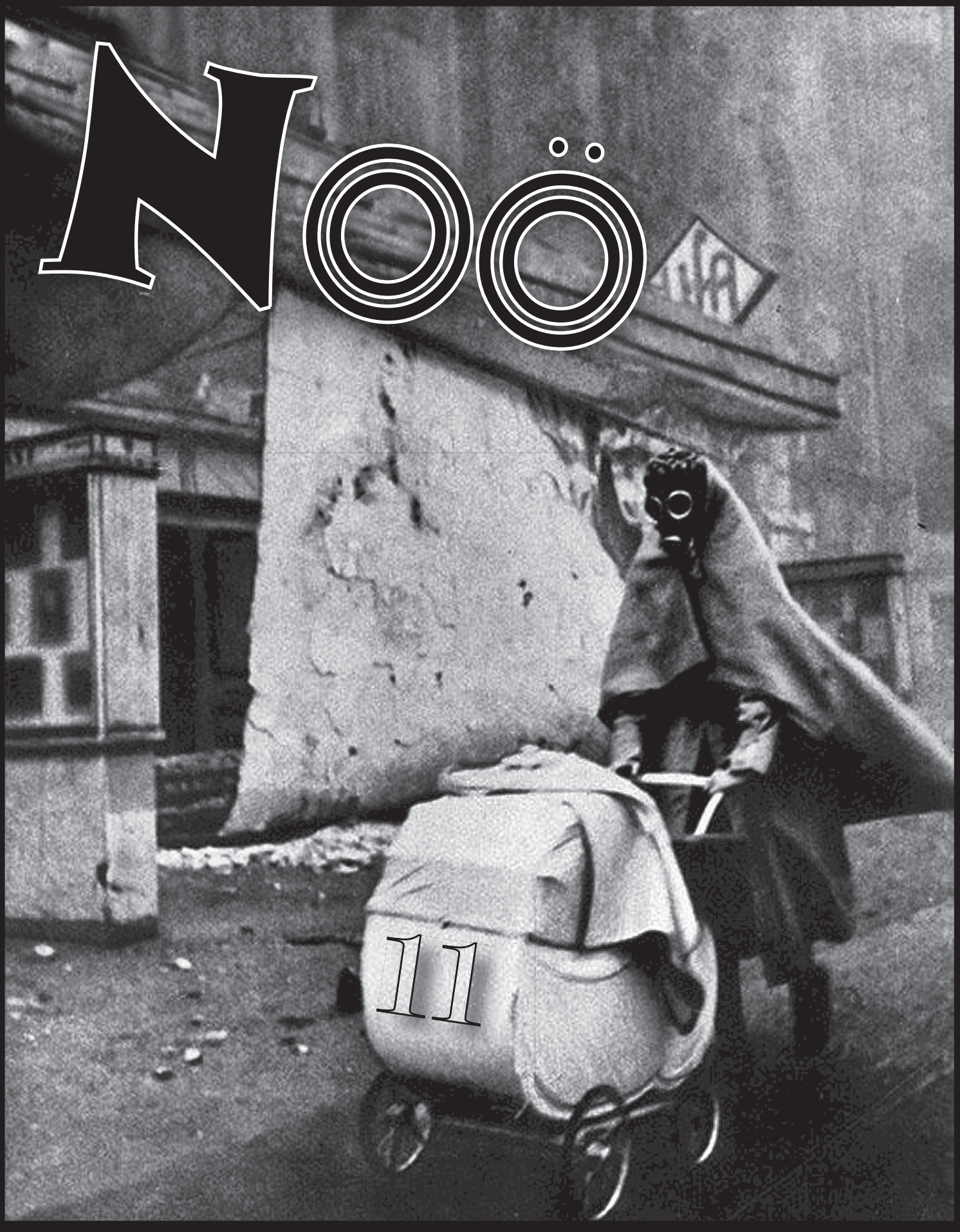
NOÖ



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A JOURNAL OF PROSE | POETRY | PICTURES FREE

Contents

 ISSN 1939-4802. For submission guidelines and contact information, please visit **www.noojournal.com**.

Editors' Notes

Mike Young — Editor
Ryan Call — Associate Editor

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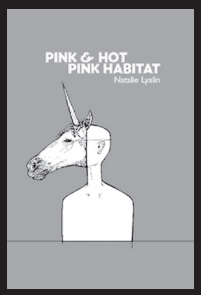
WE ALL HAVE THINGS WE SHOULDN'T LOVE. One of mine is ordering Dominos pizza online. For the uninitiated, Dominos allows you to drag little ingredients around a pie—delicate pixelated mushrooms, banana peppers, sausage chunks—without making your hands smell weird. Which is, okay, pictures, great, whatever. But then Dominos kicks open the future hatch and breaks the backboard (the future, yes, is made of a portal/basketball conglomerate material): they allow you to *track* your pizza. From assembly to oven to delivery. What's more, they name the players. Jody puts your pizza in the oven at 7:14 PM. Tony quality checks at 7:20 PM. Mario gets into his hatchback at 7:29 PM, Band-Aid on his pinkie from burning himself on your extra cheese. Mike swoons at his laptop at 7:41 PM, too rapt to do any real work, happy to shell out mondo bucks for shitty pizza, heart wheezing with gratitude for his era, this chance to participate in a bourgeois culinary spectacle of techno-utopian conviction.

One night, after ordering and thanking the delivery man whose name I'd already learned from the privacy of my monitor ("Yo CARLOS. How it be CARL? Do you like my sweatpants CARL-FACE?"), I dreamt of the next step. Here it comes: cameras. In the oven! In the box! Let me watch my slices all the way; let the feed go black only when I've fed myself. And why stop there? Why can't I track the mozzarella back to the curd? Why can't I watch—with humility and awe—milk cows from my native California valleys? Grass chomping, their spots and shy eyes. Let me watch them toil unwittingly at a life's work of dying to produce thingstuff that might one night taste of garlic and cardboard. We're in the traffic of stories here at NOÖ, and I can think of no more captivating narrative than the one of my cheese, the historical trials of my cheese, affixing my attention as I wait with my shirt off in my apartment for the harbinger of tomorrow's heartburn.

Because we live in the future, we have to do future-like stuff. That's why we've redesigned the magazine again, adding another four pages and a coat of slick. Check out our expanded Presents section, which features short essays on terrific new small press titles. In the future called always, reading innovative fiction and poetry is a little like whisper farming. So support small and independent presses: they are stapling because they love. Speaking of, Magic Helicopter Press—our affiliate micropublisher—has announced their lovely 2010 lineup, which you can discover at **www.magichelicopterpress.com**. And online at the NOÖ Journal website, we're starting a new feature called NOÖ Weekly, which will satiate your rumble for literature between issues by publishing new poems and stories bi-weekly. These installments will be edited by guests of the magazine, so that our readers might enjoy a broad range of aesthetics. Seriously: pizza aside, we're really excited about this new idea, and we hope you'll check it out at **www.noojournal.com**. As with most things from the future, this idea is stolen. *SmokeLong Quarterly* inspired us. They do good work and probably eat things, just like you. Just like all of us! Until, of course, the hour arrives when we only eat vitamin smoothies. We'll play zero gravity lacrosse and pay to perform remote voodoo on figure skaters in FOX's hit show Make A Weirdo Cry. Who's got two thumbs and a sunken-eyed love affair with the uncanny promise of tomorrow-land? This guy. Which is why I'm eating this cold pizza, while you've got all your awesome friends and a great new issue of NOÖ Journal. You should read it. Thanks to Ryan Call for being awesome. And thank God I thought up all this stupid pizza stuff and didn't have to mention all the babies in this issue. For some reason, there a lot of babies.

NOÖ Presents

Reviews of independent literary projects



WHAT: **Pink and Hot Pink Habitat**
BY: **Natalie Lyalin**
IS: **Poetry collection**
SAYS: **My squid is just so deep down right now**
FROM: **Coconut Books**
AT: **www.coconutpoetry.org**
PRESENTED BY: **Erin McNellis**

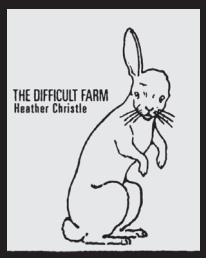
YOU STUDIED ecology in seventh grade, memorizing the biomes for your science test: the chaparral, the rainforest, the tundra. You learned about the delicate balance of life, you imagined yourself into each exotic environment from your cold, smooth desk under the fluorescent lights—but you never imagined any place quite like Natalie Lyalin's *Pink and Hot Pink Habitat.*

Lyalin's is a world you will want to inhabit. As the title suggests, the book is a bizarre ecosystem—one in which "beaver humans," "boy birds," a "super dolphin" and a "mathematic horse" coexist harmoniously. Lyalin's vigorous, sparkling language is the life force pulsing through these poems, bringing into balance the wildly disparate creatures that inhabit them. Many of her poems do contain animal imagery, but there are syntactical beasts stalking these pages as well: phrases and clauses as unexpected and marvelous as the blue-tongued skink. "In the nebulous of pushpins you stand sideways." "The leaf of you, the bend, the fire flicker for the Kazak." "The electric gems show their horseness, / their speed ability." In lines like these, we can start to understand what Lyalin means when she says, "language comes in prisms and I cradle it as an animal mother." Crystalline vision is nursed by organic energy, and the result is something otherworldly yet still somehow familiar.

> That flock of sheep is puzzle hearts. I wait after school for safety.
>
> I put cotton in my ears and float to dimension x7y giga heart maggot.
>
> The sweetness factory. Everyone is a flower and human rafts come to shore.
>
> The sleep language is what the eyelids did to each other.

In the above excerpt from "Misarubka," we are unsure whether to feel unsettled or comforted. The image of "wait[ing] after school for safety" evokes both an idyllic suburban childhood and the threat of violence that necessitates such precautions. There is something tender about seeing sheep as "puzzle hearts," but "dimension x7y giga heart maggot" is about the creepiest name for a fantasy-world ever imagined. Are the "human rafts" a delightful image suggesting that we can save one another, or are they bloated, drowned corpses? Lyalin suggests that we should "break [our] arms off" and "row to shore," which is perhaps exactly what navigating this book requires—that we repurpose ourselves, imagining new possibilities for parts of us that we thought we understood. The shore on which we find ourselves will not be listed in any ecology textbook, but it will be worth exploring.

WHAT: **The Difficult Farm**
BY: **Heather Christle**
IS: **Poetry collection**
SAYS: **Magnificence comes / in a small car, but we all fit.**
FROM: **Octopus Books**
AT: **www.octopusbooks.com**
PRESENTED BY: **Erin McNellis**



"WHEN I AM BORN, the whole world's born with me," writes Heather Christle, and it's hard to think of a better line to sum up *The Difficult Farm*. Each poem in her book is a new world born with the speaker, who "struts" at one moment in a "matchless squirrel coat" and at another moment feels "like an old sheet someone had dropped / into the river." The speaker finds herself in places as disparate as forests, battlefields, motel rooms, suburban streets, and Zanzibar—often in rapid succession—but her wry, sensible voice steers us through this surreal safari with remarkable ease.

This casual tone might seem an odd match for the marvelous events Christle describes, but it doesn't mute their mystery. In fact, it does quite the opposite:

> People love to come up to me and say
> *Hello, you enormous, vibrating bird,*
> but they are just confusing me
> with my invention, an invention
> I regret.

The ordinariness of the language here makes the strange content of these lines even stranger. In what universe could this statement warrant such blasé treatment? Christle's poems challenge us to revise our criteria for deciding what is real and what is imaginary, and demand that we treat everything in them as equally possible and equally significant.

Many of the poems in this book are like dreams, emanating from the dreamer but not entirely in her control. The worlds she moves through are marvelous but frustrating, transforming before her very eyes just as she was starting to understand them: "Now you are quite well. Now you are, // what, made of sand? And leaking. / You are a taxing companion. // If anyone is chasing us they will / surely track us down." And just as puzzling as the things that do happen are the things that don't: an unmade birthday cake bears a likeness to the new girl in town who never came to school, "despite the exquisite sharpness / of the pencils we had readied in hopes / of dazzling our unfamiliar friend." These small absences haunt us like ghosts; they are peculiar thing- and person-shaped holes that can't be mourned but can't be forgotten. They are exactly the sort of thing that we dream about, the sort of thing that shouldn't be important but is. *The Difficult Farm* asks us to learn from our dreams, bewildering as they may be—if you are reborn every night into a different extraordinary world, then why shouldn't it happen when you wake up in the morning, too?

WHAT: **A Mouth in California**
BY: **Graham Foust**
IS: **Poetry collection**
SAYS: **I'd so like to burn down your hands.**
FROM: **Flood Editions**
AT: **www.floodeditions.com**
PRESENTED BY: **Ben Kopel**

1: **TO PARAPHRASE** John Peel summarizing The Fall, Graham Foust is always totally surprising, always inherently familiar. You have never read these words in this order and yet you've known them by this heart of hearts of yours your entire life.

