

CALLIOPE

FALL 2012



CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

CALLIOPE

prose, poetry & artwork by Chapman University Student Body
fall 2012 | published by Chapman University - Orange, CA

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Book Design and Cover by *Zac Oransky from Rachelle Chuang's ART 339: Book Design*

Printed by *Lester Lithography, Inc.*

A special thanks to Joanna Levin and the Department of English, the Creative Writing Faculty — Martin Nakell, Richard Bausch, Mark Axelrod, James Blaylock, Anna Leahy, Tom Zoellner, Alicia Kozameh, Ryan Gattis, and Morgan Read-Davidson — for their support with their letter to SGA, and Eric Chimenti and the Department of Art for all their help and support..

Another special thanks to the Student Government Association for their funding and support.

A Publication of Chapman University



EDITOR'S NOTE

“The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven’s sake. Sing in the shower. Dance to the radio. Tell stories. Write a poem to a friend, even a lousy poem. Do it as well as you possibly can. You will get an enormous reward. You will have created something.”

- Kurt Vonnegut, from *A Man Without a Country*

Welcome to the reinvasion of *Calliope*. Having taken a six year beauty sleep under the *Elephant Tree*, the Muse has reawakened this autumn for the unchanging southern California leaves. But as one who only inspires, Calliope cannot take credit for the art presented in these pages. It is the musings of our Chapman University contributors that cultivated a most competitive nature for artistic expression in this issue. And for that, the editorial board, the editors, and I commend all the applicants for the entries submitted.

A special thanks to Tom Zoellner, our enterprising faculty advisor, who has wholeheartedly supported and guided *Calliope* through the publication process. His ambition and expertise have drawn contours from the mists of creative inspiration. That form is the very issue you are holding right now.

When reading this issue, please keep in mind each contribution has been selected through our anonymous review process for its unique artistic value. I believe each work speaks for itself and is ever-expressing its creativity amidst the dialogue of artistic expression and thought.

- Derrick Ortega, *Editor*

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UNDERWATER, WE COUNT TO TEN

Katie Rose Rogers

Iron mouth river who swallows the nothing of a reclined big toe

I suck a handful of your naked pebbles licking clean oh holy hopeful centers

The something of these pebbles I roll fresh soften swollen taste buds

Shy eye spies blank stare of savage waters a jawbone anklebone lisps to a green-spotted stone before
stuttering into wide-eye puddle

Tender fallow tide you are a deposit of breath and hydrogen

Of recycled carcass and this dress as I fall into your layers allowing a moment of crick crackled skin
and this scream into aqua stink you

And scream for you and scream with you from spent sung lungs

Of nothing but want of you of want of wanting want but needing only feeling not to be divided nor
multiplied by icy factored bubbles of a ripple (am I a ripple in ten seconds of you?)

You wont remember the feel of me the rise in measly degrees

Decadent river sense me in your roots a ripple spread blind oh how natural I could be

"IRREPARABLE" EXCERPT FROM WITHOUT FALLING

Sara Aguilar

She is beginning
She is end
She is everything
She is nothing
She will end
Be all, end all, for all, his all. Her.

Dichotomy of beginnings,
Their first day, his ending beginning.

So this is what it was to die.

Cold

The reigning quiet
just before the dawn.

Whisper, shuffle, whisper
of shoes too small
detaching her from the cluster of others.
Tumbleweeds of dust stretch at her ankles
as she rolled dull eyes up at him.
"You will help us."

Alone

The whisper, shuffle, whisper of closer.

Will I be forgotten?

“You *will* help us.”

This, this is what it was to die.

Not an asking, a command spoken,
harmonizing with that gaze.

Rust and faded brown
for all the world unremarkable
in every way except one.

Possessive. Mine.
Her gaze, her eyes claimed him.

Mine.

So this is what it was like to die.
There was the pain, of course.

“Please.”

But pain paled to the sweet strains
of sorrow that hummed within
every flux and filament of his frame
warbling in tune with the accusations
that chased themselves
in a damning tumult within his processor.

You betrayed your people, your purpose

*I knew you were flawed
from the first moment I saw you*

“Are you afraid to die?”

Fluted tones, soft and sweet,
but there was no escape from that gaze

“You *will* help us.”

Malleable blue, ancient optics
watched her,
his countenance tilting with a
whisper, sigh, whisper of servos.

Another crescendo of pain
rising, cresting, crashing, breaking,
breaking and threatening to wash him away.

Sweet, sweet sear of pain erased regret

I will not break.

Focused wrenched back into the present,
into these few, too few precious moments.

“Child of Earth—”
Blonde glimmers, finest fibers
fanning through the air,
tossed over her shoulder,
she planted her fists
against hips too small;
*No Earth-Child here,
no child, no earth, no here*

“You will help me?”
“I will.”
The rust of her eyes demanded more.

“Promise?”
Possessive. *Mine.*

“I promise.”

Thin lips, velvet petals
crushing under the bite of her voice,
“I want your word.”
Dark and forbidding,
his metalloid countenance
knocked askew from curiosity
optical lenses flickered,
“—I do not understand...
I cannot give you words—”
Liquid night eyes flashing

A dizzying parade of memories threatened,
Flitting through his processor.

A snarl, a guttural growl of gears
Sharp edged fingers digging, prying
Seeking, catching the vulnerable seams
in the metal armor of his shoulder
pinching and exposing tender circuitry
holding him down, forcing him to kneel.

The rasp of the red eye voice,

“Are you afraid to die?”

“No.”

“Say it,
just say that you give me your word.”
His helm dipping low,
meeting her eye level,
looming and hulking,
the underside of thunder given voice,

“I give you my word, Earth-Child.”

Liquid possession of her eyes, watching, waiting
Whisper, sigh, whisper of closer

KID ON THE ROCKS

Steven Nesbitt

Pastor Randy Woolstrum of Grace Christian Center had the unsettling ability to make me feel small. When I walked into his church for the first time—a storefront wedged between a fabric store and a sports bar called Group Therapy—he grabbed me by the hand and throttled it with a shake. *He's so goddamn tall*, I thought, even with the good three inches I had on him. *Jesus Christ!*

I told him my name and he said it back twice. He smiled like there was a piece of lettuce stuck in my teeth and he wasn't going to tell me. Every half-hearted joke I made, he punctuated with sitcom laughter. He was at the door when I got there and when I left he had another handshake for me, crunching my fingers like potato chips.

"It was great to meet you, Steven," he said, "I'll see you next week." Not a suggestion—a fact.

At our old church, my dad had been a deacon and my mom was in charge of the children's ministry. I was a church rat from the get-go. There wasn't any wiggle room for dissent because my parents filled the empty space with Veggie Tales and Bible story coloring books. Come Junior High though, heavy-handed, teenage existentialism found me. Religion faded to back-burner optimism and God became someone you turned to when you didn't study for a test or were stuck in traffic.

Pastor Randy knew all this just by shaking my hand. All the doubts and anger were drawn in my skin and he could see them like a palm reader. That's why when I came back, just like he said I would, it felt like I was walking in with a white flag. But he beelined straight for me with another knuckle popping handshake like he hadn't expected anything else.

"I've been praying for you, Steven," he said.

"God's got big plans for you, if you're willing to listen to Him."

I started going every Wednesday and the occasional Sunday in the summer before high school. They took me on as the kid who sat in the back and wouldn't stand during worship. After about a year, Pastor Randy convinced me to go to their church's summer camp. I coughed up the hundred and fifty

bucks and drove out to Fontana for the week long excursion. Every night, everyone dived headfirst into the worship, singing in cracking and sobbing voices; collapsing on the floor in trembling heaps, the Holy Spirit filling them like a water balloon. I just sat there, trying to see if I could make out God's voice somewhere in the Protestant white noise. I could only hear a car alarm in the 7-11 parking lot a block over.

