

The English Department presents
the 2016 Annual

Poets & Writers Anthology

A collection of original composition by students, staff, faculty, and community members at College of the Redwoods. We are pleased to present these original compositions for your enjoyment.

All of this would have been impossible without the hard work and dedication of the following people:

Spring 2016 Student Editors

Royce Buell
Michele Herriot
Katelyn Jones
Lilyán Navarro

Faculty Advisor:

David Holper, English Faculty

Graphic Artist:

Erin Jones

Dedication: This year's issue is dedicated to Professor Vinnie Peloso who is retiring this year. Kudos to Vinnie for his many years of teaching, serving as host of the *Mad River Anthology* on KHSU and introducing the community to a variety of poets, chairing the Book of the Year Committee, being a supporter and participant in Poets & Writers, and sharing his love of the written word with so many us here in Humboldt County.

Spring 2016

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Vernon Strength	Squid Digging Ground
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Amantha Wood	This Time

Poetry prize is generously sponsored by Northtown Books
Prose prize is generously sponsored by Booklegger Books

Honorable Mentions:

Donel Arrington	To Remind Myself That We Are at War
Luis Cardenas	Panacea
Max Hosford	Beatrice in the Bower Freeway Gods
Roy Marin	Extradited
Richard Platz	Revelation
Shilo Quentchenbach	Tales from the Library
Lauri Rose	Audacity Auntie Zeda's Ashes
Branson Schuetzle	The Inner Eye of a Sea Bird Third Rail Lobotomy
Terry Trager	Painting George
Isabel Zavala	The Path to God

Michael Bickford

I THOUGHT THAT POETRY (with respect to Dylan Thomas)

I thought that poetry
was not enough, soldering sound
into the circuitry of meaning,
a soldier of the soul's campaign to know itself
pressing my flowers in the folds
of other people's brains—an anti-thief
stealing in to pollenate their thoughts
with grains of my embattled hope;
mining the ephemera of minds
smelted and cast into ingots of image,
a sculptor of subconscious pain and pleasure
peening inner surfaces to pebbled
textures of thought—a vandal-artist
spraying Guernica on your mother's wall
with stolen cans of PBR;

not enough that it could be
the end of all, the story of the story
never told but felt and lived,
the author in absentia on permanent retreat
sending coded messages to warn
the generation next—a propheteer
auctioning the truthfulness of death
with metaphors of holy lies;
giving the ascetics emerald alms
swallowed to enlighten from within,
a savior of scripture, a prompt in the nave
whispering lines before they are forgotten
scrolls of dust—a future-critic
closing down the show before it opens
with spoilers in the final verse:

but, no, enough itself is not enough
to hear the song above the clang of chains,
the keening of the sea.

Sierr Gale
SILENT SELF

Her wrath of self-pity
slapped me in the face
with a silence I could not bear.
Wracking at my brain for a voice,
a noise, a word, a something.
Some stanza of encouragement,
a well-rehearsed skit.
The type I knew she wanted.
The condolence she craved.
And when I was left with nothing,
but a quick glance to the floor
she looked at me with a disgust
that made me pity my petty self and its silence
almost as much as she pitied hers.

Julie Hochfeld
SILENT HOUSE

The girl's parents did not speak
for seven years
after her father
threw her mother
against the white porcelain
of the bathtub
cracking six of her ribs
as if they were kindling.

Her parents did not speak
but they expected the child
to speak for them,
pouring their words into her
like a pitcher
on the kitchen table
or a shaker of salt.

The child became hollow,
filled with other people's thoughts,
sentences spoken
through her
until she did not know
which words were her own,
or if she had any.

While her parents did not speak,
except through the child,
and the child lost the words
which, like friends,
had belonged just to her,
the house absorbed the silence.

The bathtub wall,
reverberated like a tuning fork,
remembering the moment
it had shattered
the mother's ribs.

The center of the bathtub
crooned quietly,
recalling the mother
and how she had hidden

within its arms.

The lights,
naked and incandescent
in the hall,
buzzed with unspoken nouns
like a thousand flies.
And the dust which settled
on the furniture
whispered adjectives and verbs.

The white walls
filled with conversations,
like layers of dull paint
and, over that, layers of grime,
sticky as mosquito paper.

Years later, when the girl
was finally grown
and the family
had moved away,
the walls of the house
talked and talked
telling the family's story,

while the windows,
failed and full of fog,
could not stop crying.

Max Hosford
THE ARGUMENT

Even in the Arizonian summer heat, June constantly craved cigarettes: Camel brand cigarettes, specifically. The issue, however, was that the man snoring next to her absolutely loathed when she smoked. For reasons unbeknownst to her, this had become a major point of contention between Cameron and her. Half-hearted promises to quit with fingers crossed behind her back would only go so far. And so it went that almost every night she would lay awake covered in a film of sweat and wait till her partner was slumbering to creep quietly over to her dresser. The pack of Camels were kept concealed in her underwear drawer.

During the day she would indulge in a smoke to and from work, on her breaks, and almost any other time she was not in Cameron's presence. The stench would cling to her clothing, of course, but neither he nor she would touch this carcinogenic elephant in the room. Not yet, at least. And so tonight, like many nights preceding it, she took the cigarettes with her into the small bathroom connected to the bedroom. June had a routine: she would place a towel to cover the exposed crack underneath the door, turn on the fan plus small portable fan on the sink counter, open up the tiny window above the toilet, and then stand on the toilet and light up the gasper, exhaling out the window. This was a relatively safe and secretive solution to her cravings; without a balcony, such complex rituals were necessary.

On this god awfully arid early a.m, the fans blew the swirling smoke in wisps out the window, humming quietly in tandem. Perched on the toilet seat, June's eyes drifted around the small bathroom. The countertop was cluttered with assorted bathroom/personal hygiene-shit. Mostly Cameron's. A half-empty bottle of teal mouthwash sat uncapped next to a vial of contact solution, also uncapped. Three spent cardboard spools of toilet paper had apparently been tossed

towards the small trash can beside the john, but all had missed the mark. Dried toothpaste was encrusted at various locations on the sink. June inhaled a long drag. A small greenish patch stuck out on the light blue of the floor mat in front of the shower. She made a mental note to examine it the following morning. Rising from her haunches, a gray plume blew toward the streetlight outside. There were minute squishing sounds from her moist feet on the plastic toilet lid. A pile of ash was growing on the extruding window frame where she had been tapping her rapidly diminishing Camel.

As the paper and tobacco burned away and left only the filter, June stood up and tossed the butt into the toilet bowl and flushed. She produced another cigarette after closing the lid. Orange flame illuminated her flushed cheeks. Gazing out at the street below, everything was still. The incandescent streetlamp lighting the bus stop flickered for a moment. There was a single crack on the sidewalk large enough to be visible from June's window. The only noise was the low drone from the fans behind her. A thick droplet of sweat rolled down the length of her neck.

Back in the bedroom, Cameron was having that dream again; the one that would wake him up, cause him to clutch his chest, and scare the living bejesus straight out of him. It had been quite some time since that vision had rolled around in his unconscious mind, which only made it all the more intense this time it preyed upon him. As he would bolt upright, sometimes screaming, it would wake June as well. The first few times she had handled the situation well, he recalled. She said nothing, holding his hand as he attempted to stop hyperventilating and held back tears. But some time after the fifth or sixth nightmare, her silence on the matter dissipated. The inevitable questions were posed.

“Do you want to talk about it?” It came hushed and under her breath. It drove him almost

as insane as the night terror itself. His answer was always the same: a curt “no.”

