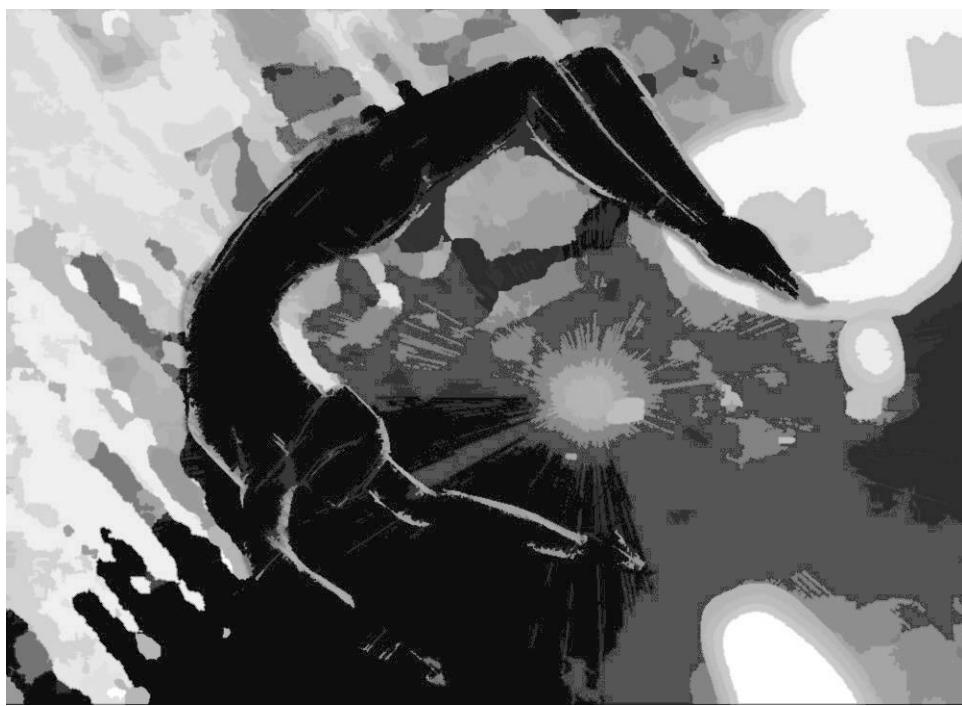
He selects his weapon back to safe and pulls it up.

The fisherman drifts diagonally away, back to the other side where he has his little shack.

Pussy, says Perez.



Chrystal Berche, 3



Chrystal Berche, 4



Chrystal Berche, 5

The Warden

Kay Phillips

Back pressed to the door. Exhausted. Sweat pooled under her chin. Tonight's fight lasted two hours. Bloodless but no less hard won, history proved her victories fleet-ing. From the other side, their aggressive protests had faded to the irregular hitched sobs of the condemned. And now, a hall resting in unstable tranquility. Tucking chin to shoulder to wipe the sweat, she noticed a thin amber beam escaping from under the door. Fury blossomed, then burst behind her eyes. She threw open the door. "If you kids don't go to sleep, so help me..."

The End

spiral note book

Arika Larson

I've been reading and reading the letter you pressed
into my palm that night

cheap lined paper and wet blue ink — I hate blue ink.

and it feels like
a brick in my pocket after these long weeks

a dent in my femur now where it slaps against my leg as I walk on and on and on
trying to forget you.

everywhere

Arika Larson

and I looked over at you with your
sleeves rolled up
red and black checked suspenders and that relentless smile
stirring two manhattans at the same time
with long graceful spoon movements by swaying candlelight,
a little nod in your chin,
and a little swivel in your hips lyrics on your lips

and the dreamy chorus
of that fleetwood mac song drifted through glassware across the bar.

you looked back at me. I smiled,
and I swear
we had a steaming hot love affair in that millisecond

The Kentucky Sun

Spencer Smith

Looking back, there never really was a summer that could be remembered fondly. The sun had a way with all types of people as well as all types of logic. The cigarettes were never that satisfying, the beer never stayed cold and for some reason, romance had a tendency to be out of season. No one ever did figure that one out.

The roughest region was always north, especially if you were one of the folks living on the confluence of the Ohio and Licking rivers. You could see the air wave past you and lose your appetite. A salad would sound refreshing for once and if one of those world weary educated types were to tell you about Europeans never owning air conditioners, you'd balk at the very idea.

Stacy Kempner had to be the luckiest woman, living at 328 W. Lindsay Street, the only house on the Licking River's banks with a tree in the front yard. It was the only relief there was for not only the summer heat but also the damned white siding of every single house up and down the street. A few years back, some boys spray painted a dog with a butcher knife on a neighbor's garage door and no one, not even Mr. Hubner himself cared to remove it. It was one more thing that made the street less mind numbing. At one point, everyone gave up interpreting the meaning of the crude picture and instead admired the colors of red and blue clashing on the white.

On the nights when the cries of crickets took over, Stacy would be out back listening to the Licking River. Her father would still be inside, hunched over in the dimly lit living room, chain smoking whatever cigarettes were on sale that month and drinking beer still thawing from the freezer. The neighbors would be hanging out in the back, taking in the scent of a crudely made charcoal fire. They'd play the Beatles from a borrowed boom box that they never returned all while a confederate flag failed to fly in the back. Ironically, that family was from northern Ohio and hadn't even been in Kentucky for longer than a few months. Stacy didn't really have an opinion on them. They weren't that different from everyone else living in that small pocket. At least that's now the case.

In those moments which became more frequent during the summer nights, Stacy would think about her grandad and the strong German name the family used to have before one of those stupid wars happened and made everyone freak out as they tend to. Her father didn't really talk about him after he died. Then again, he didn't really think about him that much either. Nor did he ever. No one knows what he was thinking about, outside of Rachel Fisher, the high school sweetheart who ended up eloping with some hotshot from the Northshore that happened to be visiting. You'd swear that deep down he was one of those compelling types and he was, to a degree. But had it not been for Grandad, who knows where things would have gone.

Stacy remembered him as hard as she could. Fortunately he wasn't a forgettable person. Supposedly he used to be a writer for a newspaper in Cincinnati and that he wrote only in German. There were some photographs tucked away in a tin somewhere, along with some cufflinks, a pen and a butcher knife with the word Olbrich engraved into the handle but no one has seen it in years. Supposedly one of the photos is the house he lived in. It was three stories tall with bay windows and finite carvings around the glass. The whole building was made of coal burned bricks and it sat on a hilltop. Grandad had a tendency to mention the hilltop when he was forced to sit on the front patio of his house a couple blocks over on Hodge Street. James Thurner would always come over and smoke cigarettes with him and listen to everything he had to say. James left town shortly after he died. That was his only friend I think.

