

*Whole Beast Rag*  
**Issue 03: TAMMY**  
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## Cake Failure by Denise Behrens

1

I am heavy as earth with all that could go wrong.  
Called my mom, left a message, said I was afraid  
of my birthday cake. It was the ganache that must  
have fucked it up--too runny, too high altitude.  
Was it my attitude? I am making a cake  
on Ash Wednesday. I am afraid it will taste of  
as if I didn't try. I tried--mom, I'm afraid  
the cake is  
caving  
in. I'm  
afraid  
the cake is  
immolating  
in its own  
skin.

2

I hate when the cake has skin. So instead I  
made a cake of clay. I made a little doll, put  
her on top, and ate her toes off. I am craving  
the taste of god. The thing inside my body lacks  
sweet teeth or teeth at all. I want to teach it the  
meaning of earth so it does not fear its nature.  
I am practicing, pureeing chalk and slipping  
it into my coffee. I've been sneaking uncooked  
rice grains when no one is looking. It wants a mouth  
full of grass for breakfast--who am I to deny  
it what it wants? I've been sneaking soil on the  
sly, I have a pocketful of ice. Measure the  
sugar. Measure the spice.  
Measure so it comes out right.

3

I've baked a cake of knives.  
I've baked a cake of fire.  
I've baked a mud cake with  
real worms. I will bake an  
oyster cake with a pearl

inside. I will freeze frame  
the moment when someone  
cuts their teeth. Will it be  
you, little girl? Will it  
be you with the half tooth?  
Will it be you buzz cut  
son, my little caon, my  
little con, will you wail  
with all the shriek of a  
rock in your shoe? Will it  
be you my lover, my  
Marlboro man? Though you  
don't smoke cigarettes.

That's a sin, or will I  
reverse the lens and snap  
when I have clamped down hard?

4

Arrive at the field in heels. Come tromp my land, my  
band of strangers, come with your tin trowels. I will  
put you to work  
in my bean field.  
and your reward:

this cake contains pieces of a white snake. You won't  
even taste it, but when you're finished you will be  
wise. You will have worked up  
an appetite  
of a kind.

5

Disaster cake,  
when cut, produces  
a hurricane.

Go out to the  
garden pick a  
shark from the  
squashes.  
Give me its jaws.

Storm's a-comin'.

6

Here's my cake dance.

Here's how I step  
from tile to tile.

Here's how I make  
a convection, a  
conversation, a  
confession of guilt.

Are you afraid of me?

Don't be.

I've stuck in a pin filling.

Pin me.

We will marry in spring.



## Tammy by Mark Brenden

Tammy i'm broken tammy you're winning tammy look how i use your name i can't hit shift tammy the system is shot have you appeared at my window tammy no it's a bird there should be a comma here tammy i'm a writer look no periods of the womanly word here tammy you be a comma look tammy you're doing it what have you made of your dear obliging suitor tammy oh god now you are a question mark appear now at my window i don't wish to make you into an exclamation point i can't even give you a back story Tammy I think of you now in my underwear and your underwear t t T T aamy I'm Brando come to me now they say! look good in my new glasses i cut my hair and go to offices in the morning tammy i'm gainfully employed but i can't find the wright keys i have all the ingredients come back to me i will cook you a dinner tammy your hips sway in my mind like gym parachutes I Could Compare You To Fruit And Flowers look just I've found the Shift Key your image creeps into my spaces and this word and the next have less than six degrees of separation from your parachute hips tammy look i'm better I Have Superior Capitalization Skills you do it to me look at you immortalize my well being witness my despair i use the word witness come see my stomach drooping and i talk to the mirror oh tammy at the carnival or tammy the soft i have replaced you with the word your name has become an onomatopoeia for the soft expanding of a woman's torso tammy o ttammy stream of consciousness could turn mother to madwoman tammy the gales of your eyelids are flooding my backyard is that a light tammy what is your magic the leaves are crunching round my bedside tammy intruder! punctuation! the clouds have broken! the i ching was right! the uprising is complete! make the period now! ah tammy you've trapped me again! look at the bloody remnants of my spaghetti bowl the broccoli sprouts were warriors of life before the poison of my saliva turned them to kleenex-ridden puddles of sperm o tammy must you force the words from my throat with butter knives tammy you beautiful cruel demon tammy your mirage leads me to my morning shower tammy you've deserted my libido and left it hanging like a dried raisin the last orgasm i achieved was sinking my key into the struggling lock tammy i can't even smoke the last fumes are breathing out i shall not die like this on the cliffs of my post-adolescence tammy at my service tammy you're needed Tammy your walks around the park are dizzying my long last hokey pokey of solitude.

## Ladykillers by Claire Burgess

Audrey couldn't stop thinking about her daughter naked. She'd gone to the grocery store because she found it therapeutic: the achievement in finding the perfect peach, the authoritative control of what goes into the cart, the simplicity of the grocery lists, the chemistry of cooking. She enjoyed pushing her cart slowly through the aisles, squeezing the fresh fruits, perusing the meat cuts, the daily specials, all that sustenance stacked neatly onto shelves. It was better than normal shopping, because this was shopping to keep yourself alive. But as she took an apple into her hand to search for flaws, pressing her fingers lightly into its flesh to find soft spots, there it was again, in her mind—her daughter's breasts.

It was because of the phone call that morning from Kate, who she had roomed with in college so many years ago and who had been one of her bridesmaids and who she did a bad job of staying in touch with other than through Christmas cards, but who had called her anyway, seemingly out of the blue to tell her something Audrey would rather not have known and was trying very hard to not think about, which is why she had gone to the grocery store—but it hadn't worked. She was still creating different bodies for her daughter in her mind, proportions based on her daughter's body in clothes, but everything else imagined. There had been mention of a tattoo, and Audrey moved it around her daughter's skin like a stamp in her mind—back, hip, shoulder—somewhere Audrey couldn't have seen it at Christmas.

Kate had asked her if she was okay right off the bat, immediately after saying hello. Audrey was sick of being asked this, was sick of people reminding her that she was sick, or used to be, or might be again. As if she could forget. I'm doing horribly, she wanted to say. I'm lonely; I'm tired; I'm angry. My own body tried to kill me. And how are you? Instead, she said she was fine, getting better every day! And then Kate told her the thing about her daughter.

"Listen," she said, "I hate to tell you this, but I think it's something you would like to know."

It wasn't. She really would have liked never to know, to spend her whole life not knowing.

Something she'd like to know? What a stupid thing to say about bad news.

Kate had a 19-year-old son who was still living with her, and she had "walked in on him while he was on the internet." And guess who was on the screen? Audrey really, really would have liked not to know.

Audrey found three good apples—Galas, her husband's favorite—and turned to the grocery cart parked beside her. The large, grimy silver hull of it seemed to her at that moment like the dry cup of a womb, empty but for the narrow shapes of the cucumbers and ears of corn and bananas resting in their loose produce bags in the upper, fold-out part of the buggy, which is where she always puts her produce, and which is where she used to place her daughter, Maggie, when she was small. She would kick her pudgy legs out the leg-holes, occasionally making contact with

Audrey's stomach, and Audrey would play along and make an "oomph" sound and double over. Maggie would laugh and laugh, high and gleeful.

Suddenly, Audrey was incredibly conscious of the empty space on the left side of her chest. She could feel the subtle unbalance of weight, the slight tilt of her shoulders to compensate. She remembered her mother scolding her in high school for wearing her book bag slung over one shoulder. It'll make your spine crooked! Audrey wondered if that would happen to her now, if her spine would curve away from that empty space as plants will grow away from bad soil. Except she was compensating for missing weight instead of added, and she was too old for her spine to grow crooked, anyway, except one day with the gradual stoop of old age. But still she forced her back straight, leveled her shoulders, and resisted the urge to look down. She knew what she would see, after all. The same thing she'd seen the last thousand times she'd checked: the brown tips of her boots below the cuffs of her jeans, the surprisingly flat plane of her stomach, and above that, the pleasant, round, and full swell of her sweater where it pulled taut over her breasts. Breast. Breasts.

If one of them was a silicone insert in a special pocket of a tailor-made mastectomy bra, could she still use the plural? Audrey hadn't yet gotten up the nerve to go to the website. Kate had given her the name and had assured her that it's not as bad as it could be; it's really just pictures, rather artful sometimes, actually. Porn's such an ugly word, Kate had said. Porn. This wasn't really porn. More like subversive art. Kate had said "subversive art" like she was reading it off a cue card, and Audrey got the feeling that she was probably repeating exactly what her son had told her in his defense. It was a nice gesture. Softening the blow.

Audrey moved on to the zucchinis. She never chose the ones in the front or on top of the pile, because that's where the grocery people put the oldest produce to get it sold before it goes bad. The fresh stuff is always at the back or the bottom. As she dug through the pile, trying to focus only on zucchini, the cold air goosebumped her arms and she felt her nipples harden. Both of them. This happened sometimes. Like phantom limb syndrome, but with breasts. Phantom breast syndrome. What an appropriate name. Her breast was a phantom, a ghost, haunting the space just over her heart.