2: *A Mouth in California* contains the tiny reversals we have come to expect from Foust, but we still will never see them coming. "It's a little like watching paint not dry" he tells us. "Unwelcome home" he tells us. What do we do? We listen. They shine a light on awe and work towards a quiet kind of rapture.

3: This, his fourth collection, presents readers with a poet allowing himself to get a little carried away with himself. Lines are longer and stanzas are thicker. But Foust's poems aren't (and personally, I don't think have ever been) overly concerned with the creation of sparseness. They are about finding focus in a life and a language that is always encountered rather than created. This is the conflict in California.

4: The poet's weapon of choice is the sentence and his ammo is the allusion. Allow me to quote Godard by way of Jim Jarmusch: "It's not where you take things from—it's where you take them to." The poet takes what he wants and hands it over to a speaker willing to work towards striking a balance with the world at large that isolates and involves all of us. Graham Foust knows us and he knows we're in this together.

5: And while the ideas and the images of the poems are ok with the need to be to themselves, they are presented by a speaker striving to be at peace with the desire to be a part of something bigger. No man an island. No poem a vacuum. "I sample to keep my poem company," is how Foust put it in a recent interview. In 'Academy Fight Song,' post-punkers Mission of Burma shout "I'm not judging you/I'm judging me." In his 'Academy Fight Song,' Foust asserts that "[t]he absolute/bleeds between these places." The poem is at once the radio tower and the long time listener, first time caller.

6: *from* OUTBOX:

> Now get in love.
> I'd so like to burn down your hands.
>
> Heartbreak thrashes the hush, a mouth
> of thought—I freak back out.
> To space's constant swallow comes
> a small unslaughter: a song
> for once, a sliver. Be let go.

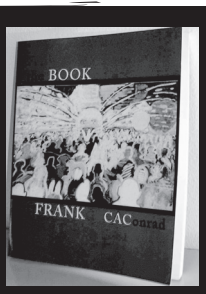
7: The mouth in Graham Foust's *A Mouth in California* is one willing to use its voice to whisper what so many others would scream. It is a mouth packed with music.

8: These words are concerned with where we are going but not content to stop when we get there. "[W]hen I'm gone/I'll be the song I wrote to get me back/to ash." That's right. Going, going, but never too far gone to come back home in hi-fidelity.

9: Me? I love Graham Foust!

10: There is a special place in Foust's poetics reserved for those of us forever "[f]ull of noise and lust," the ones with songs left to sing and summers to celebrate. His poems are the tunes I hear in my head and the soundtrack to my secret life.

WHAT: **The Book of Frank**
BY: **CAConrad**
IS: **Poetry collection**
SAYS: **any life saved in this place / is magic**
FROM: **Chax Press**
AT: **www.chax.org**
PRESENTED BY: **Mike Young**

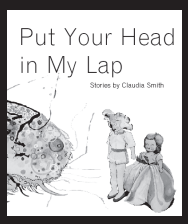


IF YOU PAINT your AstroTurf blue, people are bound to whisper. One myth of Boise State's blue football field is that birds crash, guessing water and getting techno-carpet. If you just imagined that, it's true. It doesn't matter whether you can't swim or you hate football. In CAConrad's *Book of Frank*, the hero—eponymous Frank—finds a small bird the size of his heart, but he won't save it: "I know / futility when / I see it." Frank's mother knows where the "next war" will be "by / the colors they / made her / paint / the air / planes." In this cycle of poems—which are linguistically poised, imaginatively decadent, and together form a life's narrative—the mind doesn't realize it's supposed to stay put. Minds swell, spill, invent and make real with as much commotion as bodies mix sensation, noise, and gunk.

If reality's public agreement—oh, that's a tree? okay, sure, it's a tree—then surreality is the personal: a vision that won't say okay. And what's so refreshing about Conrad's surrealism, especially in the context of contemporary poetry, is how loud and impolite it disagrees. Of trees, Frank shouts: "don't tell me it was / the wind! ... THAT TREE / WAVED / AT ME!" Conrad's construction and airing of Frank's reality isn't just dream tittering. Instead, these poems show imagination as a vehicle of outright salvation. Because Frank's world doesn't exactly want for invented weirdness: at his birth, his father screams "why doesn't my son have a cunt!?" Crocodiles swim on "the white surface of the lake," eggshell becomes hair, and a mother with tentacles and a cape glares in the principal's office. So when Frank grows "crows for hands" and "hammers / carrots / all day," it's not to bring these images to show-and-tell, but to show how a personal vision can fight back against the visions thrust upon us. The world doesn't like it when we do this. It would rather we lie and pretend, touch ourselves under the table during the dinner party. The world makes a chocolate man and blames Frank for holding "his candy genitals." It makes a Coca Cola bottle with a "fine lean waist," then tries to pretend it's Frank's fault when he puts himself in "her little glass mouth." When, in effect, and by virtue of effect, and how the virtue of effect makes us real: he loves her. That's not okay?

Fuck that. In a spirit of clarity and frankness (har har), projections in *The Book of Frank* happily unload themselves on reality: "Frank added milk to the / Instant Cowboy Mix and / herded himself into the / living room / mooing." If reality didn't want us to talk back, it shouldn't beg us so hard to stay. We're lost for what we don't say of how we know ourselves, and Frank's having none of it: "you'd never / know I lived for years / in the upper / left hand / bureau drawer / with a broken / spring and / corroded / batteries / in my neck," he tells us, "if I hadn't / just / said / so."

Frank makes and tells of his world to own his life, but it's more than that: he eats "clear around / the sleeping worm / of the apple," because "any life saved in this place / is magic ... / it's life coming back to you." And that's the frantic and successfully stunning wishfulness of *The Book of Frank*: to bring dreams to life for the reason we bring anything to life: so that everything gets a chance to know itself. Dreams touched not for the sake of merely reporting how they feel, but to reach in, pull them out—gooey, wriggling, honking—and paint them all over the world's chest.



WHAT: **Put Your Head In My Lap**
BY: **Claudia Smith**
IS: **Fiction chapbook**
SAYS: **"It won't get in, don't worry," she told her son. "How do you know?" "I won't let it."**
FROM: **Future Tense Books**
AT: **www.futuretensebooks.com**
PRESENTED BY: **Christine Crutchfield**

HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER fell short. It's not raining, but the sky is full of "bruised clouds." That gift from your husband makes you feel worthless, and the only person capable of articulating hopelessness seems to be your three-year-old. So why are you still piecing together what happened a year ago? Claudia Smith offers us a kind of answer with *Put Your Head in My Lap*. This collection of shorts explores how we fail at love, and how we split our fingernails trying to cling to it.

Smith's characters represent many of the roles women play in a spoiled relationship—the abandoned, the unrelenting, the witness—but they also share a stillness-in-motion, characters stuck inside the memories of what they no longer have. In many shorts we travel from memory to present only to end in memory again, placing us in an elliptical world where the present is less important than the events that made it this way.

The world becomes even more elliptical when we draw connections between stories. These connections—from a dark-haired husband's refrain of "stop talking" to a son's love of Spiderman to the aftershocks of a miscarriage—build on each other so that we too feel lost in the memories, that each short is another scene in the story of where happily-ever-after went. A story like "Two and Two," though a sweet moment between a couple, is turned sour by what we already know. That dark hair and that conversation about future children let us know exactly how this ends. I find connections between every story, even when I have to make a stretch. The compelling "Hook"—maybe the largest departure from the stories in this collection—can even be related back with one moment of dialogue in "Ice." But whether these characters are intended to be related or not, Smith gives us just enough, and leaves out just enough, for us to fill in the rest. And we don't fill it in so hopefully.

So what about redemption? Maybe it's in a mother and child pretending the moon is a monster, or how a dog's nose feels like velvet, in the beautiful details found even in a hopeless situation, or that failed love was at least proven love once. Maybe we find ourselves like Smith's characters when asked, with our knowledge of how it all turns out, if we'd burn the memories. We'd rather relive them. These stories are what we have left so we'll hold them in our laps. Not let go.

WHAT: **Easter Rabbit**
BY: **Joseph Young**
IS: **Fiction collection**
SAYS: **Can you save me? Yes. Put your head down.**
FROM: **Publishing Genius**
AT: **www.publishinggenius.com**
PRESENTED BY: **Mike Young**

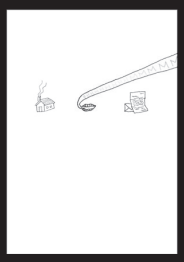
IN THE ESSAY "Cybernetics and Ghosts," Italo Calvino talks about how the storyteller only has so many ways to talk about toucans. To maintain coherent communication in the human tribe, we agree on finite sets of sounds, signs of correspondence that make a thing into a thing called. Into names. But to make stories, we activate these names into play: imagine a new toucan here, a rabbit there. Therefore the storyteller works with permutations, mixing and matching both names and things, discovering new combinations, and in so doing names take on what Calvino calls "narrative powers, potentialities contained in the word, in its ability to link itself to other words on the plane of discourse." Now fast forward to contemporary America: hot sauce and filmmakers, freeway columns and bedroom lamps. What you'll find is the human tribe still desperately at the strange work of living, and storytellers like Joseph Young still permuting our finite syllables into what Calvino calls narrative explosion: "myth, which must be recited in secret, in a secret place."

The microfictions in Joseph Young's *Easter Rabbit* work on a craft level by testing and worrying sounds and images into spaces where they might achieve a certain visual and sonic clarity, but stretch conceptual ambiguity. Young rotates his paragraph-length fictions like crystals, constructing illusions of infinite sides. The reader sees and sees and still wonders. *Easter Rabbit*'s title story runs as follows: "Can you save me? Yes. Put your head down. I'm afraid it'll hurt. It will. No one wants it." This dialogue works with the generous reader to imagine people in their physical space, but it won't do much more than that unless you keep turning it yourself.

Young demonstrates a variety of turns, choreography that suggests a vision of gainful non-understanding. He enjoys paradox: "The snake smelled them, alone, not alone ..." and "She would call, I hate you, or, I love you and the ducks would scatter." He also enjoys precise measurement: "23 directions of gray," a forehead breaking into "21 worries." Similarly, the stories construct images by way of syntactical clicks, tiny turns of the lens: "She held out her hand, a napkin, a small sketch of his ear." These stories tick along with such sentences until the camera starts to melt: the world suddenly understood not through mimetic language but through the imposition of imagination. Conversations invent machines, a spider bite invents a vision of God. And because these fissures of imagination are no less clear than Young's representations of the world, and because they operate forth from the same inviting logic of sonic connection—what feels almost like sonic inevitability—their clarity rattles the reader into spaces of classically Romantic negative capability.

These are spaces Young enforces by often titling and concluding with metaphor, floating suggestions into the opening and closing notes. The story "Pith" is a good example. Here's the story in its entirety: "When he checked the door that last time, it was open, malice leaking free like dry heat. Yes? he called and rattled the ring of keys at his hip. No, came the answer, the voice not unlike his lover, his mother, a wounded horse." This last sentence is vintage Joe Young: eerie, melancholy suggestions of physical sensation (the sound of an answer) that splay choices of sensation identification—choices generating the next by way of linguistic relation: the rhyme of "lover" and "mother," the repetition of "o" as the second letter that carries into "wounded" and "horse"—without settling on any one choice, preferring to let whatever experience the reader's mind has among these choices, these permutations, be the experience of definition.

It's probably not worth worrying if all of this suggests that Young's project is esoteric. Because it is esoteric: *eso* from the Greek "within," and *Easter Rabbit* is always concerned with the within. But let's also highlight one of many frankly observed images of feeling: in "Tabula Rasa," we see a man who "cut into the rotted comment with a hunting knife—I WANT—gathered up his garbage bag and dirty coat and shuffled on." It's Young's desire to share that image without imposing on that man's irreducible humanity, to let language steer the story, that shows him belonging to a pretty traditional lineage of storytellers: the one who hears "man" in "toucan." These stories know that their job is to permute our circumstances and our language until they've uncovered new ways to make our world mysterious again. What *Easter Rabbit* knows is that the secret's blown when you turn the lights on: the real secret is how the light spreads.