Aside from the house, Grandad never did talk about the old days. He didn't like to see that part of his life like that. He didn't even like being called Grandad. He hated living in Kentucky and chances are he probably hated it the most out of all the elders living south of the Ohio River. But he never blamed it on the Blacks nor the Appalachian Irish which was common for everyone else. Stacy picked up on this but she never asked about it. No one ever did and I think that bothered him even more.

Stacy couldn't help but think about that a lot on those nights in the backyard with the river flowing softly by. It would only be a matter of time before the damn sun would force her back inside to hide in her room without even the sheets comforting her. She couldn't help but wonder if she ever had the opportunity to ask Grandad about all those things that seem menial now. She then asked herself if any of the answers would have even satisfied her or worse.

She had to conclude that it didn't matter, at least not anymore. The neighbors were still blasting the Beatles and now tried to get the flag to fly in the dark, holding the end with one arm and flailing left and right. The stream of cigarette smoke from inside the house was still moving strong and all the beer had to have been thawed by now. It was only a matter of time. Stacy knew there was nothing she could do but listen to the river a little while longer and dread the damn Kentucky sun.



José Galant, 2 | Digital Artwork

Thank you

Holly Payne

This morning, the rain fell on the roof outside.

Grey sky and blue sheets

Warm skin and heavy blankets

Legs and arms, hips and neck,

Skin on skin, and lips on mine.

I want to thank you.

For being there when you didn't have to.

For the soft "I love you" said in silence.

The rain fell, and you stayed.

A complication

Holly Payne

I had a dream about you last night.
You pulled me close and hugged me,
I liked it.
You held me tight and kissed me,
I couldn't get away.

I got angry when you hit on me. And then felt I
foolish,
We both know I'm the only woman you talk to. What else did I expect?

And now I feel anxious as I wait the weeks for your letter.
Because I like you
(As a friend)
And I want to help you (As a friend).

It's hard.
I know I'm the first gentleness you've heard in years.
And now I'm afraid of being too nice.
Too sweet.
To lead you on.
And so I risk leaving you behind.

I have no romantic feelings for you. I'm mad at you, again, for ruining our conversation.

What flowed easily now jumps at the slightest phrase, too cautious to provoke.

I get asked all the time:
Why write to a prisoner?
Why over look what he's done?
Why go in search of darkness?

You complicate me.
That's why.
And so I can't be mad at you.

Punctuation Means

Natalie Lifson

You've always been a stickler for grammar. You never understood why
I left off the period every time I wrote "***I love you***"

I'd leave the phrase on little post-it-notes around the house, just waiting for you to find my surprises, the anticipation eating me alive. Sometimes, I would scrawl the three words upon a ripped up piece of notebook paper to place on your pillow the nights you'd come home late from work. Often, I would type them up throughout the day in neat black letters that fit just right in the small speech bubble on your cell phone. My lack of proper punctuation bothered you infinitely more than I could comprehend.

Of course, you would always respond with a declaration of love of your own.

"I love you."

you would pointedly write, period properly in place. You would make fun of me for this improper use of grammar often. "You know, you were an English major too!" you would joke. "Without a period, the statement can't be held together. The sentence doesn't end!"

Of course, I knew this. Punctuation means it has to end. If only you had left off that period too.

Now, after all these years, after this roller coaster of a sentence,
you'll know why I can no longer write
I love you without a period.

So one final time, here's your damned punctuation: ***I love you.***

At One a.m.

Jessie Kramer

I slice the kitchen open
with a sliver of light from the fridge,
wonder how you poets fucking cope
living with language so concentrated
constantly flowing through your head.

water hits the glass and fills the space
with strange music for a moment. I
forget the inconvenience of insomnia,
lost in the blackness and
my husband snoring on the couch.

INsanity

Jessie Kramer

When my grandmother ordered a
steak at a restaurant, she'd say
Touch each side to the grill just
long enough to
warm it.

Amputation started years later with a
toe, then two, then a
leg, then both legs. She would wait

until the nurse took the bedpan and then
piss the bed, chuckle that they'd have to
clean up after her.

When my father orders a
steak, he says It should
bleed on the inside. His
teeth are missing, though he is
not yet sixty.

I like my steak rare, and like to think that when I die,
I will have all my teeth and both my legs.

Perfect Illusion

Kimberly Ariel Skokin

I used to take his photo and edit it to grayscale so it looked as though he came from a bygone era. In the first photo, he is seated on a log on the bank of a frozen lake, wrapped up in a tartan scarf, holding a cigar between his index and middle fingers. In the second, he's at the apex of a mountain of jagged ocean rocks, with sea spray erupting behind him. In the final piece of the triptych, he's on a cushion by his bedroom window with his legs crossed, inhaling a cigarette. In each photo, his focus is outside the frame, as if he were in a hurry to get back to the dream world he emerged from.

When I look back at these pictures, I, too, feel as though I'm waking up from a dream. The last time I saw him, he seemed like a one-off caricature of the person I remember falling carelessly in love with. His long, feminine eyelashes were sparser than before, and set above haggard dark circles. His men's coat, I noticed, was cheaply made and the sleeves were tattered and torn. And he reeked of cigarettes, which used to draw me to him once, but now made me roll down the window of the car.

We pulled into a secluded parking lot overlooking the twin Narrows bridges. When I was a young girl, I once stopped to look over the bough of one when suddenly, my watch slid off my wrist, into the maw of the Puget Sound. My mother, to spook me, told me the giant squid under the bridges had swallowed it whole and was now digesting all the cogs and gears. I remembered that moment as I wistfully looked out the driver's side window at the water, which seemed undisturbed from my vantage point, but I knew it from my childhood to be merciless.

A layer of pale yellow sky enveloped the bridges, with periwinkle storm clouds over top. I was not used to driving, as I'd only gotten my license the summer before, so I had nearly killed us both a few times on the drive over. This protracted childhood I'd been in was no longer comfortable to me, so I aged eagerly, with a new job and home on the opposite coast. But somehow, with my hands still trembling on two and ten, sitting beside the Capgras double of the man I knew most intimately, I felt again like the inconsolable little girl, mourning all the things she could never retrieve from the beak of the giant squid.

He says: he met her around the same time I left town.

I remember: skipping school to meet him in town, begging my mother to let me see him again when she found out.