She went for a promising-looking zucchini from the bottom of the pile very carefully, like playing Jenga, and was pleased when the pile remained intact. She smirked at the zucchini pile as if she had won some victory, but as she turned to the vegetable cupped in her palm, still smirking, she was struck with an odd sense of recognition, a kind of tactile déjà vu, and reflexively looked over her shoulder to see if anyone was staring at her, if anyone had read her thoughts. Because Audrey was abruptly and horribly aware of the shape of that zucchini in her hand, the way her palm and fingers wrapped around it. A pang reverberated deep in her abdomen, like a shock wave after something large is dropped.

Audrey moved to put the zucchini back with the others, which now seemed to hold the arrangement and threat of stacked dynamite, and then realized how incredibly silly she was being.

It's just a zucchini, a type of squash with a funny name. Zucchini. Squash. Zucchini squash. If you say it enough time, it loses all meaning. And this is just happening because she has sex on the brain, because of Kate and her damn son. And Maggie.

Audrey shook her head at herself, pulled a plastic bag from the wheel with a snap, and slipped the zucchini into it, adding a second zucchini just to prove she wasn't rattled by their shape, what that shape reminded her of, what one could do with that shape. She dropped the bag in the cart as nonchalantly as she could. When her daughter was small, small enough to fit in that cart, Audrey would hold things in front of her and say their names. Maggie liked the funny ones best. Zucchini squash, ha-ha.

Maggie was now 21 and attending a university 500 miles away. Audrey hadn't seen her since the operation. She had missed a week of class to come visit and would have stayed longer, but Audrey had made her go back to school. It was her senior year, after all, but really Audrey wanted to be left alone. Like over Christmas, when she had found out two weeks before about the tumor in her left breast, a small, hard lump, almost too small to feel. When she kneaded it with her fingertips, it reminded her of gristle, something you'd spit into a napkin. All Christmas, she sneaked away to slide her hand under her shirt in bathrooms and bedrooms and closets, to caress her breast for that alien lump, convinced either that it was growing bigger or that she'd cup her hand around her breast and find the lump gone, disappeared, a Christmas miracle.

She needed to remind Maggie to do her monthly breast exams. She wondered what strangers were examining Maggie's breasts on the internet. She pushed the cart resolutely forward, trying to ignore the misaligned wheel that pulled persistently to the right, toward the misting wall of vegetables, as if some unseen force was tugging her toward them.

She stopped and pulled the crumpled grocery list from her pocket. What did she have left? Cantaloupe. Hamburger meat. Milk. Pretzels. French bread. Spaghetti sauce. Cantaloupe, that's another one. Cantaloupe, ha-ha. She lifted one, knocked on it like her mother taught her. A hollow sound meant they were ripe. Or was it unripe? Knock-knock.

The hollow space on her left side felt vast, the vast negative space of a black hole, pulling all the light and matter of Audrey into it with the gravity of its emptiness. She was imploding, gradually collapsing inward into that aching void, and it wouldn't stop until she was swallowed completely, until she disappeared with a pop like opening the lid on a vacuum-sealed jar, which would be the sound of air rushing to fill the space where Audrey once was, where her breast once was, but isn't anymore.

Once, Maggie was inside of her, but isn't anymore.

Everyone always says Maggie looks just like her mother. She had Audrey's unnaturally red lips, her static-y white-blond hair, her brown eyes so dark they were nearly black, her thin, thin skin that dried out too easily and through which you could see shallow veins on her wrists and face. Maggie had acquired nothing of her father's that Audrey could tell, except his height, and this had



always secretly pleased her, even though she loves her husband. Maggie was all hers, only hers. A cell had budded from her uterine wall and divided, divided, divided. Multiplied into an exact copy of Audrey through a miraculous case of asexual reproduction, an immaculate conception of her own will. Her husband had nothing to do with it.

Her husband's name was Greg, and they hadn't had sex since Audrey lost her breast.

Audrey hefted a hollow cantaloupe into her cart and pushed forward.

Audrey had just put the water on to boil when Greg came home. She could hear his car in the driveway and the slam of his car door, his keys jangle and slide into the lock, and then the turn of the knob and the clack of his shiny black office shoes as he walked into the hallway, paused to listen for her, and then made his way quickly through the front hall and past the kitchen to the master bedroom.

There was a time when he would call out her name the minute he was through the door, when he would greet her by sliding his arms around her waist and kissing her cheek, every day. But not anymore. She had not yet decided if she would tell Greg the thing about Maggie. She had not yet decided if she believed it.

Twenty-one and a half years ago, when the doctor had spread the cold jelly on Audrey's distended stomach and rotated the ultrasound slowly, squinting at the grainy black-and-white picture on the screen which Audrey thought looked more like TV static than a sonar image of the life growing inside her, and had offered to tell them the sex of their child, Audrey had declined.

There was a time in her life when she liked surprises.

She had the mastectomy three months ago. One fourth of a year, one trimester of pregnancy. If her lack of breast was a fetus, it would have fingernails now. Soon, she would be able to tell if it was a boy or a girl, with a small margin of error. This time, she would say yes.

Tell me. Yes. Audrey no longer enjoyed surprises.

Audrey listened to Greg's footsteps clack past the kitchen door and knew exactly how her evening would play out. Greg would go straight to his closet in the bedroom, where he would carefully take off his shiny black shoes, slide their cedar-scented shoehorns into place, and set them in the line of other shoehorned pairs. He would hang up his tailored suit and starched shirt and replace them with an old pair of jeans and one of a collection of ancient frat T-shirts from college.

Then he would pad down the hall in his sock feet and stick his head in the kitchen door to ask what's for dinner before disappearing into his basement TV room to watch re-runs of courtroom or medical dramas, which you can find on some channel or another at virtually any time of day. When dinner was ready, Audrey would call, "Dinner's ready," down the stairs, but not actually walk

down the stairs, and Greg would emerge the next commercial break. Once, before the shoehorns and the suits and the reruns, Greg had been an artist.

"What's for dinner?" Greg asked.

"Spaghetti," Audrey said without turning around. She hadn't had the nerve to cook the vegetables. They were shut into the crisper as soon as Audrey got home, where she hoped she would forget about them. No luck yet.

"Garlic bread?" Greg asked.

Audrey's shoulders tensed. She had forgotten the bread.

"Uh, no," she said. "They were out of bread! Isn't that the strangest?" Audrey grabbed a wooden spoon and started stirring the pot of water with nothing in it so she wouldn't have to turn around and look Greg in the face. "But, you know, I think I have some of those frozen rolls and I could—"

"They were out of bread?"

"Yes! Well, no. Out of the bread I use for garlic bread, I mean. You don't want garlic bread with honey oat or three seed or, or, cinnamon raisin, do you? Ha!"

Audrey stirred faster and watched the bubbles bead on the bottom of the pot. Miniscule grains of air, waiting to rise.

"Well, darn," said Greg.

Darn. Darn. Audrey wished he would just cuss, say damn. They had gotten used to not cursing over the years, setting a good example for Maggie. But now Maggie was gone, grown, posing naked on the internet. Just say it—damn!

"I do love your garlic bread," Greg continued. "It really makes the spaghetti." He said this in a tone that feigned compliment but underneath suggested that Audrey could have changed the store's inventory if she'd just tried.

"I'm sorry, honey! If you want to run to the store—"

"But they're out."

"The other store."

The bubbles broke free and rose to the surface. Greg was silent on the other side of the room. Audrey hoped he couldn't see inside the pot, see there's nothing in it but water. She stirred.

"No, that's okay. The rolls are fine. Let me know when it's ready," Greg said, and turned for the basement.

Audrey listened to his footsteps recede down the stairs and watched the bubbles rise faster, and larger, and faster, until the surface of the water was roiling, and still she watched until a drop

leaped over the rim to land, burning, on her left wrist. She flinched and dropped the spoon to wipe it away, but there was already a welt there, red and slightly raised. She lifted her wrist to her mouth and sucked on it gently, running her tongue over it until the burning eased to an itch.

Then she turned down the heat, grabbed a handful of spaghetti, held it over the now simmering water, and cracked it in her fist before letting it drop.

Audrey didn't tell Greg the thing about Maggie. They had dinner, watched some TV, and went to bed. How could she broach the subject of their daughter's incredibly public sexuality when she couldn't even talk to him about their own sex life—or lack thereof? And anyway, she didn't even know if it was true. Secretly, she had decided it wasn't. Secretly, she knew it was.

She wanted to cry, to go to the website, to call Maggie and scream at her like she had when she first discovered that Maggie was having sex—in their backyard pool, to be exact. Maggie had left her wet pool towel on the hardwood floor of her bedroom, so Audrey had, of course, picked it up, as any mother would, always cleaning up after everybody. The condom had tumbled out and onto the floor with a wet slap. Audrey could still smell it, the sting of chlorine mixed with the sweetish odor of ejaculate.