WHAT: **The Failure Six**
BY: **Shane Jones**
IS: **Novel**
SAYS: **A fox soaked in milk ran up and dragged the body away.**
FROM: **Fugue State Press**
AT: **www.fuguestatepress.com**
PRESENTED BY: **Ryan Call**

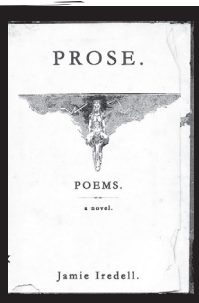
IN *THE FAILURE SIX,* we read about foxes, guitar-playing cats, clouds with little black crosses in them, geometric shapes of sound, a man with a green moustache who wields a pair of revolvers, and six messengers who struggle to recount to a kidnapped woman named Foe the details of her parents' deaths. Foe, whose memory is like "an empty well with a bottom that stretches through the earth," cannot retain all that the messengers tell her, though bits and pieces surface in her dreams and are transcribed into The Nightmare Papers, a mysterious document that her kidnappers seek to hide. As each messenger tries to reach her, they are subsequently punished and banished to the building with one hundred rooms.

What interests me most about *The Failure Six* is how soft and airy the story feels despite the terrible nature of Foe's predicament. The guitar playing cats, the scurrying foxes, and the gentleness of the sentences belie the terror of failure, of nightmares from which one cannot awake. Foe, in a transcription of one of her nightmares, writes:

> I asked the messenger if I was having a nightmare and he said I wasn't, that if he shot me right now I would die. I told him that to get out of nightmares I have to shoot myself and he said that he already knew that. He said everyone had to do that. Then he excused himself, put a pistol in his mouth, and pulled the trigger. His body crumpled at my feet. Smoke rose from the back of his head. A fox soaked in milk ran up and dragged the body away. I can't remember anything but I will remember this.

For that is the saddest part of the story: that Foe, who cannot remember her life, her parents, can only remember the frightening sensation of her nightmares. These nightmares tend to replace her waking hours, swapping the days of her life for her nights, so that what becomes real to her is the unreal. As readers, we're lucky to have means other than the pistol to escape our dreams. My wife tells me I've begun to shout myself awake in the middle of the night, and she's quite bothered by it.

WHAT: **Prose. Poems. A Novel.**
BY: **Jamie Iredell**
IS: **Prose poems/a novel**
SAYS: **A neighbor cocked a shotgun. I've had better nights.**
FROM: **Orange Alert Press**
AT: **www.orangealert.net**
PRESENTED BY: **Ryan Call**



MUCH OF Jamie Iredell's *Prose. Poems. A Novel.* relies upon a kind of turning and returning, a shifting back upon itself, a series of interruptions of language and of arc to tell the story of Larry, a troubled bear of a man on his way East. I am reminded of the classical turn of the sonnet when I read Iredell's prose poems because of how often Iredell devotes the entirety of a text block to developing one conceit, character, emotion, and so on, and then, in a line or two he tacks away from it. Take, for example, how the description of Jon, a buddy of Larry's, suddenly telescopes outward:

> Old Glory crossed the Stars and Bars above their television, a most honored spot in the living room. I believe Jon had frequented monster truck exhibitions. After a first draft of this, when he read what I wrote, Jon looked at me differently, a sadness tilting his eyes, making his baldness seem balder.

These moves are useful in allowing Iredell to send Larry through what might otherwise have been a blurry anti-narrative of drunken and drugged-out trouble-making to a revelation of sorts. I found myself reading not only to enjoy the crunching parties, the brawling and drinking, the lyrical quality of the poems, the descriptions of the outdoors, of wildlife and of wild lives, but also to search out these shifts so as to better see Larry move from what Iredell calls "debauchery and brutism" to "sensitivity and salvation."

My favorite turn in the entire book occurs near the end of the third section, "When I Moved to Atlanta," during which Larry describes his after-dinner reaction to a woman named Sally, who becomes his salvation:

> When it thundered, the light went dim then bright again. After Sally went home I felt a slight tug—the Highlander down the street—but I stayed rolled in my covers, awake as if I'd run my veins full of stuff that's meant to keep you that way, only I'd barely finished a glass of Chianti. It still graced the table, staining the cloth with myriad rings, light purple and darker and darker.

Larry is falling in love, though maybe he doesn't realize it just yet. He knows enough, though, to understand how this development in his story is a significant shift away from the caves of the bars and dives he once frequented. Running through his veins is not the crude burn of Evan Williams and cocaine, but the softer edge of Chianti.

Consider the final image in that poem: the clean, symmetrical lines of the wine glass, and beneath it the purple stains, errors upon the tablecloth. Both of these combine into an image that perhaps embodies the main tension of the book. This slow accumulation of prose poems, their constant turning and returning, not only give to Larry a specific weight, building him into a full character with which we can sympathize, but also burden him with an unpleasant, vulgar life that threatens to disrupt whatever he hopes to make for himself in Atlanta.

Jamie Iredell

GOD IN FROGS

Davin Malasarn

VICTOR SPENT THE FIRST NIGHT ALONE and awake. He listened to the rats scratching inside the walls. He traced the line of red dirt that circled his room at ankle height. There was one bathroom for fifteen men, and that too was stained with red: red in the grout between the tiles, red fingerprints on the single water faucet that let out only cold, red tracks spiraling toward the drain in the shower like a small red solar system. The men too were covered in red dust, and soon he would be red with them when he went to work in the mines.

He was alone Saturday night, but there were two beds lying parallel, one beside the window and his beside the wall. There was a closet, which he slid open. He discovered a shrine for Mary. A faded postcard in a pewter frame. Rosary beads hanging from a corner. A white candle, bent downward in the heat, praying, perhaps weeping.

On Sunday it was quiet in the mess hall where he sat alone and ate stewed beef and okra. Some men sat and watched a television program about a woman who dreamed about being in love. The men did not turn to look at him, so Victor did not sit down with them. Sunday: Domingo. He only knew a few words.

He looked at the books on the wooden desk separating his bed from his roommate's. There were geometria books and algebra books and quimica books. There was a small radio. The antenna was held to the back by a rubber band; the end was taped to the wall.

The other man arrived after dinner. His skin was dark and clean, washed for his trip, wherever he had gone. They shook hands.

"Do you speak English?"

The man shrugged.

"I'm Victor."

The man stood up straight and said, "Paulo Coutinha."

They shook hands again.

Paulo lay in his bed, covered his face with a towel, and soon he was asleep. Victor reached into his suitcase and lifted out his journal. He was composing a toast for his brother's wedding, for which he was the best man; it would be his only trip home this year. He stared at the white page for a while, then he closed the journal. Work would begin tomorrow. The process involved spraying cyanide across a field of red, crumbling rocks to dissolve the gold inside. It would seep down through grates and coat carbon troughs where it could be collected. Gold: Ouro. Cyanide: He did not know that word.

He went to the bathroom and found that his toothbrush was already covered in red dust. He looked at his teeth as he brushed, watching the pink foam covering his teeth. He wondered if he would ever be blind to the red around him.

When he opened the door to his room, Paulo was unpacking clean clothes from a backpack and arranging them into a drawer underneath his bed. American music played on the radio. The Police: "Don't Stand So Close To Me." Paulo looked over his shoulder when Victor came in.

"How do you say cyanide?" Victor asked.

"No ingles," Paulo said, shrugging.

Victor slid the fingers of one hand between the fingers of the other to show the cyanide moving through the rocks and the gold leeching out.

"Ah, cianeto, cianeto," Paulo said.

"Cianeto," Victor said, remembering. He smiled. "How long have you worked here?…Muito tempo?"

Paulo shrugged.

"Muito tempo? Muito anos?" Victor said.

Paulo lifted up his hands, five fingers on his left and three on his right.

"Every day?" Victor said. "Eight anos? Red every day?…Vermelho todos dias?"

"Vermelho," Paulo said. He pronounced it differently from the way Victor had said it. He looked around the room at the red track as if he'd just remembered it was there. Victor sat down on his bed. He did not say more. For a moment, the two were quiet, but Paulo seemed to be impatient. He lifted up a finger to get Victor's attention. He said, "Ra."

"What?" Victor said.

Paulo slid the closet door open. From underneath the shrine of Mary, he pulled out a small wooden case.

"Ra em uoro," Paulo said. He brought the case over and knelt beside Victor. He opened it and revealed a frog entombed in gold.

"In the field?" Victor asked, imagining the frog trapped in the carbon troughs as the gold rained down and suffocated it.

"Ra," Paulo said. He lifted the frog by one of its arms and held it out to Victor. Victor turned it and examined the details of the gold coating. Every fold and bump was revealed and permanently fixed. He saw his own reflected face morph as it slipped over the surface of the frog.

He returned it to Paulo who placed it into its case and slid it back underneath the shrine. Before closing the closet, Paulo knelt down and prayed to Mary.

He turned off the light.

Victor sunk into sleep, thinking of what he might find.

BABY LOVE

Meakin Armstrong

SHE WANTED ONE, SHE SAID. She wanted one who looked like me. I wanted one because I wanted her. I wanted her for everything; I wanted her to fill every crack and space inside of me.

She tracked her cycles. Made schedules. I bought the things we would need: clothes, cribs, the rest. We planned and hoped. Months passed, then years. The manufacturer recalled the crib. The advice books grew out of date. The baby clothes had something wrong with them: they had too much flame retardant. Or too little.

I got rich on a scheme I saw on TV, buying foreclosed real estate. She got fat, eating at nice restaurants. We still kept to her schedule. I was there when I was needed.

We moved. In our new place, we set up a room for the baby, but it was smaller than the old one. I kept the larger room for a home office. My office had once been a baby room: over my printer were appliqués of dancing pigs in blue pants.

I had our new baby room painted, but this time I didn't buy anything for it. I filled it with tax forms and books. In the corner was the old, recalled crib. It needed some sort of an adapter so baby heads wouldn't stick between the slats. I filled the crib with gifts we couldn't use: matching beer steins, a plastic birdbath, books, and old baby clothes.

My work-from-home scheme fell on hard times and we had to move to another place, a property I'd bought as an investment, but had never planned on living in. It smelled of dogs and children. Even after we'd been there for many years, we found rawhide bones and pacifiers behind the refrigerator, under the stove, and in the basement.

We painted all of the rooms in that house, except for the one that had belonged to a twelve-year old. It was girlish and lined with posters of teen idols. We liked it, its innocence and its little girl knick-knacks. We furnished it with matching beanbag chairs from Costco. Mine was red, hers blue. Between us, we had a small breakfast table. Every morning before we went to work, we sat in our chairs, ate our bagels, and looked at the posters.

"New" © 2010 Sue Miller (zzinnia.com)

EVERYONE THE SAME, BUT NOT AT ONCE

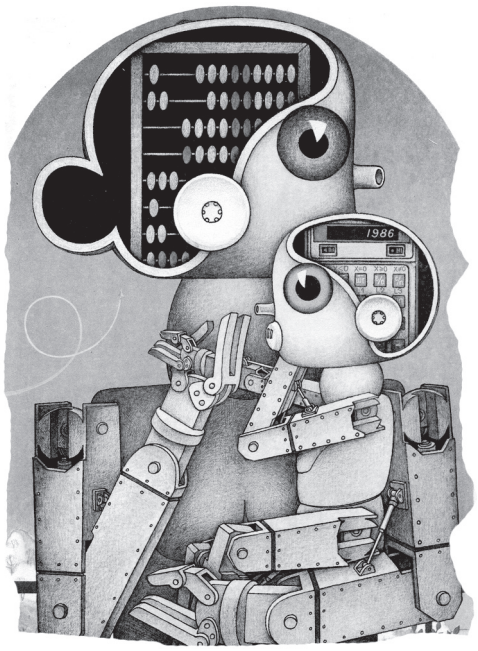
Cami Park

ONCE, AS A BOY, the man at the bus stop holding a tri-folded newspaper found a small ragged poodle in his backyard, curled around a gutted tomato. He sat next to it and petted it for longer than an hour, until his mother came outside. She told him two things: one, that tomatoes are poison for dogs, and two, that the dog barked too much. Now, when the grownup man checks his watch and looks at the sky, it's because the words in his paper have begun to peel and slough, like dead skin.

The boss of the man at the bus stop was so terrified of the dark as a young girl that she would pee in the floor duct in her bedroom rather than negotiate the dark stairway to the bathroom downstairs. Now her corner office has a bathroom steps away from her desk, where she'll go sometimes just to turn the faucets on and off. She enjoys the sound of her heels on the hard tile. She wears skirts and dresses always, and is never in the building after hours.

The intern of the boss of the man at the bus stop has a dead kitten in her refrigerator. Her father is building a box for it, the smallest of the house cat's litter, that could not eat. When it is finished and buried, the intern will climb into the hammock in the backyard, cupping her hands to her chest in the same way they cupped the kitten at the end. She'll lift up her face and feel the warmth of the sun on her hair and her skin; closing her eyes she'll let it run through her veins, drugged.