I kept going to Grace when I got back, wiggling into their woodwork like a termite, trying to hear the God everyone else heard. Pastor Randy was thrilled, slapping me on the back when I told him I was looking to strengthen my relationship with God.

“God’s got big plans for you, Steven. He’s been telling me them.”

I convinced some friends to go to the youth group, hoping it would be easier to absorb the divine by some act of group osmosis. Pastor Randy got us involved in their newly formed drama department, putting on plays for Easter, Christmas and the other services needing theatrical underline. Everything I did, I did with the hope God would finally let me in on the secret He and Pastor Randy were keeping.

There’s a verse in the Big Honcho’s book about seeds tossed into shallow soil around the rocks; how they sprout quickly, but die quickly too. My seed lasted about a year before I was left climbing over the rocks, wondering why everyone else’s crops were doing hunky dory while all I had was dirt.

In the fall of my senior year, signs started popping up all over town. Mustard yellow signs with a family of blue people standing joyously above a simple proclamation—*Yes On 8*.

I knew the church’s stance on the gay issue—they weren’t cool with it. But some of my best friends were gay and I couldn’t see them as somehow lesser, sinful and Godless just because of who they loved. But maybe it got me so worked up because it hit closer to the home front than I wanted to admit; maybe it hurt to hear them talk about it because I was starting to suspect I had some leanings off my own.

One night, I asked Pastor Randy if I could talk to him. The two of us went into the prayer room—a small room with candles, low music and love seats and I broke down and admitted everything. Pastor Randy listened to me talk for fifteen minutes, smiling and nodding, and when I was done, he gave a simple, “No, Steven, you aren’t. You’re just confused.”

“I don’t think I am.”

“You’re just confused, Steven. I can guarantee you.”

He brought out his Bible and pointed to all the verses. The Big Honcho's book wasn't very flattering on the subject, and having Randy read it out loud might as well have made it fact.

"This isn't God's plan for you."

Things changed after that night. Pastor Randy wouldn't shake my hand or touch my shoulder anymore. No one would. Everyone talked to me like they were in Hazmat suits. I felt like a pill in water, dissolving out until nothing would be left.

That October, Pastor Randy commissioned me to work on a Murder Mystery dinner. I indulged the outlet with egomaniac enthusiasm, happy to finally have a public venue to show off. But I think I was just happy to be acknowledged again.

The show wasn't anything professional and was filled with C grade, Saturday Night Live humor. But the audience ate it up, happy to see their kids on stage. After the votes had been tallied and before the murderer was announced, Pastor Randy came up to give a brief sermon. With all the plays he normally inserted himself about two-thirds of the way through with a message. This sermon started out simple, about how we are not of this world and how this world can seduce us into its morals; how the world can trick us into thinking its right, even when we know in our hearts it's wrong. We were seated behind him, whispering and cracking jokes, only half-listening. But all of us tuned in when he dropped it.

"—which is why Prop 8 should be passed."

The audience grumbled with approval, turning to each other and nodding.

I could only stare at the back of his head, as the bus went right over me. The stage lights for the production, the ones I helped hang, suddenly were too bright, too strong. I sat there, melting like a wax figurine, trying to get a poker face working while Pastor Randy, the man who told me he heard God and told me God spoke to him about me, went on and on to a swooning congregation about why they should vote Yes on Prop 8, how a homosexual lifestyle was "spitting in God's face."

After the show, Pastor Randy caught me leaving. My hands were in my pockets.

"Good show, Steven."

"Thanks."

"Steven, God's really blessed you with a creative talent."

"You're a great writer, a great performer, and I hope you'll serve Him with that. He has amazing

plans for you. If you knew them, you'd be blown away.”

“I hope he does.”

I grabbed his hand, shook it, gave him a smile and never saw him again.

Grace Christian Center isn't there anymore. A year and a half ago, it moved to I don't know where. The fabric store next door expanded into the old space. I never went back to Grace Christian Center, never talked to Pastor Randy or anyone from that church again. After Prop 8 passed, he sent out a flyer congratulating us on doing God's work—a USPS middle finger. He sent me birthday cards for a few years after too, his signature stamped in them, but those stopped after a while. I still have his number. Sometimes, I think of calling him and asking if he still prays about me, if God still talks about me. But I won't.



ALLEYWAY BICYCLE

Nicolas Yang

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THE WINDOW FOG OF BREATH UNBEAUTIFUL

Joseph Dye

The window fog of breath unbeautiful
on cold and winter nights angelifies
the street-side gas-run lamps and store displays
as autos growl past, dripping rain and ice.
The moon is peeking, white, halated, bright,
and codifies the night inaugural.
It stands to see the details rushing past
akin to timelines scarcely realized by
Medea before Thanatos arrived
to carry out his murder, swift for death.

Her children roar; the engine rumbles loud.
The rain is pouring once for each new child,
again for each cull Thanatos performs:

The universe will die, and you as well.
This time is just a bastard branch of her's,
and damned are such by mother's choice.

CRYOGENICS

Z.K. Lowenfels

Don't

because who would want to catch game stares or numbers floated bar-wise cross room space, because invitations to meaningless word-lust over coffee is no thanks, because no one wants nothing less than you.

Don't flirt.

Don't

because pillow talk is murder and caress is blood wetly bothered red, because skin brushes oils freckles hairs thoughts into concoction, concoction resulted is poison.

Don't touch.

Don't

because the sound is a warning to sanity-textured lips, is sickly sickly sickly optimism, is hit-me-so-hard-I-pass-out corporeal corpulence self-satisfied time filler.

Don't laugh.

Don't

because it's piss in rain, they call anything music nowadays, pouring cascade-like down what you call cheek but is more just target painted pinkish tan begging for bullets, you are simple scum.

Don't cry.

Don't

because it's a lie, probably existing in nonexistence only, like a unicorn, because you are the kind of person who believes in things like unicorns, because you are a churlish child but erections and ejaculations need names no matter if misnomers be and noble was the connotation of the word chosen by masses trusted.

Don't love.

Don't

because no one will say yes, because why would anyone say yes, because it's an invitation to nowhere, because a church declaring words does not a husband nor wife make, because future sticks like honey in throats because future is transient and thoughts, contrary to popular believers, are not what counts. Don't propose.

Don't

because this has all been done before and done better, because ashes are to loss what echoes are to you, because no is no is no is no because you know this because knowing this is not an answer because answers subside in waves of highway philosophizing sliding down with Sisyphus into oblivion, the other oblivion, a comfort, saying that one thing as you tumble roll fall.

Just don't.

Don't.

Don't.

Don't.

Don't.

But you do.



BUMP IN THE ROAD

Shelley Lamotte

CALLUS CARNIVAL

Lauren Sarazen

“Find her. I don’t care how, just do it,” Old Man Sterns said, wiping the sweat off his bald, pink head with a damp handkerchief. It was August 24th, and it was a scorcher.

I don’t know what made me go looking for her there, but I guess I just felt it, felt it deep in my bones. Why would Virginia Sterns go to a callus carnival? I don’t know, I said to myself. The girl has money. She’s got at least three square meals a day. And then I said, the girl loves to dance, doesn’t she? Sure she does, Dick. How many days has she been missing? Twenty days. And how long has the dance marathon been going on? Twenty days.

I haven’t called up her pop yet. I meant to, on the first day I saw her. I’d been on the assignment half a day when someone told me she loved dancing. I came straight here, gave the man my quarter and sat down.

The auditorium was covered fairly well. The dance floor was dark, though the contestant’s dancing shoes had scuffed it irreparably. Giant trees made of foil and chicken wire arced above the dance floor, leaves a warm, brassy gold with rhinestone-spangled leaves. A full piece band was set in the corner, their black suits velvety dark, slick.