On this night, as he awakened soaked and with chest heaving, no hand extended across his abdomen. After almost five years, Cameron was attuned to notice the little differences between the way the mattress sagged when there were two supine bodies or only one. He was definitely alone in bed tonight.

Placing his hand over his pectoral, Cameron felt his breakneck heartbeat. As much as he hated June’s condescending inquiries into his night terrors, he still felt slightly betrayed that she wasn’t present right then; because when she was there, at least he could close his eyes and grasp tightly at her palm. He needed her, and he needed her to be silent and let him deal with his shit. The digital clock on the bedside table read *2:33 a.m.* Come to think of it, where the fuck was June?

If she hadn’t been absorbed in her own post-midnight smoke-filled thoughts, June would have heard a yelp and then heavy breathing. But she didn’t, and the sounds melded with the whir of the twin fans.

The clock displayed green LEDs in the shape of *2:42 a.m.* Composure regained for the most part, Cameron devoted more thought to making guesses as to where his lover could be. She had been home when he returned from work earlier that evening, and he could have sworn that the last sight before his eyes shut and the dream took hold was the form of June’s curled back. One mole on her left shoulder blade, when combined with the surrounding freckles, formed a vaguely Ursa Minor-ish formation, the mole being Polaris. Cameron stretched his legs and stood up. Two pairs of car keys rested next to the timepiece on the nightstand, irradiated in a Geiger counter green glow. So she hadn’t driven off somewhere. Amidst these thoughts, Cameron realized he needed to pee.

No light leaked out from under the bathroom door. There should have been the faintest bleeding of yellow from the streetlight outside the window, but Cameron did not notice its absence. He did smell something rather unpleasant, however.

As soon as he turned the knob, the door swung wide, and a heavy gray cloud made contact with his face. Without his glasses and with his eyes beginning to water, he could only faintly make out the form of June atop the toilet with a glowing gasper between her fingers. She was smoking. In the apartment, no fucking less. *In the apartment!*

All the tension he had only partially buried came rushing to the surface. “What the hell are you doing, June?” His arms flailed about.

There had been little time for her to react when the door flew open. The next moment Cameron was already hurling emphatic obscenities in her direction. The cigarette slipped from her fingers and landed on her right foot. Her boyfriend watched the glowing red trail of its descent.

“You’re fucking kidding me, right?” He looked around the restroom, eyeing the towel bunched up by the hinges of the doorframe. So there was planning involved in this fiasco.

Carefully removing the cigarette from her now blistering flesh, she dumped it into the toilet. Then she slowly sunk to the floor. “Do you need to piss?”

“I said, just *what* are you doing in here?”

“Well, I think you know the answer to that one, Cameron.”

“Why in Christ’s name are you *smoking* in the bathroom? In the *goddamn* bathroom?!” He was practically screaming by this point. June’s face never lifted to meet Cameron’s. “I explicitly told you you should fucking quit already. It’s disgusting. Come on. *Jesus!* Inside the apartment. Inside the *bathroom!* It’s like three o’clock in the morning. What the fuck do you

think you're doing?"

"Why are you screaming?" she screamed back.

"Because I'm fucking *irate* right now! I woke up in the middle of the night, you're MIA, god knows where-"

June interrupted. "Wait. Cameron."

"-and I have to take a piss-"

"You had that dream again, didn't you?"

That shut him up, mid-sentence. He stood there, quaking with anger. June could hear the gnashing of his teeth.

"Shut the fuck up, June. Go to bed."

And with that, he pivoted straight out of the bathroom. He stopped only to grab the pair of shorts beside the bed. Pulling them up his long legs, Cameron briskly walked out through the front door. He slammed it, loudly. No doubt the neighbors heard.

Thomas King
THE ABDUCTION AT SULPHUR SPRING

Pastor Edward MacLean
Civil War Road
Sulphur Springs, Arkansas

December 19, 1918

My Dearest Gladys,

I have disturbing news, dear, and I am compelled to tell you of what has happened. A lot has occurred since you left back in June. If I do not unload this burden, I am afraid I will be a strange, different husband than the one you have been married to for the last seventeen years. You remember how Brother Henry and Sister Lillian Hammond, such a sweet young couple, were regular attendees of the Sunday congregation. Since you have been gone, Lillian has become heavily pregnant, and it has not been safe for her to make the two-mile journey to church by horse and cart. Poor Henry was not able to be present for the baby's birth because in mid July he received orders to go fight in the war in Europe. With the help of Sister Josephine Reynolds, Lillian gave birth to a beautiful baby girl on November 7. Lillian named the girl Henrietta, after Henry. I write this with tears in my eyes because on November 9, Lillian was informed Henry had died. He was reportedly blown to pieces by an artillery shell. Lillian was given his dog tags and a tattered wedding picture Henry had taken with him as a source of comfort. As you can surmise, she has taken Henry's death in a deeply macabre manner. Josephine moved in for a

while with Lillian to help her cope with the loss and to help take care of little Henrietta. But I'm afraid these morbid things I have told you so far are not the extent of the dark news. I have always been under the conviction that superstitions are without merit, but I have had to rethink my stance on that subject. I am not willing to consider that there might be something to one of those superstitions after all. I have witnessed bizarre occurrences, which cause me to be more terrified than confused.

Two Mondays ago, Brother Walter Reynolds found me behind our house splitting wood. He informed me that he had taken the two-mile trek through the valley to check on his wife, Lillian, and baby Henrietta. Sister Reynolds was near frantic, and Lillian was near tears. He told me he asked her what the matter was. Lillian said nothing, but wiped her hands nervously on her apron. Josephine told him a whippoorwill had been singing on an oak branch a short distance outside of Lillian and the baby's bedroom window at night. She said it had been doing that for the past three nights in a row. According to him, she said, "Walter, because of that whippoorwill, I fear for Sister Lillian and that baby. Whippoorwills are bad omens, Walter. They wait for the person to die, and then they take the soul." Walter said he told her not to be so disressed, that she and Lillian were probably just thinking about Henry's death too much, but that he would come and tell me to pray more fervently for them. I assured Walter I would definitely pray over the situation.

Last Monday, Walter came to the house, while I was warming up some stew, and informed me that he had ventured back to check on the women. He said that the predicament had worsened. Walter was noticeably shaken. He said that when he had arrived at the house, the women raced out to meet him. Lillian had little Henrietta bundled up, held in a protective manner. Josephine had beseeched him to follow them around the back of the house, where

Lillian and Henrietta's bedroom was located. The whippoorwill was perched on the ledge of the bedroom window. It had been singing while incessantly staring through the window since yesterday evening, and whippoorwills are supposedly only night birds.

"The bird would not leave," said Walter. "I shoed it away, and it flew to the closest tree and lit on the lowest branch, just staring at me." He went on to add that he had went back around to the front and was about to enter the house, when Lillian shrieked that the bird was back on the window ledge looking at her and the baby again. "Pastor, I want you and I to make the trip back there and spend the night tonight." I wholeheartedly agreed.

Upon our arrival, the women and baby were safe inside the house, but the whippoorwill had resumed its perch on the ledge outside of the bedroom window. I went back to the wagon, grabbed the shotgun, and was going to kill the bird. Josephine screamed at me not to kill it because I would make the omen worse. I decided that that was hogwash, but that if I did kill the bird, I would cause the anxiety to escalate needlessly. As an alternative measure, I thought I would stand guard next to the window, to keep the bird away, when a second whippoorwill came and joined the first one. The sight of those two whippoorwills staring down at me raised the hair on my arms and neck.