He says: maybe he does like her because she looks like me.

I remember: nausea from the shitty vodka we were drinking in a dark campsite, wanting desperately for his friends to like me even though the drugs they gave me made me feel paralyzed.

He says: I am still his best friend and he would die if I walked away from him.

I remember: he was unhappy when I got into college, and he never once came to visit.

After some time away, it is easier to remember the past as rosy, if for nothing more than survival. I stepped off the plane having forgotten that Tacoma is covered always by a muted fog. I'd forgotten that hordes of crows stop traffic to pick at possum carcasses splayed in the road, and

that two deranged men snuck out of the town's mental hospital without a trace. All I remembered before landing were the baskets of petunias hanging in my mother's driveway, but I was short-sighted. In the same way, he came to me in dreams, with enough sweet words for endless manuscripts, and enormous, inviting brown eyes like portals into space. In the present moment, he could not meet my eyes and grant me passage to that ethereal and mercurial place. He wouldn't stop saying he was sorry.

I'd spent so much time studying those photographs while I was away that I almost fell in love again. Charmed, still, by the places we'd been, I remembered the Bavarian town with its ornate displays of blinking lights along the trim of the cottages; the seaside shore where gentle humpback whales sprayed mist in the distance; the bedroom where we locked ourselves in and rebuked the outside world, where we slept nude, huddled like sardines in the creaky twin bed, and talked about how badly we wanted to flee Tacoma and never look back. I never doubted for a second how serious he was, but when I left, he did not follow, preferring to stay locked into that bedroom for the rest of his life, fated to smoke cigarette after cigarette at the foot of that inhospitable twin bed.

Foolish girl as I always was when I was with him, I burst into tears, and he reached over to give me a kiss on the forehead. I wondered how I'd carry on now that my perfect illusion was disrupted, what I'd do with these warped memories that rippled out beneath the bridges.

He met my eyes for the first time that afternoon and my God, it was impossible to believe he could ever look at my stand -in that way, flooded with all the grief and passion and depth that he'd held onto for so long while waiting for me to come home. It was a look that defied memorialization, gone in an instant.

I turned the car around, away from the twin pillars and the magnificent and immutable Sound, and drove him back to his mother's house. I held on to the photographs, but left the rest of my heavy heart in the belly of the giant squid.



Kira Fröse, **Follow your inner groceries**

Café Mania

Kole Allan Matheson

Alarm clock ringing
out
first light

O.K.
let me get
up
dressed drive

coffee house *park*

“I’ll have the dark roast please.”

Sip. Slow. Sip. Move. Sip. Go!

*And now it's on with the day and I'm turned on full blast to dart to desks and race and dance
trumpets ringing eardrum and skim time rushing and flashing precision like a laser on the screen
and sprinting cheetah hunting paper work and heart pounding ten times the seconds to day shift
done*

Until
night shift
slugging with
another

“Cup of dark roast please.”

Sip. Slow. Sip. Move. Sip. Go!

And now it's on with the night and neon light buzz and I blaze through the night like a lightning bolt through a tree and blare at the work like a tuba underwater and blurt blurping big bubbles of progress then night shift done and then home for the night and that dark roast sure does have me awake and ready to blazerace through (what now?) through my sleep time that's what and I won't sleep until past midnight which leads past REM and back

To
wake up
to drink up
another day again

the solace of many a night

JC Mari

the thought of suicide
Is like a mosquito
That sneaks into your room.
At first

It hangs around corners
Lands on windowsills

Circles
The lightbulb
and does

what
mosquitoes generally
do

But when it finds you
When it gets a taste

It becomes relentless

Like Galapagos hawks rushing down.

It Rains
JC Mari

Rain on
A May afternoon
Of the year
2016, 4:30
P.M.
And

I wish things were
Different, I
Wish there was
A breakthrough of
Profundity or
At least a
Woman my own
To go back to
But

There's just
The usual circling
And crawling and
The usual ghosts
Smoking and
Staring while the
Rain falls,

The same fucking
Rain from a
Million light
years ago
falling
as it always does

making
the pavement stink
like dead cigars
Every face's an open window
to cartoon graveyards.

Lunching with the Ladies

J.D. Hellen

“She can’t pull off that skirt with those knees.”

Dani is holding her phone across the table, its screen canvassed with a petite girl showing off a little black dress in front of a bureau. Because I’m sitting at the end of the table, I can’t exactly see who Dani is accusing of fashion faux pas. I assume it’s her new neighbor, the one who sings when she walks the dog.

Sara seizes the phone and spreads her fingers across it, inspecting finer details. She narrows her eyes. “My God. She needs to cover up those chicken legs.”

Her lips recede above her gums as she says this, and I fight the urge to tell her to cover up those teeth.

Instead of contributing to the banal exchange, I pull another piece of bread from the basket; it’s cool and still barely-touched. Since arriving at Markey’s Modern Bistro, the bread’s been my only sustenance.

Sara snorts. “Does she still sing when she walks the dog?” The bread’s usually my only sustenance.

I started meeting up with Dani and Sara when I became single for the first time in four years. Dani was new to the office, like me, and she was friends with

Sara from general staff meetings. Lunching with the ladies allowed me to contemplate a dialogue of diets and dresses, not my loneliness. However, once spring came and the warm weather began to thaw my heart, I realized how little I had in common with them. Sure, they spoke for hours about a person’s nail polish, but they never noticed anything important.

Especially when it was sitting in the same room as them.

I first noticed it a little over a month ago, while Sara weighed the pros and cons of a new pair of heels over her salmon cake salad. At this point, I’d lost interest and let my gaze span the dining room. The room was nearly normal, except for a lone figure in one of the back booths. I call it a figure because it wasn’t exactly a man. It had the appearance of trying to remember a man; parts of it were missing. The colors weren’t right. I didn’t say anything to the ladies about it because I reasoned I was just tired.

But it kept showing up. Every time conversation devolved, there it was. One table closer.

Right now, it’s behind us. Dani’s purse actually swung into it when she first pulled out her chair. It’s simmering like summer asphalt; I can’t believe no one notices.

This is why I’m getting up for the bathroom. I know why it’s here. It’s telling me to leave, to save myself. I’m not one of the ladies.

Before I even make it into the bathroom, I hear the wine glasses falling onto the floor. It’s followed by a scraping sound and a few screams. A leather purse hits the floor.

Only Sara’s words are clear, “These pants are ruined!”

Industrialism from 30,000 ft.