There were twelve of ‘em out there then. It was easy to pick her out from the photograph, but the large white 54 pinned to the back of her cornflower blouse helped. She shuffled along to the music, her willowy frame draped around her partner, the legs of her white Palazzo pants swaying along. The black and white didn’t do justice to her coloring, with hair like that. Her flapper crop was the color of a burnt penny that lay in against smooth, creamy skin. The sharp, precisely coiffed waves hair in the snapshot her father gave me were fluffy curls now, errant strands sticking out in all directions. Sure, she was tired. She’d been dancing nonstop for twenty days, but there was still rhythm to her steps, a certain, telling excitement that there was nothing she liked better than dancing.

I lit a cigarette and watched her dance—more like a chain gang shuffle—for thirty minutes before the air horn sounded a 15-minute break. Attendants herded the couples off the floor. I stood, and followed.

They all looked dog-tired, but some more so than the others. Their clothes were faded, second-hand, patched. The women had that pinched, hungry look to them that was all too common these days, and then men were thin and sour. Walking past a doorway, I smelled the thick oatmeal with its dusting of cinnamon wafting. That was the beauty of these things—they'd wear holes in their soles, but they'd eat.

“Excuse me sir, but these cots are for ladies only,” the attendant at the door said as he brushed me off.

I paused momentarily and waited for him to leave before ducking into the room marked gents. I walked down the rows of beds to find number 54. He was out cold, as were his fellows, laying diagonally, one leg off the bed. I patted his pants, checking for the bulge of a wallet. I found what I was looking for—James Murphy, 24, lived outside Spokane. I nudged his leg with my foot. Waited. Nudged him again. Waited. Nothing. He was breathing though.

The air horn sounded. As if by magic, the men rose like the walking dead, and limped back to the floor. Number 54 stayed put.

“Come on, guy. Wake up.”

I slapped him plain across the face. Still nothing.

“Contestant 54, please return to the floor,” the PA crackled, its disembodied voice echoing through the empty room.

I unpinned his numbers and attaching them to myself, then hoisted his body and maneuvered him into one of the tall metal lockers. We both shared dark, slicked back hair and a taste for cheap, knock-off suits. I loosened my tie, ran my fingers through my hair, and did my best imitation shuffle as I rejoined the others on the stage.

Virginia stood alone, a golden spotlight bathing her in light, as the MC led the crowd in the countdown to her elimination. She bit her lip nervously, shifting her weight from foot to foot. As I moved towards her, lauded with thunderous applause from the audience, her expression changed from relief to confusion. I slipped my arm around her waist and took her hand as the music started up.

“Where's Jimmy?” she asked in a low tone.

“Sleeping.”

“Who are you?”

“Dick Howard.” I twirled her around the floor. The audience tittered in excitement at the sudden burst of energy from couple 54.

“And aren’t you a little bit curious as to who I am?” she asked archly.

“I know who you are. You’re Virginia Sterns.”

She stopped dancing and simply stared at me then.

“Don’t stop dancing now. We still want that money, don’t we?”

I swung her out. “How much is it, anyway?”

“\$1,500.”

“Well then, let’s give ‘em a show,” I said, stepping briskly.

She looked up at me with those doe-like eyes. “My father sent you, didn’t he?”

I nodded curtly and continued to spin her around the floor.

“How’s the competition?”

She glanced over the eleven other couples on the floor. Ten were shuffling along slowly, despite the lively tune. Only the couple in the south corner of the floor—number 17—was keeping up with the tempo. Their clothes were relatively new, and their dancing shoes were shiny, their steps expert and sure.

“Other than the *experienced couple*, I think we’ve got a shot.”

“That’s what they’re calling ‘em? Those are hoofers if I ever saw one,” I said. “Let’s pick it up.”

I spun her out, and then pulled her close, for the Balboa. She followed my lead with minimal hesitation. The quick, small steps were hard on her sore feet, but I could feel a current of excitement ripping through the crowd. We provided a counter point to Couple 17’s traditional Lindy Hop. Our spins were tight, our bodies close. There was a faint tittering heard over the music.

“Scandalous, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Very. It’s very popular though. Not that you’d guess it in Washington.”

“Where’d you pick it up?”

“Newport... I spent some time down there.”

“Hmm.”

“How do you know our good man Jimmy Murphy?”

“He’s been around.”

“He’s been driving from Spokane to Pullman regularly? Are the two of you involved?”

“So you’re a flatfoot or what?”

I wanted to keep pushing until I got the answers, but there was a flinty glint of suspicion in her eyes that spelled trouble.

“Yes, and no. My life’s been a mixed bag so far. I’ve done a little bit of everything, I’d say. And you?”

“A whole lot of nothing, but you probably already knew that.”

“Ah, yes. Miss Virginia Sterns of the Pullman Sterns—your pop is the dean of the college, isn’t he?”

Virginia said nothing, pursing her lips in annoyance.

“You spent four years studying history and French, wrote for the newspaper for three, and didn’t go driving with any of the boys—not even Bobby Winters. I was impressed by that last one. Am I missing anything?”

“Why ask questions if you already know everything anyway?”

“But you’re keen on it. Don’t deny it.”

“I don’t enjoy this game you’re playing.”

I smiled. I liked to see her all riled up. I think that’s what the world needs sometimes.

“I know your old man blames that Fitzgerald for incensing you, but I think it’s quite an improvement,” I continued. “I rather liked *Beautiful and the Damned*.”

“I’m so sick and tired of everyone blaming literature—“

“Technically, it’s pulp.”

“It’s damn beautiful.”

“That’s lovely repetition for a fine newspaper woman like yourself.”

She flushed and fell silent for a moment. The woman from couple 45—was staring. She swiveled

her head around to look at us, owl-like. Her dress showed its age in the mending and faded fabric. The dark circles under her eyes and hollow cheeks were sad reminders of Hoover's renegades. I looked on Virginia's healthy frame and sighed. She was just taking up someone's spot.

"Why the dance marathon though? You know this is some folks' only shot at a decent meal."

"I love to dance. And I met Jimmy at the gas station on my way out, and he offered to split the money down the middle."

"Don't get me wrong, here. Like I said, I like the improvement. You've got moxie running off like that. Your reputation is ruined—"

"Like I care," she said, tossing her hair out of her face.

"But don't you want to give her a chance?" I nodded at couple 45.

Virginia paused.

"I guess it sounds pretty selfish, doesn't it. Trying to take the prize to run away to Paris?"

"It's a matter of perspective. I'd suggest New York."

"I just need to get out. I don't really care where really. This contest...seemed like the way," she said.

"She stares at me all the time, you know. In the dressing room, while we're eating. She won't talk to me. She took in the soles of my shoes on day one and that was that."

We both fell silent, losing ourselves in the twists and steps. The lively tune was hollow to our ears now. The trumpet player sent the song to a close with a vibrato crescendo, before the air horn sounded, signaling the next rest period.

Her eyes were closed now, and I could feel her breath on my neck, an even in and out, as I guided her to shuffle slowly from side to side. Her hands were around my neck, knotted together at the wrists with scrap fabric just in case.

The song came to a close, and the bandleader struck up another tune, brassy and upbeat. There were few others on the floor by now, yet they had all picked up their pace.

"Virginia. Virginia!" I fished a tiny pin out of my pants pocket and jabbed her.

She startled awake.

“What song is this, again?” She asked, groggily, caressing the back of my neck with her clammy fingertips.

“Chicken Ain’t Nothing But A Bird,” I replied, guiding her into a swing out.

“And before that?”

“Yacht Club Swing.”

“Eyes on the prize, kid. I’m keen on that fifteen hundred.”

The audience groaned collectively as Couple 83 toppled over and lay slumped in a pile on the floor. They were dead asleep and nothing, not even the cries of their most ardent fans, could rouse them. Assistants carried them off the floor on stretchers.

“I don’t know if I can take it anymore,” she moaned, clinging closer to me. She smelled of sweat, gardenias, and baby powder. “I’ve worn a hole in my shoe.”