Nightfall arrived, and I quit my post outside the window and went inside. Josephine had prepared a fine supper, and a warm fire glowed in the fireplace. By then, though, both whippoorwills had lit on the window ledge. At probably nine o'clock, they began calling outside the window. Lillian and Henrietta had been in bed for about an hour, trying to rest, when the house shook. Startled, Walter and I rose from the couch. Josephine, who had been sleeping on the chair, jumped up as well. We ran to the bedroom.

Had Josephine and Walter not been there to see the same thing that I saw, I would say that I had momentarily lost my mind. Soft blue-green light fingered at the window—silent tentacle-like swirling light. The whippoorwills ceased their calling and began bouncing off the outside of the window. They finally broke through, and curls of light swirled in from the outside, down the wall, and around the bed. Lillian screamed as though stricken. The child cried a soul-haunting cry. The sound of her cries remains in my ears and disturbs me still.

Josephine ran, grabbed a broom, and tried to dissipate the light, but the broom merely passed through the appendage-like light beams. Walter ran to the bed, hunkered down, and put his arms around Lillian and the baby. I did not know what to do. I just stood there, like an idiot, dreading what might happen next. The light appendages curled under the bed. The two whippoorwills landed on Walter, pulling on his ears and pecking the top of his head. I ran and kicked at the tentacles, but my feet passed through them, just as Josephine's had, having no effect whatsoever. The whippoorwills sounded like they were laughing at us.

A loud boom roared above the house, and with the boom came the sound of something massive peeling open. An indigo-green colored light flashed. The house shook even more violently than before. The arms of light took on solid form. What they were made of, I cannot say. Four or five wrapped themselves around Walter, pried him away from Lillian and the baby, and slung him to the wall on the other side of the room. Josephine dropped the broom and ran to Walter. The whippoorwills, one each, lit on Lillian and Henrietta. In the blink of an eye, they were all pulled through the window. The indigo-green light was immediately replaced by normal night. The only hints of Lillian and Henrietta were a faint scream and a fainter cry, gaining distance in the night sky. I have not a clue where they went—or what took them and why.

My dear, I was of clear mind then, and am of clear mind now. I love and miss you, but I want you should stay in California a while longer. Whatever evil has visited us, I want you far away from it. Please pray ceaselessly for us because everyone has been hearing more whippoorwills during the day, laughing.

Gladys MacLean

c/o Mildred Fletcher

1313 Lovecraft Lane

San Francisco, California

Lilia Mizer

1945

At last going home
No more sounds exploding my ears
What was I thinking?
It was all a nightmare come true

No more sounds exploding my ears
At the foolish age of 18
It was all a nightmare come true
Sitting in a train watching a bombed town slip away

At the foolish age of 18
The heavy weight of a gun in my hands
Sitting in a train watching a bombed town slip away
Seeing the lifeless body of someone too young

The heavy weight of a gun in my hands
The wailing of someone finding a familiar face among rubble
Seeing the lifeless body of someone too young
Despair, defeat, and pain

The wailing of someone finding a familiar face among rubble
Life going, trapped, and finally death
Despair, defeat, and pain
I try to escape from this but I can't keep it away

Life going, trapped, and finally death
What was I thinking?
I try to escape from this but I can't keep it away
At last going home

Lilyán Navarro
THE REAL ME

Women, and sometimes children,
after donning masks of
careful indifference,
are the ones who usually ask,
"Can you talk?"
To which I answer, "...Yes."

But the Real Me wants to say,
Only when I want to
And not with you
Today,
Ma'am.
The Real Me wants to ask,
Loudly,
Are you deaf?!
The Real Me questions the wisdom of
parents who task their children with
grilling strangers.

The second most popular question
of my existence is,
"Are you a girl?"
To which I say,
barely holding in a sigh,
"... Yes."

But the Real Me wants to sass,
No, I'm a butterfly.
And the Real Me wants to know,
Do you not have eyes?
Did you forget how to use them?!
The Real Me can't help but wonder,
Why is my sex questioned
when Frida Kahlo's never was?
She too had dark skin,
plus a unibrow.

Kids like to ask,
"Why are you in a wheelchair?"
To which I usually reply, "Why not?"
Because the truth sometimes
scares their parents.

But the Real Me would rather say,
My jetpack needs repair,
A laugh is preferable over that

look of unwarranted
pity or fright.
The Real Me has no desire to
waste time explaining,
What I have isn't catching,
because their minds
have already decided.

Then there are the questions
formed of innocence and imagination,
"Are you a robot?"
No.
"Are you half a robot?"
No.
"Are you an alien trapped in a robot's body?"
To which I laugh.

But the Real Me sometimes says,
Look, kid,
I'm not a cyborg, android,
or anything else
your Comi-con heart wishes.
I'm just me.
Okay?
There are times though, that
the Real Me dreams
the wheelchair is a Transformer,
a companion
to help me realize
all of the adventures
I dream of.

There are those
who issue rapid fire demands,
"Do you eat?"
"Why do you use oxygen?"
"Where do you sleep?"
To which I answer in kind,
"Food."
"Breathing is a hobby I enjoy."
and "Really?"

And the Real Me marvels at
their ability to take for granted
each breath, each bite.
The Real Me sometimes envies
such blessed ignorance.

It never fails that
someone simply must know,
"Have you ever been kissed?"
To which I say ...nothing, but smile

Because the Real Me knows
they do not mean
kisses from children, friends and family,
but to answer,
"Yes,"
would leave the Real Me asking,
Why, does that surprise you?

How shocked they would be
to learn what goes on
inside the Real Me.

Adelinea Nissen

I AM WATER TRICKLING DOWN

I am water trickling down
Falling to the ground
Collecting in the river soon
Faster and faster I flow
The mighty cliff is in sight
I will soon plunge over the sharp edge
Down to the bottom I go
Falling faster now
Through the mist and through the clouds
The sharp jagged rocks, I see them now
But a different fate is in store for me
The droplets push and shove and set me free
As I'm sprayed into a cave I land
In your hand I find peace
Then I'm gently set down on a smooth leaf
There I sleep, my fears are over
I am finally free
I am finally free
There I sleep, my fears are over
Then I'm gently set down on a smooth leaf
In your hand I find peace
As I'm sprayed into a cave I land
The droplets push and shove and set me free
But a different fate is in store for me
The sharp jagged rocks I see them now
Through the mist and though the clouds
Falling faster now
Down to the bottom I go
I will soon plunge over the sharp edge
The mighty cliff is in sight
Faster and faster I flow
Collecting in the river soon
Falling to the ground
I am water trickling down