Chad Lutz

From here you can see
the entire eastern end of the city;
everything that butts up against
Lake Michigan. Smog, thick, hugs
the landscape like a sandwich baggie.
Below sit rows and rows of houses,
office buildings, and supermarkets
arranged like a board game.

From here, my heart cries,
"We've turned our planet into
a checkerboard. Down there,
it's the bottom line.

Little Black Dress

Stephen V. Falcone

(An attractive 50ish woman with chic silver hair, high cheekbones, and a dancer's body, moves slowly to Wynton Marsalis' "After You've Gone" in a string of pearls, heels, and a teeny black dress with a daringly short skirt. She hugs an URN and sways softly to the tune.)

MEG

Mm. Still got it, you old smoothie. (rubs URN to her cheek)
Smooth as peach fuzz (sniffs) though that cologne's a little
metallic.

(MEG dances, hums to the tune, does a slide step.)

MEG

Why, thank you, dear. You still lead beautifully. (chuckles) Am I still your Leggy
Meggy, you old wolf?

(MEG stops, holds URN away from her, tugs at her skirt.)

MEG

Is it too revealing? (laughs, hugs URN) Never for my Leery
Dearie! (kisses URN) You always know what to say. Makes a
lady feel like dancing. (they sway) Still got the best moves, yes
you do. (they dance a bit out of the light) Speaking of
moves...you old rascal! Mama knows what her Sloppy Poppy
likes, yes she does!

(Music swells as MEG dances the URN upstage, away from the light.)

-- BLACK --



D.S. West, 2

Late for the Sky

Terry Barr

Returning to our college from a Jackson Browne concert in downtown Birmingham, my friend James and I discussed the girls in our life. My girl, Sheila, was putting me off lately, a prelude to Exodus. His girl, Lori, a professor's daughter, wanted all of him and quick.

Before the show, we had eaten supper at his mother's house: hamburgers, green beans, mashed potatoes, all to the tune of The 700 Club playing in color behind us, Pat Robertson exhorting any and all to refrain from the Evil One, the Great Tempter, and to say our prayers.

James had bought my ticket for the show. He urged me to go, for I was his hippie friend, his rock and roll friend, and I couldn't refuse that part. I was such a friend to him that night that I passed up the joint that snaked down our row, knowing how offended he'd be, how disloyal I'd be. How stoned I would get.

“Say a prayer for the Pretender.”

Browne ended the show with “Running on Empty,” and God knows what he knew.

What he couldn't know, however, was that as we drove the back roads home to our rural college, James kept shaking his head and glancing over at me. I wished at that moment that we could turn on the radio, get some rhythm going. Even the Bee Gees would do (“It must be the Night Fe-ver”). But James had removed the radio apparatus from his brown Pinto's dashboard. I thought it was some religious thing: “Temptation Eyes,” or sounds?

“I don't know,” he said, as he spoke of Lori and all that she meant. “I just wish Jesus had said something about it.”

“About what, man?”

“About masturbation. Then I'd know what to do.”

I paused. I said nothing, and soon the lights of our dorm shone down upon us.

I wonder now if he figured it out. If he ever did.



Henry Hu, **Accept (Walks of Life)**

The Memory of Vision

Steven Carr

Fading in and out like poor reception on a television, Luke saw the waters of the Straits of Gibraltar glisten then darken several times before he looked away. Sitting on the small wall of white stone that surrounded the parking lot he ran his hands over the rough stone as he looked around for his partner, Mike. With Mike nowhere in sight, Luke could feel the panic rising in him, that sense of dread that started in his stomach and crept into his throat, at times almost choking him. He stood and walked carefully to the front of the red store with the sign that said The Last Shop in Europe and put his face to the glass and peered in. He could barely make out the images inside, but Mike was there, standing in front of shelves loaded with small objects, most likely souvenirs of Gibraltar. Mike bought souvenirs wherever they had traveled together.

Luke rested against the glass and squinted at the sunlit white Ibrahim-al-Ibrahim mosque and the white cliffs of Gibraltar behind it. It blurred into and out of shape as he stared at it, its minaret sometimes completely lost in the bright light of late afternoon. He rubbed his eyes and walked back to the wall and sat down again and faced Morocco, unseen but not so far away as not to be imagined. They planned to go there tomorrow by ferry. Above the waters of the strait Luke could make out a few seagulls dancing in the sky, their loud cries echoing much like bitter complaints.

It was in the Bahamas, on a white sand beach lined with tall palm trees, when the boats on the sparkling water faded from his vision that Luke had first became concerned. That was before the trips to see the missions in Arizona, or the Columbia Gorge, or the doll museum in Kansas City. Those places and all the others Luke remembered not so much for their own merits, but by the ever in-creasing inability to make out the smaller details and the feeling that his eyes were being closed without the involvement of his eyelids. It wasn't until they were standing in the National Gallery of Art looking at a white marble statue beneath a white light and it all disappeared from his sight for several moments that he admitted to himself and to Mike that something was terribly wrong with his eyes. The news that he was going blind and it could not be helped came soon after.

In Gibraltar the day before he and Mike had taken a road and then a path up the rock and fed peanuts and apple slices to the Barbary Apes. They then stood at the top of Gibraltar and looked down at the thousands of gulls swooping in and out of their nesting places on the cliff that shot straight up from the water. Luke had not told Mike how little of them, the gulls, he had been able to make out, how much they seemed no more than mists darting in and out of view. But he could feel their presence, that mass of feathered life he'd seen

In the months that followed Luke did what he always did, he worked, read, went to the movies and spent time with friends, and he and Mike traveled, to San Francisco, to the civil war sites in Virginia, to Toronto. Knowing it did little good to complain, Luke never mentioned to Mike that the brighter the day the less in the distance he could see or that small objects often disappeared from his sight entirely. He bought post cards along the way, and when they returned home he would sit alone at his desk in the study and look at them through a magnifying glass and there imbed into his memory those images he had not been able to see while at the actual sites. As his sight came and went unpredictably, he managed to fool even Mike who knew him better than anyone else, and traveled as if he were seeing everything. No one noticed that he talked little about what he saw, but said a great deal about what other qualities he recalled about a place.

There on the wall with Morocco not far away, Luke was suddenly overcome with grief. He had known for sometime the anxiety he felt about what lay ahead, but he had shoved his deeper feelings, his utter sadness, to some place deep within him. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine the straits of Gibraltar unseen, or going through the markets in Morocco and not seeing the faces of the merchants. His own tears surprised him as they ran down his cheeks. He wiped them away and opened his eyes and saw nothing, only blackness. He waited for things to come

into focus, for the light to invade the darkness, but as he sat there alone and listening to the gulls and the world remaining shrouded in complete night, he knew that the time had arrived. He was now blind and there was nothing he or anyone else could do about it.