“Hold on a little longer. We’re so close,” I said, casting my eyes about at the remaining two couples. Their steps dragged along, off tempo, disjointed.

“But why does it matter anyway? It’s just money and I’m so tired.”

“It’s never *just money*. We don’t all have Papa Sterns footing the bill.”

“Oh don’t blow your wig. I want that money more than you do. It’s my ticket out of here,” she said. “I’ve just got to get out of Pullman.”

“You’re already out of Pullman.”

“But you’re not taking me back,” she said. Her tone was firm, but her eyes were searching. “How about you come with me?”

I hesitated. Old Man Sterns would set the law on me if they both turned up missing. Virginia stared me down, insistent on an answer—the right one.

“Sure, we can drift, but I don’t know what I’m going to tell your pop.”

Swing out.

PHANTASMAGORICAL

Maxwell Celentano

Gazing up at the starry night
As pallid moonbeams ignite hidden desires
A minute shimmer crosses her visage
While she loses herself in the whispering memories
Of days gone by...
Images of a man,
Ignited by a tumultuous assault
Towards her window
He left his child in the company of a cruel housekeeper,
Promising to return

The ship
Casts off from everything she had ever known,
Starting its journey across the passionate sea,
Never looking back
Finally, a mirror,
The reflection staring lucidly back at her
Inviting her to a small table
With a crooked smile
“Tea time”



Nicole Martinez

Sitting in an empty room, she waits. Hours pass this way: her legs folded beneath her, hands cupped together on her lap. She doesn't move. She doesn't even blink. Is she still alive? I try to raise an arm, but it's useless. She's been stuck fast since the moment she got home this morning, however long that's been. There isn't a clock that I can see.

She waits and waits. For what, I don't know, but I continue to stare at the blank white wall, waiting for that something. This room smells like fresh laundry and buttercream frosting. Mom is burning those candles again. I can hear her in the kitchen. The sounds of her pulling pots from the cabinets echo through the house. It's so loud. Why is it so loud?

This white is getting on my nerves. I try black. Too dark. It overwhelms me. I'm drowning in it, and she still can't move. Back to white, quickly. White is brighter. White is more like light. I can't let it go dark again.

In my mind I reconstruct the room. There is a softness beneath her; a purple blanket atop a twin bed. Beneath that, a blue duvet. Beneath that, a mattress, springs pressing into her slightly at a point beneath her knee. The bed frame is made of wood that smells like rain. Its scent lingers in the air, struggling against the freshness and the buttercream. What else? The walls were recently painted some shade of yellow. I can't remember. She'll never see them anyway.

There is a desk to her right, covered with stacks of paper and about twenty notebooks: half-finished ideas. A page flutters in the breeze, but she can't feel it. Only the sound. Are they still stacked in a precarious tower, ready to tumble over at the faintest touch? I'll say they are, though they may have been moved. More fluttering sounds like wings made of words, and then a soft thump as one of my half-made creatures falls to the floor. The carpet breaks its fall. I guess they weren't moved after all.

There is a little buzzing sound to my left. It moves closer, then darts away in a second. Closer and closer, the buzzing becomes a roaring in my ear. A buzzing without a body. There is nothing in this

painfully white room. I want to swat it away, but she won't be moved. How can she, when this is all she knows? I can only do so much; I can't make her stir.

More sounds from the kitchen.

Mom shouts, "Do you want anything to drink, sweetie? Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes."

I want to ask for 7-Up, because now the walls are spinning around and around. I'm dizzy and I can't make them stop. I can't breathe. I'm going to throw up. She says nothing.

"Sweetie?" Mom repeats.

Footsteps pound the hardwood floor, moving closer. I can't stop the room from spinning. I can't stop the buzzing. She's stuck in the midst of a terrifying uncertainty and can't break free of it. The footsteps stop somewhere in front of her. Her eyes tear at the blank walls, searching. She cries, because that's all she can do. She'll never be able to see, and I'll never see again.



ARACHNOPHOBIA

Sara Herrmann

HANDS

Lizzi Murtough

I dreamt your hands last night.
They knuckled down my spine,
fish-tailed between my thighs,
ambled aimlessly down the arch of my calves,
and found asylum in my instep.
I drew my knees to my chest to lift you,
to bring your face closer to my face,
that I could trace the outline of your lips with mine,
and hold between my spindly fingers your spindly fingers.
But as my body bent, creaked, moaned,
your callous fingertips scraped my soles,
and fell fast from the grace of my ankles.
I reached out for my feet,
drew my knees hard into my sternum,
collapsed my lungs,
decompressed my swollen heart,
and watched you go.

AND I CAN HEAR IT

Joseph Dye

and I can hear it
her theremin voice moving forward in time
but the numbers are flashing
like so many moths trapped inside a greenhouse
and I can't feel anything
or understand.

I'm with her now
and it's just the two of us
and she says something simple
a good morning pleasantry
a peace offering, confirming what I already know.

And I don't say anything
because I'm not even there
to speak.

An isolation tank is built around me
and it's just salt and water-
the beginnings of new life-
and blackness-
its absence.

I turn over so my face gets wet
and hold my nose and mouth underwater.
I want to come up coughing and choking
but I stay under.

The saltwater runs down my throat
and I inhale it into my lungs.

I die and return to the surface.

My mind was watching the entire time,
and so, unthinking, I reply.
Something simple.
A pleasantry in return for the one you gave to me.
And decide to stay above the water for a bit.

But now you're getting wet, too.
I can see the ends of your hairs glistening
in the sepia light.
I'm sorry that I'm bringing you under
and hope you can forgive me.

But you don't drown when I do,
preferring to float to the surface
gargling saltwater instead of breathing it.

The pressure in my ears is enormous.
You are talking and I cannot hear
because I am too busy bleeding from my ear drums.

Half my mind survives and talks without thought.
And half stays in the ocean
in the tank
waiting to see the sepia light above you
rippling through the surface
like so many moths trapped inside a greenhouse.



WELCOME, TOMORROW
Njeri Parker

FORM

Brandon Stuhl

Vacant. Form. Here, is, form. Here was form, here is form, here will be. Comforting? It's similar to what was previously known, but contrary. That's it, that's all. That is all there ever is, negation of previous notion. It is far beyond malignant or benign, apathy to say the least, vested at most. Its manner timid and relaxed, its shape dull, acute, it will not accept advances for it can only serve as passive. Passion? Spare it. We waited, we wait, and shall continue as before, as now, as will again, without registering movement, progress. Well, at least we perceive none. Those who were forced, by the nature of common circumstance, to remain patient, did so, in vain vacuum. Others stretched their arms in a V crying, "I have come home now," as if their creation would extract them from the vile vainness of their own manner, prepared to tell it, "Never lived a lie." Forever unaware of veracity, "vile" they accused, accuse, will accuse skeptics. Patient hands are never ready to receive, gifts of all kinds, new shapes gather, accumulate, create new form, but identity is lost, traded for the ideal, gained by savage visions, vexed are now those once open palms. They are proud, and they telegraph, vehemently, various incarnations, but always the same name nmae eman. Consistency is, apparently, credibility instead of redundant inescapable vice. Valiant is the dialect, soaring in the face of all others. Its vernacular veils contradiction for fear instead of, instead of, instead...for fear of an embrace, no. No. For fear. Fear. If you must, fear. Fear. Violence. Villains.