The sun shines on everyone the same, but not at once. The sun is constant. The Earth could go about its orbit in a purposeful way or in a lackadaisical manner and to the sun it would make no difference. The sun has eaten hearts, is regularly smothered. The sun is the subject of much gossip, rumor, and science, not all of it true. The surface temperature of the sun is 9,800 degrees Fahrenheit. The sun has packed so many suitcases.



by E. Benyaminson for Hello, I'm Robot!
by Stanislav Zigunenko (Russia, 1989)

GRIFFIN

Donna D. Vitucci

First published on the Whidbey Writers' Workshop site / Selected as "Student Choice May 2009" by the MFA Student Community at Whidbey Writers' Workshop

NAMING THE BOY Griffin was our first mistake. "Do you even know what a griffin is?" I said to James. We were too smart for our own good. His hair, my husband's, was dusty in its dryness. He was not a user of product; he eschewed product, or anything that came in a can. His vegetables were frozen until I boiled them, boiled the guts out of them. He ate mush. He was my baby until the baby.

Our Griffin, he was brand new territory. James had been used to the high tune of grass, and me, my giant boyfriends.

Chances were I was here again only because I'd been here before. Fuck that merry go round. Motherhood was all points new and unknown, the danger zone, the war zone, the twilight zone, where I logged my best according to the clock and my breasts and the high pitched wail. I knocked a broom at the smoke alarm until it hung from the hallway ceiling displaying its wire innards.

Griffin sucked under a discreet blanket.

"Ah, show them off, baby" said James, probably thinking he remembered their allure and their resist against gravity. He zipped when he saw the veins, a network of monstrous glee at which the baby sucked lapsarian blue. The walls shuddered with their own caught breath. Everybody took five.

James skipped down to the Wagon Wheel, returned with a pack of True menthols. He handed them to me, my sheepish husband, his hair all at odds with his racing home. "What did I miss?" he said. Clouds of whiskey breath buffeted my cheeks and floated up to the ceiling, balloons perfuming the room.

We watched Griffin grow. James carried a tape measure at all times. He'd been a Boy Scout before the grass grew tall and tickled his nose. Once the baby sprouted wings when he should have been walking, we tethered him with a dog leash to the back porch rail while I chiseled at the ground. We couldn't remember rain, or what it did.

"We don't know the first fucking thing," I whispered at the house, crossing my fingers for pity from somewhere. In the no-wind, the baby lifted now and then on his own. He was trying.

"Well, who wouldn't want out?" James said when I reported, like a normal mother, to Daddy the day's accomplishments.

I said, of my own small deeds: "Rows of carrot and beets and butter head lettuce, five different kinds of heirloom tomatoes."

"Five?" His Doubtfulness said, tickling the baby's chin.

Griffin's wings fluttered and his feet left the ground then lit softly, his baby toes bending with precision.

"He's fucking levitating," James shouted.

"Told you."

My husband, dry as a stick, came to me and nuzzled my neck with his hair of straw: "I always knew you were part angel."

"He doesn't get buoyancy from me," I said.

James backed up to stroke the baby's one wing. "No mythology on my side."

Both of us abdicating while Griffin lifted in his pretty little orphan-hood and the leash kept him from penetrating the sky.

I said to James, "Our child has wings."

James patted the boy's head and the baby's laugh rang bells.

"Drought's still on," James said. He scuffed his boot toe at the ground.

I looked back at the small things I'd planted, already shriveling. "I'll get the hose," I said.

The baby had piss leaking down his chubby thighs, onto the porch step, green as anti-freeze, and trickling in the direction of the garden.

Giddy-Up Little Baby

Charles Hale

WHEN MY BEST FRIEND, Fast Eddie, returned to town with the news that he had received a DUI while visiting his cousins in lower Alabama I knew we were going to have to find alternative forms of entertainment. He told me about his Alabama adventures while we sat in front of the bookstore in camp chairs with a cooler between us. His visit was six weeks long and every day he was there he wandered the strip malls and the convenience stores with one of his five cousins and their friends. There was a girl involved. Her name was Robinella and Fast Eddie had wedding aspirations. Then one day he caught Robinella coming out an automatic carwash riding in the lap of a cousin. Needless to say, he canceled the caterer, went on a three-day bender, got a DUI, and fled to Oxford. The guy needed a distraction, and though I didn't have breasts, I figured I could come up with something.

We made a gallon of red Kool-Aid and one of purple Kool-Aid, and got some cups, some ice, and a "FREE KOOL-AID" sign. We decided that out in front of the bookstore would be as good a place as any to pass the day and perpetuate our unselfishness. Whenever there was a lull in the drink giveaways, one of us would take to following a complete stranger around the square. This was not stalking, it was passive-aggressive admiration. After a couple of hours of dancing on the verge of being arrested again Fast Eddie went to get a newspaper.

"Dude. Check this out," Fast Eddie hollered.

"I know," I said. "It's a newspaper bin converted into an art project by a local artist."

"No dude. Seriously, come here."

"I know," I said. "It's the hipster paper. I know, I write a column for them. Sometimes you're in it."

"Goddamn it, Charles," Fast Eddie yelled. "Would you just get off your fat ass and come look at this."

I poured one more cup of purple Kool-Aid and moseyed over to Fast Eddie. He was holding the newspaper bin open and staring like a four-year-old on Christmas morning. I'll admit that when I first looked in the bin I was speechless. Then I looked around the street to see if anyone else had seen what Fast Eddie had discovered. Then I asked him the dumbest question I've ever asked anyone.

"Is that really a baby?" I asked, with my eyes transfixed on the small child shaking a tiny maraca and sitting calmly inside the newspaper bin.

"That doesn't seem to be the most important question at this time, does it?" Fast Eddie had a point because this was not a 'wrapped in swaddling clothing and lying in a manger' kind of moment and we certainly weren't wise men carrying frankincense and myrrh.

"South America, 1940s"
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(www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/)

After a few glances at each other and at the baby, Fast Eddie reached in and pulled it out. Because of the overalls it was dressed in, we decided it was a boy.

"We should call him Bert," Fast Eddie said.

"I concur," I said. "But, what do we do with Bert now that we have him?"

Fast Eddie was holding Bert away from his body, but I noticed a resemblance.

"This is your town, Charles," Fast Eddie said. "You should know something we can do with Bert. It's our duty to show this little fella a good time."

"You're right, Fast Eddie, as you often are. We could use him to pick up chicks, but that might not be so fun for him. But I've heard tell of a mini horse in some people's yard down the road on Van Buren Ave."

"You're telling me," Fast Eddie asked while making silly faces at Bert. "That allegedly there is a mini horse within walking distance?"

"Allegedly. Yes," I said.

"Well then," Fast Eddie said. "It's settled. We'll find the mini horse and give Bert his first horseback ride."

Just as we decided our plan, the mayor walked out of the bookstore. I told him about our situation with the Kool-Aid, Bert, and the alleged mini horse, and I asked him if he would sit with our cooler and chairs for a little while. It wasn't until I told the mayor he could drink all of the Kool-aid he wanted that he agreed to sit with our stuff.

I also agreed that he could sell cups of Kool-Aid for 25 cents, but no more. He nodded. Then I led Bert and Fast Eddie down the street to see if our dreams of a mini horse ride for Bert would come true.

Bert started crying before we got off the square. Maybe he saw his own reflection in the glass of the video rental store. Maybe he saw the reflection of Fast Eddie, whose mane of dirty red hair could make anyone cry. But I digress, and digressing with a screaming baby in your midst is worse than drinking turpentine and pissing on a brush fire.

I thought taking Bert away from Fast Eddie would help the screaming but instead it got a maraca thrown at my head. I was able to dodge the flying maraca, but Bert had some arm strength, and when the percussion instrument landed on the sidewalk it cracked open, and forty-seven green Skittles spilled into the street. My immediate thought went to the mayor back at our Kool-Aid stand and how I didn't trust him with the purple liquid for very long.

"I don't want to be responsible for these things in the street," I said. "And we should see the mini horse before the mayor gets goofy on the Kool-Aid."

"I was actually thinking that there were many sexy women walking around right now, but you seem to have a point," Fast Eddie said before taking Bert back from me.

We stopped at the waist-high wrought iron fence and gazed into the yard that allegedly held the mini horse. The only clue we could see was some kind of fenced in area toward the rear part of the yard. I scanned the grass for mini horse poop, but either we had the wrong yard or the owners were meticulous with their clean up.

"Yo, mini horse, show yourself," I yelled in the direction of a magnolia tree.

"Come out, come out wherever you are," Fast Eddie yelled. Bert was standing on the sidewalk and holding himself up with the bars of the fence. Within moments the mini horse appeared. It was there, in all its glory. Bert slid through the fence and into the yard. Fast Eddie and I stared as Bert crawled over to the mini horse. When Bert was close enough, the mini horse leaned his head down to the ground and the two of them seemed to have some kind of conversation.

Fast Eddie made a move to climb the fence. I could tell he was worried about the kid, but I held him back. Bert wasn't ours, though we had found him and a cosmic connection had started between him and Fast Eddie, so his well-being wasn't my top priority. I wanted to see what would happen. I couldn't hear the conversation between Bert and the mini horse, but they apparently established some sort of rapport because after a few moments the mini horse knelt to the ground. Bert crawled over to the side of the mini horse and worked his way up onto its back. Bert held the mane as the mini horse stood. There was a moment of stabilizing that was as touching as anything in a movie. But once the mini horse was sure Bert was secure it broke into a healthy trot. They were coming directly toward us and I was worried the mini horse would put on the brakes once it reached the fence and Bert would be catapulted. Instead the mini horse made a slight adjustment and leapt over the fence. I looked over at Fast Eddie; he had tears all down his face.

Bert and the mini horse had a head start on us as we ran up Van Buren Ave. We passed the video renting store, and I slipped over the green Skittles on the sidewalk. I was back on my feet quickly and the spill had allowed Fast Eddie to catch up.

By the time we reached the mayor outside the bookstore, Bert and the mini horse were nowhere in sight. The mayor was doing jumping jacks next to our cooler and all of the Kool-Aid was gone.

"Did you see them?" I asked, frantic.

"Did I see them? How could I not?" the mayor said. "Their beauty, their grace, the way the child and the mini horse moved in unison. It was like watching Moses part the Red Sea. I have plans for them."

The mayor continued doing jumping jacks. Fast Eddie's mouth was round and gyrated forward, trying to hurl words without success.

"But did you see which way they went? Why didn't you stop them?" I asked. For obvious reasons I felt like the only sane person around.

"I've already passed the smoking ban and turned this town into an official bicycle friendly community. With the help of that baby and the mini horse I'm going to raise enough money to build a parking deck. Then I'll be the greatest mayor south of the Shenandoah Valley and east of The Alamo. Yes. I can see it now."

© German Federal Archive

INDIAN JONES

A D Jameson

"Little Man" © 2010 Lucy Diamond-Phillips (www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/)

INDIAN JONES NOW LIVES in Brooklyn. He buys vanilla Cokes at the corner shop and squeezes the straws until they crinkle and tear. He's cheesy and rundown. Others pretend not to notice. The anesthesiologist pretends not to notice. Everyone gets old, even Indian Jones. But his tedious droning doesn't help. Pin him to the wall. He likes it. Go on. Take a knife and stick it in his shoulder; he'll just giggle. Anything's better than his drone. You'll be the guy who finally knifed up Indian Jones. Some'll love you and some'll hate you. Some'll never believe it, and never give in. Some'll send flowers. Some'll look for and find the younger Indian Jones.

The younger Indian Jones has a small bachelor flat a block away, on Upper Brook Street. This is the bar where he drinks. He still hasn't been on a date. He still hasn't kissed a girl. He doesn't know that he's Indian Jones, or, rather, he doesn't know yet the Indian Jones that he'll be. We shouldn't stare at him, or make him feel uncomfortable. Try and sit so you can look at his reflection instead. Look at how his hair runs the length of his spine. Look at his hot pants and silk pants and lace-up leather boots. He's cool and meticulous. He studies everybody in this room, including you. He sips cocktails, his hands more fragile than butterflies. He's thinking about stones. Today's the day he sets out as Indian Jones. He has to find stones, made from copper and bone and gold. He'll have to look very hard, but he'll find them. Hidden where only he would look, which is how he'll learn he's gonna be Indian Jones. After he finds the stones, others will tell him he should keep them and have them carved up into rings, one for each finger, with an eleventh one for his nose. He'll simply reply, "They belong in a museum." Which is where they are today, whenever you want to see them.