Vanessa Pike-Vrtiak
THE FORMULA

There is a formula to love
wait at least 3 days before you call them back
don't be too available
don't give it all away
your disinterest is amusing

don't show the crazy
don't peek at the freedom in blood
the desert canyons you carved out of thighs
the empty cavalier that tends to run itself down the corners of your mouth

give him more than he is used to
let him fill his pockets with the sand you have saved
from the crushed rocks of men before him
don't mention the men before him

brush your body like a paint brush against his crotch
feel the fire you both started
let it be the reason you go searching
let it be the reason he dropped the umbrella in the thunderstorm
to kiss you
felt the rain splatter the switchblades of your lips
let his tongue be the windshield wiper to all the dirt that touched your soul
hear him use your name like the rhythm of a siren song
feel your dress cruise up your thigh
circumvent the sound of your breath
let it run like wild geese

know that in that moment
you were just as intended
so lovely the world stopped to notice you both

there will be more music than you will know what to do with
feel it rest in the space between bones and calloused feet
flex the muscles of your heart you never knew were there
sponge all the God from his body
every drop
take more than you need
save it when you are out of courage

use the laughter you shared
that gathered more youth
than any smile can contain

Branson Schuetzle
LOVE LIKE BEEFHEART

There's this love song on the radio
With an innocuous beat
It goes
kick
kick
snare
kick
kick
snare
crash cymbal
(repeat ceaselessly)
While the high hat keeps time
tsk tsk tsk tsk tsk
As if disappointed in
whoever wrote this shit
I listen and think
This isn't what love is meant to be
Love isn't a drummer timidly tapping
on half the kit while the rest sits
unused and uncared for
the bass kick comes on slow
like a failing heart
This isn't what love sounds like
So goddamned predictable
My love sounds like a Captain Beefheart record
a Beefheart record that's all over the place
full of blues scales
and organ
and saxophone
A piece where you can't tell
what note will be played next
or where it's leading
Then throw in Frank Zappa
shredding on his guitar and
playing around with some fuzz pedal effect
that makes it sound like a kazoo
having the life choked out of it
Then add a choir of doo woppers
all doo wopping to an entirely different song
because that's what love is like
You never hear Beefheart on the radio
because these plastic people that listen

don't understand love
not true love
not the love that can't be
farmed
bottled
sold wholesale
the only thing they know about love
is what they hear in a 3-minute
radio friendly song
and a 90-minute
made-for-TV movie
that's been cut for time
That's not love
Captain Beefheart is love
and the world needs
a little more Beefheart

Joe Shermis
TURNING TIDES

Tides will pull us outward,
waves will wash us in,
the timing gives us both ways
with the simple question: when?
When do things come back to us
and when do all things leave,
it's part of letting water flow
as we learn to love and grieve...

We all roll down our mountains
when climbing makes us sweat,
letting go to gravity
is sometimes one's best bet;
we scamper up an incline
and fall as things give way,
dropping into space unknown
as work turns into play...

Vernon Strength
THE SQUID DIGGIN' GROUND

We all had a ball at the squid diggin' ground

Just ask any trout
Who swims in the seas
It's fun to be out in the sun and the breeze

The baiters were hooking and baiting as fitting
And doing the bidding
Of those who were squidding

Who weighted the bait
And sounded it down
Down in the sound where the squiddies are found

The clammers were combing
The sands of the strands
And scooping up clams from the sands with their hands

When the catch had been caught
And we had what we got
The cooks lobbed the lot in a lobsterly pot

The waves crashed in louder
The skies got more starry
We dined on hashed chowder and hot calamari

Now down in the dunes by the lovely lagoons
The fiddlers tuned
And then fiddled their tunes

The dancers were spinning
And cutting fine figures
Reeling the reelers and jigging the jiggers

Jigging and reeling and spinning around
And having a ball at the squid diggin' ground

Hailey Veltri Wohlwend
HURRICANE GIRL

Little girl,
Why do you hide your crying?
Your tears are justified monsoons
And when you sob,
There are gales wailing with you
So tell me little girl,
Why are you silent?
You – who have centuries' of hurricanes
Roaring in your chest.
And, with one word
Can call them flooding out
To tear your fears to shreds.

Hurricane girl,
Daughter of typhoons
The levies will tremble
At the Force 5
Ripping through your veins
And your war cry brings cities to their knees
So let the world face you
If they dare
Dare them to stand before you
And not feel awe
Because you will blow them all away

Tempest's teen
The ocean
Has always been
Your homeland
You have spent your days
Making weapons of scales
And your siren's song
Sends sailors gladly to their graves
So let them hear you sing.
You are a ship-shaker
Storm-chaser
Heart-breaker
Who has been tame
For far too long.

Monsoon maiden
You have grown up

Having people ask
Why you devour
Everything in your path
Devour those people.
But then spit them back out
Because you don't need
That kind of bitterness
In your life
Remind them why storms
Are measured
By the size of their curves

Torrential downpour,
They tell you that
You cannot love the ocean
That her skipping waves
And whale songs
Are for sailor's eyes only
Wash their words away
Because hurricanes are born
Over the sea
And rainstorms feed the ocean
So you see one cannot live without the other
Love the ocean
She is yours

Hurricane woman
Take your enemies
And crush them.
And if they try and tear you down
Don't worry about it
Never forget
You
Are a hurricane
To their straw house
And you'll win

Hailey Veltri Wohlwend

DRUNK POEM

Bartender
I cry
Bartender
Get me a glass of your finest
Poetry
I want Plath – on the rocks
A shot of Keats
Rumi on tap
Give me Hughes
(Shaken not stirred)
I need Thoreau and Mary Oliver
Shelley and Angelou
I want to drink in Neruda
Till I can't see the world the same way
And take a boy home
After he proves he can hold his Haiku

Bartender
Get me some good aged Bukowski
The hard stuff –from the top shelf
I want to devour stanzas
Till I've forgotten why I came here
And scream, "Oh Whitman!" at 2 AM

Bartender
Read me a poem
Again and again
All night long
So I wake in the morning surrounded by Hafiz
And Frost
And a pounding headache
I want to philosophize about the meaning of existence so hard
That my friends will whisper
"Let her sleep it off..."
"She'll be fine in the morning...?"
"- Right?"
I need a Blood Poetry Level of at least 0.1
And when I finally go
I will drive home so madly
That when the police pull me over

And ask me to recite the alphabet backwards
I will cry, "Nevermore!"

Bartender!
Give me a poem
I need to forget everything.

Amantha Wood

THIS TIME

Today I am stepping forth into a dream.
A beautiful song exhaled upon a still wind.
Engaging in rhythm, married in rhyme,
I place one foot in rolling waters of a shoreless sea,
And so I walk.
Around me abounds fantastical artistry of memory gone by.
A lasting imprint of reflection, perpetuated by every breath.
An echo of forest,
A fading of sunlight.
Kite strings of laughter breaking my grasp, the sound
Lingering as a tickle in my heart.

I am only one in the dream.
Frolicking in the cosmos, where stars catch my breath,
Lifting me upwards,
Dangling me in ascension.
My body a drape of cloth, undulating with windsong,
Teasing everything below.

I am a child of illusion,
I roam where I may.
Grasping and letting go the vines of seduction,
Swinging on the vibration of translucent heartbeat,
Accepting the freedom of being able to see through the
Darkness.
For all things come to pass.
I keep my body buoyant,
To ebb and flow as it is pummeled with pain.
For I fall often and I cry so hard....