Yet, some how, we said, "And so, here it is." Form. Thy will be done. Forever, and ev...oh, there it is again! Noise, always the noise! Fucking noise! Do they not rest? There are places for these things, pricey yes, but it's your responsibility, that's why they're your progeny! West wall, hurry, south, takes a moment, east, faster quick, north, just a second, finally, tip toes! Come on, come on, higher! Just a bit high...Window. Blinds. Peek. Cul-de-sac, below. For fuck sake, they've multiplied! Vermin. They don't even count as full fledged citizens, why allow them to wander the streets as if they were? It's very simple: you let one loose, you train it to stay in its cage, where it belongs. Agile, things. Bodies in motion. Agile minds, too...squandered on the vacuum of youth. I squander plenty, too. But at least I'm aware of it. And one of them has found the asshole of the street, manhole, unplugged. Yes,

please lose yourself in there. I should hurry to pinch one, let it rain in that swamp while it's inhabited. Belongs down there. My progeny. Oh, shut up? You have back yards. No one speeds through a cul-de-sac, no where to go, no chance hitting a few. Funny, that'd be: one engraved into a grill, another flies, bowling pin. Awful mess it'd be. Fish fry must hide at birth, else a maternal meal, we think nothing of it. Monstrous if it's our own species. Weep even for still-borns. Why not? Unparalleled substitute for veal. Cheaper, too. Modest thing.

Shut up shut up!

Oh...no. What awful things to consider. Mind wanders to so many uninhabitable venues. Drop blind. Dwell on it. Composure, composure. Quiet first. Awful things. It's partial to the ages as they go by. Tk, tk, tk, tk, on and on, tk, tick, tisk, tissck, tsssssvvck, tsssssssvvvvvvvvvvv. Quiet. Take stalk, all that there ever was, is, will be; take stalk. Room, twelve by twelve. Thirteen? Not square anyhow, thirteen by eleven and two fifths, east wall, blank, south wall, door, east corner, we'll get to that, west wall, closet, holds a shrine, porcelain god, many hours praying, closed, been since, well I forget, north wall, window, six up, high, but I have a system of teetering, tippy-toes, let's say, four across, wooden blinds, drawn tight, ceiling blank, floor, wooden slats, no furnishings, only get in the way of my path. My path! Oh, there is my path! It' mine. Now there was, is, will be comfort as I traveled, travel, will continue to travel, shoulder always whisked, whisk, will continue to whisk the wall. Yes this robe has worn, is worn, will ware through to the skin through to the flesh through to the muscle. I once painted the wall, shoulder height, was red for a time, is brown now, will be white again. It's not that bad. Only a little macaroon-white-green, nor does it reek as it used to...or will. But that the wall was red for a time, curious. Where did that come from?

That's right! I have memories. What? Things. Things, catalogs, catalogs of things. Things like eggs, eating eggs, cracking one open and sucking it clean. Things like sniffing leather, intoxicating. Things, you know. Like reading, words, describing potted men, crutched men, dead men. Things like sewers, bad place on a rainy day, safe on a clear one. This is what memories are for! A sewer, something about a gaping hole, mid circle, dead-end street, looks like, a tit, tee-hee, suck it dry. Wonder if any of the other kids, little Veronica, Vilhelm, Vince, and Vicky...oh, Vicky, she was so... Well, wonder if they thought to go in. They saw it too. I knew I shouldn't have been there, I shouldn't be here, apparently it's dangerous. But, pick a day of doom, and defy it, what I always say, what I will say. Someone left the cover off, just for me, makes sense, or it doesn't...either way, I'll do it. I'll pretend. I am the Riverside Ghost. Never have I ever exited out through the gift shop, the unkempt winter ready New York sludge pot, gray peach, hairy bog. Here it goes...so this is what it's like? Go figure, just another

disappointment. Inviting, warm, inside it's damp, sticky, getting colder the further I go. Hold on, make sure, peek outside, make sure no one sees. Good. Vince, looking the other way, he's a tattle-tale, we all know the type. Okay, the coast is...no, wait. That creep. Old man, up there on the third floor. Him again. Does he have nothing better to do? He'll tell, he will. No? Even if he does, that's it! If he does, who will listen? No one listens to those who have nothing to say. Voyeur...It's flattering. Back in, slowly. Like that, huh? Anyway, back in. Colder further in, strange, tighter too. Well, here I'll be seated, if only to, oh, here it comes, a separation. Half of me goes on, further, and further, becomes situated, the other half tailspins, sucked out through helmet tube. That's it, end, so quick.

Is that the way it happened? Is my memory defective? Does it serve me right? Don't know. Won't depend on it. What is dependable? Path! That's right, the path! It's my path. It's a long path, journey, an odyssey, been at it forty-six years, or something like. Is that right, forty-six? Could it be two? Tk, tk. And these scabs, I can depend on these scabs. Tasty. I've been picking at them, tk, tk. Just has to be something underneath. Like I am, beneath this ceiling, some kind of vault. And there must be some inner chamber where ghostly bug-eyed Marvins planted their seed. In my death, they will see life. Cruel joke. That's the nature of all things, an anecdote, which all existence seems to cling to, as I cling to this wall. All I've got, all I can be sure of any more, my wall. But the cycled, cycle, coming revolution... if only I could be removed. So, I dig. One day, soon, I will find their vestibule, remove it, like so many burrowing ticks, parasites, I'll rid of it, and my freedom, freedom from that, which I have no connection to, in any form...or will the form be another memory. Please don't let it be that. Horrible things, memories. If it be memory, and I recall it at will, I control it. Can I then destroy it, and so, escape it? That's it! I'll call, at will, a memory, any memory, like a servant, a peon to tremble before me. I'll entertain it for a bit, if only for a few humored inquisitive moments, but when the little tyke is going on about its merry fashion, I'll strike. And then to the next, and after that, another, and another, until all memory is slaughtered...I'll be free. Forty-six and two, digging, always digging, will become forty-six and two ahead of me. Freedom. That is the plan. Though, remember the path. There is always the path, it must continue in tandem. Fine, but I should be careful I'm not overtaken by the dual task, memories and the path, at once. Only one way to find out. The path, was a go, is a go, will be a go. Now, memory.

At will. At will is a bit shaky. Just rusty at it. In complete command. It's what they always say, you learn to ride a bike with crutches you never forget. Memory, a building...see that's it, done and done...a building. Prestigious building, or so its occupants assume. More like an aquarium, broad windows for superior beings to gaze, ponder their own essence, relating themselves to simple animals. There are desks, four rows, chairs facing empty white plaque. There were a handful of others here, they are

hodgepodge, variance of all kinds. One fella, white-haired, glasses, rules them. Has fashionable taste. Can't agree more, dress the part, what I say. Mostly, this group has been, is, will be young ladies...the better to think with, apparently. But who keeps track of these trivial things? Serve more, memory, serve! Papers, they are fixed, staring at a stack of papers, stapled, pages folded back. Pens in their hands, they scribble, scribble away, all of you, scribble I say! Pretentious. One speaks, an address, the others listen. His face has a certain, similarity, to, mine. Oh, is this one pathetic. He tries, but he's been here before, never learns, always the same mess of stories. Puh, stories! Bastards of memory, what I say. Thinks he's soooo clever. Tisk, tisk. He's nothing new. Now! Spring! Put a stop to it, whole debacle! I grab a copy of his vile anecdote, crumple it up and toss it at him to knock a blow at his fragile ego, it shatters like so much coconut jism and pelts the other occupants in the room. Now! As some are fixed on their own copies, still scribbling, and others decide to watch, voyeurs, I lunge at this fool. He's down! We are down! A hodgepodge of fists, teeth, nails. There goes a shirt, and shoes, more shoes perhaps, punk kid, now it's all gone, like the Greek ancients did it, rumbling around, blood, sweat, and the bare flesh, ripping and clawing, I pick at his scabs, reach deeper, third leg sword fight, memories die hard, the whole bundle rolling around the room while others look on, filthy voyeurs, like that? My member, he bites down hard, takes it all in, holds on, no use anymore anyway. But this must end. Must be an end to the source! Open wide, your precious backside! With the whole of my crown I stop it up, plug it up, so no more of this shit can ever again soil the landscapes of consciousness. End!