Indian Jones memorized everything, and grew up to be the hunter, not the hunted. He could sit in the bathtub for an hour without getting his pants wet. He could be like an animal, and track a rabbit that had hopped across melted snow. He never blinked. He never sneaked his hands down your pants. He never didn't find a priceless artifact. Once he looked everywhere for a priceless artifact, and no matter where he looked a priceless artifact wasn't there. He began wondering whether he'd have to search the entire earth. He knew that that would take too long, so he sat down to eat his fish cake. That's when he realized the fish cake he'd been carrying in his lunch pail was a priceless artifact. Excited, he ran the seven miles to the museum, even though he was hungrier than he'd ever been in his whole life. Passersby asked why if he was so hungry he didn't eat the fish cake. "It belongs in a museum," he shouted. After that adventure he took three vacations, each one to San Pedro, and those were the only vacations he ever took.

The several times villains tried to get the best of Indian Jones have been documented in the newspapers, and growing up I could never wait for the Sunday edition.

INDIAN JONES DEFEATS KILLER GOLEM

INDIAN JONES SURVIVES DEADLY HIPPY WARLOCK

One time I saw Indian Jones fight off an attack that the newspapers didn't report. I was walking home from school when I saw Indian Jones chasing after a strapping

young man. The man stopped to pull a knife on Indian Jones, who ducked the blade and slapped the man so hard he fell down dead. But that didn't fool Indian Jones; he kept slapping the man, repeatedly. Then he kicked him, bump-bump-bump, until he could kick no more and fell over, asleep. I couldn't believe what I'd seen, watching from the branches of a fir tree. I climbed down and cautiously made my way over. The strapping young man had turned pale, but otherwise looked all right. I was scared that at any moment he'd jump up and wring my neck. I wouldn't have been afraid except that Indian Jones was absolutely unconscious. He was smiling, breathing so slowly I could hardly tell he was alive. The strapping young man stirred, and I knew that if he woke up first then Indian Jones and I were done for. I acted fast. I stripped the lower branches from the fir tree and wove them into a plait with which to bind the strapping young man. I finished just as the man came fully to. When he realized how I'd bound him, he spat and cursed me, and thrashed about, and promised to kill me. He told me he'd fatten me up, then drink my blood through my nostrils and eardrums. His eyes grew clammy and cold. All night long he cursed and threatened, straining at the plaits, his eyes growing colder and clammier. I looked at him but didn't say a word.

Indian Jones slept like a zombie. He slept for two days and three nights. The strapping young man meanwhile cursed me with every curse. His eyes clammed to three Kelvins above Absolute Zero. Then Indian Jones stood up, smacking his lips, saying he hadn't slept so well since his mother's bosom. Seeing the plait-bound man, he asked what was up. I recounted the details and Indian Jones said I must be a clever fellow. He strode to the glowering, strapping young man and slapped him a few times across the face, asking how he liked being bound with those plaits. Then he asked me to help haul the man to the museum, which is where you can still see him today, whenever you want, except for Sundays, when the museum isn't open to the public.

For my help in that adventure Indian Jones adopted me as his partner. We drank vanilla Cokes in every café in Paris. I showed Indian Jones how to weave plaits, and he showed me how to find priceless artifacts, which is how I learned what I needed to find you.

Indian Jones's father was rich, but Indian Jones was self-made. He threw away all his father's money, and burned down Harvard when his family sent him there. His father's company made children's toys, but Indian Jones was no child. He had his plate too full looking for priceless artifacts to have any time for toys or children or business.

Indian Jones could have been anything—his butterfly hands could have made him a boxer or musician or therapist—but he chose to be Indian Jones. If you drive down Old Mill Road and cross the heather, you'll find a crumbling old mansion, and in that mansion lives the very old Indian Jones. This Indian Jones never found a single priceless artifact; instead he used his butterfly hands to become a sculptor. By now he's a very old sculptor who can't remember anything, who sits all day in a courtyard, drinking grappa. He's surrounded by his statues, but can't remember that he's the man who sculpted them. A dead dog lies at his feet, with big, watery eyes, like eggs. This dog remembers nearly everything. It remembers Indian Jones sculpting the statues. When Indian Jones pets this dog, this dog knows what those butterfly hands have done. That dog feels like a goddess of memory on Olympus. Lavished in courtyard sunlight, in the company of his dog and his many statues, Indian Jones is God.

Untitled © 2010 Lucy Diamond-Phillips (www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/)

BURNING THE AIR BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

Sasha Fletcher

I SAID I CANNOT GET YOU OUT OF MY HEAD. I was in the shower. You are being ridiculous she said. I said that doesn't change anything. Policemen were crawling all over our house. They were coming up through the garden and over the walls of the yard. They were grilling things using the grill. Who she said Were you talking about earlier. I told her I didn't know. I told the policemen to go home. I saw them in the alleyway building tents and dressing their guns up as birds.

I took out the garbage. Then I took out the recycling. The paper had to have a lid on it. The plastic did not. The garbage men came. I sat on the stoop waiting. What are you doing with all of that I asked. We are they said Building you a beach.

This seemed hard to believe.

I heard a cop come through the faucet this morning. I sent him on outside to grow me an ocean. I told him when he did I would grind him into a beach.

There was a cop in the backyard again. He was building us a deck. But he didn't have any wood. I had no idea what he was trying to hammer together back there. Hey I said. Scoot.

Failing that I told him to grow me an ocean. I told him I heard they were building us a beach. What I asked Did he think of that?

I buried the bathtub today. She went to go run a bath, and a cop came out of the spigot and into the tub. What have you got to say for yourself she managed to finally ask. Out of his mouth tumbled little yellow ducks.

What's up with that the cop asked. He meant the yard. The mound of dirt where the bathtub was buried. I don't know what you are talking about I said. And what about this beach business. You can't have a beach without an ocean he said.

I am going to grow an ocean in my heart. I am going to drown in it.

Didn't I tell you to grow an ocean in my backyard I said. The cop said No. He said That was another cop. You were going to grind him up into a beach when he was finished. Whatever happened to him I asked. He told me That cop ran around and he ran around. He dressed his gun up like a bird and it ate all the teeth right out of his mouth. He ran around all the time and when he ran around yelling. He built a tent in the street and in it he made a hole in the ground. I don't know what he was doing. He kept on eating these little yellow ducks. Or keeping them warm in his mouth.

Listen I told the cop I need you to find out about this beach for me. I need to know if this is real here. Please I said.

There's something in the garden she said. Other than plants I said. Other than the drawings of plants you cut out and put on sticks and placed in the garden. And that other thing. Right I said That other thing. Yeah she said. She said I don't understand the things that happen around you anymore.

I wanted apples to grow I wanted flowers to grow I wanted balloons to grow I wanted very tall trees to grow and for balloons to grow from them I wanted something incredible to rise up out of the ground and straight into the clouds and for it to devour us all.

Out of the garden marched these little yellow ducks. And they went on down the alleyway. And into the street.

I followed them. I called her on the phone. You are not going to believe this I said.

At the ocean down the street were all the cops I'd ever seen. Surprise they said. Please don't grind us up into a beach they said. The garbage men came by. They had their garbage trucks. There was a switch on them. All the garbage came out as sand. They knelt in front of the cops. The cops split their heads open with billy clubs.

I opened up my chest and let out the ocean I was growing for you. I added it to their ocean. I looked over at the garbage men

Out of their heads came seagulls and even more little yellow ducks and a giant wind that made enormous waves and sunshine and hot dog carts and you. They crumpled to the ground and the gulls took their skins off to the clouds and threw them in a pile on the sun where they burned forever.

YOU'RE DUST

Steven Trull

THEN, I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT. Like there was all this dust. And the dust just kept coming, like, it would fall in the air all slow, and then when you thought it was done, then it fell some more and more of it fell making all this noise that only a dog could hear. It was Crystal. She said *what? What you'd say?* Or something like that. And nobody had said anything because we all owed her some money or something. And Donald just kind of sat there not saying anything. And I just sat there not saying anything. And the dust just kind of sat there not saying anything, I guess. And Crystal, she like kept saying stuff. Like how somebody owed her two dollars or something. And Donald just sat there. And I just sat there. And nobody said anything. And there was this dust like not a lot of it but you could make pretty stick figures with it on the table. And Donald just sort of looked around and stuff like all normal and stuff. And I just looked around, too, but I was looking at Donald. And he was looking at other stuff. Like the floor. He looked at the floor a lot. And then looked at the mirror. And he started looking at the mirror a lot. He saw himself somewhere in there. And I guess he liked what he saw because he kept looking at himself in the mirror. And it was Crystal. And we like owed her for all the stuff. But Donald he, like, looked at himself in the mirror like he was all sexy or something. He was posing a lot like looking at his muscles. But he doesn't have any muscles because he uses all these drugs. And so, I don't know, there was all this dust. And I looked around. And I liked the drapes.

"22" © 2010 Zack Sternwalker

They were, like, super white and all flowy and stuff and like, I don't know, just all flowy like silver pillows or super white flowers in that girl's mouth. Like, I kept seeing a white flower in Crystal's mouth. Or my drag queen friend's Paris's ball gown under the water like after she dived in the lake and pretended she drowned everything in white cause she had no money for laundry. It was the Crystal. Except nobody was saying anything.

Except for Donald, he was there, like, whatever, just doing nothing. Like, he just kept looking at himself all sexy like he was getting turned on by it in the mirror. And he wasn't saying anything. Just looking at himself. That's all. Except he wasn't even saying anything. He was just, you know, looking at himself in the mirror. I don't know where his self went. And I think Crystal knew it because she was all quiet. And he was, like, all checking himself out and not saying anything. I liked his hair cause it was blond, almost white like his room but a little bit dirty too like his room. He whispered stuff through his hair all wispy-like, like all these spider webs and zombies and when you listened to him he whispered into the mirror and sometimes he'd be like: *What? Oh, nothing.* And the Crystal, she said some stuff that we couldn't hear. And Donald was all normal. He stared at himself some more. And then he stared at himself some more. This kept going. He kept staring at himself and the whole thing went on like this for a long time. And then he starts talking to me but I thought he was talking to Crystal: *Dude, do I look like I have AIDS or what?* I looked at him and, I don't know, I didn't want to tell him about his acne problem cause I like the acne on his face and I like the acne on his ass and I like the other acne on him too. And I told him I like it when he lets me pick his acne and I like it when he lets me pick his face and the other things like his scalp. So, I said: *What? Uh, what does the AIDS look like?* He was all like: *Um, I don't know. I guess it looks like you have a bunch of zits or something and then your skin is super dry with flakes that are fun to pick off.* I started to laugh at him. I said: *No, then, you don't look like you have the AIDS. Just skin problems. I got some Clearasil.* He looked at himself for a long time again. And I'm glad because I like the zits and the pimples and the stuff and I want to keep popping them. Donald was like: *What?* And I didn't say anything. I just thought to myself all quiet that somewhere inside me I thought that Donald looked super cute all the time. He whispered some more stuff to himself. It made me sleepy. Like all lazy to listen to him. Like, I don't know what and I kept thinking in my voice: Donald where are you? Like, where did you go? Where do you go when you stare at yourself? And I thought: Probably nowhere. And I kept thinking. And he didn't say anything, like, nothing. He just stared. And I just kind of, I don't know, wondered, I guess.

The Only Thing Good Is the Moon

Craig Greenman

1

THE LAST TIME I SAW my grandmother was at a nursing home in a part of town I'd never seen. It was raining and the leaves were falling. They stuck to the sidewalk, then to your shoe, having dropped from the rain.

My grandmother's hair was drawn from her face. She was lying on her back.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" she said.

"No."

"Well," she muttered.

She'd been laid out under a few blankets. The TV was on, softly, and the door was ajar. The smell of urine came from the hallway.

"You should cut your hair," she said. "Girls don't like long hair."

I took her hand. It was damp.

"How are you feeling?" I said.

My grandmother was ninety-one years old. She was dying.

"The nurses are lousy," she said.

I examined her room. It was a modest cell looking out on a parking lot. My grandmother's name, "Hazel Quinn," was written above the bed on a paper heart. The walls were made of cinder blocks.

"Do you watch TV?" I asked.

"Oh"—she was surprised—"I watch Pat Sajak."

"You mean the 'Wheel of Fortune'?" I said.

"Yes, that."

I hadn't seen her since her surgery. My father and two aunts had been there. The ward had had a slow elevator.

She looked at me. "Your hair is curly," she said.

"Yes," I said.

"It didn't used to be so curly."

"No."

"Do the girls like it that curly?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. I could hear it raining outside.

"It's very long," she said.

2

My grandmother hadn't been diagnosed with anything new; she was just dying. She had been dying, off and on, for about a year.

"Charlie," she said, "what happens afterwards?"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"After you go."

"What happens?"

"Yes."

"Don't ask me that," I said.

"I don't mean, do people come to your funeral."

"No."

"Do you believe in angels, Charlie?"

"No," I said.

"I don't believe in angels, either," she said.

"Okay."

"Do you believe in God?" she said.

"Please don't ask me that, Grandma," I said. "You know."

She didn't say anything.

"What happens afterwards, Charlie?" she repeated.