...and then that first breath comes, deep and gentle,
I am an infant in my mother's arms.
Nestled in her rhythm,
Asleep in her rhyme.
I awake to the passing of time.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Donel Arrington

TO REMIND MYSELF THAT WE ARE AT WAR

because they have been waging a war against life

a war against peace
a war against love
a spiritual war
against the black and the poor
indigenous tribes
against the brown
against women
against the east
against culture
against thought

WE ARE AT WAR

through the lawyers and police
through what you see on TV

WE ARE AT WAR

with the CIA and FBI
who murdered Martin Luther King

WE ARE AT WAR

with a set of values that don't represent me
the army the navy
the FCC – yes, every commercial that you've ever seen
is an act of war,

and it's hard to see when your trapped in concrete
but the 3rd world only exists because of the 1st -

and that's you and me,
and still there's death and torture

and orphaned Iraqis

WE ARE AT WAR

with our souls' Christianity
the KKK religious fanatical
red white and blue slaves,

the war that we wage
against the earth as it quakes,
yes, every time that you drive
down the street it's an act of war
and every time you turn on the heat,
it's an act of war
eat fruit from Costa Rica
buy clothes from Taiwan
hear about Alaskan Pipeline

and do nothing to stop them
Monsanto corporate buy-in produce
act of terror
US is terrorist
Monarch butterflies are disappearing, yes,
200 species each go extinct every single day
WE ARE AT WAR
with the global elite

the president don't speak for me
politicians never will
I will never be
spoken for
un-American Human

I AM AT WAR
with all that's failing humanity
soon to be erased from planet, by hate
the insanity of society not real
I AM AT WAR
and I will never forget
that love is the cause
and I won't neglect doing what's right
cause it's easier to have fun and forget
that
WE ARE AT WAR

Luis Cardenas
PANACEA

Inside their very own house, the brother and sister of Timmy, or Little Tim, were found on the living room floor with multiple stab wounds. Timmy was the first to spot them laying there. With an abundant amount of innocence, he suspected that they had accidentally taken a nap in the middle of a hot dog eating contest. Little Tim even thought that the stab wounds on his sister's body were just skin pockets so that she could store more lipstick and bobby pins inside.

Shortly after Timmy made this ridiculous discovery, his mother and father came into the living room to share the sight. The loud shouts that they emitted upon reaction hurt poor Timmy's ears. Instinctively, Timmy's mother grabbed him and carried him outside into the car. Together, they stayed in the car as Timmy's father made a phone call to the police.

While Timmy's mom was hitting the hard glass window repeatedly in agony, Timmy asked her, "Mommy, is Daddy talking on the phone with an onion? Is that why he is crying?"

Almost three years since that event and Little Tim still does not understand what exactly happened to his brother and sister, Martin and Priscilla. Neither did Detective William, a middle-aged man in uniform whom Timmy's mom and dad were always on the phone with. Detective William was always coming inside Timmy's new house as well as the old house where the tragedy occurred. Little Tim thought Detective William was a pretty nice guy. All the police stickers Timmy had on his bed were because of Detective William.

The last time Timmy saw his siblings, Martin and Priscilla, was at their funeral. It occurred some weeks after the murders. For some reason, Timmy was having a hard time finding the "fun" in "funeral." He did not know why Martin and Priscilla wanted to keep on sleeping, especially at the bottom of the world.

Every time that Timmy heard one of Priscilla's favorite songs on the radio, he told his mom to take him to the place where Priscilla was buried under, so he could wake her up. His mother would just ignore him and consume her red pills that she carried with her everywhere. Timmy once saw the red pill container opened on the kitchen counter and thought it was candy. He was about to lick one of the red pills until his mother yelled at him and told him he could die if he took one. Never again did Little Tim feel like going near them.

Immediately after Little Tim and his parents found Martin and Priscilla in the living room, they moved to a new house. It was a much smaller house with only two bedrooms. Poor Timmy found it quite difficult to play hide-and-seek in a house with only two bedrooms. In the new house, the bedrooms of Timmy and his parents were really close together. In the middle of the night, Little Tim's mom would wake up screaming from her nightmares. Her nightmares were all the same. They consisted of her finding Martin and Priscilla murdered. Every time that she would wake up from the nightmares, Little Tim's dad would hug her and chant to her, "It's all right honey, it's all right." As soon as Timmy's father began embracing Timmy's mother, she would start to violently strike at him. Timmy would hear the entire thing. He would hear his mother weeping and the sound of her knuckles on Dad's bones and the swallowing of the red pills. This would occur nearly every night. The nights in which Mom did not receive a nightmare were a Godsend. Timmy's mom would have not been able to survive these daily panic attacks if it wasn't for the quotidian aid of Dad.

Nightmare or not, Timmy felt really bad for Mom. She never smiled anymore. Only cried. The times that she would cry the most were on the anniversaries of Martin and Priscilla's murder as well as on their birthdays. Little Tim also noticed that she would also cry every time that she finished speaking to Detective William on the phone. Tired of seeing his mother sad all

the time, Timmy was willing to do anything to help her. Timmy did not know that the only thing that his mom and dad wanted was justice.

On one regular afternoon, after her routinely consumption of her red pills, Timmy's mom encountered a cryptic old lady on the way to work. The old lady was costumed in red rags. The appearance of the old lady in red made Timmy's mother contemplate. The old lady in red then kindly asked Timmy's mom to follow her into her home after revealing that she had been watching her and her family since the day of the murdering.

But before Mom could decide whether to follow her or not, the elderly lady elaborated, "Trust me, I know what you need. It's a panacea."

That only bewildered Mom. However, the tone in the old lady in red's voice seemed reliable. Mom followed the precarious lady to her house.

Inside the old lady's house, candles were placed on every surface capable of supporting them. Flowers, dead and alive, stylized the house. What caught Mom's attention the most was the colossal enchanting lock on the basement door. The old lady in red took a large key from her pocket. It was equivalent to the lock's size. She then proceeded to the basement door and unlocked it, gesturing Mom to follow her. "This will help you find out what really happened to your children. Trust me."

Mom was feeling a bit spooked, but she was willing to do anything for the justice of her kids.

The old lady in red stopped at what seemed like a coffin to Mom. The coffin was dark purple, despite all the dust it contained on top. The old lady blew some of the dust off and opened it. Inside was a skeleton of an ancient human corpse. The old lady in red licked her chapped lips and said, "Listen to me carefully, for I am not allowed to have this coffin opened

for too long. This is no ordinary embodiment of bones. It is one of the Egyptian's mummies. Do not ask me how I gained possession of it. The case of your two children, Martin and Priscilla, has not yet been solved. Therefore their souls have been placed in limbo. They have been in limbo for almost three years. What this ancient skeleton does is it accesses one selected soul from limbo and temporarily brings it to life on this skeleton. Once the soul is inside this skeleton, you can communicate with it. You can ask one of your children who stabbed them and finally bring justice to their case to free them from painful limbo. You can also say your final goodbyes. But only to one. You must make your decision and come back tomorrow around this time. You cannot converse with anyone about this. Know this, this skeleton can only function once, so choose whichever child is more convenient.”

Mom processed all of the information. The thought of her selected child turning out to be oblivious to their elusive murderer worried Mom a lot. She took another red pill and, instantly, Mom formed an idea, an idea that convinced Mom it guaranteed the justice of Martin and Priscilla as well as their freedom from their torturous limbo that the lady in red had told her about. She then ran back home, ditching work. At the house, Little Tim received Mom with a big hug. Timmy was surprised to find Mom with a smile. That made him very happy and excited.

“Timmy?” asked Mom in a hopeful tone. “I need you to do me a little favor.”

Willing to do anything to unbury Mom's happiness, Timmy responded, “Yes, Mother?”

“I need you to ask Martin and Priscilla a few questions.” With her smiley stare still locked on Timmy's eyes, she reached inside her purse for her container of red pills and handed Timmy eight.

Max Hosford
BEATRICE IN THE BOWER

On a warm summer's morning
lost somewhere between the air conditioner hum
and golden fields of grain
flowing in the breeze, rising and falling
unsyncopated breaths
where I bury my nose.

With the window open, the desert seems almost endless
but quenching waters spurt forth
from your cool rock-face
and I watch as your bramble bush burns
but is never fully consumed
and I am consumed.

Your eyes open, with a vision beheld
my figure bathed in the streaming light,
wielding the angelic spear
to pierce your St. Teresian torso
lit aflame from the inside, some glorious pain
and I the Holy Ghost illuminated.