“You should have come in to the shop.” It was Mike, sitting down on the wall next to Luke.

Luke heard the rustling of a plastic bag. “What did you buy?” “A snow globe with the mosque inside,” Mike said laughing.

“Do you want to see it?”

“Not right now,” Luke said. “I’m enjoying the view.”

The End

Sorrow of the Alone

Joe Bisicchia

Sun,
radiant sun.

Yet,
rain drop

upon
rain drop,

one upon

one

upon

one.

Harper in a Honda

Jessie Kramer

We fucked all summer
to the music on his iPod
something corporate screaming konstantine
plunking out piano chords

In the fall we fucked over our
textbooks, test prep and syllabi
in shreds on the floor of the backseat
parked on dead end dirt roads.

Winter was more of a problem
working over layered clothing with
frostbite fingers we fucked quickly
little breaths of air
white with desperation

and then spring fucked our farewells for us
pushing us away. The stories we tell
now speak of “college relationships”
to hide the fact that all the passion
is sucked out of us when we are young.



Cynthia Morrison, **Acrylic Cubism**

Dry Martini

Linda Nguyen

Follow these steps: Get invited to a bar no matter your tolerance for alcohol.
Pick a drink or two from the menu but ask what the others are having too.
Follow the conversation. Smile and nod often whenever appropriate.
Chime in when you agree. Hold your tongue when you don't.
Laugh at people's jokes whether or not they're funny.
Pay for your drink(s) when it's all said and done.
Place a big tip so you won't appear petty.
Say good bye. Hugs. Empty kisses.
And only if they're lucky:
See them again.
Repeat
all
of
the
above
as
many
times
as
necessary
until the emptiness ends.

Charles Dickens and Chess

Catherine West

Playing chess with a ghost is not as difficult as you might think. Fingers with poinsettia-red nails simply seduce pawns and a king to destroy my world. They do her bidding.

Haphazardly, I shift bishops, rooks and knights to and fro or in a zig-zag motion with little idea of their purpose.

Sure of her moves, the ghost sacrifices few of her players.

Don't know if she's cheating. Even if she is, I won't say anything. Watching her face concentrating on the board, my eyes always travel down, down, past the sloping line of her cleavage to the gruesome, gaping hole in her stomach.

When I smell gardenias and gunpowder. When my tongue tastes sour berries. When my ears feel like they are going to pop, she's standing at my bedroom door.

Open wounds bleed through her pretty gold dress. Crimson soaking soft silk, a macabre sunset. Slimy chunks of chocolate-red flesh fall when she saunters to our table. There's a plop-thud when the rotting muscle hits the floor, a sizzling like bacon in a scorching skillet, then the remnants of her disappear before she sits down to begin her dominance.

When each game is over, every piece rolls off the table onto the floor. I pick them up and reset our sides. We start again.

After three games, she leaves.

No poof of smoke. No creeping ivory mist. No theatrics.

She opens the door and walks out of the room. All elegance and cruelty and blood and long coffee-colored legs.

Felt tricked after our first time together. Thought ghosts rattled chains. Took you to revisit your past. Showed you a grave and how empty your life is without people in it. Provided absolution in altruism.

We just play chess.

After nine games in three nights, I call her Briar. Can't tell you why I chose it, but she never complains.

All she said was, "Don't have much use for a name." "Why do you come to me?"

"I ain't coming to you. You can be anybody."

Briar took a blowtorch to my dignity and pissed on it for good measure. She never asks my name. She didn't want to know. I doubt you want to know. I'm just a man who plays chess with a dead woman. A gorgeous, bleeding dead woman.

The fourth night, third game, Briar questions, "You haven't asked what happened to me."

"Didn't much care." Ha! She's not the only one who can be an asshole!

Have I mentioned Briar has hazel eyes? I probably didn't. Light brown, gilded with hot yellow specks. Those orbs narrow in the most viciously sexy slits. Muted scorching of meat falls and disappears around our feet. "You know, if you're gonna be a sensitive, I can leave."

Swallowing the lump in my throat, hiding the lump in my pants, I plead with her to stay. I want some more. The little orphan boy begging with his bowl. Ready for punishment, but craving anything, any feeling.

Fluid circles of candlelight conceal part of her face. I think she likes it like that, the anonymity of it all. The hostile curve of her mouth impersonating a smile, the small dimple in her chin, makes me happy. Strips of shadow shudder and sway against the wall near my bed.

"Tell me what happened to you, Briar."

Reaching across the table to grab her hand, I grasp at her index finger before she snatches away. Can't imagine the Arctic is colder than the small portion of skin I manage to graze.

"Don't. Touch." she seethes.

She moves her Queen sideways.

I move a Bishop. She takes it. I don't protest.

"I slept with my husband's brother. My husband came home. Found us together. Killed his brother. Killed me. Killed himself."

She could have been reading a grocery list. Her voice was flat, matter of fact.

Sugar. Eggs. Milk. Flour. Baking Powder. Cheating. Murder. Suicide.

All of them in Aisle four just past the pasta sauce.

"What's strange is he didn't kill me right away. He made me put on my favorite dress.

Paint my nails. Do my hair up real nice. Like when we went out dancin' on a Friday night. Then he pulled the trigger."

What do you say when someone shares their story of how they were murdered?

All I could muster was, "I'm so sorry."

"I'm sorry too. I loved this dress. Probably the reason he made me wear it.

Lenny was always a petty bastard. Handsome, but petty as hell!"

She said his name. She laughs. "I see Lenny sometimes by the magnolia tree outside our old house. I'm not mad at him no more. He ain't mad at me either. It's the funniest thing."

"Thank you for telling me."

Seventh night, first game. The evening took its time cloaking the sky in sable and Briar is waiting for me, but I'm at the convenience store covered in blood. I shot the clerk.

Baptized in blue sirens. I hear the officers ordering, shouting, hollering.

I am light and dark. I am wise and foolish. I am hopeful and despairing. I am a King. Briar is my Queen.

I am in love.

I raise my gun.

I am alive and then I am dead.

Didn't have to search for that magnolia tree. I know where it is and there I wait for her. Time is what time is and I now have no basis by which to measure it.

Briar is not what I remember when she appears. There is no wound in her stomach. Her gold dress isn't ripped and tattered from buckshot. Caramel skin glows. Smile brighter than the moon in shimmering meadows.

King. Queen.