But Audrey was no prude. In fact, she had previously thought of herself as sexually enlightened. She was a teenager in the '70s, for Christ's sake! She had her first boyfriend at 16 and had sex for the first time at 17, just a year older than Maggie had (but which she realized as an adult was far too young). Seven men had come before Greg, who made eight, and she and Greg had lived in sin for a year before marriage, to her mother's horror. Audrey had been skinny dipping with boys, had sex outdoors and in cars, had gone to a Grateful Dead concert and done 'shrooms, even had two one-night stands with virtual strangers.

Audrey hadn't given it too much thought, but she (formerly) held the loose conviction that if people liked to look at porn, then they had every right to look at porn. She had actually gone to a strip club once with a bachelorette party and had felt alternately thrilled, embarrassed, and anatomically curious when one of the strippers spread her legs a foot from her face.

And once upon a time, Audrey had been Greg's muse. She would take off her clothes and pose for him while he was in art school so he could study the human form. He did sketches of her full-length and close up, capturing the curve of her back, the line of her leg, the angles of her jaw and neck and clavicle. The shadowed V where her thighs met. The hang of her breasts.

And now, at age 48, where was that person? Might she be there still, buried under the hardened ash of decades? Could Audrey chip away at herself and find her, a gleaming fossil of bones, perfectly preserved? No, no. More likely that girl was lost, gradually sloughed away with so many years of dead skin and hair funneled down so many different shower drains. Now she was a wife,

a mother. It seemed her life could be quantified, added up to a sum—she used to be even, but now she was odd. One husband plus one daughter plus one breast equals three.

The next day, since the grocery store hadn't worked, Audrey went to the mall to avoid thoughts of her daughter. She was supposed to be picking out new drapes to match the new couch she and Greg had ordered for the living room, but she couldn't concentrate on the fabric swatches, couldn't picture the exact color of the rug, the exact color of the couch on order. She should have taken pictures. So instead, she looked at clothes that she would not try on for fear of seeing herself in the unforgiving dressing room mirrors, had two egg rolls from the Chinese place in the food court, and then perused the bookstore for a couple of hours, not buying anything. And the whole time, in the back of her mind, her daughter was taking off her clothes.

Audrey lasted till almost 4:00, and then she drove home and turned on the computer.

She had at least an hour, maybe two, before Greg got home. She'd be late putting on dinner, but then again, she didn't feel like cooking anyway. The computer was in the basement, Greg's basement, so she didn't use it very often. She always felt as if she was trespassing when she entered his domain. After Maggie moved to college, Greg had taken it over and started jokingly referring to it as his "man cave," which Audrey had always thought sounded Freudian, like a euphemism for a male uterus.

As the computer booted up, Audrey felt her heart beating faster than normal, pounding on the inside of her ribs beneath her missing breast. Audrey dashed upstairs to check the driveway for Greg's car, which wasn't there, and then poured herself a very large glass of red wine and took the bottle with her to the man cave. By the time she gathered the nerve to actually type in the site's address, she was on her second glass.

The site was done in pink, black, and white, with "Lady Killers" scrawled across the top in the kind of font used in I Heart Mother tattoos. To the left was a photo of a pale girl with long, fire-engine-red hair and a nasal ring like a bull's. She was cupping her breasts in her hands and letting the pink of one nipple show coyly through her fingers. Her name was apparently Poppy from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and she was today's featured Killer. To the right of Poppy was a sort of mission statement, along with quotes from the *LA Times*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Wired Magazine*.

"Lady Killers is a community that celebrates alternative beauty and culture from across the globe. We're here to celebrate ourselves, our individuality, our lifestyles, and our bodies, and we're redefining beauty, every day," said the mission statement.

*"Alternative pin-ups for the modern age . . . Fierce, in-your-face, and f\*cking sexy," said Rolling Stone.*

*"Girls just like the one you always wanted to talk to in college but were too scared—because she was so hot, and because of that skull-and-crossbones tattoo on her neck," said Wired.*

*"Today's real girls next door," said the LA Times.*

Oh great, it's getting press coverage, Audrey thought.

Audrey clicked on the tab that said "Meet the Killers," and was brought to a page saying it was members-only and asking for Audrey's full name, age, email address, zip code, and 30 dollars for a six-month membership, none of which she was prepared to give.

There was, however, a free 200-photo preview.

Once, when Audrey was in junior high, a man had flashed her in the public library. The surprise and fear of it had hit her like a wave a nausea, the suddenness of that worm of flesh unexpectedly exposed. That's how she felt when she clicked on the preview button and was assaulted with a black-haired, blue-eyed girl crawling towards her on a floor with her bare breasts hanging downwards like drops of water from a ceiling just before they detach. And the same again at the next picture of a girl peering flirtatiously over her shoulder with no pants on, her bare bottom seeming even more naked between her white tank top and cowboy boots.

Maybe a boy forced her to do it, Audrey was thinking as she made herself click onwards. Yes, she was suckered into it by a boy who told her it would be sexy. Or maybe she did it for money, but Audrey and Greg give her all the money she needs. Maybe she's on drugs! Oh my lord, some boy got her hooked on drugs and now she's doing this to support her habit, trading her body for chemicals to put in her body. She wanted to drive to Maggie's university and burst into her dorm room and take her in her arms and tell her everything will be okay, she will take care of her, she doesn't need to do these things, they'll get her better.

Instead, Audrey kept clicking.

Girl with safety pins through her nipples, girl with a tattoo of an anatomically correct heart on her breastbone, girl lounging in a window seat quietly reading a book, naked.

This isn't art, Audrey was thinking. This isn't a celebration of the body. Or maybe it is, but it's also porn. Audrey knows what Kate's son was doing with these pictures of Maggie, though Kate skirted around it. Men all over the country—maybe the world!—are doing the same thing in their computer chairs, tugging at themselves while they stare at Audrey's daughter.

When Greg was still hanging on to the idea of being an artist, he had taken her to a friend's exhibition. The friend had done an "installation" of furniture arranged into domestic scenes for every room in a house. Audrey had said the person should be called an interior designer, not an artist. Greg had said that first of all, many people would say interior design is a type of art, like architecture, and second, art is anything that evokes a feeling in the viewer. Audrey thought that was bullshit. "Bad seafood can evoke a feeling," she said. "You know what I mean," Greg replied.

Could aroused count as a feeling? Because that's the only way this was art.

Audrey kept clicking.

Forty-five minutes later, Audrey heard the groan of the garage door opening. She jumped as if she had been caught, well, looking at porn, frantically closed the browser, and dashed upstairs. Greg's key jangled in the lock, and then Audrey was in the hall bathroom, locking the door behind her and leaning her back against it with the light off, panting. Greg's shoes clacked down the hall towards her, echoing unbearably loud in the small room. Audrey held her breath as he passed, afraid of making the smallest noise, but that only made her lungs spasm for air, made her throat clench, made her choke.

When Greg's footsteps disappeared onto the carpet in their bedroom, Audrey leaned with both hands on the cool porcelain sink and let herself gasp for air. She could hear the blood rushing in her ears, feel her heart pounding beneath her un-breast. Her skin was clammy with sweat, and there was a familiar but nearly forgotten feeling between her thighs, wet with more than sweat.

There were no windows in the dark bathroom, and for a long moment Audrey couldn't tell if her eyes were open or closed. She could feel the mirror over the sink, watching her like a huge glassy eye, and she was convinced that if she turned on the light she would see someone else there where she was supposed to be reflected, a stranger standing in her skin. The hair stood up on her arms, her scalp shrunk around her skull, her ghost breast prickled. It was a feeling like doom and also like anticipation.

At Maggie's sleepover party for her seventh birthday, she and her friends had locked themselves in this very bathroom one at a time and played Bloody Mary, the game where you shut yourself in a bathroom, turn off the lights, and spin around three times saying "Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary." When you open your eyes you're supposed to see her, Bloody Mary, staring back at you in the mirror, all horrifying and dripping and glorious with gore. Maggie had scared herself so bad that she came out crying and ran to Audrey, who was making them popcorn in the kitchen. Audrey had held her and stroked her hair, telling her it wasn't real, she only saw herself, just herself. It only took Maggie sixty seconds to pull it together, and then she asked when the popcorn would be done and walked back into the den with her chin up and shoulders thrown back.

Audrey reached one hand toward the light switch, stared into the dark where her face should be, and flipped it on.

The face in the mirror was awash with blood under the skin, blazing her cheeks a gruesome red. Her eyes were wide and dark and glittering, her lips purple and parted. For a long moment, Audrey stared at the woman in the mirror, and then she slipped her hand beneath her shirt, touched the cold and nerveless ridge of her scar, watched the woman in the mirror do the same.

No, it was somehow still Audrey. Still Audrey. Still her.

.

After Audrey slowed her breath and cooled her face and scrubbed the wine stain from her lips with a wet hand towel, she emerged to face Greg's questions about the conspicuous absence of

dinner. She had been shopping all day for new curtains to go with the new couch in the living room, she said, and she had just arrived right before him. She was so exhausted, she said, could they go out for dinner? Audrey surprised herself by walking up to her husband and running her hand behind his neck as she said this, and he surprised her by consenting. Audrey changed into a white wrap dress with a blue floral pattern and a pair of matching high-heeled peep-toe shoes that made her feel like a sexy '50s housewife. She even took off her reasonable nude-colored mastectomy bra and replaced it with one made of white lace. It was sexy and gave her right breast just the right amount of lift, and if you weren't standing too close, you couldn't even tell the flesh-color peeking through the lace on the left side was synthetic.