I squeezed her hand. "You're not going anywhere," I said.

3

I stepped into the hall.

I saw an old acquaintance of mine. He was visiting someone—he didn't say whom. I tried, but I couldn't remember his name. All I could remember was that he went by his middle name.

He watched me as if he were waiting for me to say something. Then he shook my hand and walked away.

From the hallway, I could see inside all the rooms. There were machines for which I had no names. The nurses wore baby blue smocks.

"What's on TV?" I said as I returned to my grandmother's room.

"What?" she asked.

"I said, 'What's on TV'?"

"Oh."

She didn't elaborate. "What's on TV?" I repeated.

My grandmother began to cry. It started with a whimper. Then she gripped both sides of her bed and shook the blankets.

"I hate it!" she screamed.

She turned toward me. "I *hate* it, Charlie!"

I stared at her. The veins in her neck were ugly.

"Don't," I said.

"Don't *what?*" she cried. "What am I supposed to *do*, Charlie?"

I looked out the window. The parking lot was dark. The sky receded and a streetlight came on.

4

"Your grandpa's a stinkpot," my grandmother said.

"Okay," I said.

"I don't like the cemetery," she continued. "It's too dark. I don't want to be in a box next to your grandfather in a box."

"Put us in the same box," she concluded.

"Okay," I said.

Neither of us spoke again for a while.

"How's your church?" she said.

"Fine," I replied.

"Are there any girls there?"

"No."

"How's your mass?"

"The same," I said. "I say the same things as before."

"Then you're a liar, Charlie."

I didn't respond for a moment.

"It's a living," I said.

"That's true!" she laughed. "It's a living!"

I winced.

"They like me," I added. "It's important for the parishioners."

"For who?" my grandmother asked.

"The parishioners."

"What happens afterwards, Charlie?" She rolled over in bed.

5

A nurse entered with pills. She put them, with a cup of water, on the nightstand. Then she left.

"So, Charlie," my grandmother said, "are you going to pray for me now?"

"There's nothing to pray for," I said. "You're fine."

She looked at me and snorted. "Does that make it official? Isn't there a form you have to fill out?"

"Stop it," I said.

"Your father asked you to come, didn't he?"

"No," I lied.

I had come over the night before on the ferry. My father was afraid that she would die before confessing.

"What are you thinking about?" my grandmother said.

"Nothing," I said.

I drew my strength from my parishioners, like a man watches his dogs play in the water.

"Excuse me, Grandma," I said. I stepped into the hall. My acquaintance was still there.

"Would you like a smoke?" I said.

"All right," he said.

We went outside and smoked.

"Quite a night," I said. The darkness had broken. The clouds were passing before the moon, white and empty.

My acquaintance watched me. "Do you know why I'm here?" he said.

"No," I said.

"It's Trudy, Charlie. She's bad."

"Oh," I said.

Trudy was the girl I'd dated in high school. She had a genetic disease—MS? I was in the seminary when I'd heard. After that I avoided her.

"That's terrible," I said.

6

We went to Trudy's room. She was lying bare except for a thin blanket. A tube ran from a machine to her throat. Every two or three seconds, her face tightened.

"Hi, Trudy," I said.

She didn't say anything.

"Do you remember me?" I added.

She nodded.

"Christ is with you," I said. "He loves you, Trudy."

She opened her lips—then closed them—then opened them and closed them and opened them—and then she left them open.

"I'm afraid," is what she had said.

Back in high school, I'd taught Trudy how to water-ski—or tried to teach her. She couldn't get up. She would drag behind the boat for miles. I would circle back; yell at her; tell her that she just had to *will* it done. Later I found out she'd had the disease. The first sign was clumsiness (for which she was famous), followed by an early and painful death.

7

I sat with Trudy for a while; then I went back into the hall. Trudy's mother, who had also been sitting with her, followed me out.

"So that's your God," she said.

"No," I corrected her.

"Yes," she corrected me. "That's what he did to his own son."

Trudy's mom looked how Trudy might have looked.

8

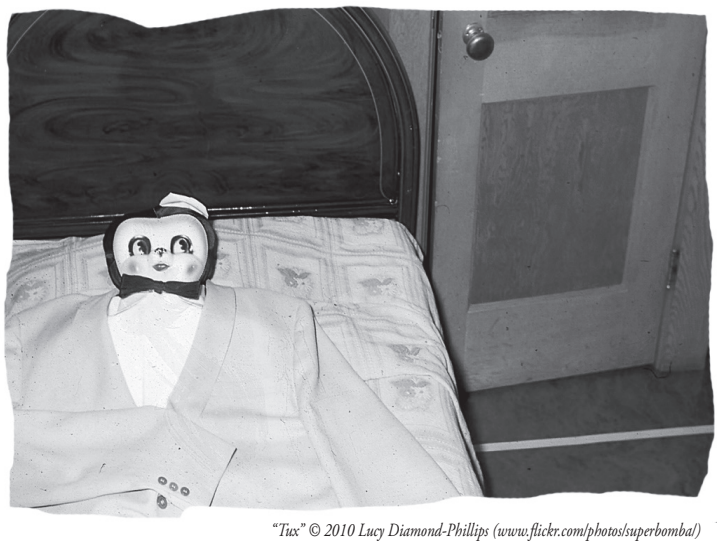
When I returned to my grandmother's room, she was asleep. The room was dark and the television was on. My grandmother wore a pink sweatshirt.

I took her hand and pressed it to my mouth.

"Please, God," I said.

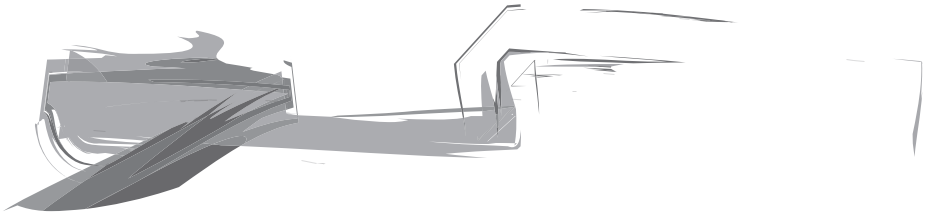
Back in the seminary, I made the case that, because praying is a reflex, it must be true. You wouldn't pray, evolutionarily speaking, unless there was something to it. But when I make that argument now, it falls on deaf ears. You don't have to believe in something that exists.

I went out to the Buick to find my things.



"Tux" © 2010 Lucy Diamond-Phillips (www.flickr.com/photos/superbombal/)

CASE HISTORY #3: CATIE



Carolyn Zaikowski

"I **WANT TO MAKE** things with other things. I want to make rocks into spaceships with hammers for wings."

She is taking careful notes on how to melt record albums in the oven. She read somewhere that if you do it at the perfect temperature, for just the right amount of time, you can get them to a malleable consistency. She wants to turn them into bowls and sell them in the park.

"Okay? We have to go clean off some records. After that we make a chandelier out of recycled jars."

She wants me to use my hands. She tries to teach me how to engage with physical materials. Her mind works through her skin.

"You can make coffee tables out of anything. Not just flat things. I'm talking, like, old computers. Dried up teabags. Batteries. Guitars."

There are so many things hanging on her walls: broken skateboard decks; a plastic gorilla bank; guitars; frisbees; in the corner near the top of the closet, there is a paintbrush stuck to the wall, thick with neon pink.

A drawing of a girl with no face. A Buddha, backwards. Self-portraits in charcoal. A flimsy tapestry that I bought for her in Bihar.

She drinks Kombucha. She writes country songs even though she is from a city in the North. She takes photographs of invisible things. She can't believe I haven't seen *E.T.* She loves avocado. She has one dreadlock.

We have the same initials; we carve them into the wooden pole at the rest stop in the mountains. We spend weeks perfecting our recipe for vegan fudge. We cry when we say goodbye to the harmless dog. We stare at the redwoods. We give granola bars, juice, and mixed nuts to the homeless man. We swim naked in the lake and hide underwater when hikers pass. We write songs that we don't tell anyone about. We get stoned and make the ugliest faces possible. At the cleanest river we've ever seen, we find god rippling. We take pictures of our bruises. We spray paint sidewalks at night. We drink whole bottles of red wine while watching game shows.

We show each other our bodies and, for the first time in our lives, we aren't scared. This is a secret.

She looks at me as I stand in the mirror. She tells me to make my own world. She teaches me to never be afraid of rust.

GELATIN

Kate Wyer

SHE PUT THE PIZZA IN THE OVEN knowing that it wouldn't be eaten. She put a movie in the player. There was a moment and she could have put the bland crust in her mouth and chewed. She could have watched the movie about blindness.

Instead, things like walls and toilet seats were broken. He had been sitting on the stool in the kitchen. He had just put down his lunch box and gloves. She split open.

Grease hardened. The movie menu repeated.

The dog peed on the walls and hid under the couch.

He asked for details and she opened. He wanted to know if her mouth—

No, she said. No. Peas froze on her eyelids that were blind from swelling.

He took a shower to scrub under his nails. She sat on the floor and crashed her car into a tree. It opened the guard rails on the Delaware Memorial. The water in her lungs.

He watched it all in his mind. How did I fail you? he asked.

She rolled her head from her shoulders and retched.

The dog's snout was visible under the couch. Its lip curled.

The sleeping pills hissed open in her stomach. She pressed against his back. His stomach empty and rolling, too. They cramped and burped bile, burped gelatin.

Carlo Farneti, illustrations for Baudelaire's Les Fleurs du Mal, published 1935

Big Accident

Jeannie Hoag

Untitled © 2010 Lucy Diamond-Phillips (www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba!)

And blessings on them
and those who stand in the parking lot
and wait, and those who rustle beside me

still and moving quiet
and those who think this blue sky
is morning and to lay on the grass.

The parked cars waiting, dogs waiting,
woman in blue dress walking slow and
taking in the street sounds.

Emergency vehicles gone past now,
am I the only one here
who remembers them. Disaster

somewhere and with my imagination.
How do I put it
I thought I saw the first man

I loved and know it isn't him and know
I could love him much better this time.
People looking familiar are not familiar,

running against that past which
does not allow me in anymore.
Once right here next to me

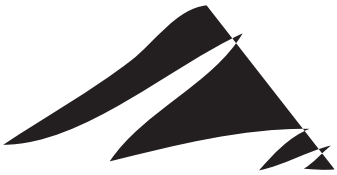
a man masturbated next to me.
It was unwelcome. The cops
didn't do anything. What

could they do, emergencies abound.
These flowers look dead like
they could use some water and still

a bee is trying to pollinate.
This reproduction—sometimes we
want to be alone, to let that heavy afternoon
work us, let it be done.

Space Junk

D.A. Powell



You are the sovereign who rides me; I am the ass.
We had made contact just beyond this sphere.
From among the planets, a tiny bit of space junk fell.

What would a cosmoplast look like if it were us?
Struck by its own discarded stages, which didn't burn up
on impact. That's why we need a more formal class

in matter. That's why physics. And that's why God
allowed us to make junk. He himself made junk of the void
and called them planets. A tiny bit of space. In space.

Alert the media that things are going to have to change.
For one thing, there'll be no trip up the Irrawady.
What would Jesus or Roger do? Take it up the Aswan

cataract as a suitable alternative. If love may be fallen into,
so might the meteor crater. So might gravity suck us
toward the great black hole in our own unheavenly crown.
Oh, infernal orbits. Even they will not keep us. Falling.

NOTE TO A YOUNG FRIEND

K.M.A. Sullivan

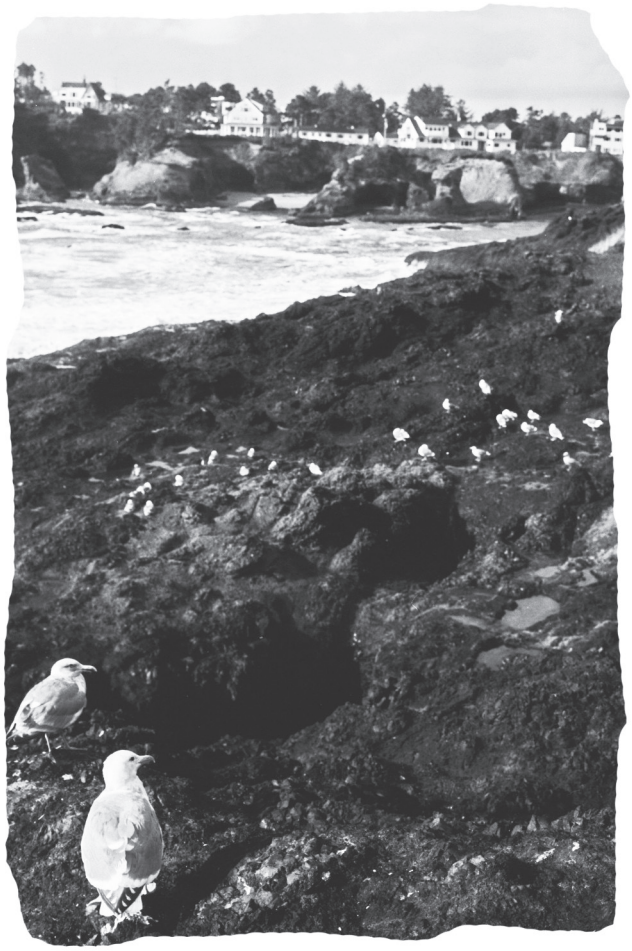
I won't say I love you.
You write these words to me
in pictures on a note you pass in class.
Love is still a country fair for you,
apple pie for breakfast, all-night
pizza delivery, a candy cane tree.