No. No! Memory remains. It wouldn't be that easy. Memories are only repressed. I'll hold out hope, puh, hope, there's a joke, the hope that I destroyed, destroy, can destroy memory. Repression, key for now. No more, horrible things, memories. For now, all there was, is, will be, my path. And scabs to pick, yes, I continue to search, deeper. Looking for some form or another to make sense of, sense of anything. But form is empty as memory, vacant. Now there's a thought, the vacancy of memory. Vacancy of form.



SummerNiche
DESIGNS

AS FAR AS I CAN SEE

Summer Woodward

LA PERSISTENCIA DE LA MEMORIA

Katie Annarino

everything folds
in the folds the beefy
structure of the world rots

in the folds
pockmarked steel is metallic pain
cannibalized by rust mites

in the folds
four-legged soldiers scurry
vulturing from bone to branch

in the folds
clock faces melt into hunchbacked
time suspended puddled over a rock
hand in dream they walk
beside the plump pink-fingered mountains

he puts on his mad hat
smells the sand
the root of his neck
wedged in the cracked
skin of earth

ostracized outside himself
he dances near dream
the sound of the snapping
clock tightly locked
folded in the grey tissue paper sky

from his mouth
a fat snail spills
a tongue welding
paralytic nonsense

DO SUCCULENTS BLOOM?

Tara Dalbow

A man slipped by, such an expression of unhappiness was enough by itself to pull my eyes up from my book in time to see him sit down two rows ahead of me. The bus quivered to life and we continued threading our way up the street. Light smashed against the bus windows, the ruffled surface of ocean, sun tinged, that gold, astrals bleeding from sides of buildings, the sun setting into the city. The hard shattered light melts, drips down into my lap. The broken stars pool up. I watch the back of the man's head bounce, his hair falling in familiar patterns, like the falling of his chest, the rhythm of his breath. I flush. The color falls from my face, coalescing with the light. Indeed, the election, and yes, no rent at a decent price, and has it been warm for this time of year, and then someone one was yelling about the oil. I suddenly heard it all, all the voices wreathing around and hurling themselves at me. The first five seconds of a roller coaster, the zooming in on a microscope, the sudden acute awareness of the temperature and of the faces, and of my own frayed hemline. All the orifices of me now more sensitive and receptive than they had been in months and then Matthew just sitting there. Had it been six months? Ten months? "Excuse me sir can you too see the man right there?"

Nerves and cells and fibers still recognize and resent you. Suddenly I was back in your windowless room begging the succulents to bloom (they didn't) but I begged. I could feel the sunken center of your mattress and the damp warmth of your favorite flannel. It was as if the last two years had never happened, as if I was all yours again and as if this bus was your one bedroom flat. It isn't, but it's as if it were. The first time I met you you were pushing a cart, I knew that that moment, for whatever reason, was the moment that I had been waiting for my entire life. Like how in movies when plants grow in fast motion, that's how all my life had been till then. I had been craving a natural disaster and you gave me all that and more. I was filled so full that parts of me overflowed everywhere. I didn't miss them then, but now I do; sometimes I look for them but they must have crawled off out of the sun somewhere. The woman two seats down is reading a book. I squint and squirm until it's a poem, and then it's a poem you used to read to me, and the neurons connect again, and I remember the smell of that herbal tea you made at night when you read. How I collected and catalogued all the bits of

you, warm and gory and funny, stored you in my stumbling cells. You once told me that gold was the only metal that you could hammer until it became transparent but that would still be strong enough to stay together, a brilliant airy flake, you said that gold was like our souls. I didn't laugh then, but I get it now so I laugh, laugh, laugh. The woman sees me, hears me, her fingers gripping harder now, pulling her book in so I can no longer see the words or smell that herbal tea. Her eyes now hidden; I can only guess at the life she's seen. I wonder what pieces she's missing and whether or not she has met someone who has filled her too full the way food and water and blood never could?

We were always either blooming or burning. You left me a pile of ash windblown and lifeless last time. And now with you just sitting there (here) suddenly something is growing out of the soot. I saw for the first time the face of the older man seated beside me, he had been sitting next to me for how many stops now, all his life reflecting back out at me, I stared for a second (how had I not seen his eyes when I sat down.) There they were, green and brooding, sharp blades of grass and parakeets and obsidian. He buried his face in a newspaper, his face is his story, not mine. I wonder at his hands but he soon retracts those too. Men are so selfish. I offer my hands. Do I not, my knowledge engraved on my palms, on my forehead, sprouting from the corners of my eyes, etched into my face? I want to make eye contact, I want to ask questions, and answer with more than fine when someone asks me how I am. All that is me, rooted deep in my ribs is begging to be brought forth out my collarbone, I want to let you pick the petals. But I just stop and know that everything is fine as long as you keep your eyes down. I remember who I was before you got on the bus, the numb, the cold, the blurry vision, all locked up just like you always are and I forgive the man. I was forever pleading but I could never ascertain whether you were unlocked or not, you snipped away at me without ever letting me close enough to recognize you. Now blossoms, and blush, and light are all making a mess of me. I reteach myself to read but *feeling comes first*, and I realize that I had almost forgotten how it felt to feel and to see and I can no longer just sit and read.

One night when I was doing dishes I started thinking too much. I wondered why I couldn't recall your mother's maiden name and why I didn't know the reason as to why you only drank beer from a glass. I called you into the kitchen and proceeded to dig and dig into you but you just lowered your eyes and deflected my words until I was again telling you everything and you were silent. In the end you thumbed away my stained face, washing my hair in the sink, we made love till all the questions had fallen and broken on the linoleum floor. (I swept them up the next day, but you were already at work.) I remember standing there with a cigarette in one hand wondering whether all women were loved like this.

My palms slick, a phantasmagoria of you and I slide across them. I feel again the ripples of your thumbprints on my head; I was always having a migraine. I remember the pacing of your thoughts on late nights; I was never sleeping either. We built bridges between our eyes, so much suspension and tension; I thought you were what was keeping me alive. The light was settling down now, it poured into the bus smooth and soft. It is the end of the day and everyone seems to be surrendering in the same way. You are still sitting there. I can only really see the back of your jacket, a bit of the nape of your neck, and all your brownish hair. I want to hold you and hurt you. I couldn't believe that I could measure our time apart in years, it was yesterday and I was just out to get you milk. It was as if I had been dead this whole time. I skim the agenda in my bag - I most certainly hadn't died. I wondered where you were going? My blood is unusually comfortable today; I think that maybe I am feeling well enough to join you.

The man next to me reaches over my head to grab the yellow wire. He says excuse me as he sits back down, still, he doesn't look at me. I fumble with my skirt and decide that I would still wish him a good day. The bus falls into an eddy behind a large sign and a bench. The man beside me stands and, as promised, "have a good evening sir." He smiles and nods as he turns away.

You stand and follow the man off the bus, my skin ablaze as the bus begins to pull away. I try the windows and the doors but the driver is yelling at me to sit down. I am soaked before I realize that I am sobbing. The flames are subsiding, the tears drying them away, you're gone but I am still feeling. A stranger takes my hands. Can you feel me? I realize the lady is holding more than just ash. I smile.

(poetry) The lady reads and reads till the bus winds down, handing me her book, Oh sweet world. I walk away, warm.



FARAH
Emnet Affework

RESTRAINT

Taylor Stark

I can't touch you;
Such restraint
I can't beare the insides aloud
Hold it all in, tape yourself together
You're whole, I swear,
you're whole

It's this moment of an hour
An hour where the dying light
hits strands of hair
becoming golden in peripheral
But it's only for that moment,
of that hour

And when it fades, so does its glow
The illuminated piece of beautiful,
dead cells turns to mud
Brilliance, a brief look in the rearview
And the road ahead is swallowed
in fog and dark and grey

I can't touch you;
Such restraint
One could cut this thick air,
this heaviness of a nothing
or intangible something
Of sorts that thwarts our inmost desires
our most private, hidden fires

In pauses and hesitant glances
there are showers
To extinguish the once was-es
and has-been embers
Of youth, of ignorance, of uninhibited yearning

But in mature distance
More halfness, more sorrow,
more insight of burden,
more bloody marrow

I can't touch you;
Such restraint
Is it worth the growing up,
the being noble, the sensible,
sober-minded shell of a self

In honesty, and in light of such hell,
I prefer insanity to the pangs of refined gait

"WHAT HAPPENS NEXT"

EXCERPT FROM WITHOUT FALLING

Sara Aguilar

Stay with me.