Max Hosford
FREEWAY GODS

the empty highway at night
is a black-Tarmac tabernacle house of holy
tires spinning in supplication
foot on the clutch and hand on the stick-shift
making fourth and fifth-gear prayers in the pilot seat

the thump-thinking of a dying engine
and the freeway gods are displeased
with those who only care to get to point B as fast as possible
because the Road brings its parishioners slowly and quietly
to faraway places and lovers and homes up the coast

headlights revealing tumbleweeds
revealing lonely nights at eighty-eight miles per hour
but just then another Follower of the Road flies by
with streaming yellow and red lights
and you were never really alone

Roy Marin
EXTRADITED

They anesthetized his mother
and pried her open with a metal tool.
The tool grasped his head
and pulled him through
her unconscious contractions.

The doctor wielding the tool
caught him by his feet
held him up
handed the tool to a nurse
and gave him a swat on the butt
declaring him a boy.

His first breath
was a cry of pain and surprise.
Thus was he extradited
from the warm safety of his mother country
and sentenced to life on this planet.

Richard S. Platz
REVELATION

Twenty some years ago, on my fiftieth birthday, I backpacked alone to Papoose Lake high in the Trinity Alps Wilderness. Climbing to a gap in the head wall overlooking the lake, I sat on a smooth white boulder and surveyed the dazzling glacier-polished granite slab stretching far and away into the distance. The sun was hot. A breeze tousled my hair. I was almost dozing, when God appeared.

“Before now,” He said, “I have never appeared unto any man.”

“Whoa,” I said, flattered and dumbfounded.

“And I’ve never told anyone what to do.”

“Never?” I said. “Hold on . . . what about Moses . . . the ten commandments?”

“Not My message,” God replied.

“What about Jesus . . . and Mohammed . . . and Joseph Smith . . . and all the others who’ve written down Your messages?”

“Not Mine.”

“Messages from your messengers?”

“Nope.”

“Your angels, then, acting on their own?”

“No. It doesn’t work that way.”

“Huh.” I scratched my head. “Then where did those messages come from? Satan? Were they delusions? Or manipulative tools of control freaks?”

“Never mind that,” God said dismissively. “That’s not what I want to talk about.”

“Okay. What then?”

“Can you do something for Me?”

“Er . . . I don’t know,” I said cautiously. “What did You have in mind?”

“I’d like you to carry a message back to all mankind. Spread the word.”

“Well, that’s not really my thing. I’ve got kind of a busy schedule . . .”

“No rush. Fit it in when you have the time.”

I pondered uncomfortably for a moment. “Are you sure you’ve got the right messenger here?”

“Don’t worry about that.”

“Uh . . . so what’s the message?”

“Just this: *Until now, I have never appeared unto any man, and I have never told anyone what to do.*”

“Ah . . . like you were saying.”

“Yes.”

“Seems simple enough.”

“Can you repeat it back?”

“Don’t know why not,” I said. ““Until now . . . You have never appeared unto any man . . . and . . . er . . . You’ve never told anybody what to do . . .””

“Close enough. You’ll do it, then?”

“What’s the . . . ah . . . time frame on this?” I asked, postponing commitment.

“Your choice. Okay? No time limit.”

“Well . . . just how am I supposed to spread this message?”

“Again, your choice. You’ll do it?”

I sighed. “I guess so. No one’s going to believe me, though. I suppose You know that.”

“I know everything.”

“Why bother then?”

“That’s not what I came to reveal to you.” He began to *fade*. “Do it on faith.”

“Wait a second,” I said, standing, dizzy in the blinding sunlight. “Is that it?”

“That’s it.” His empty voice whisked across the sepulchral white stone. I could see the ragged spires of Sawtooth Peak manifesting through His dissolving form.

I shouted, “Will I be seeing You again?”

With the timbre of wind rustling through tall grass, I believe I heard Him say, “No one will be seeing Me again.” And He was gone.

So that’s it. That’s my message. Or rather God’s message. Take it or leave it. I’ve done my job.

Shilo Quetchenbach
TALES FROM THE LIBRARY

From the circulation desk,
I watched them.
Some passed silently by, like ships in the night;
Others had questions, problems;
They always thought I could help them.
Can I help you?

Through lazy afternoons,
I watched them.
I catalogued their quirks.
I imagined their stories.
I gave them names.
Like:

The purple girl.
She looked normal, really.
Like anyone.
Her dress, socks, backpack, keychain, hair –
Normal. Except –
Purple.
Everything
Was
Purple.

The old man, leaning on his cane,
Humming along to silent music,
Earbuds snaking from his ears to
The ipod, in his shirt pocket,
Just like a teenager.

The urgent request:
Quick! I need a plastic bag!
I spilled slaw all over my backpack!
I cringed,
And hoped there were no library books in it.

The bandit (so I named him):
He didn't steal anything, so far as I know, but –
He stalked through the lobby, black trench coat billowing,
Cowboy hat jammed on his head; red bandana 'round his neck –
Escaped from some old Western.

The man who couldn't return his books;
He'd taken them boating, on vacation, in the Gulf.
Now they were with the boat –
 At the bottom of the sea;
 Entertaining the fish.

The man without his ID;
He'd ruined it, he said,
 Opening a door, in Galveston, Texas.
He'd been locked out of the house,
With his mom,
His 90-year-old grandmother trapped inside.
And all I could think was,
 I wish I could do that.
 But he still couldn't check out books,
 Without it.

The stoned dude who just wanted to chat,
Repeating himself often,
Enthusiasing about watermelon,
Ignoring my supervisor's glares;
Insisting I fist bump him –
 I did, rolling my eyes –
 Before he'd go away.

The bitter, disillusioned grad student,
Scattering pearls of what he must have thought were wisdom:
 I'm a gangster!
 Grad school is hard!
 The secret is –
 He paused to look around,
 Grinned;
 Don't read everything.

She picked the book up off her table and then set it down again. Sighing she turned toward the door. Out of the corner of her eye she saw her easy chair. It looked comfortable and serene, a piece of home that she tried not to see as a traitor for so easily settling into its new surroundings. Or was it a traitor? She could swear it was whispering to her, ‘Come to me woman and I’ll take you away from this place.’ With a defiant twist of her foot, she spun back to the table. The spin nearly threw her, but she caught the edge of the table, and sorting herself out, she picked up the book. It was a mystery, a good one, an Agatha Christie she hadn’t read in years. Cautiously, the near slip reminding her what a disaster a broken hip would be at her age, she headed toward the chair. Halfway there she stopped, sighed, and turned back to the table. Remembering Clara’s words from last night, “Mom, you have to socialize, I can’t be your only friend. Go play bingo, it’ll be fun,” she set the book gently down on the table and giving it a little ‘see you later’ tap, headed resolutely towards the door of the apartment.

Stepping into the hallway, she took a deep breath and turned right towards the dining room. The hallway was painted a bland non-offensive apricot, and the pictures on the wall were determinedly cheerful and as bland as the walls. No one could ever be offended by them – nor could anyone ever be truly moved by them. They made Jean long for the brilliant reds and greens of the Gauguin reproductions hanging in her sun-room. She had a brief fantasy of sabotage but knew the plan was stillborn even as it came to mind. Who would drive her home to get the pictures? Who would help her switch them out? Certainly not her practical Clara.

Coming up the hallway toward Jean was an attendant pushing another resident who rode, head hanging forward, in a hot pink wheelchair. The attendant's smile was genuine, "Mrs. Wright, so nice to see you out and about. Going to join us for bingo today?"