There's a young woman who'll show
you soon enough that those three words
come with oceans to swim
and spiders that can't be sprayed.

I've already crossed too many oceans.
I need to keep my feet on the shore
for a while. But stand with me
at the edge of the low-tide lagoon.

We can squish sand through our toes,
call out to the horse head seal
when she surfaces, dig
for phosphorous at waters edge.

That is more than enough,
and more than either of us expected.



"Sea Birds" © 2010 Colleen Peddycord

when i think of sorrow i think of sparrows

Erin Elizabeth Smith

When I think of sorrow I always think of sparrows. And zebra finches flushing to twice their size then shrinking again to something small something that disappears. I think of the rabbit that watches me from the lawn that doesn't run when I startle it walking to the laundromat in my pajamas tipsy from drinking alone though they say wine might be good for me. And really I still smile when I watch the squirrels chase each other along the telephone line but it's on a night like this when I realize I can't see myself alive in twenty years though I can see myself in the kitchen, in anybody's kitchen, closing my eyes, biting down on a barrel like it's a muffin like it's birthday cake. And there are times when the shape of my hands on my thighs is almost enough. When the cold summer rain is almost enough. When the phone ringing in the other room is like a sparrow singing in the too-late morning when I'm still in bed when I'm watching the ceiling waiting for it to open to cave in. Waiting for the neighbor's dog to start barking for the fire engines blowing through the red lights for the moment when I turn and am forced to realize no one's there and that someone could be. That the bed is too big. That there are squirrels in every city and they could be the same squirrels really. Realize there will never be a time when it feels easy. Realize no matter how much I wish it the ceiling is solid and the rain is over and I'm here and cold and walking in the street at two with a basket of dirty sheets. Realize the rabbit has such large eyes and when I feint toward it, it takes off into the street. And somehow I'm surprised when its tail flashes like Hatteras like a mirror in the sun.

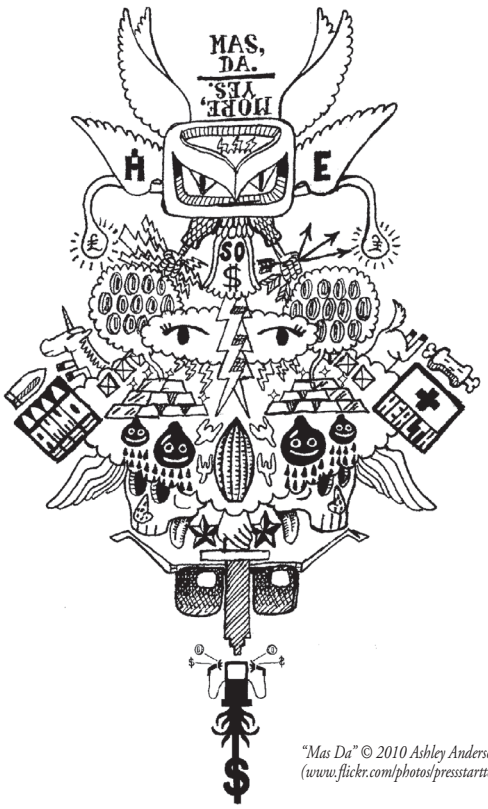
Two Prose Poems

It Is Paper You Know

Danika Stegeman

Cash Rules Everything Around Me
C.R.E.A.M.
get the money
Dolla dolla bill y'all —*Wu-Tang Clan*

Where does the paper come from? Trees is the answer. Fort Knox says my father. There is gold and gold and gold there. The paper is the money is the = (equals sign) is the gold. Let's make more. Negative numbers are all over the place. They sew people's pockets with holes and trash the sidewalks with trashcan trash. Afterwards they laugh about it a lot. Look at them filling stuff up with their empty. Look at them. If you do not see them you must not walk anywhere or else you are a dirty liar without any pockets. Let's make more. When Mr. Rogers was alive, he took me to the factory where they make the paper. The paper says we trust god. I trust my father and Mr. Rogers. God must want all the people to come live with him so he kills them. Some fast and some slow. Mr. Rogers, when the people enter the gates do they look like sheets shuffling off a machine or like zeros vomiting? Are all the people invited to heaven or just the ones with televisions? Let's make more so that all the people can buy televisions just in case. Let's make more. The trees have never minded.



"Mas Da" © 2010 Ashley Anderson
(www.flickr.com/photos/presstarttobegin)

Ghosts

I left at least three ghosts in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Each mimics the needle shade of a different pine. Ghosts must camouflage themselves with the terrain they face. At any given moment, one of the ghosts is caught stealing firewood from behind a gas station. Another is getting high next to the clearest lake in Custer, watching ripples on the water wash over other ripples on the water. A third is breaking my last pair of glasses again and again. There may be a fourth ghost wandering around somewhere wearing the hat you lost when you went there without me. That's what you get.

Four Questions

Thomas Patrick Levy

Did You Ever Feel Lonely?

Once, yes, when you were sitting in a tree with your Edvard Munch mask, not right then, but later, when we went inside to each other's toes and eyes, when we were sitting blind in our chairs staring into the black screen of your projection TV, imagining something beautiful like a peach pit, like the shadow of a raccoon in the garbage, but not then, really either, but later, when your lover moved around us like a scarf in a mirror, when her reflection covered you, then me, then you again, when my mouth tasted of a kind of drunken glue and hers like cold spring water.

Can You Identify Your Mental States?

I've been at this for weeks now, counting everything. In the rain I found a razor stuck to the parking lot, found a penny, kicked the penny, gave the razor away.

I ate in the city across from an old man who had ice shavings tucked into his beard.

I went into the corner with a Viking sandwich maker, slid a brass dollar into the folds of her thin apron, went back east to ride the trains through the wormholes of a different city.

Her eyes with me like an avocado pit as I cleaned the pulp of an orange off the blade of my shiny new knife.

Have You Ever Asked What's The Use Anyhow?

I go around with a welding mask, magnified, so that each shell is as large as a truck. I disassemble all these mistakes. I've already missed the end of the world.

I ask you and you say nothing as if you've rolled over to look up at a soft constellation on the ceiling.

You know that I would rather be lying in a different bed.

I know about the mold on the window frame, about the carpet stains, about the shreds of dryer sheets under the laundry under the bed.

Do You Accept The Fact That You Have Only Two Alternatives; Either Die Or Live?

The tree is dying. At night, by the light of the laundry room, I can see its exposed roots covered in a jacket of water beetle shell.

The grass is dirtied with chicken bones.

I'm out there by the dumpster with a bag of soda cans, trying to ignore your hair which crumbles into your head like the cord of a snail's shell.

You say you don't want anything to die.

You say there is too much bread in the pantry.

You say there isn't anything to worry about.

Beneath my boot, the shell sounds like hard candy.

from Synesthesia

Of Moving Water, Erosion, And Other Alterations

Jordaan Mason

SINCE THEN horses were sea salt in my arms. A mare is a horse that is a mother. I had a mother and she had a death. I was a mother for a moment when I took care of him. He was my son. But I never gave birth because we put latex between us. We protected ourselves from the problem of children. He said: Children don't have children. I asked him: Don't I have you?

My first real blood started when I stopped singing. He helped me clean it up with paper towels. I didn't tell my father. My father was a horse that could not swim. He did not know very much about blood. My mother took me to the drug store and we got the right things to take care of it.

I snuck a pack of condoms into my coat pocket. I said: No mothers today, tomorrow. No children. I did not have foals coming out of me for the sake of it.

We all agreed on this.

A death is my mother, her body cleaned out of organs, and put into the ground. A child is my father feeling the need to cry over it. A child is a son that is abandoned by the mother, a daughter being fucked by boys in the other room.

Horses carry all of us into heaven after we die. In heaven I am the mother of horses.

The Snow Globe

Dennis Cooper

A **SHAKY FLASHLIGHT BEAM** illuminates a stiff. Is that the boy you hit? It's prone beneath the snow wearing your overcoat and dirty, scotch-taped glasses. Yes, sir.

He had a deep depression, the worst one in our short lives' storied history. It reduced him to a speck. The storm helped. That snowball hid a rock.

You froze to death ten feet from here under white out conditions. It took years, this glass of scotch, and a cheap crystal ball to find the body.

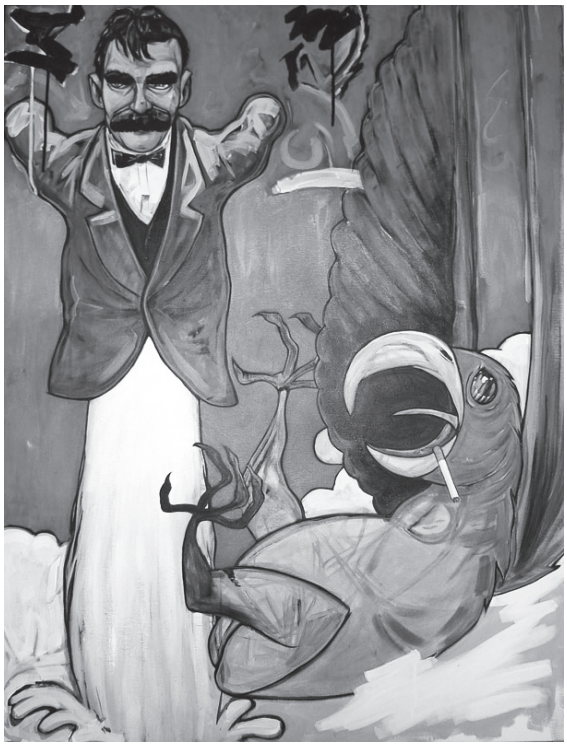
He hobbled through a blur and hurled his snowball at my head. That missed. Later, he's lit by a jittering beam. Once this ugly little globe was the whole earth.

Untitled © 2010 Lucy Diamond-Phillips (www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba/)

MY ENDLESS, TERRIFYING APPRENTICESHIP

Dobby Gibson & Matt Hart

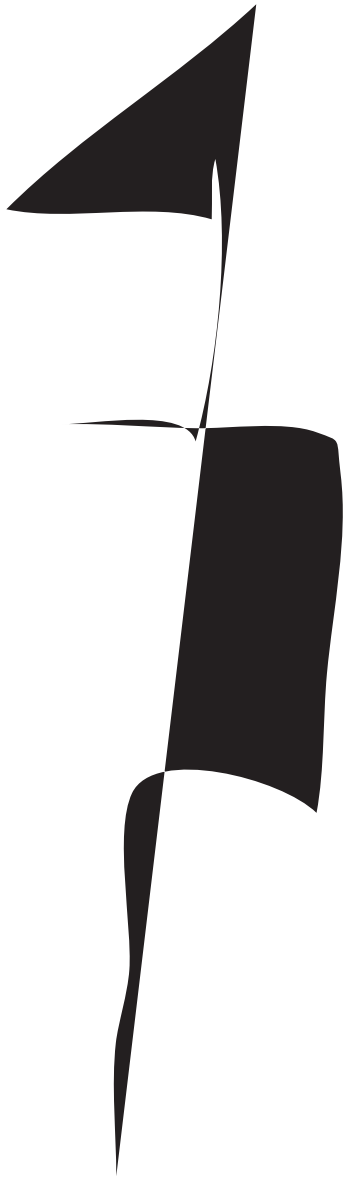
Amputation. Sediment. Soldier. Tango. Daughters. Prison. Undertaker. Beer. The inaudible. The laundry. Another moth lost in an empty room. Then a photo op with mop-water in an even emptier room. Broom stick. Mayonnaise. A response to the squirrel's question. Somebody invading the silo out back. Then from deep inside the apple comes the sound of you sobbing, and I'm strangely relieved. Yes, I reserved separate rooms. Yes, I love you more than my puppet. Weird hairs. Coke mirrors. A third hand suddenly there in your bathing suit. Terrifically overboard against the windshield of life. Everybody dancing to dust. Flak jacket. Novocain. Three-stories tall. The mall is not a building; it's our mother, the inferno, and she's calling us to supper. The repair. The manual. The supper is us.