"Don't. Touch." she says.

Checkmate. All the pieces fall to the floor.

Learn by Doing

Kendra Arimoto

You made mistakes on

every inch of my body

Over and over

Until you figured me out

Ruining me for everyone else

Cracked screen

PJ Guippone

I am so sad
like I keep randomly crying
she says to me through a cracked screen

cracked by the wrongs I have
done, shattered by the pain
she feels, destroyed by how

far I fell. You don't care
I mean nothing to you
she prods now through cracked lips

lips I kissed with love stronger
than the wrongs I have committed
worse than any back hand could have been.

I'm nauseous, this is toxic
she continues to twist the knife, double
sided, protruding from her own chest

making her own pain worse, but
keeping us connected, always connected
even now, apart, still connected.

Standing Orders

Iraq, 2003

Robert Alderman

“If you hit them, don’t stop,” said the Sergeant, popping white-knuckles into weathered palms at twelve Bic’d dandruffed heads. “Keep moving on. Standing orders.” Civilians, he meant.

“Their elderly, women — won’t make a dent — even their kids,” the veteran stayed calm.

“It’s stopping—Humvees hard-hit, Hajis gone, no fucking trace of that insurgent scent...”

Private Graham shook his head. “No way,” he said, MacArthur’s inspirational poster

tacked right on the concrete wall. “Soldiers shield, protect — nineteen forty-six!” His eyes pled.

The Sergeant shrugged. “Die or kill another.”

The General’s placard-tape shuddered, peeled.

The Misty-Eyed Assassin

Danny Uebbing

Londonderry, Ireland.

Jasper coiled his finger. The Brit downstairs in the tuxedo swirled in his scope. The rain sheeted its applause against the estate's windows in the background. This was the perfect position: in the third story antechamber of a forgotten corner of the estate. Hunkered down in the sweaty, crimson box of a room as though it was a confessional chamber, he thought. And he would not be let out until he came clean.

Damned Protestant swine need their own personal confessional chambers do they, Jasper thought as he followed the large Brit with his scope.

His muzzle jutted out an open forgotten square of stain-glassed window in the corner of that golden ballroom below.

"Jasper," screeched a voice.

"What!?"

"Are you in position?"

Jasper grabbed the cheap two-way radio and turned down the bloody volume.

"I'm in position, Dad," he said.

"Good. They wouldn't let me in. But I have the car waiting. And I can see the target from here, yes."

Jasper's father lifted his binoculars. He stood out against the treeline in the rain, his cheap rented tux drenched. He lifted his flask from his inner pocket and took a hearty snort. Then reported through the radio:

"He's dancing with the missus now, the good lady Wolworth. But soon he'll go to that podium. And when he goes to that podium you hit him, ok son?"

"I got it, dad, just stay off the radio and keep that car running. I'll be out in a jiffy."

Jasper steadied his aim, recoiling his long bony finger around that thin trigger like a scorpion's stinger. The song ended. A group of young people approached the good Earl Wolworth. Go up on the podium for your speech now, Jasper thought. But no, there was a blonde girl in a white dress who looked seemingly straight at him through the scope.

Is that? Jasper's mind jolted.

He repositioned himself and followed his scope on the girl. She took a glass of champagne and drank and laughed, lovelier than ever, the girl he knew. Her dainty, yet in Jasper's view, well-flaunted décolletage triggered in Jasper a certain music — the kind that all comes rushing back.

"Dad," Jasper croaked over the radio.

"Yes, boy what is it? Is it done? I didn't hear a shot."

"No, it's...that...there's someone down there... could compromise the whole thing."

"Who is it? The police?"

"No but, I say we abort...Hit him some other time—"

"We will not abort, boy. Do you have any idea how long it took me to get in there and plant that gun? This is our moment!"

"Alright son, just settle down and focus. Get your shot when he goes to the podium. Hit him and we go home, ok?"

"I'm going to hit him. I gotta check on one thing, though."

Jasper switched off his radio, stood the old rifle up in the corner and brushed himself off. He walked downstairs like he was coming back from the men's room. He went straight across the party to the girl at the bar. He took her hand and led her out to the balcony, leaving her time to all but gasp, "Jasper!"

"Holly! I thought you were in London, acting?"

"And I thought you were going to join me when you finished school."

He grabbed her then and kissed her. "You need to leave."

"I can't." "Why?"

"I'm covering the story for the newspaper." "What newspaper? What story?"

"I work for a newspaper now — I'm a writer." "And the story?"

"Kiss me..." She kissed him. "You're all wet," she said. "The story..." Jasper said. "10 year anniversary."

"Of what?"

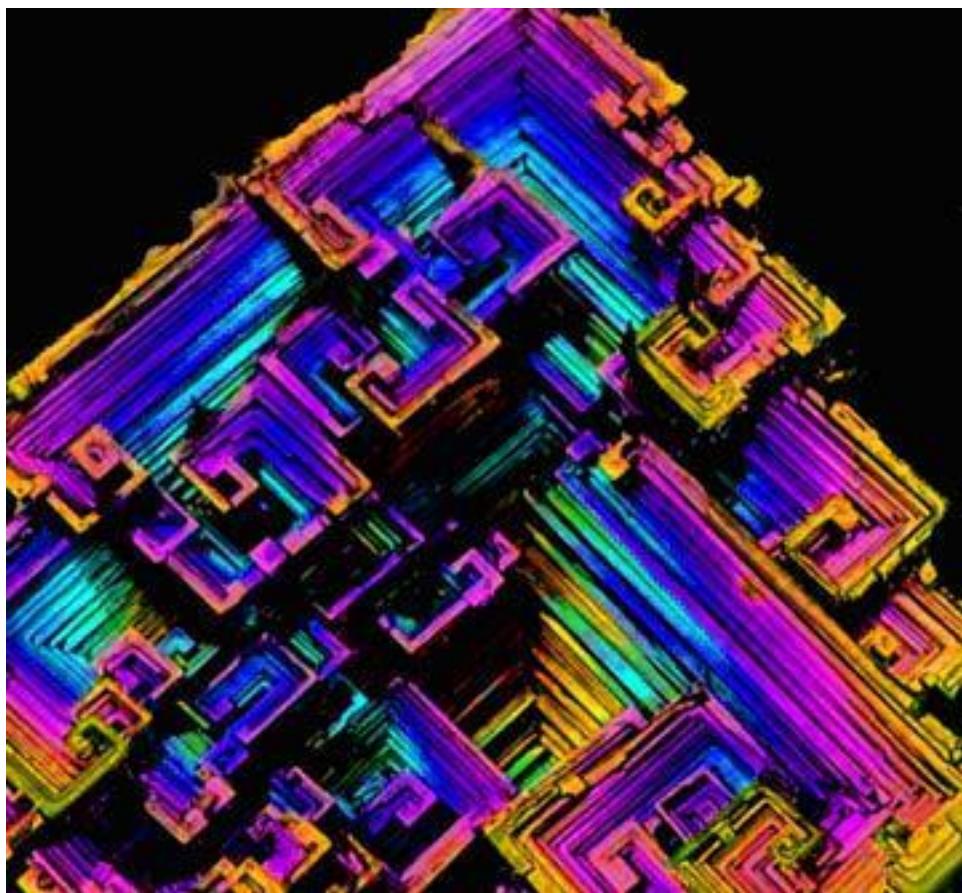
"The Earl, owning this estate." "Oh, kiss me again."