The woman in the wheelchair also smiled. Disabled from a stroke half, her face drooped downward, making the smile into a twisted Quasimoto sort of thing. A thin line of saliva dribbled from the soft corner of her sagging mouth. She struggled with the words, "Good day to start, double points today."

Jean smiled back. They were nice people. She hoped they would not see the smile for what it was, a weak attempt to disguise dismay tinged with fear, "I...I forgot something" she said, and turning back she fled into the relative safety of her own small apartment and its "linen" colored walls. Like the apricot of the hallways, it was a color picked by a corporation because it was sure to neither offend nor truly delight anyone.

Her back to the door, breathing heavily with an emotion she refused to name, she reminded herself it had been her own idea to move to *Oak Village Active Retirement and Assisted Living Estates*. Of course, the children had been supportive and, she suspected, quietly ecstatic that they hadn't had to force the issue. It was losing the driver's license that had made it clear to Jean she could no longer live alone, not without serious imposition on her friends and family. And that she couldn't, wouldn't do. That would have hurt worse than the diagnosis of dementia.

Still, how Clara could think she would *ever* want to play bingo was beyond her. She was a solitary intellectual creature; she had always been a solitary creature, and even in elementary school she had been considered a stuck-up little loner. People annoyed her with their banalities, and small talk made her antsy to be somewhere else. Her pleasures were books not parties.

Crossing the undersized room, Jean sat heavily in the easy chair and gazed out the window toward the outside world. Looking down at the grocery store parking lot, she tracked the comings and goings of women chasing two-year-olds and men pushing carts filled with beer and pizzas. Feeling the flat innocuous world of *Oak Village Estates* pressing into her heart, Jean imagined where all those young mothers and busy single men would be in another 50 years. When she called tonight, Clara would be disappointed with her faint-heartedness, but Clara could be damned. Her mouth set in a thin line, Jean reached for her Agatha Christie. Just because she was old did not mean she would surrender herself without a fight.

Lauri Rose
AUNTIE ZEDA'S ASHES

There was no use procrastinating longer than she already had. The task was not going to go away. She would have loved to put this off, and off, and off, but there was only so long the post office would hold a package. Her father should have been coming with her, but true to form, he had called early that morning to say a business deal was coming through and would she mind terribly going alone. It would not have mattered if she said the truth, that, yes, she minded terribly; he would just not have shown up. She contemplated not going herself, just letting the package languish there on the cold post office shelf until they sent it back. But, in a moment of pity, or maybe just weakness, she had promised her Aunt Zeda that she'd be responsible for the ashes. If none of the family would help, then she would just have to quell her queasiness and do it alone. The problem being, she didn't like her aunt—no one did. Zeda had been a mean ugly-hearted woman who lived alone most of her miserly, crabbed existence. Janice definitely felt put upon.

The package was just a smallish white box with blue and red priority-mail stickers sealing the corners. A small label on the side said, "Armstrong Family, Ltd." Not even the word "crematorium" to alert people to be respectful. Janice had no idea what she had expected, something draped in black?

Hesitating only a moment, Janice pulled the package toward herself. As she lifted it off the counter, she found it was lighter than she'd expected but still had a certain heft to it. Involuntarily a thought rose in her mind, "So this is what's left of a life?" She jounced the box in her hands feeling the weight of it. Janice was 52, the youngest of all the cousins; in a short 30 or so years when she was gone there would be no memories of her aunt left in the world. It

would be as though her aunt had never existed. And, thought Janice, remembering a certain unpleasantness about a broken teacup, that might not be all bad.

The small square box sitting on the passenger's seat of her Honda Civic looked so inconsequential, just another box. She thought it should be pulsating, or radiating or ... something. Surely it should be more demanding of attention than this plain white box; after all, there was a dead person in it. Or at least the more substantial parts of a dead person. Inside the package Janice knew there would be another box, a plastic one. No one had wanted to pay extra for an urn. Janice's father had said, "She's dead, she won't care. Why waste money?" Janice imagined the box inside must be black. And what would she do with that box when the ashes were gone? Could you just throw something like that in the recycling? What would the sorters at the Center think if they found out they were handling something coated with the last microscopic bits of a person? Was it even legal? Would she have to wait for a HazMat day? Once again, her aunt was causing her problems.

Later, much later, after the box had moved from a closet, to the garage and back to a closet, Janice's neighbor Kendall would convince her to use the ashes as fertilizer for some daffodils. It worked better than either expected. The daffodils were the brightest and loveliest Janice had ever grown. This made Janice wonder if her aunt's cold-heartedness had been a ruse. Or maybe her aunt was trying to apologize. Even if it was just the extra calcium, the daffodils made Janice feel just the littlest bit ashamed.

Branson Schuetzle

THE INNER EYE OF A SEA BIRD

All the churches are closed
and I'm walking along the beach
under the shadow of an overhead albatross
and all the churches are closed
The cigarettes in my coat are stale
Leftover from before I stopped smoking again
and before I started again
and before I quit but didn't really mean it
and all the churches are closed
I flick the bic
but it's too windy for the cigarette to catch
and I curse God
and all the churches are closed
I can hear the notes of poorly tuned guitar in the distance
and I follow it until I come across a lonesome vagrant
fretting with dirty calloused fingertips
singing out to whomever will listen
but nobody cares for him
and all the churches
are closed
So I reach in my pocket
to fetch him a bill
but I realize that I'm broke
so I say something along the lines of
"Sorry."
but I don't really mean it
because I'm beginning to loathe the guitarist
and his rendition of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow"
so I click my heels
and I close my eyes
and I wish myself home
and when I open them
I'm still standing in the same place
and the guitarist is staring up at me
and his guitar is still out of tune
and I think I feel a lump in my lung
and the albatross followed me all this way
and all the churches are closed

Branson Schuetzle

THIRD RAIL LOBOTOMY

Keep the pigeon-toed pansies away
from the kitty petting
fun loving check out clerk
With her badge of honor that spells out her
name, age, sex, orientation, occupation, social security, blood type and party affiliation
Don't let her remember what the big bright orb in the clouds
feels like when the rays
cast down upon her baby soft skin
Remind her that the sun
gives you cancer and it's safer indoors
Keep prescribing the kids happy-go-lucky pills
and gotta-keep-up-your-gpa pills
so that their parents don't go grey
at such a young age
Keep them pretty
but keep telling them to be prettier
Tell them that they can be as pretty
as the blushing airbrushed beauty
that lives in the magazine rack
near the checkout line
The airbrushed beauty that
laughs at your alligator skin
and your shit credit score
Never stop running
Never give up
Not until your heart bursts
so we can sell you some long live pills
to keep your clock springs oiled
so you can keep on running
until something else inevitably breaks
Maybe one day you can be the airbrushed beauty
lounging in the checkout line
laughing at the credit scores of all the
deadbeats you went to highschool with
That's how you know you've made it
That's how you know you've won
When the deadbeat assholes from Lawndale are beating down your door
Just to catch a glimpse
Just to have a taste
of what it must be like
to be imbued with such magic
But they don't realize that the magic

exists inside a realm
that no person can touch
Not even God can feel the magic
that resonates from within
the airbrushed beauty
with silicone upholstery
and a smile that never creases
never cracks under the pressure
of a coked-up heart that's ready to burst
and rains down acid upon you all
All the queens of Castro
couldn't make the streets of 'Frisco glisten like her
All the pills in the world
couldn't keep this corpse a'walkin

Terry Trager
PAINTING GEORGE

Pearl's hands trembled as she carefully arranged the paintbrushes in a tidy row. She liked for things to be tidy, with everything in its place. An octogenarian in her twilight years, her vision was severely fading; and yet, she could still make out some colors. Her favorites were vibrant and bold and expressed volumes more than any words could construe.