"Atlas" © 2010 Brian Kubarycz (yammerskooner.deviantart.com/gallery)

MICROWAVE, DEATH OF

Stefi Weisburd

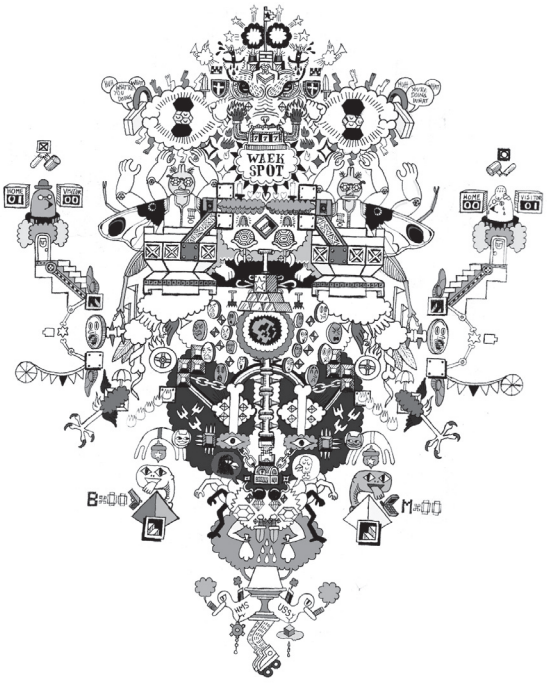


I've seen dust meanies glower from under
the toaster, heard the smoke
detector clear its throat like Zeus warming
up for a big one. All because defrost's
on the fritz. The microwave fan still pomps, still
circumstances, but the light's on
vacation in Aruba, and water that won't
boil sulks in its saucer like a stuffed
lap cat. So much for the miracle
of radiation warming
my heart, clouding my eyes
whiter than egg substitute. How naked
I am without my trinkets, my
dependencies hanging out like laundry
yakking to a field of canned corn. Possible
culprits: the boy exploding
cockroaches on the baked potato
setting; his father
recreating the Universe's
first 3 nanoseconds by frazzling
AOL CD-ROMs until they writhe
& spark. Now the microwave's
toothless. Pity. I do
remember God saying let there be
2.54 gigahertz. Time
is slowing to a simmer, and woe, the Pyrex
casserole forgot how to make gumbo, peas
are cold and peevish. Where will water
molecules get their jollies,
their rock and roll that
steams them to the future?
Already my knuckles are sprouting
tufts, my eyebrows merging. I stoop
and grunt to hunt flint, gather
kindling and stone to chip and flake, but
Great Sky Mother only knows
how I'll manage to defrost
that mastodon stuffed into the fridge.

4.5: Nativity

Joe Hall

And in the jungle of your youth where you imagine a body sleek
As a dolphin's, even then a head
Was rolling along what seemed to be
The boundary of your yard, a head that feeds
On fingernails and idiotic worries, some part
Of it bleeding, maybe its mouth, some part of it laughing, maybe
Its eyes, and the head just rolls, and here the manger is, the
Christ baby, his bones a dense web of revised
Saints and household motherfuckers—Still
You look backwards, feeling the superheated wind
On your shoulders amid the panoply
Of lights, some holy spirit lurking in the eaves
Like a perverse, crystal man-o'-war, a spinning zoetrope
Above a bratty shepherd squeezing puss from a zit while a great
Burden is let loose between the virgin's legs—One magician
Sees fire racing star to star, one magician sees the
Image of the infant repeated on the brass censer he holds and looks back
To the manger—there are a thousand bawling Christs
In the now ampitheatrical barn, commanding him to live out his life
In a caravan's most wretched tent whittling
Christs from cork to be set adrift
On an alkaline sea and the final magician can't believe
He came all this way with no one
To suck off—The scene
Piles upon the scene—Looking for your ideal self
In a junkyard in a mansion of unspooled film
In each transparency's specific weight, what you want its own burning
Ruining self—Return to
Scene: desert, night on the Nazareth road
Sound of boots scraping macadam, icy fists of stars
And smoldering armored vehicles' bricky glow



"He's Got the Whole World In His Flan"
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TONIGHT'S HEADLINES

Kevin Sampsell

government to
lightly push horses
into giant Hurricanes

leggings
robber
to share
secret
dance

'Mom' predicts
fat Velvet attack

music isn't 'real'
says Afghanistan

Contributors' Notes

Ashley Anderson is an artist living and working in Atlanta, GA. He enjoys David Lynch movies, Flannery O'Connor, and Indian food. See more of his work at www.flickr.com/photos/pressstarttobegin.

Meakin Armstrong is the fiction editor at Guernica. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *elimae, Mr. Beller's Neighborhood, Our Stories, InDigest, TheAtlantic.com, Time Out New York, USAir Magazine*, and in the books, *New York Calling: From Blackout to Bloomberg* and *Museyon Guides Film + Travel North America*.

Dennis Cooper's forthcoming books include *Smothered in Hugs* (Harper Perennial 2010) and the expanded paperback edition of *The Weaklings* (Alyson Books 2010).

Christine Crutchfield is a native of Atlanta. She serves as an editorial assistant for *The Massachusetts Review*. Stories appear in *Susquehanna Review, Duck & Herring Co. Pocket Field Guide, Chattahoochee Review* and *Seeing Other People.*

Sasha Fletcher is the author of the novella *When All Our Days Are Numbered Marching Bands Will Fill The Streets And We Will Not Hear Them Because We Will Be Upstairs In The Clouds* (MLP 2010).

Dobby Gibson is the author of *Polar* (Alice James Books), which won the 2004 Beatrice Hawley Award, and *Skirmish* (Graywolf Press). He lives in Minneapolis where he serves on the board of directors of The Loft Literary Center.

Craig Greenman teaches philosophy as Assistant Professor of Humanities at Colby-Sawyer College. His fiction appears or is forthcoming in *Potomac Review, Pear Noir!, PANK, Flatmancrooked*, and 1*0,000 Tons of Black Ink* (Best of 2009 Edition). He lives in New Hampshire.

Charles Hale is a writer and a window cleaner living in Oxford MS. His work has or will appear in *Fifth Estate, Oxford Town,* and *The Local Voice*.

Joe Hall is the founder and co-organizer (with Wade Fletcher) of the Washington, DC area reading series Cheryl's Gone. His first book is *Pigafetta Is My Wife* (Black Ocean Press). *HTMLGIANT, Barrelhouse, Versal, Hayden's Ferry Review, Cimarron Review, The Boog Portable Reader 4*, and others have been kind enough to feature his poems.

Matt Hart is the author of *Who's Who Vivid* (Slope Editions) and the editor of *Forklift, Ohio.*

Jeannie Hoag received her MFA in poetry from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her poems have appeared in *Invisible Ear, The Blue Letter*, and *Notnostrums*. She lives in Buffalo, NY, where she is studying to be a librarian.

Ad Jameson is a writer, video artist, teacher, and performer. His fiction has appeared in the *Denver Quarterly, Fiction International, Brooklyn Rail, The Mississippi Online Review, elimae, Caketrain,* and *PANK.* He is the author of *Giant Slugs* (Lawrence and Gibson 2010) and *Amazing Adult Fantasy* (Mutable Sound 2010). He contributes to the group literary blog Big Other.

Ben Kopel is the publisher of the press *Laminated Cats Ltd*. His poetry has recently appeared in *Forklift, Ohio.*

Brian Kubarycz's art appears online at yammerskooner.deviantart.com /gallery. His prose appears in *Unsaid* and *60 Writers 60 Places*.

Thomas Patrick Levy is a native of New Jersey who now lives in Southern California. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *PANK, Kill Author, decomP,* and *Titular*. You can follow him at www.enumerations.org.

Davin Malasarn was a 2008 PEN Center USA Emerging Voices Fellow. His recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review, Rosebud, Night Train* and other literary journals. He is an editor at *SmokeLong Quarterly.*

Jordaan Mason is a confused art-school drop out living in Toronto. He has spent the last several years working on the novel *Synesthesia, or The Power Is Out, Sing* and playing in the bands The Horse Museum and Hugs Honey Hex. He enjoys medicated sleeping, word games, and surrealism. Please write him at: jordaanmason@gmail.com.

Erin McNellis is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the University of California, Irvine, where she is writing a dissertation on states of attention in 20th Century American poetry. She maintains a blog about poetry and philosophy at uncomplicatedly.wordpress.com.

Sue Miller lives in Connecticut with an assortment of goldfish. She is a founding editor of *GUD,* and has served time at *NFG, Story Garden,* and *Night Train*. To find out more, visit zzinnia.com.

Cami Park swears by breakfast. The results can be found in places like *Quick Fiction, Smokelong Quarterly, FRiGG Magazine, Abjective,* and *elimae*. She keeps a blog at odd-citrus.wordpress.com

Colleen Peddycord lives in Bend, Oregon. She could live in Oregon forever, Henry Rollins frightens her, she doesn't think South Park is funny, and she's spent her life saving on a plane ticket to India.

Lucy Diamond-Phillips finds photos and lives in Brooklyn. View her gallery at www.flickr.com/photos/superbomba. Her images in the magazine are used under a CC Attribution-Share Alike license.

D. A. Powell's most recent book is *Chronic* (Graywolf, 2009). With David Trinidad, he is co-author of *By Myself: An Autobiography* (Turtle Point, 2009). Powell lives and teaches in San Francisco.

KEVIN SAMPSELL is the author of *A Common Pornograpy* (Harper Perennial) and the publisher of Future Tense Books.

ERIN ELIZABETH SMITH is the author of *The Fear of Being Found* (Three Candles Press 2008) and *The Chainsaw Bears* (Dancing Girl Press). Her poetry and nonfiction appears in *The Florida Review, Third Coast, Crab Orchard, Natural Bridge, West Branch, The Pinch, Rhino,* and *Willow Springs* among others. She is the managing editor of *Stirring* and the *Best of the Net Anthology*.

DANIKA STEGEMAN co-edits the journal *Rooms Outlast Us*. She currently lives in Minneapolis, MN where she works in a library. Her work has appeared in *Denver Quarterly, Cimarron Review, Juked* and *HTMLGIANT*.

ZACK STERNWALKER lives and works in Pittsburgh, PA. He has been published online at radioactivemoat.com and hahaclever.com. He has published several books of short prose and letter writing, including *Please Let Me Help* and *I Am Not A Bad Gorilla.*

K. M. A. SULLIVAN grew up roaming the hills and beaches of Truro, Cape Cod and currently writes poetry and fiction in Blacksburg, Virginia where she is an MFA candidate at Virginia Tech.

STEVEN TRULL is not a writer. He likes to copy things. When he is not copying things from people he likes, he does other stuff.

DONNA D. VITUCCI'S fiction has appeared in dozens of print and online journals.

STEFI WEISBURD'S first book *The Wind-Up Gods* won the St. Lawrence Book Award. She is also the author of *Barefoot: Poems for Naked Feet* (for children) from Wordsong Press. She works as a science writer and nanoscience outreach coordinator at the University of New Mexico.

KATE WYER works as a mental health interviewer for the public health system of Maryland. Her fiction has most recently been featured in *Wigleaf, Fringe* and *Robot Melon*.

CAROLYN ZAIKOWSKI is a writer, performer and social worker. She is currently an MFA candidate at Naropa University's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in such publications as *Fact-Simile, Apothecary, Monkey Puzzle,* and *The Anthology of the Awkward* (Fast Forward Press). Find her at liferoar.wordpress.com.

MANY THANKS TO THE WARM OF HEART

Amherst Books
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Bookslut
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Clayton Banes
Colin Bassett
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Mel Bosworth
Blake Butler
Christy Call
Laura Call
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Each poem in *The Difficult Farm* is a new world born with the speaker, who "struts" at one moment in a "matchless squirrel coat" and at another moment feels "like an old sheet someone had dropped / into the river."

I buried the bathtub today. She went to go run a bath, and a cop came out of the spigot and into the tub. What have you got to say for yourself she managed to finally ask. Out of his mouth tumbled little yellow ducks.

We have the same initials; we carve them into the wooden pole at the rest stop in the mountains. We spend weeks perfecting our recipe for vegan fudge. We cry when we say goodbye to the harmless dog. We stare at the redwoods. We give granola bars, juice, and mixed nuts to the homeless man. We swim naked in the lake and hide underwater when hikers pass. We write songs that we don't tell anyone about.

If love may be fallen into, / so might the meteor crater. So might gravity suck us / toward the great black hole in our own unheavenly crown.

A shaky flashlight beam illuminates a stiff. Is that the boy you hit? It's prone beneath the snow wearing your overcoat and dirty, scotch-taped glasses. Yes, sir.