Digits, silver-blue and scalpel sharp ghosted over her fine boned arm in a grazing caress. In the darkness they were safe, sheltered. She had been right to suggest that they retreat here, to the remains of what was once her people's city, her home and not home. He had no desire to wander long, not amongst these skeletal relics, and so had sought out the first building within his strength to reach. With stillness of the eternal, he knelt with her in the envelope of the night. Rivulets of her blonde hair pillowed about her face as she lay watching him. There was no need for light—not that there was either a moon or sun remaining to give it—her eyes gave as much illumination as his did. Her eyes. Her unnaturalness. That gaze, innocent and ancient held him, bound him to her side. How was it that she could hold him in such a way? Neither and either, yet his very core still called out to her.

Stay with me.

Her. It had always been about her, for her, with her, through her.

Her.

"Earth child."

Eyelashes, bleached white, fluttered in amusement. No earth child here, they whispered, dancing against her flesh; no earth, no child, no here. The ruin of two races they were, the culmination of extremes neither had wished to take; lengths gone to that no one could have ever conceived of, let alone entertain the possibility of them taking.

Stay with me.

Now it was her arm, milk-bone white that lifted, her fingertips soft and yielding to the hard irrevocable angles of his face.

"We can start anew..."

Her slender back arched under the force of her rippling laughter and instinctively he recoiled at the sound; the dry leaves of rattling bones in her chest as she gave voice to her amusement. Ruin, it cried, ruin is all there is, ruin is what we have become and all that we are now. Ruin.

“Will you not stay...?”

stay—

She bowed her head, nestling her cheek in the edges of his arm, the velvet of her eyelashes shielding those extraordinary eyes even as he shielded her from the wind that pushed and beat against their shelter, crept through and in uninvited. Under the roar and rush of air, her last breath was a weary promise. I will stay.

Stay with you stay with me
Stay

“My... heartbeat...”

Tissue paper fingers pressed against her chest, thin, narrow, still. Not a flutter of movement against her white palm. Whisper of eyelashes, extraordinary eyes looking up, up to find him as she knelt within the shelter of his shadow.

“Earth-child...”

Her bottom lip quivered, trembled; the only sign of weakness she had fallen victim to. Her eyes narrowed, judgmental slits.

“No.”

No earth.

No child.

No here.

*You've betrayed your people,
your purpose...*

I knew you were flawed...

*Abhorrent to your programming,
your duty to Veyron, to us all...*

Her palm pressed harder—could she will the blood within her veins to move?—as she gazed upon him to feel nothing, nothing there, nothing around them but the silence of the void. Logic warring with disbelief as her arms gravitated toward her head, palms perfectly flat against her temple, pressing, pressing, listening, listening, listen for the tireless drum. Nothing. Ruins crumbled around her resting place, she had awoken from nothingness into nothingness. Sluggish, resistant memory awoke gripping,

grasping her consciousness; they had run, run, running away to save...is this life?

“My Earth-child—”

Possessive eyes, demanding, expecting nothing less than everything from him, and now, now... the fluid lines of his shoulders, firm and resilient forged for the long march of millennia, had begun to wilt after mere weeks of knowing her. Those eyes flickered, the petal of her lower lip trembled as knowledge pushed upon her collarbone, forcing her shoulders down, down down; she had done this, done this to him.

“—Earth-child—”

...stay...

Those eyes, waiting, watching, looking and seeing for the first time. Panels and alloys beginning to rust, his optics dim, movements restless and weak as servos were sluggish to respond to command relays.

“...Annabelle?”

...stay with me...

But that voice, still velvet.

Mine.

Only one left now, one to accept her becoming...

“What am I...?”

“You are something more now, Earth-child”

Possessive eyes, waiting, watching as slowly he reached out to her, one digit brushing against her skin, lingering on her cheekbone so cold, cold; what warmth could she give him now? No longer unique, only ruins, ruinous form, not even human, not really, not anymore. Unable to answer him, she allowed herself to be still, content in the moment to look up, up at him, at the whole of his frame that folded before her. That was when she realized she had never seen him kneel before, hadn't known he was capable. So she watched, waited as he knelt before her, knelt with her, knelt for her. He was a god to and for his people, and now, now he knelt for this wisp of a creature, this flesh and blood creature, creature of tissue and matchstick bones that she was.

Where is your god now?

Large, opulent, his cerulean optics watched her, mechanical irises clicking, a whisper, sigh, whisper as the entire weight of his focus came to rest upon her.

*You've betrayed your people,
your purpose...
You were supposed to lead...
The will of Veyron himself,
ignored, abandoned, lost all for...*

Her

She had brought him, had lead him astray. Because of her, he knelt among the ashes of nothingness...
with her.

With her, for her, through her...

“Earth-child...”

She is beginning

She is end

She is everything

She is nothing

She will end

Be all, end all, for all, his all. Her.

TURBULENCE

Robyn Mack

twigs leaves particles of Earth
are whipped up into a tribal dance
mating, swirling madly around each other
like a tiny tornado

Cacophonous
Not unpleasant
fountain's blood sprayed into mist
into air into movement
amiable cocky behavior to attempt the sea against

the rocks

branches sigh
lash their hair about gleefully



LUCY
Elise Moberly

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STATION

Z.K. Lowenfels

Everyone carried umbrellas. Besides a few not so bright tourists with wide-eyed readability, everyone knew that the cusp of spring meant half-hearted London showers. Stopping. Starting. Stopping. Pouring. It was a rhythm of adolescence. Gawky spring.

The sound the commuters made as they opened their umbrellas to meet the rain was almost quantifiably music. Individual individuals, met by a common enemy, disappearing into their conformity, becoming a single entity for just a moment. These people would never again, in the history of time, be grouped together in the way they were that night, at that moment.

Nameless appreciated this. That was his Thing. He was a nightly Appreciator of the Interesting. A connoisseur of misfits and otherwise misshapen human beings.

Fellow miracles.

Fellow mysteries.

The rain slowed again to a drizzle, leaving a damp layer of uncomfortable wet on the streets. An air of possibility. Spring was horny.

Nameless watched from his favorite corner next to the coffee shop, posed with his head slightly down and earphones in. He aimed for unassuming, that was his ultimate goal. To be nearly invisible. A second unremembered. A monochrome face, as soon as seen... erased.

“Guardian!”

It sounded more like a grunt than a word. It was late. The hawker handing out *The Guardian* was cockney. These things happened.

“Gaurrrrumph!”

“What is he saying?” a matronly woman with an overlarge Tube map asked her equally matronly husband. Mrs. Husband shrugged.

“Show me the map.”

Their child jumped between them.

“Ooo, I see a KFC!”

They moved on.

Nameless looked down and realized that the metal tail of his earphones was hanging out, rather naked, and quickly tucked it in before anyone noticed.

He'd brought a book—he always brought a book—but he usually ended up staring at the same sentence for hours. The sentence today was “Paneloux is prepared to replace Rambert at the quarantine station.” His eyes gravitated toward “Paneloux.” The ups and downs of each letter. The sweetly French accent in his head. The delicate balance of the Pan with the Loux. He wondered if perhaps there was a secret sandwiched between them, there, in the “e.”

Paneloux is prepared.

Prepared Paneloux. Replaced Rambert.

This was the sort of delicious discovery that made it impossible for him to finish a book, even when he wasn't using it as an accessory to disguise his eavesdropping philosophizing ways.