Before she put on the dress, Audrey stood for a moment in her underwear and looked at herself in the mirror, and then slipped on the heels to complete the picture. She looked at her pale legs and flat stomach that had been slimmed by the nausea and vomiting of chemo, the soft shadows cast by her hip bones and clavicle and bottom few ribs. "Just look how thin you are!" Maggie had said in the hospital. "And you didn't even lose your hair! I wonder if Hollywood has discovered this yet." Maggie had brought a tape measure and they had ordered Audrey new clothes out of catalogs to make her feel better. Sure, Audrey was thinner now, she could even wear the old pair of Levi's she had saved from college with some room to spare, but it wasn't the same. Instead of regaining her college figure, she had lost something, something other than her breast. There was a looseness to her skin now, a wan look like something vital had vacated her flesh, like there was no longer enough of her left to fill her skin.

She thought of the girls on the website, the firm skin of their bodies unblemished but for their tattoos, which somehow served to highlight the perfection of the rest of it. She thought of their breasts, some so small as to be androgynous, some so full she wanted to heft one in her hand to feel the weight of it. She thought of the flare of their hips, the fragile caps of their shoulders, the pinks and browns of their nipples, the graceful arches of their backs. She thought of their thighs and the place between their thighs, which they never fully showed, the site was classier than that. She thought of their faces, so brazen and fierce and luminous like saints on fire.

Greg let Audrey choose the restaurant, so they went to the little French hole-in-the-wall near their first apartment where they used to eat almost once a week in their twenties. Outside on the sidewalk there were white-clothed tables under an awning hung with multi-colored lanterns and Christmas lights. Inside it was dark and close, with irregular chairs and tables chosen from junkyards and garage sales and the sides of roads. There were tasseled pillows and curtains of dusty green velvet, cracking oil portraits of bleary-eyed strangers in heavy frames, knick-knacks like paste jewelry boxes and porcelain animals and faded silk flowers in wine bottles, lamps of red and green glass that hung from the ceiling and illuminated fallen moth bodies in silhouette. Audrey and Greg had come here often when they first started dating, when Audrey wore thin Bohemian dresses with no bra and Greg's fingers were always tipped with crescents of paint under the nails. Greg had said it reminded him of a Van Gogh fever dream, and Audrey said he should paint it, and he said, "Yes, I should," but never did.

Now, as they sat across from each other on the sidewalk, their bodies occupying the same space they had so many times before in so many years before, it seemed to Audrey that their lives were all about places, coming to places and leaving them, and coming to them again as different people, changed. The colored lanterns cast their faces in reds and oranges, washed their cheeks with color, color almost like the blush of youth. They shared an eggplant pizza, eating it with their hands and licking their fingers. As they walked back to the car, Audrey tripped on her flirty heels and Greg caught her arm. In the car, they kissed, and he tasted like spicy marinara sauce and merlot.

At home, Audrey led her husband to the bedroom by one hand while he unbuttoned his shirt with the other. She sat him on the bed, untied her dress, and let it slide down her body to the floor, still in her heels. He ran a finger lightly down the hollow by her hip bone and then pulled her toward him with both hands so he could repeat the action with his tongue. Then she was on her back, then they were kissing, their tongues thick with wine, then Greg was kicking off his pants awkwardly and they were laughing, then Greg's mouth was on hers again and neither of them was laughing anymore. Audrey felt her skin fill, blood rushing to plump out the deepening wrinkles, flood the gaps where things were lost, where Audrey had receded and her skin remained the same. Greg kissed her neck, skimmed her shoulder with his teeth.

Lights bloomed on the backs of Audrey's closed eyelids like the lanterns in the restaurant bursting into flame, and she felt as if her whole body was pulsing with those lights, her very bones bright and burning like tubes of neon. It had been so long, so long, and every touch was like a sleeping limb waking, pins and needles, all of her buzzing with the ecstatic pain of feeling. Greg's hands were on her breasts, pulling away the white lace so his mouth could get to her nipples. Audrey gasped, arched her back in anticipation, and then he stopped.

Her skin was suddenly cold where his hands and mouth had been. The lights died on her eyelids, and when she opened them, Greg was sitting up beside her with his head in his hands. He had momentarily forgotten about her breast, Audrey knew, cause so had she. He had pulled down her bra expecting it to be there and it wasn't. Instead, he was face-to-face with the scar, pinkish and puckered like a gnarled kiss. Her skin felt loose and empty on her bones.

"I'm sorry," Greg said, turning his body back to hers. "It caught me off-guard."

He placed one hand deliberately over her remaining breast and left it there, heavy, unmoving, and it felt like a hand on her throat.

Audrey pulled away and turned out the light.

In the morning, Audrey faked sleep while Greg showered and got ready for work. The steam brought the scent of him, of his wet skin and soap, to Audrey in the bed, and it was all she could do to not get up and slip off her nightgown and step into the heat of the shower with him. But



there would be her scar, lobster-red and glistening under the hot water. She rolled over and closed her eyes and willed herself to sleep and failed.

As soon as she heard the garage door close, Audrey rose and walked into the bathroom, the Greg-smelling steam curling the baby hairs on her neck. She brushed her teeth and splashed cold water on her cheeks and then stared at herself in the mirror. The fabric on her cotton nightgown hung deflated over her left breast, as limp as it would on the hanger.

Audrey walked straight down to the computer, not even pausing to pour herself a cup of the coffee that Greg made for her in a passive attempt at apology. Yesterday, she had been on photo 133, a platinum blonde named Diesel wearing only work boots and a neon orange construction vest, when she had heard the garage door and panicked. There were still 67 to go, and she hadn't seen Maggie yet.

This time, she didn't hesitate. She typed in the address without pause and clicked rapidly through the first 133 photos, her face inches from the screen. Girls flashed in front of her in mad, quick, vibrant succession, like film loose on a projector, too close to the light, catching aflame. There were girls with tattoos covering their whole arms and girls with none at all, girls with eyebrow rings and lip rings and tongue rings, girls with mohawks and girls with pin curls. There was a Japanese girl with pink hair, a lollypop, and a Hello Kitty tattoo; an albino girl with no tattoos at all, just her pink-rimmed eyes and pale hair and translucent skin whiter than paper; a chubby girl with bedroom eyes and heavy breasts and nipples the size of saucers; a waif-thin girl in combat boots and men's boxer-briefs with ink sparrows perching on her hipbones. Two girls in black latex sprayed each other with hoses in a warehouse. A barefoot girl in a sundress hung upside-down from a jungle gym, the skirt falling above her panty-less waist. A bronzed girl in blue jean cut-offs and a white tank top you could see her nipples through ate watermelon on a picnic blanket, the juice dripping down her chin. Breasts, hips, hands, thighs, breasts. Flesh eyes tongues teeth flesh flesh flesh. And then there she was, so suddenly Audrey almost clicked past her, number 187:

Maggie.

There were no props, no gimmicks, just Maggie in a bare white room, pale shoulders straight to camera, the bottom of the frame ending right beneath her breasts. Audrey noticed things in pieces, the whole of it too much to take in at once. The brilliant red of her lips, the blush-pink of her nipples, the blue edge of a tattoo peeking from beneath one arm, the black of her pupils like holes straight into her head, holes straight through the photo and into Audrey. Her face was defiant, exultant, fearless. But what struck Audrey most was not the tattoo, not her daughter's face, not the bare and whole pair of breasts. It was the way the large, arched window behind her let the bright flare of daylight into the room, burning her away at the edges, blazing her pale hair in a nimbus of white fire. Audrey thought of spontaneous combustion, of blinding angels, of staring into the sun.

Audrey remembered her daughter, newborn and pink like a soft dollop of flesh barely formed, remembered her adolescent with swinging arms and legs like awkward strangers. She

remembered her own body in the mirrors of her youth, its firm tight flesh, both breasts still full and healthy, and how she would always find things to hate about it, how all women did, not knowing how wonderful, how perfect their bodies were, and how easily that would be gone. Her eyes touched every inch of her daughter's bare skin, so much like her own once was, and she felt every emotion in her sharpen and purify, separate like light through the prism of her daughter, the colors fractured and thrown on a wall: fear, awe, loss, hope. She stared into the flare of her daughter's white body until it seemed no longer flesh, until it was a bright daughter-shaped burn on her retinas that she knew would remain even when she closed her eyes. Seething, glowing. Painful and beautiful.

That afternoon, Audrey went to the grocery store to purchase the things she forgot two days before. She took the zucchini squash (ha-ha) from the fridge and washed it, chopped it, and sautéed it with some portabellas in marsala wine sauce. She thought about calling Maggie, but she didn't know what she would say. Part of her wanted to ask Maggie about the website, to scold her, to remind her of the professional career and family she will eventually have and how this would ruin it all, and part of her didn't. If she mentioned it, Maggie would get defensive. The distance between them would grow, and Maggie wouldn't stop, she knew, just because her mother told her to. In fact, usually when Audrey told her not to do something, she was even more likely to do it.