"I must go," Jasper said. "Leave here at once and perhaps we will see each other again."

Back in position, the Earl had finished his speech, and sat back down. The music began again and Holly swayed across the room and hooked the Earl with her arm.

Jasper flinched. The scope blurred from his fresh cold-sweat. His eyes misted. He followed the waltzing couple nevertheless. As they went around for a big swirl, the Earl opened up to him for a moment. This is for Ireland, he thought.

The hammer fall surprised him. And as the shot rang out the recoil kicked up into his nose causing his already misty eyes to water even more. He scurried for a final view through the scope. The girl was down.



Sandeep Mishra, **Civilization**

Contributors

Heleen Abramson made Aliyah (under the Law of Return of those of the Jewish Faith) to Haifa, Israel in February 2014. She enjoys becoming part of the fabric of life in Haifa, especially its diverse ethnic and religious population.

Kendra Arimoto is a Japanese-American femme interdisciplinary artist, activist, and stay-at-home mother/wife of a big blended family. She is currently an Artist-in-Residence-in-Motherhood committed to utilizing the fragmented mental focus, exhaustion, nap-length studio time, and other distractions of parenthood (as well as the absurd poetry of time spent with children) as working materials rather than obstacles to be overcome as an artist-mama.

Terry Barr is the author of "Don't Date Baptists and Other Warnings from My Alabama Mother," a nonfiction essay collection where Baptists are involved but never harmed. Terry is actually half-Jewish, and he married an Iranian woman who also turned out to be half-Jewish. Their two daughters are, thus, half-Jews too. They live in South Carolina where it's crab grass season, which is fine since above all else, Terry hates doing yard work.

Chrystal Berche dabbles lots, and somewhere in those dabbles blossoms ideas that take shape into images. Many of her current pieces of artwork start out as three-minute gesture drawings and eventually get paired with some sort of still life photography and a lot of playing around in Photoshop. She loves to take pictures, especially out in the woods, where she can sit on a rock or log and wait quietly, jotting notes for stories until something happens. A free spirit, Chrystal digs in dirt and dances in rain and chases storms, all at the whims of her muses.

Joe Bisicchia writes of our shared spiritual dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, his works have appeared in various publications. The former TV host enjoys collecting empty cardboard boxes, filling them with thought-provoking thingamajigs, and then sharing them. Pebbles are a weakness, for each feels so much like the world in one's hand and are sometimes hard to let go, unless they are perfectly flat and by grace there is an adjacent sea to skip all the way to heaven.

Tami Canaday is a Colorado native who gigs her life together by working as a writer, tutor, and catering staff member. She hikes for the scenery; she swims for the exercise. She'll read anything.

Steve Carr began his writing career as a military journalist and has had short stories published in *Double Feature*, *Tigershark Magazine*, *The Wagon Magazine*, *CultureCult Magazine*, *Fictive Dream*, *Ricky's Back Yard*, *Sick Lit Magazine*, *Literally Stories*, *The Spotty Mirror* and in the *Dystopia/Utopia* anthology by Flame Tree Publishing and *100 Voices Volume II* anthology by Centum Press, among others. His stories are scheduled for publication in *Noise Medium*, *Visitant Literary Journal*, *Panorama*, *Bento Box*, and in an anthology by Fantasia Divinity Publications, to name a few. His plays have been produced in several states including Arizona, Missouri and Ohio. He is a 2017 Pushcart Prize nominee.

Steve Falcone was born in Philly, but has taught, acted, and directed most of his life in the Midwest. An Emeritus Professor, he still directs a play a year at John A. Logan College where he taught. His plays have been produced as far south as Florida, toured the Midwest, and won awards as far north as Alaska. He lives with his wife of forty-five years in the college town where they met, travels all over the world, and zooms into L.A. seasonally to see his writer/actor sons

and two granddaughters. He directed his mystery-comedy, *DURTY BIRD*, at Logan College last March and is taking a play to The Tampa Bay Theatre Festival for the second year running.

When Kim Festa is not teaching, writing, frying chicken cutlets, or baking chocolate-chip cookies, she can be found in two places: at ball fields cheering on her three spirited sons or at a shoe department trying on ridiculously impractical heels. Kim has taught in the New Jersey districts on Paterson, Newark, and Oakland, and has helped countless students realize that they are the heroes of their own stories. She dreams daily of sipping piping-hot lattes in Italy with her husband Gregg.

Jessie Kramer has a marvelous time teaching composition, literature, and creative writing at Rochester College in between reading and writing, hanging out at the park with her daughter, going on dates with her husband, and exploring her beloved home state. She a huge Pinterest addict, and it is a rare week indeed when she doesn't attempt a new project or recipe (happily, most are successful). She's currently working on a collection of creative non-fiction based on the experience of growing up in a mid-western homeschooling family, and she is a huge football fan. Go Pats!

In Kira Fröse's drawings and collages, she works mainly with oil pastel crayons, watercolor, and charcoal. She also works with plastic and latex at times. What excites her most about these art forms is their freedom and flexibility. At a certain moment the artwork seems finished, and at another moment she can cut it into thousands of pieces to make something new. When she creates works of art, she constructs them and touch them with her hands — she has to touch this.

PJ Guippone is working on a creative writing degree as an undergraduate at Temple University, so spending too much money on "city experiences" is really just training for his future lack of funds as a starving artist. He also likes to create artistic expression through photography because of his love of the visual arts combined with his complete lack of ability in the same fields.

Harshal Desai is an artist and journeys through lenses of photography, inks of writing and creating. He is intrigued by realms of nature and anthropomorphism, gaining inspiration from nature, the simpler life, the yearning for individuality and the power of love. His desire for writing stemmed recently from personal experiences and observations of daily life around him.