“The world is ending!”

Nameless stopped staring. A Homeless had wandered up the stairs. An old vest. Fingerless gloves. Thinning hair. Wild eyes.

“You gotta—you gotta do something. You!”

The shout of “You!” was, in fact, at no one in particular, but merely to the indifferent passers-by. There were fewer of them then. It was getting later. It was always getting later, though. Even Now. Even Now. Even Now. Now is constantly pushed into Then.

Then.

Homeless began to get angry.

“The sky is bloody falling, I saw it, I saw it.”

Bloody falling. This was beautiful.

“Don't go in the Tube. Talk to the government, we all deserve cheese. We have to protest, people.

People need to protest! Know what happened? Know? Eh? Know what happened? This happened. This is happening.”

Nameless agreed silently. Insanity was sadly accurate sometimes, an obvious metaphor for the absurdity of life itself. It was too bad it was obvious. If it wasn't, it could have been profound.

His eyes once again found Paneloux. The quarantine station. Who was sick? He couldn't remember. Then he remembered. Everyone was sick. Paneloux. Paneloux wasn't. No. Everyone was sick. Paneloux was sick, too. Except the “e.” The “e” kept him alive. Paneloux is prepared.

Then.

A girl arrived. She didn't go into the station. She didn't buy a coffee. She was waiting.

She was short. Short but not tiny. Medium short. A four in the spectrum of shortness. She seemed gaunt. Not extremely thin, but somehow undernourished. Like she'd been eating oatmeal three meals a day. But her face was still rounded. Childlike in chubbiness. Sad chubby, not jolly chubby. Then. The lips. In his head, Nameless gave them a paragraph of their own.

Lips. Slightly rouged with lipstick. These were the centerpiece of her face, maybe even her whole body. The centerpiece of other bodies. The centerpiece for the station. The city. The world. These lips—they were something unlike the lips lips lips that limped without periods in a stew in the back of Nameless' brain. These lips. They were possibly an answer. Possibly a question. They were possibly. They were posed.

A ray of filtered light fell on The Girl. Spring was getting it on.

The Girl leaned against a cement block, one of those giant ugly pieces of foundation, and looked around. She had a small purse slung around her shoulder, and she reached for it instinctively, unbuttoning the latch and making sure all was safe. She pulled out a small phone. It was a cheap one, he'd seen it at Vodafone for five quid. She put it to her ear.

“Hello?”

He could just barely distinguish her voice through the soft nothing of his earphones.

“It's me.”

This statement is always true. Nameless smiled to himself. He liked things that were true. He said it to himself, so quietly that no one could hear even if they were right there, like he was singing along to lyrics, but not singing. Breathing along. It's me.

“Nothing,” she said. “Where are you? Hmmm. Okay. I’m just waiting. At the mouth of the station. Not too bad. How’d everything go with...?”

She paused. Listened. Her eyes followed the new arrivals as they bustled in. “Oh, thank God.” Paneloux. Maybe the “e” was God.

“No, I am. You’re right. It’s just an expression. It doesn’t mean I actually believe—yeah. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. No. Okay. Bye.”

She took the phone down from her ear and held it, hovered over her purse, like she wasn’t sure if she wanted to put it away. She put it away. Then, changing her mind, she laughed lightly to herself and pulled it out again.

She bit her lip and began texting. Her fingers moved quickly over the tiny keys. It was like her instrument, she could play it without real effort. Nameless wondered what she was writing. A love text, perhaps. A hate text. A question. An answer. A lie.

Nameless didn’t support texting. He was an old soul. Condensation of language distorted it in his mind. Besides, the people he knew, he’d see them when he saw them. People used to see each other when they saw each other all the time, but now it was all calculated. Numbers and numbers and numbers.

Her phone didn’t ring. He definitely did not hear it ring—but she picked it up. It must be on silent, he thought. He wondered why. Where had she been that was so untouchable? Perhaps at a film. Or a meeting. Or painting. He liked the idea of her painting, but he knew immediately that none of these things was right. She had come from somewhere dark. Dark in the real sense. Dark, like shadows and pain and death. Dark, like cutting and crying and starving. And loneliness.

“What’s up?” she said. “Oh, cool. Nah, it wasn’t that difficult. Oh really?” She laughed. It felt staged. He wondered who she was staging it for.

“Shut up, you...” she said, looking down like someone was flattering her.

She kicked an old rock between her feet. Back and forth. Back and forth.

“That’s not fair. No, I’m not. I’m really not. I’m—at best, I’m average.”

As she said this, a particularly beautiful girl—leggy, confident, with a Camden edge—walked past. It happened in a second, the exchange of their eyes as they took each other in. The tall girl walked a little taller. The short girl slumped a little shorter, grabbing a lock of hair and twirling it, not cutely, but

almost angrily.

“Average, for sure,” she mumbled. Then she smiled a little.

“Well, thanks for saying that, anyway. You’re not so bad yourself. Ha. Yeah right. There is no way. I miss you too. I wouldn’t say it if it wasn’t true. Okay. Bye. No, you. Ha. Okay. Bye.”

She took the phone down from her ear. Lost. She seemed in another world as people hurried by and in and out. She was realizing something. She was feeling something. Something was happening deep within her.

Then.

She looked up. Fully, at the sky. Spring was pregnant.

Nameless looked back down at Paneloux, but all he could think about was how wonderful it all was. The world. The universe, in its infinite twisting nexus of mystery. And in all of everything—this one girl was having this one moment of poignancy. Paneloux, Paneloux, Paneloux.

He stood. The night had said, it’s me. Now he felt exhausted. The good exhausted, like post exercise exhaustion. Or post inspiration exhaustion. Or post cognition. He checked the headphones. He kept the book by his side, clutching it upward so that it rested on his hipbone, so that he would feel it with every step.

The train station and the quarantine station. He would enter them both. He would have safety. He would have “e.” He would have Paneloux.

He stepped forward.

He stepped forward and disappeared.

A suited businessman rushed in eternal hurry, pushing past an older woman.

“Hey!”

The businessman turned back. He gave an economical shrug of apology. Shrug. As he did so, he stepped backward into The Girl.

Another “Hey!” From her, this time.

Her cheap phone clattered to the ground. The plastic back fell off, exposing the innards. But something was missing. There were no batteries. There were never batteries. The girl gathered it, popping the plastic into place. No one saw the evidence of her charade as she slid the device back into

her purse and leaned against the cement and Spring spluttered a slight drizzle.

“No one saw,” she whispered to herself. Her heart was pounding. She had almost been exposed. We are all on the verge of being exposed. She wiped the last bit of lipstick from her lips, looking around at people who didn’t look around. From the emptiness of the mutter, she caught one word. It stopped everything. She needed this one word. She didn’t know why. But she did. The absurdity, defiant of context, eased the sore tendons of her soul. This was why she was here.

“Paneloux.”

CONTRIBUTORS

As a painter, **Emnet Affework** loves to explore the visual styles of cultures, in particular those from the Indian subcontinent, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Middle East. He is fascinated by patterns, so most of his work plays with traditional motifs and symbols that are brought to life with color and unique compositions. *emnetaffework@gmail.com*

Sara Aguilar calls Huntington Beach home and has a Bachelors of English Literature as well as a Bachelors of Fine Art from Notre Dame de Namur University. Recently she completed a Masters of English Literature from Chapman and is currently working on conquering the M.F.A. Creative Writing degree from Chapman as well. Her often fickle muse comes in the shape of her beloved sheltie, Nikki.

Katie Annarino is a second year graduate student in Chapman University's Creative Writing program. While at Chapman, her organization for graduate students called The Inklings, bridges communication between faculty, students and provides outreach to local schools. For her master's thesis, she is developing a creative nonfiction book about El Camino de Santiago, a pilgrimage route across Northern Spain which she will walk in early spring.

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