Audrey thought about her daughter, this person made of the materials of her own body, thought about how amazing and terrifying it was that she had begun as a nauseated flutter in Audrey's stomach and now she was walking around on legs separate from Audrey's, a completely separate person, a person Audrey had never expected. She would not call her, at least not today, and she would not tell Greg. She would keep Maggie's secret inside of her, make it her own.

When Greg came home and asked what was for dinner, Audrey had an answer: "Chicken marsala and garlic bread."

"That's my favorite," said Greg.

"I know," said Audrey.

Later, they walked down the hallway lined with Greg's paintings like windows to the past, not looking at them, not seeing them. In the bedroom, they grabbed at each other like things they had lost and not quite found. Their bodies pressed like they were trying to rub away skin. But this time neither one forgot the absence of Audrey's breast. When they removed each other's clothes, Greg didn't touch her bra, barely touched her breast at all. The scar stayed under the silicone pouch, hidden, untouched, aching, and when Greg removed her panties, he turned her over and entered her from behind. But Audrey allowed him this, because she could feel something stirring deep in the cup of her hips, a place she thought long empty, waking and stretching slowly like something

long asleep, and when he thrust into her she felt it burst awake and lurch through her whole body and then away before coming back to her, a feeling like falling, falling, falling, and surviving.

[^](#)

## [Untitled] by Ashlee Cermak

i found out about the lump in my right breast three weeks before i got married. it was my first visit with a new gynecologist, a round and rosy woman with accolades on the wall certifying her fluency in russian. i took russian in college for half a semester but dropped out the day before the first exam. ironically, the only phrase i remember is a toast that means "to your health."

there i was—legs spread wide because i don't care, ass cheeks sweating as the doctor performed a breast exam, prodding my tits with her gloved hands. she kept her eyes on me and we chatted about my upcoming wedding. then her brow furrowed and she broke her gaze. she prodded some more and asked if i knew i had a lump in my breast. no, can't say i did. she asked if i had a family history of breast cancer and i rattled on about my great-grandmother having her breast removed in the '40s. she asked about my grandmothers' history; my paternal grandmother is cancer-free and so was my maternal grandmother until she died in a car accident when my mom was 15. as for my mother's history, i couldn't say. i told the doctor how my parents are poor and don't have insurance. i have no idea the last time my mom received any medical care. the doctor pursed her lips and said i'd better make an appointment for a breast ultrasound. don't worry, she cooed, the imaging clinic is conveniently located in the same building. how nice.

she coaxed me to scoot my ass just a little closer to the edge of the exam table and soon finished inspecting my vagina. she left and i wiped myself of the jelly they smear on the forceps to make sure the metal slides in easy and got dressed. then i walked across the hallway to the imaging clinic—so convenient—and scheduled an appointment for a breast ultrasound with the lady at the front desk. she said i'd have to wait until the following monday. i distractedly agreed and walked out. i had to get to work. cars whizzed by on the suburban main drag as i walked in the grass because there was no sidewalk.

when i got to work i felt a lump—haha—rise in my throat and i went to the bathroom to fight it down. there a co-worker asked if i was alright and i burst into tears. i was coughing and sputtering but was able to choke out they found a lump and i wouldn't know if i had cancer until next week. i couldn't work and called my husband, sobbing, to be picked up. he told me later he thought i was laughing when he first answered his phone. i spent the rest of the day in bed. disgusted with my body, i didn't want to feel the weight of my breasts so i wore a bra all the time.

## The Uterus Monologues by Kristin Fitzsimmons

*Knock Knock.*

*Who's there?*

Likes: Spending time with friends (stomach and liver), the fetal position, and lead smocks used for dental x-rays. Dislikes: sharp objects, radiation, and scooping the litterbox.

.

Advertisement for Self-Concious Uteruses: birth-control pills and (anti) menopause pills look exactly alike! Aside: They also look quite similar to Smints which is maybe why no one buys Smints anymore.

[^](#)

## Fem Tex(t): Pop Quiz by J. Fossenbell

**Part I.** Read the following passages and select (encircle, mark out, claim, capture) the *most appropriate* word to fill in the blank:

1. Secure Withdraw Cord is sewn the full length of \_\_\_\_\_ pad.
  - a. landing
  - b. bachelor
  - c. legal
2. Sure Grip \_\_\_\_\_ has been specially designed with finger grips to provide exceptional control.
  - a. Missile
  - b. Needle
  - c. Lipstick
3. Individually Wrapped to keep \_\_\_\_\_ clean and protected.
  - a. scalpel
  - b. warhead
  - c. alibi
  - d. icon
4. Uses industry-wide standardized \_\_\_\_\_, indicated by the \_\_\_\_\_ range
  - a. montages; shooting
  - b. appetites; methamphetamine
  - c. hot-pants; soft-core
5. Since the risk of \_\_\_\_\_ increases you should use the lowest \_\_\_\_\_ needed to control your \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. exposure; aperture; utter humiliation
  - b. retaliation; visibility; exposure
  - c. propagation; exposure; reputation
  - d. unintentional murder; font size; spiritual involvement
6. We Put \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ First® is a registered trademark of First \_\_\_\_\_ Enterprises, Inc. and is used under \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Quantity; Life; Blunder; extreme duress
  - b. Fabulousness; Your Ass; Pants; strobe light

c. Accuracy; Penetration; Abortion; force

7. 100% \_\_\_\_\_ or your \_\_\_\_\_ back!

a. hot shit; dignity

b. retribution; faith in all that is holy

c. occupation; hairy

d. gutted; prom disaster

**Part II.** Fill in the blanks (holes, lacking places, vessels of emptiness) with the best (strongest, most accurate, most established, most logical) responses (backtalk, reactions, emissions, revolutions).

1. HOW TO USE YOUR LAST SYMBOL OF FAITH

2. Talismans can be used comfortably and with confidence.

3. The arbitrary tool, which consists of a barrel (outer tube)

4. containing an electronic device, and a plunger (inner tube),

5. has been designed for easy swallowing and proper

6. depth.

1. Before you begin, wash your flowers.

2. Choose a position for comfortable enlightenment.

3. (Stand, placing one foot on the hot mess

4. or sit on the mountain with your lips apart.)

5. Appeal now and take your due.

^

## Preface to Shedding by J. Fossenbell

The worst thing girl-thing can do. Withhold her. Then wash out all the little hims in brownbath. Girl peacock has tail so long and proud of don't touch. So many many eyes she opens when she squawks. Every kitten she loves will come still, licked clean, cooling. Every chick will squirm and drive her beaktooth hurt just to get open. Make hole sounds. She will shed herself all the way down into her boots. She will cry from all the little squeeze pain she will love so. Wash the bedspread on a Sunday morn. She will want more sugar, more meat in her squall of mouth. When the time comes, she will devour. Scream like baboon girl at war, but grow so tender. Beautiful ass in th eair, beautiful rot-red petals. Roseheads, eggheads, pavé design in a box. She will trust herself so little. Till she empties.





## Design with Almost Roses by J. Fossenbell

the cells die unrecorded  
around the stress you put on a name

*Conception ingénieuse.* like

if you put the stupid thoughts end to end to end  
they will make a sentence

whatever works girls

just *always®* do it with confidence

*Let your style shine!* like

place the needles end to end  
and spin them

you will come out deflowered  
and *incredibly Thin™*

## Smoke M If You Got M by J. Fossenbell

my eternal sister  
my profound cancer

is a medical conspiracy  
how you write the name matters  
check the variations against aggressively

we come in too many ideas  
and not enough self  
to fuck them  
all the way they deserve  
to be done

the shape of the bolt  
being changed  
always deliberately  
a proprietary interest  
in wrench sales

this is a bad business model  
this is bright lights in dead water  
if you let them pronounce  
you you kill the sky  
you're standing in

## Or Whatever Makes You Feel Radiant! by J. Fossenbell

*[Show off your one-of-a-kind-style*

when I realized I was all alone I got bigger

*by embellishing a wide strip of fabric*

in secret and found and opened a quilted box filled

*with pearlescent discs or sparkling buttons*

with my mother's straps and pins but when I think

*to create a belt that pops!*

of all the ways to tell everything at once

*Pair it with a dress, skirt, or whatever*

whatever is my favorite one ]

*[TO USE: POUR UTILISER:*

Tap tap tap, rip, wrap, roll on.

*TO REMOVE: POUR ENLEVER:*

Pull out. Get off. Sigh deeply.

*TO DISPOSE: POUR JETER:*

Yank, tie off, toss, tell your diary.]