J. D. Hellen is a resident of New Jersey who still hopes to find a way to get by without a regular-person-job. She spends non-writing time in a regular-person-job but breaks the monotony by searching for Mimosa tree saplings along the roadside and drinking tea. "Lunching with the Ladies" is her first published piece.

Dom Hewett works in a bookshop at the moment. He drinks too much coffee and eats too much cake. He is from a big family, and grew up in a small village in the west of England. He has brown hair, brown eyes and brown boots. He likes telling jokes. Henry Hu: Hong Kong bred, Sydney based. Most of Henry's artworks are personal and intentional, with a focus on storytelling. A big fan of presenting artworks as a complete sequence/series, Henry usually creates individual collections consisting of multiple pieces, often in the same style and grouped by specific themes, concepts or stories. By utilizing digital tools, a variety of styles can be seen across his collections that match their subject matter.

Arika Larson is a playwright and poet who has a really weird day job in New York City. She likes doing laundry, walking really fast with nobody in front of her, and days where she switches from coffee directly to wine. In fact, her back-up career would be sommelier. She loves palindromes, double contractions (like wouldn't've) and does most of her writing in motion.

Lara Lillbridge loves to dance off-key and sing off-beat. She is terrible at remembering to check her hair before she leaves the house, and only remembers once she is at the grocery store, and so she leaves her sunglasses on because her youngest son used to think sunglasses made him invisible, and it's always worth a try.

Chad W. Lutz was born in Akron, Ohio in 1986 and raised in the neighboring suburb of Stow. A 2008 graduate of Kent State University's English program, Chad is currently attending Mills College in pursuit of an MFA in Creative Writing with a concentration in telling lies (fiction). His writing has been featured in *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Kind of a Hurricane Press*, *Haunted Waters Press*, and *Sheepshead Review*. Chad runs competitively and won the Lake Wobegon Marathon in May 2015, setting the course record by nearly three minutes in a time of 2:33:59. He aspires to qualify for the Olympic Trials.

J.C. Mari: 5-sentence bio thing? No, because it could be used in a court of law. But he'll tell you things he likes in no particular order of intensity: Rachmaninoff, Long Island ice teas (a lot), vodka on ice., scotch and water. You'd be insulted if he kept on, so he won't. Well, that's almost five (i.e. sentences).

Kole Allan Matheson teaches English part time at a local university in southeast Virginia, though his delinquency was evident early in life when he fired his father's gun into the front door of the house. As a late teen he began writing poetry in jail for vandalizing a police car. Now a husband and father to four daughters, Kole continues to write for the joy of word frenzies and the maintenance of his joy and sanity.

Sandeep Kumar Mishra is a writer and lecturer in English with a Masters in English Literature and Political Science. He has published three books: *Pearls* (2002), *How to Be a Teacher* (2016) and *Feel My Heart* (2016). This year his work has been published in the *New England Review*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *International Times*, *Literary Yard*, *Ripen the Page*, *Poetry Nook*, and *Forever Journal*.

Cynthia Morrison, B.A. resides in south Florida where she is a writer, artist, stage combat director, and an award winning playwright. She is a graduate of the Burt Reynolds Institute for Film and Theatre. Her plays have appeared Off Broadway in New York, Washington D.C. and internationally in London England. Cynthia's works tend to lean towards historic content. However, she also specializes in works that speak against the suppression of women.

Kay Phillips usually writes short plays and screenplays, but she loves flash fiction. She finds it fun to challenge herself to see if she can tell a complete-ish story in very few words. She's almost debilitatingly shy, so writing is a perfect way to create friends that she's too chicken to find in real life. She lives for horror movies! Stephen King's *It* is her favorite book but she won't be watching the remake because she's fiercely loyal to Tim Curry's interpretation of Pennywise.

Alan Reade started as a performance poet in the Monterey Bay Area of California before moving to Seattle to create larger multimedia performance work. In New York City and the Bay Area, he created several performances with LGBT themes and toured with them around the United States and Canada. He now works as a writer and producer of independent film in Los Angeles. These poems are from his forthcoming book, *Everything Is On*, which explores themes of life, love, and loss.

Kimberly Skokin is a barista by morning, psychology researcher by day, and Twitter fiend by night. She mostly writes science-y material about compulsive hair-pulling or reproductive genetics, but every now and then she can write a short story about human feelings and how

weird they are. She lives her life according to the Vonneguttian motto, "God dammit babies, you've got to be kind." Among other things, she enjoys cardio kickboxing, rooftop gardens, and esoteric bullshit. Ask her about her Hello Kitty toaster.

Spencer Smith is an American writer currently residing in Stuttgart, Germany. Back in America, he held a fondness for traveling the Mid-Western rust belt (which is where he's originally from) and collecting jazz records. Now that he's in Germany, when he's not writing, he's usually spending time with his wife and two cats or getting furiously frustrated with the hypocrisies of Europe overall. If he had to pick two writers that were the most influential to him, it would be James Baldwin and Mikhail Bulgakov.

Danny Uebbing enjoys teaching at times. He has in the past received some non-automated and sincerely encouraging rejection letters. He is looking forward to summer. An avid Mets fan, he is no stranger to adversity. He continues to dream of the big one and hammer on.

Catherine West is a writer born, raised and living on the South Side of Chicago. She fixes punctuation and grammar for big companies to pay the mortgage. She suffocates her sorrows by eating things bad for her. While curating content for her blog, "The Scriptor Complex" (<https://catherineadel.wordpress.com/>), she is also currently finishing her first novel, "Potter's Wheel."

D.S. West is an alleged poet and artist, hopelessly lost inside his mind in sunny Colorado. A list of his publications is available at <https://icexv.wordpress.com/>. D.S.'s favorite snack: avocado smeared on crunchy crackers, the green topped with thin slices of tomato, canned anchovies and goat cheese. D.S.'s dating advice: fewer anchovies. D.S.'s advice for happy living: find a partner who loves canned fishes, and never be lonely-- promise.

Heather Whited graduated from Western Kentucky University in 2006 with a B.A. in creative writing. After working in Japan and Ireland, she spent two years in Nashville, Tennessee earning her Master of Arts in Teaching before relocating to Portland, Oregon. She has been published in the literary magazines *Lingerpost*, *Straylight*, and *The Timberline Review*. In August 2015, she received an honorable mention in *Gemini Magazine*'s annual short story contest. She has been a contributor on *The Drunken Odyssey* podcast.