She peered through the lenses of her prescription spectacles at the loving face of her husband, George. He was sitting for her again in front of a giant picture window through which you could see the blossoms of the cherry and apple orchards coating the ground in shades of pink and white. This was to be yet another portrait of him, not that she minded. George was the only person patient enough to sit long intervals of time for her and look cheerful doing it. Thus, he became her favorite subject.

Additional to her failing vision and trembling hands, she took long periods of time to decide what colors to use and to study the light and shadows. Sometimes it was frustrating not being able to see as well as she used to. Nevertheless, she had to paint. In her breast stirred an aching need no other activity would quell.

“Now, Pearl, I'm sure whichever color you pick, it will be lovely,” George's smooth, deep voice reassured her. She smiled her appreciation, finally settling for Hansa yellow and Quinacridone red. She mixed the acrylic colors together with her fine nylon bristles, adding a gloss medium. “Special sauce,” she called it. It would keep the acrylic from drying too quickly. She used to work in oils, but she was now so aged that there was an actual chance that she would pass away in her sleep while waiting for a background to dry. The gloss medium provided a happy middle ground. Now, she was working with a bright tangerine color, and she added just a

touch of Mars black and a touch of Titanium white until she achieved his specific complexion. She laid the paint down purposefully, blending the shades with the brush and smoothing away mistakes with her fingers. She continued working like this for a time, composing all of the values of his skin until most of his face was constructed.

Pearl sat back and studied her painting. She could hear George snoring softly in his burgundy armchair. She breathed deeply, recalling the very first time she had seen him.

He had been slumped over, much as he was, now, with a book open on his lap, face down. The book was *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Pearl saw that there were no other copies on the shelf, and she needed that book for an English paper she was writing. Wincing, she deftly commenced the extraction of the book from the sleeping man's lap, undetected. Or, so she had thought.

“In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice.” George spoke the quote to Pearl's back while she was trying to sneak away. Realizing she'd failed in her endeavor, Pearl turned around very slowly, procrastinating the moment she would meet his accusatory gaze. However, when their eyes met for the first time, his expression was soft, bemused.

“Trying to steal my book,” he teased, causing Pearl to turn red around her neck and ears. He continued in a sultry tone, “Tsk, tsk. I shall forgive you. On one condition. Come to dinner with me, tomorrow night.” His bright green eyes danced with mischief as a smirk played across his lips. How could she possibly refuse an invitation like that? He wasn't conventionally attractive, but he had those eyes and a grin that made her heart flutter.

Pearl went on that date and many more with George. That had been sixty years ago. To Pearl, it could have been yesterday. George was known to flirt, but he was faithful. Neither of

them had ever wanted for anything – nor anyone – more.

She spoke softly to herself as she studied her progress on the canvas. “I’ve been studying your face so closely for so long, I could probably paint it even if you weren’t here.” She chuckled.

George cupped his hand around his ear. “Come again, my love?”

Instead of repeating herself, she just looked over at him and said, “I love you.”

He blushed. As audacious as George was known to be, somehow she could still call his heart into ecstasy. “Aw, shucks, baby. I love you, too.” He opened his frail arms to her. “C’mere, let’s have a kiss.”

“Shush, you! I need to keep working.” She grinned at him coyly, and then she painted a cerulean shaded book on George’s lap.

Pearl hummed sweetly to herself as she painted. To make the composition more interesting, she added a wine glass on the cherry wood end table next to George. She modeled it after the wine glasses at the French restaurant they had gone to on their first date. She remembered that the escargot had been rubbery and bland; it tasted of apathy.

Looking across the table at her date, she noticed George fingering the rim of his glass while leering at her, declaring, “Your breasts would fit perfectly into these.” She gasped audibly, but she quickly composed herself. *The nerve*, she thought. Secretly, her heart raced with passion.

Taking a sip of the red zinfandel, Pearl girded herself. Narrowing her eyes, she responded, “Darling, please. They’re much more your size, wouldn’t you say?”

George almost choked on his drink. He searched her grey-hazel eyes for a smile. After a short time, she produced it, however grudgingly. He beamed back at her.

“I’m enjoying this conversation *exceedingly*,” he proclaimed, reaching for her from across

the table, and time itself. They found one another's banter endearing and would often enjoy bouts of verbal sparring. Conversations echoed across the years of her memories, haunting, comforting, and perfect.

Suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Mrs. Lumley?" Yanked back into the present, Pearl turned with a start, but it was just her nurse coming to check on her. Her young, kind face smiled down at Pearl. "Mrs. Lumley? I've been trying to get your attention for some time, now. Are you ready for some lunch?"

Pearl grimaced. "No, thank you, Kate. No appetite today."

Kate squeezed Pearl's shoulder ever so gently. "That's all right, Mrs. Lumley. Maybe in an hour or so? Say, what a magnificent piece you have here! Just look at that." Kate leaned closer, genuinely admiring the subtle details and nuances of the painting.

"Well, my George is a fantastic model. Aren't you, dear?"

He continued to snore and sputter in his chair. His soft whiskers rustled, and he murmured in his sleep.

"That's lovely, Mrs. Lumley." Pearl thought she detected a hint of sadness in her voice. She dismissed it.

"Say, I've got an idea. Can I take a picture of you and your painting?"

"That would be wonderful. I'd like that very much," said Pearl, adjusting her seat and position until she was facing Kate. Her painting of George was visible over her shoulder. "Make sure you get George in the picture, too."

"Of course. Everyone, smile!" Kate held up her phone and snapped a picture. She then turned the screen around to show Pearl.

Pearl's smile gradually began to decay as an agonizing awareness unfolded in her mind.

She could see herself sitting there, posed, beaming radiantly, holding up her brushes like a fan across her chest. Her painting of George was just over her left shoulder. Over her right shoulder, was George's empty chair.

The memories which time had erased seeped into her skull like maggots. He could have been sleeping. But he wasn't.

Pearl dropped the phone and fell into Kate's arms. She allowed herself to be cradled as she softly began to cry. She stared vacantly at the empty chair, and imagined that it was George's arms around her.

Isabel Zavala
THE PATH TO GOD

I found God between hips in the form of an orchid. I haven't seen heaven in a while, but I'm on a journey to that garden. Just have to close my eyes and feel your hand on my forehead. They say the saviour is all around us, in the molecules of the air and in the pull of your hair. I'm still searching far and wide for a similar feeling to the one I have inside. The tingling of breath against my neck.

Isn't there a book or a revelation about any of this? Maybe I'm just better when it comes to sins. I would much rather do it all with you, through sunflower fields of obscure intentions. Who am I to deny the vast idea of miracles? I've seen them bestowed at my feet and between my teeth where your skin lingered against my name and begged for defeat in a war amongst souls that feel complete pressed along the fine lines of fire that have forged steel and branded wounds.

I'd be one hell of a liar if I told you I hadn't been tempted by someone else's flesh, but I wouldn't want to misconstrue my sentences with my intentions. I'm just trying to find my way through the forest, and I'm not sure if I'm on the right path, but I swear to you, I'm on my way back to your heaven.

Now, I could go to churches and say I found my salvation within some prayers and meditation, and perhaps half of that would be true, but the reality is there's nothing more spiritual than sharing sweat in the most intimate way. Without any words to say, except the body language we use to conversate.