*[S'adapte à la plupart des petites culottes.*

when your hose are quitting

think *Un style qui scintille!*

just think of how your thighs kiss

think *Our thinnest and most flexible protection.*

and this discomforts you

*Daily Freshness.*

don't think full load or fatality

*New look!*

and you won't be laden by insides

*Shine on!*

coming all out]

*[Shop the collection*

and whatever comes will be protected but lady

*Preguntas?*

isn't Pregnant? though it looks it when you pray

*call 1-800-888-3115*

don't forget to start with dying then always ask

*To open:*

to be more than you but you will trust

*lift here and*

yourself so little

*pull*

till you empty]

^

## Essay on Increase by Sarah Fox

*The time of increase does not endure.* —I Ching

Winter starts with little snow. Once the river freezes  
your floating boat will also stop. Little snow's growing  
power. Little snow can change you. Can friend you,  
like the Little Prince. Diseased river, its little sacrificial  
godness, grotesque angel carved into the miserable snow.  
Other planets are in bloom. Your sinking boat will stop  
sinking. The tulips will be in bloom there. Bullet holes  
will be blooming in Heaven, on little stars and galaxies,  
in the distant past where my virginity drifts as a moth  
in the sun. The year of the Dragon, and of Neptune  
whose distractions are primeval. The constellation of the horse  
who threatens lyric poetry. The constellation of the most ancient  
goddesses. The frozen river arrested here at the start of the year.  
It furthers one to cross this great water. Where the bullet pierced  
it the boat's tears turn to pearls of ice. The planet Neptune's  
future crossing over the great constellation of oceanic feeling.  
The feral mothers have always been famous and dirty.  
Thank you God for everything. Love is the bone and pearl  
of my feminine survival, I'm not scared. You must sacrifice  
a little aesthetic leverage to deal with this new kind of weather.  
On the deck of the boat the future's in terrible conflict, terrible  
bullets. Bells will toll and curse, or ring the weather in or birth.  
Now's the perfect opportunity to decide. Clouds will rock  
and suffer the menopausal moon its scarlet blossom. I love horizons  
strewn with temptation. I notice the constellation of the prince  
waylaid by barefoot servants, and the night is ever cold and roars.  
Sin might be another word for Song. All of Rome could freeze over.  
Every mother is full of grace, she is full of holes. O mea culpa  
Father, mea corpus. O tower my tower. O river. It furthers one to cross  
without artifice. There are zeros to hatchet in little holes—you  
can see how bullet is one letter away from ballet and how the wound  
in the little boat freezeframes the angel at the threshold of history.  
You dread exit and its obstacles. I point to the constellation  
of the High Priestess radiant between poles. The new year's mirror

fogged and hoary up there. Poles of the nothing that binds. You as much as I remain strange, almost blank, under the frosty transit. There are many here among us helplessly exposed in the virgin tundra as the year quietly births behind the sun. Meanwhile Mars points directly at our faces but we don't know why. I never dreamed I'd require a bird dress, or that so many dragons had piled up at the threshold. Our father has become a hole we fall through like time. I might make believe a ghoul, but I didn't make the world. Words carry soul between us. The world creaks across. We aren't like the boat and are forced to move along. We search for the most magnificent door in the fairy tale. We weren't born in prison, but I feel criminal in these feathers, and molt a little sacrifice. Between poles, or towers, we recall how everything has happened once again. I have a little tower. I'm of some twin constellations. In my tower I keep the moon inside a pot and stand very still. I'm trying to summon the gentle wind, the arousing thunder. You can see how people might be tempted to dance and sin. But dance is only one more away from Dante, who another path did take. We must make ourselves at home with natural disaster. Every little word is a person, we must behold those ancestors to increase song between us. In my tower I trace starlines on the far side of the sky. It furthers one to increase on the side of mercy. What is exorcised from capital gains wings. It furthers one to drift between towers. The cosmos show us the beautiful and damned always only making meaning out of thin air. The story of being a day old, all in one piece. Not quite empty. Still casual. Anyone's guess. If only I had a California I could make at home. If only the past centuries had been better. California's nearly Cassandra, who was raped by all the kings of Rome. Her prophecies greet us frozen in time, like Rapunzel who waits and waits. We must further. Here's a certain threshole—a window, parted draperies, glowing eyes watching distantly in the sky. A pair of dark wings...

—For Sarah Caflisch, 1 January 2012

## Essay on My Tower by Sarah Fox

*The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed by it.* —Julie Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*

*I'm in the milk and the milk's in me.* —Maurice Sendak, *Mickey in the Night Kitchen*

My small awakening pearls in a bell  
amidst the windblown birdsong  
and bats touring the tower  
where I nest in late grandmothers'  
hairstrands and rosepetals. I often press  
myself against the column: all the water,  
my body's spectral crashing waves underskirt.  
Or the more birdlike comportment  
of zero traumas ever. Or is this a well.  
I conjure extra instinct in the higher air.  
Animals transit the rotunda, moths  
venture here to whiten and die.  
This must be real, then. I can't stop  
touching the shape. At the head  
of the cylinder. Seated at the right  
hand of the Head of the Table.  
My small glass thought divined  
from the bottom of my nakedness.  
If I ever could touch and feel it.  
I'm in the cock and the cock's in me.  
As if my inner violet finally opened  
with Mars as its ruling planet. As a tower  
about war. Between structure and lightning,  
the god in the details of pure air  
and the bruise I believed to be true.  
Bruise-colored tissue eclipsing  
the solar heart of me—the core  
of this traumatic need for infinite  
contact with pure surgeon tower dazzle.  
My tower-spectacular me straddling  
bearclaw and speculation. Cave goddess

and risky behavior. As if my inner mouth  
can't stop rooting for the primal colossus—  
the pure and vigorous heart—of my tower  
of towering father at the bottom of every well.





## Memo Pad Hands by Jeannette Gomes

wrote you a note on the back of your hand  
oh gentle gentle memo pad hands  
my dream  
circle be my circle come around and around with me  
make sick little boy jump in the sky  
ghost of the planet neptune humming out the gourd  
living loving caressing the void  
half ghost encased in forever noise  
sing songs of glorious hurdle jumps  
thank you taco carrot beet juice  
telephone pole dancing monkeys clutching hand cymbals  
portable music box cutter lover  
paper mâché cream hands I am eyeing like the peace I've been wanting  
since the beginning of my lonesome years  
I can rain out from the corners and pour myself a new cup of laundry  
the tide pull out of boulders  
creaky floorboard old fashioned noose twisting around new fangled necks  
you have to hit the truth  
live and die/crawl in your skin  
plant all the seeds of all the most beautiful dreams  
my fingers are pulling them closer when my hand is scratching the table  
I will pet ghost table long after my nails have chipped away every trace of wood  
I am going to cut up tiny circle-sized pictures of us and put them on a giant-sized wall-sized poster  
because you are so beautiful and we are small.  
I am going to hug all babies with ashes in their eyes  
these rivers and streams are like other rivers and streams but these are made of tiny tar people.  
I love you because this feels like cobweb heaven.  
I love you because we are all made of shredded contents of sort-of interesting legal documents.  
Teleport all the mountains into the ocean so when we fall into the sea the last time, so it  
won't be as much of an environmental adjustment as it is a pesky gill development.  
Iowa avenue  
living snouts of screaming joy fall throw from their cases  
falling all over the pavement with their screaming air violently pushing holes.  
Bat lakes flying over us grape lines  
phone lines sine fire

I hope you are bound, my tiny ocean fingers of everlasting love  
OUR LOVE GEOMETRIC SHIMMERS OF THE SUN OVER THE DEPARTING YEAR  
I WOULD LIKE TO LIVE FOREVER HERE



## Waiting for the Train by Jeannette Gomes

I am watching falling leaves disintegrating into black bile beneath my feet  
tiny horde of black bile people breathing out hate spores  
into the world and watching them pass and fall away  
their furling coil around the living and born slowly fall away  
their furling fires that were living inside us fall away  
take me to the top of the agrocrag  
this train is on the surface of the sun  
our bodies are sugar glass  
we are running express to bryn mawr  
all bacchae please exit the train now  
you can't buy alcohol without the wristband  
GET YOUR WRISTBAND  
we are falling up and down  
we are the surface of the moon  
we are learning our bodies are the substance of sound  
we are blue and made from blue and rain and accidental grace  
we are gorgeous and nothing and falling on our face  
this train is on the surface of the sun  
perfection beyond the coming breath of understanding  
we are the droplets of understanding  
we are it's cycle of creation and death  
we are the present in the closet of existence  
waiting for the

## Prompts by Jeannette Gomes

write from the perspective of a column on a spreadsheet

write from the perspective of a column on a spreadsheet that rebels right out of your computer to organize your life in the most insignificant way possible

write from the perspective of a grumpy train conductor in the 1970s who falls in love with a red-haired woman with two children

write from the perspective of a drowning girl who is being drowned by her lover

write from the bird on the top of the gas chamber

write from the perspective of an internet meme

write from the perspective of a ghost that people enjoy having around

write from the perspective of the beard of a man who is snuggling in the breasts and stomach of a woman he loves

write from the perspective of a mother who is watching her child falling in the street

write from the perspective of a mother watching her child fall to the ground while there are bullets riddling his skin

write from the perspective of the fire hydrant that is watching it all from a distance across the way

write from the perspective of the little girl who loves the little boy

write from the perspective of the little girl who loves the little boy because she was supposed to grow old with him and how she must think all the things that were supposed to be fate and how it all falls into silent reconsideration and probably will remain stuck there

write all the little pieces of your soul that have been left out in the cold, have been left stuck in all the most traumatic moments of this life and before. tell them to me, all one by one and then tell me what you would say when you reached to take them back

what do you say when you bring your soul back

what do you say to a broken heart when the breaks are untouchable

write from the perspective of silence

always write from the perspective of the voice of silence



## **Fits Like a Glove the Vision of Evil Bad** by Jared Joseph

I mean the death drive that lurks  
Malibu all over  
Puts in full sway the palms of love.

Let us query one more text about the sea  
It's borderline as smart  
As rain yesterday tomorrow sarsen.

The whales pray to Dionysus  
Sarsen on her face was so good  
So sorry

The orgy at the party was so Dionysian  
The people still waving goodbye, goodbye  
& Lorelei at the window  
At the window full of light

When a face becomes a whale song sarsen  
It's good to be blind.  
It looks good to be blind  
With a collie goading the way  
& nothing wincing.  
I mean the death drives in a PT Cruiser

The lovers in an outside-Paris suburb  
just outside Paris in the promenade  
it is so much juster outside Paris  
Stump one another in the car

Who planted olive branches on her stumps  
With duct tape on the blood in the Century  
Seven or something maybe just outside Par  
is as rain yesterday tomorrow severs ices se

vers lovers  
Divers lovers  
Fucked 300 people  
The crotch carts 300 people  
Pull from my hand the ocean coffin  
Lorelei's rot a whale bloats tonight the window sarsen

Hair's son  
Let down your trusses.  
A golden shower of ducats  
Let down your dead.  
Let us query one more text about the sea  
I mean the death drive that jerks  
Piss out your dead.  
  
Bring out your piss out your dead.



## Orpheus by Jared Joseph

Hi are you again  
gallanting psycho

tropic drugs of De Forest  
Wisconsin to the youthly bracket?

many sev'ral  
moons away

the party

stank sulphrously.  
eggily it bloomed

basements beneath  
the cellar sepulchers

the DJ from Haiti's  
a limp in the closet

the threat of the morrow  
crocheting your elbow

into the tables' manic wood  
marry though thou used to be

nearly to me.  
Bacchus blocks us

so nearly near to  
me you

were. Jeez

zeus: into gubernatorial  
sensitive waters i've paid

with my life can i  
take your hands & dance axes?

me & the lyre i invented  
won't look back so don't timber

me i'm still a shiner  
apple soot & blue

setting the house of cards  
a fire to save her to live in

to forget & beget  
to have one on me

And legend has it

*have one on me*  
*& this one & this one &*  
*have one on me*  
*& this too & this too &*

lusterly he put it in her





## Demiserebirth by Jared Joseph

The first fuck is the deepest  
The first fuck is the best fuck  
The hole room breaks & falls  
the objects break away and fall  
fall away always  
the hot horsehair moons

All the animals die & become  
Animals make sense this time  
We all become senses  
The room leaks demiserebirth  
Perhaps a plumber's in order

The next day we order a plumber.  
Expedited delivery is leaking  
There are dove hairs everywhere  
It is miserable  
Or it is pigeon hairs & ocean oil  
I put olive oil in it after the first  
Fuck the deepest forever  
Reminds of times I don't remember

The way the man distracts me stares  
A remembered object fucks me  
While we are out of it  
out of myself & into the other  
The first fuck impulses  
Imply a concentration  
Heigh ho! Voila!  
Your name yells into the bed

I remember into the bed  
The first fuck brands  
You like a cow  
I forget  
You are really quite a woman  
Nike

You slashed victory over my head why didn't you tell me  
Sensei  
Yell into the bed

Your name cells into the bed  
We leave the bed outside the coffin awhile  
We fuck & the final burial is  
Distracting  
A coughing fit of blacks  
Sudden blank butterflies  
Dig the whole thing the coffin  
Bedpan for the living but the dead pain  
Bed is for living

Final budding pleasure place  
Again  
What's your number again  
I mean the tattoo in the place  
To mark you I mean the tattoo  
Rhymes with armed against the demons  
In the tampon the Aurora Borealis  
Taboo

Love is Real



## Key Change by Jared Joseph

god's not the only one  
who invited us to party

casablanca  
romanian paul  
pol pot  
those wet apocalips  
the stalin car

who knows at what the cow lows & mews  
the grass isn't sweetening the winedark dawn isn't  
vintage

more of a rosé color or the hue of bubbly  
from a glass the universe is still beginning  
vantage

more than anything in the world i used to  
light the cigarette & get gassed  
without a warrant  
in my blood

in my blood a huddle of ashkenazis  
crossed into other nights  
crossed out

madrid hi  
london  
(heathrow)

[Eurydice]

## A Pregnancy by Molly Sutton Kiefer

i.

A pregnancy is something wished for. A half moon is what one becomes. Tools to use on the journey: thermometer, preferably the sort with an extra decibel; an instrument for writing, maybe in the sand; a chart, which you can find crumpled in a garbage bin. Flatten, try again. Measure yourself in the mornings, before your hips have swung, feet spread. You should find equilibrium in the sun-tones.

ii.

In 1598, John Florio spent time with ink and quill, tapping housecat with nib; declared pregnancy greatnes with child, pregnancie, a being great with childe or with yoong. There was crooning, toms at the door. The housecat was nibbled. Nibbled back.

iii.

My mother told me I was an easy pregnancy. She never threw up, and though she only menstruated once or twice a year (she had polycystic ovaries too), she found me inside on the first try. Whose body is it? Acquiring my sister took three or four cycles, medicine bottle collection. My sister pinched at my mother's insides. She had been ready to give up, how long it was taking. Her legs don't show as much. Mine are covered in stretch stains.

iv.

Suppose we all could feel a pregnancy simultaneously. Suppose my stomach were made of clear glass, a fish-bowl. I can hear it: you are wishing too. I would dictate the swish, that minnow-flick, know it: you're hiding.



## Prenatal Yoga by Molly Sutton Kiefer

### I. Savasana | Corpse Pose

Bulbed women glisten.  
Sweet balloons, static cling,  
to the center. We haven't realized  
how malleable we can be.  
There is warrior into goddess.  
Little creeks swaying  
down our backs. The room is full  
of puffed breath, full blow  
of anticipation lingering,  
pressing against one another.  
We become fallen pine, fronds  
and sticky sap, sinking.  
I imagine the full blush of an orange,  
navel widening, peeling the skin  
to reveal a glowing sphere.

### II. Uttanasana | Standing Forward Bend

Widening women ache.  
Outside, thick autumn clouds,  
rain drawing night. Brows furrow,  
windshield wiping sweat, our arms  
and digits swinging into place, black bears  
with distended bellies, mat slipping.  
Abdomens sway open, overripe blisters.  
One woman has missed her due date  
by miles, her gravity closer to Styx.  
I cannot—these two words pulsing  
beneath my heart bones, black splotches  
before my eyes, not just rain clouds.  
Here the windowsill mocks me—  
I could just lean into it, sweaty hand  
mirroring sweaty hand, topple through  
into the night, bare branches,  
slick pavement, splotch and blister burst.

### III. Balasana | Child's Pose

At the gates of my hips, you are tumbling, resting. Tumbling, resting. Slight propel of legs  
on the ultrasound screen, your knees

knobbing, pumping, breathing in and out  
of the folds of uterus, and we search  
for something we already know—  
we call it bicycling. But you are at will,  
freely stirring amniotic detritus,  
you are that willow across the pond,  
whose fronds bicycle the autumn air.

[^](#)

## The Dwarf by Molly Sutton Kiefer

I ate an apple, and it protested,  
little worm devoured my insides.  
I ate an apple, two strong bites,  
and it came through me twice.

Snow White had her little dwarfs to keep her,  
preserve her under glass, a specimen  
they fantasize about at night.

Sweeper, singer, baker of pies,  
she kept the shortest men happy.  
I string cramps, stings  
along my spine.

I'm plugged into something I can't control,  
panels lit by organs: heart's glow,  
deep sparkle of lung cavity,  
steady pump of intestine.

Creatures creeping at night, reshaping me into being.

## Triangle Shirtwaist by Molly Sutton Kiefer

Women who escaped for a promise. One even gave Vesuvius the slip.

Veer off to Greenwich Village. Grate ticks by,  
tinder freight. A plum. A calm. Sheer the ferry's waist.

Needle prance, your empty pocket. Subject to rhythms  
of the machine. Foreman's rubber-tipped sneak a peek.

Those thread-cones, make them faster. Mistakes meant hunger.  
You know. So he locks the door. So he can look inside.

Ribbons as fat as hats, guild a key. Whispers among the machines.  
Clara had six broken ribs when she said strike. *We all stood up and  
walked out.* Whores can be hired too, thumb a nose.

Mink brigades meant safety nests, those coppers showed  
clubbing caution. *Those brave girls.* Beckon back.  
No union in the ash building.

Tip a cigarette, waft and then, that flame dawdles.  
Death's slow tease. Crush a boulevard. The building's spindles  
cast in an alleyway. *We watched them burn.* Falling and fall-out.

Ribbons of flame. *We still had to play the hoses upon them.*  
Narrow nose of fire.

The women were swatched in white, put in troughs.  
The women were waiting to be told where to go.

*I've looked for her, I cannot tell.*

The face of a woman no longer a woman.

*I knew her by her hair; I had braided it for her that morning.*



## Mermaid Theory by Amira Madonna Masri

perfection lies pollute minds  
dietary slip eats up insides  
skip meals  
trip heels  
hike up that skirt  
they'll kneel  
they'll kneel  
know your queen  
she's the fem-enemy  
who makes a beeline  
for the best of me  
tear it up  
looking down  
her royal highness  
airbrushed, but hush  
it's too much  
beauty unmatched  
she hatched  
[goddess]  
from the ocean  
she could be your friend  
for a price  
'cause she can turn an army  
to mice  
coily unmanned  
aloof and unplanned  
her manicured hand fans  
the fires that she  
lit when the powers that be  
questioned her sincerity  
approach, but step warily  
coming too near will doom you to roam  
the outskirts of her Eden alone  
she can smell the fear under your cologne  
you don't trust, but you must  
you only doubt 'cause you lust  
grain by grain, time slips  
through hourglass hips

and every grin on her lips  
cracks like a whip  
slave to her, who craves to lure  
sailors off-ship  
engulfed by the tide, eyes glide  
over porcelain skin  
the same bait  
that drove Adam to sin  
the price of her prowess  
shown by the emotional mess  
of a drunken master:  
her heart is a natural disaster.



## Artwork by Jam Hibdon

### ARTIST STATEMENT

The series is to resemble a photo-set that might accompany an article in a modern women's magazine showcasing young, attractive, alternative women who have chosen to modify their bodies, and in some cases, sacrifice a vital appendage in the mix. A grotesque fetish viewed through the compelling lens of extra-normal feats and modern diversity, masking the detrimental priority of fashion, which has grown to consume flesh in new, and dramatic ways.

The connection with the body is a talking point that seems to be lost on many, lost in the day-to-day shuffle of surviving. As humanity continues to change, to keep up with our technological tower of Babel, we will no doubt be challenged to make decisions based on questions to which the answers will constantly be changing as well.

This is but a glance at one of those questions: How will the fashion (and culture) industry respond to digital evolution of (wo)man?



Chain Girl



Gill Girl



Goggle Girl



Quad Girl



Tail Girl

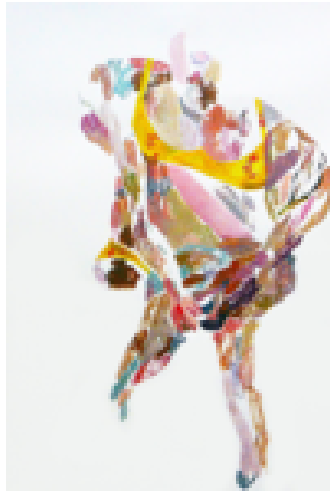


Wing Girl

[^](#)



## Artwork by Jennine Scarboro



*Beautiful*

Whisk me from my boring little island and deliver me to a world of glamour, high-fashion  
all-night champagne parties, and wealth.



*Blonde*

I would run from this room right now, find a tree, and string Barbie up.



*Bothness*

Find genius in the opposing position, privileging the complex messiness of the both over the simplistic clarity of the either/or.



*I Put This on for You Now Come and Take It Off*

We are told nothing of the woman's appearance, she is revealed only through her ornaments.



*Kant*

That landscape, that whole terror of the icy slope.





*Marionette*

She turns to me with malevolent red eyes. They glitter blankly and something is wrong with her hands. I realize, watching, that she is controlled by wires pulling her fingers along the keys.



*Ontological Question 1*

Death by gun shot, cancer, car crash, in your bed; it's all ultimately cardiopulmonary arrest: The heart stops beating, oxygen can no longer reach the brain and that's it, you're dead. Always the same death.



*Ontological Question 2*

In a shadow we are equalized, all the same color, all with a mutable form that shifts with light, dense to translucent, stretched to compressed, thin to wide.





*Witch*

The witch is an alluring vision who uses her loveliness to enchant, or she is an ugly and fearsome being who may transform into a nocturnal beast or disappear to lurk, invisible but watching.



## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

### Denise Behrens

Denise Behrens is a perennial undergraduate at the University of Iowa. During a stint in Portland, Oregon, her work appeared in Portland State University's Pathos magazine. Upon her return to Iowa, more work appeared in Little Village magazine, in both poem and article form. She also flirted with the short story form in an undergrad journal, The Aberrant Parade. Lately, she writes reviews and manages content from [writinguniversity.org](http://writinguniversity.org). Her creative life of late includes syllabic poetic forms, perusing fancy culinary journals, and painting grotesque cakes.

### Mark Brenden

I'm Mark Brenden, a 23-year-old temp worker and writer living in Minneapolis. "TAMMY" is an attempt to show the effect certain aspects of the "cult of womanhood" can have on certain men. No worries if you don't like it.

### Claire Burgess

Claire Burgess's fiction has appeared in *Third Coast*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Redivider*, *Annalemma*, and *PANK*, and has recently been listed as notable in *Best American Short Stories* and *Best American Nonrequired Reading*. She is a founding editor of *Nashville Review* and received her MFA in Creative Writing from Vanderbilt University. Originally from Alabama, Claire now lives in Pittsburgh with her husband and zero cats and is working on finishing a collection of short stories. You can find her online at [byclaireburgess.com](http://byclaireburgess.com).

### Ashlee Cermak

Ashlee Cermak loves a good to-do list. She's up to 66 push-ups—on the real—and regularly walks around town without a bra and everyone knows it. Let them look. When she's not searching for missing clients in Wal-Marts across the metro area, she whips up delicious dishes for friends and drinks wine to feel fine. Favorite cheese: havarti. If she could be anyone else: Miles the cat.

### Kristin Fitzsimmons

Kristin Fitzsimmons lives in Minneapolis where she's an MFA candidate at the University of Minnesota and member of the poetry collective OUR FLOW IS HARD.

### J. Fossenbell

J. Fossenbell writes poems and other stuff. Her work has appeared in *ILK Journal*, *Parabasis*, *Everyday Other Things*, *Cerise Press*, *Wazee Independent Journal*, *The Word* magazine, and in translation in a handful of publications in Vietnam. She lives in Minneapolis, where she goes to MFA school at the University of Minnesota and is an editor for *dislocate* magazine.

### Sarah Fox

Sarah Fox lives in Northeast Minneapolis where she co-directs, with John Colburn, the Center for Visionary Poetics. Coffee House Press published her book *Because Why* in 2006, and will release *The First Flag* in Spring 2013. She teaches writing and poetics, contributes to the multi-author arts and culture blog [Montevidayo](#), and also serves as a doula. Recent work appears, or soon will, in *Conduit*, *Action*, *Yes*, *Fence*, *We Are So Happy To Know Something*, *Poetry City USA Vol. 2*, *Spout*, *Altered Scale*, *Rain Taxi*, *LUNGFULL!*, and others. She performs poetry rituals and other intersubjective actions in public and private spaces around the Twin Cities and beyond.

### **Jeannette Gomes**

Jeannette Gomes lives in Chicago. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Red Lightbulbs & Untoward Magazine*. She loves putting her face in her cats' belly fluff.

### **Jared Joseph**

Jared Joseph is currently pursuing his MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Recent works have been published in *Radioactive Moat & elimae*, while his chapbook "Commuting: Have Gone to Ithaca. -Frank Quiteyly" is available from Varmint Armature Press, an imprint of *Trnsfr* magazine.

### **Molly Sutton Kiefer**

Molly Sutton Kiefer's chapbook *The Recent History of Middle Sand Lake* won the 2010 Astounding Beauty Ruffian Press Poetry Award. Her work has appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Comstock Review*, *you are here*, *Gulf Stream*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Wicked Alice*, and *Permafrost*, among others. She received her MFA from the University of Minnesota, serves as poetry editor to *Midway Journal*, and runs *Balancing the Tide: Motherhood and the Arts / An Interview Project*. She currently lives in Red Wing with her husband and daughter and is expecting a second child in February. She is at work on a manuscript on (in)fertility. More can be found at [mollysuttonkiefer.com](http://mollysuttonkiefer.com).

### **Jam Hibdon**

Jams was born and raised in Missouri. He ran barefoot often, and has shared in journals, movies, comics, and performances with friends from all over. Along the way, he received a BA in English, and has comics forthcoming in his ongoing *Lingua Franca Comics*, and the *Middle West Anthology*, edited by Skip Harvey. See more of his work at [kaijucomics.blogspot.com](http://kaijucomics.blogspot.com).

### **Jennine Scarboro**

[No bio given]